GENDER IDEOLOGY AND CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS: HOW RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ARE INTERNALIZED BY YOUNG WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Juliann Evans
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
Sociology

Committee:

_____ Director

_____

_____

_____ Department Chairperson

_____ Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

Date: _____ Fall Semester 2020
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Gender Ideology and Conservative Christian Religions: How Religious Beliefs are Internalized by Young Adult Women in the United States

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Sociology at George Mason University

By

Juliann G. Evans
Bachelors of Arts
Christopher Newport University 2017

Director: Shannon N. Davis, Professor
Department of Sociology

Fall Semester 2020
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

DEDICATION

This thesis project is dedicated to the 15 young women who took the time to share their stories with me. I am grateful for the opportunity to sit down with each of one of you. You inspired me more than you know.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

GENDER IDEOLOGY AND CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS: HOW RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ARE INTERNALIZED BY YOUNG WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

Juliann G. Evans, M.A.

George Mason University 2020

Thesis Director: Dr. Shannon N. Davis

This thesis examines the lived experiences of young adult women raised in the Baptist denomination in the United States. The objective was to discover the mechanisms behind the development of their religious ideology and how it connects to their gender ideology. Fifteen young women completed semi-structured in-depth virtual interviews over the course of five months. The key finding is an understanding of how the women came to develop a modern spiritual gender ideology through their own interrogation of the gender ideology they were socialized to hold as children. These results can be used to empower young women raised in conservative religions to remain spiritual while affording space to question traditional gender norms. Religious organizations can also use these findings as a way to better understand younger followers in order to better integrate them into the organization going forward.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Human behavior has been systematically entangled with many principles set forth by religious doctrines. The majority of norms and expectations stem from the frameworks developed centuries ago and have been used as a basis for the structuring of societies and governments worldwide (Peterson 2018). Christianity has become embedded into cultural aspects of the United States and is highly influential on how humans view the world, others and themselves. Although there are many positive aspects of religious beliefs, the teachings and understandings projected onto others are potentially damaging to those who are vulnerable to the criticisms made about particular populations in the sacred texts (Franiuk and Shain 2011). Women are consistently portrayed in a negative light by the doctrines that have been used to guide the lifestyles of billions of women, men, and families (Kirk-Duggan and Torjesen 2009). Specifically, Christianity is built off the belief that a single woman sparked the beginning of human suffering by giving into enticement, and as a result, the population of women have become equated with temptation and destruction (Holland 2006). This contributes to the belief that women need to be subjugated by men (Holland 2006; Franiuk and Shain 2011; Kirk-Duggan and Torjesen 2009).

As advances in modernization, education, and economic development have influenced stark changes in our society that were not predicted by religious doctrines, the

relevance of religion has been called into question (Peterson 2018). The rise of social media and technological outlets have connected humans to each other in novel ways and women have begun to defy the roles that have been laid out for them in religious texts. In addition, women have started to obtain higher education than men and have entered traditionally male-dominated professions more than ever before (Chetty et al. 2016). This shift has allowed for women to feel their subjugated positions viscerally in every institution they encounter (Franiuk and Shain 2011). Thus, the expectations of adhering to traditional gender roles has been recently viewed as more damaging and restricting for women whose desires do not match these expectations (Kirk-Duggan and Torjesen 2009).

Despite this realization, it is still extremely common for children to grow up attending church services with their families and be exposed to the strict teaching about gender. However, churches have begun to pick up on the changes in gender ideology in society to better fit the current zeitgeist and stay a relevant institution by disregarding certain traditional teachings and becoming more inclusive of diversity (Bulanda 2011). It is necessary then to discover more about whether the decline of religion has influenced a relaxing of traditional gender beliefs in Christianity which has subsequentially led to an increase in teaching women and girls that they are equal to their male counterparts. More specifically, it is important to determine how the Baptist religion has dealt with changes in the position of women in society as there is a stronghold for this denomination in American society that continues to perpetuate the subjugation of women in their teachings (Shaw 2008).

Even though the Baptist religion has begun to vary substantially based on location and cultural changes (Shaw 2008), it is important to account for the possible lack in changes in areas that hold more traditional gender values. In order to understand whether growing up in a more traditional religious setting has affected how young women have internalized gender values and have constructed their gender ideology based on their religious upbringing, a deep dive into the lives of young women who have been or were a part of a Baptist church for years has been conducted and discussed in the present thesis. Growing up, I attended a traditional Southern Baptist church in a rural area of Virginia that held onto traditional gender values and the submission of women. Based on this experience, I chose to specifically study young women who were raised within the Baptist denomination to discover whether they experienced different variations of teachings on how women should act in society.

I conducted in-depth interviews with 15 young adult women who were raised as Baptist in the United States and inquired specifically about their development of religious understandings and religious gender ideology throughout their lives. In this thesis, I answer the question: how have Biblical teachings shaped the internalization of gendered expectations for young women who attended Baptist religious services in their childhood?

Chapter 2 includes an in-depth literature review that connects the present work to established research. This literature review situates the current study into the relevant social scientific discussion. The most pertinent theoretical frameworks are discussed and supporting themes discovered in similar research studies are analyzed. The

methodological design and procedures regarding this method are explicated in Chapter 3. The third chapter details the choices made to collect and analyze the data in this project. I describe the sample selection, the ethical considerations brought to bear on the question, and the instrument used to collect the interview data. The chapter also presents a description of the interviews and includes a table with the sample demographic information of the participants. How the data was analyzed and the ways in which the findings were discovered is included in the final section of this chapter.

Chapter 4 contains the results and findings that were compiled from the data analyzed and connects these to the established literature. I begin by providing participant biographies that give a brief overview of how each participant became affiliated with the Baptist church and how they came to make their decisions in adulthood about their religious beliefs are written here. The findings are presented in three themes. This key finding is a documentation of the common ways that the participants wrestled with their religious experiences and how they came to develop their gender ideology. The overall discovery of this project was a modern spiritual gender ideology held by the majority of the participants. The next finding illuminates the complicated relationship my participants had with Biblical inerrancy. The last finding highlights the complex understanding of gender afforded to participants through their modern spiritual gender ideology by examining their interpretation of men in their religious denomination. The overall consensus was the belief in gender equality and many of the women interviewed expressed their desire for the unification of all people.

The final chapter builds on the results of this study and translates them into implications for similar research. The implications discussed focus on future research on religion and gender and religious organizations, specifically conservative Protestant. I also present implications for the field of public sociology and how future public sociologists can use the findings from this study to educate the public about the viewpoints of young adult women who were raised conservative Protestant and how the public can be involved in similar research. The various implications provided are ways in which future research can be used to make social change and to assist in expanding consciousness for religious organizations who may not understand the beliefs of young adults in the United States. Overall, this research project raised my consciousness about a particular group of women, shifting my understanding of how religion can be interpreted differently and more positively by young women who questioned what they were told to internalize.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

      This chapter presents perspectives on conservative Protestant research in efforts to situate the current project into the established literature. With this, I begin with a description of the background of the Baptist church in the United States and how women have come to be understood within the structure of the church. The gender ideology and religious ideology that is taught within Baptist churches is examined. The main theoretical explanations analyzed in this thesis in order to connect to the current research include doing gender and doing religion, moral order, religion as a gendered institution, and religious socialization.

      Next, empirical findings that contribute to this project will be synthesized in detail and laid out by relevant themes. These themes incorporate research that produced findings to support the argument that religion reproduces inequality and that parents influence youth's religious outcomes. Additionally, research providing support for the gender differences in religiosity will be detailed as well as research that details patterns surrounding conservative religious women, their traditional gender beliefs, and orthodoxy.

Background, Theoretical Explanations, and Empirical Findings

Conservative Protestant religious beliefs perpetuate traditional ideologies of family, gender, and individual responsibilities for success. In the United States, the majority of religious persons are Evangelical Protestants who fall under the Baptist family. Further, the most followed Baptist denomination in America is the Southern Baptist section (Pew Forum of Religion and Public Life 2015). A primary reason for the sustained popularity of conservative religions stems from the historical contexts of American politics and the conservative movement that took place after the successes of the Civil Rights and Feminist movements posed threats to the status quo for White men (Shaw 2008). This shift in power allowed for a revitalization of conservative religious beliefs by politically enforcing certain traditional gender differences originally set out through biblical interpretations, thus reiterating the power of godly men over women as engrained in the creation of human beings (Schnable 2017). Women are often the object and center of many traditional beliefs that revolve around sexuality, deviance, education, and family roles. These facets of conservative religious teachings restrict what women think they can do and limit their lifestyle options to a select few (Shaw 2008).

The traditional teachings of southern Baptists are considered among the most conservative for the denomination of conservative Protestants, reiterating a gender ideology that consists of essential differences between men and women (Bulanda 2011). Embedded in the religious and gender ideology of Southern Baptists is the notion of individual responsibility for life outcomes that correlates with how Americans view success and failure. In addition, both the Bible and society view negative occurrences as

7

products of the sins committed by each person and not the structure of society (Shaw 2008). Thus, women are faced with many challenges if raised religiously, and this may influence how they organize their own gender ideologies. However, it is important to understand both of the concepts of gender ideology and religious ideology as complex social processes that intersect with many other aspects of individual and collective influences making it difficult to know how traditional religious beliefs are interpreted by women today. It is also necessary to distinguish between potential place differences as there is variation in diversity that has led to shifts from conservative to liberal beliefs based on location. A more traditional belief system has been seen to persist rather homogenously in rural and or southern areas (Woodberry and Smith 1998; Moore and Vanneman 2003).

After analyzing the literature on religion and gender ideology, many key themes were found that highlight potential negative and positive influences of conservative beliefs on women. The current chapter focuses on much literature that surrounds religion and adolescents as the question at hand includes a durational component of religious participation. Thus, as the participants for this study attended church services throughout their entire adolescence, it was necessary to examine what influences are most salient during this developmental period that may have led to the internalization of the Bible's teachings. How women have understood what they learned at this time in their lives and the influence their religious education has had on their adult gender ideology is imperative to the question at hand. Although religious adolescence is a main theme in the scholarship, I have pointed out others that will help to provide a more cohesive basis of

8

the theoretical frameworks that have been developed and the concepts that were utilized in this project. These central themes also allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of where and how the current research project can contribute to the cross-disciplinary literature on the social phenomena. First, I describe the main theoretical explanations that help to put the themes into context.

Theoretical Explanations

  Doing gender and doing religion. The connection between conservative religions and gender ideology has been analyzed under many theoretical frameworks over time, but religion has often been defined in problematic ways because of the view that it is an individual experience over a societal phenomenon (Bulanda 2011; Maltby et al. 2010; Moore and Vanneman 2003). Thus, the theoretical explanations analyzed in this section utilize a more multifaceted conceptualization of religion in order to understand the complexity behind it and to view it as a multidimensional process that is constantly negotiated, created, and performed in social interactions (Bulanda 2011; Pearce and Thornton 2007; Smith 2007). The "doing religion" approach allows for it to be understood as pervasive on every level of analysis and connects it to a similar explanation of gender. Gender is understood as something that is being done and is a social process that is constantly being recreated through interactions as it is constructed and enacted in different ways based on contexts (Schnabel 2017; West and Zimmerman 1987). Both gender and religion are acted out in similar fashions and are connected due to their differing social expectations based on biological sex. These understandings allow for the

theoretical and empirical explanations to be broader and more complex in explaining the effects of religion on different genders and age groups.

Moral order. Childhood and adolescent exposure to religion has influenced much research on the effects of traditional gender beliefs on life outcomes. However, there is a strong belief that religion has positive influences on the lives of young Americans and can combat many behaviors deemed dangerous (Pearce, Uecker, and Denton 2019; Smith 2003a, Smith 2003b). It is necessary to incorporate the theoretical explanations for why religion is believed to be a positive influence on adolescents, in efforts to search for underpinnings of this in the current research project. These positive effects are viewed through a non-reductionist approach that allows for religion itself to have causal influences on action and social processes (Smith 2003a; Smith 2003b). The main positive outcome is the development of a moral order that categorizes certain behaviors as having higher negative costs such as substance abuse, early sexual activity, and lacking virtue (Pearce, Uecker, and Denton 2019). Parental influences on children are believed to have substantial effects on the development of a moral order in their offspring and this moral order is theorized to be developed and sustained in adolescence to death (Smith 2003a). Even though there are many limitations to this theory, using it as a basis can help to determine if religion has yielded positive outcomes for individuals and will also show what these limitations are in practice.

Religion as a gendered institution. Although religion is often viewed as a solely individual characteristic, structural understandings of this social process expose how gender is omnipresent in the practices and ideologies of religious organizations. Thus,

10

religion can be understood as a gendered institution where gender is embedded in its framework and works in tandem with the dominate practices to reproduce gender and gender inequality (Acker 1992). Gender beliefs shape religious understandings of the roles that men and women should hold in society, and this is especially true for conservative religions that emphasize natural difference between men and women (Schnable 2017). Religious texts also influence the strength of gender differences as women are blamed for being deviant and closer to nature, while men are portrayed as powerful and protectors of the weak (Holland 2006). Schnabel (2017) emphasizes gender as embedded into religious institutions so much that he believes secularization can only occur if society is systematically degendered first. As religion and gender work together to influence individual ideologies that are reproduced through social interactions and affirmed by organizational structures, gendered institutions like religion are legitimized and taken for granted.

  Religious socialization. Another taken-for-granted theoretical approach to understanding the mechanisms behind religiosity stems from socialization theory. Socialization explanations for religiousness are common in religious research but are typically utilized to explain how children are integrated into society based on parental influences. This theory however has been criticized for its continuous use as being a straightforward process that will lead to assumed outcomes and is commonly influenced by adult perspectives that do not accurately represent how this process affects the youth being studied (Klingenberg and Sjö 2019). Thus, religious socialization should be understood and conceptualized as a process that operates in various setting

simultaneously and should consider changing positions of the non-religious population. This theory should also include agency-related perspectives that have been less emphasized and be viewed as a phenomenon that is differently shaped based on cultural and societal contexts (Klingenberg and Sjö 2019). Miller and Stark (2002) dispel socialization theory as an explanation for gender differences in religiousness, but a contemporary reconceptualization may contribute to a better understanding of gender and religious socialization. This concept is mentioned in many of the works analyzed in this review, making it imperative to address the current theoretical understandings of religious socialization. I next outline the research findings that are most relevant to the current question with these theories in mind.

