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GENDER IDEOLOGY, GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS, AND IDENTITY  
AMONG CONSERVATIVE BAPTIST WOMEN: AN INTERSECTIONAL  
PERSPECTIVE

by

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A.A. Eastern Florida State College, 2019

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Honors in the Major  
in the Department of Sociology  
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## ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study, I interviewed 13 women from two separate conservative Baptist congregations in Central Florida, one English-speaking and the other Hispanic.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this research was to explore the ways in which conservative Baptist women develop their identity as women, the gender ideologies they espouse, their experiences in ministry, and the possibility that they can achieve gender consciousness without aligning with feminist principles. In addition, my research employs an intersectional perspective to demonstrate differences in the experiences of white women and women of color in the church. This study consisted of semi-structured interviews with women from both the Hispanic and the predominantly white congregations over the course of a month.

According to my findings, strict complementarianism, the belief that men and women have entirely separate but complementary roles, was only observed among a small number of women. The majority demonstrated egalitarian tendencies with a combination of complementarian and evangelical pragmatist ideology. The latter was especially observable in spiritual practices and decision-making in marriage. For most of the women, their ideations of gender, marital, and parental expectations were not reflected in their actual practices. In terms of intersectionality and the experiences of women of color, the majority of women from the Hispanic congregation and white women from the English-speaking congregation determined that racial conflict did not take place within their church. On the other hand, Black women within the predominantly white congregation and two women who belonged to ethnic minorities within

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<sup>1</sup> In this research, I will use the term “Hispanic” when referring to congregations and women who identify as Hispanic. Elsewhere, I will use the terms “Latino,” “Latina,” and “Latino/a.”

the Hispanic church did report friction, lack of community support, and discriminatory behavior towards them. These were not aspects of white women's experiences in ministry.

This study is significant because in addition to highlighting the gender ideologies upheld by conservative Baptist women, it also describes the ways in which they negotiate the scriptures to perform womanhood and expounds on the idea that conservative women can also find gender consciousness despite rejecting feminism. However, solidarity and inclusion were not found by women of all races and ethnicities. This research views these experiences and ideas of womanhood through an intersectional lens. As a result, it explains how race, ethnicity, and nationality can also frame ideas of womanhood and affect gender consciousness among women in conservative Baptist congregations where one race or ethnic group predominates.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge the 13 women who generously shared their experiences and perspectives as Christian women with me, several to whom I was a stranger. Some of the topics discussed were painful and even triggering for women, particularly those who felt exploited, unheard, and marginalized within a community they previously considered to be a safe haven for them. Their openness about their struggles made this thesis possible.

Next, I want to recognize Professor Armato, my faculty mentor, for believing I could excel and encouraging me to pursue Honors in the Major through this thesis. His constant support, constructive criticism, and example in the last year have made me a thoughtful researcher and a better sociologist altogether.

I also want to thank Dr. Jeanine Viau from the Philosophy and Gender and Women's Studies programs, for understanding my vision and providing her expertise on theology, gender, and Christianity. Her contributions added nuance and an interdisciplinary perspective to this study.

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## INTRODUCTION

This research documents and analyzes the experiences of conservative Baptist women of diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. More specifically, the relationship between gender ideology, doctrine, and race in the formation of conservative Baptist women's identity and practices is explored. Utilizing qualitative data obtained by phone and online interviews, I analyze the influence of these factors in women's gender performance within marriage, relationships, family, among others. I also examine their involvement in ministry, the development of gender consciousness within homosocial groups, and their negotiation of identity and doctrine in these spaces. In addition to applying the theoretical lenses established by the following scholarship, my research attempts to provide an intersectional analysis of conservative Baptist women by inquiring on how race and ethnicity shape the ideas of womanhood that women of color hold and their experiences within both predominately white and Hispanic congregations.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

When speaking of women as a segment of society, it is important to first establish the difference between gender and sex. Traditionally, the two have been considered inextricably connected and interchangeable terms. However, sociological analyses distinguish between sex and gender, viewing them as two distinct social processes. While sex alludes to “socially agreed upon biological criteria” utilized in the classification of an individual as male or female (West and Zimmerman 1987:127), gender is a “social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do...not social practice reduced to the body” (Connell 2018:7). In other words, while the assignment of sex relies on biological characteristics, gender is relational and constructed through social interaction. Although it is commonly attributed to biological differences, standards of behavior are created through these interactions to determine a normative performance for each gender. As a result, a man may be accused of possessing so-called “feminine” traits, and women may be characterized as “masculine” in some ways if they deviate from culturally predetermined ideals (Connell 2018). In this way, gender is not biological but socially constructed which makes it highly susceptible to changes across time, culture, social structure, and the individual’s life course. Gender both produces and is produced by social interactions and institutions, like the church, which ultimately shape an individual’s identity, behavior, and experiences.

### *Subordination of Women*

Binary definitions of gender place men and women as opposites based on essentialist understandings of gender which did not distinguish gender from biological differences between the sexes (Connell 2018). For women, this proved to be especially significant in their subsequent

subordination and disenfranchisement. As established by early feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir, women are an “Other” in a system designed by and according to prescribed characteristics associated with men (de Beauvoir 2016). This creates an androcentric society in which men are the default and women are inherently deviant from the norm. Thereby, gender becomes significant only in reference to a woman and how her experience is defined by it. For instance, de Beauvoir proposes that such an ideology is evident in the characterizations of women as “hormonal creatures” although men’s bodies are affected by hormones as well (2016:269). This argument then becomes a justification for the exclusion and discrimination of women which facilitates the establishment of a patriarchal social structure. When men, as the “One,” dominate virtually all spheres of the public domain, women become a subordinate group ideologically and structurally within the broader society. Nevertheless, before discussing how such inequality is institutionalized, it is essential to recognize that neither women nor their oppression are monolithic.

### *Intersectionality*

Initially, feminist theory did not include the voices and standpoint of all women. Prominent feminist efforts were dominated by and catered to the needs of white wealthy women. As a result, feminism did not account for the ways in which race, class, and sexuality interact to frame the idiosyncratic experiences of women in white patriarchal society. For this reason, Patricia Hill Collins, among others, developed an intersectional standpoint on women’s gender inequality as opposed to treating women as a homogeneous group. Building upon the principles set forth by previous Black feminists such as Alice Walker, Angela Davis, and Audre Lorde, Hill Collins proposes that gender inequality is part of an overarching system of oppression which she

calls the “matrix of domination” (2016). Under this social mechanism, women of color experience the oppression that results from two intersecting marginalized identities simultaneously. Intersectionality, as coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), requires the ability to view an individual’s experience as a product of these social identities interacting at the same time in order to address their particular oppression within this matrix of domination. For this reason, understanding the fact that gender, class, sexuality, and race do not operate separately is paramount in the study of women’s identities and their negotiation of religious gender ideology and practices.

#### *Institutionalization of Inequality*

As previously discussed, institutions and the ideologies they produce are not only gendered in nature (Connell 2018) but also geared towards the dominant gender, those with enough power to establish them in the first place: men. This institutionalization of gender has led to the employment of hegemony as a tool to maintain the patriarchal social order. Hegemony establishes the authority of one group and the subordination of another (Connell 2018). This tool performs a major function in the matrix of domination which holds all women, to different degrees, at a disenfranchised position not only ideologically but also structurally. In androcentric society, religious and non-religious institutions alike are founded upon and enable the reproduction of patriarchy because they were not originally designed for the success and advancement of women. This is especially relevant when analyzing religious structures, the gender ideologies they promote, and women’s experiences as they navigate such institutions and society, as a whole. The following literature specifically focuses on these aspects as they relate to

conservative Protestantism and provides insight on the experiences, ideologies, and gender practices of men and women across race, ethnicity, class, and religious affiliation.

## CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANT GENDER IDEOLOGIES

### *Complementarianism*

Gender ideology in conservative Protestantism, which includes fundamentalist and evangelical denominations, can be defined as “ideals based on perceived truth concerning all women and men that can be supported through the Bible” (Piper and Grudem 1991, as cited by Colaner and Giles 2008:527). The maintenance and growth of a Christian family are seen as dependent upon adherence to these divinely predetermined roles. In response to this notion, two main ideologies arise: complementarianism and egalitarianism (Colaner and Giles 2008). In the spectrum that is gender ideology these two ideologies oppose each other, yet both utilize scripture to support their perspective. Complementarianism upholds the view that women and men were created fundamentally different and are thus unequal in their roles within marriage (Colaner and Giles 2008). Based on this interpretation of scripture, God created women and men as separate yet complementary beings. This idea originates from Eve’s designation as Adam’s ideal helper, “And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). Among complementarians, this requires men’s headship of the home and women’s duty to bear children and devote themselves to homemaking. Colaner and Giles’ study, revealed that internalized complementarian gendered expectations among conservative Protestant college women at a Christian university directly influenced the students’ aspirations given the belief that motherhood is a woman’s primary role according to the Bible (Colaner and Giles 2008). Although it is important to distinguish between aspirations and

attainment of the “stay-at-home mom” role depending on other social determinants such as race and class, this research demonstrates that complementarianism contributes to the internalization of these ideals among conservative Protestant women, even for young college students who are also pursuing a career.

### *Egalitarianism*

Egalitarianism favors the idea of partnership between men and women in all aspects, including marriage (Colaner and Giles 2008). As previously stated, egalitarianism may find its roots in biblical teachings as well. Evangelical feminism as embodied in the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus (EEWC), formerly Evangelical Women’s Caucus (EWC), is a marginalized yet relevant subculture within evangelical Christianity (Gallagher 2004a). Their ideology focuses on mutuality and equality of all people regardless of gender or sex before God, based on scripture, “...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). In this, they embrace egalitarian marital roles and gender constructionism consistent with secular feminist theory. Such an approach opposes complementarian doctrine entirely which inevitably places women at a disadvantaged position given that they must submit to the husband’s leadership and strive for domesticity. This resistance to traditional essentialist views of gender led conservative Protestants to view evangelical feminists as a threat to the social order and the authority of the Bible (Gallagher 2004a). Additionally, the association of evangelical feminism with the secular world and the lack of resources among evangelical feminist institutions also played a part in their disempowerment. For this reason, egalitarianism remains a widely marginalized ideology within the conservative Protestant tradition.

### *Evangelical Pragmatism*

Although egalitarianism and complementarianism are two opposing sides of the spectrum in conservative Protestant gender ideology, a third variant that has taken hold during the last 20 years is “evangelical pragmatism.” Evangelical pragmatism is a “softer” form of patriarchy that favors egalitarian practices yet maintains male spiritual headship (Gallagher 2004a). This approach was incorporated into modern conservative Protestant doctrine as an alternative to gender essentialism and evangelical feminism. Faith-based books that claimed to provide “pragmatic advice on parenting and balancing work and family” gained popularity within evangelical circles during the 1990s (228). This shift occurred during a time of increasing polarization between complementarian and egalitarian evangelicals, the transformation of the male primary breadwinner ideal, and the need for dual-earner households. In fact, approximately 56% of evangelical women worked outside the home in 2004, while the reframing of male headship as spiritual and essentialist views of gender continued to predominate evangelicalism (Gallagher 2004a). The emergence of evangelical pragmatism as a “middle-of-the-road” religious gender ideology demonstrates the fluidity of values and practices even within conservative Protestantism. To further illustrate this, Gallagher establishes that only 5-10% of all evangelicals supported strict egalitarianism or strict complementarianism while 87% believed in mutuality within marriage and 90% believed in male headship (Gallagher 2004a). This demonstrates the widespread support for a combination of egalitarian and hierarchical ideations of marriage. Thus, while Biblical scripture is used to justify egalitarianism, complementarianism, and evangelical pragmatism alike, it is evident that biblical doctrine is negotiated and socially constructed by all believers to uphold, challenge, or redefine systems that contribute to the subjugation of conservative Protestant women.

## GENDER IDEOLOGY VERSUS PRACTICE

While gender ideology is promoted by institutions and internalized by those who are socialized in them, this does not guarantee that ideology and practice will always coincide. This phenomenon was observed among conservative Protestants who supported male headship of the home while also engaging in egalitarian practices regarding financial decision-making, working outside the home, and child-rearing (Denton 2004). In Denton's study, 86.6% of conservative Protestant men supported the ideal of male headship. However, only 42-49% of conservative, mainline, and liberal Protestants reported that the man has more authority in financial matters. A similar pattern is observed in the proportions of Protestants from these three denominations who reported that both the wife and husband take the lead in deciding who works outside the home (63.2%, 65.9%, and 66.9%, respectively) and child-rearing (51%, 45.5%, and 48.2%). These percentages convey the resemblance in marital and parenting practices across all denominations regardless of adherence to the principle of male headship. That is to say, religious gender ideology by itself has limited influence on parenting and financial decision-making because conservative, mainline, and liberal Protestants alike engage in equally egalitarian practices. Another occurrence worth noting is that, in terms of decision-making, husbands reportedly "gave in" only 24% of the time for conservatives and 23% of the time for mainline and liberal Protestants (Denton 2004). Although Protestant couples from all denominations and gender ideologies do appear to employ some egalitarian marital and parenting practices, husbands cede in disagreements about important decisions less often than wives. These statistics suggest two ideas: conservative Protestants are no more complementarian than their more liberal counterparts

in financial or child-rearing practices, and regardless of doctrine, patriarchal dynamics prevail even within otherwise egalitarian Protestant marriages.

The most significant disparity between conservative and mainline protestant marriages in Denton's study is observed in spiritual leadership. While mainline Protestants are 93% as likely to report that the woman takes the lead in spiritual matters as liberal Protestants, conservative Protestants are only 47% as likely to do so (Denton 2004). This dynamic among conservative Protestants in spiritual matters, despite being just as egalitarian in financial and child-rearing practices as other liberal and mainline Protestants, supports evangelical pragmatism's idea of husband's headship only in the spiritual sense. Even though this enables conservative Protestants to adopt egalitarian practices in other areas of marriage and parenting, they maintain complementarian assumptions that justify the biblical mandate for the husband to be the leader of the home. This negotiation and reframing of male headship that is commonplace in evangelical pragmatism certainly contributes to the continuous subordination and unequal status of women not only in conservative Protestant households but in all institutions where male spiritual leadership is required as well.

In sum, differences between gender ideology and practices in the daily lives of conservative Protestants demonstrate the complexity that exists even within dogmatic institutions. Conservative Protestant men and women manage to uphold biblical authority by adhering to patriarchal ideas that place the husband as head of the household. In the process, egalitarian decision-making and parenting may take place but it is rationalized as acceptable because spiritual male headship is preserved. This doctrinal flexibility, though limited, must be recognized while also reiterating the gender inequality that is facilitated by complementarian and



pragmatic beliefs which hold women as inherently different and at a subordinate position in relation to men.

## GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE CHURCH

### *Sanctified Sexism*

Patriarchal tradition continues to dominate power dynamics and leadership within the conservative Protestant Church, even among congregations that adhere to the more “balanced” approach of evangelical pragmatism. Once again, the institutionalization of complementarian and pragmatic gender ideologies continues to disempower women both within and outside the home. An aspect of hegemony within conservative Protestant structures is manifested in what has been termed “sanctified sexism” (Hall, Christerson, and Cunningham 2010). This refers to demeaning language and discriminatory behavior against women justified with the use of biblical scripture. In this manner, men posit themselves as allies of God and perceive themselves as having the authority to correct women’s behavior in accordance with their interpretation of scripture. While any disparaging remark can have negative effects on the woman that is targeted, the use of spiritual justifications to support them can add to the distress. In research conducted by Hall et al. (2010), women in Christian academia did exhibit a significantly decreased sense of influence and access to information as academics when sexist remarks were supported with scripture. Not only were their qualifications questioned with biblical ideas of male leadership, but they were also denied access to opportunities and information that would facilitate their advancement as academics. The diminished self-confidence and sense of influence among the women denote the heightened legitimacy and power men’s statements have on women when they draw upon shared religious beliefs (Hall et al. 2010). This impacts Christian women’s ability to perform leadership

positions, limits the resources they receive to advance in their careers, and prevents them from even recognizing themselves as capable of being in leadership positions because of their gender. Subsequently, the enforcement of men's domination with scripture even in academic circles sustains and extends women's inequality beyond the spiritual and domestic realms.

The employment of sanctified sexism to prevent or discourage women from taking leadership positions in conservative Protestant congregations is yet another tool that relies on this binary and biological conceptualization of gender. For that reason, role incongruity within the Church places women at a disadvantage when they aspire or already hold leadership positions among the clergy (Ferguson 2018). In other words, because women are not prescribed the role of spiritual leader their gender is not seen as congruent with the role they seek or already acquired. This is especially true within complementarian churches. Therefore, prevailing essentialist gender norms contribute to women's structural disadvantage in religious institutions by either barring them from leadership positions altogether or leading to scrutiny once they hold those positions, especially if they adopt assertive leadership styles that are culturally reserved for men (Ferguson 2018). In order to remedy role incongruence, women and men may reframe leadership roles to fit their doctrine and retain spiritual patriarchy (Chan 2015). For instance, in this case-study, women in an Asian-American complementarian congregation had previously led worship under more egalitarian clergy. After the church experienced a schism over women's ability to lead, the complementarian pastor reinterpreted worship as a teaching practice and prohibited women from doing so (Chan 2015). In that sense, women's leadership was contextual and malleable. Their involvement was redefined as leadership under the pastor's interpretation of

scripture in order to reinforce and expand his belief in strict complementarianism contrary to the egalitarian faction of the church.

Further, women who had led Sunday School and worship previously redefined their involvement in complementarian terms and reported resisting egalitarian ideology even prior to the schism (Chan 2015). Thus, the same position which is considered to be leadership elsewhere can be reframed by women themselves in order to reconcile the doctrine with their actual practices, much like conservative Protestant couples negotiated egalitarian marital roles with male spiritual headship. Furthermore, ideologically egalitarian individuals chose to remain at the complementarian church by reevaluating the doctrine itself and focusing on what they considered “primary doctrine,” or the belief in the Holy Trinity and eternal salvation (Chan 2015). Once again, doctrine and practice are social constructions that may sometimes be at odds. While this may seem like cognitive dissonance to outsiders, these egalitarian men and women retained their own gender ideology by fixing their identity on the core tenets of Christianity and separating it from complementarian doctrine. Thereby, all social actors even within conservative Protestant institutions engage in meaning-making and negotiation between biblical doctrine, gender ideology, and practices while operating under a broader patriarchal system.

#### CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANT ANTIFEMINISM

While conservative Protestantism typically does endorse antifeminist and complementarian principles, this does not guarantee ideological homogeneity. Previous studies have demonstrated that evangelicals and fundamentalists are more likely to see feminism as hostile to their values (65% and 54%, respectively) (Gallagher 2004b). Some of the participants’ answers which reflected this idea pointed to the rise of materialism, lesbianism, autonomy, and

individualism as negative aspects of contemporary feminism. Conservative evangelical men and women alike expressed their concern regarding the preservation of the family and gender relations between men and women. These evangelicals assert that feminist ideals result in animosity between men and women, preventing true progress, and eroding God's divine social order (Gallagher 2004b). It appears that principles such as individualism and autonomy are typically not celebrated in conservative and Protestant circles, especially particularly in a feminist context. For complementarians, if women prioritize self-sufficiency, which they described as individualism, it can prevent them from fulfilling their biblical role, leading to the demise of the family and society itself.

