

THE EVANGELICAL GENDER DILEMMA:
FROM TRADITIONALISM TO FEMINISM AND THE SPACES IN BETWEEN

by

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CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

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Because feminism is concerned with equality for men and women and the interrogation of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon, evangelicalism is traditionally viewed a movement counter to feminist viewpoints. Although evangelicalism understands gender as being biblically based on the “creation order,” in terms of separate roles, male headship and women’s submission, the ways in which feminist ideology and evangelicalism interact shows that evangelicalism cannot be easily dismissed as strictly counter to feminist ideas. Changes in gender role ideology show that a significant minority of evangelicals fall somewhere in between a traditional and more egalitarian view of gender roles in the church and home. Exploring gender role ideology in the context of the evangelical movement will show that contradictions within the movement reveal that “ideology and practice do not always correspond” (Colaner 101). Through scholarly research, interviews and personal experience, I will illustrate that the evangelical movement’s engagement with contemporary society—especially since the rise of biblical feminism—has led to a mixture of traditional values and more progressive, liberal views by a small portion of its followers.

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Introduction

I think feminism has gotten a bad rap . . . I mean, if you take it to the absolute extreme, you end up saying men are just basically evil . . . but those people are very, very few . . . I think that feminism gets a bad rap because Christians look at where it's gone too far and then they won't listen to some of the much more reasonable stuff . . . But in many ways, women are an oppressed group in society, and feminism is meant to address that. They ought to, and Christians ought to recognize that that's biblical . . . you know, defending those who are oppressed. I'm all for it. (Gallagher, "Antifeminist" 450)

The opinion of this 31-year-old Evangelical Free woman represents the dilemma of achieving gender equality within the evangelical community. Although this woman believes that women are oppressed and that defending them is a biblical undertaking, she also feels feminism has "gone too far" for many Christians to listen to the "more reasonable" demands of feminism (450). Unlike this woman's more liberal opinion, evangelical views on feminism are often critical. However, there are also many voices, both male and female, that advocate for forms of gender equality. Evangelicals define gender equality as being based upon the biblical roles God has given to men and women; many believe that men and women are equal in merit but separate and distinct in their roles (Grudem and Piper 1991). Moreover, gender roles in the broader evangelical community are understood as "ideals that are based on perceived truth supported in the Bible" (Colaner 98) but this "perceived truth" differs among its members whose ideals are varied.

The influence of biblical feminism in the 1960s and onward has affected discussions of gender role ideology and practices among evangelicals. Arguments over biblical authority, differing interpretations of the scripture, the prominence of secular feminism and pressures from society have led many evangelicals to adapt notions of

gender ideology in the home and church to more closely align with prevailing social norms. It is this adaptation that most accurately highlights the tensions among contemporary evangelicals between thought patterns concerning equality and the practices many follow in the home and church.

It can be argued that contemporary evangelicals' gender ideologies are "most accurately understood as a continuum, with extremes on either side corresponding to [c]omplementarianism and [e]galitarianism" (Colaner 100). The interaction of more progressive or egalitarian views and more traditional or complementarian views have shown that the evangelical community is far from homogeneous in its attitudes and beliefs. Both men and women within the movement have differing views on how gender equality looks in the home and the church.

Although egalitarian views may have replaced traditional viewpoints on gender role ideology in some contemporary evangelical circles, patriarchal structures are largely still intact and complementarian views comprise the vast majority of evangelical beliefs.

While many households now require two incomes and women are more frequently entering the workforce, it is necessary to explore how shifting power structures are legitimized within evangelical families that still fundamentally uphold a patriarchal structure.

In "Symbolic Traditionalism and Pragmatic Egalitarianism: Contemporary Evangelicals, Families, and Gender," Sally K. Gallagher and Christian Smith posit that the shift in power structures in the home has led many evangelical families to redefine gender role ideology. They argue, "It is not then surprising to find traditional gender ideologies being modified to better account for and justify the distribution of power and

resources within evangelical families” (230). This modification of traditional gender role ideology is best understood through Gallagher and Smith’s argument that male headship, a central practice among evangelicals, supports as well as contests “ideals of hegemonic masculinity” (214). The exploration of how contemporary gender role ideology is being modified, and how male headship functions in the evangelical community, is vital to understanding evangelical views on gender equality and women’s roles in the home and church.

This exploration will show that evangelical gender role ideology is complex and multifaceted. For example, notions of mutual submission are prevalent among some evangelicals even as the husband still remains head of the family and, in most cases, primary earner. Furthermore, although many evangelicals affirm the biblical ideal that the husband is head of the household and primary decision maker, in practice the decision-making process is often far more democratic and the husband’s headship is often more symbolic.

Through personal interviews and case studies as well as scholarly research, I will examine how women’s lives are positioned within the evangelical community, looking specifically at how gender role ideologies are understood in the home and church.

Ultimately, this study will demonstrate that although evangelicals are understood as having a “strong antifeminist consensus . . . there is a surprising amount of support for feminist positions” (Wilcox and Cook 28). Moreover, although research will show that contemporary evangelicals combat the perception that feminist views and evangelicalism exist at two extremes, research will also highlight that evangelicals’ support for feminist positions creates its own unique tensions within the community. As will be discussed,

these tensions often produce a divide between evangelical thought and practice; evangelicals on the whole tend to uphold a patriarchal structure in order set them apart from society and remain distinct in their beliefs. This investigation will highlight the tensions between principles and practice and discuss how these tensions play out in contemporary evangelical gender dynamics.

The first section will cover the leading up to and rise of biblical feminism and explain how women's equality has been discussed in the evangelical community since the 1960s. The second section will cover case studies and interviews, focusing on contemporary evangelical gender role ideology and evangelical attitudes towards feminism.

The Rise of Biblical Feminism

The rise of fundamentalism in the United States during the early twentieth century directly impacted how women's roles were viewed in the evangelical community. A movement that once tolerated—and sometimes even celebrated—women preaching and women's gifts as missionaries began to curtail these leadership gifts. Fundamentalists' use of the Bible as literal truth forestalled many arguments for women's equality in the church and home. In "Feminism, Fundamentalism, and Liberal Legitimacy," John Exdell argues, "Fundamentalists are prepared to cite biblical text to prove that the male-governed household is natural and established by divine commission. The dynamic of male authority and female obedience is inextricably connected to an entire fabric of feelings and moral entitlements that constitute a way of life based on male supremacy" (Exdell 9). This increased conservative, inerrant message continued to promote a distant relationship with American society at large and its changing social norms. Into the 1930s

and 1940s, fundamentalists continued their efforts to “redeem the nation from corruption,” however; by World War II their separatist ideology resulted in a split among its faction (Bendroth 38). A counter movement soon emerged by more progressive evangelicals who were attempting to re-engage American culture.

This offshoot of “new” or neo-evangelicals desired to spread positive messages, get back to the evangelical roots of social activism, and re-engage American culture using contemporary approaches of interpreting the Bible; these approaches differed from fundamentalists in that they did not shy away from using intellectual advances and methods. Into the 1940 and 1950s, many institutions such as the Fuller Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminar (and their affiliated scholars) began to closely examine scripture utilizing more modern advances in sociology, religion and science. These scholars found it “difficult to claim that no errors existed in the biblical record” and believed that hermeneutical skills would strengthen biblical authority (Cochran 19). The goal of these more progressive evangelicals was not to discredit the text but instead to use “higher criticism” to strengthen the legitimacy of the Bible and “not destroy the authority of [it]” (22).

Amid debates over biblical interpretation and a liberalizing of more prominent seminaries “conversations about the home began to shift from matters of child-rearing and religious nurture into a series of debates about family-related issues beginning with divorce and then spiraling on to birth control, abortion and homosexuality” (Bendroth 43). The shift from discussions of the family and its private interactions in the domestic sphere to more public interactions actively engaging American culture continued into the early 1960s.