Empirical Findings

      Religion reproduces inequality. Even though Smith (2003b) theorizes that religion has primarily positive outcomes for youth and people in general, Herzog (2012) warns that inadequate structuring of religious programs can reproduce inequality, especially when comparing various socioeconomic groups to each other. Her analysis of the organization of youth groups implemented by youth ministers in different SES locations were seen to reproduce inequality through a cultural isomorphism (Herzog 2012). She found that due to ambiguity on how to structure youth groups, youth ministers take from other models of established institutions that already tend to stratify groups based on resource availability and cultural beliefs. This ambiguity reified inequality as youth groups attempted to maintain relevance and negotiated with competing forces to remain legitimate. These counter influences were embedded into the program and emphasized

12

social status, entertainment, and likeability that may distract from becoming more important to the youth participating (Herzog 2012; Smith 2003b). Thus, inequality is reinforced through modeling after other inequality-producing institutions, especially that of the education system, and the incorporating of competing influences into the structure may cause negative impacts due the possibility that these influences will overshadow the positive effects that religion can have on youth (Herzog 2012; Smith 2003b).

Research on prolonged childhood exposure to religion, especially conservative ones, has also shown that women are more likely to occupy less valued occupations and make less wages than those who were not exposed (Glass and Jacobs 2005). Women are more disadvantaged by the effects that conservative religions have on their lives as certain ideological beliefs emphasize the roles of motherhood, working in feminine-type occupations, working less than full time, which hinders human capital development along with educational attainment (Glass and Jacobs 2005). Adhering to conservative religious beliefs has also led to inequality in political participation for women, as women are less likely to be involved with politics while their male counterparts are encouraged to (Cassese and Holman 2016). Cassese and Holman (2016) found that messages about gender and authority garnered from church services and religious teachings demobilized women from participating in politics, producing gender inequality in the realm of policy changes which allows for the maintenance of the status quo that already disadvantages women. Thus, religion has an influence on perpetual gender disparities as it is embedded in its organization and promotes women to accept the teachings about gender roles as correct. This in turn leads to lower attainment of education and monetary resources that

force women to be dependent on men as bread-winners and decreases participation in voting for policies that can change this reliance on men (Cassese and Holman 2016; Glass and Jacobs 2005).

Parental influence on youth's religious outcomes. The development of religious beliefs stems from exposure in the younger years of life, which is heavily influenced by the religious affiliation of a child's parents (Pearce and Thornton 2007; Smith 2003a). Smith (2003a) found that parents who are religious and attend more services were likely to hold high moral expectations of their children and are more supervisory of them. Children then learn how to understand what is right and wrong from the beliefs of their parents along with which behaviors are good and bad (Smith 2003a). However, the influences of parental religiosity on their offspring's religiousness is more heavily taken from the mother as she is more likely to reflect her values onto her children (Pearce and Thornton 2007). Pearce and Thornton (2007) analyzed the correlation between maternal religious ideologies and their children's religiosity over their lifetime and found this to be a key influence on the development of interrelated family ideologies as well. Thus, the ideologies of parents affect how their children structure their own lives, interconnecting the family with religion and gender.

Although parental expectations may lead to more positive experiences for their offspring with religion (Smith 2003a), a number of parental religious aspects will in turn affect their offspring such as educational attainment and conservative religious beliefs (Glass and Jacobs 2005). Maternal influence is especially important when understanding how a child was socialized into particular religious affiliations. The combination of her

14

beliefs encouraged by the church and the beliefs of how she views family behaviors can have substantial influence on how young adults internalize religion (Pearce and Thornton 2007). Thus, the influence of parents, especially mothers, on all facets of life, not just religion, is necessary to understand how a person has developed their ideologies.

Gender differences in religiosity. A common theme among gender and religious research contributes to a greater understanding of how men and women differ in religiousness. Men and women are taught to value different beliefs and adhere by different standards from each other despite being a part of the same organization. Miller and Stark (2002) find that women and men differ in risk preferences when it comes to religion. Women tend to avoid more risky behaviors that are condoned by religions where men are more likely to participate in them (Miller and Stark 2002). Along with this, women are more religious than men overall and are subject to more rules regarding their bodies than men (Schnable 2017). More conservative religions naturalize gender differentials between men and women, placing them into different positions and roles that perpetuate observed gender differences (Pevey, Williams, and Ellis 1996; Schnable 2017). The patriarchal underpinnings of religions, especially conservative Protestant denominations, support these differences which are internalized by men and women and contributes to the construction of individual identities (Schnabel 2017).

Schnabel (2017) found evidence for this by analyzing gender differences in individual religiosity in expression and in-group pride as women were more likely to intertwine conservative religious principles into their gender expression and behavior due to the strict teaching of purity. This phenomenon was found to be less significant for

men, as they were more strongly influenced by in-group pride of being a man and religiosity strengthened this relationship for men but not for women (Schnabel 2017). Thus, constant exposure to conservative religious teachings about gender can lead to the internalization of these teachings, which becomes ingrained in individual ideologies. This can then be outwardly reflected in behaviors associated with ambivalent sexism and can become pervasive in conservative religious institutions as these behaviors are understood as either hostile or benevolent (Maltby et al. 2010).

Maltby et al. (2010) found that men were more likely to align with principles of ambivalent sexism, especially that of benevolent sexism due to the belief of paternalism that is reiterated in religious teachings. Men are taught to view themselves as strong leaders that protect women as they are believed to be less physically strong and powerful (Maltby et al. 2010; Schnable 2017). Since this belief is deemed correct by the church, it teaches men to use benevolent sexism in interactions with women which legitimizes women as being inferior and unequal. The system of inequality is then perpetuated on every level, as religion is a gendered institution. However, Pevey et al. (1996) examined how women negotiated their different gender roles in conservative spaces and analyzed how they separated themselves from the teachings of submission and their self-perceptions. After interviewing Southern Baptist women at a conservative church, Pevey et al. (1996) found that the differential beliefs of gender were molded in ways that allowed for these women to internalize a form of empowerment, despite being taught to be submissive towards men. In light of all of the negative implications that conservative religious beliefs have on female behavior, instances of negotiating with these terms

should be further evaluated to determine the lived effects of believing in naturalized gender differences.

The findings of Pevey et al. (1996) may be operating in concert on a contextual level due to the church's situated location in the United States. Moore and Vanneman (2003) also found that the permeation of traditional gender attitudes in certain conservative denominations may be more contextually based due to the prevalence of fundamentalist thinking that is concentrated in the south. The women who reside in the south, like those observed by Pevey et al. (1996), are more likely to be surrounded by various factors that shape their gender attitudes due to authority structures that imbed these religious views into other facets of life like popular media (Moore and Vanneman 2003). Thus, studying conservative religions requires an analysis of place-based factors that may be influencing the legitimation of gender differences in these areas more than others before classifying all of the churches and denominational affiliates into the same category and understanding them as being influenced by the exact same structural operations (Moore and Vanneman 2003).

Conservative religious women, traditional gender beliefs, and orthodoxy. All of the gender differences found in these previously mentioned studies stem from the underpinnings of the religious doctrines made sacred by institutions. This is an imperative theme among the findings as women are more likely to take the meaning behind these doctrines literally than men (Bartowski and Hempel 2009; Cassese and Holman 2016; Pevey et al. 1996). There is a gender gap in biblical inerrancy as women who affiliate with conservative denominations are much more likely than men to believe

in the words of sacred texts like the Bible as well as view the concepts of sin and salvation as more serious (Bartowski and Hempel 2009). As Cassese and Holman (2016) found a connection gender and political participation, they also found that women's strength of biblical inerrancy led to more traditional gender beliefs as well as a denial in believing that gender inequality was a problem. Bartowski and Hempel (2009) also found a significant correlation between gender traditionalism and theological conservatism and attribute this relationship to the lack of public authority allotted to women in the church.

Pevey et al. (1996) found that women were teaching gender traditionalism to other women and encouraged them to place their domestic roles over any other in their lives. Women are more deeply connected to these conservative gender teachings and this in turn shapes how they view their duties in life as well as the options they have to choose from (Cassese and Holman 2016). These studies also show consistent attendance of religious services strengthens women's beliefs in sacred texts and ideologies that comprises traditional Christianity (Bartowski and Hempel 2009; Cassese and Holman 2016; Pevey et al. 1996). Thus, it is important to further understand the connection women have with these ideologies as they reify gender inequality and traditional gender roles stating that women should and must be submissive to men. As the themes mentioned work together to create a more cohesive image of conservative Christianity in America, I must also briefly discuss the methodological choices of the research studies I have reviewed in order to further understand the literature at hand and the gaps that my project and method were able to fill.

CONCLUSION

The gaps in previous scholarship were visible after conducting this literature review; the current research project helps to fill in those spaces. There is a substantial lack of within-gender group studies in religious scholarship; my thesis includes this type of analysis. Schnabel (2017) emphasized the importance of doing research using this type of sample so that more complete considerations of the processes behind religiosity and gender can be discovered.

This review of literature included an emphasis on how the resurgence of conservative religious affiliations may affect gender equality due to the strong correlation to traditional gender beliefs. However, Pevey et al. (1996) found that Southern Baptist women had negotiated their roles in their church and created methods of empowerment that are usually deemed oppressive. The study at hand contributes to these findings and provides potentially generalizable practices that can be used to reduce gender inequality in institutions in which it is embedded. There is a distinctive gap in qualitative work on conservative Protestant religions and so accurate theoretical explanations for patterns and observations are underdeveloped. The emphasis on biblical inerrancy and conservative Protestantism is relevant and is clearly gendered. This review of the literature demonstrates that it is necessary to gain a fuller understanding of how women incorporate the Bible in their lives from their standpoint and to determine the effects that their interpretations have had on gender ideology. Building on the qualitative work of other scholars, I used the theoretical frameworks to design a study to allow women to tell their stories of how they came to create their own gender ideologies. Previous research helped

me thinking about how gender operates in a conservative Protestant denomination like

Southern Baptist. In the next chapter, I explain the methods and methodological design

that was implemented to answer my research question.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

INTRODUCTION

  The data collection method chosen for this study was semi-structured in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview process consists of a one-on-one session where the researcher asks a list of prepared questions to a consenting participant who then responds with as much detail as they are willing to give in order to answer the question. This process allows for the respondents to provide information that relates to their lived experiences and the research question at hand. In-depth interviews are also the most optimal method to gather answers to open-ended questions that can be responded to in a multitude of ways and will likely vary by participant (Carr et al. 2018). The answers to the questions tend to elicit lengthy responses that contain various indicators about how the participants have made meaning from their experiences. Due to the complexities of the answers and the open-ended nature of what the findings were expected to be, interviewing with women that aligned with the demographic of interest seemed to be the most appropriate method to satiate the inquiry fully. As the research question posed was related to the lived experiences of women raised Baptist specifically and was formulated with the intent to discover new information about how these women understood their

experiences, it was further decided that interviews would be the best method to answer the current research question.

The choice of interviewing was also made because of the lack of research on the subject being analyzed that includes the use of this method. Since there had been little previous research conducted on similar topics that utilized interviews with women who were raised in such a specific conservative religious institution, there was a gap in understanding how religion and gender operate in the lives of young women who were raised Baptist in the United States. In addition, there was previously little understanding about how young women made sense of these influences in their lives. The current study was able to address this and fill in some of the gaps. Thus, in-person semi-structured interviews was understood as the best method for acquiring this information and allowed for the discovery of missing pieces to be added to the current sociological contexts of conservative religious influences on gender ideology.

In the subsequent parts of this chapter, I explicate the details of how the data collection process was conducted and include information about the sampling procedures, ethical considerations and measurement strategies implemented as well as a description of the interviews and the overall process of how the data was analyzed. The sample that was obtained for the study will also be described. I then discuss the data analysis process that was completed in order to determine the key findings.

SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The sample selection procedures I chose to utilize consisted of purposive and snowball sampling techniques that allowed for the targeting of a specific group of people

that fit the population of interest. These people were required to be women between the ages of 18 to 35 and they must have attended a Baptist church in the United States. They also had to have been raised primarily as a Baptist since they were at least a teenager, preferably since childhood or early adolescence. Fifteen participants who fit these criteria were found through snowball sampling and word of mouth. I communicated with them virtually through email, Mason360 and text message. Many of the participants provided subsequent participants who fit the background characteristics desired. I also attempted to recruit participants from various student religious organizations that had been established at George Mason University. I contacted multiple Christian-related organizations that were affiliated with this school in hopes of gaining the desired sample size. In efforts to find a gatekeeper, I reached out to the listed affiliated members by locating their contact information on the organization's Mason360 profile via chat. The religious organizations that were contacted were George Mason's Christians on Campus, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Patriot Christian Ministry, The Gathering, Bible GMU, MakeNew Christian Fellowship, Mason InterVarsity and the Student Bible Study.

I chose these eight groups due to their explicit descriptions on Mason360 that indicated the values of each group and their mission statements. These statements include teaching the word of the Bible, focusing on God or Jesus Christ, or creating a positive Christian community through worship and spreading the message of the Bible and or Jesus Christ. However, only one participant was discovered through this method. Additionally, I contacted 7 other student groups via Mason 360 that were related to women, gender, or graduate students in general. These groups were the Graduate and

Professional Student Association, The Future is Female, Well-Being LLC, Chase Dreams Not Boys, the Panhellenic Council, Queen in You, and the Women and Gender Studies department. Again, most of the participants were not recruited through this method as the response rate was relatively low.

I attempted to find participants who were raised in Baptist contexts but were loosely or no longer affiliated with the religion as well. I posted flyers around George Mason's campus explicitly stating the topic of the research in relation to the Baptist religion, gender, and the details about the desired sample characteristics that was needed. Additionally, I posted the research flyer on my social media pages. These pages included Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Overall, the participants were gathered via word of mouth from previous participants. I provided an incentive for participation, which included a $5.00 Amazon gift card that was sent to each participant via email after they participated. I used the same verbiage on all the current recruitment materials. This verbiage included details about who was eligible to participate, necessary contact information, the purpose of the research, the expected time commitment to the study, and the participant benefits. I also created a new email address for the participants to communicate through. The correspondence included solely information about scheduling and the returning of a signed informed consent form. I asked the participants who already completed their interviews if they would be willing to assist with finding more participants who may fit the sample. This turned out to be the most effective sampling method for the current study due to limitations created by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Ethical considerations. As the present research design included working directly with human subjects, I had to make a plethora of ethical considerations. First, it was imperative that I submit the research materials to the institutional review board in order to gain approval to work with human subjects and implement the design of the study. I included in this submission an informed consent form that required a signature from each interviewee who agreed to participate. This form encompassed an explanation of the purpose of the research, a description of the study and the target population, the time expectations for participation, a description of the procedures to be completed, any risks that may have been faced by the participants, and any benefits that would be gained from participating in the research project. This form also informed the participants about how the data would be used post-research and how their confidentiality would be maintained.