However, there is a general approval of first- and second-wave feminism, with an aversion to third-wave feminism. For example, two-thirds of the interviewees expressed their appreciation towards feminism in the 70s for promoting equality in employment practices, education, and wages (Gallagher 2004b). Others mentioned greater awareness of rape and domestic violence as positive outcomes of feminist efforts. On the other hand, participants proposed that third-wave feminism has focused on "individualism, the politics of sexual identity, abortion, and gender difference" which they perceived as problematic for society as a whole (Gallagher 2004b:462). In addition, they considered feminists as being "too militant," self-centered, and simply unwilling to submit to anyone's authority. In their view, these strategies only damaged and weakened relations between men and women. Interestingly, on the topic of abortion, 49.4% of evangelicals and 51% of fundamentalists reportedly believed it should be legal in a few cases (Gallagher 2004b). These results illustrate the ambivalence that is present among conservative Protestants regarding feminism and women's reproductive rights.

Moreover, racial and class privilege was evident in participants' responses. For instance, particularly white evangelicals appreciated the demands put forward by white women in the 70's which emphasized "the individual and personal benefits of feminism rather than challenges to structures of inequality or benefits to lower income and minority women and households" (Gallagher 2004b:460). Concerning third-wave feminism, these participants considered it "too radical." This disparity is likely due to contemporary feminism's focus on the deconstruction of institutionalized gender and sexual inequalities and greater emphasis on minority women's struggles. Efforts that seek to challenge the status quo upon which patriarchy and the marginalization of people of color, sexual minorities, and the poor depend can be considered a threat to white evangelicals' privileges. It should also be noted that, regardless of denomination, church attendance and immersion in conservative ideologies were the most significant determining factors in antifeminist or feminist views (Gallagher 2004b). Ultimately, greater exposure and adherence to conservative biblical doctrine and political values resulted in increased support for antifeminist ideologies which deem modern feminism as destabilizing God's divine order for marriage, family, the church, and society.

#### *Biblical Literalism as a Resource*

Conservative Protestant gender ideologies have often relied on biblical authority and literal interpretations of scripture among complementarians and even gender equality women's groups. The rejection of gender constructionism and support for men and women's equally valuable yet distinct roles in religious and secular settings are often established upon this commitment to biblical authority (Kohm 2008). From a feminist standpoint, gender essentialism, binary classifications of gender, and complementarian understandings of men and women's roles

are products of a broader system of oppression that has denigrated women to a subordinate position in relation to men. This patriarchal social structure that has designated women as the “Other” (de Beauvoir 2016) also underlies religious institutions and the construction of doctrines that reproduce gender inequality. To secular feminists, even with the rise of egalitarian evangelical feminist organizations like the EEWC, biblical literalism can seem incongruous with the idea of women’s agency and autonomy. In spite of this, biblical literalism has become a resource for Protestant women especially within ministry.

Among women who are involved in conservative Protestant churches, biblical literalism becomes both a schema and a resource to compensate for their subordinate positions in ministry and to prove their religious devotion (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). A schema is a particular ideological framework upheld by an institution. In this case, conservative Protestantism promotes biblical male headship, especially in spiritual affairs. Women who internalize this belief based on a literalist interpretation of the Bible perform gender within the biblical schema while also using it as a tool to hold men accountable for their behavior (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). Since men are held at a higher standard as representatives of Christ who is considered the “Head of the Church,” women can utilize this metaphor to assert their agency before men. Furthermore, adhering to biblical literalism can serve as a resource to gain social standing within the church given women’s already disadvantaged position. This pattern is evident due to the fact that conservative Protestant women who attend church regularly are approximately 10% more likely to be literalists than their male counterparts and about 30% more than conservative Protestant women with low church attendance (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). These results suggest that biblical literalism is a gendered resource. Only women need to

use it to gain status or legitimacy. Conservative Protestant men, who are just as engaged in the church as women, do not need to adhere to biblical literalism at the same rate because the schema already grants them authority and resources such as power, leadership, and dominance. Additionally, the gap in biblical literalism between women with high and low attendance further supports this theory given that the women who will need this resource the most are those who are actively involved in ministry (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). Acknowledging the utility of literalist hermeneutics for conservative women despite its reinforcement of patriarchal dynamics and women's subordination is necessary for the analysis of women's gender identity. Instead of reducing conservative women's ideologies to the structures operating around them, recognizing their agency and the strategies they employ as they navigate these institutions provides a clearer image of conservative Protestant womanhood.

## GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONSERVATIVE WOMEN

With the rise of debates about women's rights and gender inequality within conservative Protestant organizations and in the secular world, feminist and antifeminist women have organized and mobilized to demand policies they assert will be most beneficial for women in modern America. Group-consciousness, in this case gender consciousness, is a key factor in this collective action. However, gender consciousness is typically utilized when referring to feminist advocacy groups only. This is because one of its main components is "collective orientation," which "assumes that the group desires change in rank or power because either it has been subordinated or its dominance has been challenged" (Gurin 1985:146). This perspective presumes conservative women are unable to develop gender consciousness altogether because their views do not align with feminist values. Nevertheless, conservative women's organizations

have demonstrated that this may not always be the case. Gender consciousness, meaning the awareness of women as a collective and demanding solutions to problems they perceive disproportionately affect them compared to men, is very much present in conservative evangelical women's organizations and political interest groups (Schreiber 2002). While women's ideas of public policy for all women are certainly politicized, it is important to recognize the existence of gender consciousness among conservative evangelical and non-religious women's organizations to better comprehend the relationship between their ideology and identity as women in a patriarchal society.

#### *Christians for Biblical Equality*

While evangelical feminist groups like the EEWC have attempted to challenge and deconstruct complementarian and pragmatic doctrines that prevent men and women from being considered equals in all aspects before God (Gallagher 2004a), their agenda was not well-received by conservative Protestants who desired to cling to essentialist ideas of gender to maintain patriarchy within and outside the church. As a result of disagreements among evangelical feminists themselves, the movement became divided between the previously mentioned EEWC and another group named Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) (Kohm 2008). Although the two originated under the umbrella of evangelical feminism, CBE rejects gender constructionist ideas and advocates for a transcendentalist approach that distances itself from feminist theory and bases its stance on God's moral law as it is written in scripture. First, the concept of gender constructionism was not accepted among CBE members because it was perceived that, "...what is socially constructed can likewise be socially deconstructed, and the results of deconstruction can be deconstructed...an infinite loop" (Kohm 2008:347). Advocates



for “Biblical equality” argue that understanding gender as socially constructed will always lead to the reproduction of gender inequality due to the fallible perspective of humanity. Thus, they strive to provide a transcendent standard of equality that is found in God’s divinely preestablished dichotomy of men and women as portrayed in scripture (Kohm 2008). For CBE members, true equality is first found in the idea that men and women were created in God’s image, different but equal in value. This requires a commitment to biblical authority that does not leave room for feminist ideas of gender constructionism.

To achieve true gender equality for women, the CBE determines that the transcendent code of mutuality and dignity that Christ’s behavior towards women denotes in the Bible must be applied to contemporary gender law (Kohm 2008). Perceiving biblical scripture as transcendent truth that is constant across time and culture, CBE members determine that adherence to a biblical approach to gender equality instead of secular feminism is the most viable solution to women’s subjugation within the Church and in the broader society. This complexity is what separates Christian gender equality from liberal and other evangelical feminist groups like the EEWFC. Despite retaining gender essentialism, resisting to account for the social construction of doctrine itself and shifting away from contemporary feminism altogether, CBE advocates certainly demonstrate gender consciousness as they organize to transform the institutions that contribute to women’s inequality in religious and secular spaces.

### *Concerned Women for America*

Non-feminist advocacy among conservative women is not always confined to theological debates, doctrinal disagreements, and women’s duties within the Church. Although many conservative women’s organizations are religiously affiliated, the issues they address also pertain

to public policy that affects all women. One of these groups is the Concerned Women for America (CWA) organization which tends to focus on the family as the center of society, the sharing of Christian values, and morality (Schreiber 2002). The CWA's stances against abortion and international family planning programs due to beliefs in the "sanctity of life," and concern for women's emotional trauma and health reflect the gender consciousness among these women. Despite their objection to women's reproductive freedom and biblical ideology that seems to overlook the matrix of domination that operates in the political sphere to obstruct women's true liberation, CWA advocates perceive that these very liberties are the real threat to the lives of women and their children (Schreiber 2002). Akin to conservative Protestant women's groups such as the CBE, their perspective is rooted in the belief that laws based on their interpretation of scripture will ultimately benefit women more and lead to the preservation of the traditional family.

Interestingly, conservative women's organizations such as the CWA posit that feminist groups tend to make universalist claims about women's interests while also stating that they represented the "real" interests of the majority of "reasonable" women (Schreiber 2002). This sentiment, which characterizes feminism as unreasonable, originates from the perception that feminist policies tend to disregard the family and antagonize men and children. Thus, in Schreiber's analysis, it is important to view conservative women as having agency over their own ideas and being motivated towards the wellbeing of women, men, and children alike, which often goes unmentioned in debates about anti-feminist groups (2002). Of course, it is also crucial to remember that women's ideologies and policies are politicized and constructed by patriarchal social institutions, like the government and the Church. Feminist and antifeminist

attitudes alike do not originate from women's gender consciousness alone. Nonetheless, the successful mobilization of conservative women's groups certainly suggests gender consciousness is attainable in these communities as well.

## INTERSECTIONALITY AND CHRISTIANITY

An intersectional lens is critical when studying the experience of all women in religious and non-religious spaces. As observed in the CWA and the antifeminist views of white evangelicals, generalized claims about policies that would benefit women frequently neglected the perspective and needs of women of color. This issue has been widespread among conservative and liberal women's organizations throughout history. At its beginnings, the feminist movement itself also failed to include women of color and their unique standpoint. In order to address the issues of racially and sexually marginalized women, it is necessary to understand their oppression as a product of the matrix of domination. This system of white, heteronormative patriarchy can only be deconstructed by centering the experiences of women of color and sexual minorities in feminist discourse (Hill Collins 2016). In this sense, feminist gender consciousness is insufficient for women in the absence of intersectionality.

An analysis of how race, gender, class, and sexuality shape the experiences of all women is critical. Black feminist scholar, Audre Lorde advocated for this approach to addressing women of color's struggles when she stated, "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house...And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support" (Lorde 2016:341). Lorde concluded that feminist strategies that did not challenge racist and heterosexist systems would never achieve justice for all women. Being dominated by middle- and upper-class white women, feminism would not be able to dismantle

the systems which kept those same women in a privileged position. Subsequently, Lorde determined that equality could only be obtained when white wealthy women were not at the center of the feminist agenda.

### *Christian Perspectives on Racial Inequality*

When analyzing the experience of women of color in conservative Protestantism, it is also necessary to consider understandings of racial inequality among Christians. In order to contextualize Christians' attitudes towards racial inequality in the U.S., two main perspectives are defined: structuralist which sees the social structure as the cause for Black people's disenfranchisement and individualist, which associates inequality with lack of motivation and willpower (Cobb, Perry, and Dougherty 2015). Structuralist and individualistic explanations for racial inequality were examined in non-multiracial churches where over 80% of members belong to one race and multiracial churches where no one race makes up 80% of congregants. Although the racial makeup of the congregations was expected to directly produce either structuralist or individualist ideologies among congregants, this idea was not entirely supported. Overall, Black women and men in both types of congregations were more likely to support structuralist views of inequality (Cobb et al. 2015). The same pattern was not observed among other racial groups, however. Hispanics had more individualist views of racial inequality than Black and white congregants, emphasizing personal responsibility likely due to their firm belief in the "American Dream". Simultaneously, Hispanics and blacks both upheld structuralist views at a higher rate than whites. While racial makeup of the church did not affect Hispanic and whites' views, blacks were significantly less likely to support structuralist perspectives of inequality if they attended a multiracial church (Cobb et al. 2015). While this could be a manifestation of white hegemony

within the church, it may also point to those congregations' tendency to attract Black congregants who already held individualist views of inequality. Thus, multiracial churches do not necessarily instill individualist views of inequality in Black members.

On the contrary, there was a greater correlation between views on Black/White inequality and control variables such as education level, political affiliation, geographic location, and gender across racial/ethnic groups. Highly educated, older, liberal, women living outside the South were the most likely to hold structuralist views, while less educated, older, conservative males living in the South were most likely to hold individualist perspectives (Cobb et al. 2015). Therefore, regardless of religious denomination perspectives on racial inequality among Christian Black, Hispanic, and other people of color are not homogeneous. It can be concluded that ideologies among women within conservative Protestant institutions, independent of their racial makeup, will be influenced by other intersecting identities. Nevertheless, adherence to an individualistic view, which reduces racial inequalities to the individual and neglects the larger system of white patriarchy, can lead Christians to overlook the distinct ways in which white women and women of color experience and understand womanhood within the church. Furthermore, individualistic explanations for racial inequality may also inhibit white women and women of color from developing gender consciousness amongst each other.

### *Black Women and the Church*

When examining racial identity among women and how it interacts with gender inequality, it is important to account for the experiences of women of color. Reiterating Hill Collins' and Lorde's Black feminist theories, Eurocentric and patriarchal systems can only be dismantled and transformed when the experiences of Black women and other women of color

become central to feminist discourse (Hill Collins 2016; Lorde 2016). This approach is necessary to understand the ways in which women's experiences are diverse, racialized, and shaped by white patriarchal society. Daphne C. Wiggins's (2005) ethnographic research does exactly this as it explores the experiences of Black women in two Black churches: Layton Temple Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and Calvary Baptist Church. Much like white conservative Protestant churches, these two congregations exhibited a gendered division of labor as men made up the majority of preachers, deacons, and trustees while women were most often assigned positions in Sunday school, child care, and secretaries of committees (Wiggins 2005). In Baptist congregations, women have often been recognized as leaders if they were active in the community or directly related to the pastor. Of course, there have been a few exceptions as time has progressed and the Black church has begun to ordain women. Nevertheless, most of the women recalled seeing strong female leadership but recognized they were "not to be in the pulpit" (120). Once again, the patriarchal dynamic found in white conservative Protestant congregations is also experienced by Black women in the Black church. Among those who felt discomfort due to the lack of women clergy, there did not seem to be a concerted effort to address gender inequality in the church. This is due to a firm distinction between the sacred and the secular (Wiggins 2005). More specifically, the women perceived secular methods to promote equality such as affirmative action were inadequate for and should not be applied to a spiritual organization. They also did not claim to align with womanist and feminist critiques of the church. This resulted in a general inaction regarding gender equality within these two congregations.

When addressing the intersection of race, gender, and religion for these women, it is also important to consider the history of the Black church as it relates to the White church. Wiggins (2005) recounts the way in which racial segregation, especially during the Jim Crow era, led to the racial divide that remains among Christian congregations to this day. This has played a key role in the formation of the Black church, its culture, and the way in which Black women have developed their racial and gender consciousness within the church. Overall, most women in Wiggins's study (2005) engaged in certain racial practices such as intentional support of Black businesses, Black politicians, though not solely on the basis of race, and the celebration of Kwanzaa among some of the participants. However, Wiggins identifies two different camps concerning race-consciousness among these Black women. One-third were integrationists, who strived to be color-blind, wanted unified churches regardless of race, and preferred racially specific issues to be minimized within the church (Wiggins 2005). One of the participants who was an integrationist emphasized the need to separate race from "the Spirit," meaning race should not be treated as a salient identity in ministry. Thereby, for these Black Christian women, racial inequality in leadership in predominantly white or multi-racial congregations was not to be perceived as a race issue because God's spirit precedes and anoints all leadership. Further, these women attributed their more inclusive views to a "conversion" process through which God took away their prejudice against whites (Wiggins 2005). As mentioned above, this perspective can be expected to be upheld by Black Christian women who view the spiritual and the secular as fundamentally separate.

Conversely, nationalists were opposed to some of these perspectives. For the most part, nationalists concluded that they would not attend or join a predominantly white church and

expressed distrust towards congregating with white Christians who have not pursued relationships with Black men and women in other contexts (Wiggins 2005:159). This is directly related to the history of racial segregation not only in the nation but in American congregations. For these women, it is challenging to find fellowship with white Christians who have traditionally remained in white circles and have not endured the same struggles Black Christians have faced. For them, Black churches provide an environment in which they feel understood and connected to their culture. These diverging perspectives among Black Christian women demonstrate the ideological heterogeneity even among women who share similar racialized and gendered experiences within Christian institutions.

#### *Latinas and the Church*

Race and ethnic consciousness in conjunction with religious involvement also inform the gender ideologies and understandings of womanhood embraced by Latinas residing in the United States. Previous scholarship suggests that, in terms of gender ideology, conservative Protestant Latinas who uphold biblical literalism and attended church regularly also exhibit support for ideas of male headship (Ruiz, Bartkowski, Ellison, Acevedo, and Xu 2017). Of course, this is due to the emphasis placed on spiritual male headship among conservative Protestant congregations. Nonetheless, some aspects associated with complementarianism were present among all Latinas. For example, support for female domesticity, the belief that women are responsible for child-rearing and housework, prevailed across the participants' religious affiliation and independent of biblical literalism (Ruiz et al. 2017). This is the result of social values such as familism or the idea that family precedes the mother's interests, and gender traditionalism which are common in Latin American cultures. In this sense, female domesticity is



more cultural in context than religious. This is also evident when acculturation is taken into consideration. Participants who chose to be interviewed in Spanish did adhere to more gender essentialist views than those who preferred English (Ruiz et al. 2017). Assuming Latinas who chose English were more assimilated into American culture, these findings provide support for the theory that acculturation can result in more egalitarian gender attitudes. That is not to say Latin American cultures are less egalitarian than the American culture. Patriarchal systems exist in both. However, familism and gender traditionalism are not as common in the U.S. and these tend to diminish in influence as Latinas become more identified with American culture. This demonstrates how race, culture, and ethnicity interact in the formation of gender ideologies and womanhood even within conservative Protestantism.

Further, the experiences of Latinas, especially those of immigrant status, within U.S. congregations are essential for the development of an intersectional understanding of conservative Protestantism. The social context in which the two congregations selected for this present study are located is especially relevant in this analysis. As previous scholarship on multicultural congregations have posited, the increase in immigration from Asian and Latin American countries specifically in the South has been met with an effort to minister to those populations by white Catholic and Protestant churches alike (Nagel and Ehrkamp 2017). Nagel and Ehrkamp's qualitative research across congregations in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina demonstrate how multicultural approaches meant to reach out to immigrant communities were simultaneously committed to inclusion and prone to conflict. First, while the goal of these predominantly white churches was to reach across cultural, racial, and ethnic divides to share their beliefs with Latino/a immigrants, the most common strategy of achieving

this was to provide separate times and spaces for Hispanic services (Nagel and Ehrkamp 2017). Even though the groups were segregated, leaders from both congregations did not consider it to be divisive but rather an opportunity for Hispanics to have their own services instead of being forced to attend services in English. On the other hand, it was this very dynamic which maintained both groups estranged from each other and unable to connect.