The Civil Rights Movement and the massive social changes in America impacted both the more progressive and conservative camps of evangelicals who began to assume a heightened political presence in America. In “White Evangelical Protestant Responses to the Civil Rights Movement,” Curtis J. Evans argues “the more active involvement of evangelicals in the political sphere was a direct result of the major changes in family life, sexual liberation, a growing youth culture, and Supreme Court decisions that broadened the scope of personal freedom” (248). It was this *broadening* of personal freedom that left a niche in which biblical feminists could assert their views on women’s equality while also maintaining biblical authority.

Although secular feminism was long underway in the 1960s, a more substantial organizing by biblical feminists didn’t begin until the 1970s and was aided by the more intellectually grounded battles fought by neo-evangelicals. “In addition to reforming evangelical theology, progressive evangelicals hoped that they could improve biblical credibility by reconsidering what the Bible said about contemporary social issues . . . women’s equality was an obvious question to address” (Cochran 21). The topic of women’s equality within the evangelical movement always existed in some form but neo-evangelicals’ critiques of biblical authority gave women’s equality a renewed, strengthened vision. The biblical feminist movement’s use of hermeneutics as a platform for demanding that evangelical women deserved biblically-based equality would not have been as well tolerated or successfully organized without the critiques made by neo-evangelicals.

A more cohesive organizing by biblical feminists began when the Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) committee was formed in 1973. Shortly after, an offshoot of the

ESA and one of the earliest biblical feminist groups was formed: The Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC). The EWC's use of hermeneutical interpretations placed the Bible at the center of debates for women's equality urging evangelicals to see equality between men and women as a biblical undertaking. For example, as debates amassed concerning the meaning and scope of the scripture, biblical feminists chose to directly confront the "hard" or "problem passages" such as those in Timothy and Ephesians that deal with women preaching and submitting to their husbands (Daniels 4). This undertaking only gained the attention of a minority of evangelicals at the time, but it wasn't long before biblical feminist arguments would become more visible. Shortly after the EWC was formed two of its own members, Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni, published a work that had great success in the Christian community.

In 1975, Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni published *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation*. Like the arguments made by the EWC, Hardesty and Scanzoni's arguments for equality were successful because they "drew on neo-evangelical methods of biblical interpretation . . . [to] show that many of the passages traditionally seen as limiting women's roles were situationally limited" (Cochran 26). Their methods of biblical interpretation involved breaking down the creation account and the "problem passages." To do so, Scanzoni and Hardesty spent a considerable amount of time studying the newer, more progressive biblical scholars as well as more wide-ranging intellectuals such as feminists, anthropologists and scientists (26). They used these varied methodologies to inform their biblical views and positions. They argued that the Bible's "teachings are not intended to be normative commands for all people" and placed the teachings of the scripture in their historical and cultural

position. They attempted to show that scriptural commands were relevant in the time and place they were given (26). In using these neo-evangelical methods, Scanzoni and Hardesty's arguments for the reform of women's roles in the church remained a Christian undertaking; they grounded all their arguments in the scripture keeping their demands for equality biblical. In short, Scanzoni and Hardesty advocated, "Christians must honestly face the historical fact that the church has erected barriers – socially, legally, spiritually, psychologically – against women's advancement" and promoted possible solutions for women's unequal status in the church and home (Hardesty and Scanzoni 203).

Overall, Scanzoni and Hardesty's work received a positive reception from evangelicals and even the criticism it did receive did not condemn their work "for moving beyond the boundaries of evangelicalism in its view of biblical authority" (Cochran 29). Their work received a book-of-the-year award from the more progressive evangelical magazine *Eternity* and received a positive review in *Christianity Today* whose editor at the time was a strict inerrantist (28). Ultimately, *All We're Meant to Be* combated the idea that evangelicals and feminists were at odds. Their work "helped show evangelical women around the United States that they could be both evangelicals and feminists" (Cochran 11). Approaching the early 1980s, however, disagreements emerged among secular and biblical feminists as well as the more progressive and conservative factions of evangelicals.

The secular feminist movement was facing growing tensions concerning homosexuality and differing tactics for approaching patriarchal reform. Liberal feminists, for example, wished to reform patriarchy while radical feminists wished to overthrow it. Just as the secular feminist movement was in disagreement over its

political views, so too was biblical feminism. Although the topic of homosexuality within feminism was not new, during the 1980s an increased visibility incited by the media and gay rights movement unequivocally impacted both secular and biblical feminism.

The events of the Stonewall riots; its impact on the gay rights movement, an increased visibility of AIDS; and the fear this disease prompted, and court hearings over sodomy laws were all widely circulating in the media and receiving increasing attention. The role of the media was integral in promoting an in-or-out, support or don't, mentality and both biblical and secular feminists followed suit adopting polar stances on homosexuality (Cochran 103). The goal of biblical feminists to remain within the evangelical scope of biblical authority came to a head when it became clearer that association with pro-homosexuality and pro-choice stances distanced them from the evangelical community.

In 1985, while biblical feminists were facing disagreements over more progressive and "radical" topics in feminism, a backlash began at the Southern Baptist Convention against the more moderate and progressive evangelicals; "fundamentalists sought to take over the leadership . . . [they] held theologically to biblical inerrancy and ideologically to pastoral authority, "traditional family values," and social and political conservatism (Cochran 158). Moreover, unlike both progressive and traditional biblical feminists and the more progressive evangelicals, these fundamentalists opposed the ordination of women and began to stage "a step-by-step takeover of the denomination" (158). This conservative take over was in reaction to a budding liberal doctrine.

As biblical feminism remained divided over mostly all its views, it had become clearer to many traditional biblical feminists that “radical feminist ideas had indeed spread over to the biblical feminist movement” (105). In 1987, a portion of the EWC’s membership split, forming the Christians for Bible Equality (CBE); the CBE was a more traditional biblical feminist organization that disagreed with the more progressive direction the EWC was moving in and the inclusiveness of a lesbian-rights agenda (96).

Surveys done of the EWC and CBE during this time demonstrate the polarized views these biblical feminist organizations held: 3% of the CBE supported homosexual rights, versus 83% in the EWC; 13% of the CBE supported women’s right to a safe abortion, versus 100% of the EWC and 100 % of the EWC supported legalizing abortion. One issue that both organizations remained committed to was women’s ordination, where 94% of the CBE and 98% of the EWC showed support (Cochran 132). The disagreements within biblical feminism indicated that issues over biblical authority and scriptural interpretation were reflective of issues happening within the broader evangelical movement. Moreover, the splintering of the biblical feminist movement echoed both the current issues and the divisions of its secular counterpart further demonstrating the complex position of women’s liberation.

Because some biblical feminists were more closely aligned with progressive evangelicals, the more conservative camps of evangelicals did not “look so benignly” on the growth and successes of the biblical feminist movement and questioned its placement within evangelicalism when it came to biblical authority. They believed that more progressive biblical feminists, like the EWC, “let personal experience inform their ethics, and learned their behavior from the world instead of from the church or the Bible . . .

allowing the secular feminist movement to dictate their agenda” (64). Some even referred to the EWC as a “lesbian support group” (Daniels 15). The CBE was able to remain largely supported by evangelicals because “their adherence to inerrancy and evangelical methods of biblical interpretation . . . remained, for the most part, solidly evangelical” (Cochran 147). This position allowed the CBE to remain within the scope of evangelical biblical authority. As biblical feminists continued to impact evangelical gender ideology, traditionalists were mobilizing.

Founded in 1987, the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) was created to further traditional viewpoints on gender roles in response to feminist arguments. It became apparent to the CBMW that the only way to combat secular feminism was to amalgamate some of its beliefs into their own, and they became an exemplar of the co-opting of more progressive Christian views of equality between the sexes. The CBMW perpetuated an agenda that remained closely tied to notions of equality and used more “equality-friendly” language. This organization, however, was still very much anti-feminist; it upheld patriarchal structures, women’s submission and limitations on women’s roles. The co-opting of equality-friendly language by the CBMW made their position seem less threatening and less anti-equality. By emphasizing “women’s equal merit and urg[ing] men to lead by servanthood and sacrifice, like Christ himself” (Worthen 7), the CBMW was able to demand women’s equality while also maintaining male superiority in the home and church.