Further, I made sure to include a statement about how the research was voluntary and assurance that the participant could drop out of the study at any time without penalty. In addition, my plan to voice record each interview was made explicit and each participant was asked to initial a line indicating that they consented to being voice recorded. All 15 participants gave consent for recording, which was completed via Skype. I also informed the participants that they could ask to stop the recording at any time if sensitive information surfaced that they did not want recorded. However, this did not occur over the course of the interviews. Lastly, I gave the participants the contact information of mental health services offered by the university, along with the research faculty member who assisted in the research, and the Research Development Integrity and Assurance office.

25

Even though the form stated that the research was voluntary and that signing it meant that the participant was giving consent, I reiterated this to the participants and reminded them that they could leave at any time during the interviews without penalty. Due to the sampling method chosen and the desire to find a very select group of women, I was not able to gather anonymous. However, I adhered to strict procedures regarding confidentiality and ensured the participants that the gathered data was protected. The informed consent form that was given to each interviewee to read over and sign included a detailed section on the steps that were taken to ensure that the confidentiality of each participant remained safeguarded throughout the entire process. I made sure that the guidelines regarding confidentiality began with the process of recruitment and indicated that any participant who was interested in interviewing would not be named in the research and that their personal information would be kept by me and the member of the research faculty only. I made the participants aware that any hard copies of data would be kept in a locked box at the student researchers' personal residence. I assigned each participant a coded name during the process of data cleaning and a pseudonym for the final write-up in order to keep the identities of the interviewees hidden.

I only used the coded names in the data collection process and any identifying information was not included in the coding lists. Each interview was conducted in solitary via Skype, where I and the participant were the only present parties. I also reminded the participants that their identity would still be safeguarded and that any quote or statement included in the final write-up would be addressed under a pseudonym. I made it clear that the data would be handled as carefully as possible and with full

consideration of each interviewee. In addition, I reassured the participants that their data would be used for no other purpose than the current research. These measures taken and the information given to the participants about the study allowed for each participant to know exactly how I would handle their data and who would have access to it in order to make sure their confidentiality was protected.

MEASUREMENT STRATEGIES

Interview schedule. The main strategy of measurement utilized was an interview schedule that I created and adhered to as strictly as possible in order to facilitate a conversation and stay focused on the purpose at hand. A semi-structured interview process was employed through the creation of this interview schedule which included a list of prepared questions and follow-up probes that the respondents answered. A copy of this interview schedule is located in Appendix A. I asked questions that related to the participants self-understandings of their religious experiences and gender ideology. I structured the interview schedule to begin with more broad questions that led to probing for many of the participants. The questions and probes were open-ended and constructed with the goal of eliciting long, detailed answers or stories instead of short responses. I formulated most of the questions in terms of asking "how" so that the interviewees were prompted to think about their responses in relation to the overall process and elicit more complex answers. The detailed interview schedule represented the entire process and included plans on how to begin the conversation in a way that made the interviewee feel comfortable.

In addition, I made sure to ask if the participants had any questions before beginning the interview. I included relative probes for each question so that the most in-depth answers to the questions as possible could be gathered while the validity was maintained. I created the interview schedule to begin with questions about the backgrounds of the participants so they could discuss their own understanding of the overall topic of the interview. However, an anticipated and common occurrence that stems from in-depth interviews is the realization that certain questions may not be eliciting the desired responses (Carr et al. 2018). With this, I only omitted one question from the original interview schedule as the data gathered from the previous question was found to be sufficient. I took part in active listening and reflection on the answers being provided in order to determine whether the question was answered in its entirety.

I prepared sixteen open-ended questions that coincided with four topics of interest, but only fifteen were asked. The data consisted of the answers and responses received from each of the questions where common themes were discovered. These themes were evaluated in order to determine which factors shaped a similar population who were raised under the same religious denomination. The data fell under themes and concepts that were found to be vital to the understanding the Baptist religious experiences of young adult women. These concepts were operationalized into topics that aligned with various questions and probes asked in the interviews. The topics included Religious Biography, Religious Socialization and Church Locality, Religious Beliefs, Understandings and Internalization, and Religious Christian Gender Ideology. I announced a pre-interview script before asking any pertinent questions so that each

interview began exactly the same. This script included a reiteration of important points laid out in the informed consent form that was signed before the interview was scheduled. These points included a restatement of the purpose of the interview, a reminder of the interviewee's confidentiality, a reminder that the interview was to be recorded but could be stopped per request, assurance that the interviewee could ask questions or stop the interview at any time, and space for any questions that the participant may have had before questions were asked.

Due to the complexity of the questions, many of the probes I included were more relative to follow-up questions in order to get the most out of each as possible. These probes were also the main indicator of internal validity and helped the interviewee answer the original questions posed as accurately as possible. As mentioned above, I structure the interview schedule to begin with more biographical questions to make the interviewee feel more comfortable and in control of their responses about their own religious background. Even though they may not seem directly related to the research question, gathering the background was imperative to comparing the participants' experiences. These questions also helped me determine if the original interview schedule was working in the way it was intended to in order to maximize the results.

Again, I requested a signature of consent regarding the use of the recording during the interviews. I revisited the recordings in order to make sure that no imperative information was missed during the interview. This also allowed me to give my complete attention to the interviewees who were sharing their stories with a stranger. My decision to record the interviews was based on the belief that the presence of a researcher could

influence the respondents and so it was important that interest, politeness, and gratitude were shown towards those who had decided to interview with me in order to maintain validity. I was aware of body language during the interviews, including eye contact and nodding displays, so that a deeper connection could be made with those presenting personal information. Thus, it was imperative that I record the interviews so that the flow of the conversation proceeded in the most genuine way possible.

The current study was constructed under the theoretical framework of standpoint theory. This means that I had to be fully aware that being a researcher was going to have an impact on the interview in ways that I could not control. Being aware of this allowed for my own neutrality and bias to be checked. However, the connections that I formed with the respondents were positive and mutually gratifying. It was rare for the interviewees to ask me for clarification about any questions and there was no discomfort shown towards any of the questions that caused them to not be answered. Thus, I barely made any changes to the interview process as they went on. Each individual biography was obtained in efforts for me to truly understand the direction of the interview. In the biographical section, I asked questions about current religiousness to determine the present relationship to the church or what led them to change. I then asked the participants how they got involved with the Baptist church and at what age. The purpose for including measures regarding biography was to inquire about the entirety of the participants' religious experiences from when they were first involved so that I could obtain the greatest understanding of their background with the Baptist religion. This information helped me to preface the variant probe questions created based on the

responses received from the participants. It also allowed me to make connections to their experiences and beliefs to be made in later questions.

For the second topic, I asked questions to measure religious socialization and the influence of church locality. The influence of the mother, father, and church leaders on religious upbringing were discussed but variations of each question were asked by me based on a case by case scenario as some of the participants were no longer religious or had chosen to follow a different religious path. I inquired about how being raised as a Baptist influenced the participants relationship decisions as well and this included both romantic ones and or friendships. I asked this to determine if the participants socialization had influenced who they had decided to be friends with or date and then connect it to their upbringing. Then, I asked the interviewees whether they had surrounded themselves with similar people and why they have chosen to do so in efforts to determine if they were open to people with different backgrounds than their own.

My last question on this topic involved church locality so that place-based factors could be determined as it related heavily to the research question. I posed two questions to help gain a deeper understanding of the location of the church and or multiple churches that participants attended in their lives and whether they felt the culture of the surrounding area influenced the culture of the church. Further, I asked that the participants discuss the geographical location of their church in efforts to determine if they were in a more rural or urban area. The final question I included in this section was more sensitive in nature and required the participant to determine the political orientation of the churches they had been affiliated with. The participants were asked by me whether

31

they shared the beliefs of the church or if they had experienced conflict with their beliefs and what they were taught to measure whether they developed their own beliefs outside of the church.

The third topic in the interview schedule was based on the religious beliefs, understandings, and internalization of the participants. I asked the participants to describe their current beliefs and what they agreed or disagreed with the most from their religious education. I designed this question to measure whether the participants' current religious beliefs allied with what they were taught or if they had developed separate ones. I also inquired about whether they had developed a moral philosophy that aligned differently than with what they were taught. This included gender inequality and whether they believed their religion had the tools to fix the social problems they cared most about. I measured religious internalization by asking about the interviewees' personal feelings towards the Bible and its principles and whether they believed it was correct or not. My final measure for religious beliefs and internalization included questions regarding whether the participants incorporated Biblical teachings in their everyday lives or not. I asked again if the participants had beliefs that differed from what the Bible says in order to maximize measurement validity and gain a further understanding of whether the beliefs that were internalized were the same as what the Bible has taught them or if they had molded their own.

The last topic that I queried about included five questions regarding religious Christian gender ideology as this was the main variable that was being measured in the study. I measured this by first pointing out the fact that women are more likely to be more

religious than men, and then inquiring about the feelings that the participants had about this statement. They were then probed about why they believed there was a difference between genders and whether they thought there should be or if they had experienced a similar occurrence in their own lives. I continued to measure religious Christian ideology through the asking of a question related to the opinion of how the participants believed women should act and what responsibilities they should take on in life. I connected this question religion by asking if they shared the same beliefs as what they were taught at church or if they differed. I then probed them by asking why and where they learned to think differently. The next question I had originally posed, which was about the beliefs surrounding the participants individual responsibilities as a woman and what they were in relation to family, work and education was omitted as the question before this acquired enough information.

The probes helped me to gain a more cohesive understanding of how the participants' viewed their own responsibilities as women in society. This topic was continued when I inquired about the influences of the Baptist religion and how it impacted the lives of the young women who participated in the study. Again, the probes helped me obtain clear answers to the question by confirming if the participants thought their experiences had been positive or negative and how they had changed over time. The last question I asked and the last one that measured this topic was included as an attempt to gather a more cohesive image of how the participants believed men and women should act and whether they believed there are gendered differences in responsibilities. I prefaced the question by stating the fact that men and women are taught to act differently

and are assigned different responsibilities in the Baptist religion. I then asked participants to describe their feelings towards this fact. My final probe was used to discover the interviewees' views on gender equality and if their views of gender equality aligned with how the religion portrayed it. This helped me to determine if the earlier questions measured gender ideology correctly or not. I then asked the participants if they had any further questions, comments or concerns to make about the interview and feedback about the structure, questions, or project was appreciated. With this, I include information about the sample obtained below and the process that I took in order to analyze the data collected.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWS

Sample details. The data for the current research project was collected through in-depth interviews that ranged from 30 minutes to 2 and a half hours. I conducted interviews virtually through Skype over the course of five months and a total of 15 interviews were completed. As mentioned above, the majority of the participants were found through snowball sampling and had to fit the description mentioned in the Sampling Procedures section above. The table below provides the relevant details about each participant and their demographic information.

Table 1. Description of Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Age when First Affiliated	Age when Interviewed	Current Denomination	Location of Church	Believes Bible as Truth
1. Andrea	Birth	24	Non-Denominational	Virginia	Yes
2. Allison	Birth	24	Baptist	Virginia	Yes
3. Carey	As an Infant	24	Non-Denominational	Virginia	Yes
4. Cassidy	As an Infant	31	Presbyterian	Arkansas	Yes
5. Chloe	Childhood	21	Non-Denominational	Virginia	Yes
6. Claire	Childhood	24	Non-Denominational	Virginia	Yes
7. Emma	Birth	30	Baptist	Alabama	Yes
8. Erica	5 Years Old	28	Spiritual	Louisiana	Somewhat
9. Hannah	7 Years Old	23	Baptist	Virginia	Yes
10. Helen	3 Years Old	26	Non-Denominational	Virginia	Somewhat
11. Karen	5 Years Old	20	Non-Denominational	Virginia	Somewhat
12. Kim	3 Years Old	25	Spiritual	Virginia	Somewhat
13. Lauren	Birth	32	Spiritual	Wisconsin	No
14. Megan	Birth	19	Baptist	Virginia	Yes
15. Riley	As an Infant	22	Non-Denominational	Virginia	Yes

As seen in the table, most of the participants were able not able to provide an exact age for when they first started attending the Baptist church as they were usually too young to remember. The majority were taken to church by their parents from birth of infancy and proceeded to attend until they reach adolescence where many were given the opportunity to choose if they wanted to continue to go to the Baptist church or not. Most of the participants were in their twenties and were at a point in their lives where they

were able to determine their own beliefs without outside influences. For the most part, the participants had changed denominations as young adults and no longer identified as Baptist and many dropped an affiliation with a denomination all together. All but three of the participants identified as currently religious. However, those three participants considered themselves spiritual apart from organized religion and still believed in a higher power.

Most of the participants attended a Baptist church in the state of Virginia, but were spread across the state. This was due to the location of the study being conducted as I reside in Virginia and attend a university located in Virginia as well. Those who did not attend a Baptist church in Virginia added diversity to the project and allowed me to gather a more general image of Baptist churches across America. The table also includes whether the participant believed that the Bible was truth in order to gauge whether they held an ideology of Biblical inerrancy. The majority indicated that they believed that the words of the Bible are true in its entirety while some felt that it was somewhat true but that some parts were questionable or should be historicized. One believed that it was not true and has been manipulated. A more in-depth look into this information will be provided in the findings chapter. Overall, there were many commonalities in the participant pool's demographic information and ideological beliefs.

ANALYTICAL PROCESS

I collected and analyzed the data through the process of reviewing handwritten interview notes and transcribing the recordings of each interview. During the interviews, I took detailed notes for each question asked and jotted down as much as possible. After

the interview was completed, I reviewed the notes and transferred them to a word document that coincided with the corresponding participant. Periodically, I would review the notes and compile common themes for each question. Once all 15 interviews were completed, I transcribed the recordings in order to make sure no pertinent information was missed in the handwritten notes. The transcriptions were ultimately the source of the data analysis as they provided more detail than what was written. For each participant, I wrote an overview for each question and their subsequent probes asked and transferred them to a blank interview schedule document in a list-type format.