The separation between both groups often prevented white congregants from facing their prejudices and building relationships with Latino/a congregants (Nagel and Ehrkamp 2017). In response to this issue, occasional events were held in which both the Anglo and Latino congregations would come together to share traditional meals and socialize. While this certainly enabled white American church members to interact and learn from the cultures of Latino members, the majority of the labor fell on immigrant women who were expected to bring “ethnic” meals to these events (Nagel and Ehrkamp 2017). This demonstrates the power dynamics and assumptions that informed the relationships between white and Latino/a congregants. It was common for the Latino congregation to be treated as “Others” who were welcomed yet responsible for bridging the gap between themselves and the white congregants. This was observed by a pastor who mentioned that the lay leadership from the Latino ministry was serving in the white church but her fellow white church members did not exhibit the same willingness to cross the cultural divide, “It’s not their style. They don’t feel like they’re obliged to put themselves out to build the relationships quite as much as the Latino group” (202). In this way, the social and structural inequality experienced by Latino/a immigrants who share facilities with white Christian churches is evident. This issue is particularly relevant to the two congregations selected for this study which are both coexisting as separate ministries, one

predominantly white and the other Hispanic. It is expected that white women and Hispanic women will experience or be aware of this inevitable marginalization and racial inequality that continues to be reproduced in churches across the South despite their intent to foster inclusivity.

## METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study consisted of 13 semi-structured interviews which ranged from 40 minutes to 2 hours each. These were conducted via phone and webcam, recorded, and transcribed. The names of participants and other identifying information were omitted from the data. Instead, each participant chose a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. The sample for this research was exclusively comprised of women over the age of 18 who are currently or were previously involved in two conservative Baptist churches in Central Florida. To further protect the identities of participants, I have assigned each congregation a pseudonym. The first congregation, Covenant Baptist Church (CBC), is English speaking and the other, Iglesia Bautista Central (IBC), is Spanish speaking. Given that I attended both congregations regularly, this sample was obtained through convenience sampling as seen in Colaner's study (2008) and snowball sampling (Chan 2015) in order to facilitate the selection of women who were active attendees, held positions in ministry, and had developed close relationships with other congregants. Moreover, this increased the probability that firm adherents to conservative values, as seen among regular congregants in Gallagher's (2004b) and Hoffmann and Bartkowski's (2008) studies, would be overrepresented in the sample for the purposes of this research.

Concerning the recruitment of women for this study, I would like to emphasize my role as an insider of both congregations, primarily the English-speaking church. A common factor between these two independent conservative Baptist churches was the exclusive nature of their social networks. Many of the women, especially middle-aged and elderly women, were hesitant to participate in a secular project such as this one which involved interviews that focused on deeply personal subjects. There was also a racialized component to the sampling process. While

my position as a previous leader in the youth ministry, despite being Latina, did allow me to connect with white leadership who were able to give me access to other white congregants, my access to women of color within the predominantly white congregation was limited. Future research seeking to recruit congregants from predominantly white or multiracial independent Baptist churches should take into consideration these barriers and the need to rely on various social networks in order to access congregants of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

An additional aspect that influenced the sampling in this study were the geographic location and demographics of the community these women resided in. Both churches were affiliated and located in a predominantly white suburban town in Central Florida. The median age is 43.5 years old, 70.2% of the population is white non-Hispanic, and the median household income is \$45,938 (Data USA 2018). Given that the population is older and largely white, interactions between community members are limited. The language barrier and marginalization caused by the immigration experience among the Hispanic participants in this study also made it difficult for this gap to be bridged between them and English-speaking congregants. This isolation was exacerbated by the fact that the two congregations were independent Baptist and reluctant to collaborating with outsiders even across denominations. Thus, the environment within which these women were operating, the ideologies promoted by it, and women's experiences are unique to the insular culture of the denomination and community.

### *Social Factors*

Some social factors I considered in this research were age, race, ethnicity, marital status, educational attainment, employment status, number of children, household income, church attendance, biblical literalism, and language. To maintain an intersectional approach, I selected

women of varying ages, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds while also taking into account whether the congregation they attended was predominantly white or predominantly Hispanic. Of the 13 women, five were from the Hispanic congregation and eight were from the English-speaking congregation. All women from the Hispanic congregation identified as Latina, Hispanic, and/or white. Among the English-speaking women, one identified as mixed-race Latina, one as Black non-Hispanic, one as Black Hispanic, and the remaining five identified as white. In terms of age, the youngest participants were 19 years old and the eldest was 85. The rest of the women were between 35 and 70 years old. Not all women were willing to provide their approximate annual household income. However, among those who did provide it, household income ranged from \$15,000 to \$200,000 a year, with most earning over \$40,000 a year. The education level of all 13 women ranged from some college to post-graduate and only two were unemployed, a widow and a stay-at-home mom. Marital status was also taken into consideration as this can also impact gender ideologies and practices. Nine of the 13 of the women were married, two were widows, and two were single. Only two, the youngest participants who were 19 years old, did not have any children.

Another significant factor in this analysis was church participation and attitudes about the Bible which can also influence the internalization of doctrine and gender ideals (Gallagher 2004b). The women were asked how many times a week they attended services. Over half of the women (8) attended church services up to three times a week. It is important to note, however, that one of the participants no longer identifies with the faith nor attends church services. Instead, she reported her attendance at the time that she was still a member of the church. There were two other women who explicitly mentioned no longer identifying as conservative Baptist

after leaving CBC but have continued to attend other Baptist congregations. Lastly, to measure biblical literalism among participants, I utilized the four-point Likert scale provided in the study by Ruiz et al. (2017) which consisted of a single item: “The Bible is the literal word of God and a true guide faith and morality.” Participants were given the option to 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Somewhat Disagree, 3 – Somewhat Agree, and 4 – Strongly Agree.

### *Guiding Research Questions*

1. What are the meanings of womanhood for conservative Baptist women?
2. How do conservative Baptist women perform gender in marriage, ministry, the workforce, and parenting?
3. How do conservative Baptist women perceive their role within the church?
4. What does gender consciousness look like for conservative Baptist women?
5. How do race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background affect women of color’s identity and experiences within predominantly white or Hispanic congregations?

To assess gender ideology and practices, some questions were extracted or adapted from Denton’s marital practices and gender ideology survey such as, “Who usually takes the lead in spiritual matters?” (2004:1171). The rest of the questions in the interview schedule were designed by me and can be found in Appendices A (English) and B (Spanish). To analyze these, I transcribed and coded responses following the various gender ideologies, marital practices, and other major themes discussed in the literature review. Moreover, I also created codes according to new topics that emerged in the interviews themselves. The software I utilized for coding was the QDA Miner Lite by Provalis Research.

## FINDINGS

As mentioned in my methodology, the major themes that framed my research and analysis are directly drawn from the previously reviewed literature. Below, my findings are organized into four main topics: gender ideology, gender practices, ministry experience, and gender consciousness among white women and women of color. Before proceeding with the discussion, I will restate the definitions of some key concepts. The three primary gender ideologies among Christians are complementarianism, egalitarianism, and evangelical pragmatism. “Complementarianism” posits that men and women are created fundamentally different and must fulfill entirely separate roles that complement each other while “egalitarianism” emphasizes partnership and mutuality between men and women (Colaner and Giles 2008). Some egalitarians embrace gender constructionism such as the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus (EEWC), and other groups like Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) reject this idea, upholding the difference in God’s prescribed roles for men and women yet stressing their equal value (Gallagher 2004a; Kohm 2008). Next, the more recently developed gender ideology, “evangelical pragmatism,” is defined by Gallagher (2004a) as a “soft” form of patriarchy that maintains male headship in spiritual matters despite promoting more egalitarian practices in parenting, decision-making, among other things. In the upcoming portion of this analysis I will discuss the prevalence of these ideologies among participants from both congregations.



## NEGOTIATING DOCTRINE AND GENDER IDEOLOGY

Although gender ideologies are explained by previous scholarship as frameworks that women may fit themselves into, my findings suggest that such ideologies are better understood as a spectrum. Most, if not all, women seemed to hold some egalitarian ideas regarding to gender while also affirming complementarian views in other aspects. These contradictions are best explained when ideology and practices are analyzed separately. As highlighted by the literature provided earlier, ideologies often do not coincide with actual practices as one might expect. In my conversations with conservative Baptist women from the two selected congregations discrepancies, contradictions, and negotiations that take place between ideology, scripture, marital decision making, parenting, and gender performance among Christian couples are evident, especially due to the rise of evangelical pragmatism (Gallagher 2004a). In the following section, I will first discuss the various gender ideologies observed, any overlaps I noted, and the strategies employed by different women to explain their application of scripture in their own lives as Christian women.

### *Godly Womanhood and Manhood*

Out of the three primary gender ideologies found in conservative Protestantism, the majority of the women demonstrated a combination of complementarian and egalitarian attitudes. This overlap of egalitarian and complementarian ideas is similar to evangelical pragmatism, which upholds male spiritual headship but emphasizes mutualistic parenting and decision-making (Gallagher 2004a). Among the 13 women I interviewed, 10 described an egalitarian understanding of gender solely when speaking about the embodiment of a “godly woman” and a “godly man”. For instance, when asked to explain what godly womanhood and

godly manhood looked like to each of them, several women from both congregations described God's equal expectation for all believers regardless of gender:

There's no difference in God's principles amongst all people. So, my response is, to live a life that's godly, biblically principled, and the standard's based on God's Word. So, the same applies to a man. (Eva, Black, 61, widowed, CBC)

Evidently, gender performance was not seen as a factor in achieving a "godly" identity for women and men, since godliness was defined as a "relationship" with God that can only be developed by reading the scriptures, attending church, and submitting to God's guidance in their daily lives. On the other hand, when godly womanhood and manhood were framed in terms of "roles," complementarianism was the most prevalent ideology, even among several of the 10 women who viewed godliness in gender-neutral terms:

I guess I have always been taught that their role is different. So, they [men] have more responsibility, more accountability. So, a godly man should also be ruling his home, the church, anything he is in charge over. To a higher standard than maybe a woman would. (Joey, white, 43, married, former member of CBC)

A godly man is one for whom God is first...A man of God is conscious about the fact that he is the leader in his home. He is the one who can guide his family spiritually. He is the one who can avoid that his children will take the wrong path in the future...That is primarily the man's responsibility in the home. (Aurelia, white Hispanic, 43, married, IBC, translated from Spanish)

These two statements by Joey and Aurelia capture the complementarian idea of men and women's fundamentally different and separate roles that work in tandem with each other to ensure the family operates properly and in a "godly" fashion. There are two core assumptions here that justify the patriarchal order in the home beyond doctrine. The first is that the husband is

held to a “higher standard” by God than women are. Therefore, it is logical for him to be at a superior position than the wife since he must answer to God for his entire family, including her. Further in the conversation, Joey explains that this is backed up by the Bible given that Adam and Eve both sinned when they ate from the forbidden fruit, yet it was him who God called and punished more harshly for the actions of the two of them jointly. This becomes a recurring theme throughout these interviews which I will continue to expound on in the following sections. The second element, as articulated by Aurelia, is the man’s direct relationship and reliance on God in his leadership. Several of the women reasoned that this patriarchal order works because the man is ideally supposed to be led by God. Therefore, when a husband reads his scriptures and prays for guidance, every decision and action he takes is assumed to be approved of by God and the family must follow him.

Also, as seen in previous literature, the idea of familism, or the idea that family precedes the mother’s interests, that predominated Latina Christian women regardless of religious denomination becomes especially relevant for “less acculturated” Latinas (Ruiz et al. 2017). According to Ruiz and colleagues, acculturation refers to the extent to which women have assimilated into American culture. In both their study and mine, less acculturated women preferred to interview in Spanish. Most importantly, out of the six women who identified as Hispanic, five were immigrants. Only one of these interviewed in English, Laia, the 19-year-old mixed-race Latina who grew up attending CBC. Thus, as proposed by Ruiz et al. (2017), less acculturated women like Aurelia, a Cuban immigrant, tended to support ideas of male headship, female domesticity or the belief that women are responsible for raising the children and caring for the home, and traditional understandings of gender. Additionally, previous research viewed

acculturation as a possible contributing factor in more egalitarian views of gender (Ruiz et al. 2017). I did observe this, particularly in Laia and Luisa's case, the former being an immigrant who grew up in and integrated well into American culture, and the latter who was born and raised in the U.S. Both of these women interviewed in English despite being bilingual. Nevertheless, the rest of the women from the Hispanic congregation did promote female domesticity and familism:

A woman of God can be described as demonstrating and being an example...being an example in her home first, for her children, praying daily, and maybe reading the Bible...that is what one should wish for, that the children are following God...The same goes for the church...I think it is important because we need to be there to pray for others. (Belgica, Hispanic, 61, married, IBC, translated from Spanish)

Here, Belgica, one of the most consistent complementarians of the 13 women interviewed, sees godly womanhood as contingent upon the woman's duty to be an example for her children, be responsible for their spiritual lives, and even the spiritual well-being of the congregation itself.

These dualistic, complementarian views on godly manhood and womanhood were also mentioned by younger participants who no longer adhere to these ideas but felt the pressure of conforming to them as they entered their teenage years at CBC.

[A godly woman was] a woman who submitted to her husband, was married at a young age, had a lot of kids, and her focus was her family, her home, and her husband. To me that's what a godly woman was always portrayed as. At the age of 14, I believed that in order to be godly I had to marry the first man I ever dated, make sure to stay pure [virgin] until marriage, and had to be sure to get married at a young age, and have children, and focus on my husband and family and if possible be a stay at home mom and wife...they also kind of pushed that homeschooling your children helped you be godly and your children be godly because they weren't

being brainwashed by our public school system. (Laia, mixed-race Latina, 19, single, former CBC member)

As seen above, complementarian ideas such as women's submission, female domesticity, and the idea of men and women holding separate, yet complementary roles were also internalized by girls from a young age. Interestingly, the construct of virginity or "purity," marrying young, and aspiring to be a stay-at-home mom, which continue to be relevant to Laia as a young adult, are not mentioned as qualities of a "godly woman" among the older women. This aspect will be further discussed in the gender consciousness section of these findings.

#### *Ideals of Marriage and Family Dynamics*

To reiterate, all the women did exhibit overlapping gender ideologies, at one point or another. For most of them, this overlap was particularly noticeable when I inquired about their views on a "godly" marriage, parenting, and family dynamic. Evangelical pragmatism in their understanding of submission and leadership between wives and husbands became more prominent at this point:

I think that, as a woman, submission—which is a word that is very misinterpreted—submission, by definition [in Spanish], is clinging to someone or something. So, I think that by submitting, as a woman, I am clinging to my husband so he can teach me, protect me, and bless me. Subsequently, I am an example to my son...because submission brings blessing. It brings blessing and respecting the roles that God talks about is a blessing. (Suzy, Hispanic, 43, married, IBC, translated from Spanish)

I think I have known of one pastor...put his wife in a lower position than him. He was the one that made the decisions, he was the spiritual head of the household... I'm not saying that men are not the head of the household...I'm just saying, in that verse that says, 'women submit to your husbands,' if you do a study on those verses...the man is supposed to treat his wife in such a way that she would *want* to

submit to him...That verse is supposed to be full of love and respect for each other. And he is to treat his wife in such a way and put her on a pedestal...that she would love him with all her heart and she would want to please him...It's not about the man putting his thumb and pressing her into some position of submission. (Emilia, white, 66, married, CBC)

While the women above do uphold the idea of clearly delineated marital roles, every single one of them draws a distinction between traditional views of submission and their personal interpretation submission in the scriptures. Explanations for their rejection of traditional views of submission involve examples of Biblical passages being taken out of context, abuse, controlling behavior, and violence between partners. These negative effects of traditional interpretations of scripture led the women to reframe and dig deeper in order to construct a healthier understanding of their relationship to a man in accordance with the marital roles they see provided by the Bible. Similar to evangelical pragmatists, in this negotiation of meanings, Rosa, the Hispanic 54-year-old married woman from IBC, defines male headship in a spiritual sense while also clarifying that submission does not signify oppression for the wife.

In the Bible, it talks about how the woman should submit to the man. But the submission they [church leaders] preach is not the one the Bible talks about. Because, yes, the woman must submit in *spiritual* matters. It's not that I am going to submit, and he is going to abuse me or that I have to do what he says. It's not like that. (translated from Spanish)

Instead of abusing his power and headship, the husband is expected to behave in a way that demonstrates his love and devotion to God, to his wife, and to the role God has given him as the spiritual leader of his wife and family. In this way, complementarian-leaning women are not challenging the idea of male headship over the home and ministry, but that of explicitly abusive

male leadership. Further, as mentioned by Belgica, the 61-year-old, married, Hispanic from IBC, there are concessions that can be made when the husband cannot fulfill his duty as the head of the home:

I think that even though the man should be the boss, as the word of God says...and should have control over his home, sometimes we [wives] cannot escape that role because, there are men that dedicate themselves very little to that. They should be the boss in the family, the priest of the home, but if they fail, the woman is there. I think God won't disapprove of us doing that. On the contrary, we have to watch out for our children. And I think that is the responsibility of both, although it should be the father's priority, but if he isn't there, then it's the mother's. (translated from Spanish)

This flexibility of roles for men and women within marriage has been a key component of evangelical pragmatism especially with the widespread need for dual-earner household since the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gallagher 2004a). Belgica continues, adding that this was a consequence of societal and cultural changes:

The man should be the one to watch over his home, if it's possible as the Word of God commands it, the woman has to stay home. But now...we, humans, have changed it. That role is not being fulfilled anymore because one could say that 80% of women work outside the home too. That's in the past now...Now, with everything, it's not enough for only the man to work so the woman helps him financially. She's not his "helpmeet" anymore, she is his financial support. That is a huge failure. (translated from Spanish)

When I asked the women what made this dynamic ideal, Joey, who presented a mostly complementarian gender ideology also expressed nostalgia toward families of the past and negative changes that she considers have taken place since:

*Interviewer: I want to go a step farther and ask, to you, what makes that dynamic ideal?*

I think it would be because then the mom and dad have more of an influence on the children. They're not alone as much being influenced by their friends, the world, TV, society in general. The parents will have better control—I don't know if control is the word—but a better influence over their children's lives if they were around more. They're gone too much.

According to Joey and Belgica, the idealization of complementarian marital practices is rooted in the desire to preserve the traditional structure of the family and the processes associated with it, such as the division of labor between husbands and wives. This was a concern shared by complementarians like Piper and Grudem (1991), Concerned Women for America (Schreiber 2002), and even evangelical egalitarians like CBE (Kohm 2008). The main assumption is that adherence to the roles God designed according to this interpretation of scripture, which consisted of the man being the primary breadwinner and the woman being the homemaker, was what held families together in the past. The women above, both of whom had children and were employed outside the home, perceived a rise in divorce rates, less communication within families, less time spent supervising the children, and women's need to work outside the home in order to help their husbands support the family as products of societal and economic changes that included shifts in gender expectations themselves. Thus, for Joey and Belgica, adherence to complementarian gender dynamics believed to be predetermined by God is seen as the best way to prevent the ultimate demise of the family as an institution.