The CBMW took a direct response to prevailing biblical feminist arguments by closely examining biblical feminists’ use of the scripture. Wayne Grudem and John Piper, two founders of the CBMW, published their arguments against biblical feminists in

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism. They found evangelical feminists’ “essential position wrong in the light of scripture, and ultimately harmful to the family and the church . . . [but] affirm[ed] that the evangelical feminist movement has pointed out many selfish and hurtful practices that have previously gone unquestioned” (10). This viewpoint, called complementarianism, argues that “women should not be pastors; that men are natural leaders and women should naturally submit to them (especially in marriage)” (Sowinska 173). They believe, however, that men should not be dictatorial leaders and find this fashion of leading ultimately harmful. Their overall view is more accurately portrayed in their literal interpretation of passages in Ephesians: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church” (Eph. 5.22-23). For complementarians, forms of gender equity may exist but only insofar as the man still remains head of the wife and ergo the family. It became clear that the realignment that emerged from the Southern Baptist Convention and the creation of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood meant that liberal agendas and feminist ideals were of concern for some evangelicals.

In response to this complementarian viewpoint three biblical feminists, Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon D. Fee, published *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*. Their viewpoint, egalitarianism¹, called for the “biblical liberation of both men and women” and believed that if the Bible was read properly it actually advocates equality and a “breaking of gender barriers” that would help connect evangelicals to the “core of Christian values” (Sowinska 173).

¹ The term egalitarian is often used synonymously with biblical feminism. For the remainder of this paper, I will use these terms interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

Egalitarians found that Galatians 3:28 best typified their viewpoint: “There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3.28). Egalitarians believe that in Christ, no one gender is more important than the other and that there is a “fundamental equality” between men and women (Colaner 100).

As evidenced by complementarian and egalitarian viewpoints, the fragmentation and ideological polarization of gender ideologies is situated in the “most prominent differences between feminist and traditionalist understandings of reality— the way these groups understand gender” (Sowinska 174). These differences become even clearer when examining the roles of men and women in contemporary evangelical culture. Looking at gender role ideologies of evangelicals today and the “overlapping and synthesizing of traditionalism and egalitarianism in evangelical gender relations” can provide a better understanding of the “complex interactions of cultural and religious influences that constitute the process of evangelical identity construction” (Hansbury 6). Evangelical identity construction relies on such markers as male headship and women’s submission to allow evangelicals to remain distinct and separate from mainstream culture. An investigation into how shifts in gender role ideology have impacting these markers will provide a unique understanding of contemporary gender role ideology in the evangelical community.

As will be discussed, most evangelical gender role ideologies combine elements of traditionalism and egalitarianism but in almost all cases, a fissure exists between evangelical beliefs and how these beliefs are practiced. To better understand this gap, I will conduct an analysis of contemporary evangelical gender role ideology. The first

topic on evangelical women and preaching will cover differing viewpoints and provide a framework for understanding women's role in the church.

Analysis of Contemporary Gender Role Ideology

Women and Preaching: Viewpoints

Today it is still common to find that men fill most senior pastor positions in the evangelical church. Most evangelicals believe that women are not to preach to a mixed-gender or male audience: Paul states "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man" (*New International Version*, Tim. 2.12) and:

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. (*New International Version* 1 Cor. 14.33b-35)

Complementarians such as Grudem contend that the passages that speak of women teaching have more to do with women teaching the Bible and less to do with women teaching skills or information while in the church. He argues that "the setting in which Paul does not allow a woman to teach and have authority over a man is in the assembled church" and that women are not restricted from teaching either outside the church or within the church. This means that women can teach such things as languages and mathematics or give guidance in a church setting (497). The vast majority of evangelicals acknowledge that women can teach in most situations and should not be kept from *all* leadership positions in the church but affirm that women should not preach the Bible or teach Bible study to a mixed or male group.

Linda L. Belleville, an egalitarian author and adjunct professor of New Testament at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, applies hermeneutics to decipher the meaning of

Paul's statement; she explores the context in which it was spoken to discover what she believes was the true intention of Paul's statement. Belleville shows that a "reasonable reconstruction" would show that:

The women of Ephesus were trying to gain an advantage of the men in the congregation and teach in a dictatorial fashion. The men in response became angry and disputed what the women were doing. This interpretation fits the broader context of I Timothy 2:8-15, where Paul aims to correct inappropriate behavior on the part of both men and women (I Tim. 2:8, 11). It also fits the grammatical flow of I Timothy 2:11-12: Let a woman learn in quiet and submissive fashion. I do not, however, permit her to teach with the intent to dominate a man. She must be gentle in her demeanor. (2411)

Belleville's interpretation explores the event in which Paul felt it necessary to correct the inappropriate behavior of both the men and women and argues that Paul was asking women not to disrupt or teach in a dictatorial fashion. She goes even further in her argument, stating that she does not find that Paul was telling all women not to teach men the Bible but only to act appropriately while in the Church. This egalitarian viewpoint is not common among most evangelicals but debates over women preaching and teaching the Bible to mixed and male audiences are still waged daily.

As evidenced by both viewpoints, the role of women in the church is contentious. Evangelical women do in fact preach and teach the Bible but many are still met with resistance and given little support. In an interview conducted by Julie Ingersoll, author of *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battle*, a male assistant pastor "agreed that there were few women serving as pastors in his denomination and explained this by saying that it seemed to be a response to the market" (65). Even if the market still feels more comfortable with men teaching the Bible, women have gone against these responses – with mixed outcomes.

Women and Preaching: Case Study

For a period of two months, I visited a mid-sized Foursquare church alternating my time between Sunday service and women's Bible study. During my time there, I learned that the senior pastor's wife was also a pastor, and they were considered to be a pastoral team. After speaking with members of the congregation and sitting in on services, it was apparent that while the pastor's wife, Pastor D., was an active member of the church's leadership team, she did not preach to the congregation on Sunday mornings or lead mixed-gender Bible studies. During my time there, the senior pastor went away on two separate church retreats. During his absence a male member of the leadership team stepped in. Other members told me that this was common practice and occasionally a male deacon would also fill in to deliver the sermon. When I questioned whether Pastor D. has ever delivered Sunday sermon, the answer was no. She served primarily in an administrative and individual-counseling capacity, in addition to leading the women's groups. It was clear that Pastor D. was undeniably popular among the congregation and that she took great pride and privilege from her role. When it came to teaching the Bible, however, her role was limited to women only.

Women and Preaching: Analysis of Case Study

A poll of *Christianity Today* readers found 38% of readers strongly agree or agree that only men should be ordained while 47% disagree or strongly disagree. Moreover, the results for those that identify as evangelical found that 15% of women and 14% of men strongly agree that only men should be ordained (Tennant). A larger portion of evangelicals may agree that women should be ordained but the obstacles many women in leadership roles face make this a statistic difficult to see in all areas of practice. These

results coincide with the fragmentation of beliefs and practice concerning views of gender equality and the limitations placed on evangelical women's roles.

The complementarian viewpoint would "tend to view women's roles in ministry, particularly in church settings, as limited . . . [and] few complementarians would support placing women in roles of leadership, such as that of pastor or priest" (Grudem 195).

Because most evangelicals tend to favor a more complementarian viewpoint, even if they believe that women should be ordained, they also believe that their roles should be limited. Complementarians would then argue that Pastor D. is using her gift while also being true to the scripture. Biblical feminist and egalitarian viewpoints would support Pastor D.'s position and calling, without limitations on her ability to sermon, but the reality is quite the contrary; her congregation would likely not support this.