I assigned the participants coded names and color codes in efforts to separate the data points and keep the information as clean as possible. The text following the codes were the same color as the coded names so that the answers provided were easy to follow when attached to the question they aligned with. These data points were examined in order to determine the general findings that aligned with each question and the topic that they were related to. After extensive review of each point, I identified the most common trends and divided them into themes that are laid out in the next chapter. These themes were formulated in a way that best related to the current research question so that an answer could be discovered. Analyzing the data through this process allowed me to consolidate complex responses to my questions into general points that were then translated into themes if the answers were found to be similar. I then located quotes that matched the themes in the transcripts to provide evidence for my findings. I was able to find and determine an answer to the current question through these quotes, which are included in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of the overall findings from the present research study. I discuss the key themes discovered from the collected interview data of a sample of 15 women in my search to answer the question about how place and Biblical teachings shaped the internalization of gendered expectations for young women who attended Baptist religious services. As noted in the previous chapter, the young women were aged 18-35 and had attended a Baptist church from a young age and for at least five years. Before describing the results of my study, I provide a short background for each of the women I interviewed. These biographies provide insight into the experiences that the participants had with the Baptist religion from the time they became affiliated to the time of their interview. I have included them in order to paint a vivid picture of the ways in which these women came to understand their religious experiences with this denomination and how they have come to develop their own beliefs or understandings that best fit them. These biographies also will aid in transitioning into the findings that focus more on the process behind their gender ideological development.

PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

Andrea grew up going to a Baptist church with her parents and found religion to be a positive influence on her when she was younger. As she aged, she began wrestling with the values she was taught and the teachings of the Bible, particularly around the subjects of slavery and oppression. After taking time away from religion in early adulthood, she decided to begin practicing it again. She started molding her own religion in relation to her values. Her perspective of religion has changed as she now centers her religion around social and racial justice and believes that the Bible is about justice.

Allison started going to a Baptist church from the time she was born and she currently goes to the same church. She did not feel like she learned what religion was truly about until she got older. She had positive relationships with the adults at her church as she felt that they were not judgmental and open to sharing their struggles. She started to value helping others and went on mission trips in her teenage years to serve underdeveloped communities and expose people to Christianity. She now believes that religion is about a relationship with God that needs to be worked at and developed. She centers her religion around maintaining this relationship over the institution of the church itself, and feels that her Baptist church taught her to think this way.

Carey started attending a Baptist church with her parents in infancy, but started going by choice around age 11. She struggled with the social pressures that she experienced in her youth group and felt like the culture of her church was hypocritical, exclusionary, and judgmental. She felt that her church was very patriarchal, outdated, and held different values from her own. She did her own research outside of church in order to understand

her own viewpoints of religion. She left the Baptist church due to disagreements with the culture, and switched to a non-denominational church in adulthood. Her current church preaches the values that she agrees with which are unity, love, and the empowerment of all people. She believes her experiences have made her a better person and have led her to develop her own religious beliefs that do not exactly align with what she was taught in the Baptist church. She now tries to put the Bible's words into action in her life and feels that it is written to empower both women and men equally.

Cassidy grew up attending an Independent Fundamental Baptist church that was chosen by her mother. She immediately questioned the church and experienced abuse from its leaders. She felt that her church did not follow the scripture of the Bible and made its own interpretations that emphasized the control of women. She decided to leave the Baptist denomination after she experienced continued instances of abuse from her church in adulthood and now identifies as Presbyterian. She still struggles with engrained beliefs about herself and others but has worked to redevelop what she beliefs by following the Bible. She has been able to turn her experiences into something positive as they have led her to grow in her faith. She dreams of becoming a pastor of her own church that will be dedicated as a safe space for the marginalized and oppressed.

Chloe was introduced to the Baptist church through a friend in adolescence, but was raised as a Christian by her parents from birth. She began to disagree with the values of the church and felt that it expected her to behave in certain ways. She left the Baptist church in adulthood because they discouraged mission work for women. Despite this, she still attended two Christian colleges and is dedicated to her religious beliefs. In adulthood,

40

she switched to a non-denominational church where she felt that she could put her religious beliefs into action and complete the mission work that she desired. She discovered that she had to find a foundation of her religion on her own before choosing a denomination.

Claire was raised in a non-denominational church but started going to different Baptist churches in childhood. She felt that church was fun when she was a child, but realized that a relationship with God is something that she had to put effort into as she aged and experienced struggles with this. She did not feel comfortable at the Baptist churches she attended because of her race and stopped going. Religion was more of a social experience for her until college, where she made the decision to attend a non-denominational church of her choosing in order to determine if she wanted to remain religious. She now aligns more with what she has been taught in her non-denominational church than the Baptist church due to its emphasis on real world issues. She considers her experiences with religion as more positive because she no longer feels like it is an obligation, but is instead a personal choice.

Emma started attending an Independent Fundamental Baptist church that was chosen by her parents at birth. She experienced a lot of negativity in the church and felt that her religion was based more on enforced rules than internal motivation. She felt like her church did not focus on what God wanted for others but instead on what the church wanted. As she grew up, she questioned what she had been taught in her church and disagreed with their values. She started to meet people who believed in using religion to change the world through external action. She switched to a Southern Baptist church that centers the belief that religion should be used to help people around the world through

mission work. She believes this is different from what she saw in her original Baptist church as they only wanted to keep their religion between themselves. Her values now line up with her current church as she feels that it is open to all denominations and emphasizes serving the community.

Erica was sent to a Baptist school by her parents in Kindergarten where attended church until 8th grade. She felt uncomfortable with what she learned and disagreed with the idea of a malevolent God. She indicated that her Baptist education was more focused on damnation and fear. This made her uncomfortable and she started to question what she was taught. Later, she started attending a historical Black church that centered racial justice and community but still disagreed with some of the core ideas of organized religion. She now no longer considers herself to be religious but felt that her religious upbringing led her to value community, work towards social change, and emphasize morality in her education. She now feels that she can make her own choices about what she believes and has let go of the rigid beliefs that she was taught. Her experiences have led her to form her own kind of spirituality that centers the sanctity of life and the politics of love.

Hannah went to church at the Baptist school that her parents had her attend until high school. She was more active in religion when she was younger but has stopped going as often due to her school and work obligations. She believes that religion helped her develop her moral beliefs and has been a more positive influence on her life overall. She had adult influences who she thought of as role models and still has relationships with them. However, she did not agree with the way her Baptist church scrutinized women's sexuality and this led her to wrestle with her beliefs about whether to have sex before

marriage until adulthood. She also disagreed with the ways in which gay people were viewed in the eyes of the church. She still considers herself a Baptist but would be open to other denominations that have fewer conservative views.

Helen was raised attending both a Baptist and Catholic church because of her parent's different affiliations. She went to the Baptist church more often as it was the church that her whole family went to on her dad's side. When she was younger, she felt like religion was more a routine and something she had to do to check a box. She did not agree with the values of the older generations at her Baptist church and felt that she saw the world differently. She stopped going to church completely due to the judgement she saw in the Catholic church that she went to. She believed that the institution of religion was pulling away from her personal relationship with God. However, she has formulated her experiences into something positive because they have led her to make religion a personal choice where she can put in the effort that she wants to. She used to feel like it was a burden but now she views it as more of a relationship that she can work on without having to be affiliated with a church organization.

Karen started attending a Baptist church with her parents in early childhood. When she was younger, she felt that she was taught very basic information about religion but as she aged, she received a more in-depth education about the Bible and the teachings of the Baptist church. She started to question its stories and the rules that others expected her to follow. She stopped going to her Baptist church due to disagreements about the way certain people were treated and switched to a non-denominational church that aligned more with her values. She believes that her religious experiences have had a positive influence on her

life as she has been able to come to a place where she can separate what she was taught and what she believes. As a result, she has been able to develop her own ideologies that fit into her life. She has molded her own personal religious beliefs in a way so that they are no longer constraining and feels that she can use them as a tool to better herself.

Kim began going to a Baptist church in early childhood and attended a church that her family had gone to for generations. She felt like the teaching about damnation and viewpoints of gay people were something that she disagreed with from a young age. She did not feel like she fit in and she questioned the ideologies she was taught. She was not drawn to the religion and felt unwelcomed by adults who she felt were not good role models for her. She stopped going to church and believing in religion altogether until she got to college. She became depressed without a belief in a higher power and did her own research in order to learn more about a spirituality that fit her beliefs. She has discovered that her experiences with the Baptist religion led her to develop a positive perspective of a spiritualty that she can embrace. She feels that her upbringing and current understandings of organized religion have helped shape who she is now.

Lauren was raised in a Baptist church that was attended by her and her adopted family. She has some good memories from her childhood as she enjoyed the opportunity to serve others but they were mostly negative. She experienced dissonance and was made to believe that nothing could hurt while she was being sexual abused by male members of the church. She also felt that the Baptist church was dichotomous and that the gender roles were too strict. Through her education in adulthood, she found that what she had experienced was common in religious institutions. She left the Baptist church later in life

but had spiritual experiences often and was not able to give up the belief in a higher power. Her upbringing led her to turn what she had gone through into something positive and her understanding of her traumas helped her commit to self-improvement, healing, and discovery. She has now found a spirituality that focuses on love for all people, unity, and positivity.

Megan grew up going to a Baptist church because of her family's involvement with the denomination. She has always felt very supported by certain members of her church and continues to go to the same Baptist church that she was raised in. She struggled with personal issues when she was a teenager and started to go to church less at this time. There were some people who she has felt animosity with at her church but indicated that she has always had a solid support system through her family and a select few others. Overall, she believes that church helped her heal from her struggles and this led her to become very involved in adulthood. She holds many of the same values that she was taught in the Baptist church but has felt conflict with teachings about race and the emphasis placed on women taking on only domestic roles. Overall, she feels that religion has been a positive part of her life and she has a desire to share her story in order to help others.

Riley was taken to a Baptist church by her parents in early childhood. When she was younger, she felt that church was a part of her family identity and something they did together. Then, it shifted more to her feeling the need to check off boxes but not truly understanding why. As she grew older and entered high school, she decided to take her religion in her own hands and started seeing it as more than just checking a box. She began to understand that what she wanted was a relationship with God, and that this

relationship takes work to maintain. When she got to college, she experienced struggles with self-love and anxiety for the first time. She felt that this made her stronger in her faith and helped her become more empathetic towards others. In adulthood, she made the decision to leave her Baptist church because she felt that it had been made to be exclusionary and began going a non-denominational church that shared her values. She feels very positively about religion and she believes that she has developed her own faith outside of the institution of the Baptist church. She now lives through the words of the Bible and believes that God has a purpose for her.

FINDINGS

In connection to the participant's biographies, the findings shed light on how these women have grappled with their traditional religious upbringing in a Baptist church and how they have come to develop their religious and or spiritual gender ideologies as a result. Additionally, the participants provided detailed insight into how they have internalized their religious experiences, and how this has shaped their beliefs after spending long periods of time in a conservative Christian setting. Overall, each participant came to understand their religious background as having been a positive influence in their lives despite the nuanced and complex ways that they had to deal with gender beliefs that they did not necessarily agree with.

With this, the Bible was proven to be a very important guidebook for most of the women as they sought out its teachings in order to come to their own understandings of its meaning. This finding aligns with the research cited in this paper as women are more likely to be Biblically inerrant and believe in the scriptures of the Bible than men

(Bartowksi and Hempel 2009; Cassesse and Holman 2016; Pevey et al. 1996). This study was able to provide reasons for why this is, and these reasons will be explained more in-depth. In conjunction with this finding, these women did not develop a negative viewpoint of a God or higher power who places women over men despite being taught this inside the walls of the church. They in turn took it upon themselves to do their own research and mold their own beliefs outside of a religious institution. This led many of these women to value the personal relationship they had found with God over the church itself. As a result, they had come to feel valued and empowered in their being religious or spiritual women. These findings present a new understanding of how young women have come to break free from the gender expectations prescribed to them in a conservative Christian religion and paints a different, yet exciting, picture than much of the previous literature.

The findings are laid out in various themes and pertinent associations are made to the established research as similarities and dissimilarities were present in the data gathered from the interviews. The first theme centers on the findings about the participants' experiences as women and will focus on how each came to the space that they now find themselves in, with a specific focus on the various challenges that were faced in terms of questioning the gender norms that were expected of them while affiliated with the Baptist church. This section will also include the reasons behind the how and why each participant either left the Baptist church, stayed in the Baptist church, or left behind organized religion entirely. Next, an overview of how the participants viewed the Bible and its teachings in relation to whether they hold a mindset that aligns

with biblical inerrancy will be presented. This section will also detail the challenges that arose between participants' reading of the Bible and their beliefs about their gender. The participants' attitudes towards men in the Baptist church will be analyzed as well.

RELIGIOUS GENDER IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN

The participants were able to explain how their gender ideologies as women have been affected by their religious upbringings. Gender ideology in this instance is defined as the ways in which an individual views the roles, responsibilities, and behaviors that men and women should adhere to in society as related directly to their gender. With this, a traditional gender ideology emphasizes the belief that women and men have different responsibilities solely based on their biological sex. Often, a traditional gender ideology enforces the belief that women are the submissive sex and that their purpose is to serve men. This is consistent with the gender ideology that each participant was taught to internalize by their Baptist churches. Although the women in my study were taught to adopt a traditional gender ideology that placed women under men, they were able to craft their own gender narratives within the Baptist faith and turn religion into a source of empowerment. This finding is consistent with what Pevey et al. (1996) found in their study, as the participants also molded their beliefs in ways that led to personal female empowerment.

However, there were some imperative differences in the findings of the two studies. Pevey et al. (1996) found that their participants were dedicated to their Baptist church and accepted a traditional gender ideology. They also felt that the role of women

as homemaker was empowering for them and they taught other women to take on this role as well. They also did not question the gender beliefs of their church as they were able to subvert their understandings of what submission entailed (Pevey et al. 1996). In contrast, the present participant pool tended to leave the Baptist religion entirely and turn adopt a non-denominational ideology or a spirituality outside of organized religion. It is important to note that the women interviewed in the Pevey et al. (1996) piece tended to be middle-aged and born before the internet was developed. Thus, it is likely that there are generational differences that have led younger individuals to want to become part of a more unified religious organization that discourages division. They also tended to reject a traditional gender ideology, which is a distinct difference from what Pevey et al. (1996) found. There are other similarities and differences that were made explicit between various previous research findings that will be referenced throughout this section.

In accordance with previous research, the participants became involved in the Baptist church mostly because their parents were affiliated with it and so they took them to services from a young age (Pearce and Thornton; Smith 2003a). However, most of the women were able to make to their own decisions about their religious beliefs outside of parental influences. When they were younger, the participants did not begin to fully comprehend religious principles until they reached preteen to teenage years. All of these women started to become cognizant of their gender and the ways in which it operated in a Baptist religious setting as they aged. The participants understood the traditional gender roles placed on both women and men in conservative Protestant religions and were taught that women were meant to take on the domestic work in the home while taking care of

children. They also felt that women were expected to behave in ways that aligned with a traditional gender ideology as they were told that women should act in traditionally feminine ways. Most of the participants did not feel the need to adhere to these gender roles or behave in ways that women were expected to after they began to witness and comprehend what these expectations were interpreted as by the church.

