

**RELIGION AND WOMANISM IN THE LIVES OF CENTRAL TEXAS
AFRICAN AMERICAN BAPTIST WOMEN**

A Dissertation

by

DEIDRA ROCHELLE TURNER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2007

Major Subject: Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Religion and Womanism in the Lives of Central Texas African American Baptist

Women. (August 2007)

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African American Baptist churches are not known as bastions of sexual equality. The dominance of males in the pulpit and the conservative and literal interpretation of the Bible often support this idea. African American women, however, were influential in building and expanding the role of the African American church as well as their role within the church, and they remain the greatest percentage of the congregation. African American women, particularly those with a high level of religious commitment, utilize their religious beliefs to construct their ideas of womanhood and those religious beliefs may be shaped by an underlying womanist ideology. This dissertation offers insight into understanding the tension between the perceived sexism in the African American church and women's continued work in their congregations and utilization of their religious beliefs. Twenty women between the ages of 25 and 55 were encouraged to tell their stories about their experiences with religion in interviews. Each woman's interview focused on her religious beliefs and church involvement past and present, how her beliefs and activities affected how she felt about herself, and her opinion of women's

influence in the church. Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed for perceptions of self, inequality, power and a connection with womanism.

In speaking to each woman could be found the tenets of womanism wrestling with conservative religious beliefs. Despite their church's conservative environment, the participants attributed their positive self-regard to their faith. Strength, independence, leadership, independent thinking and being community minded were attributes these women sought to emulate and pass on to others.

While the participants understood themselves to be equal to men and capable of wielding the power of influence, at the same time there is contentment with or tolerance for the current male dominant structure of their church. This is due to a belief in a hierarchical system of control at home and church, referred to as the 'God-head hierarchy'. God controls all, man answers to God and woman answers to man. The complexity of womanhood shows as they try to negotiate and interpret their religious ideas with their personal experiences.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the countless family members and friends that continuously encouraged me. To my husband, Darron, thank you for being a rock and a sounding board. To my parents, James and Queen, thank you for instilling in me a strong belief system and for being role models of faith. To Karen Atchison, thank you for giving me a place to study and fellowship and for being a constant resource.

To My Brothers:

Earl, John Desmond, Kavin, Darrell, Daryl, Tony and Willie

To The Sisters:

Sister Annie Lee Botts, Sister Audrey Thompson, Sister Audrey Botts, Sister Naomi Brazzell, Sister Rosia Lee Samuel, Sister Doris Jean Bullock, and Sister Billie Jo King

To My Sisters:

Sheryl, Shalonda, Trinia, Dawn, Roslynn, Mona, Damali, Djuana, Aisha, Leigh, Zoranna, Rachel, Nury, Tiffany, Lisa and Pam

To The Sisterhood:

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated

Thank you for the wisdom and guidance. Thank you for the laughter and support. Thank you for being my heroes and sheroes. To the village that has raised this child, I will always be in your debt. May I give back as much in my lifetime as you have given to me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My family moved to Houston when I was nine. It was then that church became a major part of our upbringing. We joined a very conservative Baptist church. My father, who previously did not attend church, became active, which prompted greater attendance for everyone. As my father moved from choir member to deacon to minister, our attendance was mandated each time the church door opened, whether for a service of some kind, piano lessons or cleaning the church. Not only our schedule but our lifestyle changed dramatically due to this church's teachings. Women were not allowed to wear what pertained to a man (Deuteronomy 22:5), which meant tossing all my pants and shorts in the trash. When cleaning the church, I had to stand at the bottom of the steps while vacuuming the pulpit, because women were not allowed in this space (I Timothy 3:2). We were asked not to eat certain foods (Leviticus 11) or cook on Sunday (Exodus 35). Because the husband is the head of the household, the pastor did not allow his wife to work, and my mother soon followed suit (Colossians 3). I was often brought before the congregation to verbally verify that I was still a virgin (I Corinthians 6:18). Services were boisterous, full of shouts of praise, dancing in the spirit, and speaking in tongues; and for the most part we were close knit. Yet, I found myself constantly challenging my Sunday School teachers, looking for the exception to the rule. "If men shouldn't wear

This dissertation follows the style of *American Sociological Review*.

earrings, why were they asked to bring them to Aaron when he was making the golden calf (Exodus 32:2)?”

As I entered college, I quickly began shedding the traditional readings of the biblical text and sought not only new answers but new questions. In reading womanist works about black women in various denominations and also reading womanist theology, I began to wonder if the women written about in these books resembled the women with whom I attended church. My assumptions about who they were and what they believe, these women working faithfully in conservative churches, prompted me to direct my research towards them.

Regardless of age, women normally outscore men on measures of religiousness, and church involvement is more closely related to life satisfaction for blacks than for whites (Ellison 1993; Ozorak 1996). Also, religion has played a significant role in the history of African Americans, and women continue to make up the majority of the congregation. For these reasons it would seem to bear importance on self-definition in African American women. As a result, the analytical framework must bring together this area along with others to generate a more complete story of factors that determine how African American women define themselves as women and the relative importance of those factors. Also, womanist writers such as Patricia-Ann Johnson have noted that in order for womanism to thrive, it must move beyond academia and become a part of daily conversations with African American women. A starting point of common ground in moving discussions of womanism and womanist theology must be found.

There is much debate over religion's influence as positive or negative where women are concerned. Some evidence supports the idea that it serves as an oppressive conservative force keeping women bound to and unquestioning of traditional roles. Ozorak (1996) notes that such authors as Morgan and Scanzoni (1987), Chusmir and Koberg (1988), Jones and McNamara (1991) and Dhruvarajan (1990) find devoutness or high religiosity connected to gender-role stereotyping, lower levels of motivation, diminished interest in career, and social inequality. Still others find it to be a liberating force open to an interpretation that gives women strength and freedom. Ozorak (1996) also cites Spilka, Hood, and Gorsuch (1985) as seeing rewards for religious faith that include comfort, security, and a sense of belonging and personal growth. Ellison (1993) cites Maton (1987) and Maton and Rappaport (1984) in discussing the socioemotional support and tangible aid provided by the church. Watt (2003) found that it helped college women shape their identity.

In viewing the situation of women in black churches, particularly the National Baptist Convention member churches, one might assume that the lack of their presence in the pulpit is a reflection of a forgotten voice, oppression, and formalized power controlled by men. But Black women have reinterpreted and refuted scripture that did not fit into their experiences for generations. Women such as Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee were early forerunners in African American women's religious leadership. In the early 1800's Stewart, an abolitionist, was the first known American woman – white or black – to speak before a mixed audience of men and women. She utilized the Bible as the basis for her right to speak publicly. She employed examples of

Deborah and Esther to emphasize her point of women's rights. Sojourner Truth felt led by God to change her name from Isabella Baumfree and to *sojourn* through the land to preach the *truth* concerning slavery. Because she was illiterate, she claimed her only text was "when I met God," focusing on her personal experience and relating it to her audience. Before the formal establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Jarena Lee, a member, announced her calling to the ministry and became the first woman within that church to do so. Her announcement caused much debate within the young denomination, and though she was never officially recognized, she did not let that impede her ministry. Stewart, Truth and Lee were outstanding examples of black women utilizing their own experiences to emphasize biblical women who reflected their personal experiences. The Bible's authority was used to forge new ground not only within the church but also within the community. It was not seen as a hindrance to them as women but a definer of their purpose in life.

However, for much of the existence of black Protestant denominations, women were blocked from formal leadership positions, especially ordained ministry. After emancipation the newly created Protestant African American congregations were the primary organizations African Americans controlled. Jim Crow laws existing through the early 1970's restricted where African Americans ate, slept, went to school, worked and their participation in government. So, greater power was assumed within the churches by black men, who often created stricter rules and norms for black women, thereby barring them from the pulpit and positions of formal leadership (Harris 1999). This block is also seen as resulting from patriarchal values and gender bias of

mainstream Christianity and the broader culture moving into the practices of black churches (Harris 1999).

In discussing religion and the church, I borrow an explanation from Marcia Riggs, who uses “the term black or African American church to refer to those congregational settings where African American Christians predominate: congregants and leaders of independent, historically black-controlled denominations and members and leaders in local congregations within white mainline denominations.” She, as do I, realizes that

the use of the term black or African American church seems to ignore the pluralism that characterizes African American religious experience and churches. However, [we] join established scholarship in using the term black or African American church ‘as a kind of sociological and theological shorthand reference to the pluralism of black Christian churches in the United States’ (Riggs 2003, p.18-19).

I enter the field with my own biases, having grown up in conservative Baptist churches watching women work to maintain the Sunday ritual and also living among the women being interviewed. Entering college and being introduced to feminism, womanism and womanist theology, I also watched my own opinions, beliefs and practices transform. Nevertheless, the research will attempt to determine how African American women currently active in conservative National Baptist Convention of America member churches interpret church teachings on the roles of women, how those teachings affect their attitudes about themselves as women, and on what wider philosophical perspectives such as womanism these beliefs rest.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Construction of Gender

Even to those who believe that in the beginning God created life male and female and that the female was created as a helper comparable to the male, there still looms the question of what it means to be man or woman. Early studies in the mid to late 1800's concentrated on the biology of each creation – brain size, height, strength, etc., to define the sexes and justify gender inequities. The classical tradition of sociology confined the discussion of women largely to issues of family and as part of broader theories of structures that were considered gender neutral. The effects of culturally defined masculinity and femininity on shaping the structures and processes central to their theories were largely unrecognized (Chafetz 1999). Sociologists have furthered the discussion to include the social elements that affect not only the characteristics that we use to define men and women but also the wide use of only two sexes to describe humans.

West and Zimmerman conceive of gender as a negotiated emergent feature of social situations. It serves as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements (West and Zimmerman 1987). The automatic placement in a sex category and the creation of “essential” differences makes doing gender unavoidable and sustains the normalcy and legitimacy of social arrangements based on sex category. Doing

gender inappropriately will call into account the behaviors of the individuals and not the institutional arrangements (West and Zimmerman 1987). For Bartowski and Read (2003), religion is not a static hierarchical institution but a cultural “tool kit” of resources, dictates and prescriptions as to how women are to negotiate or do gender appropriately. For these reasons many women may be reluctant to press for changes in their congregations. The fear of being isolated from a major source of comfort for not following the norm may be too overwhelming of a burden. This may help to explain why women remain faithful to traditions that seem oppressive. Women ministers in certain conservative Baptist churches, whether married or single, would also be suspect, as their preaching performance could be seen as an imitation of masculinity. The biblical text, as interpreted by church leadership, provides mandates for women’s roles within the church and the family, proper attire and decorum.

For Nancy Chodorow (1995), gender is not only constructed by social situations.

Gender is an ongoing emotional creation and intrapsychic interpretation of cultural meanings and of bodily, emotional, and self-other experiences, all mediated by conscious and unconscious fantasy (p. 540-1).

Within the development of identity by the family through socialization, identification, and enforcement, there is also a personal experienced gender and self-construction. The psyche produces social and cultural forms of masculinity and femininity and vice versa. This idea is necessary to explain how aspects of traditional roles continue through counter instruction and as ideologies shift (Chodorow 1978; Chodorow 1995). Gender is therefore constructed not only by family and culture but also by personal meaning to which no universal claim can be made. So, while the women in this study share the

same faith, each personal experience creates a different approach to reading the biblical text and utilizing it in everyday life. Therefore, even as the research seeks to find similarities in the defining of womanhood, each woman's experiences may highlight varying aspects.

Gender, then, can be seen as a product of socialization, personal interpretation of experiences, structural constraints, situational needs and negotiated performances. All of these things should be considered when investigating personal definitions of womanhood. While the answers may be diverse and complex, the information gathered gives us further insight into cultural and situational aspects of the ideas of womanhood.

Intersectionality

Black feminist thought shares the idea with Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalysis that identity involves both the social-cultural-political and the "individual creativities of consciousness" (Chodorow 1995, p.518). Accordingly, within the second wave of feminism, women of color, particularly black women, began to highlight the nuances of their social situation as compared to the dominant feminist theory. Not only were women of color affected by patriarchy but also by what they argued was a racist capitalist society. As black feminist thought began to develop fully, it continued to locate the interlocking, multiplicative relationship of oppressions as a core theme, giving them a humanist vision that shunned separatist solutions to oppression (Collins 1986).

Intersectionality provides an interpretive framework for the individual and group experience.

Yet, treating race, class, and gender as if their intersection produces equivalent results for all oppressed groups obscures differences in how race, class and gender are hierarchically organized, as well as the differential effects of intersecting systems of power on diverse groups of people (Collins 1998, p. 211).

Patricia Hill Collins (1992) uses Dorothy Smith's stance of "knowing from within" to press for a standpoint theory that recognizes the multiple systems that define a person. She posits that gender alone cannot explain personal development, identity, or social systems, and that there needs to be an understanding of how various systems interact to affect people. bell hooks (1991), in agreement, notes that sociology must deconstruct the category "woman" in order to move beyond the focus on gender as the sole determinant of identity. Subordinate groups divided by race, class or gender experience a different reality from the dominant group and therefore interpret that reality differently (Collins 1989). Just as personal experience influences gender, the intersectionality of other structures creates differences in the experiences of those within the same group. Though the participants in this study share the same race, religion, and gender, each structure plus additional social structures such as class can create differing definitions of womanhood.

Therefore, in exploring the definition of womanhood, social location in addition to the context of their lives must be taken into consideration. "Context refers to the real historical and contemporary aspects of life: where people live, what they eat, the political milieu, and child-rearing practices..."(Mitchem 2002, p. 6). Intersectionality highlights, then, how social structures such as race, class and religion assist in creating

the environment for familial socialization, personal interpretation of experiences and social interactions. As African American women stand at the crossroads of various social structures, a standpoint is created which includes an often overlooked everyday knowledge that womanism seeks to articulate.

Womanism and Womanist Theology

In 1983, Alice Walker published a book of prose entitled *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*. At the beginning of the book as a four-part definition, Walker created the term 'womanism' (see Appendix D). With roots in the black folk tradition, this definition inspired women to re-explore and redefine feminism.

Womanism evokes elements of feminism in its commitment to fighting sexism and goes further to emphasize the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender. Womanism implies an investment in the connection of all races and alleviating social injustice of any kind. Alice Walker expounds on this by stating,

Black children, yellow children, red children, brown children that is the black woman's normal, day-to-day relationship. In my family alone, we are about four different colors. When a black woman looks at the world, it is so different . . . when I look at the people in Iran they look like kinfolk. When I look at the people in Cuba, they look like my uncles and nieces (Walker 1984, p. 24).