The pastoral team, as demonstrated with Pastor D. and her husband, maintains the gendered hierarchy, upholding the male counterpart's authority (both in leadership within the church and at home). The childcare, Sunday school and the more administrative duties in these situations is left to the woman whose "essential nature is thought to be dependent, designed for supportive rather than leadership roles and in need of masculine leadership and guidance" (65). Pastor D. represents a woman whose unique position blends her "essential nature" with attributes of leadership and a guise of equal opportunity in the church. Her position, however, maintains a gendered order that doesn't threaten the patriarchal structures of the church and home and limits her seemingly equal access to leadership positions.

Although it is not uncommon to find women in co-pastor, assistant pastor or pastoral team roles, these roles generally have limitations, as evidenced with Pastor D.'s

functions in her church. These limitations are less about evangelical attitudes towards women's preaching and more about how their role is *defined* in practice. Ingersoll's research found that when women found opportunities in the evangelical church it was increasingly common for those positions to be as part of a pastoral team, often as husband and wife. These teams allow women to seemingly share a position of authority while also upholding a patriarchal order in the church (Ingersoll 63).

For a period of two years, Ingersoll conducted in-depth formal interviews with evangelical women from several different cities in the United States. She also conducted an "uncountable" number of informal interviews and spent a considerable amount of time "as a participant observer at churches, conferences, seminars, and activities at other Christian college and seminaries" (8). Ingersoll's field study supported the rarity of women preachers actively preaching at any large services or audiences that including men. For example, Ingersoll's interviews demonstrated that many evangelical women preachers felt hesitation, dissent and fear from members of the congregation and/or male leadership members. As Ingersoll concluded, "It was not uncommon for women to report direct, public challenges to their serving pastoral roles" (66). One pastor she interviewed explained that while working as a traveling minister with her husband, members of the congregation would get up and leave when it was her turn to preach (66). Women in these positions are often met with resistance and, in some cases, it was the "congregation members or colleagues [that] limited their ability to function properly in these roles" (69). This lack of acceptance on an individual and institutional level leaves many women ministers to struggle with reconciling their place within evangelical institutions.

A study of two hundred evangelical women conducted by Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Christine Pohl found that many women have experienced “struggles over their authority and their freedom to preach and live out their calling” (38). Some of these women are combating these struggles by tracing the history of evangelicalism; they are looking back to the roots of evangelical tradition. Evangelicals from the Wesleyan background, for example, provide a broader account of evangelical women’s history that emphasizes women’s prominent leadership roles. Many evangelicals from this tradition—especially in some holiness sects—“describe experiences of sitting under powerful women preaching and learning from compelling missionary teachers” (107). Although during the era of Civil Rights Movement women’s roles as preachers and missionary teachers were largely nullified by shifts in evangelical discourse, a significant minority of women are beginning to find empowerment by recalling the roots of some evangelical sects and their rich history of women’s leadership.

Creegan and Pohl believe that “identifying with such stories can give a backbone or sturdiness to evangelical women such that they are less inclined towards fussing over small difficulties and despairing over minor inconveniences” (108). On this point, Pohl and Creegan’s argument falls short. Current research confirms that a majority of evangelical women that are preachers face more large-scale battles (Scott 2014; Ingersoll 2003; Basher 1998; Creegan and Pohl 2005; “Women still face obstacles”). This includes confronting gender-role stereotypes and the misconceptions surrounding women’s ability to lead, as well as struggling to fit into largely patriarchal structures that favor male leadership. Although Creegan and Pohl highlight a valid point—evangelical history is a rich one, and women can find empowerment in the roles of their

foremothers—the present battle is a struggle for gender equality in name *and* in practice. For example, Ingersoll found that the substantial number of women in her study met resistance that somehow interfered with their ministry abilities. A smaller number of women did receive a large amount of support from members of their own congregation, however, even these women “found that disheartening roadblocks were put in place by other religious leaders who withheld the cooperation that would normally be given to male leaders” (Creegan and Pohl 69). This included denying women access to spaces that would allow them to fulfill their ministry duties such as not allowing them access to a retreat space once they found out that a woman was the main speaker or prohibiting the use of a baptistery so long as a woman was performing the ceremony (69). The importance of women’s historical position as prominent missionaries and preachers notwithstanding, the main challenge for evangelical women in leadership today concerns women’s acceptance in church leadership roles and the lifting of many limitations put on their duties.

Women pastors, like Pastor D., “are at the center of an ongoing cultural battle over what constitutes appropriate roles for women. They are both symbolic and active participants— whether by design or by accident— in the production of gender as an aspect of culture” (Ingersoll 136). Pastor D., for example, stands as a symbolic reminder that although some evangelical women do preach to congregations and serve the full duties of their leadership positions, a significant amount of women are still held back from full participation. However symbolic her story may be, Pastor D. is actively engaged in defining what gender ideology looks like in evangelical culture. Her leadership position represents a dilemma many evangelical women face when entering

into pastoral roles in the church. She would “appear to have equal access to leadership but [is], in fact, limited to a subordinate role” (Ingersoll 63). On the one hand, Pastor D. has the respect of her congregation both in title and in practice, sharing some of the responsibilities of the leadership team but, on the other hand, her leadership at the church is merely in name’s sake. She is not allowed to assist her husband with sermon or deliver a sermon herself.

Pastor D.’s story shows the complexities of gender role ideology and authority in the church today and the fragmentation that occurs from the “combined elements of both traditional and egalitarianism” (Gallagher and Smith 217). The disconnect between evangelical beliefs in equality and the enactment of equal treatment on an institutional level shows that even as notions of equality may exist, there are still many limitations that are put on women’s full participation in leadership roles.

Pastor D.’s position is on the continuum between two distinct gender ideologies, where her position is not quite traditional and yet not egalitarian. She combats the notion that women should not be in leadership roles but upholds the idea that women should not preach to mixed-gender or male audiences. Nonetheless, her struggle highlights the reality for many evangelical women in positions of leadership; women are still being kept from the pulpit in many evangelical churches in an ongoing battle for gender equality in practice, not just belief. Most of the limitations evangelical women face stem from a literal reading of the scripture and, more specifically, a belief that men are ultimately the head of the church and the family. As will be discussed, male headship and women’s submission are the core values that define evangelicals and, therefore, one of the most

difficult battles for biblical feminists and egalitarians to wage in their efforts for gender equality.

Male Headship and Women's Submission: Viewpoints

Gallagher and Smith's study found that the "great majority of evangelicals interviewed . . . emphasized men's headship as a core family value" (217). A very small minority of evangelicals function without male headship whether it's symbolic or more obvious and pervasive. In *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions*, Grudem confirms that the majority of evangelicals believe that men are the head of the family and wives are to be submissive to their husband.

Grudem believes "submission to a rightful authority is a noble virtue . . . a privilege" and not an inferior role (396). The complementarian viewpoint shows that:

Just as God the Father and God the Son are equal in deity, equal in attributes but *different* in roles, so a husband and wife are equal in personhood, equal in value, but *different in their roles* God gave them. Just as God the Son is eternally subject to the authority of God the father, so wives are to be subject to the authority of their husbands. (Grudem 384)

Grudem advocates that these roles are part of God's divine plan for man and woman and each should take great pride in their distinct but equal roles. Male headship, he contends, does not imply or indicate that "the husband is wiser or a better leader or a better decision maker, but . . . that headship is a part of the God-given role for the husband" (362).

Grudem also makes it clear that biblical headship does not mean that the husband can act in a "selfish, harsh, domineering or tyrannical" way just as the wife should not try to defy "the husband's leadership by trying to usurp it" (341).

Grudem provides a model to display the danger of blurring biblical roles:

	Errors of Passivity	Biblical Ideal	Errors of Aggressiveness
Husband	Wimp	Loving, humble headship	Tyrant
Wife	Doormat	Joyful, intelligent submission	Usurper

Source: Grudem, Wayne. *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions*. Colorado: Multnomah, 2006. Kindle file: 352.