Some were able to detail how they felt women were expected to behave in these settings in terms of actions and or personality traits. For example, Carey said,

> "I feel like it was very much in the old church set in stone. You are woman, you will marry man. You have babies. You take care of them until you die. You cannot preach in the church, but you're supposed to teach your children. You cannot speak into men's lives, even though that completely goes against what the Bible says, because we were literally made to be men's helpers. And if you cannot have children, then you need to work yourself to death, taking care of everyone else's children. So, there was like a form of respect, but it was only if you were doing what you were supposed to be doing in their eyes."

This quote provides imagery about the ways in which religious organizations can indoctrinate and socialize members into adopting a traditional gender ideology that discourages women from taking on roles that differ from being a wife, mother, and caretaker. However, Carey also indicated that the non-denominational church she attended at the time of the interview did not teach women to abide by these strict gender roles, as they encouraged women in church to feel empowered and take on leadership positions without reprimand. Even though both religious organizations Carey was

affiliated with utilized the same Biblical texts, women were socialized to live by more rigid and divided standards in the Baptist church than in the non-denominational Christian church. Claire indicated that women were socialized to behave similarly in her Baptist church, noting that women were "always supposed to be dressed well and just show up their best because you're there looking for a husband."

Stereotypical feminine personality characteristics dominated the description of what the women were taught to be like in their churches of their youth. For instance, Chloe also detailed how she felt women were supposed to behave, and stated that they were expected to be "more or less being quiet or being calm or just listening." Cassidy felt that women were expected to behave in a way that was "quiet, controlled, and submissive." Emma said that women were supposed to be "very submissive and if you have the ideas you give them to a man and he brings them up, you don't bring them up." Karen responded similarly as she believed women were expected to be "more like the quiet supporter." Kim said, "they were basically expected to just sit down and shut up and be a wallflower." Riley was able to describe the ways in which she wrestled with how she was told women should behave. She said,

> "I think women are more taught that they are supposed to be quiet and things like that. So, it's like you know how do I use that in a way that is honoring to God, like what does quiet mean? What does meek mean? What does submissive mean? So, like I think have definitely had to like think about those things and be like okay how am I think about that?"

In contrast, the women noted that their own beliefs about women's appropriate personalities and behaviors were quite varied and not always consistent with their churches' teachings. Overall, the participants thought women should behave "however they want." Many rejected the traditional roles set out for women. As an example, Andrea said "I just don't think that women should always be submissive or just fall back to being mothers and just nurturing. Like you can, if you want to then great. If you don't that's also great." Hannah responded similarly with "I think that is up to them how they want to raise their family if that means they want to be a stay at home mom or they want to be a boss lady like for their job, it really just depends on each family. I wouldn't say that every woman needs to be the same." Riley also felt that women could be either mothers or working women if they wanted to be, and indicated that it was up to the individual woman. Kim summed it up as she stated,

> "I think that women should be able to do whatever it is that they want. I feel like
> we have been constrained for so long by our identity and how we were expected
> to act and be portrayed in public and in relation to people's heterosexual partner. I
> think it's ridiculous. Women should be liberated."

Erica emphasized that she believed that femininity should be valued more in society in general, and that a "comforting ethic" should be integrated into our institutions.

There were some slight variations, as a few of the participants felt that it depended on the situation or that women should behave in a way that is respectful. Others said that all people, regardless of gender, should behave the same. For example, Lauren said that women should behave "largely, however they want. This goes the same for men

and trans." Emma similarly said, "I think men and women should be expected to behave the same way." However, most of the participants stated that their beliefs about how women behaved in society differed from what they were taught in church. When asked if they had the same beliefs as what the church had taught them, many said no. For example, Lauren said that her beliefs were "almost completely opposite."

Some of the women explained how their beliefs differed and provided examples. For instance, Andrea said, "Ownership of your own body, that's definitely not something that was taught." Chloe answered by saying "I definitely believe that all people should have the same opportunity to speak, I believe in freedom of speech and all that stuff so I think the way I was raised was different because women were not encouraged to speak." Emma responded, "Growing up, what I was taught in church was that women should never have authority over men." However, she felt that men were taught that they could have authority over women. She disagreed as she thinks that both genders are inherently equal and that neither should be able to dominate the other. Helen claimed that she had beliefs that were different than what her family and the Baptist church taught her but said "I think that is a generational thing." Megan, one of the participants who still attended the Baptist church when interviewed, indicated that some of her beliefs differed from what she learned in church as well. When asked if her beliefs about how women should act were the same as what she was taught in church, she said "No, I don't think that women should be that way. I understand that we were kind of brought up to be able to stay in the house and everything but I am also the type of person where I want to be able to go out

and I want to go make a living for my family as well. I don't want that to just be put on my husband."

Many of the participants grappled with the issue of women not being able to lead a church. Similarly, to the findings of Pevey et al. (1996), a few of the women felt that men should continue to be leaders, or weren't sure how they felt. For example, Allison said "I feel like a preacher should be more of a man because I feel like women get really emotional with the situation and they're more nurturing." Megan also explained a time where a discussion about whether women should be leaders came up in Bible study. She stated that "there were a lot of people that kind of disagreed with the thought of a woman leading or preaching a service and it kind of just crossed my mind. I didn't disagree but I didn't agree." However, there were more participants who felt that women should get the opportunity to lead which goes against traditional beliefs and the findings of Pevey et al. (1996). Chloe said, "I think that all women should have the same opportunity as the male to preach." Kim also referenced her feelings about not seeing a woman lead the church, and indicated that the lack of female leadership present in the Baptist church discouraged her. She said,

> "I felt like women's voices weren't valued in the church. And I think that really discouraged me because I'm the type of person that really likes to know more. I like to learn more and like to hear and I really want to make a difference in this lifetime. It's really hard to do that when you're so devalued that you can't make the difference that you want to make."

In contrast, Carey described how women at her non-denominational church were given the opportunity to preach. She said,

> "We've had women preach. Wives can speak into the man's lives. Wives can lead volunteer work. Wives are empowered to teach their children, teach others, and have women's groups that are closer in age with authentic divine women who speak into you with such authority and such passion that I don't believe that they would ever be allowed to be speak that way at the old church."

Cassidy also indicated that she thought women should be able to lead, and that she had plans to become a preacher of her own church one day. Ultimately, this finding shows how young women have developed beliefs that differ from their conservative Protestant religious education. When asked where they learned to think differently, the most common answer was their parents or siblings while another common answer was college. Thus, other societal influences and institutions have helped shaped how these women think about themselves and other women. Additionally, the fact that a lot of the participants felt that women should lead church services goes against traditional religious beliefs. Overall, many of these women did not seem to adhere to traditional gender roles or were open-minded to the idea that women could choose their roles based on what best fits them.

In order to understand the full extent to which a Baptist religious upbringing has impacted young women in the US, the participants were asked how they would say being a woman raised Baptist has influenced their lives. The answers varied, but overall, the common consensus was that these women felt positively about the outcome of the

influences that the Baptist religion has had on their socialization. However, the ways in which this conclusion was reached did not come without its hardships or strife for some of the participants. For example, Megan said, "It has influenced my life kind of a good amount" and detailed how she went through a tough time in her preteen years outside of church. She stated that "I am able to use that to become stronger in my faith and to be able to tell people and use that as a story to help other people."

Those who understood the process and the outcome more positively had different responses. For example, when asked how being raised Baptist has influenced her, Allison said "I would say I feel a little more confident than maybe a person that doesn't have a relationship with God because I would say that I don't feel like I need assurance from the world as much." Claire felt that it influenced every step of her life and helped her become cognizant of her race and black representation. Helen also had positive things to say about her upbringing. She said,

> "It definitely made me a lot closer to my family members growing up in the church with them. I think a lot of connections happen around Sunday service, even to this day anytime we have family reunions there is always a church service involved. I think it definitely gave me that connection to them and gave me roots and a foundation there where I don't know if that connection would be as strong if I was either a male who wasn't the one planning out a lot of these things or if I wasn't involved in the Baptist church at that age."

Although she is no longer affiliated with a church organization and does not agree with the beliefs about gender that she was taught in the Baptist church, she now feels like her religion is more of a personal relationship that she can put time into when she pleases.

The rest of the participants truly wrestled with their religious upbringing and the beliefs that they came to develop in adulthood. Carey said "I feel like because I was raised Baptist, I'm kind of okay with the like gender roles, like the male goes out and makes all the money and I needed to be a stay at home mom. But with today's times, that's not really how things happen. Because of the current church that I'm at and because of my mindset outside of the church, I feel like I'm completely okay with not following what I was raised was as Baptist." Andrea also wrestled with some of her beliefs and said, "The thought of a women being destined to be a mother, destined to marry and then having a family, that is something that is a part of the teachings at my church but even when I wasn't religious or as religious, I still held those values. So, I think that was positive for me because those haven't changed even though I turned my back on religion for a little bit. But there have definitely been some bad influences but I think it's because I grew in a place that was pretty conservative and as I began to step out of that things changed." Erica, although she is no longer religious, felt that her religious upbringing has helped her come to value community and understand it as a way to make social change.

In relation to her experiences as a woman raised Baptist, Emma said,

"There were a lot of different prejudices and such to overcome like the man versus woman. A lot of just assuming that you had to respect authority because it was there and not really questioning that authority was definitely something that I

felt one way about until I got to be about 18 or 19. And then I started questioning like, wait, this isn't normal. I think it made me a thinker."

Hannah felt that being raised Baptist helped her become morally sound but also led her to grapple with beliefs about pre-marital sex. She said, "For a lot of it I think it would be good morals but once you get to high school and trying to figure out who you are I would say that would be a little hard just knowing that you are not supposed to have sex until marriage and just feeling bad about if you did make a mistake because if a guy did that it would be less frowned upon in society even if they were religious. I would say that was hard." Karen indicated that she questioned the gendered prescriptions of the Baptist church and did not like to be told how to behave. However, she believed that her experiences were more positive overall because of the way it influenced her mindset. She said "Now I am in a place where I can think and can separate ideas for myself like it's not like a rule book for me. It's just ideologies that make sense and you can like fit into your life so it's not constraining, it's not restricting. It's more of a way to better yourself so I guess it would be more positive now that I have that separation in my mind.

Riley indicated that her religious experiences were heavily impacted by a female role model she had at her Baptist church. This role model helped her develop a new and more empowering understanding of how women can be viewed in religious spaces. She said,

> "I think in the beginning it made feel like I had to put up a front of like the right kind of person and a front of what that looked like. To be this really put together girl that was really nice and always honored her parents and didn't ever do

anything wrong so I think that was big when I was younger. And then I met my

youth pastor's wife. She was never going to be this little put together person in a

dress and act just so and she was just very unique in being herself. So, I think that

showed me that you can do both, you can kind of have this confidence about you.

So, I think like growing up I never thought of Christian women as being very

individual, I felt like they very much were in the identity of what their husbands

did. But as I got older, I met different women that were just so themselves and

had an identity made for from what Christ said that they were and not who

someone else said that they were."

Chloe came to the conclusion that being a Baptist was not for her. She said,

"I would say being raised Baptist as a woman made me want to not be a Baptist

woman even more. I realized how much it was hindering me. I really wanted to

go do mission work and a lot of people were like well how are you going to do

that as a woman and that motivated me even more to want to go do that. So, when

I went to a different church that very much encouraged women to go do things

productive that made me realize that I just didn't want to be a Baptist woman

anymore."

Cassidy wrestled with countless experiences of abuse, neglect, and mistreatment.

However, she was able to mold her experiences into something positive. She said "I still

have nightmares from my experiences but the overarching picture has helped shape my

self-view and my experiences have helped me appreciate myself. I feel that my

experiences with the Baptist religion have taught me to be okay with myself and to use

59

my experiences to love and serve others to make change." Kim also felt that the culture of the Baptist church was hurtful and discriminatory. However, she said the following in relation to her upbringing: "I feel like it's definitely made me sit down and see that how you were raised and what you were raised to believe does not have to be the end of your story and that you are continually growing. We're continually trying to find the truth, no matter what that is. It's not the end of your story that, yes, you may have been raised to think about this and you may have been taught a whole like plethora of things, but that doesn't mean that any of that is correct." She continued with "I think that it was important to have that Southern Baptist upbringing to realize that there is a better, more loving lighter version out there."

Although Kim is no longer religious, she has discovered a spirituality that works for due to her religious experiences. Lauren had a similar story. She overcame sexual abuse in her church, and found a spirituality that has led her to become more positive and see her experiences as a challenge that she won. She still struggles but has learned to see religious institutions as businesses that contribute to capitalism. She said "It's a lot of work to switch that system and choose who you want to be and what you want to believe. I definitely find myself slipping into those thoughts that I know are lies and I know that for the system to work people have to be unpaid labor and that's just the system. The thoughts that I have of not being good enough and these other things stems from that."

Although many of the participants started attending a Baptist church from a very young age, they did not begin to understand the gendered expectations placed on them until adolescence or teenage years. As they aged, many of the women became conscious

60

of what they were being taught and were able to formulate their own religious beliefs outside of the church through research and critically assessing how they viewed themselves as women. They were also able to decide whether they agreed or disagreed with the Baptist religion and were afforded the agency to seek out different paths or remain affiliated if desired. Those who continued to be affiliated with the Baptist church tended to have more positive adult influences early on and did not experience as much conflict with traditional ways of thinking in a religious setting. However, all of the participants felt that society and or their families taught them to act in ways that contradicted the gender roles of the Baptist church.

Many felt that the Baptist church was too strict in the opportunities afforded to women, particularly leadership opportunities. In many instances, the participants felt that their Baptist churches fostered a culture of discrimination, exclusion, misogyny, and or abusive behavior. There were many who did not internalize the gender beliefs they were taught as they questioned them from a young age. Some had internalized beliefs that were damaging but worked to become conscious of them. They remolded their religious gender ideologies in ways that allowed them to view women and themselves more positively. With this, most of the women interviewed had disassociated from the Baptist religion entirely and made the decision to find a space or belief system that centered the beliefs of equality, inclusivity, and unity regardless of gender.