A womanist aims to be empowered by a positive self-definition, interprets her own reality, and defines her objectives. She exudes strength and courage and is a powerful and independent subject. Her cultural heritage lends itself to her leadership capabilities. Walker describes her as audacious. Allan defines audacious behavior as a

“rich, self-affirming psychological resource that facilitates survival advantage in the social pecking order” necessary to overcome “arrogant authority” (Allan 1995, p. 439). Also, according to Allan (1995), womanism is pro-woman without negating the unity-seeking component of the definition. It affirms black women’s connection with men through love and through a shared struggle for survival and productive living. Finally, a womanist appreciates fine arts, nature, and spirituality and is given to hospitality and care of others.

Contemporary womanist theology critiques sexism, misogyny and abuse of women found within biblical texts and has a concern for the Bible’s use as a tool of oppression. Womanist theology uses black women’s history, culture and religious experience to interpret theology and church liturgy (Weems 1991). It is a womanist theology that is concerned with survival, community building and community maintenance of not only the black Christian community but also the larger community. Womanist theology permits black women to define themselves and embrace and affirm cultural and religious traditions (Ruether 1995). It also goes beyond sex oppression to investigate all institutions of oppression evident in the biblical text. The theology stresses the equality of all beings regardless of sexual orientation, among other things. While suffering and oppression are often viewed as the norm for black women, womanist theology seeks to resist the idea of passive suffering as redemptive and virtuous. Womanist theology seeks to abandon naïve Biblicism that supports traditional Christian paradigms of suffering and draws instead from an African American experience (Johnson 2002).

For the womanist theologian, the Bible is scriptural authority but not to be taken literally in every aspect. Women's experiences are positioned as instruments to critique biblical interpretations. Therefore, black women, as marginalized readers, retain the right to resist biblical passages that they find antagonistic (Weems 1991). These experiences enable them to press for more loving relationships based on equity. Its long history of speaking to oppressed peoples has made it a significant resource in the lives of black women and a major source of religious validation (Grant 1993). Like feminist theology, womanist theology is committed to remembering and retelling the lives and sufferings of biblical women, but these stories are read and interpreted in light of black women's experiences. These experiences often involve suffering and oppression, and the Bible, for womanists, speaks to the deepest aspirations of oppressed people for freedom, dignity, justice and vindication (Ruether 1995). In this way, womanists argue that the Bible provides hope for liberation of the downtrodden, in addition to giving insight into contemporary dilemmas of black women, reflecting values, and advocating a way of life many black women strive towards (Weems 1991). Womanist theology also reads within the Bible support for the tenets of womanism.

In summary, womanism calls for an emphasis on community, on empowerment of black women as equal partners with men, and on the struggle against injustice in any form. Womanism requires women to believe in themselves as capable leaders and recognize this history of leadership in the faith text. Within a religious context, it is used to interpret the faith text from the reader's standpoint and move the reader from

oppressed to empowered. Womanism and womanist theology provide a venue for women of color to continue to battle inequality within the walls of the Protestant church.

African Americans and the Protestant Religion

In his work, *African American Christianity*, Paul Johnson speaks of the black slaves' conversion to Christianity (1994). From the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, Christianity was reluctantly shared with slaves. It was first thought that English law forbade enslavement of Christians. Even after legislation declared that baptism did not alter slave status, slave owners still opposed a message of equality or liberty being shared with enslaved persons. This was felt to confuse and threaten the racial social order. For those that did attempt to indoctrinate their slaves with Christianity, they would filter the message through white ministers who focused on scriptures related to servitude, avoiding such stories as Moses' deliverance of Israel from bondage. When white churches allowed slaves to be a part of the congregation, they were seated separately, normally in a balcony. Only there to listen, they did not vote on church affairs or serve in any capacity. When slaves met privately for their own services, they conducted them as they saw fit. Enslaved black women occasionally served as preachers and teachers to these clandestine congregations (Gilkes 2001).

In 1701, the Church of England began a concerted effort to convince slave owners of the necessity of slave conversion. Their argument insisted that spiritual equality would not mean moral equality. Christianity would make the slaves more

obedient and docile. The Anglican message during the first 120 years of American slavery attracted very few. It was not until the Baptist and Methodist evangelistic revivals that followed the Great Awakening beginning in the 1740's, that slaves embraced Christianity in large numbers. All classes of society were welcome to participate in these boisterous and charismatic revivals and prayer services. Free blacks and slaves attended and served as exhorters and preachers. While the Baptist and Methodist evangelicalism of 1770-1820 failed to convince most whites of the equality of slave and free, it created a group of black preachers who began to pastor, and assisted African Americans in creating a Christianity that unified the sacred and the secular. In fact, the expressivism and message of equality of the Methodist and Baptist faiths influenced many emancipated slaves' and free blacks' decision to join these denominations during Reconstruction and on (Johnson 1994).

The black Protestant church, through the 20th and into the 21st century, has remained the predominant organization in the black community. Forty-three percent of African Americans attend church on a given Sunday. Sixty to seventy percent of the church membership is women (Pinn 2002). However, men dominate the formal leadership of the three largest African American denominations – the National Baptist Convention, African Methodist Episcopal, and Church of God in Christ. Only an estimated 5% of the combined congregational clergy in these denominations are women (Pinn 2002).

African Americans and the Baptist Church

The first black Baptist congregation was recorded to have organized on the plantation of William Byrd in 1758, and the first black Baptist congregation led by a black preacher was formed between 1773 and 1775 in Silver Bluff, South Carolina. From 1815 to 1880, many black Baptists worked through white Baptist churches via the African Baptist Missionary Society, but faced with various slights of a racist nature, knew they needed to form their own organizing body. Many regional and national organizations were formulated, but the longest lasting is the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. (NBC), founded in 1894. It has spawned several new organizations, one of those being the National Baptist Convention of America. Currently, there are eight identifiable black Baptist organizations in the United States, with the NBC being the largest. The NBC is also the largest African American organization in existence with a membership that includes nearly a fourth of the blacks in the United States in the late 1980's (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990). Women's activities in the NBC are channeled through the Women's Convention, a department of the denomination that was established in 1900.

The general consensus within these Baptist congregations is firmly against the ordination of women, although there is no official stance. In a study by Lincoln and Mamiya, nearly 73.6% of black Baptist ministers indicated a disapproval of women serving as pastors (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990). But, as Baptist churches are not linked in

the same way as the African Methodist Episcopal or the Church of God in Christ, each local congregation is free to ordain whom they see fit, women included.

African American Women and Sources of Power

Elizabeth Brooks Higginbotham notes that by the late 1800's as the black church grew and became more 'regularized,' a greater degree of patriarchy within the structure began to take shape. Black women responded by developing a 'feminist theology' within the black church. Higginbotham describes this feminist/womanist theology as one that conforms to Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin's concept of a "stance of 'radical obedience'" (Higginbotham 1993, p. 122). Black women's feminist/womanist theology characterized women as having the capacity to influence men and emphasized positive use of the power of persuasion (Higginbotham 1993).

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw positions such as stewardess and deaconess, and missionary and auxiliary groups such as the National Baptist Convention's Women's Convention, open up new avenues for women's leadership within the church. According to Higginbotham (1993), Gilkes (2001), and Dodson (2002), women's positions allowed them to influence the community and the church and positively persuade the leadership in directions beneficial to women. The deaconess role gave women legitimacy as informal spiritual leaders. Because their work keeps them in close contact with the pastor, they are in a position to effect change. Deaconesses are usually older than the average adult member and hold much respect in their church and

community. Their influence can sway formal leadership as well as other laypersons. In addition to her duties assigned by the pastor, a deaconess cares for the garments and coverings of the altar and baptismal pool. Her services are key to some of the most important rituals of the church – communion and baptism. Most women serving in these positions are married to deacons and stewards, so their personal relationships also give them a direct line to the ear of the church leadership (Higginbotham 1993, Dodson 2002). However, this role is not a decision-making role, and the real authority rests with the male leadership.

Another source of women's influence is their numerical strength within the congregation as well as the length of time they have been members of the church. "Church mother" is a title bestowed upon an older churchwoman who is respected for her wisdom and spirituality. She provides the necessary continuity over the changing historical conditions (Gilkes 2001). As keepers of the church history, in a position reflective of that within the black family, church mothers are often consulted by the pastor before any new directions are undertaken in the church. Some church mothers are also church founders, preachers, and auxiliary leaders, with full formal authority within the congregation as well (Gilkes 2001).

Many women also hold the position of teacher. Their large presence in secular education made for an easy transition to spiritual education that held no gender or age restrictions. Formal education was not attainable for many blacks during the early formation of the black church, so teachers were highly valued and respected. This position gives women the chance to share their interpretation of church doctrine and

biblical passages and creates role models for the young and the women they teach. It also provides them with knowledge about denominational procedures and policies and builds valuable leadership skills.

Through the auxiliary groups such as the Women's Convention, the Women's Department, missionary societies and the various other church positions, women exhibit their influence and persuasion in the form of their organizational effectiveness. These long-standing organizations provide the structured volunteer network that aids in the workings of the denomination inside the local church and within the community. Normally self-governing bodies, women's auxiliaries and women's church positions focus projects in areas that they deem important, and the women maintain the most control over the project. The Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention endorsed the establishment in 1909 of the National Training School for Women and Girls, the first school for black women that was owned by black women. They also established a settlement house in Washington, D.C. in 1913 (Higginbotham 1993). From the beginning, the black church has provided social services to the community such as health services, tutoring, scholarships, and schools. Without women's groups leading the charge, these social services would go understaffed and often under funded.

As the majority of church congregations, women also hold economic influence. The black church in America is congregationalist and therefore prospers or folds on the basis of its membership. So, although men may control the formal financial and governing portion of the church, women laity can always choose to secede. Or, if a financial decision is made with which the lay strongly disagree, they are able to withhold

adequate funding. In practice, women use this power sparingly but strategically within the church. Just as auxiliaries provide organized volunteers to maintain the presence of the church, these volunteers also give and help raise funds necessary to enact church projects. What is obvious is that the women's groups are not mere mindless workers in their response to requests for assistance by church leaders. They often use passive resistance similar to that used in the Civil Rights Movement to show their disapproval and enact changes.

Black women used the Bible and the church's stance on social justice to sanction both domestic and public roles for women. Women's organizational leadership found within the black church has translated well into the social sphere. Their experience within the church also made them legitimate leaders within the social and political aspects of the black community. Black churchwomen brought their leadership and organizational skills, their ability to interact across class, age and gender and the strong tie to black social issues and moral grounding to secular organizations, including the highly successful club movement. Their influence in secular organizations helped to enhance their standing within the churches as well. In all of these ways, then, black women exercised some influence and power within the churches, despite their lack of formal leadership positions.

African American Women and Barriers to Power

Despite the various forms of informal influence, black church women must still work within a hierarchical structure in which formal power positions are in the hands of men. While providing women a voice, even the development of womanist theology did not change the hierarchical structure of the black church or inhibit men's assumption of their intellectual and physical superiority over women (Higginbotham 1993). Womanist theologian Jacquelyn Grant believes that black male leadership in churches celebrates women as the "backbone" of the church in order to keep them in the "background" (Frederick 2003, p.4). By celebrating the supportive roles played by women, the effect for some may be back handed encouragement to remain faithful in their current positions. Moving away from them would be seen as abandoning one's post. The hegemonic domain of power's significance lies in its ability to shape consciousness via the manipulation of ideas, images, symbols, and ideologies. Religious teachings have long been engendered gender ideologies needed to maintain inequality (Collins 2000). These include injunctions against women speaking in church or exercising power over men, for example.

In most black conservative churches, women are not allowed to be associate ministers or pastors. Preaching is the most masculine of the pillars of the black church and is the most prominent aspect of the central ritual event – the church service (Gilkes 2001). For this reason and the church's influence in the black community, the black minister is often its spokesperson. Even in politics, ministers are most likely to be

approached when officials are seeking someone to represent the “voice” of the black community on civic boards and in appointive political offices (Gilkes 2001, p.205).

Women are therefore bypassed as representatives despite their overwhelming presence in the church and the community. For Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, it seems as though the churches with the broadest appeal in black communities facing great crises have thrown up the greatest barriers to women’s empowerment in their national bodies and local congregations because of the restrictions on women’s leadership (Gilkes 2001).

Even as the number of women entering the Protestant ministry has increased significantly, black women completing seminary are seeking ordination and employment primarily in the mainline, predominantly white denominations, thus draining away resources from black churches. While these denominations are more open to women preaching, even these women are often assigned pastoral duties in small churches or as associate ministers who may specialize in religious education or youth work which may or may not be their first choice. There has been a struggle for clergywomen, white and black, to be promoted or assigned larger, more prominent churches, although gains have been made in recent years. Without these experiences, they are blocked from higher administrative positions within the denomination’s governing body (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

Some observers view every element of religion as prejudiced against women (Ozorak 1996), arguing that the structure, content and purpose of religion lends itself to women’s disempowerment. Proponents of this view claim that religion cannot be changed without its complete dismantling. In support of this view, Ozorak (1996),

reviewed previous studies that found a causal link between women's religious commitment and choosing family over career, adhering to stereotyped gender roles and having the least resistance to social inequality.

Also, the actions of Protestant women of color are not only judged against interpreted biblical standards but also ethnic/racial standards of womanhood, another inhibitor of gender empowerment. For African American women, this often means adhering to a "strong black woman" type and placing issues of race over issues of gender. Beth Richie would define this as "gender entrapment" where both she and Mitchem (2002) see the lure for African American women to fit a perceived role by being "good" according to social conventions and not shame the race. Hargrove, Schmidt and Davaney (1985) agree, stating that

generally where ethnicity is a primary part of the religion, women are likely to be strongly reinforced in the kind of personal and family piety that can be utilized to maintain a group's ethnic identity (p.123).

Even politically active churches that have a more positive view of black feminism, generally do not give gender and racial issues equal attention, nor do they emphasize that black women should share equally in the political leadership of the African American community or identify as feminists (Calhoun-Brown 1999). Allison Calhoun-Brown (1999) also found that older people tend to believe in the equal importance of the problems of black men and women but Baptist identification is a negative predictor of a belief that all forms of discrimination should be addressed simultaneously. In the same study, Calhoun-Brown also found that those who are

heavily involved in church, regardless of age, are less likely to approve of women as preachers. Christopher Ellison (1993) further states that

regular interaction with like minded church members may reinforce basic role identities and role expectations....these persons may gain affirmation that their personal conduct and emotions with regard to daily events, experiences, and community affairs are reasonable and appropriate (p.1029).