As demonstrated by this table, complementarians believe that neither husband nor wife should exhibit extreme passivity or aggressiveness. It would appear that he is advocating for a “balance,” however, this ideal is wholly reliant upon the man as the head of the wife and her ultimate submission to him in their marriage. Moreover, “the husband has the primary responsibility to provide for his wife and family, and the wife has the primary responsibility to care for the home and children” (375) and he believes that labor is a gendered phenomena and women should be relegated to the care of the home and children. This argument further clarifies the position of stereotypical gender norms as the foundation for many evangelical family dynamics.

Gallagher and Smith maintain that male headship has become largely symbolic; it functions more as an identity marker that maintains the distinctiveness of evangelicals (Smith 2004, Gallagher and Smith 1999). Even though headship may be more of a symbolic marker, structures are still in place that uphold a gendered hierarchy favoring male privilege. Even the more egalitarian scholars argue more for mutual submission alongside headship rather than an abandonment of headship altogether.

Egalitarians look at the main verses in the Bible that deal with headship and marriage and try to understand the cultural and social position in which they were written. I. Harold Marshall, an egalitarian biblical scholar, believes that

complementarians have misconstrued Paul's message about the husband being "head" of the wife:

What Paul is saying . . . is evident from his description of the husband's Christ like ministry of life-giving, self-giving love for this wife (Eph. 5:25-30). As Christ loves, nurturers, provides for and sacrifices his own life and special (divine) prerogative for the church, so should the husband for his wife; as the church submits to the ministry of Christ (and as believers submit to one another, Eph. 5:21), so should the wife to her husband. (3462)

First, egalitarians believe that the word *kephale* or "head" can be translated in multiple ways. "Based on thousands of Greek writing . . . more than 25 possible figurative meanings for *kephale* [exist]. None of the listings includes the meaning of "authority," "super rank," leader," or any hierarchical connotation" (Cochran 52). Egalitarians conclude that the best translation would be that of "source" or "origin," which would show a more "organic unity, that the husband and wife are part of one body in which the husband's role is to nurture, love, and serve his wife" (52).

Secondly, when it comes to issues of women's submission, egalitarians argue that mutual submission is often discussed alongside it:

The series of biblical passages often used to legitimate *wifely* submission (Ephesians 5:22-21) are proceeded (and, in their view, superseded) by a verse that commands *mutual* submission: "Honor Christ by submitting to each other" (Ephesians 5:21) . . . [and] I Peter 3:7 . . . describes husbands and wives as "joint heirs" or "fellow heirs" of God's grace. (Bartkowski, "Debating" 404)

Ultimately, egalitarians believe that husband and wife are an equal union. "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God" (I Cor. 11.11-12).

In Ephesians 5:21, Marshall argues that Paul was trying to "indicate the ways wives should be submissive within a society when submission is expected" (2128).

Egalitarians conclude that the “social convention of the time, both Greco-Roman and Jewish, expected subordination from the wife . . . but in the Western world today, expectations have changed [to that of] equal partners; one-sided subordination of the wife to the husband is seen as inappropriate and is not demanded” (2054). Although expectations may have changed for some, most relationships in the United States still uphold a gendered order with the man usually being seen as head of the family even as most families now rely on the income of both parents. On this point egalitarians overstate the status of gender equality in marriage. Lastly, although notions of mutual submission have become more common among evangelicals, usually this mutual submission functions in a limited way. For example, mutual submission exists alongside male headship.

Male Headship and Women’s Submission: Case Study

While attending a Foursquare church, I conducted informal interviews with a married couple. Their family was doing missionary work in Turkey but came home for three months to visit family. Husband and wife were interviewed separately and asked how submission and headship functioned in their own marriage. The husband D.G., a forty-year-old evangelical Christian, expressed that although male headship is vital to his marriage this should not equate to the woman being treated unfairly. He states that “according to the Bible, the husband is to be “head” of the wife as Christ is of the church” but believes that this “does not mean a man has the right to boss his wife around and expect her to serve his every whim. It’s not to be selfish, but rather a selfless thing, and a huge responsibility” (Interview with author).

When D.G. was asked how he believed his wife saw his role in their marriage, he felt he was “that of the spiritual leader” but concluded, “It’s a question of role, though, not of ability or value” (Interview with author). It is clear that although male headship is central to D.G.’s marriage, he also believes that men and women “are of equal value and worth before God, and come to salvation the same way. They are both expected by God to live holy lives and submit themselves completely to Him” (Interview with author).

His wife L.G. was also interviewed and asked similar questions about their roles. She stated that her husband “discusses everything with [her], but he makes the final decisions” and also agreed that men and women “are all equals heirs in Christ” (Interview with author).

Male Headship and Women’s Submission: Analysis of Case Study

At appearances, D.G. and L.G. seem to belong to the more extreme, traditionalist camps of evangelicals. They do not believe in or use birth control. L.G. and her daughter wear only long dresses and skirts and L.G. covers her head. The couple home schools their children who are vigilantly guarded from pop-culture; secular music is not allowed or tolerated and television watching is timed with programming being pre-selected. Moreover, their children’s interactions with other children are generally limited to children from church or home-schooling groups.

Many may assume that these characteristics would be that of a family that likely follows a strict, patriarchal order but in reality, their marriage combines some egalitarian elements. This reality is further complicated because many of their beliefs may mimic more egalitarian marriages but, through discussions with the couple, it is apparent that these more egalitarian beliefs mostly fall short in application.

L.G. operates her own home-schooling site (in which she brings in revenue in the form of donations) and her income is vital to the family of eight. Although D.G. teaches languages online and is the primary breadwinner, he also works from home and assists with child-rearing responsibilities. The necessity for both incomes is common in many modern-day evangelical families, much like society at large. In this respect, “evangelicals preserve the ideal of complementary marriage while adopting the rhetoric of headship to the realities of economic strain” (Gallagher and Smith 219). Gallagher and Smith’s research found that with a decline in men’s roles as primary providers, notions of headship drew less from men as providers and more from men as protectors, final decision makers and spiritual leaders (228). This adaptation allows the marriage to preserve male headship in light of women’s economic necessity and contributions to relationship.

When D.G. was asked how headship functioned in his own marriage, he cited first that the husband is “head” of the wife and then secondly that he is responsible for the spiritual leadership of his wife and family. When he was asked how his wife viewed his role, his response was also “as that of a spiritual leader” (Interview with author).

Gallagher and Smith find, “The transformation of headship from authority-breadwinner to symbolic spiritual head and protector continues to provide an ideological framework within which individual evangelicals may maintain a sense of distinctiveness from the broader culture of which they are a part” (229). The ability of evangelicals, like D.G. and L.G., to practice gender ideologies that coincide with economic shifts in broader culture help them to still “maintain group boundaries [as] part of the balancing act [they] must engage in to remain not of the world or mainstream culture despite their deep level of

engagement with it” (Hansbury 8). Because headship is a core value for evangelicals, it is important to them that they be “in, but not of, the world” (Gallagher and Smith 228) but continue to function in such a way that their core values—male headship and spiritual leadership—are not compromised.

Although “virtually all marriages operate according to some gender role identity, and some social contexts emphasize the importance of adhering to gender roles more than others,” (Colaner 100) evangelicals must operate in such a way that they remain within the boundaries of the faith and this performance is of great importance. This makes the “ideological fragmentation” that occurs between the more traditional and more progressive gender role ideologies clearer when examining how certain men and women interact in their marriage.

When L.G. was asked whether or not men and women’s roles are different, she stated that she believes women and men are only different in “mind and bodies” and “equal heirs in Christ” (Interview with author). This belief is very common among complementarians and more conservative biblical feminists. This does not mean that they are equal in terms of role; being different in “mind and body” implies that men and women only have equal status when it comes to their souls. The Christians for Biblical Equality (who are in close alignment with the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood’s beliefs) statement explains that “the blessing of salvation [was] without reference to racial, social, or gender distinctives (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-28) and on the family, the Bible teaches that husbands and wives are heirs together (1 Cor. 7:3-5; Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Gen. 21:12)” (Bilezikian, et al.). I would argue that this statement is indicative of the main values of evangelicalism; men and

women are different in mind and body and have very different roles. Although men and women come to salvation the same way, however, the equality ends there. The view that men and women are only equivalent through salvation helps support the division of gendered roles in the home and church and men's ultimate authority.