It is important to note that these views idealize the concept of the "traditional" nuclear family, which has not always been attainable for many, by equating fewer instances of divorce in the past and the appearance of more family interaction and greater influence over the children with higher social stability. Nonetheless, as suggested by feminist scholars like Connell (2018),



such gender essentialist ideologies which have placed men at a dominant position in relation to women led to the construction of a social structure in which women are socially and structurally disenfranchised. Men, on the other hand, thrive in a society built for them, while also bearing the weight of providing for both the broader society and their families. Thereby, this dynamic enabled the reproduction of the hegemonic relationship between men and women that has been upheld by social institutions such as the family and the church. From a feminist perspective, this does not result in greater social stability but rather in fewer resources, opportunities of advancement, and influence for women, including within ministry (Hall et al. 2010). Hall describes these as manifestations of “sanctified sexism” in the church, which I will discuss further in the “Women in Ministry and Sanctified Sexism” section.

### *Biblical Literalism*

Biblical literalism and the negotiation of scripture become important factors to consider in the reframing of submission and headship observed among conservative Baptist women. First, 10 out of 13 women, reported being firm literalists in their interpretation of the Bible. As proposed by Hoffmann and Bartkowski’s work (2008), I observed that biblical literalism did become a resource for women even within the patriarchal structure of the church and marriage that is posited by conservative Protestantism. By utilizing and interpreting scripture to emphasize the husband’s duty to honor his wife and God’s expectation of him as her guide and protector, these women were able to reinforce their agency by holding men and even church leadership accountable for their misuse of power over women.

On the other hand, scripture was both a source of inner conflict and a tool for women who no longer adhered to conservative Baptist doctrine. Their deconstruction and reframing of scripture itself led them to understand their faith and marriage differently:

I do believe that what the Bible says about marriage is true...if you look at Ephesians or just the different passages that talk about the wife submitting herself to her husband...that is an isolated text...in other parts of scripture it tells us *all* Christians to submit ourselves one to another. That means a husband would submit to the wife and the wife would submit to the husband...I think that while we have different roles, we're equal in identity...my husband can't be a mother and I can't be a father. He can't be a wife and I can't be a husband...but I think that biblically we're equal in the sight of God and I think that differs from what I was raised to believe. I think those Scriptures were taken out of context and they were used to keep women in a subjugated space. (Eliza, 37, white, married, former CBC member)

Eliza's perspective is very similar to that of "biblical equality" which is promoted by egalitarian Christian groups like the CBE (Kohm 2008). While she still sustains that gender does help define the role of a mother and a father or a wife and a husband, she does believe these roles are equally valuable. Moreover, she does not believe the husband has authority over the wife but instead, they should "submit" to each other. Like other women, including the more complementarian women mentioned at the beginning of this section, Eliza's conclusion comes from a place of understanding the ways in which scripture has been employed to abuse and oppress women. She goes a step further by expanding her interpretation of the Bible in a way that allows her to reject the patriarchal ideal within marriage and the family held by complementarians. This reframing of doctrine and scripture seems to derive from a social location in which they have felt oppressed by both the institution of the church and complementarian gender expectations. Their particular position as subordinate members in a

patriarchal institution, as well as their desire to retain their beliefs, compels them to shift their understanding of scripture in a way that ultimately leads to a more egalitarian view of marriage and leadership. Eliza's statement on her identity as a Christian woman when I asked whether her spiritual life had been impacted in any way while she was a part of the conservative Baptist tradition is a great example of this process:

I personally would say, yes, because I never felt freedom. I never felt like I could make my own choices and that I would be valued for making my own choices. I felt like, as a woman, if I made my own choices and followed those choices I would be seen as rebellious or not submissive. So, now that I've changed my mindset, I have a lot more freedom to be who I believe God made me to be.

Contrary to more conservative and complementarian participants who interpreted scripture to find comfort within their subordinate position to all men and their husbands, Eliza and a couple others stressed mutual submission between husbands and wives, equal value before God regardless of gender, and recognized scripture as a tool manipulated by the oppressor.

A less common, yet significant finding were the non-literalist remarks of some of the women I interviewed. While only two of the 13 reported being non-literalist or mostly non-literalist, a third woman who considered herself mostly literalist expressed one of the most non-literalist opinions out of all the women:

I think the only problem I found with it [the Bible] has to do with the feminism side of it...I find it very difficult to believe that it is the literal word of God, untarnished or unchanged by human males because we are human and they had their way of thinking, the way they wanted things to be...I find it very difficult to believe that they did not add that into it. (Luisa, Black Hispanic, 54, married, CBC).

Luisa, an egalitarian, expresses her conflict accepting the scriptures as literal due to the way conservative Baptist interpretation has contributed to the subjugation of women. She speculates that the scriptures are not the literal word of God, but rather a reflection of what the men who wrote it believed and wanted society to operate as. This is certainly a view that deviates from conservative Protestant beliefs about the Bible and it was only shared by two other women: Rosa, the 54 year old Hispanic woman from IBC who was not a member of the conservative Baptist tradition until joining this congregation eight years ago, and Rachel, a white, 19 year old woman from CBC who no longer identifies with the faith. Thereby, although this is a highly uncommon view among women who are raised and remain in conservative Baptist congregations, it is clearly still possible for women to develop this view, especially as they realize how disenfranchised they are within ministry and outside of it.

#### MARRIAGE, THE FAMILY, AND SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Another aspect that was reflected in my findings was the discrepancy between ideology and practice. As articulated by several of the women, cultural and economic changes as well as the socioeconomic status of their own families do impact their gender practices within marriage in ways that might not coincide with complementarian ideology. Female domesticity, homeschooling, the husband as the primary breadwinner, and even male spiritual headship are not always achievable. While previous data revealed that over half of evangelical women worked outside the home in 2004, prompting the development of evangelical pragmatism (Gallagher 2004a), all the women in this study, with the exception of an 85-year-old white woman who was a widow and a 45-year-old Hispanic stay-at-home mom, were employed outside the home. Therefore, negotiation between doctrine, gender ideology, “ideal” marital roles, and parenting

practices was particularly challenging. Below, I will analyze the ways in which women's accounts of marital and parenting dynamics within their homes are reframed as they strive to conform to gender expectations consistent with complementarianism while also compromising depending on their culture and socioeconomic status. Conversely, I will also discuss how some women actively resisted complementarian roles within their marriage.

When I inquired on the women's ideas of a "godly marriage" and their own marital practices, all the married women and one of the two widowed women described their marriage as a partnership. However, this had very distinct meanings for complementarian-leaning women and egalitarian-leaning women. I identified two main conceptualizations of partnership: complementarian partnership and egalitarian partnership. The former could be compared to evangelical pragmatist ideology since it implies compromise between complementarian ideology and egalitarian practice. Women who practiced complementarian partnership heavily emphasized the gender hierarchy and strict marital roles that are unique to complementarianism. Evangelical pragmatists, on the other hand, tend to advocate for mutualistic marital roles and male headship that is solely relevant in spiritual matters (Gallagher 2004a). Compromise in complementarian partnership was not a product of these evangelical pragmatist ideas, but rather a tool to maintain the patriarchal family structure in all aspects, not just the spiritual. Egalitarian partnership, on the other hand, was practiced by women who did not subscribe to the idea of marital roles based on gender. As with gender ideologies, some women also demonstrated an overlap between these two marital dynamics. In this section, I will expound on and provide examples of complementarian and egalitarian partnership in marriage and parenting. Next, I will describe the way spiritual leadership was actually distributed and reframed by women.

### *Complementarian Partnership*

Complementarian partnership, as observed in this study, is founded upon the maintenance of a leader-helper dynamic in which neither the man nor the woman can fulfill their roles if the other is not fulfilling theirs. As Evaa, the 61-year-old Black woman from CBC put it, "...even a stupid man could be perceived as a good man if he has a good wife. Or a good husband for a wife. You could say the opposite as well." Ideally, there is an interdependency between husbands and wives that allows marriage to operate as both fulfill separate but complementary roles. There are three main components in this complementarian partnership: God leads, the husband and the wife act in unison while abiding by their respective roles, and decision-making is mutual.

*Interviewer: Assuming that both [husband and wife] are Christian, you said that a man of God should take leadership in various things—spiritual and at home—so how does that work at the same time that you have to be united, be one, and do things mutually?*

It works because each member in the relationship must follow God's principles, which both need to agree on. They should know that the woman should submit herself to the husband...letting herself be guided by her husband, because if her husband is the leader of the home and acts wisely, and she is one with him...anything that happens, not because he is the leader...but because it has been discussed, it's because they are one. It doesn't mean that because he is the leader nothing is discussed between the two of them before making a decision. (Aurelia, the previously mentioned complementarian white Hispanic married woman from IBC, translated from Spanish)

According to Aurelia, mutuality is only possible when the husband and the wife "become one" and look to God for guidance when a decision must be made. Of course, in practice, this ideal looked slightly different for all women.

...I certainly had my own opinion. I told him, 'Let's talk it out, see what you think we should do...' As I got older and studied the Bible more, I realized we shouldn't

dispute with anyone. Just try to give it over to the Lord and talk to your husband. Let God lead him or lead you, so there wouldn't be an argument. (Catherine, white, 85, widowed, CBC)

Here, Catherine, an 85-year-old widow from CBC, describes how she learned to discuss things with her husband, giving him her opinion without disputing. As mentioned by Aurelia, prayer, unanimity, and mutual submission to God were central to Catherine's decision-making practices in her marriage. It should be noted that while they both held this view, Aurelia perceived that it is the man whom God leads, and the woman will need to be led by her husband. She should not look for God's guidance on her own in decision-making within her marriage, but rather defer to her husband as he is the leader of the home. On the other hand, Catherine considered that either the husband or the wife can be led by God directly. Still, and perhaps relating to her actual marital practices, her language reinforces the patriarchal order that is maintained in complementarian partnership as she says, "...see what *you* think we should do..." when referring to her conversations with her husband.

I do kind of take a leadership role in our marriage...I voice my opinions strongly in decision making, but at the same time I do respect him. Because he is away a lot and I have to make a lot of leadership decisions and because we don't necessarily get to talk every day...But for the most part I really do try to make him feel like a leader...I will go to him and then ask his thoughts and opinions on things...it's kind of hard to plan things out, but for the most part, I do go to him and any major decision...we talk it over together. And if in the end he feels a certain way that I don't agree with, I still do what he says.

In this example, the leader-helper construct is simultaneously challenged and reinforced in Joey's self-reflection and reframing of her role as a wife. In other words, she acknowledges that sometimes she does take on a leadership role, which she associates with her assertiveness

and decision-making, but she understands this as only reasonable because of her husband's frequent absence. She can take a leadership role in her marriage but only to assist her husband in maintaining the household. Moreover, she describes how she ensures that her husband does not lose his position as the leader by always consulting him in major decisions and allowing him to have the last word despite what her own opinions might be. The recurring theme of the wife as a supportive figure for her husband, someone who makes him "look good" and handles some of his responsibilities while reaffirming his leadership, is what makes marriage a partnership for the complementarian-leaning women in this study. The husband can only fulfill his role as the head of the household with the wife's help. Likewise, she can only fulfill her role by helping him.

The practice of "giving in" or compromising to reach an agreement with their husbands that Joey and Catherine mentioned is suggested in Denton's (2004) research which determined that Protestant husbands of all denominations reported "giving in" only 23-24% of the time in decision-making. In this case, doctrine and scripture were used as justifications for such a dynamic in marriage. Regardless of the extent of the wife's involvement in decision-making, the women above perceive that this complementarian partnership is effective because God is supposed to be at the forefront of the union between the husband and the wife. By extension, any decisions made within the marriage by the husband as the leader and any suggestions given by the wife as the "helpmeet" are believed to be ordained by God himself.

One of the few women who presented an overlap in her understanding and practices of partnership in her own marriage was Evaa, the Black widowed woman from CBC who was mentioned at the beginning of this section. While she upheld the view that the husband is the patriarch of the home, she did provide a nuanced interpretation of these roles:



The roles and the tasks—in my opinion there are no roles or tasks that are specific—the responsibilities that a role may assume is not static. The husband is head of the house, woman is his helpmeet. That is biblical, that will never change, but that doesn't mean he doesn't do laundry. That doesn't mean she doesn't cut the yard. It depends on what works.

In Evaa's perspective, the leader-helper dynamic is biblical and unchanging. While later in the interview she stresses that the man should be respected by his wife as the leader and he should also accept her feedback, she still concludes that their roles should not be limited to gendered tasks. Instead, it is up to the husband to define what being a leader is and it is up to the wife to decide what being a helper will signify within their marriage to make it work. Evaa herself discusses how her husband was much more nurturing than her while she was a better educator than him and this led him to encourage her to direct Bible studies, despite him being the man and the leader in the relationship. Thus, it can be concluded that Evaa's unique perspective on gender expectations is the product of her negotiation between a doctrine that establishes a gender hierarchy and her own realization that traditional gender roles can be impractical and even unachievable to some. While she does not reject the leader-helper dynamic between husband and wife, she does accommodate her interpretation of this ideal to fit her situation. Once again, this highlights conservative Baptist women's agency to make concessions and reframe their ideologies to manage contradictions or any challenges they may face within their marriage.

Beyond marriage, parenting was also described as a partnership where strict roles were necessary in the dynamic that was idealized and practiced according to the women's accounts. First, Belgica, the 61-year-old, married Hispanic from IBC establishes the most complementarian perspective on parenting and distribution of authority within the family out of all participants:

If the father needs to discipline [the children], the mother does not need to intervene, but rather observe and if she sees there is something wrong, not say it in front of the kids. She should say it privately. But not intervene, in case this causes any inconveniences. I think that the mother can discipline the children if the father is absent, but if the father is there, he should discipline them...because he is the father, he is the one they should obey more than anything. (Translated from Spanish)

Thus, it is clear that there is a hierarchy that must be respected by the mother as the subordinate. While she may exercise her authority as a mother, it should only happen in the absence of the father. Provided that complementarian-leaning women already uphold male headship of the home, it follows that the father would be the only one who is seen as the ultimate authority even in punishment. Rachel, the white 19-year-old who grew up while attending CBC with a father who was heavily involved in ministry and adhered to complementarian ideals, explains the diverging roles between mothers and fathers, based on her own family dynamic:

The Dad was...the authority figure. And, while the mom did have authority, she wasn't viewed as that. She was definitely the "carer"...Like, you're supposed to respect your mother but she would never punish you...

In this way, complementarian partnership differs from evangelical pragmatic parenting practices. While according to Gallagher (2004a) evangelical pragmatism emphasizes that male headship is solely spiritual, complementarian partnership upholds the man's authority position over the woman in all things. Supplemented by other complementarian ideals such as female domesticity, a complementarian partnership dynamic in parenting diminishes the mother's own authority due to her subordinate role in relation to the father. Thus, according to these women's

accounts, while a mother is expected to bear the burden of child care and homemaking to assist the father, her authority is often limited in order to uphold male headship over the home.

### *Egalitarian Partnership*

Contrary to meanings of partnership among complementarian-leaning women, even those who reframed their interpretations of biblical roles between husbands and wives as they tried to make sense of their own marriage dynamic within the conservative Baptist framework, egalitarian partnership emphasized flexibility of roles regardless of gender, equal authority, and individuality. Once again, Eliza, the 37-year-old former member of CBC who no longer identifies as a conservative Baptist, explains her egalitarian beliefs with regards to marital and parenting practices after studying the scriptures and reevaluating her interpretations of them.

As far as a husband ruling over a wife, I don't necessarily see that in context. My interpretation is that a godly family is two parents who love Christ and are in pursuit of Christ, read the Scriptures and apply it to their lives and then lead their children, in humility, to do the same. So, I think that roles of authority I would definitely say that it's distributed evenly between the parents.

Although Eliza continues to uphold scripture as a guide for marriage and the family, she no longer believes in the principle of male headship seen among more complementarian participants. Once again, she emphasizes the belief in equality between the husband and wife, and equal exercise of authority as well.

Despite also holding egalitarian views on marriage and the family, Luisa, the 54-year-old, married Black Hispanic from CBC, did not base her reasoning for the dynamic between her and husband on the Bible but on what "works" for them as individuals, akin to Evaa's argument regarding complementarian partnership within her own marriage.

...Being more of a modern woman than a biblical one, I feel that it is a partnership between a husband and a wife...if I'm going to do something I pretty much always consult my husband...He doesn't always consult me on everything, but I try to consult him because I think that's the right thing to do. I am not of the philosophy that the man has the final word and I just do what he says and that's it...And my husband is not that kind of person either. We don't really have roles...I work full time and I'm not at home a lot and my husband has more free time, more time in the home. So, he does a lot of the things that would be typically a wife's job like washing clothes, cooking dinner, cleaning the kitchen, things like that. So, we don't have typical male-female roles.

Luisa's deviation from scripture as a guide for marital and parenting practices in the following statement may also be related to the fact that, despite previously considering herself to be mostly literalist in biblical interpretation, she does not view scripture as inerrant and unchanged by its writers. She also explains that she consults her husband not because he is the authority but rather because she believes it is what both husbands and wives should do as partners, even if he does not always consult her. While more complementarian women concluded that the husband had the final word once both had discussed their viewpoints, egalitarian-leaning women like Luisa and Eliza disagreed with this premise. In Luisa's case, of course, her husband's mindset and her career also contributed to the development of this egalitarian dynamic within Luisa's marriage that other women did not share. Thus, she did not need to modify or uphold conservative Baptist ideations of marital roles. Instead, she rejects these principles when she identifies herself, her ideas, and her practices within marriage as modern, rather than biblical.

Individuality is another major aspect of egalitarian partnership that refers to the husband and the wife's ability to pursue their own goals and relationship with God as independent individuals outside of marriage. Instead of their identities and spiritual lives being hinged upon their marriage, particularly the woman's, given the traditional subordinate position prescribed to

her, those who practiced egalitarian partnership mentioned the mutual support that existed within their marriages in each partner's individual endeavors. Eliza explains what this individuality between partners looks like in her own marriage:

...While I still love my husband and honor him, I view us as equal and my relationship with God is apart from him. The role that my husband plays in my spiritual walk is more of a camaraderie than me looking to him for my relationship with God or looking to him to direct me in my relationship with God. Now it's me seeking God on my own, which I did before as well, I just felt very—like my purpose in life was to support him in all of his endeavors. So, now it's evolved into more of a 'we're equal and we serve God together' instead of me letting God direct [husband's name] and me just following...We make decisions together and he supports me in a lot of my ministries.

In this way, egalitarian partnership drastically differs from complementarian partnership not only in that the husband and the wife are not confined to traditional gender expectations in order to fulfill their marital roles, but in the nature of the relationship itself as well. For instance, complementarian partnership, in practice, resembled more of a co-dependent relationship in that the wife would rely on the husband as the head of the household and ultimate authority, assuming he is following God's guidance, while he would rely on the wife to help him fulfill his role as leader. This was seen particularly in Joey and Aurelia's perceptions a godly marriage. However, egalitarian partnership was explained as a "camaraderie," as Eliza called it, in which no partner has more authority over the other and both can pursue their own aspirations while being directed by God individually.