This type of group reinforcement can also serve as a means to ostracize those who do not adhere to community standards.

Finally, some women may not even recognize the potential for power in their roles. Those historians, sociologists, theologians, and other academicians interpreting the actions of church women typically do so from a feminist/womanist perspective that may not be pervasive or acknowledged within the black church membership. Women must first be made aware of their potential before challenges to inequality can be made.

Conservative Attitudes and Women's Roles

Regardless of the faith or political affiliation, conservative women utilize similar methods to align personal activities with beliefs often deemed oppressive. Ozorak (1996) referred to this as 'cognitive restructuring.' Women reinterpreted their environment within the boundaries of their faith to maintain a high sense of self. Klatch's (1987) study of politically social conservative women found them comparable to women in conservative religious groups. All found women's roles in line with traditional ideas of gender which includes support for men and an orientation towards others.

The women of faith considered the roles of wife and mother to be preeminent. While the Mormon women in Beaman's (2001) study were encouraged to attend college and be prepared to live independently, being a stay-at-home mother was the most valued position. Divorce is an option that can create tension between the woman and her faith.

As wives, the women believe in being submissive to their husband. Mormon women in Beaman's (2001) study equated male headship with husband/wife equality. Each person, husband and wife, has specialized areas, or different roles but both set of roles are considered of equal importance. For them, in the Genesis reading of the creation story they interpret "helpmate" as an equal companion that reflects God's design. Bartowski and Read's (2003) study of evangelical women found similar reasoning and reading of the biblical text. Women are not seen as inferior because they submit to their husbands. These women considered themselves empowered by their choice of submission. They are not doormats. While the husband makes the final decisions, the participants in their study considered it proper for husbands to first have a discussion with the wife. Ammerman's (1987) Fundamentalist participants agreed, the couple should arrive at consensus prior to the husband making any final decisions. For the Mormon women in Beaman's (2001) study, the Latter Day Saints' stance on family was not considered restrictive or inhibiting to their autonomy. Similarly, Muslim women in Bartowski and Read's (2003) study found the hijab liberating by allowing women to pursue public sphere activities and intermingle with men. It is also seen as a symbol of devotion to Allah and serves to unify Muslims.

Separate roles were not only seen as necessary for proper functioning of the family, but because the duties complimented what was considered the gender's 'natural' disposition. Bartowski and Read's (2003) evangelical participants found different roles necessary because of men's weaknesses. Bartowski and Read's (2003) Muslim participants also saw the hijab as necessary because men lack sexual restraint. The Mormon women in Beaman's (2001) study referred to the limiting of the role of priests to men because of their egos and the need to look good. The Catholic women in Manning's (1997) study saw the role of the priesthood limited to men because women are more spiritual than men, and being a priest keeps men more in tune with God. Some also believed that God gives women other forms of spiritual expression, such as having babies, which men could not express.

Men as priests/preachers were seen as man's role not only because they needed to be closer to God but also because God has placed men as the head. Manning's (1997) conservative Catholic participants considered the priesthood as a male role because the priest represents Christ. Yet, men must use this position responsibly and even though the Mormon women of Beaman's (2001) study saw the position as good for men's ego, men are not to use the position for their own good. But because of the weaknesses of humans, it was not the structure of religion, but human imperfection that causes feelings of exploitation.

While these women find feminism is at odds with their belief system, their comments reflected its influence. Manning's (1997) conservative Catholic respondents opposed women's ordination but insisted they were not against women's equality. The

social conservatives in Klatch's (1987) study found feminism to encourage women to abandon their husband and children to pursue personal interests, yet they were all very active in political mobilization. However, those conservatives in Manning's (1997) study also felt that not only disrespect for women's bodies but women's efforts to duplicate male ideals of achievement led them to accept patriarchal norms that devalued women. Those in Klatch's (1987) study also protested the prevalence of male values only because a gender-free society negated traditional female qualities needed to sustain a moral society.

Self-Identity and Religion

Despite a decline nationally in church attendance, the African American population still maintains steady growth in church attendance with women attending at a rate higher than men. Religious involvement has been said to serve many purposes including being a source of support (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990), a tool of resistance (Robinson and Ward 1991), a stress buffer (Maton 1989), and a source of comfort, security, a sense of belonging, and personal growth (Spilka, Hood, and Gorsuch 1985). Religion can also serve as a coping mechanism for the difficulties faced in life (Constantine et al. 2002; Pargament et al. 1990) and comprises a significant component of a believer's multifaceted identity (Maclean et al. 2004). Christopher Ellison (1993) described black churches as incubators for social and political leaders and noted that they serve as a community gathering place. Ozorak's (1996) study found that women

considered their religious work as a door to personal development that assisted with their coping skills and their ability to repair past mistakes. Indeed, some researchers argue that the psychosocial research has been flawed by its failure to consistently include the use of religion as an identity construct for African Americans (Ellison 1993; Calhoun-Brown 1999; Watt 2003; Frederick 2003).

Researchers who have set out to meet the challenge of investigating the everyday black woman and how she negotiates her daily spiritual endeavors have found that the “supportiveness and quality of fellowship provided by religious groups constitutes an important source of positive self-regard among African Americans” and “cushions the harmful effects of certain types of adversity on black self-esteem” (Ellison 1993, p.1043). African American congregations reinforce ethnic beauty, community strengths and connect the religious word directly to racial issues. Watt (2003) found that for college women, spirituality included a search for meaning which shaped identity. As African American women were more spiritually centered, there was an increase in self-esteem because they connected with their racial and gendered self. Ozorak noted that regardless of emphasized “negatives” of religion, people would “strive to maintain a positive self-concept, distorting their beliefs as necessary to do so” (1996, p.18).

As this research seeks to understand religions influence on African American women’s identity and the possible significance of womanism, it is important to remember “there is a difference between holding liberal gender issue positions and having gender consciousness. Gender consciousness implies elements of system blame, power discontent, and collectivist orientation” (Calhoun-Brown 1999). So, while the

participants may agree with the tenets of womanism, being a womanist implies actively pressing for changes in women's positions.

Purpose and Research Questions

As researchers investigate identity construction, they are confronted with the standpoint created by the intersectionality of social structures. To aid in the complexity, gender, one of these structures, is not only situational and negotiated but also created by the interpretation of personal experiences. While this task has been undertaken by many, some researchers argue that religion has been overlooked as an identity construct.

This research seeks to determine how African American women interpret church teachings on the roles of women and how those teachings affect their attitudes about themselves as women and their roles within their churches and communities. In so doing, it will add to the literature on religion as an identity construct and the current research recognizing how African American women use religion to rebuff or make sense of barriers to church leadership. Specifically, this study was designed to contribute to previous research regarding African American women within the black church and their attempts to utilize religion to define womanhood. A primary focus of this research will be to investigate the degree to which religious women in a black conservative denomination identify with the concept of womanism.

As women are more likely to be involved with church activities and African Americans attend church at a higher rate than other racial groups, religion would seem to

serve a significant role in identity construction for African American women. This study addresses the following research questions: (1) how do African American women currently active in conservative National Baptist Convention of America member churches interpret church teachings on the roles of women, (2) how do those church teachings affect their attitudes about themselves as women, and (3) on what wider philosophical perspectives such as womanism do these beliefs rest?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research questions outlined previously, I carried out a qualitative study of twenty women who were active members of churches with history in the National Baptist Convention of America. A qualitative research method utilizing interviews was chosen for several reasons. First, the alternative, quantitative research, would not allow for the depth of answer needed. While some prearranged questions were utilized, speaking with each individual led to new questions and thereby new insight. Second, personal interviews gave voice to the women. They were able to speak to their own experiences and allow those experiences to find a place in academic work. Third, in order to achieve the stated goals, a method of research that allowed for dense description of the organization of each church and the womens' personal history in the church was needed.

Sample

Women from congregations with a history in the National Baptist Convention of America in Hearne, Texas and Fort Worth, Texas were chosen based on their involvement in at least one major church auxiliary, regular church attendance, and having been a member of the church for at least a year. None were compensated. The

sample is not representative of the female membership in the National Baptist Convention of America churches.

The participants were all African American women between the ages of 22 and 55, coming of age during the second and third waves of feminism. The age limit also allowed me to select women who were post-college age and have completed the most crucial areas of social, cognitive, and moral development. There is then the hope the women have reached identity integration.

Identity integration is the development of a sense of agency and responsibility for the construction and maintenance of identity, with ones' values and philosophy of life becoming more centralized, and the possibility of identity fragmenting when behaviors do not reflect one's values (Maclean et al. 2004, p. 430).

In studying women who not only attend church on a regular basis but also are actively involved with church auxiliaries, there is the strong possibility that they operate from an intrinsic religious orientation meaning their religious beliefs do more than provide comfort or social reward. For such individuals, religious faith "gives meaning to all aspects of life, acting as the primary motive, and is fully integrated into the life of the individual, with religion serving as an end." Identity integration/commitment and an intrinsic religious orientation have been found to be positively correlated (Maclean et al. 2004, p. 430).

Thirty-seven names of possible persons to contact in Hearne were generated by members of churches that I had become acquainted with while living in the community. I then sent a letter to this first group to enlist their participation and schedule visits to conduct interviews. One had a bad address, 2 elected not to participate, 20 did not respond, 14 responded yes, and 10 of the 14 were able to arrange an interview. In

addition, nineteen names of women from one of the older churches in Fort Worth I also attended were obtained from a women's auxiliary membership roster. Ten of those women volunteered to participate and interviews were completed with all ten.

Of the twenty participants, one had lived in her respective city less than six years and the rest lived there at least 11 years. Sixteen had also attended the same church for over 11 years. Seven of the twenty women interviewed were either raised or brought to church by someone other than their parents.

One woman was in her late twenties, three were in their thirties, thirteen were in their forties, and three were over the age of 50. Six of the women held a bachelor's degree and three held a master's degree. Of the 13 women who were currently single, eight had been divorced and one was a widow. Fourteen of the participants' parents were currently married or widowed. Fifteen of the women had children (See Appendix A).

All twenty women had been baptized by the age of 13 and all were involved in a church auxiliary. The majority attended church services at least twice a week. Nine women have National Baptist Convention involvement on the district, regional, or national level. Eleven of the women participated in community work by volunteering at nursing homes, hospitals, and schools; with organizations such as AIDS outreach, United Way and the women's shelter; with community watch, booster clubs, alumni associations, scholarship funds, sororities; and volunteering through projects initiated by their employer.

Location of the Churches

Hearne is a rural town of fewer than 6,000 persons in Robertson County Texas, in what is called the “Brazos Valley.” According to 2004 U.S. Census data, Robertson County is 52.1% female and 23.1% black. Those ages 65 and older make up 16.5% of the population while those under the age of 18 make up 27.6% of the population. Only 12.7% of those 25 and older have at least a bachelor’s degree, while 68.1% hold a high school diploma. The median household income is \$30,615, with 19.1% living below the poverty level. Hearne was chosen because of its availability to the researcher and its National Baptist Convention churches operated under similar doctrines.

Fort Worth is a city of 534,694 persons in Tarrant County Texas. According to 2004 U.S. Census data, Tarrant County is 50.2% female and 13.7% black. Those ages 65 and older make up 8.3% of the population while those under the age of 18 make up 28.2% of the population. Those 25 and older with high school diplomas make up 81.3% of the population, and 26.6% of those 25 and over hold at least a bachelor’s degree. The median household income is \$47,660, with 12.9% living below the poverty level. Fort Worth was chosen because of its availability to the researcher, the chosen church also belongs to the National Baptist Convention of America, it operates under similar doctrines as those churches used in Hearne, and to serve as a comparison to women in a smaller town.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection (individual interviews, written questions, and church observations) was carried out January 2006 through August 2006. Twenty face-to-face, semi-structured interviews lasting about 45 minutes to one hour each were conducted. The tape-recorded or videotaped interviews were conducted by the researcher and took place in the participants' homes or at the participant's church, after which transcripts were made of the conversations. Individual interviews included open-ended questions organized around the three areas: personal interpretation of church doctrine on the roles of women, how those teachings affected their attitude about themselves as women and how women were influential in charting the congregation's course. The interview addressed general questions on the participants' definition of womanhood, the history of her church involvement and her personal interpretation of church doctrine involving women (See Appendix C for the interview schedule).

Participants were also asked to answer a set of eight written questions given to them either before or at the completion of the interview. The written questions focused on the participants' reaction to the definition of womanism and their interpretation of scriptures that relate to women's involvement in the home and church (See Appendix D and E). The written questions were also used to give women an opportunity to consult the actual scriptures when providing responses. They also gave me an opportunity to seek further explanations to findings from the individual interviews and church observations. Five of the ten participants in Hearne and eight of the ten participants in

Fort Worth returned answers to the eight written questions about their interpretation of various woman-focused scriptures as well as the definition of womanism.

Also, I served as a participant observer at five of the six churches the participants attended, attending one service in each. Notes regarding the make-up of the membership, those serving in various positions, and the content of the sermon were taken. One service was videotaped. The Sunday worship service observations gave a visual image to each participant's oral description of her current church practices.

Analysis

The data were analyzed by reconstructing the information gathered into themes involving the influence of church doctrine on construction of womanhood, and possible connections to womanist ideology were made. Individual recordings were transcribed verbatim as Word documents. A large right margin was created to leave room for the researcher's codes and themes. The text was broken up into data units, coded and placed in categories. Each category was re-read and the data units reevaluated for possible inclusion in a different or new category. This sorting process was done 3 times. Results were presented by describing the individual women, separated by residence. Then, the data were analyzed utilizing the Walker definition of womanism (See Appendix D). The results of these analyses are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the results of the interviews and questionnaires, organized according to parts 1 through 3 of Alice Walker's definition of womanism and several themes determined by the research questions. I conclude with an overall summary of my findings.

General Church Experience

For all of the women in the study, church attendance early in life was a positive and gratifying experience. As children, these women did not fully understand what was occurring during the service, but they did enjoy the social aspect church provided. For many of the participants, their church social circle included the same persons from school and the neighborhood. Often, they said the benefits of their religious upbringing were not realized until they grew older and endured life experiences such as nearly being shot by their toddler or rebounding from congestive heart failure.

Even for the few who stated they were forced to attend church as opposed to the others who looked forward to attending, they believed the religious foundation they received was influential in shaping their value system and providing direction in their personal and professional life. At work they share their faith with others and rely on it when they are faced with difficult people and situations. At home, they utilize it in

instructing their children and it gives them a pattern for being a successful wife.