L.G. was asked how submission functioned in her marriage. She stated, "Christians are to have mutual submission to each other. But a wife through love and respect, submits to her husband" (Interview with author). L.G.'s statement is even more compelling when you understand her personality; she is outspoken, educated and stands firmly when she has an opinion. When asked if her husband practiced headship, she agrees that he does and that he makes the final decisions but she is always involved in the decision-making process (Interview with author). In the end, however, both L.G. and D.G. agree that their marriage functions through mutual submission.

Most complementarians do not believe the Bible promotes mutual submission. Instead, they believe that the Bible supports mutual consideration and love but never states that husbands should ever submit to their wives (Grudem, "Myth"). When the term "mutual submission" is used, egalitarians believe it should mean that there is "mutuality in all aspects of life including the home, church, and career" (Colaner 100). Even so, few biblical feminists and egalitarians would argue against male headship. Moreover, although D.G and L.G. use the term mutual submission, they don't actually share mutuality in all aspects of the home and church and instead have mutual consideration.

That being said, the husband as head should be "understood as self-giving love and service within this relationship of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21-33; Col 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7)" (Bilezikian, et al.). This notion of headship and mutual submission can most

accurately be understood by investigating the research of W. Bradford Wilcox, author of *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands*. Wilcox argues that in the last two decades a “new fatherhood” ideal has emerged. He concludes that during this time, there has been a “softening” of patriarchy among evangelical men. Although evangelicals emphasize male headship as central to the family, recently focus has moved away from the language of leadership and towards the language of sacrifice. For example, when D.G. was questioned about how headship functioned in his marriage, he explained that it is “selfless” and a “huge responsibility” (Interview with author). The burden of headship has become more prevalent than the notion of women’s submission. Because less emphasis is placed on the submission of women and more emphasis is placed on the sacrifices of men, there is also a greater preponderance of gratitude being exchanged within marriages. This exchange comes with its own limitations.

Wilcox argues that “the stress on sentiment in the domestic arena—sentiment motivated both by theological beliefs and about divine love and by a familistic appreciation for the sentimental character of family life—might motivate men to express appreciation to their wives for the housework they do” (142). This appreciation, he believes, helps evangelical marriages to remain successful and appease societal pressures for great equality in marriages. Furthermore, Wilcox research found that conservative Protestants have “greater inequality in the division of labor in households with children” but that conservative Protestant women were “slightly more likely to report that their household labor is appreciated” (150).

Wilcox’s findings support the notion that male headship continues to be redefined as society changes its expectations and views of gender. For example, Wilcox argues that

in the last thirty years, male headship has transformed to be more “oriented towards service,” shifting from “domineering position of authority” to a more spiritual role that focuses on the “emotional needs of their wives and children” (172). This transformation shows that evangelicals have indeed been influenced by more liberal beliefs of society insofar as headship continues to be redefined to compete with broader social norms.

D.G. and L.G. views confirm that evangelicals “borrow from the underlying principles of liberal democracy in their rhetoric of equal opportunities for women and examples of joint decision making at home” (Gallagher and Smith 226). While some evangelical families uphold patriarchal structures and in all appearances seem quite traditional, some hold beliefs that situate them somewhere along the continuum of traditional and more egalitarian gender role ideologies. As Gallagher and Smith have pointed out, “What women gain from this bargain is the ability to exchange support for symbolic headship, emotional intimacy and greater economic security . . . [it] effectively obligates men to greater participation in the emotional, nurturing work” (228). Notwithstanding, although many evangelical marriages may show that men are providing more emotional support and greater gratitude, household divisions of labor are still disproportionately unequal and patriarchal structures are left intact.

Contemporary Responses to Biblical & Secular Feminism: Viewpoints

Complementarians argue that evangelical feminism and egalitarianism has “become a new path by which evangelicals are being driven into theological liberalism” (Grudem, *Evangelical* 15). Grudem reasons that evangelical feminists attempt to redefine parts of the scripture that it finds are unfavorable and, in doing so, are misleading Christians:

One by one, the teachings of the scripture that are unpopular in their culture are rejected, and, one issue at a time, the church begins to sound more and more like the secular world. This is the classical path to liberalism. And I believe that evangelical feminism is leading Christians down that path one step at a time. (18)

Grudem also believes that evangelical feminism and its promotion of theological liberalism are creating a “tremendous pressures in present-day culture [to] deny male leadership in the home and the church” (17). While male leadership is being rejected and men are being disempowered, Grudem finds that women’s ordination is on the rise. He believes that women’s ordination is also becoming further accepted among liberal organizations. He worries that just as women’s ordination has become more common in contemporary evangelical denominations so too might the endorsement of homosexuality:

No leading evangelical egalitarians up to this time have advocated the moral validity of homosexual conduct . . . and I am thankful that the egalitarian organization Christians for Biblical Equality has steadfastly refused pressures to allow for the moral rightness of homosexual conduct. However, we would be foolish to ignore the trend set by a number of more liberal Protestant denominations, denominations that from the 1950s to the 1970s approved the ordination of women using many of the same arguments that evangelical egalitarians are using today. While the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church-USA, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have all resisted internal movements that attempted to pressure them to endorse homosexuality, they still have significant minorities within each denomination who continue to push in this direction. (514)

Although complementarians advocate that “significant minorities” are pushing for the endorsement of homosexuality, egalitarians “affirm that the Bible’s prohibition of homosexual behavior as a universal normal” (Webb 4507). William J. Webb, theologian and former professor of New Testament at Heritage Seminary, notes in “Gender Equality and Homosexuality” that “when the hermeneutics that lead to egalitarian conclusions are consistently applied to the homosexuality texts, the result is a strong argument *against*

accepting homosexuality” (4631). On the topic of homosexuality, both the large majority of complementarians and egalitarians believe the Bible does not endorse it.

Both complementarians and egalitarians attempt to distance themselves from what they consider contemporary, liberal, secular feminism. Complementarians agree that “this brand of feminism . . . is a direct challenge to what the Bible teaches about male and female (Gen 1:26-27; Matt 19:4-5)” (Burk 3). Complementarian Denny Burk argues that the church does not need feminism that “treats gender differences as socially constructed and who says that sexual differences between men and women are a farce.” Feminism, he believes, tries to redefine Christianity and “in some cases destroy it altogether” (2).

At their very foundation, feminist theory and complementarian viewpoints differ drastically in approach. Feminist theory, in its simplest form, attempts to deconstruct gender ideologies and stress how social, cultural, political and religious forces shape us; for example, they frame and construct our gender roles and behaviors, our values, and interactions with society. Complementarians and most egalitarians, on the other hand, believe that men and women have explicit gender roles given by God; a distinct biblical division exists between the sexes. It is this fundamental difference between core values that causes such friction between secular feminism and most evangelicals.

Due to these frictions, most egalitarians also wish to make a distinction between evangelical feminism and its secular counterpart. To do so, egalitarians stress that their self-identification as evangelical feminists and their use of the words biblical equality are vital to their distinctive position:

Though *feminism* accurately describes the aspect of this position that seeks to be more supportive of a women’s freedom and opportunity to serve alongside men in ministry and marriage, the qualifier *evangelical* is helpful in distinguishing evangelical feminism from the unbiblical aspects of liberal religious and secular

feminism . . . Finally, *biblical* is added to the concept of gender equality in order to distinguish evangelicals from those who seek gender equality primarily because of cultural pressure, personal agendas or equal-rights politics, rather than out of obedience to the Bible. (Groothuis, Pierce and Fee 115)

It is clear that while egalitarians argue for women's equality, they also wish to remain outside of secular feminist culture. As Gallagher study has found, only 10% identify as being evangelical feminists and just about the same amount are completely opposed to feminism "of any sort" (Gallagher, "Antifeminist" 468). Notwithstanding, about 65% of evangelicals found that feminism was "hostile [to their] moral and spiritual values" (458). Gallagher found that on topics that were feminist in nature, such as views on abortion, marriage and headship, most evangelicals were not explicitly anti-feminist in their opinions and responses. It would appear that the vast majority find feminism itself a threat but still espouse some feminist beliefs (468).