Altogether, both complementarian and egalitarian partnership had the components of mutuality, dialogue, and collaboration. This is not unexpected, given the rise of evangelical pragmatism and similarities in egalitarian decision-making about child-rearing and working

outside the home among conservative, mainline, and liberal Protestants alike (Denton 2004; Gallagher 2004a). In my conversations with women whose gender ideologies varied across what I consider the spectrum between complementarianism, evangelical pragmatism, and egalitarianism, none appeared to disagree with the notion that marriage was a partnership. Doctrine, gender ideology, and biblical literalism did not significantly determine whether women favored partnership or not. All women regardless of ideology valued effective communication with their husbands in decision-making. The distinction came about when defining marital roles within that partnership.

Egalitarian-leaning women who were less literalist in biblical interpretation and rejected aspects of conservative Baptist doctrine tended to resist gendered marital roles and co-dependency between partners. Instead, they practiced mutual respect, submission, and support between partners in their personal endeavors. Submission here signified equal respect between both parties rather than a hierarchical relationship. Complementarian-leaning women who were more literalist in biblical interpretation and adhered to conservative Baptist doctrine supported the view of partnership as dependent upon the husband and wife's ability to abide by gendered marital roles. The husband's headship was reinforced by the wife's reliance on him to make the final decision and her duty to make him "feel" like the leader even when making decisions on her own in his absence. This demonstrates how the wife's agency and independence was reframed by women themselves in order to maintain the image of the man as the ultimate leader. Subsequently, women who struggled to meet traditional gender expectations also reconstructed meanings of marital roles as they attempted to fit into the leader-helper dynamic promoted by conservative Baptist doctrine. As observed, most women deviated from the complementarian

“ideal” in various ways including in parenting. In the next subsection, I will discuss how spiritual leadership was also a contested role for women, particularly those who upheld complementarian partnership in marriage.

### *Spiritual Leadership*

In this last subsection, I will briefly discuss one of the core aspects of conservative Baptist doctrine regarding marriage: spiritual leadership. As previously mentioned, both complementarianism and evangelical pragmatism propose spiritual leadership must be held by the husband as the “Priest of the Home,” in Belgica’s words. Out of the nine married women, six reported taking leadership in spiritual matters such as prayer, acts of service, and Bible reading. Interestingly, four out of the six were complementarians who had initially asserted that the husband should take spiritual leadership over the home. Thereby, I perceived a discrepancy in ideology and practice with regards to spiritual leadership, as well.

When I asked the women who, between them and their husbands, took the initiative in spiritual matters, Belgica’s response denoted a self-awareness of the ways in which her marital practices do not adhere to the “ideal”:

Well, I do! I have to do it. It’s not that he doesn’t like it, he just isn’t like that. But I tell him, and he tells me that it’s okay...He never prevents me from having my meetings or when I have a retreat. On the contrary, he has always supported me. Everything that is spiritual, when we eat, [for] prayer, I tell him, “Well, now I am going to have you pray.” Because the man has to pray, right? [I] just guide him, nothing more. It should be the opposite...it shouldn’t be this way, but... (Belgica, 61, married, Hispanic, IBC. Translated from Spanish)

There are two conflicting ideas in Belgica’s statements on spiritual leadership within her marriage. First, she admits that she does take the initiative in spiritual matters. She explains that her husband “isn’t like that,” meaning that he does not have a personality that drives him to take

control in spiritual practices. When I asked whether her husband identified as a Christian, she suggested that he has not always identified as a Christian but was growing spiritually. It is her proximity to the faith and the institution of the church which have led her to take on a spiritual leadership role in her household. Of course, she is aware that this presents a challenge to her complementarian views of male spiritual leadership. To reinforce her husband's leadership position, she says she asks him to pray over meals and other matters. Thus, she later shifts her perspective by repositioning herself as simply a "guide" for him to take the lead in prayer. Despite these practices, she sustains her initial complementarian ideology when she says that she should not be the one to take the initiative or guide her husband.

Several other women who leaned more complementarian also expressed being the spiritual leaders of the home even if they did not refer to themselves as such. Even among egalitarian-leaning women like Eliza who believed in equal authority between husbands and wives, there was some negotiation and reframing of spiritual leadership. For instance, here, Eliza explains why she takes the initiative more often in spiritual matters:

I homeschool my kids, so I have more time to influence them and when we have family devotions...we read the Bible and stuff...after every dinner and we each take turns, my husband reads, I read, sometimes my kids read. So, it's pretty dispersed, the spiritual leadership...

Although Eliza does say that spiritual leadership is distributed between all members of the family, she states that she takes the lead most often and reasons that it is because she is home with her children more often than her husband is. The fact that Eliza reports that she is significantly more responsible for childcare in her household, especially given that she homeschools her children, alludes to the complementarian expectation of female domesticity



which was very much encouraged by the conservative Baptist church as other participants discussed earlier in the interview. Thus, even for the more egalitarian women in this study, affirming their spiritual leadership without justification or negotiation was challenging due to prescribed roles for women in the family by conservative Baptist doctrine. Further, beyond spiritual beliefs and female domesticity, another aspect that hinders women in the U.S., regardless of religious affiliation, is the inequitable distribution of household and childcare responsibilities between men and women. According to Pew Research Center (2015), in 2013 mothers spent 14.2 hours on average every week on housework while fathers spend 8.6 hours per week, and 10.7 hours per week on child care while fathers spent 7.2 hours per week. This may make it even more challenging for ideologically egalitarian women to engage in egalitarian parenting practices in their household.

Lastly, four other women reported that both their husbands and them took leadership in spiritual practices. Emilia, a 66-year-old white married woman from CBC asserted, “I would say both of us. Because both of us are individuals and we both individually have to answer to God...I think both of us at different times make decisions about spiritual matters.” Despite being more complementarian, Emilia’s statement captures the individuality seen in egalitarian partnership. Among these women, all of which were complementarian, spiritual leadership was almost a grey area in which both could take leadership as various times because of their individual relationship with God. Of course, the idea of the husband presiding over spiritual decisions was widely accepted among these women but the same could not be said if the wife wanted to preside over spiritual matters. Only one woman, Catherine, the white, 85-year-old widow from CBC, mentioned that her husband took the lead in prayer and Bible-reading which

may be related to the fact that she was the oldest of all participants and was more exposed to traditional marital and gender dynamics than the other women.

## WOMEN IN MINISTRY AND SANCTIFIED SEXISM

Learning about the involvement and experience of women in ministry within the conservative Baptist tradition was another objective of this research. As discussed by previous scholarship, the conservative Protestant church is an institution that has perpetuated patriarchal power dynamics that have maintained women at a subordinate position even despite their ability to use scripture as a tool to hold men accountable and secure their status within the church (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). In fact, Hoffmann and Bartkowski's findings found that women with high church attendance were 30% more likely than women with low church attendance to maintain literalist interpretations of scripture that support male headship. It was theorized that women with high church attendance were more likely to adopt literalist interpretations of the Bible because they needed it as a resource more than those who were not as involved in ministry (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). Thus, these women did not use scripture to challenge the superior position of men in ministry, but rather strived to achieve legitimacy by upholding biblical principles and remaining engaged even within the confines of their subordinate status. My study expands on women's own understandings of their role as women "serving" God, their experiences, and any limitations they may have encountered while participating in ministry.

### *Women's Roles and Responsibilities*

Overall, there were two main understandings women's role within ministry: the supportive role and the familial role. While there was some overlap between these two, almost

all women described their role in ministry as the former. The women emphasized their roles as “servants” of God and as helpers to male leadership in several ways. For example, Joey, a white, married, complementarian woman who formerly attended CBC, describes herself as an active member of the congregation who fulfills a secondary role in ministry specifically due to her gender:

I guess I see me as under God, of course, and under the pastor of the church. So, under a man. I see myself as like, a woman, yes, I can do any role that a man can do, but the man is still above me as a woman in the church. So, my role would be more children and other women in the ministry than leading a group of men.

Consistent with complementarian doctrine, Joey initially positions herself in submission to God and then to a man. In this case, the man she is in submission to is the pastor, as he is the head of all ministries. The hierarchical order here is especially significant because, as discussed in the complementarian partnership section, the notion that God is the primary figure to which women must submit to allows them to accept male leadership, assuming that the man will abide by and be held accountable according to God’s authority. Otherwise, the role of the woman as subordinate is still respected by women like Joey because submission is seen as God’s design, not man’s command. Furthermore, it is worth noting that both Joey and Evaa, the 61-year-old Black woman from CBC who was mostly complementarian, mentioned that they were aware that they could do anything a man could and knew of women who wanted to have equal authority as men, but they were willing to follow the scriptures regardless of how they personally felt about their position as subordinates to men. This aspect will be further discussed in the last section of the discussion.

The familial role, which was less prominent, was mostly held by women from the Hispanic congregation. Supported by the complementarian ideal of female domesticity and the concept of familism in Hispanic cultures, a few women defined their role in ministry as interconnected with motherhood.

Before anything else, my role is in my function as a mother... This is what comes first, it's the most important thing, but outside of the family, is the workplace... Beyond that, everywhere, I always look for a way to contribute and tell [others] and share the testimony of what God has done in our lives... In that sense, I feel that in that way, I can contribute to society because I think, in some way... our conscience of what is good, what is bad, how we view friendships, with my own daughter when sometimes things aren't going well, I can give her advice from what the Bible teaches us, that is one way I can contribute. (Aurelia, white Hispanic, 43, married, IBC, translated from Spanish)

Aurelia finds that her service to God is primarily fulfilled in her responsibilities as a mother. She perceives that her duty is to lead her children to abide by what the scriptures propose according to conservative Baptist doctrine. Thus, her ministry is motherhood. In her perspective, by educating her daughter on Biblical principles she is contributing to society as a whole. Of course, this commitment to the ministry of motherhood specifically among Hispanics in this study can also be explained by the previously mentioned cultural aspect of familism which emphasizes the woman's selflessness towards her family (Ruiz et al. 2017). It is important to mention that several other Hispanics mentioned their responsibility over others' spiritual lives within their families and communities, not just their children. Likewise, Aurelia also views sharing her beliefs and values with others in the workplace as an extension of her ministry. The idea that a woman's ministry can also involve outreach is typically rooted in this biblical passage, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20), which is interpreted by conservative Baptist doctrine, as a command given to all Christians regardless of gender. Therefore, while there were several ministries in which women were actively involved in within the church, they also stressed the importance of ministry outside of the church building.

In terms of the actual location of women within these two conservative Baptist congregations, all women reported being involved in similar areas of ministry. All of the women, including the youngest participants, Rachel and Laia, had been involved in the children’s ministry, the youth ministry, women’s Sunday school, women’s Bible study groups, nursery, cooking and cleaning, and the music and drama ministries. This, however, was not solely by choice, but also due to the actual structure of the church and its leadership.

The nursery was led by a woman, there was a women’s bible study that was led by a woman, but apart from those two things I think every other ministry was led by men. So, Awana (children’s Bible study), youth ministry, missions board, the music ministry, the security ministry, the finance committee...as far as those things, those were all led by men. The only two ministries that I could think of that were led by women was the nursery and the ladies’ Bible study. (Eliza, 37, white, married, former member of CBC)

Here, it becomes evident that women, though provided with a variety of opportunities to serve in ministry, are relegated to work with either children or other women. Additionally, according to Eliza, even in those ministries where women predominated and were most involved, the leaders were almost always men. Prohibiting women from leading men and sometimes boys, as was the case for Eliza while she served in the youth ministry, maintains the patriarchal

structure in which women and children are subordinates. There is a structural barrier which women cannot cross, regardless of their involvement and commitment to ministry. This is a manifestation of the institutionalization of gender inequality within the church. In the following subsection, I will discuss the concept of “sanctified sexism” as it was exhibited in the accounts of women from these two separate congregations while also discussing their own attitudes and understandings towards the patriarchal structure of the church.

#### *Ambivalence on Sanctified Sexism*

“Sanctified sexism,” is a term used to describe any demeaning or discriminatory language, attitudes, and behaviors against women that are justified with biblical scripture (Hall et al. 2010). This issue manifests itself in various ways within Christian institutions including ministry and academia. For instance, men may employ scripture to justify their authority over women and their responsibility to correct women’s behavior in accordance with their interpretation of scripture. Moreover, Hall et al. (2010) also explains how the use of scripture to support sexism in Christian academia contributed to a decrease in sense of influence, self-confidence, and access to information and opportunities of advancement among women faculty. This was due to the legitimizing effect biblical scripture has on Christian men’s statements and behaviors towards women who share the same faith. Although, in my research, I did not explicitly ask women about sexism within ministry, I inquired on any unique challenges or limitations they may have faced while serving in ministry that could pertain to their gender. Overall, there was an ambivalence among women regarding these topics. Most of the participants were hesitant to attribute any limitation or obstacle within church to their gender. In addition, there was significant overlap among the women who felt limited by the church as an

institution or the leadership in certain aspects and those who emphasized the ways in which they were able to participate freely. However, only a minority asserted that they had never experienced any difficulties due to their gender while also reiterating their support for the patriarchal dynamics that are promoted by conservative Baptist doctrine.

Among the women who perceived certain limitations due to her identity as a woman was Suzy, a 43-year-old married Hispanic from the Hispanic congregation. It is crucial to note that Suzy originally came from an ecumenical tradition in which the patriarchal structure in ministry was not enforced as in conservative Baptist congregations like CBC and IBC. Having previous experience leading ministries over men and women alike, Suzy's perspective of IBC was framed by her background in a more egalitarian denomination. Out of all participants, she provided the most detailed and critical analysis of the gender inequality that is perpetuated within conservative Baptist church.

I think that in certain denominations...the scale is tipped in favor of the man. It does not include the woman entirely because she can teach women and children, and that is it.

*Interviewer: That's the limit?*

That's the limit...if we view it from the perspective from within the church, it is possible that it's more limited. But, if we view it from the perspective, outside the church...well, I think we are not limited...I am conscious that my role as a Christian and servant of God is not 100% within a church...it has to be more about God...for those who are not believers and that is a broad field where you can...develop your gifts, talents, ministries, and skills...that God has given you. (Translated from Spanish)

Suzy first acknowledges the structural advantage that men have over women based solely on their gender in conservative Christian denominations. Earlier in the interview, she alluded to this when she commented on women's struggle to attain leadership positions despite their

tendency, in her experience, to be more dedicated and diligent in their labor than men who are given these opportunities because of their gender. Then, she explains how women are limited to certain kinds of ministries such as children's ministries and women's bible study groups as was evident among almost all the women in this study. Despite being largely implicit, this gender hierarchy and inequities can be considered sanctified sexism as they are all justified by conservative Protestant interpretations of the scripture. Nonetheless, Suzy does provide a new perspective that may contribute to some women's negotiation between their role within the church and their ability to serve God in their personal lives as Christian women. In her perspective, she is not totally limited as a Christian woman because she interprets her role in ministry to extend beyond the walls of a church. She accepts the institutional barriers within the conservative Baptist church itself because she finds comfort in the fact that she can serve God and others in the "secular world" where there are not as many obstacles for Christian women as there are in organized ministry. A similar pattern is observed among the women who described their service to God in terms of their familial role, most of whom identified as Hispanic. While they recognize and even agree with the restrictions placed upon them in ministry in relation to men, they view their role as mothers and the workplace as central in their service to God.

While compartmentalizing their service as Christian women within and outside the church is certainly a way in which some women are able to manage their limitations in ministry, others expressed frustration, a sense of powerlessness, and an awareness of the unequal treatment women receive in church.

I say the biggest challenge in general, not just in ministry, like you said, is being heard. I feel like unless a woman is adamant, what she says has to be confirmed often by a male...often, it's ignored. (Eva, 61, Black, CBC, widow)



Rachel, the 19-year-old white woman from CBC seconds this thought, emphasizing that, “once you get somebody to listen to you that was in a [leadership] position...things got moving. But until that happened...you were...stuck. You couldn’t do anything.” Thus, both of these women recognize that their input as women is disregarded and their influence in ministry is hindered or stifled unless it is backed up by a man, especially one in a leadership position. Here, the institutionalization of gender inequality in the church via sanctified sexism is manifested in both the culture of hostility towards women among men in leadership and the patriarchal structure of ministry which disempowers women whenever they attempt to diverge from their subordinate roles, as discussed by Suzy earlier. A term that has been used to refer to this gender inequality among leadership and clergy is the “stained-glass ceiling,” given that women are entirely barred from pursuing ordination in conservative Protestant churches and are not hired at the same rates as men in denominations where they are allowed to lead as only 11% of congregations are women-led in the U.S. (Duke Today 2015).

Additionally, a few women, reported feeling controlled and humiliated by men and women congregants alike which, in turn, negatively affected their own spiritual lives. Eliza, the 37-year-old white married woman from CBC who also led women and teen girls explains the impact sexist rhetoric and practices had on her personal “relationship with God”:

I did have congregants make comments to me about the way I raised my children, the clothes that I wore, the clothes that the girls in our youth groups wore...I had people tell me great things but also that I felt that they would not have said to a man in leadership...I never felt freedom. I never felt like I could make my own choices and that I would be valued for making my own choices. I felt like, as a woman, if I made my own choices and followed those choices I would be seen as rebellious or not submissive.

Eliza's experience included both negative and positive encounters that she recognizes as only based on the fact that she was a woman leading other women. Concerns about her performance as a mother and girls' modesty, especially among other women, demonstrate how women police each other drawing from scripture in an effort to both solidify their status as Christian women, similar to how biblical literalism becomes a resource for them to gain legitimacy among conservative Baptist women (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008). Whether such criticism comes from men or women, it is still an example of sanctified sexism as it attempts to manipulate women's behavior in accordance with conservative Baptist gender expectations and the patriarchal order within the church by appealing to their religious beliefs.

Finally, there were about four women that firmly stated feeling no discriminatory treatment or limitations during their involvement in ministry. Once again, these women embraced the complementarian ideals of gender roles in ministry and the family and utilized them as the basis for which they cannot say they have faced obstacles in ministry. As Emilia, a 66-year-old white married woman from CBC put it, "The buck stops with them [men]... You know, there's a line you don't cross." In general, these women did not resist the patriarchal order of the church, viewing it as biblical.

*Interviewer: ...there are some women who feel limited to an extent because there have been times where they wanted to do something, serve in a certain way, and they were not allowed because of their gender...but that has not happened to you?*  
No, it has not happened. I understand what you're saying...the Baptist church, you know is very strict with that God's word says. We do not have women pastors, other denominations do. That does not mean we do not believe the woman has a role, that the woman has incalculable value. The Christian husband is nothing without his wife. She helps him in his mission, she is the one who can support him in everything. But I am conscious that, as a Baptist, this is what I have been taught but

regardless, I agree because that is what the Word says. (Aurelia, 43, married, white Hispanic, IBC. Translated from Spanish)

Aurelia does not feel limited in her role as a Christian woman in ministry because she perceives that a “strict” interpretation of the scriptures concludes that men must lead in all aspects within the church while women must support men in their own endeavors and abide by their role as defined by God in the Bible. Interestingly, she only mentions a woman’s value in terms of marriage or in relation to a man, as a whole. There is no mention of women’s individual pursuits within the church as they strive to serve God apart from a man. This lack of emphasis on women’s agency and individuality within the church may contribute to women’s feelings of being controlled and undermined by men, as previously mentioned by Evaa, Rachel, and Eliza. Nonetheless, Aurelia and a few other women do not share this sentiment because they believe that God, via the scriptures, has designed a role for them that is fulfilling and even empowering as they view themselves as the foundation that sustains the men who lead the church.