Personally, they report that their religious practice gives them a strong feeling of self-worth. In the next few pages, I give a brief introduction to the participants.

Robertson County Participants (Hearne)

Mara is a petite woman, who at first glance, one would write off as a wall flower due to her quite voice and constant gazes at the floor. However, her comments were anything but small and frail. She gave a strong indictment against the inactivity and stagnation of the church. She feels the church is caught in tradition of its own making and is not meeting the needs of the youth nor is it utilizing the talents it has nurtured. She has two children and is in her late forties. She is not involved in community organizations and does not see herself as a womanist because she values not only women but men. However, she finds her actions, attitudes and beliefs in line with womanism.

Milcah is a tall woman with a warm smile. She is recovering from surgery but still converses with me for one of the longest interviews, about an hour and a half. She is highly active in church, participating in the youth ministry; in the school district, participating in the booster club and PTO; and in the community participating in the NAACP and the alumni association. In her late forties, Milcah is a proud grandmother. She has lived in Hearne and attended the same church her entire life. Based on the definition of womanism, she would consider herself one.

Ruth is the daughter of a minister and is in her early fifties. She has raised her own son and helped raise her siblings' children. Ruth loves participating in community organizations. She reduced her activities after she married but is still active in several church and community organizations. She holds a bachelor's degree and works in the Hearne school district. While she did not respond directly to the question on womanism, she describes women as servants and is unsure of whether they should serve in church leadership roles such as ministers or deacons.

Sarah is in her late fifties, works in the school district and holds a master's degree. She has been in Hearne for over eleven years and has one child. She is involved in one community organization and several church auxiliaries. She has never lived outside of Hearne except when in college. Her voice creates a comforting environment and she quickly assumes a nickname for me. After watching her boisterously directing elementary school students onto buses and into their parent's cars, she is surprisingly shy, not wanting to be videotaped. She did not respond directly to the question on womanism but feels that women can serve within the church as ministers and deacons. She feels women also know how to get things done and do not always have to wait for the approval of the pastor or deacons.

Lydia is in her late thirties and has lived in the Brazos Valley all her life except for the years she attended college close to home. She is very active in the community, a trait she attributes to the church and the community-active grandmother who raised her. Her involvement includes the NAACP and the Community Emergency Response Team. She seems to be involved to the point of being overwhelmed. Lydia has no children, is

the prominent care giver for her parents, and is currently working on her second degree. She did not respond directly to the question on her feelings regarding womanism, but in responding to her agreement with women as ministers, emphasized that her opinion did not come from a liberal standpoint.

Eunice is a soft-spoken mother of three who is used to small town living. She works in the Hearne school district and is active in her church, but not in community organizations. She attributes this lack of involvement to the commute she makes each day to work and church. She chose her current church very carefully after waiting several months for the Holy Spirit to confirm her choice. She identifies with portions of the definition of womanism.

Martha is in her late thirties and is always involved in some activity with her job or community organizations. She has lived outside the state of Texas and has lived in the Brazos Valley for over eleven years. Her current commute has lessened her involvement in church activities. Her toned body signifies regular exercise and her constant smile reinforces her belief in putting others first. She holds a bachelor's degree and has no children. She identifies as a womanist.

Miriam, divorced from a soldier, has lived in other parts of the country although she has been a citizen of Hearne for over eleven years. She's in her forties with no children, but the photographs in abundance over her television tell me there is no shortage of them in her life. She mentions previous community involvement but now has turned her attention to attaining a second degree. Several of her church activities have also had to be placed on hold. Miriam, raised partially by her grandmother, has strong

feelings regarding gender equity in the home and church, ending several of her answers with “I have a problem with that.” Her “problems” include male ministers preaching against women serving in the ministry, wives who bend to the will and whim of husbands who may not have their best interest at heart, and utilizing male deacons who have less financial experience than other women in the congregation. She does classify herself as a womanist.

Mary is in her late forties and has only lived outside of Hearne while in college. She has been a member of the same church under the same pastor her entire life. She has one daughter who is out of the house. Mary is active in the church and in a community organization. She did not respond directly to the question on womanism. She finds the separate roles of men and women in the church to be equal, such as deacon and deaconess, does not feel women should wear pants to church nor should they serve as ministers or deacons.

Elizabeth is a short spunky woman who is very clear in her convictions. She was raised by her grandmother. While she has lived outside of Texas, she has been in the Brazos Valley for over eleven years. She is a grandmother and is proud to see her daughter teaching her child things she learned from Elizabeth. She participates in a church auxiliary but is not involved in any community organizations. She did not respond directly to the question on womanism but feels that submissiveness does not require a woman to walk behind but beside her husband.

Tarrant County Participants (Fort Worth)

Deborah has lived in the Fort Worth area for over eleven years. She is an associate minister and stay-at-home mom who holds a master's degree in the sciences. She home-school's her children. Deborah is active in her church and other church ministries. She is very matter-of-fact and creative. With her hair in natural twists, her wit and wisdom give her the air of a guru to whom you automatically feel drawn in search of answers on religion and relationships. She is in her early forties and says she does not connect with womanism for several reasons, one being because for her it downplays women who work in the home.

Euodia has lived in Fort Worth her entire life. She is a newlywed in her early twenties and is the daughter of a minister. Euodia holds a master's degree and is not yet ready to begin a family. Euodia comes across as a very focused individual. Even as her dog decides to rest his head on my lap during the interview, she is not distracted in answering her questions. She finds herself in agreement with parts of the definition of womanism. She is very active in her church and works with various community service activities.

Lois is a soldier's bride of over twenty years and has lived outside of the country. While living outside of the United States she converted briefly to Jehovah's Witness but was shunned when she began openly disagreeing with several of the teachings. She has been in the Fort Worth area for over eleven years. She has three children and is in her late forties. She has a healthy smile and infectious laughter which was heard throughout

our interview. She volunteers at nursing homes, with youth organizations and neighborhood watch and agrees with parts of the definition of womanism.

Priscilla is a widow in her early fifties and is the daughter of a minister. She has lived in Fort Worth well over eleven years. Her abundant stories and easy laugh make her a popular mentor and teacher at church. She is short in stature with looks that belie her age. She and her daughter are best friends. Her employment provides numerous opportunities for community involvement. She did not respond to the question on womanism but felt God can use whomever He desires in church leadership. Also, she commented that women are their own worst enemy, in part, because they fail to support one another.

Dorcas is not short on words as she talked for an hour and only answered two questions. It is hard for me to believe her when she says she is shy. In her early forties, this mother of two has lived in two other states besides Texas. She has been in Fort Worth for over eleven years. Dorcas has dealt with many illnesses including congestive heart failure, asthma, nasal surgery, and scoliosis but has found an increasing faith through all her difficulties. She is not sure she agrees with the definition of womanism as a description of herself. Dorcas is active in church organizations but not community activities.

Esther has lived in the Fort Worth area for over eleven years. She is in her forties and still has two of her three children at home. While she is active in her church, she does not list any community involvement and does not consider herself a womanist. Esther is stylish in her dress and is not prone to lengthy responses as her interview was

the shortest, lasting less than 20 minutes. While Esther lived with her parents growing up, it was her grandmother who brought her to church.

Shiphrah is a forty-something mother of two who, while she has lived in the Fort Worth area for over eleven years, has lived in other parts of the country. Pursuit of her bachelor's degree brought her to Texas, where she vows to stay unless her children move, in which case she will go where they relocate. Shiphrah is in a period of transition where she is looking for a new church and re-evaluating her belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. She considers herself a feminist as opposed to womanist, as she is more familiar with the previous term.

Persis is in her early forties and has never lived outside of Fort Worth even when pursuing her bachelor's degree. She does hold regrets for allowing fear to keep her from going away to college, and her answers regarding womanhood emphasize planning, goal setting and following your dreams. She feels that she fits the definition of a womanist. Persis is active in a church where she has been a member her entire life but not active in the community. While she has no children, she has raised her niece as if she is her own.

Anna has lived in Fort Worth her entire life and has always attended the same church under the same pastor. She is in her late forties and has four children, the last of whom are in college. She speaks often about her struggle with an empty nest and dating. She participates in an auxiliary in church but no community service activities. Her comments reflect a strong hold on traditions that were instilled by the aunt who raised her, yet she finds herself in agreement with the womanist definition.

Tirzah has lived outside of the state of Texas but has been in Fort Worth for 23 years. She is in her late forties and has two children. She volunteers at schools and nursing homes and is active in numerous church activities. She is family focused and still looks to her mother and sisters as examples for how to live her life. She would consider herself a womanist.

Womanism Part 1

1. From womanish (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You are trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. Serious.

The first part of Walker’s definition connects womanism as an off-shoot of feminism by referring first to womanist as a black feminist or feminist of color. Simply put, feminism advocates equal rights for men and women. A feminist of color incorporates issues of race and class into the dialogue. As the origin of the word implies, a womanist, regardless of her age, has a sense of maturity, responsibility, and inquisitiveness.

A Black Feminist or Feminist of Color

The participants were asked to read Alice Walker's definition of womanism taken from *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*, and based on their interpretation, to decide whether they would define themselves as womanist. Of those responding, nine said they would refer to themselves as womanist. Miriam felt that she was a womanist because she enjoyed seeing the strength in other women. *"As a child, I was fascinated by the strength my grandmother and mother showed. My grandmother was always independent and always had a circle of 'girlfriends' that she could unwind with."* Milcah, as does Euodia, sees herself as a womanist because she *"always wanted to know more than what was allowed."* Eunice and Lois choose to identify as a womanist because they feel *"committed to survival and wholeness of entire people..."* Martha chose to identify as a womanist for several reasons including that she is *"not afraid to take charge of a situation and become the leader..."* Tirzah adds that her identity as womanist came from her upbringing. *"I was raised to be an independent thinker and based on the information, I formed my opinion of individuals or circumstances."* Both Anna and Persis found womanism in line with their religious beliefs. Persis stated, *"I appreciate that the church has been an area in our society where women play a very visible role in leadership and ministering. The church values the contributions women make in the church and I believe it's the place we gain most of our strength."* Of these that said they would consider themselves womanist, it is not clear that any agreed with

all parts of the definition. None of the women had previously heard the term womanist, and the two familiar with feminism did not identify a difference between the two.

Several of the participants had reservations about the issue of black feminism or aspects of womanism. For example, Esther disagreed with womanism, stating that her behavior was not outrageous and that she was beyond the point of acting grown up. Priscilla found not patriarchy to be the enemy, but other women, who fail to support each other's successes. *"We always think it's somebody else...It's kind of like those crabs in the bucket. We start reaching up and saying get back down here in this bucket."* Deborah felt that womanism rejected biblical values of womanhood and referred to womanism as *"feminism on steroids."* A stay-at-home mom, she thinks feminism downplays the importance of women's work within the home. She went on to say, *"To me it was demanding rights from people who really don't have the authority to give. So to me it's a smoke screen. The feeling is the wording of the Bible is just meant to put you down."* Again, patriarchy is not felt to be the problem because man has no real authority, since he is submitted to God.

Rebecca Klatch, in *Women of the New Right*, found a similar sentiment among politically social conservative women. Their disillusionment with feminism included its perceived disregard for the role of the homemaker in its push for women's self-fulfillment. This created an assumption that women cannot be fulfilled caring for their husband and children. Men are then not to blame for degrading women's work, but feminists, who slight contributions of stay-at-home mothers (1987).

While Deborah criticizes womanism for its perceived devaluation of women's traditional and "biblical" roles, she herself is an associate minister. She operates in a church position that many conservative Baptist laywomen feel is only reserved for men. Similarly, while Esther does not see herself as outrageous, she describes women as the strength of the family and feels they can fulfill any occupation except pastor. Priscilla does not limit women's occupation at all because she refuses to limit God's will.

All of these women found the worth of women to be as substantial as that of men. Shiphrah, a self-professed feminist says, "*One of the things is, I really don't believe that God created woman as an addition. I think we were created as a complement and I do think we were created to walk beside him. I don't think we were created to walk behind him and be kept quietly in a corner.*" Even women like Eunice, who believes women should be humble, describes influential women in her life as strong.

In speaking to each woman, whether they agreed with womanism or not, we can find the tenets of womanism wrestling with conservative religious beliefs. Each expressed an idealization of strong women within their family and congregation, but at the same time contentment with or tolerance for the current male dominant structure of their church. The complexity of womanhood shows as they try to negotiate and interpret their religious ideas with their personal experiences.

Trying to be Grown Up

Walker's womanist definition includes the point that a womanist wants to know more, is responsible and in charge. When asked the question "When did you know you were a woman," while having no shortage of descriptors of womanhood, most were stumped when asked when they crossed the threshold into womanhood. Of those responding to this question, seven referred to having to take responsibility for their well-being and others and having to make their own decisions. Two felt they were born that way and two others felt they were still growing into womanhood even though they were past 45 years of age. For some it was not the act of marriage or motherhood that propelled them into this new place but the fact they were able to care for these people and themselves. Three of those that were divorced mentioned the break-up as their catalyst into womanhood. They had to be the primary breadwinner and caregiver. They had to learn who they were apart from their husbands and appreciate that person. Anna, one of these, said, "*I knew to teach my girls how to become a woman, I had to become a woman they could learn something from, and not just, 'oh, well your daddy's gone. I'm not going to do this.' I had to step up.*"

Just as these women wanted to know more, they encouraged their children to ask questions and gave them more information than was given to them. Dorcas reported that her mother did not give explanations unless probed and that obedience was mandated 'because I said so.' By contest, Dorcas always wanted her children to know the reasons why she taught them certain things so they would act with understanding and not out of

fear. In order to know more, a woman is described as a person who listens, asks questions and has a spirit of discernment. Anna says to “*Listen. Ask questions if you don’t understand. Be absolutely clear on what is being asked of you.*” The women in this study felt that learning from those around them, lessons both positive and negative, made them more complete women, women that others could learn from as well. However, one must wonder if they are sowing seeds of discontent in their children as the asking of questions may lead to the challenge of the status quo.

Another theme that emerges from the interviews is that womanhood is about getting an education and always looking to advance. A woman should have goals for her life and gives of her time and talent. Persis’ advice for young women would be to “*have a plan and then work your plan and keep God in it and let Him direct you.*” Martha stated, “*Get an education definitely. Sometimes college might not be a 4 - year institution but there are so many trade schools you can go to now...and always continue to try and do better. Don’t just settle...what’s the next step, how can I advance within this company?*” To be ‘in charge’ she should never settle for anything less than the best.