The majority of the participants were taught to view women through a traditional gender ideology, but many they felt that the patriarchal organization of the church interpreted the position of women as less than men. Many did not feel that the feminine

qualities that they were expected to exhibit were viewed positively by the church as they were interpreted as weaknesses. However, the participants believed that these qualities should be understood as strengths and that the Bible and or a spirituality that promotes femininity made this clear to them. This belief as well as the connection to the metaphysical felt by the participants was the mechanism that led many to make the choice to leave the Baptist church, but keep in tact the desire to have a relationship with a God or higher power that valued women equally to men.

Thus, the religious gender ideology of the women interviewed did not resemble a traditional religious gender ideology. Instead, the gender ideology that was discovered has been conceptualized as a modern spiritual gender ideology. The attitudes towards gender and religion that make up this ideology include the belief that women and their feminine traits should be valued as their increased connections to spirituality were understood to be divine by both those who identified as Christian and spiritual. The decrease in the perceived importance of the religious organization itself and the similarities in how those who were spiritual viewed gender indicates that the women in this study held the same core values and beliefs regardless if they identified as religious or spiritual.

What can be seen here is a more modern and generational shift away from organized religion to valuing a relationship with God or a higher power that promotes gender equality and the empowerment of all people, including women. Most of the participants who still were affiliated with Christianity and held this ideology centered the Bible as their resource for strengthening the relationship with God and not the church.

However, all of the women interviewed tended to integrate only the more positive teachings of the Bible into their religious beliefs that relate to principles such as love, forgiveness, truth, and justice. They were also seen to wrestle with the Bible in its entirely.

BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDINGS, INTERPRETATIONS, AND INTERNALIZATION

Since women are more likely to believe the Bible as truth, the participants were questioned about their personal attitudes and internalizations in order to determine if these contributed to their religious or spiritual gender ideology. The findings were understood to match the existing literature in some ways, but were mostly different and much more complex. In general, most of the participants felt that the Bible was completely true apart from four individuals who agreed with some of what the Bible teaches and one who disagreed the vast majority of it. For example, when asked how she felt about the Bible and its principles, Riley said "I think that it is 100% reliable and true and I think that it is the spoken word of God so I think that what it is say is what God says. While I think people can actually hear from God, I think that everyone can read the Bible and see what God has to say." Emma felt similarly as she said "I think it's necessary. You can't have faith without the Bible."

Chloe said "I think it's accurate. There is this whole saying about how the Bible was written over so many years based on so many different continents and so many different authors who all said that their writings were divinely written so I think the Bible is pretty much the ultimate textbook of all information." Andrea also believed that the Bible is correct and said "I think it's just internalized in me. I think I've always believed

that it was correct so I've never thought to question it." Claire stated something similar when ask if she felt it was correct. She said "Yeah. I think it's a really well written story and it's written by so many different people. It's not written by just one person. I think that's super important to recognize that it's not just one author."

However, there were other ways of thinking that were not so black and white. Some felt that the Bible was correct in what it says, but pointed out potential flaws with its many translations. For instance, Carey stated that "a lot of people my age consider it to be a text that has been translated in so many different aspects that it's not true anymore. But when I explain it to them, it's like, well, it's no different than your 12th edition of the same biology book. The information is still true. The wording's different." Another said, "I do know there's been some translational errors, but I don't think it's anything earth shattering or we would just throw out the whole book." Others felt that the text is accurate, but that it can be interpreted in different ways. When asked if she believed the Bible was correct, Helen said, "I would say to an extent, but I think some people would take it way to far. I think that is another very personal interpretation of the Bible and I think some people's views are different even though they are reading the same words."

Hannah said something similar. She stated that, "I think a lot of the stuff it has in it is correct. I know a lot of people are going to twist on how something is worded but I think a lot of the core stuff is correct." Although Andrea said she has never thought to question the Bible. She also said "I think honestly it's all about interpretation. There are things that you just can't take word for word, but it's meant to be something to interpret." Allison believed that the Bible should be looked at as more of a guidebook and stated that

"at minimum, it is saying that this is what I would think you would need and like what you should do. And then you just kind of interpret it yourself and it gives you like the guidelines and everything, but it's also giving you the free will to decide what, what you want to believe."

Thus, this finding overall supports the notion that women are more likely to possess a religious viewpoint of biblical inerrancy and believe in the words of this text as complete truth (Bartowski and Hempel 2009; Cassese and Holman 2016; Pevey et al. 1996). However, the participants in this study were conscious of the ways in which different people may understand it meaning. With this, there were other participants who felt that the Bible was somewhat correct in what it says, but wrestled with how people may interpret it, edit it, and or use it in negative ways. Erica, for example, explained her relationship with the Bible as complicated. She said,

"I think it is a complicated text. I think it can become just like anything, like when people have like just enough knowledge it can be dangerous. I think that can be true with the Bible. Like it can be just enough to be really dangerous in how we treat one another, because it can be very exclusionary rather than liberatory. So then at the same time, there's parts of it that undermine institutions and can like really point our eye towards something bigger and show us that other things are possible."

Kim had a similar viewpoint of the Bible, but felt that it has been edited over time by men in power in order to stay in control of people, especially women. She said "You gotta remember who could read and write and who could influence the story. I think that

a lot of organized religions, especially Christianity based, have been influenced so much and they've been taken so far away from them original intent because people were trying to make them fit their agenda that they're almost tainted." There was one participant, Lauren, who believed that very little about the Bible is true and felt that it has been manipulated completely over time. When asked if she believed the Bible is correct, she replied with "I believe it's extremely incorrect. I believe that it's layers and layers and layers of incorrect, and then they just like pepper it with like these tiny little truths." Thus, there was some conflicting feelings towards the Bible as many felt that it depends on the interpretations being made about its scriptures.

Additionally, there were many examples where the participants struggled or disagreed with parts of the Bible, even if they felt it was truth. Cassidy felt conflicting feelings towards some of the passages in the Bible. She said "I feel that there are some principles that are hard to accept, especially those that teach about how women should behave and about revenge, but I believe that all of the teachings have our best interest in mind." Riley also mentioned some struggles as she stated "I think there's definitely parts of the Bible that I struggle with like we even just had a discussion the other night about woman having long hair and what does that mean. So, is it bad that women have short hair, is that sinful? And having to like research that."
Karen mentioned that she disagreed with some parts of the Bible as well. She said "I agree with a lot of them like the broad ones but then there's some things that are more specific, like it just doesn't sit right. But the whole be kind don't judge others yeah, I like

that." Both Andrea and Chloe stated that they preferred passages from the New Testament and did not refer to the Old Testament as much in terms of what they believed.

There were also participants who held beliefs that differed from what the Bible said in relation to its prescriptions about gender and women's bodies. When asked if she had any beliefs that were different, Allison stated "Yes. I would say that I know in the Bible it says that abortion is bad, but like in certain circumstances where the mom's going to die or some kids, I feel like it's not right." Chloe indicated that she grappled with some of the texts about gender too and replied to the above question "I think that the Bible says so many things about sex and gender, because like women were less than back then." Karen also said, "I don't think that women should have specific set different roles in the household just because they're a woman." In addition, Cassidy, Lauren, and Kim all indicated that they did not completely agree with the ways that women were portrayed in the Bible and felt that the behaviors prescribed were limiting and were in turn used by the church as methods of control. This complicates the current understanding of what defines biblical inerrancy as young women may interpret the text differently than how men or older generations may interpret it. This seemed to be one of the mechanisms that led these women to complete their own research outside of the Baptist church and formulate a more modern spiritual gender ideology.

The participants were asked about their views on gender equality in order to assess the finding from Cassese and Holman (2016) who discovered a significant correlation between biblical inerrancy and beliefs that gender inequality was not a pressing issue in society when analyzing the beliefs of conservative Protestant women. In

the current study, those who believed in biblical inerrancy did have strong opinions about gender equality. This is the opposite of what Cassese and Holman (2016) found in their research as all 15 participants stated that they were for gender equality or equity and believed it is something that needs to be addressed in society. When asked what her views on gender equality were, Andrea said, "I am all for it. I think it is long overdue." Claire's response was similar as she stated, "I think everyone should be equal. I don't see anyone as less than, and I would hope that people wouldn't either." Cassidy replied with "I that women are just as valuable as men and have an equal responsibility to humanity. I feel that God has a purpose for women's lives." Emma answered the question with "In general, I'm very for it. I think there's a misunderstanding of it within the church, but it's definitely a good thing." Chloe gave a more religion-specific answer but stated "Since I am Christian, I believe in a male and female gender and that is the basis but I believe all people no matter what they believe they are or what they think they are or what they call themselves I think all genders should have the ability to have the same opportunities." Overall, each participant gave a similar answer and indicated that they felt that both genders are equal, even those who believed the Bible as truth.

This goes against the connection that Cassesse and Holman (2016) made between biblical inerrancy and traditional gender beliefs as they found that women who were affiliated with a conservative Protestant denomination were more likely to possess a traditional gender ideology that believed the Bible as truth. In contrast, the women in this study tended to hold an ideology consistent with biblical inerrancy but not a traditional gender ideology. This seemed to stem from the common interpretational differences the

participants made about the Bible as they focused more on the positive teachings that promote love and equality. There were many who saw the Bible as truth and believed that its scriptures were created in ways that are meant to empower women but felt that the patriarchal underpinnings of the church used interpreted these texts differently as a form of control.

Thus, this finding shows that possessing a mindset of biblical inerrancy does not necessarily lead to an agreeance with traditional gender beliefs and it has in fact led to a more liberal view of women in the church for this set of young women. Although the majority indicated that they believed the Bible was completely true, they questioned its historical nature, translational errors, and the ways in which it has been interpreted to put women down in organizational settings. Additionally, many believed the Bible was true but still did not fully agree or like everything that it has to say. It was made clear by most of everyone that they did not agree with traditional gender beliefs and so they did not internalize them through their religious education. They instead made the decision to view the Bible's gendered teachings as either outdated or they interpreted them differently from how they were told to view it in church. This interpretation fostered a mindset of equality as these women felt that the Bible actually prescribes gendered behaviors equally to men and women once they did their own research. Societal influences and the belief in gender equality that stemmed from experiences outside of a religious context also contributed to this mindset.

This finding puts into perspective the ways in which the Bible has been integrated into a modern spiritual gender ideology, as it was not commonly viewed as

oppressive but rather liberatory if the positive aspects of it are focused on. These women, although they many felt it was truth, also understood the Bible as more of a guidebook that should be interpreted by the individual reader. They felt that it was more important for determining how they should treat other people. For instance, the most common scripture adopted by the participants, even those who did not believe the Bible completely, was "love thy neighbor as you love yourself." Overall, Biblical teachings that express how others should be treated were the basis of the modern spiritual gender ideology as the participants adopted this teaching and tried to put it into action. This seemed to connect to femininity as these women tended to focus more on the Bible's teachings that promoted cooperation and equal treatment while wrestling with its points about revenge or damnation. Thus, this highlights how the Bible and its teachings has been interpreted as a more liberatory model that can be used for social change and equality by these women.

THE PERCEIVED ASSOCIATION BETWEEN MEN AND RELIGION

It is vital to note the position of men in the Baptist church that was brought up many times throughout the course of the interviews conducted. In accordance with established statistics, all of the participants in this study agreed that there is a difference in religiousness between genders and believed that women are more likely to be religious than men. The interviewees were asked how they felt about this fact that women and why there is a difference in order to discover the mechanism behind this. Their answers varied but many came to the consensus that there is a difference because women gravitate towards emotionality, spirituality, and the metaphysical that allows them to be more

70

imaginative about what is possible and believe in something greater than themselves. For example, Claire answered the question with "I would say that's true because having a spiritual faith takes imagination." Cassidy had an answer that emphasized women's emotionality. She said "I believe there is a difference because women are allowed to be more emotional and I think that we are made that way for a reason. I think that men are more likely to view religion as illogical."

Emma also indicated that this was true and said, "Maybe because women are more open to the idea that they don't know everything than men." Along similar lines, Helen attributed this difference to a desire to connect to others. She said, "I think women look for a connection to others, just like the natural empathy I think the connection to others and the connection to something greater is something that women seek out a lot more than men." Karen also emphasized some traditional feminine characteristics when asked why she thought there was a difference in religiousness between men and women. She said that, "the only thing I can think of is the stereotype that women are more emotional so they would seek something more spiritual to support that aspect while men are supposed to be more inverted just not talking about their emotions so they wouldn't talk about spirituality and stuff dealing with their emotions."

Some pointed out how the behavior of men may be the reason for this, and focused on traits that seemed to be considered as weaknesses. Carey stated that "I feel like men try to solve the problem, literally head on with as much brute force as possible and women naturally, because maybe we're just a lot more intelligent, we try to solve things through psychology and we look inwardly instead of around. I feel like we use

71

what other people consider our weakness as our biggest strength." Megan said, "I feel like men are just a little bit more hard headed in relation to what they believe should be how it is so I just feel like that is kind of more the thing." Kim made a similar remark, and stated that men "don't have that great of emotional intelligence, like they don't know how to read the energy of the room because they don't have emotional intelligence."

Another reason for the difference was attributed to the gender roles that are prescribed to men and women in society that allow women to associate with the unseen realm of religion than men. With this, the gender roles prescribed to men may also influence their ability to be religious. Thus, the participants felt that strict gender norms not only shape women's lives, but men's lives as well. For instance, Chloe stated "I definitely see how a lot more women can commit to a religion and stick with it and do like the daily reading of the Bible or whatever their religion. If you are looking at like housewives like a lot of moms are at home where a lot of husbands go to work and I think if the women are at home, they have more time to read the Bible." Andrea emphasized masculinity itself and said "I think there's that notion of expectation for men to have everything, to be in control of everything, to be the provider, to be in charge. But when you go back to religion, religion is all about surrendering your life to a higher power, to God. And so, the fact that like you have to give up your control and you have to trust that you're not in charge, I think is made harder because of masculinity." Erica believed that men are taught to be more rational, as she said "rational thinking I think is socialized into men a lot." She did not feel that women were taught to be as rational, opening them up to the metaphysical.

Lauren made a very complex remark about the reasons why men and women differ in religiousness, and highlighted how she believed that men are also oppressed from a structural perspective, but less aware of it. She said,

"I think because men have more power in these instances like they are less apt to even know that there are roads to choose. They are operating under the same sorts of things like I have got my role of what it is to be a man and I am going to just do that. It works for them easier because they don't have to worry about their virginity and they don't have to worry about all of that kind of stuff. It is very much like women are under a microscope all the time if you're religious like your body is not your body. Your body doesn't belong to you. Men own all of it. So, it is easy for them to not want to investigate the ways that they are also oppressed in a religious system because they are looking at the goods but its like you're not looking at the bigger picture. If you're not looking at things structurally then you're not understanding how it all works together to just really undermine you and your quality of life."