In this section, I discussed the different roles and responsibilities that women held while participating in ministry and the institutionalization of gender inequality inside the church. While women were active in a variety of ministries and made up the majority in many of them, by all accounts in this study, men continued to hold positions of power even in those women-dominated ministries. Of course, the conservative Baptist doctrine, which already supports the ideas of male headship and female domesticity, reproduced a patriarchal structure within the church itself that relegated women to positions where they could only lead children and other women. This created barriers for women seeking other opportunities within ministry and fostered a culture in which women’s voices were often disregarded. In addition, sanctified sexism also

manifested itself in how women, their ministries, and their lifestyles were sometimes scrutinized by women and men alike in ways that men would not have been criticized given their status within the church.

Ambivalence towards sanctified sexism came about as the majority of women accepted this patriarchal structure and embraced their location within it on the basis of doctrine while also being aware of sexist and discriminatory attitudes towards them. Notably, only those who came from other denominations or had left the conservative Baptist church such as Suzy, Rachel, and Eliza made a direct connection between doctrine and the challenges they faced as women at CBC and IBC. Nevertheless, for the majority who remained in the conservative Baptist tradition and still acknowledged limitations due to their gender, compartmentalizing their individual service to God from the structure of the church seems to have allowed them to manage these conflicting perspectives within themselves.

## INTERSECTIONALITY AND GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS

In this final section of this discussion, I will compare the views and experiences of white women and women of color regarding race, ethnicity, solidarity, and feminism in the conservative Baptist church. Given that, historically, women's groups have either excluded women of color or centered white women as discussed by Black scholars like Patricia Hill Collins and Audre Lorde (2016), I first use an intersectional approach to address women's understandings of how race interacts with gender to inform women's identities and experiences in church. As described by Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality is the ability to understand an individual's experience as resulting from various social identities that interact simultaneously and continually within a broader system of oppression named "the matrix of domination" (Hill

Collins 2016). Thus, applying an intersectional lens to gender identity and gender consciousness among conservative Baptist women requires including both the perspectives women have of race and ethnicity as influencing factors in their experiences and the experiences of women of color in the church.

Furthermore, women's understandings of race, ethnicity, and intersectionality in the context of the church are especially significant because modern evangelical churches tend to employ a "color-blind theology" which emphasizes that Evangelical doctrine "transcends racial and ethnic differences" and "overcomes diverse sociological and social backgrounds" (Grenz 1993:31). As a result, for many Christians who share this belief, churches become color-blind spaces where race and ethnicity are deemed irrelevant in the experiences of people of color. This is especially problematic as individualistic explanations for racial inequities, the assumption that people of color who address racial issues seek to create division, and a denial of the role of race within the church ultimately foster "color-blind racism," or the "othering" of groups of people without explicitly berating them for their racial or ethnic identity (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Hearn 2009).

#### *Color-Blindness and Race in the Church*

Within the two congregations I selected, CBC and IBC, both color-blind theology and color-blind racism were present in women's conceptualizations of and experiences with race and ethnicity. Color-blind theology was cited by most white women and women of color alike, even those who acknowledged that differences in race, ethnicity, and culture were mentioned in some conversations at church.

Well, in some way, it is always mentioned [race, ethnicity, and culture]. It's not that we are always talking about the same thing because in the end, we aren't Cubans, Venezuelans, Colombians, or Ecuadorians, we are all Christians. And what unites us is God's Word and there is no difference at all...we do have activities where we bring food and our ideas come from...our idiosyncrasy. And that simply adds color to everything we do...in a positive way. (Aurelia, 43, married, white Hispanic, IBC. Translated from Spanish)

According to Aurelia, who attends a predominantly Hispanic congregation, although nationalities and ethnicities are acknowledged, it is only during events where congregants bring traditional dishes from their respective cultures. However, she also states that race, ethnicity, and nationality do not matter when it comes to Christians because they are united by faith alone. Consistent with color-blind theology, Aurelia sees race and ethnicity as potentially divisive while the scriptures and the doctrine serve to unify everyone to the extent where there is no difference between individuals of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. It can be inferred that Christianity itself is seen as a solution to these racial and ethnic identities that are assumed to be inherently divisive at the individual level. Similar to Bonilla-Silva's (2006) and Hearn's (2009) explanations of color-blind racism, Aurelia's perspective is limited by its neglect of the system that is responsible for racial inequality and as it continues to frame the experiences of individuals within and outside the church.

When I inquired on race relations within the church, color-blindness was also mentioned by Emilia, the 66-year-old white woman from CBC.

I do not pick and choose my friends by their skin color...one of my best friends in the world is Black. She is a big Black momma, she is hilarious. I love her...Down here, it's different here. There are more cultures in this area...

*Interviewer: ...beyond your personal relationships, as an observer, down here in CBC...do you see a lot of interactions between people of different cultures and races...what do you see?*

Specifically, in the church we have not had as many Spanish people at our church. They go down to the Spanish church [IBC]. We do have a separate congregation that is connected to the “Mother Church,” we have several Black people that go to that church [CBC]. I have seen since the Black Lives Matter groups have become so vocal, that it definitely has come into the church...But I do know, that me personally, I am not...I don’t feel I’m prejudiced towards people. I have got so many friends that are different races. I don’t see my skin.

Although Emilia can certainly distinguish between whites, Black, and Latino/a people within her church, she adopts a color-blind attitude regarding her personal relationships. In her view, she does not acknowledge skin color as an important aspect of an individual’s identity. She associates awareness of others’ racial or ethnic identity with prejudice and references her friendships with people of various racial backgrounds as indicative of a lack of racial bias. Nonetheless, she describes her Black friend as a “hilarious,” “big Black momma,” which resembles “controlling images” like the Black mammy, as discussed by Patricia Hill Collins, which were employed by white Americans post-slavery to justify and maintain the oppression of Black people (Hill Collins 2000). The image of “mammy” reinforces white dominance by creating an ideal of Black women’s expected behavior as nurturers, caregivers, “faithful, obedient domestic [servants]” (72). While Emilia’s remarks are certainly benevolent and not explicitly racist, her color-blind perspective may not allow her to recognize the biases that underlie such characterizations of Black women. Moreover, she reiterates her color-blindness in response to the Black Lives Matter movement (Black Lives Matter 2020) which, according to her, has been introduced to the church by some Black congregants. As explained by Hearn (2009), color-blind theology, which assumes that racial and ethnic differences are overcome by

the faith and inequality is therefore nonexistent within the church, ultimately leads white congregants like Emilia to dismiss grievances expressed by Black congregants and view racial justice efforts as divisive or hostile to the community of believers.

When I spoke with women of color who attended CBC, the predominantly white church, their views of race relations and color-blindness within the church were vastly different.

*Interviewer: When you hear the word “colorblind,” “we don’t see color,” “we don’t recognize differences in race,” would you say that the church is a colorblind space?*

No, it’s not. It can’t be. The church itself, no. The faith, the Bible, does not recognize race. The Bible itself is colorblind, but the church is not...I think most of the folks that I’ve dealt with especially during this socioeconomic, cultural warfare we’re in, believe that they are colorblind.

*Interviewer: But you see that they’re not?*

They’re not. They treat me different...Do I hold that against them? No. But it’s a fact. That’s the problem, people don’t recognize it and seek the truth about it so that we can get past it...It’ll die down, but it’s gonna come back up again. (Evaa, 61, Black, widowed, CBC).

Evaa, one of the only two Black women I had access to from CBC, brings another perspective that does not entirely deny color-blind theology while also bringing awareness to the ways in which racial identity frame the treatment that Black women like her receive from white congregants. Thus, she understands the scriptures as color-blind in the sense that they can be applied to all people equally, but also recognizes that the church as a part of the community can reproduce the social inequalities that exist in “secular society”, which she refers to as a “socioeconomic, cultural warfare.” Furthermore, she also clarifies that although people believe themselves to be color-blind, it is that very unwillingness to acknowledge and learn about their own participation in the oppression of Black people that prevents them from moving forward.



Evaa concludes that this perceived color-blindness and avoidance among particularly white Christians will only aid in the continuation of racial injustice and social unrest.

It should also be noted that not all the white women who attended CBC and Hispanics who attended IBC shared a completely color-blind ideology. Overall, both white women and Hispanic women who considered themselves to be color-blind did agree that women of color share a different experience as them within and outside the church.

*Interviewer: ...if I walk through the door as a brown woman, including in church, do you think that people might interact with me or might view me differently? Not in a negative way necessarily, but how they would approach me or how they would relate to me...would that be different to a Black woman...or to an Asian woman, or a white woman?*

Yeah, I think it would, unfortunately. Especially in a church. It shouldn't, but I do believe it would... (Joey, white, 43, married, former member of CBC)

While earlier in the interview Joey expresses that she does not “see” skin color, she does believe that a congregant’s racial identity can inform their experience within the church, the way they are perceived by other members of the church, and the treatment they receive. While some women did recognize skin color as a significant identity in a woman’s experience, the majority of white and Hispanic participants determined that culture rather than race itself was the most important factor in shaping womanhood. Aurelia, the 43-year-old married Hispanic from IBC, explains her perspective based on her experience practicing psychology in Japan when she still resided in Cuba:

*Interviewer: ...Do you believe that...race can affect [women's] experiences and how they define womanhood...or how people interact with women of different races? Or do you think that the experience of a woman is the same regardless of race?*

Well, I think that there is a difference. But not because the person has a different skin color, but because...the culture in which she has lived has made the woman the total opposite of another sometimes...

Like Aurelia, many women upheld the view that culture could transcend skin color and that race itself was not what truly framed women's experiences in society and institutions like the church. Joey, the white woman from CBC mentioned above, proposed that a Black wealthy woman would view womanhood and have an entirely different experience compared to a low-income Black woman. Turning back to intersectionality, race is certainly not the only identity that determines the experience and viewpoints of women. Instead, it is the interaction of gender, class, ethnicity, race, among others, that inform the individual's experience within this multifaceted system of oppression that Patricia Hill Collins (2016) calls the "matrix of domination. Omitting race as one of the most salient identities in women's social interactions allows color-blind theology and color-blind racism to be reproduced within the church at the expense of women of color. Below, I will discuss a few of the several experiences women of color at CBC and IBC had with racism, exclusion, and discrimination.

### *Experiences of Women of Color*

As mentioned previously, the women in this study attend either of the two selected churches: CBC, a predominantly white church, and IBC, an affiliated predominantly Hispanic church, IBC. When it comes to racial discrimination, only the two Black women from CBC and two women from IBC who belonged to ethnic minorities within the church reported experiencing such treatment. One of the first prejudiced behaviors observed by women in both churches was stereotyping. Suzy, a 43-year-old, married, Mexican immigrant from IBC expresses frustration at

the way in which her ethnic and cultural background are unappreciated and mischaracterized by others at her church.

*Interviewer: ...Do you feel that...there is an interest in getting to know you or your culture just as you have for others?*

No, not everyone is interested. Depending on their...temperament...many times they try to impose things instead of listening or empathizing.

*Interviewer: Imposing, in terms of culture?*

Yes, from their culture, their roots, their beliefs, their experiences. So then, for example, one time someone who visited from Ecuador and lived in Argentina made a comparison...unfortunately, of a friend of hers who was Mexican but was like a porcupine...in that her “quills” would raise up and prick people for every little thing...from my perspective, that was an insult...because you are generalizing all Mexican women... (Translated from Spanish)

Suzy, who is mostly surrounded by Cuban and Ecuadorian immigrants, explains that she feels there are certain perspectives that are imposed by the racial majority. The first example she provides is that of an Ecuadorian visitor who stereotyped all Mexican women as hot-headed and aggressive as a joke. Suzy explains that she felt insulted, but this sentiment was not shared by the majority of the congregation because they lacked her ethnic background and an interest in learning more about her culture. Subsequently, this indifference and insensitivity towards Mexican culture made Suzy feel marginalized. Later in the interview, she also talks about some congregants’ tendency to impose certain cultural practices upon her, such as joint bank accounts, which she and her husband did not view as necessary. While the majority of Hispanics from IBC denied that race influenced the experiences of congregants, Suzy was one of the few who believed race did play a role within the church. It can be theorized that her rejection of color-blindness may have been framed by her experience as an ethnic minority within the church.

Similarly, both Black women I interviewed from CBC shared their experiences with stereotyping and even exclusion by white congregants:

...there is definitely a bias in most independent Baptist churches...that initially when I walk in the building, I have to prove myself. I have to say, I am not your...stereotypical Black person...I had an altercation...with a person in the missions' board. That person was not happy with me because I had asked for support for a missionary in a Black church...later that person came to me because they were unhappy about the fact that the money was given to this ministry...I was like, "Well, why?" And this person said, "Well, we should be giving money to only *our* missionaries." And Black churches "needed to get up and stop whining and take care of themselves." And I was like, "What's the difference sponsoring a Hispanic ministry and funding a Black ministry?" And that person said, "Well, there's a Black church right around the corner down there. Maybe you'll be more comfortable there." (Eva, Black, 61, widowed, CBC)

...I have been in the hospital a couple of times and [pastor] has never visited. There's always an excuse. You know, "he doesn't know my name." How do you not know my name? It's on the [tithing] checks! So yeah, I feel that there is a difference. You have to be old and white to be of any worth. (Luisa, 54, Black Hispanic, CBC)

First, Eva explains the hostile treatment she received from a white man when she was a member of the missions' board. As she mentioned earlier in the interview, not only were her ideas undermined because she is a woman, but being a Black woman, she was also the victim of prejudiced and defensive remarks from white men who viewed her ideas as a threat to their white ministers. His suggestion that she should attend a Black church also denotes a separatist and racist sentiment which seeks to protect the institution that is the white church from Black people and other people of color. Understanding the history of racial segregation among Christian churches in the U.S. is crucial in analyzing this interaction.

In addition, Luisa's statement echoes Evaa's feelings of discrimination and ostracization as she has not received the same support from the pastor as other women despite attending CBC regularly for years and tithing faithfully. Instead, she asserts that only the white and elderly members of the church are truly valued. Thus, unlike women who held a "color-blind" image of the church, Luisa perceives that racial identity determines how much value an individual holds within the economy of the church which implies that the white conservative Baptist church also upholds a structure in which white members, including white women, are privileged and Black members—especially Black women—are left at the margins.

Finally, expanding on the topic of racial inequality within the church, Evaa responds to other women's views of racial conflict within the church and Black Lives Matter.

*Interviewer: I had conversations with other women from the church and some of them perceive...that before anybody talked about Black Lives Matter, there weren't any racial conflicts within the church...what do you think about that?*

*...I have offered, "come talk to me, have lunch with me." I don't know where the hostility is coming from! ...My soul hurts and my heart hurts because I'm the only one they can really talk to...They don't know me, and they don't know Black people because they don't associate with us. (Evaa)*

Evaa perceived that the attitudes expressed by white women towards Black people and racial relations within the church are rooted in their unwillingness to interact with people of color. She proposes that white church members are ignorant regarding Black congregants' lives because they do not associate themselves with them. Evaa's perspective is reminiscent of the Black women in Wiggins's (2005) ethnography who expressed distrust towards white Christians who have remained in white congregations and have not pursued relationships with Black people

outside of church. This division that exists between Black women and white women, including at CBC, will become relevant in the following subsection.

*White Women, Women of Color, and Gender Consciousness*

Another concept that I explored in my conversations with participants was gender consciousness among conservative women. While gender consciousness is typically understood as only fostered within feminist groups (Gurin 1985), researchers like Schreiber (2002) argue that gender consciousness can also be developed among conservative women's groups like the Concerned Women for America (CWA). Despite upholding patriarchal social structures, conservative groups like CWA do contribute to the development of gender consciousness among women which compels them to raise awareness and fight for solutions to issues they perceive disproportionately affect women and their families (Schreiber 2002). To determine the extent to which gender consciousness exists among conservative Baptist women, I inquire on their sense of community and any social issues they consider to be important to address as Christian women. Lastly, in keeping with the history of evangelical feminism and egalitarianism embodied in the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus (EEWC) and Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) movements discussed by Gallagher (2004a) and Kohm (2008), I also introduce the topic of feminism and ask participants about their attitudes towards it with regards to their religious beliefs.

While the majority of women in this study were or had been members of women's bible study groups and other ministries for women and girls, when I asked whether they felt a sense of solidarity with other Christian women, answers varied greatly particularly when race, ethnicity, nationality, and racial makeup of the congregation are taken into account. Only three women

asserted that Christian women were united as a community, including across denominations, all of whom were white, U.S.-born, and attended CBC which is predominantly white:

*Interviewer: So, in these groups...would you say that women are united in those groups?*

Yes. Yeah, definitely.

*Interviewer: As a whole...do you think that Christian women across denominations and across congregations...are united as a community that has that same solidarity that your groups have?*

Yeah, yeah, I do...The Bible tells us that he has given us the Holy Spirit...you can tell, as you get older and you're walking in your faith you'll meet people and you'll go, in the back of your head, "They're a Christian." You can feel it. There's a spirit. A spirit of camaraderie, of community. 'Cause the Holy Spirit is not Baptist! (Emilia, white, 66, married, CBC).

Emilia perceives that women in her congregation and across denominations are united because they are all believers and are connected by the same "Spirit". This Holy Spirit fosters a "spirit of camaraderie" among the women, according to Emilia. Conversely, this remark followed her statement about how she often listens to messages from other Christian women who do not share the exact same doctrine as her and this would be frowned upon by people in the independent conservative Baptist denomination. Therefore, she is aware of the hostility that is present between Baptist churches like CBC and other Christian denominations. In this example, it is clear that the community of Christian women is not as united as it may appear, especially for those who subscribe to conservative Baptist doctrine.

Among Hispanics from the Hispanic congregation, IBC, a similar perception of unity is present. However, some of these women only referred to the community inside their congregation and expressed uncertainty regarding the population of Christian women, as a whole. While Rosa, the 54-year-old married Hispanic from IBC states, "...We are united by our

faith, the same faith, we care for one another, pray for one another...” she also mentions that she has little knowledge of Christian women outside of her own church. Eliza, the 37-year-old white woman from CBC also shares this view, which she attributes to the conservative Baptist denomination itself being more separatist similar to Emilia’s statements. On the other hand, Aurelia, another Hispanic from IBC explains, “It’s difficult for me to give you a definitive answer because I live in a country that is different from the country I was born in, where I know few people. It takes a lot of time for one to have a broader notion.” Additionally, as it was observed in Nagel and Ehrkamp’s (2017) study of churches in the South which had separate but coexisting Hispanic and Anglo ministries, a few women from both CBC and IBC recognized the lack of interaction between members of the two congregations, particularly from whites. Eliza also described the discrimination and marginalization against Hispanics she witnessed which resulted in an unequitable division of labor between the Hispanics and non-Hispanics given that more Hispanics volunteered and worked low paying positions at CBC. These accounts suggest that gender consciousness among Christian women in the U.S. in terms of unity is not necessarily attainable especially for immigrant women such as Aurelia and Rosa.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, among the five women who firmly responded that there was no true solidarity among women within their church and across the nation, race and ethnicity became even more prominent in the conversation. As observed in Aurelia’s remarks, the marginalization that Latinos/as who migrate to the U.S. can experience within bicultural churches in the South (Nagel and Ehrkamp 2017) combined with the separatist nature of independent Baptist churches Eliza spoke about certainly play a role in women’s lack of awareness of a broader community of Christian women. Subsequently, one of the main reasons



for Hispanics who asserted that Christian women were divided was lack of interaction between women from different denominations and congregations.