An often repeated idea is that women can do anything and are not limited by their gender, if only they stay grounded in their faith. Martha explains, “*You can succeed at anything you put your mind to. You might have setbacks, but as long as you’re determined and you pray about it, what’s in God’s plan, you’ll be able to accomplish.*” Milcah agrees by saying, “*Just because you’re a little girl does not mean you have to be a school teacher or a stay-at-home mom or a nurse. You can be that doctor, lawyer, that CEO. Whatever you want to be, you can be that.*” One’s attitude should also be pleasant

and positive. Lydia suggests that a woman be careful in *“the way you talk to people.”* Eunice adds, *“Your attitude is so important. I see so many young women who are pretty on the outside...but the way they are inside is just totally different.”* They believe these accomplishments are possible if their personal relationship with God is their first priority. A woman should be aware of what she believes and remain consistent in those beliefs. Euodia says she would teach young women about *“having a personal relationship with God. Knowing Him personally for themselves and not basing their religious standards or actions on anybody else. Basing it on their relationship with Him and the teachings they have received.”*

Womanism Part 2

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Ans.: “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”

The second part of the definition discusses women’s love and appreciation for their culture as women and for individual women. “Women’s culture” refers to the behaviors and belief characteristics frequently reserved for use when describing women’s roles and traits. For instance, women are considered emotional, focused on the

group, a nurturer, and sensitive. The women in this study took pride in the roles of wife and mother because they allow them to exhibit characteristics connected with women's culture. Womanist understand themselves to be capable of leadership because it too is a part of their culture, their heritage. Yet, in that love and appreciation for womankind, they still engage in activities that benefit the people, both men and women, as they see their personal struggle reflected in the lives of others.

Loves Other Women

The participants' role models for womanhood are found in the biblical text and in women with whom they live and work. When asked about women who were influential in their lives, the participants often named women who reflected the same characteristics they used to describe womanhood. They chose women who modeled what they deemed a positive Christian lifestyle. Ruth said of her mother, "*She is a strong Christian woman, for one thing, and what she says she stands on it exactly.*" The influential role models had talents the women sought after. Martha admired her Sunday School teacher. "*I wanted to be like her when I grew up. I wanted to play the piano in church and teach Sunday School and everything like that.*" The personality traits of the models were giving, caring, hard working, dedicated, committed and loving. Dorcas describes her mother as "*dedicated and committed. She doesn't want you there if you're not going to participate 100%...She's going to give her all and expect everyone else to give their all too.*"

These role models included academic teachers, Sunday School teachers and teachers of life. They provided encouragement and advice for marriage and motherhood. In describing influential women in her life, Lois says, *“They were strong, God-fearing and had such poise and how can I say it? They were just all that, you know what I mean?”* The influential women - mothers, grandmothers, aunts, co-workers, and church workers, provided blueprints for how the participants were to live their lives and what consideration they took for themselves. Elizabeth summarized, *“...you believe what they instilled in you about being modest, about respecting yourself - have a goal, be ambitious, don’t expect a man is going to take care of you.”*

Women, especially older women, were expected to live their lives as an example to others. For Lois, the story of Ruth and Naomi tells her how she and all women are to regard older women. In interpreting Titus 2:1-5 (See Appendix E6) which referred to required behavior of older men and women, many participants elaborated on women as role models. Tirzah explains this scripture by saying, *“Live a godly life so that when you are old you have little regrets and don’t wish to be young again or be jealous of those who are young...encourage the young, lead by example, share mistakes you made in your life in hopes the young won’t repeat them.”* Milcah remembered watching women at church cope with adversity with a dignified calm. In other words, women have the responsibility of role-modeling Christ-like behavior. They serve as life coaches utilizing both good and bad personal experiences to teach those who are younger.

The biblical characters with whom the participants identified were chosen because their stories resonated in the participant’s personal lives. Several of the

characters were chosen because they exemplified God's use of people whom humans may find unacceptable as leaders. Mara finds strength in an unlikely character, Rahab, who some interpret as an innkeeper and others as a prostitute. *"But then when you look at Rahab, it's like do I see faith? She had to have faith or she wouldn't of...she had to have some kind of belief. And so that tells me that God can use anybody. Any type of woman...You know God has used imperfect people all throughout His works."* The biblical role models say to them that no matter how low they may go in life or what indiscretions may be in their past, they are not beyond God's usefulness.

For those who identified as womanist, none dealt with the idea of loving another woman sexually when discussing the definition. However, in their interpretations of Deuteronomy 22:5 (See Appendix E5), answers included a rebuke of homosexuality or cross-dressing. One reminisced to the days when homosexual Christians were closeted, upset about the move toward more openness and acceptance within the church, but none chose to go into further detail other than to say it should not occur. In spite of this, the other aspects of womanism, such as independence and leadership abilities were found throughout the conversations with the participants.

Appreciates Women's Culture

Wife

A hierarchical system of control, referred to as the 'God-head hierarchy', is prominent in the participants' interpretation of women's roles within the family and church. God controls all, man answers to God and woman answers to man. This structure was affirmed as appropriate in the home with husbands and wives and in the church with the pastor and the congregation. Scriptures such as Colossians 3:18 and I Peter 3:1-7 (See Appendix E2) that deal with submission and this hierarchical structure seemed to influence this thinking, but each woman still added certain conditions to the idea of wifely/womanly submission. For example, submission was not believed to involve an unquestionable authority. Women were to realize the strengths they brought to the relationship and utilize them. Also, the Bible was viewed as the ultimate authority to be followed regardless of all else.

For Euodia, submission was less about her husband, who serves as her intermediary with God, than it is about obedience to God. She says, *"As a wife, if I trust God, then I should trust my husband. In an effort to show this trust, I should submit to him (my husband), because my husband should get his directives from God. In essence I'm not 'obeying' my husband – I'm obeying God through my husband."* Deborah, who is married, further notes that it is not only wives who must deal with submission when she says *"everybody is submitted to somebody."* Euodia believes the husband is

following God's directives and he is submitted to God. Eunice, who is single, and Miriam, who is divorced, both make reference to slavery in their discussion of submission in describing what it does not include. Eunice states, "*I don't think it means bowing down when he comes in the door... But I think you're supposed to help. When God created Eve, he said Adam's helper, he didn't say Adam's slave.*" Miriam adds, "*Not that we are to be slaves but we have to be submissive to something.*"

The wife, seen as the primary nurturer, brings a different aspect to family decision making. She also is seen to hold education and natural traits that assist her in being a help to her husband and family. Elizabeth, who is divorced, hints at some of the problems in the notion of wifely submission when she states, "*I didn't have a problem with being submissive but I had a problem with somebody talking to me like I was stupid.*" Deborah agrees, saying, "*that doesn't mean that they're mindless and walked over.*" There is the idea that each woman brings uniqueness to her marriage that should not be stifled. While she may not make the final decision, she should be a part of the process.

Submission also does not give the husband sole authority, as Eunice's statement earlier clarified. A wife is to be her husband's helper. Martha, who is single, further reiterates that "*it means they should work together on matters of the family...*" Clearly as a partner in the relationship, a woman has some duty to assist in leading the family. Her submission is not "*blind obedience,*" as Deborah states, but she has the ability and responsibility to decide what is not in her or her family's best interest. Eunice states, "*I believe submit in this text does not mean doing, being or accepting anything that is*

ungodly to please your husband.” Miriam’s caveat is similar when she states, *“that if your husband is a walking Christian you should respect him.”* Mary, who is divorced, adds that *“...a woman is supposed to be submissive to her husband...as long as he is a good provider and a good leader...”*

So, while these women profess to believe in a hierarchical structure that places men over them, they limit this principle in various ways so that husbands’ control is not absolute. They believe that a woman clearly has some input into decision making and is not obligated to follow unjust directions from her husband. In Ammerman’s work with Fundamentalists, she found this same idea of submission at work. While husbands were seen as holding responsibility for making decisions, the couple still talked it over and reached a consensus on what was God’s will for that particular situation. “The ‘ideal’ of male dominion is thus subtly accommodated to the reality of modern expectations for equality” (1987, p. 139).

While women may be seen as physically weaker than men, none of the respondents considered her mentally weaker. In fact, strength was the most often used characteristic to describe women. For the participants, submission does not negate her strength or her influence within the family and community. In fact, the wife is often seen as an additional bread winner and confidant to her husband. As Esther states, *“You’re the strength of the family...She’s just as responsible as the male if there is a male.”*

In Esther’s comment, as well as others throughout, there is an underlying theme of the lack of a male presence within the home and church. For some this leaves the hierarchical structure in jeopardy as women are left to bear the burden of raising the

family alone. Milcah agrees, *“God created man to be the leader of all affairs. It’s because of man’s slothfulness that you see women usurping their authority or rather their opinion.”* In Milcah’s comments we see again the reference to the lack of a male presence this time within the church. For her, men’s falling away has left the door open for women to take up a mantle of leadership that is not biblically theirs.

But sometimes, the women found their lived lives to be at odds with their biblical interpretation of marriage. Miriam, who is divorced, felt that marriage should be a partnership and that if the woman has greater skills in an area such as money management, she should be in charge of that area. *“But I don’t have a husband. The one I had I don’t have him so I just keep my mouth closed and look at other people and learn.”* Tirzah, who is also divorced, says, *“...you know I tried to be all of those things [Proverbs 31 woman], but for whatever reason it wasn’t enough [to save my marriage]. I think because of my religious background I stayed in my marriage much longer than I would have.”* She goes further to say,

“I look at some of the things it [Bible] says to do and I think, well, maybe that’s why I’m not married. I’m one of those women if I see something wrong, I can’t keep my mouth shut. I have to speak up about it and the Bible tells you don’t do that to your husband and don’t cause him to be angry and blah blah blah. Well, I can’t do it. I knew what the Bible says and I was quiet for a lot of years. I really was. I wasn’t happy but I was quiet because I was trying to do it God’s way. Like I said, maybe I wasn’t patient enough.”

These two women decided to find personal fault with the way their marriage turned out as opposed to disagreeing with the Bible.

For Esther, she found the strength to divorce her husband in her religion. *“But it was religion that said I could go forward, get my strength back and support my kids and*

I would be okay.” She discussed praying to God for a sign that it was acceptable for her to leave her husband. Anna also received strength from religion but not to decide to divorce but to wait on God to bring her another mate. Other divorced women found difficulty in the decision to leave their marriage. Tirzah found being divorced made her initially feel unworthy to teach others about Christ. Yet, she felt “*womanish*” by doing it. Shiphrah had to seek the counsel of her pastor in order to go through with her divorce. Even though her husband was verbally and physically abusive, she struggled with the appropriateness of divorce. *“I had a hard time with my divorce because I was finding my spirit at the same time. I was finding my spirituality. I thought, divorce is a sin; it’s an abomination before the Lord. God doesn’t like it.”* It took her pastor convincing her that God did not want her hurt, but loved, in order for her to leave the marriage.

Mother

Being a mother is also structured by the hierarchical system. Priscilla describes a mother as *“a person who puts her child before herself but not before her husband.”* She goes on to say, *“she [mother] is a person who gives until she has nothing left to give.”* As mothers, women are seen as the main role models and teachers to their children. Often referencing Proverbs 22:6, which says, *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it,”* these women identified the mother as responsible for incorporating a spiritual foundation into the lives of their children. Esther states it as, *“You’re there to teach your children, guide your children and instruct*

them on doing what's right, bringing them to be a part of the church and following God."

While women incorporate lessons learned from their mother figures, they mold them to their own style. Often they choose to be more open to conversations of any topic with their children and explain why things are done a certain way. Dorcas, while extremely close to her mother, says, *"If I don't question anything like going to church there was no extra motivation from her. I raised my children slightly different, give them reasons why."* Milcah's mother walked an exceptional life before her, but she did not speak to her children about personal subjects. With her own daughters, Milcah says, *"We had the type of relationship they could ask me anything whereas with my mom we didn't. We didn't have that."* Again, we see these women encouraging their children to know more, to ask questions, and have the right to understand parental demands.

In discussing the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 (See Appendix E1), the participants elaborated on their ideals of womanhood and motherhood. From this scripture they found a great deal to live up to. In Priscilla's words, *"I've always wanted to be like that. Just do what you need to do, get your job done. Take care of your household. Take care of your family. It doesn't matter if anybody else knows what you're doing, but your family will know that you took care of them."* Deborah sees this biblical character as *"industrious and wise and giving and generous and all that kind of thing. She was able to look after her household and she had so much creativity and industry that it spilled over into her giving to those in need. And as a result her whole family was blessed and they arise and call her blessed."* Put simply by Miriam, *"women are the glue*

that keeps the family together.” While men are believed to provide overarching leadership, women are the ones who make sure the day-to-day operating of the family is successful.

However, it was believed that the bearing of a child did not usher one into womanhood, but it is the ability to lead and bear responsibility for that child that enables her to claim being a woman. As exemplified by these women’s interpretation of Proverbs 31, a mother is charged with the responsibility of making sure her family is well fed and clothed and she is someone that her husband and children take pride in. As mothers, women prepare their children for the future, and this gives them some degree of power and influence. As Deborah explains it, *“The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.”* While these women find strength and power within their role as mother, they still must adhere to the decisions of their husbands. Ammerman (1987) says of her Fundamentalist participants, “Having and raising children are sources of status and power for women; but that power is limited by the fact that women do not control whether or when those children arrive” (pp. 139-40). While the participants in this study may have more control over when they have children, their beliefs on submission give their husbands control over how many the ultimately will have, if any.

Committed to Survival of Entire People

The second part of Walker’s definition of womanism emphasizes the community both locally and globally when it mentions “committed to survival and wholeness of

entire people, male and female” and “traditionally universalist.” For these women, the commitment comes across in their participation in community activities and the belief that they are commissioned to spread a message of faith that can lead to a better life. Not only did these women speak of their own involvement in the community but they also spoke of being taken with their mothers, aunts and grandmothers to community activities. Euodia says, *“People that have been influences in my life are not just active in church, they are active in their communities.”* Lydia agrees, *“Being right under her [grandmother] footsteps doing what she did...I truly believe that has set the tone for me. I guess that’s the reason why I stay as involved in the different things that I do.”* Most of the women, like Lois, concluded that their role in the community was dictated by their Christian beliefs. *“If there is something going on in the community, I try to become involved in it because that’s my role, my role as a Christian.”* As Christians, they felt it was their responsibility to be prepared to help anyone who might need their assistance.