The present project found support for previous findings that indicate that gender differences are naturalized in the church on all levels (Miller and Stark 2002; Pevey et al. 1996; Schnable 2017). Most of the participants in this study felt that there were naturalized gender differences between men and women in the Baptist religion. However, the participants had various responses to whether they felt this was a good thing or not. Most of the participants did not believe that the strict gender divide in responsibilities were a positive part of religion. The participants were told "In the Baptist religion, men

are taught to act differently and take on different responsibilities than women. How does this make you feel?" All of the interviewees believed that this was true and had evidence to back it up. Andrea noted that she felt kind of annoyed and said that she has "seen a lot of people in a lot of churches who have interpreted the Bible in a way that is not what it is intended to be and so it's really annoying because I don't think there are any divisions of how you are supposed to act in a church or roles you are supposed to take."

Cassidy said that the statement made her feel angry, as she feels that men and women have different roles inherently but that there is a need for both. She stated that "The different roles have been molded to make women do the hard work as they are forced to take on the emotional burden of the church but still have no voice. Women have been viewed as helpers to men and the roles were made evident to me throughout my upbringing. There is definitely cognitive dissonance present with what the Bible actually says and how women are expected to act in religion and society." Chloe answered the question by saying that the statement made her sad because her experiences resonated with it. She said "I definitely see how men and women acted differently. I think it brought more separation than community." Claire had a similar response as she replied with "I don't love that because I think that is like the "man word" for like prepare yourself to get married or like you always have to be the father and the strongest person in the home. And I think that's why a lot of little boys, like aren't even allowed to cry when they're younger, but girls are."

Carey replied with "I feel like men have a lot more pressure to have it all together. Even from a psychology standpoint, like it doesn't just have to be financially. I

feel like with the Baptist situation they are taught that you can't show when you struggle, especially to your wife." Some of the participants felt that men and women should take on different responsibilities in a way that is a more natural and unset division not based on gender. For example, Emma said "I think it's a double-edged sword because there is a trend in society were men don't want to always take responsibility and it can be a good thing because they need that push like, okay, you do have responsibilities and you can't let somebody else do it all. But then there's also the bad side of that, where it's overemphasized and men feel like they have all the authority and women have none." Cassidy also indicated that she believed that men and women have different roles inherently but that there is a need for both. Helen concurred with the statement that men and women are taught to take on different responsibilities and said "I think I definitely agree with that and I think it is a very strict line about how women should behave and men should behave." She said this is not something that she would want for her own life.

Karen questioned this by saying "I don't see any reason for why gender specifically would be a cause for you to not be able to do something or you have to follow that just because of one factor." Megan responded with "I just feel like it is a little unfair how it is written in the Bible that the men should do all of the work and make the living and make the money for the family." Kim also did not feel positively about this statement and believes that women should be able to do whatever they want. Lauren and Erica provided responses that encourage changing the division in gendered responsibilities in conservative Protestant churches. Erica stated that "We should just kind of work for like a liberatory model where people can take up different responsibility,

but it's not mandated based off of something arbitrary, like your gender." With this, Lauren provided an in-depth response that highlights the changes that she thinks should be made. In response to the current question about naturalized gender differences, she said,

"It makes me see how it's going to continue if we don't tackle it from both ends. Women are behind and along side these movements, these belief systems, these structures and so if we are going to take a stand and think that this is a woman only thing it's not going to work. That is half the population of the world, that's not going to work. Whether you like it or not, men may be cast a little bit better in this set up but their outlook still isn't sunny. Its nothing to envy. If we can work on understanding how we are all oppressed and what we all have to gain, then that's where the magic happens. That's why society is set up to be so divisive. To keep us divided, to keep us small, keep us warring against each other. If we are just asking questions among one another we are not asking it of the people who are actually writing the laws."

These remarks highlight how the women in this study understood men in a religious context. Many of them felt that the position that men are expected to occupy was unfair to them. Carey believed that men should be raised to understand their emotions more and stated "I feel like when men are raised in an environment where men are allowed to be gentle or allowed to be empowered, it helps men share their emotions more." She also said that "I feel like if men were more willing to be vulnerable than the world would be a little better." Cassidy believed that men should not be viewed as

feminine if they are interpersonal. She said, "Men should be able to be quiet and feminine if they want to be" and felt that men should be treated as equals and seen as equally emotional beings. Thus, these women provided evidence that agreed with previous research that gender differences are naturalized based off of sex in conservative Protestant religions and further explicated why women are more likely to be religious despite the patriarchal structure of organized religion.

Overall, these women have wrestled with the strict division of gender in the Baptist church and indicated that it has caused more harm than good in terms of keeping men and women divided in society. They also felt that men have been damaged by the responsibilities placed on them and that it has hindered their ability to find spirituality as they are taught to be rational, materialistic, and to suppress their emotions. This novel finding highlights the ways in which both genders can be viewed as oppressed in society, even in a religious situation that is supposed to provide freedom from the hardships of everyday life. Although many of these women felt that religion should be used to unify, they believed that it has been implemented in a way that has enforced division through the teachings of traditional patriarchal beliefs. They feel that the church has been organized in a way that has promoted division and this has contributed to their leaving of a denominational church or organized religion altogether.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this chapter were able to answer the present research question, as the participants provided in-depth insight into how they formulated their gender ideologies in relation to their religious experiences with a conservative Protestant

denomination. The most pertinent discovery was a new gender ideology, which I have named a modern spiritual gender ideology. The results proved that religion, as it was understood in this context to be related to a social institution, was not as important as the connection to a higher power itself. Thus, the gender ideology examined was more spiritual than religious in nature, and was more freely understood by the participants who felt that their relationship with this higher power was personal and driven by the belief in an ordained individual life purpose. Additionally, the combination of modern societal beliefs about women and their ability to behave in ways of their choosing contributed to how the participants understood women in the religious realm as well.

Positive principles of the Bible that tended to align with more feminine qualities were also imperative to this gender ideology, even for those who did not believe the Bible as truth. This finding complicates the current understanding of biblical inerrancy as it shows how young women have molded their own interpretations about the Bible to fit their lives and be used as a source of female empowerment while still questioning or disagreeing with parts of it. They felt that women should be viewed as divine in a religious space, and those who agreed with the Bible interpreted it to say such. Also, the participants fully believed in the equality of men and women. Many felt that men had been oppressed by society and religious institutions as well due to their lack of emotional development that stems from the expectations of traditional masculinity. With this, some believed that men were in a worse position when it came to religion and spirituality as they had been socialized to be practical and were less likely to make connections with a higher power. What has been discovered from these findings is a more liberatory and

78

equality promoting religious model where both women and men can benefit if the tools are implemented correctly. In the next chapter, the implications for these findings and how they can be used to contribute to public sociology will be explicated.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The findings discussed in the previous chapter answered the research question

posed for this study and presented a novel gender ideology that I have called a modern

spiritual gender ideology. The information gathered around how younger generations

have come to understand religious institutions, their own beliefs, and values that relate to

connectivity with others were imperative to this gender ideology. Reinforcing gender

differences was not as important as the concepts of unity and equality within the young

women's beliefs. This chapter emphasizes the implications of these findings and how

they can be made relevant for future research, religious organizations, and the academic

discipline of public sociology. I first highlight the implications for research relative to the

social scientific study of religion and gender. Additionally, this section details the

limitations of the current study and ways for researchers in the future to address these

limitations.

The next section includes a discussion of implications for religious organizations,

with a specific focus on conservative Protestant denominations. The findings of the

present study will be used to formulate potential reorganizations of the ways in which the

Bible's texts should be interpreted by leadership in Baptist churches as well. A focus on how to appeal to younger generations and their beliefs in order to change the stigma that has been placed on conservative Protestant churches like the Baptist denomination will be emphasized. Suggestions towards more inclusive curriculums of different beliefs and backgrounds are made in order to make traditional religious sections more appealing to younger individuals and women in particular. Propositions on potential denominational shifts and the possibility of dropping denominations altogether are also made.

The final section addresses the implications that the current study has on public sociology. I argue that the findings of this project can be used to promote social change in oppressive institutions. The ways in which public sociology can benefit from the current findings and how they can be translated for the public to understand and implement the changes mentioned for religious organizations are emphasized. I provide potential ways to build upon the findings through research that incorporates the public. With this, I conclude with an overview of the implications and make the case for why the present study is important for both women and men who have wrestled with religious organizations and desire a more inclusive space where they can connect to all people, develop a relationship with a higher power, feel a sense of purpose, and put their beliefs into action.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research findings resulting from this study have important implications for conducting similar research in the future. First, it proved useful to implement an in-depth interview method in order to learn about the nuances behind how individuals understood

their religious experiences in real life and to see how gender operates in Baptist churches around the United States. Future research should expand upon this method and utilize more qualitative designs to further understand the shifts in perspectives about religious institutions that are occurring in younger individuals. This research should include the ways in which men have understood their experiences and could help to determine if the interpretations about religious men made by the women in this study match how these men feel. Additionally, research on what the present findings mean for the future of religious institutions as a whole should be addressed as there seems to be fundamental shifts in how young adult generations understand religion, especially among young women.

The current research project attempted to discover whether place was a factor in how the women interviewed internalized their beliefs about their gender in relation to what they were taught in church. However, due to the lack of variation in geographical location of where the participants attended church, place did not seem to be a significant factor in this project. It was more about the structure of the church that was organized by the leadership. Further research should investigate the leadership styles of various denominations to determine if the culture of the church itself is solely designed by who is running the organization. Future research should also focus more on place variations to fully determine whether geographical location influences the culture of the Baptist church and the teachings that it prioritizes about gender.

Future research should also analyze generational differences in religious experiences among women as there is reason to believe that the present findings are

82

heavily affected by societal shifts in views about gender and women's roles. The ways in which older women have come to understand their role in conservative Protestant religions may differ greatly from younger women and may be causing conflict within religious communities. Research on religion and gender should further investigate the modern spiritual gender ideology discovered by examining different denominations and incorporating various racial backgrounds to see if this concept can be applied to all women who felt conflict with the teachings of their church.

Limitations. One important limitation to the present study was the lack of racial diversity within the participant pool obtained through snowball sampling. Out of fifteen participants, thirteen were white and two were Black. This caused the current findings to potentially lack a cohesive understanding of the culture of Black Baptist churches which make up a large part of the Baptist population in the United States. Future research should implement different recruitment methods where a more racially diverse sample can be obtained. A larger sample size to analyze should be obtained in subsequent research as well.

One additional limitation is that the majority of respondents went to churches in the state of Virginia, limiting the generalizability of the present findings. Similar research should strive to obtain a more diverse sample of individuals who have attended Baptist churches in more states across the country than found in this study. Despite these limitations, this project presents many opportunities for future research and researchers interested in understanding how gender ideologies have been developed among young women who were raised in a conservative Protestant church. Projects analyzing different

denominations, age groups, races and gender identities should be constructed using a similar methodology to gain a more in-depth understanding of a modern spiritual gender ideology. The ways in which religious institutions are shifting may be discovered through a larger yet similar analysis to the one that was conducted in this study. Although there were some limitations to the project at hand, the findings have shed light on a new paradigm that may be occurring among younger generations of women who are rejecting and reformulating some of society's traditional institutions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

The research findings from this study can be interpreted to make substantial change within religious organizations, particularly those who are conservative Protestant and utilize the Bible as its central religious text. The women in this study made similar remarks about the Baptist churches in which they attended and felt that the experiences that they had in childhood affected their perception of the church until adulthood. This also influenced the likelihood that one stayed affiliated or changed their beliefs. With this, interactions with adults, the presence of female role models, and their feelings about the male leadership seemed to predict whether a respondent would feel that their time affiliated with the Baptist church was positive. Abusive environments also seemed to be connected to the structure of the church as well. The implications of fostering this kind of environment could be detrimental to the community of the church as it could be contributing to a loss of members who are younger and hold different beliefs.

It may be necessary for traditional organizations to make changes to the ways that they interpret the Bible. This change may include the need to center unification and

love by adopting a more inclusive spiritual ideology that values women equally to men. This could be potentially remedied by allotting more leadership positions to women where they are able to teach both men and women about how women interpret the Bible and how they understand their place in religion. A more modern way to teach the Bible and interpret its scriptures may need to be adopted in order to obtain a younger population of churchgoers who would contribute to the longevity of traditional religious organizations. Conservative Protestant churches should take time to learn how young adult women view themselves in relation to the church and what they may disagree with in order to discover whether their needs to be changes made in the environment of the church to be more inclusive of different perspectives.

The participants in this study emphasized a negative stigma placed on the Baptist church as they felt it was more exclusionary and outdated in terms of gender beliefs. As societal shifts in understandings around gender and women have occurred outside of religious institutions, there may be a need to modernize teachings and focus on more positive principles of the Bible in order to include the beliefs of a younger generation of women. This stigma could be reduced if Baptist organizations and those who influence what is taught in the Baptist Church listened to voices of its younger generations and made organizational changes in order to foster the safest and most inclusive environment possible.

It was very clear by number of participants who left the Baptist church and dropped denominations altogether that these women valued a type of religious environment that does not shame other perspectives but works to integrate them into the

culture of the church. Additionally, there were many participants who felt that the Bible and religion should be used as a way to create social change and put the positive principles of the Bible into action. Conservative Protestant institutions may want to examine the ways in which they can increase missionary work for women, especially within the local community.

A dedication to making changes and helping oppressed communities may also be a potential change to make that will foster a more inclusive environment for young women as well. Women may feel more valued if these opportunities are increased in the Baptist church. Younger individuals may be more inclined to be a part of traditional religious organizations if they are taught less rigid gender beliefs and emphasized more principles related to equality, love, unity, and justice. Younger women may also be more inclined to join if they saw more female leaders and felt that their voices were valued more in the church. The findings of the present study may present the need for a shift in the traditional structure of many denominations as there seems to be an exclusionary belief that accompanies those with denominations that hold stark divisions. The most effective way to create a more inclusive environment may be to drop denominations altogether as many newer Christian churches already have. The common choice of leaving the Baptist church for a non-denominational church was a trend that backs up the need for institutional shifts in traditional gender beliefs. It is possible that churches in the future will be mostly non-denominational churches if the above suggestions for change are not considered by traditional conservative Protestant churches.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

As the present study and its findings have been constructed in efforts to discover ways to implement social change, it also makes contributions to the discipline of public sociology. It is important for sociology to use its research for change and to help expand consciousness of social issues outside of academia (Stoecker 2005). Public sociology is a sub-discipline of sociology that promotes doing research with and for the general public in order to help facilitate social change around social issues that they face in real life. It promotes the idea that in order for sociology to be used for transformational purposes, it must appeal more to the general public with the intent of educating or working with various publics directly on a particular social problem (Gans 2016). Below are some suggestions for how public sociologists can utilize or build upon the findings in order to connect more with conservative Protestant women who may have suggestions on how to make religious institutions more inclusive and then attempt to implement these changes.