I would like us to get to know each other across congregations...visiting other places, meeting people involved in this and spend time with them. Because...our group here, we know each other very well and we spend time together...but beyond that, we know there are many Christian women, but really, we don't know how they interact. So, it would be good to...go to another church to spend time with them and get to know them. (Cruz, 69, Hispanic, married, IBC. Translated from Spanish).

When I asked Cruz why she thought they had not visited churches to meet with other Christian women before, she speculated that it was because no one ever communicated a desire to visit other churches or even talked about other congregations in the area overall. This, once again, may be an extension of the separatist culture that is common among conservative Protestant churches. Moreover, the location of both of these churches in a predominantly white community presents a challenge to Hispanics who are not fluent in English and this may also contribute to their lack of community with non-Hispanic Christian women, including those who share their doctrine.

A different perspective was provided by Evaa, a Black, 61-year-old, widowed woman from CBC who highlighted the division between “Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric churches”:

*Interviewer: If we talk about Christian women throughout our nation, do you believe that Christian women are united there?*

Depends on the degree of united you're talking about. On political issues we all pretty much agree on, for the most part. I sit in the precipice of knowing what it's like to go to church with a predominantly white church and knowing what it's like to go to church and be part of the non-Eurocentric congregations. So, knowing those two things what the non-Eurocentric is speaking about is very different than the concerns of Eurocentric congregations. Very different. So, to answer that question...no, they are not.

Evaa's unique experience as a Black woman who has attended both predominantly white churches and Black churches and is aware of the voices that are being centered in each of these traditions has led her to determine that unity among all Christian women does not exist. Provided that Evaa uses the terms "Eurocentric" and "non-Eurocentric" it seems that she is referring to the racial segregation that continues to be reproduced within American Christianity but was most explicit during the Jim Crow era as discussed by Wiggins (2005) in her research on Black women within the Black church. Although churches have certainly become more inclusive and diverse, this racial disparity has allowed for the interests of white Christians to take precedence in predominantly white churches such as CBC, leading the Black church to continue to advocate for and support their own communities in various ways (Wiggins 2005). Thereby, gender consciousness across racial lines does not seem to be prevalent among Christian women either. This is especially noticeable to women of color, like Evaa, who are members of a predominantly white Eurocentric church and experience alienation from other Christian women within their own congregation.

Evaa expounds on this racial divide amongst women when she shares her feelings while she participating in women's groups within the church, which were mostly made up and led by white women, as well.

...I've observed as Black women come in the church they aren't really asked to join, we're asked to *participate* in the groups. I've never been asked to join the women's groups...Others that I've talked to say, "Why is it that a white woman or a woman of less color enters into the picture and they're all of a sudden accepted into the group, but we aren't?"...it has been a discussion amongst us [Black

women]...I've also felt...that they have something to offer me but I have nothing to offer them. That I am not equal in their economy. In the church.

The first thing that Evaa notices from white women in these groups is their interest in Black women's labor instead of in building relationships with them. She perceives that Black women are never integrated into the group as white women and other non-Black women of color are. Instead, they are only valued for their service. Simultaneously, she also senses an attitude of superiority among white women in that they do not seem to be open to what Black women might contribute to the group in their own accord. According to Evaa, white women in these groups are only interested in what they can offer to Black women. Therefore, it is clear that gender consciousness is highly racialized especially within predominantly white conservative Baptist churches.

As observed among the participants in this study, the only women who agreed that Christian women were united both within their congregation and across denominations were white. While the Hispanics at IBC did sense solidarity within their congregation, they did not feel the same connection to women across the denominations as the white women did whether it was due to the language barrier or the marginalizing experience of immigration. Moreover, Black women like Evaa and other racial or ethnic minorities faced this alienation within their predominantly white and Hispanic congregations due to the previously discussed racial biases and inequities that are weaved into the culture and the structure of the church.

Altogether, it is evident that gender consciousness among conservative Baptist women is not as tangible as it was in conservative women's groups like the CWA (Schreiber 2002). As mentioned by Evaa, perhaps, politically, there is a sense of solidarity among conservative

Christian women. However, in this study, responses indicated that the unity women shared was not inclusive to all conservative Baptist women. Further, while gender consciousness in CWA was rooted in a collective identity as women who shared concerns for women's welfare and the preservation of the traditional family (Schreiber 2002), women from these two congregations did not understand themselves as united by their identity as women or by the issues that affect them as a subset of the population. Instead, as stated by Emilia and Rosa, their perceived solidarity was found in their beliefs which ultimately contributed to divisions between denominations and even women within the same congregation. Thus, I conclude that, according to these women's accounts, gender consciousness as explained by Gurin (1985) and Schreiber (2002) has not been achieved among conservative Baptist women or Christian women, as a whole.

#### *Feminism and Antifeminism*

Despite the absence of gender consciousness among conservative Baptist women from CBC and IBC, women did express their concerns for all women in society. A large portion of participants' worries focused on spiritual matters such as women's "salvation" from Hell, their lifestyles, and their spiritual health. For the purposes of this research, I will only discuss women's views as they related to feminist or antifeminist ideologies rooted in Biblical doctrine. First, there was a great amount of overlap between feminist and antifeminist attitudes among all the women in this study. However, when I explicitly asked about the feminist movement itself, very few identified with it or considered it a positive ideology. Therefore, this final subsection provides an analysis of women's awareness or unawareness of the issues affecting women in secular society and their ambivalent feelings toward modern feminism.

A pattern among conservative Baptist women which was possibly exacerbated by the absence of gender consciousness was an unawareness of issues that affect women as a community. Eliza, the 37-year-old white woman who is a former CBC member reiterates the separatist culture she had experienced within the conservative Baptist tradition as an influencing factor in this unawareness.

...I mean, aside from being staunchly pro-life...growing up in church that is the only sort of cultural alarm that was brought to our attention...So, outside of my very small circle I did not know what was going on in the world. I was very sheltered from anything going on in the world apart from conservative Baptist circles.

*Interviewer: When that issue was presented to you, was it out of worry for the woman? Was it seen as a woman's issue?*

Actually, no. I guess it was more about protecting unborn children. So, I guess it wouldn't necessarily be seen as a woman's issue. Although, they would give counsel and help pregnant women.

In Eliza's example, she highlights perhaps one of the most relevant social issues for conservative Protestants: abortion. While she remembers being taught about abortion and the need to adhere to pro-life ideology, she acknowledges being sheltered from any other social issues beyond the community of conservative Baptists. During this interview, she also realizes that abortion was never seen as a woman's issue. There seemed to be no interest in protecting or providing resources for women unless they had already undergone an abortion. Although Eliza does not specify whether the churches she attended throughout her life actively mobilized against women's reproductive rights, they shared similar values as the previously mentioned Concerned Women for America (CWA), a faith-based women's group that opposes abortion and international family planning programs in defense of the "sanctity of life," and women's

emotional and physical health from negative effects post-abortion (Schreiber 2002). However, none of the conservative Baptist women in this study mentioned becoming involved in activism or advocacy despite holding these beliefs.

Besides a general lack of awareness or information regarding social issues that disproportionately impact women's lives, another trend amongst these conservative Baptist women was confusion regarding the term "feminism." When I asked women to define feminism and share their opinions on it as they understood it, most were uncertain about its meaning:

When I think of feminism the first thing that comes to my mind...I have negative feelings about it...I can't really define it, 'cause no one has ever asked me that question before...I understand where [feminists] are coming from because they feel like they've been shunned and that men have been given—and they might be right! But, I don't live in that world. My world is totally different...in my brain, definition of a feminist is, she thinks she has rights that she wants to lord over a male figure. That's my personal opinion. That might not be the answer. I think that the majority of feminists have a "chip on their shoulder," they have something to prove, they wanna get in your face. (Emilia, white, 66, married, CBC)

Although Emilia's answer reflects this uncertainty regarding what feminism as an ideology actually signifies, her immediate reaction to the concept is negative. Many of the women in this study shared this antifeminist attitude despite being unfamiliar with its meaning and objective. Instead, participants who disapproved of the feminist movement inaccurately perceived it to be about supremacy. As Emilia states in her response, in her opinion, feminists seek to "lord over a male figure," prove a point, and intimidate others. It is interesting that women's attempts to liberate themselves from the patriarchal order are assumed to promote their authority over men. Perhaps accepting patriarchy as legitimate, in accordance with conservative Baptist doctrine, may lead women to conclude that any alternative to this order must be

hierarchical, as well. It is also important to recognize that women like Emilia who are white, educated, and financially stable are less likely to view feminism as necessary, especially third-wave feminism as seen in Gallagher's research (2004b). As a result, Emilia says, "I understand where [feminists] are coming from because they feel like they've been shunned and that men have been given—and they might be right! But, I don't live in that world. My world is totally different..." Given her racial and socioeconomic privilege, contemporary feminism is not appealing to Emilia but rather threatening.

Thereby, even amid misunderstandings regarding feminist ideology, antifeminist tendencies were more common among the women in this study than feminist attitudes. As Gallagher's (2004b) research determined, high church attendance and consistent exposure to conservative biblical and political values were contributing factors in antifeminist ideology. Over half of evangelicals and fundamentalists alike viewed feminism as hostile to their values citing materialism, individualism, lesbianism, and women's autonomy as the main downfalls of the feminist movement (Gallagher 2004b). Some of these topics were also introduced by some participants from CBC and IBC.

That fight with gender, with disparities in gender, and the revolution that has formed in this century...has reached levels that are overwhelming. It is very sad...and it becomes very difficult sometimes to tell your children how things truly are if you do not have God's word to guide your children. Because people think that it's normal to be a woman or a man because you decide it. And that is very wrong. Humanity is being led down very dangerous paths...and every day, it is worse. (Aurelia, white Hispanic, 43, married, IBC, translated from Spanish)

Aurelia's response was originally regarding her concerns for women in society, Christians and especially non-Christians who do not rely on the Bible to educate their children.

One of her main worries was the escalation of the feminist movement primarily because of the challenging of traditional, binary understandings of gender. She expresses her distress with changes in the traditional boundaries of gender, particularly alluding to the growing representation of transgender individuals in recent years when describing people's ability to "be a woman or a man" if they "decide it." It is important to recall that Aurelia was one of the most consistently complementarian women throughout this study. Therefore, the social construct of the gender binary is foundational to her understanding of herself as a Christian woman within the conservative Baptist faith. Her frustration also stemmed from the fact that she perceives social acceptance of feminism and LGBTQ+ people will undermine Christian parents' efforts to teach their children conservative Biblical values which, as observed throughout this discussion, are in direct opposition to both of these communities.

Following this understanding of feminism as a call for women's supremacy and as a threat to traditional gender roles, other women also associated the movement with division, vanity, and the ultimate demise of men.

It's the worst thing that ever happened to women...same issue I have with feminism is the same issue I have with racism...with the sexual revolution...with society branding people. That one thing has split our nation into such disparate groups of people that you can't know where you fit in...There are some things about feminism that are good...Coming from my background, being stuck in poverty because all my mother could do was cleaning somebody's house and work in an assembly line...feminism gives women that potential to support their own families. That being said, feminism has also given women the power to diminish men..."I don't need to get married, I don't need a man, I make more money than most men do!...if he doesn't do what I say, he can go..." So, the man's role has been diminished...women are losing their full power because they've lost their focus. Instead of being about the family unit, as a whole, "it's about me"...Our focus should be our families...Now it's socioeconomic success, political success, and worst of all, beauty. (Evaa, Black, 61, widowed, CBC)



Evaa's insight as a Black woman in her 60s who grew up in the South is quite distinct from all other participants who opposed feminism. First, she compares feminism to racism, considering it as a way to divide and "brand" people. While feminism has certainly been racially exclusive throughout its history, its call for equality between men and women is more akin to racial justice movements than racism itself. Evaa's view seems to conflate the controversial aspect of feminism due to its resistance to the status quo with the deliberate, divisive intent behind racism. Next, Evaa recognizes the positive aspects brought about by feminism such as women's opportunities to seek economic autonomy and higher education given the barriers her mother faced as a Black, poor woman in the South at a time when segregation was still in place. Nevertheless, she perceives that this autonomy leads women to become too independent, unwilling to get married to a man, and to become controlling of all men. Like the conservative Protestants in Gallagher's (2004b) study who asserted that feminism causes tension between men and women leading to the decay of the social order prescribed by God according to this doctrine, Evaa also fears that women's interest in their own pursuits is straying them away from their true purpose which, in complementarianism, is to care for their families (Colaner and Giles 2008). Thus, for women like Evaa, individualism, autonomy, and political power at the hands of women are considered to be destructive to men, families, and society in its entirety.

Before concluding this discussion, I must acknowledge the minority of women who were supportive of egalitarian and feminist ideas despite currently or previously attending a conservative Baptist congregation. Most of these egalitarian-leaning women had either been a part of more egalitarian traditions in the past, had rejected certain aspects of conservative Baptist

doctrine, or had left the tradition altogether. For this reason, there were some participants who only accepted biblical gender equality, similar to Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), while others fully aligned themselves with the secular feminist movement.

Suzy, the 43-year-old Hispanic from IBC who had served as a youth leader at an ecumenical church, emphasized Jesus's respect towards women earlier in the interview when speaking about women's social location within the church:

When it comes to Jesus, he was the one who came to dignify women. According to Jewish history and the history of civilizations themselves, the woman has been disparaged...[through] incorrect concepts and stereotypes. (Translated from Spanish)

Suzy's belief that part of Jesus's objective as God incarnate was to honor all women, who had been oppressed in secular and religious settings, informed her opinions regarding feminism.

...When the woman does not see herself as God sees [her], then...[she] wants to stand out by stepping over others...sometimes...you let yourself be stepped over by authority. I believe He wants you to see yourself as a valuable woman...an intelligent person who can grow to help your partner, your children, society...you become an image of helper, as God viewed you from the beginning. (Translated from Spanish)

In this way, her solution to women's struggle for gender equality is individualized and faith-based. Notably, Suzy continues to uphold the idea of separate roles for men and women but opposes the treatment of women as subordinates. For this reason, while she does not associate herself with secular feminism, she perceives that women can find equality in God's view of them according to scripture. While Suzy's approach is not inclined to structural or political changes in favor of gender equality for women, it still shares CBE's ideology which perceives the morality

of Christ's behavior towards women in the scriptures as transcendent and as the standard for equality (Kohm 2008). Thus, according to her perspective, contemporary feminism is not the solution. Instead, women's "personal relationship" with God and their ability to understand themselves within the role laid out for them in the Bible is the best path to find their true value.

On the other hand, one of the women who considered herself to be a feminist was Luisa, the 54-year-old Black Hispanic from CBC. She was also one of the few who struggled with biblical literalism, precisely because of her feminist convictions and the patriarchal interpretations of scripture she has observed in conservative Protestantism.

You know, the #MeToo movement, we still have problems where women are looked at as inferior, less than, and to some people we're fair game...In the workplace it is still an issue...

*Interviewer: Do you think feminism has a place within the church, as you know it?*

Yes. I do, because we're all children of God and we all have skills, talents, gifts, and we should be allowed to share them...we shouldn't be told "No. You're not good enough to do this. You shouldn't be allowed to..." So yeah, I think there's a place.

Luisa first acknowledges the issues women face within the workplace such as sexism and sexual harassment by expressing her support for the #MeToo movement, which strives to address sexual violence and achieve structural change (me too. 2020). Unlike most women in this study, her awareness of social issues that affect women disproportionately and her view of women as a collective instead of individuals demonstrate a degree of gender consciousness. Moreover, when I asked her about feminism's potential within the church, she asserted that feminism could benefit women within the church as it would allow them to use their "gifts" and skills to their full capacity by challenging the barriers placed upon them by church leaders. Thus, she considers

feminism to be a solution to gender inequities within the church just as it has helped ignite change in secular institutions over time.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this research, three main gender ideologies were considered as I analyzed the attitudes and beliefs of conservative Baptist women regarding womanhood, parenting, marriage, ministry, and feminism. While I expected women to fall nicely within one of these three camps: complementarianism, evangelical pragmatism, and egalitarianism, as presented by Colaner and Giles (2008) and Gallagher (2004a), women's conceptualizations of womanhood and gender dynamics were far more complex. As seen in Gallagher's research, only a minority of women displayed strict complementarian or egalitarian ideas. In this study, the large majority of women were complementarian-leaning, but some egalitarian tendencies were noted in parenting and marriage. Age became a contributing factor in this as the oldest participant, Catherine, an 85-year-old white woman from CBC, supported strict complementarianism in that the man should be the primary breadwinner of the home and handle all spiritual affairs. The rest of the women opposed this viewpoint, associating a strict patriarchal dynamic between husband and wife with abusive marriages they witnessed among previous generations. Taking the potential and explicit subjugation of women in marriage into consideration, these younger complementarian-leaning women negotiated scripture and doctrine to manage these conflicting attitudes towards male headship.

Women all across the spectrum emphasized the importance of partnership in marriage. However, while egalitarian-leaning women referred to partnership as a dynamic where both partners have equal authority, their own relationship with God, and individuality, complementarian partnership maintained that partners must abide by their "biblical" roles and depend on each other in doing so. This form of complementarianism differed from evangelical

pragmatism given that male headship was still not seen as solely spiritual by most women. Interestingly, unlike previous research in which conservative Protestants were less likely than liberal and mainline Protestants to report the woman took the lead in spiritual matters (Denton 2004), several complementarian and egalitarian women in this research admitted to being the ones who taught their children the scriptures and prayed over their families and communities. Some reasoned this was necessary in the absence of a willing husband or simply a consequence of the amount of time they spend at home with their children. Regardless, the malleability of gender ideology was evident in the ways women negotiated their ideas and practices regarding gender, marriage, and the family.

The Bible and biblical literalism became especially significant in the development of gender ideology and practices. While complementarianism, evangelical pragmatism, and egalitarianism are all justified by their adherents with scripture, most of the women in this study who identified as biblical literalists expressed fairly consistent complementarian ideals. Conversely, more egalitarian women tended to either reframe the biblical interpretations concerning gender expectations that were presented by the conservative Baptist church or rejected biblical literalism altogether. Further, as suggested by Hoffmann and Bartkowski (2008), biblical literalism was certainly a resource among conservative Baptist women in the church particularly as they employed it to hold men accountable for their behavior as representatives of God and to solidify their status within the church by policing other women's behavior.