Their universalism, or connection with all people, however, is limited to those within the Christian faith. Milcah explains Galatians 3:28 (See Appendix E7) by saying, *“One’s denomination, ethnic origin, gender or status in society carries no weight with God. Every Christian is as important to God as the next. God loves us all; we’re all a part of his family.”* It is the acceptance of Christian faith that broadens community boundaries beyond what is familiar.

Church Issues

Christopher Ellison (1993) describes black churches as incubators for social and political leaders and noted that they serve as a community gathering place. The black church has remained important to political socialization, its influence increases political participation and it is an important determinant of political attitudes and behaviors among blacks (Wilcox and Gomez 1990, Calhoun-Brown 1999). The church is viewed as the support system that has carried these women since childhood. It is through the church that they seek to aid and comfort those in their community. Most of these women have been members of their congregations for over 11 years. Priscilla referred to church as her second family. Dorcas spoke of her Sunday School teacher visiting her after nasal surgery to help her with dinner.

Church attendance at an early age, despite some things they found missing, was considered influential and helpful. Several of the participants expressed this sentiment. Euodia said, *“So it just became a part of who I was even before I really understood it, it was a part of me.”* For Mary, the reason for so many injustices in the world is that *“faith, it wasn’t instilled in them. I feel like that’s the reason why a lot of the world is like it is today...”* For those who stopped going to church because of a work schedule or college attendance, they still found the foundation instilled by church to be the reason they returned. Ruth said, *“I guess it’s because of how you’re raised...The first instinct will be your everlasting...So, I always have to go back to my beliefs and the way I was taught.”* Because they realize now the importance of the connective tissue of the black

church, they seek to learn from some of their negative experiences for positive changes with their own children and other community youth.

Several of the women, in discussing their early religious experiences, spoke about their inability to fully grasp the meaning of the religious services they attended. Mara said, *“I was trying to figure out a lot of what he [minister] was saying and where did he get it from. You know at that age I guess you read but you really don’t understand.”* For Deborah her love of singing kept her involved in church. *“And that’s [choir] what really kept me in church because I had no idea what the preacher was talking about because he preached from the newspaper. I don’t remember anything from the Bible. He preached on current events.”* It was not until later in life that they began to understand what they were supposed to be learning. Tirzah had a Sunday School teacher who spoke above their level of comprehension. *“I remember at a young age not really knowing what was going on. Back when I was growing up Sunday School wasn’t as nourishing to me as it is today. Simply because they talked over our heads and they thought this was very impressive to talk over our heads back then. So, I didn’t really get a lot out of Sunday School.”* She also did not understand *“what it really meant to be born again.”* Sarah and others were also looking for some obvious personal change and insight after baptism. Milcah says, *“My sister and I were baptized together. It was real to me but I still felt like something was missing.”* No one ever fully explained to them how the church teachings were supposed to affect their current lives. Shiphrah, in frustration, describes her experiences in church when she said, *“We’re going to talk about this one verse in the Bible. I’m going to tell you what David did on that day. I’m*

not going to tell you how that applies to your life right now. How you can take this scripture and work it into your relation with people but David had this journey, he had this sling and he killed the giant...they tell you the Bible says don't do this and don't do that but they don't tell you why..." Several participants reported that they were given warnings about what not to do but were not given instructions that included clear reasoning for the prohibitions.

The overarching religious ideals of the Christian faith came across (i.e. belief in a resurrected Christ, being a respectable person, and assembling for church service regularly) but how that applied to their daily lives did not. This lack of relevance inspired some like Milcah, Shiphrah and Dorcas to have a closer relationship with their children which involved explaining why the Bible asked certain behaviors of them as Christians. "Because I said so" was not seen as a good operating method. Milcah says of her mothering role model, *"It played a big influence on me because there were a lot of things that I didn't understand that if I'd gotten an answer to I would have done things differently."* Others like Priscilla and Tirzah opted to teach children at church and make sure they translated the lessons on the children's level. Tirzah said, *"Because like I said, back then our Sunday School teachers didn't break it down enough for us. They kept it in adult terms. So with me being a Sunday School teacher I feel it's very important for me to keep it as basic and as simple as I can."* Those who are mothers emphasized the need to make sure their children understood what they were learning at church and the importance of leading lives that did not contradict those teachings. Deborah wanted her children to better understand the Bible's meaning in their life, because for her it had

been “*more habit. It wasn’t deep.*” The women feared, though, that other children were not being reached because of the maintenance of traditions such as the prohibition of women wearing pants in the church, the old guards’ unwillingness to relinquish church positions or allow new ideas, the upsurge in teenage mothers who themselves have not fully comprehended womanhood, and the problems of single mothers whose time is worn thin with other activities.

The church is not seen as always being responsive to these issues, but instead fights within itself over side issues such as what is proper attire for women. Eunice says of the attire debate, “*I think for Christmas we did casual day and the church was packed and I felt like we need to do this more often if this many people are coming just because you change the dress code. Why not change it more often? I mean most people, when you ask them to go to church with you, what are they going to say? I don’t have anything to wear. Every time! And that shouldn’t be. That shouldn’t be.*” Mara sees the problem as stagnation in ideas. She said, “*Tradition is not bad. Change is not bad either, and I can see where I think our churches would grow. And I think that we would be able to be closer to some of our young people that seems to be going astray because they don’t have - because the churches are not offering anything. The churches are the same traditional youth meeting, the same traditional BTU, and we’re not trying. We have plenty of young people that have just finished college and have a lot to offer but they won’t allow them to come in and do it.*” Deborah confirms, “*It seemed once you graduated from high school you graduated from church. And many stopped participating and some stopped coming to church.*”

Ruth wanted to duplicate a rites of passage program at her own church but could not get cooperation from other members of her congregation. She said, *“I thought that would be a good idea [rites of passage program]. If I could get that started with the youth of our church, the girls...and take them through that process from like junior high on to high school to show them how to become a woman. And one while we looked at it at our church, but I couldn’t get a lot of people committed to help me with that.”* The need is evident; however, there seems to be an inability to convince others of its importance.

Lydia stresses the need for both new programs and more people to work together. She said, *“I think the church has an obligation to meet that need [providing spiritual environment], to offer support. I don’t think this community does enough to get families or young people involved in church. I know there is only so much you can do, but I’m talking about offering, just being more active, getting involved more, providing more classes, providing structure for raising your children...And I’m not saying just one church can do it but it needs to be like a community type effort, where you can get people more interested and involved in church.”* In spite of these problems, and the need for improvement, the women felt the church still provided them with a strong backbone of support in facing the struggles of daily life.

Traditionally Capable

Walker's womanist concept also references women as current and historic adept leaders when it describes them as "traditionally capable." While in the eyes of the participants, women's roles are seen as supportive and women themselves are not generally considered for the top church leadership positions, women are still seen as strong and influential persons capable of handling any role given to them. Esther emphasizes this point by saying, "*A woman may not necessarily be the head of the household, but she's just as strong as any man and she can do anything and persevere and go after her dreams whether it be in the church or outside the church.*" In fact women are seen as strong because they carry so many roles. The strength and independence of a woman is not viewed as being based on another person.

Several participants, such as Persis, mentioned the ability of women to do and become whatever they desired. "*They can do anything they want to do. They are not restricted by gender. There are some physical limitations on things, but I don't think there are any intellectual limitations.*" Also, within the church setting women were seen as proficient leaders. Euodia said, "*I think God has given women gifts just like He's given men gifts, and I think He's given women leadership abilities not just outside the church but in the church as well.*" These women acknowledged the strong leadership skills exhibited by their female role models. Miriam's grandmother, who sold candy from her home, taught Miriam the need for financial independence. Eunice saw strength in a maternal grandmother who stayed in an abusive relationship and her paternal

grandmother who became a widow early in the marriage and supported the family alone. Both examples said to her that a true mother/woman does whatever she has to do for the sake of her children. Eunice recognized both her mother and grandmother as role models of strength. *“My daddy’s mom lost her husband early in life and she never married again. She still raised her family and went on.”* Again, even without the presence of a man, the family still operates because women continue in their roles to support and nurture their children.

These women do not feel impotent but believe they have power that comes from the influence garnered from their relationships. Indeed, it is their social networks and ties that are said to make them powerful. But within this desire for independence and empowerment, one can also see the attempt to remain true to the contradiction of male leadership as affirmed by church teachings. As Deborah relates, *“The women are very influential, which is a dangerous kind of thing, which is why the Lord had Adam over Eve, and others too, to protect her from herself. Because men lead because of position, they were here first. Whereas, women have the power of influence and it’s a matter of whether we use our influence for good or not.”* Mara adds, *“Power is good or bad because she is closest to his [husband’s] heart.”* These participants recognize women as being strong but caution against being domineering. However, they believe a woman’s independence solidifies the relationship to her husband.

Martha considers, *“we have more power than is ever really portrayed.”* Because she is self-sustaining, a woman can be a benefit to her partner. Mara notes, *“Most men don’t do well without a strong woman.”* Ammerman finds a similar situation in the lives

of white Fundamentalist wives: “Within their households, they [Fundamentalist wives] have enormous power of persuasion that is based in part on their intimate involvement with the everyday details of the family’s life. They simply have more information, more emotional investment, and often more skill than their husbands” (1987, p. 139-140).

When asked what they would teach young girls about womanhood, strength and independence were top choices. A woman’s strength is also the reason she is expected to be independent. As Martha describes a woman, she says they should “*be independent, just be self-sustaining. Don’t think you have to rely on men for anything, be your own person.*” Mara adds, “*Women are strong, self-reliant, blessed by God, and beautiful...I just think that sometimes we think that we are the weaker of the two sexes and we allow people to take advantage of us because we think we need them to make us who we desire to be.*” Consistently, these participants argued that women have strength and independence, but that often women let others dictate their behavior in order to be accepted and valued by those around them. Also, whether it is due to fear or ignorance, women may not be fully aware of the influence they wield according to these participants. Underneath the caveats that give lip service to the notion of wifely/womanly submission, then, the participants display a strong sense of the womanist idea of women’s power and independence.

Church Leaders: Deacons, Ministers, and Pastors

Within the church, the participants viewed women as capable leaders and teachers. Most did not wish to limit service of women as missionaries, Sunday School teachers, ushers, choir members and committee members. However, when asked about roles typically held by men such as deacon, minister, or pastor, some utilized scripture and tradition to bar women from these positions.

They were asked their interpretation of I Timothy 2:11-15 and I Corinthians 14:33-35 (See Appendix E3), passages that speak of women both being silent in the church and not usurping authority over man. Some respondents felt the scriptures were specific for that time period and others saw them as properly reinforcing man's role in the church and at home today. Mara sees them as applying only to an earlier time period when she says, *"This scripture seems to have been based on the times in which it was written, where men were ruling force and women were only a minority in public worship."* While Esther agrees in part, she does not think *"we are ready to see a woman stand on the first Sunday with men as part of communion..."* This would be seen as "doing gender" inappropriately. The social standard has been set and to push for change would cast an unfavorable light on the person and not the institution.

Others, like Lois, find in these texts as a reinforcement of the hierarchical structure. *"This scripture doesn't mean that we cannot ask questions or speak at church but that we should recognize the authority of man to take the lead in all matters, especially spiritual training."* Eunice similarly comments, *"I believe that again it is*

telling you to submit to your husband and allow him to handle church problems, situations and concern.” Anna adds, “Women should listen and learn quietly and not have authority over men.”

When asked if they could serve as deacons, most were amazed that this could occur. As they had never seen it, they never considered it. Though it may not have been previously considered, the duties of deacons were seen as doable by women. Shiphrah observed, *“As far as the deacons, they [women] do everything anyway. The only role they don’t have is the actual leader, because they are doing everything else anyway. They really are you know. So, I wouldn’t have a problem with that at all.”* In fact, some, like Shiphrah, felt women already did those things but were listed under another title. Lois said, *“Deacons we always called the Mother Board, you know, female deacons.”* Those who did not believe women should serve as deacons, cited the Bible as speaking against it. Miriam says, *“when the Bible speaks of deacons it specifically speaks of men deacons.”* It is possible she is referring to Acts 6:2-4 (See Appendix E4) which is the scripture reference used during the installation of deacons, which references “men” specifically.

The question of women as ministers elicited similar results. Those against women as ministers cited either biblical texts and/or the tradition in which they were raised. Mary, for example, explained how her rearing influenced her interpretation of I Timothy 3:2 (See Appendix E4). She said, *“As far as a woman minister, I was always brought up against it, that this should not be occurring, because there is a passage in the*

Bible that says a preacher's wife. It doesn't say a preacher's husband. So that tells me right there that a preacher should be a man and that's just the way I feel about it."

Those who felt women could be ministers included some who were just coming into the opinion, such as Euodia who noted, *"At one point I was not in agreement with women being ministers either. I've completely evolved. But I don't have a problem with women ministers..."* As she experienced more women in the ministry she found little difference in their message, and she developed different interpretations of scriptures similar to I Timothy 3:2.

Some participants were simply ambivalent, not wanting to sit in a place of judgment. For example, Miriam still felt that a woman preaching was not biblical, but she was willing to 'go along.' *"No women preachers. You couldn't find that in the Bible. I still have a problem with that. I'm like, I'll go along with it. I'm not saying it's right or wrong."* These women said they were not in a place to judge other women who believed there was a calling on their life to preach.

Finally, there were those who were confident that women's ministry was valid. Martha stated, *"Women preachers. When I was growing up way back in the day you never heard of a lady minister at all, or evangelist or anything like that. But they are just as dynamic as the male."* Persis agreed, *"I think God can give the Word to anybody and I hate to think the Bible had any sexism in it."* For Deborah, who is an associate minister, the I Timothy 3:2 scripture relates to monogamy as opposed to the gender of the minister. In order to serve as a minister beyond her own church, she has decided not to become attached to a title or the use of the pulpit. She rationalizes, *"It's just another*

piece of furniture. However, Christ didn't preach behind a pulpit. He preached on a boat, on a mountain." She chooses not to challenge the customs of other churches by insisting they seat her with the other ministers. For these women, God is ultimately in control and He can choose whomever He wants to deliver His Word.