Contemporary Responses to Biblical & Secular Feminism: Case Studies

J.G. is a 31-year-old woman who grew up Baptist but spent the last fifteen years in the Foursquare church. During our interview, she was questioned about feminism and the women's movement and she replied that before recently she "was not even aware of feminists." She said that she heard people say "'femi-nazi" and "those crazy left wing feminist-democrats" but it was always in negative terms so she never saw feminism as a positive thing previously. She stated that, "As a Christian, I was certainly a feminist in belief- I believed that women were equal and hated submission, but did not act on [my belief]" (Interview with author).

J.G. was asked what she felt were the most important issues facing women today. She believes that for evangelical women, equality is a lot about balance and expectations:

I think many women in the Christian evangelical world would say that the most important issue to them is the tenuous balance of work and home life. Since many women have to work, it is extremely difficult or impossible to fill the role expected of them and have a career or job. (Interview with author)

Many evangelical women express concern over being able to balance work and home life. In a Barna study conducted in 2012, women were asked what they struggle with the most and 50% of women stated they struggled with disorganization followed by 42% that felt they struggled with inefficiency (“Christian Women Today”).

P.R., an Army Veteran, stated that the women’s movement has impacted him on a personal level. He said that he now has “a lot more respect for the women who served with me on the front lines.” He also shared that he watched “several women in [his] family succeed admirably in careers. For example, owning a business, making a supervisors position in under two years, while still being a mother, wife, and daughter.”

When he was further questioned about the women’s movement, he stated that he “will always respect women, but the [women’s] movement has been hijacked by many radicals who only use the movement to further some . . . radical political agenda that I do not respect in the least (Interview with author). He concluded that he personally didn’t know anyone that was a Christian feminist.

P.R. was asked what he believed were the most important issues facing men and women today. For both he responded that “equality in their own gender” was important. For women, he explained that they “have become more fixated on judging each other’s choice whether it be a decision to be a traditional homemaker in the 21st century or juggle a career as well as family responsibilities.” He explained that “some men are stay-at-home dads and many are being judged for their decision to support their wives efforts to

have a career (be the bread winner) and [the dad] to be the home maker” (Interview with author).

S.M., a divorced, sixty-seven-year old evangelical woman who belongs to the Foursquare church, gender roles have been tainted by personal experiences:

God made women to be nurturers and helpers. Society and personal experiences changed traditional roles. Personal trauma changes women (and men) into controllers who try to make the world into their image so they are not hurt again, or they become passive. God made men to be leaders and protectors, but again society and personal trauma has weakened those roles. (Interview with author)

When she was asked if the women’s movement has impacted her, she responded, “Yes; I have hated it.” She explained that she has seen “men become emasculated [and] watched women become hard.” She agreed that some aspects of the movement were good “because women have been used and abused for centuries, but God was taken out of the picture and the movement’s results are unbalanced” (Interview with author). S.M. concluded that she does not identify as a feminist but that she is “an advocate of women’s right to have a voice and equality based on God’s view that He does not discriminate between men and women.” The necessity to differentiate between being a feminist and an advocate of women’s rights further supports the idea that associations with “liberal” culture has consequences for the preservation of evangelical identity. The reality is that most evangelicals do believe in some form of gender equality but choose not to associate these beliefs with feminist ideals.

Contemporary Responses to Biblical & Secular Feminism: Analysis

Gallagher’s research showed that “approximately two-thirds of those . . . interviewed were cautiously apprehensive of feminism, pointing to significant gains in women’s rights and opportunities (“Antifeminist” 460). Two respondents from

Gallagher's study concluded that "feminism may be kind of radical now, but they did some really important things" and another interviewee felt that feminism had "kind of gotten off track and extreme" (460). The feeling of feminism going astray was echoed during my own research.

During an interview with P.R., he was questioned about the women's movement and whether it had an impact on him. P.R. responded that he "will always respect women . . . [but] the women's movement was hijacked by many radicals." He felt that extremists were only using the movement to further some "radical political agenda" (Interview with author). S.M.'s interview confirmed similar feelings about the women's movement. She agreed that "some parts [of the women's movement] were good" but ultimately felt that the "movement's results [were] unbalanced." She identified that because "God was taken out of the picture," the positive results became suspect. Largely, however, she "hated" the movement for its unfavorable results for men and women's roles. S.M. believed that "God made women to be nurtures and helpers . . . and men to be leaders and protectors." She felt that society was "weakening those roles" and reviled the women's movement for emasculating men and making women hard (Interview with author).

Gallagher's study resonated with themes that emerged during my research; she found that the apprehension she heard about feminism and where it had "gone wrong" centered on themes of individualism, the politics of sexual identity, abortion and gender difference ("Antifeminist" 462). Both egalitarian and complementarian views of secular feminism emphasize that its individualist nature "fosters a sense of entitlement and aggravates divisions between women and men" (462). This aggravation of gender role divisions was more apparent in discussions of practices in the private sphere than in the

public. For example, the majority of evangelicals felt feminism allowed women more opportunities in the workforce but threatened gender role divisions in the home (462). Gallagher believes that for evangelicals “the notion of equality is appropriate in some spheres of life (employment and education) but not others (family and household)” (463). Key shifts in societal attitudes towards women in the workforce and educational institutions have opened opportunities for evangelical women but these opportunities are only looked at positively insofar as they uphold the ideals of evangelical gender discourse.

Bartkowski argues that “one important source of dispute between evangelical purveyors and critics of the patriarchal family concerns the nature of gender and the extent to which masculinity and femininity are envisioned as radically distinctive or largely homologous” (“Debating” 400). Biblical feminists have attempted to draw a strong line between their views on gender roles and that of secular feminism; however, because of the successes of evangelical gender essentialist’s arguments, “evangelical feminism is likely to remain ideologically suspect to the majority of ordinary evangelicals” (Gallagher, “Marginalization” 231). Grudem has spent considerable time effectively linking “feminist’s arguments for egalitarianism as arguments for androgyny” (Gallagher 231). Because gender—and the division of gender roles—is critical for evangelical identity construction, feminism will always remain suspect so long as evangelical identity markers remain intact:

Gender is a key marker of this embattledness . . . they retain the “counter cultural” ideal that family is a hierarchical institution of which the husband is the head. Not just in spite of, but also because evangelicals are pragmatically egalitarian, the salience of the husbands’ headship takes on even greater subcultural significance as a distinguishing mark of evangelical identity. Maintaining the idea that the husband is the “head” of the family—even if that headship is largely symbolic—

reinforces evangelical identity as distinct from the “world.” Abandoning the ideal of husbands' headship would remove one of the primary ways, if not the primary way, in which evangelicals can identify themselves as a religious subculture. The degree to which gender essentialism is linked to other theological or social issues (the interpretation of the bible, abortion, home schooling, gay/lesbian rights) only heightens the degree to which gender essentialism is likely to remain foundational to evangelical identity and subculture. (231)

As Gallagher explains, evangelicals need certain “markers” to distinguish them from larger culture. Because male headship and gender essentialism have remained identity markers for evangelicals, it is unlikely that they will fully abandon these markers without risking their placement outside of main-stream culture.

Evangelical families often display more egalitarian practices in the home (e.g., joint decision making, more egalitarian distribution of housework, etc.) despite their apparent gendered divisions of labor. This further points to the “blend of traditional-provider ideology and democratic rhetoric of equal rights” in evangelical families (Gallagher and Smith 227). This blending of elements of liberal democracy with more traditional family structures was supported by over 90% of respondents that Gallagher and Smith interviewed (217).