These findings have implications and can be used by sociologist to help expand consciousness about the ways in which women have come to understand religious organizations and how these experiences can be used to reshape the core values of traditional denominations in a way that still aligns with the Bible's teachings but promotes unity over division. Public sociologists who are interested in creating social change within conservative Protestant organizations can utilize the present research and conduct community engaged research with these institutions in efforts to make changes that will be more inclusive of younger generations. Public sociologists can also take the findings of this study and share with religious organizations the suggested changes that

may be of interest by traditional denominations who struggle with maintaining young adult membership. Researchers can use the findings of this study to build on and create methods that can be used to reach publics that may benefit from them.

Particularly, women who have experienced oppression and negative treatment from religious organizations should be addressed by public sociologists as the voices of these women contain the ways in which organizations can make the necessary changes to foster a more inclusive environment. Conducting more qualitative research such as focus groups or participatory action research with younger members of conservative Protestant religious groups and discovering how they believe religious organizations can be improved is a suggestion for public sociologist as well. Thus, these findings can be used to contribute to public sociology as it presents suggestions for religious institutions and sociologists to instill social change. There are many ways for public sociologists to build on these findings and conduct more engaging research by incorporating and educating relevant publics about how change can occur in religious institutions.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the implications for the findings from this project hold importance for future research and can be used to foster change within religious organizations. Future research should expand on the present work and make it a goal to diversify the sample in order to test the generalizability or build on the concept of a modern spiritual gender ideology. It should also be used to compare and contrast different denominational beliefs and age groups of women to further understand the mechanisms behind this gender ideology. Religious institutions can learn from the findings and instill change within their

organizations by listening to voices of young women and being more inclusive of their beliefs. This can be done by incorporating their views into their religious teachings. Additionally, placing women in leadership positions and or increasing opportunities for women to work with communities are also suggestions for religious organizations that stem from the findings of this research.

Public sociologists of religion and gender can benefit from the results as they can create new tools that work to discover more about the experiences of women who have faced adversity in religious organizations. They can then use their opinions to help implement changes needed to improve the culture of churches that may focus more on exclusion and difference than inclusion and acceptance. Public sociologists can also use this study by informing publics of ways to become more inclusive and can work with religious organizations directly to implement these changes. Thus, the newfound understanding of religious institutions held by young women has positive implications as it explicates the ways in which gender teachings are not internalized by younger women but are contested instead. The desire for a more inclusive and unifying religious setting cannot be understated as these women left the Baptist church in order to find this kind of environment. This research shows that it is important for traditional conservative Protestant institutions to listen to the voices of up and coming generations and create an atmosphere that incorporates their beliefs. Thus, integrating various perspectives in religious organizations should be considered to promote the healthiest environment possible for all those who attend now and, in the future, as well.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Pre-Interview Script:
-The purpose of this interview is for me to gain a more in-depth understanding of how being raised in a Baptist religious context has influenced you in adulthood and to learn more about the surrounding factors regarding your religious upbringing.

-As a reminder, only I and the member of the research faculty named in the informed consent form will have access to the data gathered from this interview and your identity will remain confidential. There will be no identifying information included in the final write-up or potential publication of the current project. I have included a separate document for you signature if there is a comment I would like to use as a quote from the current interview. Again, there will be no mention of any information that will make you identifiable. Do you have any further questions about confidentiality?

-As mentioned on the informed consent form, this interview will be recorded. You may ask me at any time to stop recording if there is a comment or question you would like to ask and do not feel comfortable with it being recorded.

-If you have any concerns during the interview please know that you are able to ask me to stop, ask me questions, or stop the interview and leave with no penalty.

-Thank you again for agreeing to participate today. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Topic One: Questions and Probes	**Interviewee Responses and Notes** Topic One: Religious Biography
1. How did you get involved with the Baptist religion? **Probes:** -What age? -Can you elaborate on what it was like? -Who or what led you to become involved? -Would you say this was your decision? If not, whose was it?	
2.Would you say that you are currently religious? **Probes:** - *(if yes)* what do you think is the most important aspect of your religion? -Explain what has made you remain religious. - *(if no)* what made you decide to no longer be religious?	

3. How would you describe your experiences with religion from the time you got involved to now? **Probes:** - *(if positive)* What would you say has made it more positive - *(if negative)* What would you say has made it more negative? -Can you provide an example?	
Topic Two Questions and Probes	**Interviewee Responses and Notes** Topic Two: Religious Socialization and Church Locality
4. What has your experience been with adults in your church including your family members? **Probes:** -With women specifically? With your mother? -With men specifically? With your father? With church leaders? -Have you found them to be helpful to you or misunderstanding of you? Why do you think this?	

5. How would you say your religious upbringing has influenced your relationship decisions? (romantic/not) **Probes:** -Do they have similar religious backgrounds to your own or not? -Do you believe that religion has (or has not) influenced who you have chosen to have relationships with? How or how not?	
6. How would you describe the location and surrounding atmosphere the church/churches you attended? **Probes:** -Where was/were it/they located? -Do you feel that the location influenced the culture of the church? What about its teachings? -How did/do you view your church? Explain.	

7. How would you describe the political beliefs of your previous or current church? Probes: -Is/was it more conservative or liberal? Explain. -Do your beliefs align with this? Why or why not? -Have you ever experienced conflict with what you have been taught and what you believe? Explain.	
Topic Three Questions and Probes	**Interviewee Responses and Notes** Topic Three: Religious Beliefs, Understandings, and Internalization
8. How would you describe your personal religious beliefs currently? **Probes:** -Do you agree or disagree with the beliefs of the Baptist church? The Bible? Your family? -Why or why not? -What do you agree/disagree with the most?	

9. Would you say you approach social problems or world events differently than other people because of your religious moral beliefs? **Probes:** -Which social problem is the most important to you? Why? -Do you believe that religion should be able to help solve this? -How can it? (or how can it not?)	
10. How do you personally feel about the Bible and its principles? **Probes:** -Do you believe the Bible is correct? Why or why not? -Would you change anything? What and why? -What would you teach others? Would you teach girls and boys the same? Explain.	

11. Do/did you incorporate any of the Bible's teachings in your everyday life? **Probes:** -Which ones and why? Or why not? -Do any of your beliefs differ from what the Bible says? Explain which ones and why. - *(if yes)* How does that make you feel?	
Topic Four Questions and Probes	**Interviewee Responses and Notes** Topic Four: Religious Christian Gender Ideology
12. Could you tell me about a time when your gender identity as a woman was on your mind in a religious setting like church or Bible study? **Probes:** How were women expected to behave in this setting? How did you feel you were supposed to behave? Provide an example and describe your experience.	

| 13. Women are more likely to be religious than men. How do you feel about this fact?

Probes:
-Why do you think there is a difference?

-Should there be a difference? Why or why not?

-Does this align with your own experiences? Explain. | |

14. How do you think women should behave in society? What responsibilities should they have? **Probes:** -Are your beliefs the same as what you have been taught in church? - *(if yes)* Why do you believe this is correct? - *(if no)* Why do they differ? -Where did you learn to decide different?	

15. How would you describe your responsibilities as a woman (in relation to family, work, and education)? **Probes:** -Does this differ from what your religion taught you? How so? -Do you believe this differs from what men are taught/should do? -Does your family agree or disagree with your views? Explain.	
16. How would you say that being a woman raised Baptist has influenced your life? **Probes:** -Positively or negatively? Explain. - (*if negatively*) How have you dealt with this? -Has anything changed over time? If so, what, why and how?	

17. In the Baptist religion, men are taught to act differently and take on different responsibilities than women. How does this make you feel? **Probes:** -Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? -Do you see any problems with this? If so, what and why? -What are your views on gender equality? How about in relation to your religion? Do you agree or disagree?	
Wrap-up Question 18. Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns about anything I asked you today? **Probes:** -Would you have changed anything about today's interview? -Are there any final comments you would like to add? -Provide an overall review of the interview.	

Post Interview Script
- I have asked all of the questions that I prepared for you today. Thank you again for participating and opening up to me, I know that we touched on a sensitive topic.

-Remember that everything you just told me will be held in confidence and your identity will not be disclosed in the research project that you just participated in.

-Feel free to reach out to me if you have any further questions or concerns through the email address that was used to schedule this interview. If there is any information that you do not want me to include in my project, please let me know now or as soon as possible.

-I would like to offer the opportunity for you to read my finalized work if you are interested. Is this something you be interested in? (Yes/No) How would you like to receive the final project? (Mail/Email) Provide the best address for me to send the document to: _____

-I have a $5.00 Amazon gift card for you as promised. Please know that the information you have provided me means more than I can describe.

-Thank you again. (*if I still need more participants*) If you know any women aged 18 to 35 who was raised Baptist and would be open to interviewing with me, please let feel free to give them my contact information. I appreciate your help and constructive feedback. Take care and have a great day.

REFERENCES

Acker, Joan. 1992. "From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions." *Contemporary Sociology* 21(5):565–69.

Bartkowski, John P. and Lynn M. Hempel. 2009. "Sex and Gender Traditionalism Among Conservative Protestants: Does the Difference Make a Difference?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48(4):805–16.

Boyce, Carolyn and Palena Neale. 2006. "Conducting In-Depth Interviews: A Guide for Designing and Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input." *Pathfinder International Tool Series* 1–12.

Bulanda, Jennifer Roebuck. 2011. "Doing Family, Doing Gender, Doing Religion: Structured Ambivalence and the Religion-Family Connection." *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 3(3):179–97.

Carr, Deborah et al. 2018. "In-Depth Interviewing." Pp. 341–75 in *The Art and Science of Social Research*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton et Company, Inc.

Cassese, Erin and Mirya Holman. 2016. "Religious Beliefs, Gender Consciousness, and Women's Political Participation." *Sex Roles* 75(9–10):514–27.

Connidis, Ingrid Arnet and Julie Ann Mcmullin. 2002. "Ambivalence, Family Ties, and Doing Sociology." *Journal of Marriage & Family* 64(3):594–601.

Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Frina Lin, Jeremy Majerovitz, and Benjamin Scuderi. 2016. "Childhood Environment and Gender Gaps in Adulthood." *NBER Working Paper Series; Cambridge* 21936.

Franiuk, Renae and E. Ashley Shain. 2011. "Beyond Christianity: The Status of Women and Rape Myths." *Sex Roles* 65(11):783–91.

Gans, Herbert J. 2016. "Public Sociology and Its Publics." *The American Sociologist* 47(1):3–11.

Glass, Jennifer and Jerry Jacobs. 2005. "Childhood Religious Conservatism and Adult Attainment among Black and White Women." *Social Forces* 84(1):551–73.

Holland, Jack. 2006. "Divine Intervention: Misogyny and the Rise of Christianity." Pp. 67–96 in *A Brief History of Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice*. Robinson.

Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl A. and Karen Jo Torjesen. 2009. *Women and Christianity*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Klingenberg, Maria and Sofia Sjö. 2019. "Theorizing Religious Socialization: A Critical Assessment." *Religion* 49(2):163–78.

Maltby, Lauren, M. Hall, Tamara Anderson, and Keith Edwards. 2010. "Religion and Sexism: The Moderating Role of Participant Gender." *Sex Roles* 62(9–10):615–22.

Miller, Alan S. and Rodney Stark. 2002. "Gender and Religiousness: Can Socialization Explanations Be Saved?" *American Journal of Sociology* 107(6):1399–1423.

Moore, Laura M. and Reeve Vanneman. 2003. "Context Matters: Effects of the Proportion of Fundamentalists on Gender Attitudes*." *Social Forces; Oxford* 82(1):115–39.

Stoecker, Randy. 2005. "Rethinking Public Sociology." Http://Comm-Org.wisc.edu/Drafts/Pubsoc.htm.

Pearce, Lisa D. and Arland Thornton. 2007. "Religious Identity and Family Ideologies in the Transition to Adulthood." *Journal of Marriage & Family* 69(5):1227–43.

Pearce, Lisa D., Jeremy E. Uecker, and Melinda Lundquist Denton. 2019. "Religion and Adolescent Outcomes: How and Under What Conditions Religion Matters." *Annual Review of Sociology* 45(1):201–22.

Peterson, Paul Silas. 2018. *The Decline of Established Christianity in the Western World: Interpretations and Responses*. London, England: Routledge.

Pevey, Carolyn, Christine L. Williams, and Christopher G. Ellison. 1996. "Male God Imagery and Female Submission: Lessons from a Southern Baptist Ladies' Bible Class." *Qualitative Sociology* 19(2):173–93.

Pew Forum of Religion and Public Life. 2015. "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics." *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public*

Life Project. Retrieved December 4, 2019 (https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/).

Schnabel, Landon. 2017. "Gendered Religiosity." *Review of Religious Research* 59(4):547–56.

Schnable, Sierra. 2017. "True Love Had Better Wait, Or Else!: Anxious Masculinity and the Gendered Politics of the Evangelical Purity Movement." Pp. 63–82 in *Gender In the 21st Century: The Stalled Revolution and the Road to Equality*. University of California Press.

Shaw, Susan M. 2008. "Gracious Submission: Southern Baptist Fundamentalists and Women." *NWSA Journal: National Women's Studies Association Journal* 20(1):51–77.

Smith, Christian. 2003a. "Research Note: Religious Participation and Parental Moral Expectations and Supervision of American Youth." *Review of Religious Research* 44(4):414–24.

Smith, Christian. 2003b. "Theorizing Religious Effects Among American Adolescents." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42(1):17–30.

Smith, Christian. 2007. "Why Christianity Works: An Emotions-Focused Phenomenological Account." *Sociology of Religion* 68(2):165–78.

Snell Herzog, Patricia. 2012. "Accidental Inequality: How Religious Youth Socialization Reproduces Social Inequality." *Sociological Spectrum* 32(4):291–308.

West, Candace and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1(2):125–51.

Woodberry, Robert D. and Christian S. Smith. 1998. "Fundamentalism et al: Conservative Protestants in America." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1):25–56.

BIOGRAPHY

Juliann G. Evans received her Bachelors of Arts in Psychology with a minor in Sociology from Christopher Newport University in 2017. She will receive a Masters of Sociology Degree and a graduate certificate in Women and Gender Studies from George Mason University in Fall 2020.