However, women serving as pastors or the head of a church presented a challenge for some to the God-head hierarchy. As man is the head of the woman and household, the pastor is supposed to be the reflected male over the congregation. Milcah observes, *"But it is so in an order, some would call it. God is the head of Jesus. Jesus is the head of the church. The man is the head of the wife and it flows in that vein."* While several like Persis believe that God can use anyone to deliver the Word, the God-head hierarchy does not allow for women to have authority over men. *"Women can have roles in the church, be visible in church, do a lot of things and even preach, but I think there is something about the leadership of the church, where I think the God-head, the male is who it should be."*

Other women supported even pastoral leadership roles for women. For example, Deborah utilized the biblical text to justify women's roles as leaders within a congregation. *"In Micah it says that He [God] sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam. It doesn't say that He sent Moses and Aaron and Miriam tagged along. But it says that He sent them to lead them out of Egypt, so she was listed as a leader alongside."* Lois agrees, *"as a woman leading a flock, I don't have a problem with it because look at Timothy, his mother and grandmother brought him up in the Word of God. So they were teaching and that's what a minister is, a teacher."* Deborah further stated that she

thought men do not keep women out of the pulpit because of biblical reasons but because “*they see it as some sort of threat.*” Women would be taking over where men have traditionally held sway. Yet, those last comments were in the minority, as only three of the twenty women found women serving as pastors acceptable.

For all the participants, it was felt that gender should not limit women’s community occupations. They are seen as just as capable as men in every aspect outside of the church. However, most would not accept women in the highest leadership position within the church. Within the family, they understand that women may have to assume the head position due to the absence of a husband, but they find no reason why a woman should need to assume headship of a church. While she may be seen as capable of holding this position, it is not believed to be biblically allowed to do so. While women are seen as helpmates with equal influence in the running of the household, there is more derision over how much control they can wield within the church.

Church Control

Even though the pastor and deacons (who are men) control the daily functioning of the church, most participants felt major decisions were brought to the church body for a vote which allowed women’s voices to be heard. They also reported that their pastors often had an open door policy that allowed women to make suggestions and have direct contact and influence with church leadership. Persis emphasizes women’s input when she said, “*He’s [pastor] very open and we have a lot of power. I say power but he’s*

always held open business meetings where we are all welcome to go. The budget has always been available for us to look at. We have an annual business meeting.” Anna agrees when she says, *“I do believe I would be heard and I know that the best decisions would be made, because the church is a business. It’s about the business of God, but it’s also a business.”* Even though they believed the spiritual aspect of church requires male leadership, the major business decisions include participation from all parties.

Some, like Esther, felt they did not have control, but it was not necessary because the pastor and deacons were entrusted to lead. *“I think we are all under the leadership of our pastor. It’s his job to guide us and direct us and we can choose whether or not we want to follow him and we can participate or not participate. But I think it’s our pastor’s job to lead us.”* Again, in a business reference, the pastor is a salaried employee who has been given the task of leading the congregation. His judgment should be trusted because the congregation believed he was worth hiring. Ultimately, though, she can voice her disapproval by withholding her attendance and monies.

Mara felt only those closest to the pastor get heard. *“I think it’s the ones that have been there the longest that has somebody that’s closest to the pastor...I think it’s [major decision making] being done one-on-one at a round table somewhere with a few people.”* In her congregation, she did not witness an open door policy from her pastor. She felt that only those with access to the decision makers, such as deacons’ wives and those who have long standing membership, were able to effect notable change within the church. Thus, while some women expressed satisfaction with their opportunities to

influence church policies, these comments show that women's influence depends in large part on the openness of the particular pastor and other male leadership.

While a few did note that women have inherent skills that would make them more effective leaders than men, they did not see the need for major changes. In fact, no participant openly or directly took issue with the overall running of the church. Most felt they received fair and equal treatment at church even though their roles may be different. Esther states, *"I would say yes [religion treats men and women differently,] because I don't think in the eyes of religion men and women have the same duties. As I said, the man is the head of the household and the woman is his helpmate, so within the eyes of religion, yes."* For those who spoke about unequal treatment in the confines of religion, it was not the belief system that created inequalities but the individuals themselves. Priscilla says, *"I guess I don't know if religion didn't treat men and women the same or if it was people that were over religion or the people that were handling the religion. It's always when you get people in the mix, they didn't do it the same."* Adaptation of the belief system for personal gain and pride was considered the cause of most inequalities.

Womanism Part 3

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.

The third part of Walker's definition of womanism reinforces a womanist's unconditional love and respect for herself, her focus on the struggle against any injustice, and an appreciation of nature and the arts.

Loves Herself. Regardless

Several references such as that made by Miriam, underscored love for self and others, strongly supporting Walker's description of a womanist. *"I could be as big as this house, I'm going to still look good to me and I'm going to look good to somebody...I still look good because I look good to me and I feel good."* Women should love themselves even if no one else expresses that love. Eunice would add, *"You've got to love yourself. Don't go out looking for someone else to love you. First, you've got to love yourself."* Loving yourself means knowing yourself. Anna encourages young women to *"get to know yourself. Get to know what you really like. You've grown up in your parent's home and this is the way it's been taught to you, but you might like something different. Get to know yourself."* Loving yourself also meant respecting yourself. Again, self-love should not be dependent on someone else's acceptance or disregard for you.

In discussions about womanhood, the participants spoke a great deal about how their religious beliefs affected how they regarded themselves as women. Several indicated that they were stronger in Christ and that their beliefs gave them inspiration and hope. Mary phrases it, *"If you have faith in God then you will have faith in*

yourself...My self-esteem is good, has grown because I believe in Him. More so in Him than me.” Their perceived value and self-worth is strongly influenced by the belief that they are daughters of God. Anna says, *“It just made me a better person knowing that all the teachings from mom and all the Sunday School teachers, Rev. Carlton and just life in general, knowing that you’re valuable and God loves you. Just making sure you are respectful of yourself.”* Lois reiterates, *“I love me because God loved me first.”* These women believe that their faith strengthened their personal regard for themselves. Euodia claims, *“I know who I am in Christ, which means I know who I am just being Euodia. I cannot imagine thinking of myself without thinking about who Christ is and what He has been and is to me.”* Who they are as valued persons and women cannot be separated from their belief in God.

Respect

Another strong emphasis on womanhood and love of self in the narrative was respect. Respect is first a regard for yourself as a worthwhile person. It is felt that if you respect yourself, particularly in modest dress and actions, then others will respect you. Respecting yourself was described as the way you carried yourself and as not letting others treat you poorly. Sarah tells her female students *“Don’t just go for anything. Don’t let them talk to you any kind of way, especially the boys. If you don’t like the way they talk to you, leave.”* Sara adds, *“But the bottom line, if you want to be respected as a lady, don’t let them see all under your clothes, don’t show it to them or give it to them.”*

Secondly, respect is seen as deference to secular and religious authority and older persons. Finally, respect is said also to include fair and just treatment for all people. This follows their religious teaching of Matthew 7:12 *"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."* Milcah explains, *"One thing that I try to impress upon them [young girls] is I want them to treat your classmates the way you want to be treated and as you grow older in life you will come to realize that if you treat people right, most of the time they will treat you right."* Martha goes further to say, *"I always try to look for the good in someone. My mom always said, say something positive about people, not really negative."* Even though the participants felt that women have an obligation to submit, they believed they should not submit to behavior that is ungodly or detrimental to themselves or others.

Respect, for the participants, also meant being mindful of what is worn. The issue of women's attire was an important recurring theme in the narrative. Utilizing I Timothy 2:9-10 (See Appendix E5), Persis explains her view of proper attire for women. *"The Bible tells us we don't have to be all out there like that. What does that say about you as a woman when you dress like that? I think it says that you don't have any confidence in who you are as a woman inside and that's what you're going to see."* While most of the women felt that religion should not or does not restrict attire, respect for God and the church meant respecting yourself through your personal appearance and dress. This prohibited wearing anything too short, revealing, unclean, or tight. Shiphrah explains, *"I would never go to church unclean or looking like I just came out of a club or*

something, that's not what I'm saying. But I don't think it should matter if I don't wear hose, high heeled shoes and a Sunday looking dress." Modest, simple presentation (including make-up) was preferred because the appearance is said to reflect on the person. Euodia stated, *"Just things like dress and how you look is representing the God that you serve and the family that you come from and it's representing yourself."*

However, they emphasized that the focus should not be on the outward person but on building the inner spiritual person. Lydia and others expressed concern with the over emphasis on attire, *"I still question which is the more important thing, what they are wearing or saving a person's soul."* The most concern fell to the restriction of women's wearing pants in the church.

Opinions varied on the wearing of pants as acceptable attire. For the majority, pants were appropriate attire for women as long as they met the aforementioned requirements of modesty. However, because they respected their pastor and the older church members, the participants did not wear pants in the church, as this was seen as a generational preference. Lois said, *"If I know that it bothers you then I'm going to love you enough not to walk up in there [church] in pants."* Mary, who does not wear pants to church services, accepted young persons' wearing pants to church but only at non-Sunday church services. *"I don't see a problem with kids wearing pants. They've been in school all day and come directly to youth meeting or something like that. Or even as far as Mission is concerned, I don't see a problem with wearing pants as long as you're decent and in order and not revealing things that you don't need to be revealing."*

However, three others who did not believe in wearing pants to church argued that a skirt should be kept in the car for weekday services.

Deuteronomy 22:5 (See Appendix E5) was cited by some as biblical reasoning for not wearing pants to church, although it did not prohibit the wearing of pants in other places or activities. Anna interpreted this scripture in this manner, *“But I do know that in the Bible it speaks of women should not adorn themselves as men...I was brought up that you respected God’s house. I would not wear a pair of pants to Greater First to this day. I will not come in the church if I have on pants to this day.”* Pants are considered to be man’s attire and skirts and dresses are women’s attire. Respect for God’s house, for some, meant adhering to this principle, but only within the confines of the church. Six of the women who believed pants were acceptable did not apply this scripture to the situation, because during the time period of this scripture, men wore “robes” or “dresses” and thus, pants were not under consideration.

For those who attended a church where the pastor’s attire preferences were stated, different avenues were taken to enforce the policy. Martha felt that when she was the president of the Mission group she needed to take the lead in reprimanding women who came to the meetings in pants. With the new pastor, pants are deemed acceptable but are not common. Martha says of the older women, *“Some of them don’t approve of it but right now it’s just like why am I going to get upset about something like that and they know that times have changed.”* Persis ran afoul of the older women in her church when she wore a sleeveless dress. *“But they don’t do it as much anymore as when we were kids. Times have changed. Things are different now.”* While norms for attire have been

relaxed, this seems to only apply to the children, as these women still adhere to the dress standards to which they were raised.

Womanist Viewpoint in the Biblical Text

Womanist theology acknowledges the Bible as scriptural authority, directing all aspects of life. It is read through the lens of personal experience allowing antagonistic portions to be disregarded. For the women in this study, the Bible is the infallible Word of God given through men. Sarah emphasizes its unmitigated authority when she says, *“and I do believe in the Bible and I just have to do what the Bible says and I can’t make it if I don’t do it.”* She believes that the path to success comes only from obedience to the scriptures. Tirzah adds, *“I don’t question what the Bible says, I just believe it.”* She reads with eyes of faith that have been instilled since youth. Thus, the strict literalist interpretation of these women is in contradiction to the womanist emphasis on experience as authoritative.

Womanist theology finds the Bible to be a positive resource for several reasons. First, the Bible is recognized as a source of validation for black women, and this seems to be true for the women in this study. As stated earlier, the participants felt their beliefs made them valuable people. Mara states, *“I used to feel that other people had to validate me, that they had to accept me. But after I come to understand that what He’s done for me has already validated me, based on His commandments I’m already justified, I don’t have to be what someone else thinks I should be or do and it allows me*

to be my own person.” According to this belief, Christians are not only believers and disciples of Christ, but their acceptance of Jesus as the son of God makes them “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

Second, womanists argue that the Bible reflects a set of values and advocates a way of life based on those values. Euodia says of her biblical values, “*You should never do anything that contradicts what you believe. And when you know what your beliefs are, and when you have standards you are being held to as a result of your beliefs, you pattern your life in all aspects to line up with that.*” Priscilla adds, “*To be a woman you need to have...certain beliefs about something. You have to believe in something, then be able to say what you believe in...*” So, for these women, it is not enough to claim to be a Christian; one must be able to relate that to others in word and deed.

For womanist theologians, the Bible speaks to the oppressed, historically the position of African Americans. This theme comes through as personal oppression in the participant’s comments. Lois says of Rahab’s use by God, “*that lets me know when I was younger I couldn’t get too far out there where the Lord couldn’t tap me on my shoulder and say we’re going to work on this, come on.*” These women are comforted by their belief that no one is beyond the love and assistance of God. Regardless of how society views the person or group, they believe that God has a purpose for them. Thus, their faith serves the purpose of reinforcing their sense of worth.

Because the Bible speaks to the oppressed it provides hope for liberation. The participant’s carried an other-worldly hope, but not a stated support for social justice action. As Miriam says, “*Wherever I go, I’m never alone.*” She believes God is not

oblivious to what is going on but is available at any time. Esther adds, “[*my religious experiences*] have given me strength; it’s given me hope. It lets me know that no matter what happens in my life, if there’s nobody else, there’s always God. If I need someone to fall on He’s always that rock in my life, always that stability. If I just hold on it will be okay tomorrow.” There is an unflinching belief that regardless of the situation, God’s direction for success is inevitable.

The Bible, in womanist theology, reflects personal experiences. The participants found characters in the Bible influential for several reasons, including that they reminded them of themselves. Esther equates her life to the wilderness wanderings of the children of Israel. “*I’m wandering in the world waiting for something to happen.*” Mary identifies with the woman with the issue of blood (Matthew 9:20-22). “*Many years ago I had that same condition...I believe the Lord healed my body of whatever was wrong.*”

Because the Bible can be interpreted in terms of current experiences, it provides insight into contemporary dilemmas. Miriam, in explaining why Mary, the mother of Jesus, is an influential biblical character for her, says Mary’s learning she is to bear the Messiah helps Miriam understand, “*Although you don’t always see the outcome, it’s not what you think it’s going to be. You just have to learn to trust God and trust the decisions that are made.*” Persis looks to David because he, like she, is a poet. David’s psalms said to her that “*I could tell God these things [love for God] through what I write.*” The Bible’s stories and teachings are viewed as being as relevant today as when it was first written.