In ministry, most women, particularly those who embraced complementarianism, understood their position as subordinates to men in the church. As with marriage, the women often accepted this patriarchal order because it was assumed that men in ministry were appointed

and directed by God. There were two primary roles these women viewed themselves as embodying: the supportive role and the familial role. Women understood their roles as Christian women either as helpers to male leadership in any capacity within the parameters established by conservative Baptist doctrine or as extending beyond the walls of the church through motherhood or their service to others. While the majority of women did express contentment in these roles, some did acknowledge feeling limited and undermined in ministry. “Sanctified sexism” (Hall et al. 2010) was observed in several of these participant’s accounts as they felt unheard, scrutinized, and ultimately powerless within the structure of the conservative Baptist church. One woman described how she compartmentalized her ministry, focusing on her less restrictive service outside of the church, in order to manage these limitations. Thus, of the several women who did notice the marginalization women face within the conservative Baptist church, more complementarian women accepted such gender dynamics as an unfortunate reality while more egalitarian women chose to establish their ministry outside the church building or leave the denomination entirely.

In terms of gender consciousness, I had theorized there was a possibility that conservative Baptist women had developed such a solidarity on the basis of conservative politics and religious belief. Schreiber’s (2002) research discussed the existence of gender consciousness outside of feminist circles as it is observed in conservative women’s organizations such as Concerned Women for America (CWA). Women in these groups view themselves as a community advocating against policies that they perceive are detrimental to women and their families. Similarly, I expected to find a similar sense of solidarity and concern for social issues that pertain to women among the participants from both congregations. However, there were various

factors that indicated the absence of gender consciousness among these women as a whole. White women and women who were in the ethnic majority at the Hispanic church agreed that Christian women were united particularly within their congregations. When I asked about women across denominations, most of the participants, regardless of race and ethnicity, expressed feeling separated from Christian women who upheld a different doctrine than the independent conservative Baptist church. This was especially true for immigrant women whether it was due to the language barrier or the marginalization they experienced as immigrants. Further, for the two Black women in this study, there was no solidarity within their congregation nor across churches given the segregated history of churches in the United States. As discussed in the methodology section of this thesis, the geographic location of these two affiliated churches contributed to this estrangement as the community was predominantly white, older, and there was little interaction between members of the two congregations, as well.

In addition to a lack of gender consciousness among conservative Baptist women especially when race, ethnicity, and immigration status were considered, the experiences of women of color and ethnic minorities within the church were significantly distinct from that of white women. Following the theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989), color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006), color-blind theology (Hearn 2009), and Christians' attitudes regarding racial inequality (Cobb et al. 2015), it was not unexpected that women of color would face different obstacles than white women within both predominantly white and Hispanic churches. At CBC, the mostly white congregation in this study, Black women reported instances of racial stereotyping or "controlling images" (Hill Collins 2000), exclusion, discrimination, and a general attitude of superiority among white women within women's groups. This was exacerbated by



some white women's disapproval of racial justice movements such as Black Lives Matter (2020), which they associated with hostility on the part of Black Americans, and their belief in color-blind ideology. At IBC, a similar experience was shared by ethnic minorities who also faced difficulties becoming integrated into the congregation and were expected to assimilate into the culture of the ethnic majority. Altogether, these accounts confirmed the necessity for intersectional research when studying the gender identity and experiences of conservative Protestant women in the U.S.

Keeping in mind the absence of gender consciousness and solidarity between white women and women of color in the conservative Protestant community according to these women, attitudes toward feminism were mostly negative. Previous studies suggested that 65% of evangelicals and 54% of fundamentalists saw feminism as hostile to their values (Gallagher 2004b). Likewise, complementarian-leaning women in this study were the most resistant to contemporary feminism viewing it as a call for women's supremacy over men, the distortion of "biblical" sexuality and gender expectations, and individualism at the expense of the family. Interestingly, several of these same women admitted they did not know exactly how to define feminism as a concept which suggested a lack of education and awareness regarding women's issues in the church. Instead, conservative Baptist doctrine instructed them to reject gender equality efforts. As a result, most participants could not think of any concerns they had for women as a community apart from abortion which was not deemed a woman's issue but rather about the "unborn." There were, however, a few women that were on the egalitarian side of gender ideology who embraced feminist ideals and saw the need for it in conservative Baptist spaces given their experience with sanctified sexism and the patriarchal order of the church.

While the present study provides an intersectional understanding of conservative Baptist gender ideologies and womanhood, the two churches represented by these 13 women exist in a particular social context that is not generalizable to the entire population of conservative Protestant women in the U.S. CBC and IBC are both self-proclaimed independent Baptist churches in a predominantly white, suburban community in Central Florida. Further, the use of convenience and snowball sampling did not allow for an entirely representative sample given the limited access I had to racial and ethnic minorities within these two congregations. The majority of women in this study were employed, had received higher education or training, and were financially stable. Future research should include women from a variety of regions, socioeconomic status, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. While unaddressed in this study, including LGBTQ+ women from conservative Baptist traditions, their development of gender identity, and their experience within the church would also serve to expand on existing scholarship pertaining to gender, sexuality, religion, and social inequality in American society.

Despite its limitations, this research expands on and challenges the previously outlined gender ideologies among evangelical and protestant women in the United States. While facets of complementarianism, egalitarianism, and evangelical pragmatism were observed in the ideas and practices of the women in this study, it is evident that such stringent categories do not always reflect conservative protestant women's understandings of womanhood, manhood, marriage, doctrine, ministry, and gender equality. Several complementarian women who upheld male headship and gender essentialism also engaged in strategies to interpret women's submission to men in a way that is more palatable and does not enable abuse. Some of these women even expressed feeling limited and unheard within the church due to their gender. Thus, it may be

beneficial to expand and reframe these gender ideology categories. For instance, the term “complementarianism” could be split into two new categories: traditional complementarianism and ambivalent complementarianism. The former refers to complementarianism that firmly upholds male headship in all aspects of marriage, parenting, and ministry; the latter is characterized by women’s inner conflict as they strive to adhere to complementarian doctrine while also making concessions once they recognize the subjugation women can face under the established patriarchal dynamic. While the distinction between traditional and ambivalent complementarianism provides a more accurate analysis of conservative women’s gender ideologies, these must continue to be understood within the framework of gender ideology as a spectrum.

Additionally, although most scholarship on conservative Protestant womanhood has either focused on white women or considered race and ethnicity as control variables, this study introduces an intersectional lens as it explores the various layers of oppression women within the church must confront and the strategies they employ to navigate these spaces while retaining their faith. By centering the experiences women of color face within the church, this thesis seeks to disrupt the monolithic way in which conservative Baptist women are often portrayed in and demonstrate the flexibility of conservative Baptist doctrine even among its strongest adherents. Such a perspective is crucial for the development of initiatives to address the discrimination and subjugation women face within the church due to gender. Because fundamentalist Baptist doctrine and biblical literalism are foundational to the patriarchal dynamics embedded in the culture and structure of the church, it is impractical to call for changes in the interpretation of scripture for the sake of achieving egalitarianism. However, as observed among these

participants, there was a recognition of negative experiences in the church and in their personal lives as a result of strict complementarian doctrine. The women also expressed finding value in and needing access to fellowship with other ladies to pray for each other as they deal with the pressure of meeting the standard of “godly womanhood.” For this reason, I propose that the first step to dismantling the white, patriarchal, heteronormative system in the conservative Baptist church is to provide spaces where women can confide in each other and be honest about the struggles they face as they attempt to adhere to the complementarian ideals of marriage, parenting, and ministry for women. Further, education on racial biases and the uplifting of women of color’s voices in ministry is essential in order to create truly safe and inclusive spaces for all women, not just white women in the church. Establishing these small communities, especially among insiders who already feel marginalized within the broader structure of the church, can allow for consciousness-raising and the potential development of an intersectional feminist consciousness among the women.

## APPENDIX A

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed IRB Form? Y/N

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Permission to Record? Y/N

*Thank you for taking part in this study. Through this research, I hope to understand the experiences and the meaning of womanhood for conservative Baptist women of different backgrounds. I am interested in learning about any challenges and/or advantages you have encountered as a Christian woman within and outside the church. This interview will be recorded, and I will take notes as needed. Your answers will be completely confidential and any information that may be used to identify you will be removed from the data. Finally, your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may skip any questions that make you uncomfortable. You are also free to end the interview at any point.*

### **Background Information**

Name of Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation Language: Spanish – English

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity: Hispanic or Latinx – Black or African American – White – American Indian or Alaska Native – Asian – Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander – Other

Marital status: Single – Married – Divorced – Separated – Widowed

Any Children? Y/N

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Education Level: High School – Some College – Bachelor’s Degree or above

#### **A) Ministry**

- How many times a month do you attend church services?
- What do you perceive is your role as a woman serving God within ministry?
- Have you been involved in any groups or ministries? If yes, have you held any “official” positions in those ministries and for how long?
- Summarize your duties in those positions. Were they positions commonly held by men or women? \*
- Were those ministries/groups made up of just men, women, or both? \*

- Do you think you encountered any unique challenges in these groups being a woman?  
How about due to race or ethnicity? \*
- Describe your experience working with men in ministry. Describe your experience working with other women. \*
- Were there any specific challenges for you, as a woman, working with men and/or women? If so, how did you deal with them and what was the outcome? \*

*\*Women in ministry/ministry positions only.*

### **B) Gender Ideology**

- What does it mean to be a “godly” woman to you? What does it mean to be a “godly man”?
- What challenges or advantages do you associate with your experience as a woman in the church and in your “walk with Christ” (spiritual life), generally?

### **Marital Practices**

- What does a “godly marriage” look like? Are there certain roles wives and husbands should exercise? If so, what are some examples?
- What does a “godly family” look like? How is authority distributed in the family?
- How are important decisions made in your marriage? \*
- How are disagreements handled? Provide an example. \*
- Who usually takes the lead in spiritual matters? Provide an example. \* (Denton 2004)

*\*Married women only.*

- What is your approximate annual household income?

### **C) Gender Consciousness**

- Do you have close relationships with other Christian women? How about with Christian men?
- Are you part of any women's groups in and/or outside of church? Describe your experience and their significance to you.
- Do you think Christian women are united?
- As a Christian woman, what concerns you about women in society?
- Solidarity among women, observed within women's groups such as those you may be part of, has always been a key aspect of Christian and secular feminism. What are your thoughts on Christian and/or secular feminism?

#### **D) Biblical Literalism Scale**

'The Bible is the literal word of God and a true guide to faith and morality'.

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = somewhat disagree; 3 = somewhat agree; and 4 = strongly agree

(Ruiz et al. 2017)

#### **E) Experience of Women of Color (WOC) \***

*\* In this case, "woman of color" refers to any woman who does not identify as white.*

*As a woman of color in a predominantly white congregation, I have felt that my experience not only as a woman but also as a Puerto Rican immigrant woman has been different than that of white Christian women. Differences in culture and life circumstances have been particularly noticeable for me. Now, I would like to know more about your personal experiences and views on this.*

- Do you identify as a woman of color (WOC)? Y/N

*The following questions are for WOC only.*

- What are your views on racial relations within the church?
- Does race play any factor in your experiences within the church?



- Is race/ethnicity/nationality/culture a topic that is ever brought up by others in church? If yes, how so?
- Has your race/ethnicity/nationality/culture specifically been brought up by others in church? If yes, how so?
- Have you ever faced any challenges due to your race/ethnicity/culture within the church?
- Have you ever felt out of place within the church as a result of racial/ethnic/cultural differences?
- Are you mostly surrounded by other Christian women of the same race/ethnicity/culture/nationality as you or not?
- How do you think being Black, Latina, Asian, etc. affects your experience being a woman?
- Do you think your experiences are different than those of women of another race, culture, or ethnicity?

*The following questions are for non-WOC/white women only.*

- What are your views on racial relations within the church?
- Does race play any factor in your experiences within the church?
- Is race/ethnicity/nationality/culture a topic that is ever brought up by others in church? If yes, how so?
- Do you think differences in race/ethnicity/nationality/culture can present any challenges within the church?
- Do you think any women could feel out of place within the church as a result of racial/ethnic/cultural differences? Why?

- Are you mostly surrounded by other Christian women of the same race/ethnicity/nationality/culture as you or not?
- Do you think being Black, Latina, Asian, etc. affects some women's experience or definition of womanhood?
- Do you think your experiences are different than those of women of another race, culture, or ethnicity in any way?

## APPENDIX B

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed IRB Form? Y/N

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Permission to Record? Y/N

*Gracias por participar en este estudio. A través de este proyecto, espero entender las experiencias y el significado de lo que es ser mujer para mujeres Bautistas conservadoras de distintos orígenes. Estoy interesada en aprender sobre cualquier dificultad o beneficio que ha notado como mujer cristiana dentro o fuera de la iglesia. Esta entrevista será grabada y tomare anotaciones según sea necesario. Sus respuestas serán completamente confidenciales y cualquier información que podría ser utilizada para identificarla será removida de los datos. Finalmente, su participación en este estudio es totalmente voluntaria y usted puede negarse a responder cualquier pregunta que le cause alguna incomodidad. Usted también es libre para terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento.*

### **Antecedentes**

Nombre de la Congregación:

Lenguaje de la Congregación: Español – Ingles

Edad: \_\_\_\_\_

Raza/Etnicidad: Hispana o Latina – Afroamericana – Blanca – Amerindia o nativa de Alaska – Asiática – Isleña del Pacifico – Otro

Estado Civil: Soltera – Casada – Divorciada – Separada – Viuda

¿Hijos o hijas? S/N

Ocupación: \_\_\_\_\_

Nivel de Educación: Escuela Secundaria – Alguna Educación Superior – Bachillerato o Postgrado

- **Ministerio**
- ¿Cuántas veces al mes asiste a la iglesia?
- ¿Que usted percibe que es su rol como mujer al servirle a Dios en un ministerio?
- ¿Ha estado envuelta en grupos o ministerios? ¿Si es así, ha mantenido algún puesto oficial en esos ministerios?
- Resuma sus responsabilidades en esas posiciones. ¿Eran posiciones normalmente dominadas por hombres o mujeres? \*
- ¿Esos ministerios o grupos eran solo de mujeres, hombres, o los dos? \*

- ¿Usted cree que ha encontrado alguna dificultad al servir en estas posiciones o ministerios al ser mujer? ¿Y por su raza o etnicidad? \*
- Describa su experiencia al servir junto a hombres en ministerio. Describa su experiencia al servir junto a mujeres. \*
- ¿Tuvo algunas dificultades, como mujer al trabar con hombres o mujeres? Si ese es el caso, ¿cómo las manejo y cuál fue el resultado de esas dificultades? \*

\* *Solo para mujeres envueltas en ministerio/posiciones en ministerio.*

#### **A) Ideología de Genero**

- ¿Qué significa ser una “mujer de Dios” para usted? ¿Qué significa ser un “hombre de Dios”?
- En su experiencia, ¿qué dificultades o privilegios usted asocia con ser mujer en la iglesia y en su vida espiritual?

#### **Prácticas de Matrimonio**

- ¿Cómo cree que es el matrimonio ideal cristiano? ¿Hay algunos roles que las esposas y esposos deberían ejercer en específico? ¿Si es así, cuales son algunos ejemplos?
- ¿Cómo cree que es la familia ideal cristiana? ¿De qué manera está distribuida la autoridad en el hogar?
- ¿De qué manera se toman decisiones importantes en su matrimonio? \*
- ¿Cómo son resueltos los desacuerdos? Provea algunos ejemplos. \*
- ¿Quién toma el liderazgo en asuntos espirituales en su matrimonio? Provea un ejemplo. \*

(Denton 2004)

\* *Solo para mujeres casadas.*

- ¿Cuál es su ingreso familiar promedio?

#### **B) Conciencia de Genero**

- ¿Usted se considera cercana a otras mujeres cristianas? ¿Y a hombres cristianos?
- ¿Usted es parte de algún grupo de mujeres dentro o fuera de la iglesia? Describa su experiencia y el valor de estos para usted.
- ¿Usted cree que las mujeres cristianas están unidas?
- Como mujer cristiana, ¿qué le preocupa sobre la sociedad y la mujer?
- La solidaridad entre mujeres, observada en grupos como en los que usted tal vez ha participado, siempre ha sido un aspecto importante del feminismo secular y cristiano. ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre el feminismo cristiano y secular?

### **C) Escala de Fundamentalismo Bíblico**

‘La Biblia es la palabra de Dios literal y la verdadera guía para fe y moralidad’.

1 = total desacuerdo; 2 = algo en desacuerdo; 3 = algo de acuerdo; and 4 = total acuerdo \*

(Ruiz et al. 2017)

*\*Translated to Spanish by author, original in English.*

### **D) Experiencia de Mujeres de Color \***

*\*En este caso, “mujer de color” se refiere a aquellas que no sean consideradas de raza blanca.*

*Como mujer de color en una congregación predominantemente blanca, he sentido que mi experiencia no solo como mujer, pero como una inmigrante puertorriqueña ha sido diferente que la de mujeres cristianas blancas. Diferencias culturales y socioeconómicas han sido las más notables para mí. Ahora quisiera saber más sobre sus experiencias personales y opiniones sobre este tema.*

- ¿Usted se clasificaría como mujer de color? S/N

*Las próximas preguntas son solo para mujeres de color.*

- ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre relaciones raciales dentro de la iglesia?
- ¿Su raza tiene alguna influencia en su experiencia dentro de la iglesia?
- ¿La raza/etnicidad/nacionalidad/cultura es un tema del que se habla en la iglesia? ¿Si es así, de qué manera?

- ¿Su raza/etnicidad/cultura específicamente ha sido señalada por otros miembros de la iglesia? ¿Si es así, de qué manera?
- ¿Alguna vez ha encontrado dificultades a causa de su raza/etnicidad/cultura en la iglesia?
- ¿Alguna vez se ha sentido marginada a causa de su raza/etnicidad/cultura en la iglesia?
- ¿Usted está rodeada de mujeres cristianas de su misma raza/etnicidad/cultura o no?
- ¿Cómo cree que ser afroamericana, latina, asiática etc. afecta su experiencia siendo mujer?
- ¿Usted cree que sus experiencias son distintas a las de mujeres que son de otra raza, cultura, o etnicidad?

*Las próximas preguntas son para mujeres blancas solamente.*

- ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre relaciones raciales dentro de la iglesia?
- ¿La raza tiene alguna influencia en su experiencia dentro de la iglesia?
- ¿La raza/etnicidad/nacionalidad/cultura es un tema del que se habla en la iglesia? ¿Si es así, de qué manera?
- ¿Usted cree que diferencias en raza/etnicidad/nacionalidad/cultura pueden causar dificultades en la iglesia?
- ¿Usted cree que algunas mujeres podrían sentirse marginadas a causa de su raza/etnicidad/nacionalidad/cultura en la iglesia?
- ¿Usted está rodeada de mujeres cristianas de su misma raza/etnicidad/cultura o no?
- ¿Cómo cree que ser afroamericana, latina, asiática etc. afecta la experiencia de algunas mujeres y su definición de lo que es ser mujer?

- ¿Usted cree que sus experiencias son distintas a las de mujeres que son de otra raza, cultura, o etnicidad?



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