What this blending indicates is that while only 10% of evangelicals adopt the label “feminist,” (Gallagher, “Antifeminist” 468) many more evangelicals share feminist ideals and agree with some feminist positions. In “Evangelical Women and Feminism: Some Additional Evidence,” Clyde Wilcox and Elizabeth Adell Cook find that 41% of white evangelical women believe that women’s roles should be equal to that of men’s roles and 60% “took feminist positions” on certain topics (35). For example, in Gallagher’s study she found that almost 50% of evangelicals found that “abortion should be legal in a few cases” while almost 40% found that in no case should it be legal

(“Antifeminist” 459). This large divide in evangelical beliefs was not much different than what was found for nonreligious opinions. For example, almost 36% of nonreligious respondents felt that abortion should be legal in a few cases while 31% felt it should be legal in no cases. The only remarkable difference of opinion was in terms of abortion being legal “in all cases.” Here 7% of evangelicals agreed, while liberal and nominal Protestants as well as Catholics, non-Christian religious people and non-religious people agreed at a rate of about 22% to 26% (459).

On the issue of homosexuality, 26% or around one in four evangelicals feel that homosexuality should be accepted. Although this is much smaller than mainline Protestants acceptance (56%), it is still valuable to note that acceptance is on the rise (“Most Mainline Protestants”). A study by Public Religion Research Institute found that in the last decade, white evangelical Protestant acceptance of homosexuality has risen approximately 15% while mainline has risen about 26% (Jones, Cox and Navarro-Rivera). These findings indicate that although many evangelicals still adhere to traditional beliefs, changes in mainstream attitudes towards more “liberal” topics in American have slowly gained the acceptance of a minority of evangelicals.

Conclusion

Gender role ideology among evangelicals is not homogenous. As demonstrated by differing views on men and women’s roles, varying interpretations of the scripture and evangelical attitudes towards feminism, the “perceived truth” associated with gender roles and gender equality differs among its members. The vast majority of evangelicals may support a more traditional or complementarian viewpoint on gender roles; however, there are indeed many evangelicals that combine traditional and well as more progressive

ideals into their belief systems. Because evangelicals tend to view the Bible as literal truth, those members that advocate for forms of gender equality often struggle with reconciling their beliefs with their practices. This also holds true for more traditional evangelicals who tout forms of gender equality but affirm patriarchal structures in the home and church. Nonetheless, evangelicalism and feminist ideals are not always at odds. The evolution of evangelical thought towards these more “liberal” viewpoints, however, has been slow.

In “Evangelicalism, Social Identity, and Gender Attitudes Among Women,” Clyde Wilcox argues against some scholars’ beliefs that labor force participation will lead to more egalitarian views among evangelical women. He believes that evangelical women tend to retain their role as homemakers and often are already considered “working women” when they enter the labor force. Because of this, evangelical women “experience less of a change in their social identity” (353). What is most compelling about Wilcox’s argument is his assertion, “Evangelical women will not become more feminist as they continue to enter the labor force, because the patterns of their social identities “inoculate” them against such change.” He believes that the patterns of their social identities are in fact “maintained by their religious networks” (360). Evangelical women are therefore not as dramatically affected by a social identity shift when entering into the workforce and are less inclined to sympathize with some feminist ideals. He concludes his argument with the suggestion that “changes in gender attitudes among evangelicals will likely be gradual” (361). Although this article was written over twenty years ago, the same statement could be made today. Evangelicals do, in fact, change gradually.

Although evangelicals do adopt feminist beliefs on at least one issue (Wilcox and Cook 1989), their overall change in gender role ideologies and attitudes on social issues have been gradual. Why? Evangelicals believe in the inerrancy of the scripture. Because the scripture itself does not change, the only way for evangelical beliefs to change is for the religious network itself to change. As demonstrated by neo-evangelicals and biblical feminists first demands for equality, the ability for evangelicals on a whole to see equality as a biblical ideal is not a given. Even as we stand today, the idea of biblical equality has still not taken root across the entire evangelical spectrum and even if a majority believes it *should* exist, it is not always practiced. Over the last forty years, as male headship has become more symbolic and patriarchy has softened, it would appear that women have been treated more fairly on a whole and more opportunities have opened for women.

A 2012 study conducted by the Barna Foundation found that 84% of Christian women felt that their church was either totally open or mostly open to women. Moreover, 54% felt that the churches actions indicated that it valued the leadership of woman as much as men (“Christian Women Today”). In 1999 women filled 5% of senior pastor positions, a percentage that has since doubled to 10% as of 2009 (“Number of Female Senior Pastors”). So while women appear to have a positive view of their church’s view on women and more women are filling the ranks of senior pastors than a decade ago, these changes have happened at a slower rate than that of their secular or more mainline counterparts. However, as a younger generation of evangelicals begins to enter into the leadership ranks of evangelical institutions, I believe that it is far more likely that the “religious networks” that evangelicals exist within will begin to change

more rapidly than the last forty years has seen. As one thirty-year-old male evangelical puts it:

We evangelicals must accept that our beliefs are now in conflict with the mainstream culture. We cannot change ancient doctrines to adapt to the currents of the day. But we can, and must, adapt the way we hold our beliefs — with grace and humility instead of superior hostility. The core evangelical belief is that love and forgiveness are freely available to all who trust in Jesus Christ. This is the “good news” from which the evangelical name originates (“euangelion” is a Greek word meaning “glad tidings” or “good news”). Instead of offering hope, many evangelicals have claimed the role of moral gatekeeper, judge and jury. If we continue in that posture, we will continue to invite opposition and obscure the “good news” we are called to proclaim. (Dickerson)

Moreover, it is not entirely unlikely that additional evangelicals will begin to adopt the term feminist and redefine their association with it. In recent years, we have seen a handful of prominent conservative Christian women, such as Sarah Palin and Rep. Michele Bachmann, adopting the term feminist and translating it to mean a strong, powerful, conservative Christian woman. In an article published by *the Washington Post* in 2011, “Evangelical women rise as new ‘feminists’,” Lisa Miller argues that although the term feminist is a “dirty word” among many evangelical circles, “some conservative Christian women are tentatively claiming the feminist label for themselves. In the reframing . . . ‘feminist’ is a fiscally conservative, pro-life butt-kicker in public, a cooperative helpmate at home, and a Christian wife and mother, above all” (Miller). Marie Griffith, author and religious historian, believes that the use of feminist terminology by these conservative Christian women appeals to evangelical women because of the focus on the family and motherhood. Griffith believes that she can “really see evangelicals taking hold of that view that women can speak about righteous godly things, just as men can. They can make an impact on the world. Not only that, they should make an impact on the world” (Miller). This re-defining of feminism has its own

set of complications for the evangelical community but one thing is certain, some conservative Christian women are proudly taking on leadership roles and touting their gender as a source of their power.

Lastly, where does this leave gender roles in the evangelical community? Although a greater proportion of evangelicals follow more traditional or complementarian viewpoints, women are becoming a prominent voice within the movement and engaging with the political arena more so than they have in recent decades. As more prominent evangelical women begin using the term “feminism,” they will continue to push the boundaries of what behaviors are deemed acceptable for evangelical women and redefine what it means to be an evangelical feminist. This version of feminism is extremely watered down in comparison to its liberal, secular feminist counterparts; however, the utilization of the term feminism opens some doors. It may begin to dispel “feminism” as a “dirty word.” Also, if this term continues to be used by prominent conservative Christian women, it may open up opportunities and spaces for evangelical feminists to push harder for women’s equality and advocate for greater egalitarianism within the church and home. To be sure, the use of the word “feminist” by the likes of Sarah Palin has sent some liberal, secular feminists screaming all the way to Alaska, but a minority of conservative Christian women are standing up and advocating that they too can derive power from their gender. The patriarchal structures that are so inherent in the evangelical community may continue to go mostly unquestioned for decades to come but this will not stop powerful evangelical women from becoming preachers, governors, politicians and advocates. Even so, gender hierarchies within the community remain mostly unscathed. As evangelical women continue to advocate for

their gender and adopt feminist ideals and labels, it would be an optimistic goal to hope that the power structures themselves will soon change.

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