Since the women still find that the Bible maintains relevancy to personal and social experiences, they have the opportunity to resist passages that are antagonistic. When asked about their interpretation of I Timothy 2:11-15 (See Appendix E3), several women in describing these passages as being written for their time period also added how they did not see these scriptures as influencing their current life. Martha states, *“My opinion of this scripture is that women were not allowed to have a voice in the church; whether or not they understood what was being taught. However, today women are outspoken and voice their opinion. In addition, they are sometimes the messenger.”* Esther says, *“This one kind of gets to me, for I think times have changed. Women should be silent in the church. I don’t think so. I think within the black church we see men as the head of the church - our pastors or deacons or elders, but I think today’s woman has a strength that is needed in the church. We are teachers, we are missionaries, we are leaders. We are an important part of the church.”* Finally, Deborah states, *“I believe that I Timothy 2 indicates that this [a woman not teaching] is a preference of Paul’s and not a command of God.”* Even though seen as inerrant, the Bible is read through the lens of personal experience and conforms to that experience.

Findings

The findings of this research parallel those of the aforementioned studies of conservative religious women and how they negotiate their lived experiences with their stated beliefs. The participants in this study and previous studies were able to “interpret

the teachings of the church in a manner that maximizes their agency while remaining within the boundaries of church doctrine” (Beaman 2001, p. 83). The women in this study utilized their religious beliefs in all aspects of their lives. Who they are as women, as individuals, cannot be separated from their religious beliefs. The biblical text not only helps to define their roles as Christians but as wives, mothers, and church and community workers. A womanist ideology is also found in how the participants defined womanhood and how they interpreted the biblical text. Women were described as having a strong spirit and an independent personality. Not only did they have a desire to know more but they instill that same need in their children. They have an uncompromising love for themselves and other influential women in their lives. They understand their persuasive powers within a relationship and are committed to keeping the church relevant for future generations. However, for these women, the official model of religion and womanism are at odds on particular matters.

Walker’s definition of womanism includes the idea of “A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually.” Clearly these women hold a nonsexual love for the women in their lives and do not hold animosity towards their gender, though one found fault in women not supporting one another. However, as with most black churches, homosexuality is deemed unacceptable and is left to a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy. Those in this study who mentioned homosexuality were against it.

Also, the God-head hierarchy was another point of contention between the participant’s religion and womanism. This is a chain of command for both the family and the church. In the home God gives direction to the husband who then consults with

his wife and they both deliver a unified message to the rest of the family. In the church, God speaks to the pastor who consults with the trustees and deacons and they in turn deliver a unified message to the congregation. Walker's definition of a womanist defines her as "traditionally capable." Not only can an individual woman lead despite circumstances, the history of women of color includes women who have been leaders. Submission to one's husband and the restriction of certain church leadership roles would tend to imply that women are not capable of leading in the home and church. Of course, this image of submission seemingly contradicts not only womanist thinking, since it goes against women's experience, but it is also often contradicted by the women's own experiences of independence and sense of being ignored.

From the women they had known and idealized, they operationalized submission as an empowering choice. They did not find that submission and church leadership restrictions placed them into the background. They reasoned that the Bible dictates this position and God is not seen as one who honors one person over another (See Appendix E7). These women saw it simply as an order ordained by God. Each person within the family (husband, wife, child) has a role that is described in the Bible and must be followed. It was felt that it still takes strength to submit and that within the hierarchy each person is submitted to someone.

As Figure 1 illustrates, the flow is not straight up and down because none of these women considered submission to the husband as giving him sole authority. Some women felt they still had a voice in decision making in the church and in the home. Their opinion mattered and was taken into consideration. Just as God gave them a

particular role to play within the family and church, He also gave them individual talents that were useful in the functioning of both. Here, we see a definitive contradiction between the women's attempts to adhere to the official church teachings and their own self-images as strong, talented and independent women.

While certain beliefs such as wives submitting to their husbands have the ability to be oppressive, one must consider how people incorporate religious beliefs and practices into their everyday lives. In actual experience, these women were more independent and empowered than one might expect, given their verbal support for 'submission.' In this instance, the cultural heritage of the strong outspoken woman must merge with the belief that men are the leaders in the home and church. She views her submission as a choice and is not considered a blind obedience.

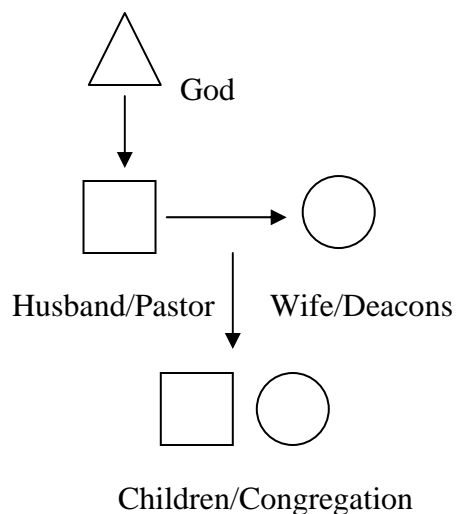


Figure 1. God-head Hierarchy of Submission

They described the husband as the head but the wife as the co-pilot. It is she who provides the stability in the household. Those in this study considered women as equal partners – Eve was created as Adam’s helpmate – with different roles in the family. Each role is dependent on the other and thereby none is greater. Connie Marshner explains the paradox of the politically active social conservative woman by defining conventions and traditional values. Conventions, such as women receiving an education, are mutable and change with the times. Traditional values such as husbands as the head of the household, are moral norms that do not change (Klatch 1987).

Submission in the home is not seen as equivalent to being barred from leadership positions. Even when it is considered that men may feel threatened by women entering the pulpit and may set rules within the church based on scripture or tradition to block their advancement, women felt they would still be able to persevere as associate ministers. An area which may be considered limiting concerns women in head church leadership roles, because while several found little problem with women serving as associate ministers or deacons, only three believed women could serve as pastors. While they understand themselves to be powerful because of their ability to influence leadership, they do not feel it is biblically responsible of them to use that power to assume formal leadership within the current structure. In their view, just as the husband is the head of the house, a pastor over the church must be a man. Marcia Riggs (2003) described this block from leadership as “standing in, yet outside, the gates of the black church.” Women must have their leadership roles within the church “negotiated and

approved by male gatekeepers.” In this she finds paradoxical the coexistence of woman’s tradition of resistance and the male gatekeepers. For her it is the “heart of the complexity and duplicity of sexual-gender relations in the African American church and tends to lead the leadership and the membership to dismiss or excuse the ways that sexual-gender oppression occurs in the church” (p. 83). Those that disagree with limiting women’s roles within the church are then complicit in maintaining a system of oppression.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The final project, then, involved ten women from a rural area of 6,000 people and ten women from an urban area of over 550,000 people. While I expected a comparison would be made between the two groups, no real differences in their attitude about themselves as women or their role within the family and church were present. I assumed that women in rural areas would hold more conservative views of issues such as women's attire and women in church leadership roles. However, conservative ideals were held both in the rural and urban area.

This research also set out to explore how African American Baptist women interpret church teachings on the roles of women. Their standpoint is an interpretative community that reads the biblical text in terms of their own experiences. "In fact, of all the interpretative communities to which she belongs [American/Western, African American, female and Christian], the African American female interpretative community (whether in the church, academy or the civic club) is the only one that has consistently allowed her to hold in tandem all the components of her identity" (Weems 1991, p. 68). In reading such scriptures as Proverbs 31:10-28 – the virtuous woman/wife, I Peter 3:1-7 – a description of a wife, and Titus 2:1-5 – a description of a "godly woman," the women utilized all aspects to present personalized interpretations of what it meant to be a good woman, wife and mother (See Appendix E).

Not only was the biblical text explored from their point of view, but biblical characters as well. When asked about influential biblical persons, characters were chosen who had experiences with which the women related, often women traditionally disparaged such as Rahab. In these women they read the idea of a second chance, regardless of one's real or perceived past mistakes, and the opportunity to be an instrument of God even while less than perfect, even being a woman. The women found a connection with the oppressed in the Bible and found redemptive qualities that they reflected in their own lives. Similarly, womanist theologians seek to investigate the biblical text to retell the story of the oppressed in light of their own experience. Both do so in order to connect the ancient text to contemporary dilemmas, among other reasons.

This research also sought to explore women's perception of how these church teachings affected their attitudes about themselves. All comments reflected positively on themselves, though some had struggled early in life with issues of self esteem. They attributed their positive self-regard to their faith. It is their belief in who they are as Christians that gives them assurance that they are valuable. Their religious foundation provided a value system on which to base decisions. When the women accepted what they saw as God's unconditional love, they report that they began accepting and appreciating themselves. These women also used their personal interpretation of the scripture and life experiences to add to their definition of womanhood. They looked to biblical passages about women to suggest how they should live their lives as well as giving them relatable characters.

Finally, the research set out to explore if the philosophical tenets of womanism played a role in these women's interpretation of church teachings and personal attitudes about themselves. As African American women, they share a cultural definition of womanhood that incorporates portions of womanism and as Baptist women they incorporate their religious beliefs into that definition. Womanism's emphasis on community, for these women, is focused on being Christ in the world and being prepared to always help someone in need. They feel that not only are you available to assist but in helping you show God to the world. Women are seen as capable leaders in the family, at work, and at church even though they are often underestimated by men. Their belief in their ability to lead appears to be more culturally based and reinforced by scripture since most of their examples of leadership are found in the home.

In describing what it means to be a woman and the influential women in their lives, the women in this study described persons of strength, respect and independence. Many of the women spoke of women in their family, church and community who taught them how to be a woman by word and deed. They found these experiences to be very influential as they sought to pattern their lives after what they had learned. As they reminisced about their mothers, grandmothers and other women who raised them, they found life lessons about womanhood in situations such as women raising their family alone, sacrificing for their children, or being active participants in community activities.

In discussions of religion as oppressive, one must be mindful of the standpoint of women heavily involved in religious activities. While some research, such as those referenced by Ozorak (1996), finds that religious women choose family over career and

adheres to stereotyped gender roles, the Baptist faith provides a value system that honors others above self. The religious foundation of which these twenty women spoke provides a standard of behavior for all roles that they found empowering and gives them a sense of value. For them, there is honor and status in caring for the family. However, the very nature of the God-head hierarchy of submission limits the amount of agency for these women so that while they state they are empowered, it is within the boundaries of a patriarchal system they accept and promote.

Collins (2000), citing Maria Stewart, says that African American women should come into their own voice; find words for their own experience. Just as Alice Walker spoke in her own voice describing feminism, quite possibly African American conservative Christian women could begin a new definition for their own experience, as Connie Marshner introduced a new title for politically active social conservative women, the “New Traditional Woman.” “She is new because she is of the current era, with all its pressures and fast pace and rapid change. She is traditional because, in the face of unremitting cultural change, she is oriented around the eternal truths of faith and family” (Klatch 1987, p. 145). The new definition for African American conservative Baptist women, like womanism, includes a positive sense of self and a need to help others through Christianity. Even in instructions of submissiveness, the new definition includes a need for strength for self and others. The new definition would also include a call to role model effective leadership and to be a ready resource to the community. However, strength and self-assurance are not focused from within but “from above,” because the fight is not only against patriarchy and sexism. The fight, as they see it, is against

“principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). And as they begin to speak for themselves, defining their own reality, they can begin to confront their personal contradictions and challenge oppression at home, at church and abroad.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Data

| Name | Marital Status | Womanist/ Feminist | Children | Community Involvement | Urban or Rural | Education | # of Church Activities | Length at Church | Length in City | # Services Attended Weekly |
|-----------|----------------|-----------------------|----------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Mara | M | No | 2 | No | Rural | High School | 3 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 3 |
| Miriam | D | Yes | 0 | No | Rural | Bachelor's | 4 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 1 |
| Mary | D | Unknown | 1 | Yes | Rural | Some College | 2 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 2 |
| Elizabeth | D | Unknown | 2 | No | Rural | High School | 1 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 1 |
| Ruth | M | Unknown | 1 | Yes | Rural | Bachelor's | 4 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 2 |
| Milcah | M | Some | 2 | Yes | Rural | Some College | 8 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 3 |
| Lydia | S | Unknown | 0 | Yes | Rural | Bachelor's | 7 | 6-10 years | 11+ years | 2 |
| Sarah | M | Unknown | 1 | No | Rural | Master's | 4 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 2 |
| Eunice | S | Some | 3 | No | Rural | Some College | 4 | 6-10 years | 1-5 years | 2 |
| Martha | S | Yes | 0 | Yes | Rural | Bachelor's | 1 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 1 |
| Dorcas | S | No | 2 | No | Urban | Some College | 4 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 3 |
| Tirzah | D | Yes | 2 | Yes | Urban | Some College | 6 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 2 |
| Anna | D | Yes | 4 | No | Urban | Some College | 1 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 2 |
| Persis | D | Yes | 0 | No | Urban | Bachelor's | 6 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 3 |
| Lois | M | Some | 3 | Yes | Urban | Some College | 3 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 3 |
| Shiphrah | D | Unknown | 2 | No | Urban | Bachelor's | 1 | 1-5 years | 11+ years | 1 |
| Esther | D | No | 3 | No | Urban | Some College | 3 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 2 |
| Deborah | M | No | 5 | Yes | Urban | Master's | 3 | 1-5 years | 11+ years | 3 |
| Euodia | M | Some | 0 | Yes | Urban | Master's | 3 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 3 |
| Priscilla | W | Unknown | 1 | Yes | Urban | Associate's | 4 | 11+ years | 11+ years | 2 |

APPENDIX B*Religion and Womanism in the Lives of Central Texas African American Baptist Women*

Name _____ Alias _____

Birthplace _____ Current Occupation _____

Years in Fort Worth (DFW) ___ Less than 1 Year ___ 1-5 Years ___ 6-10 Years ___ 11+ years

Other places lived _____

Age ___ 18-23 ___ 24-29 ___ 30-35 ___ 36-40 ___ 41-45 ___ 46-50 ___ 50+

Highest Level of Education ___ High School/GED ___ Some College/Trade ___ Bachelor's
___ Master's ___ Doctoral ___ Post-Doctoral

Current Marital Status ___ Single ___ Married ___ Widow ___ Divorce

Children ___ No ___ Yes, if so, how many _____

Parents' Marital Status ___ Never married ___ Married/Widowed ___ Divorced

Have you been baptized? ___ No ___ Yes, if so, at what age _____

Current Church Membership
_____Length of Membership ___ Less than 1 Year ___ 1-5 Years ___ 6-10 Years ___ 11+ years
How often do you attend services ___ Once a Week ___ 2 times a Week ___ 3+ times a Week
___ Once or Twice a Month ___ SporadicallyChurch Involvement ___ Choir ___ Youth ___ Sunday School ___ Mission
___ Deaconess ___ Kitchen ___ Usher Board ___ Bible Study
___ BTU Other

Is your church involvement ___ Local ___ District ___ Regional ___ National

Are you involved in the community in other ways? ___ No ___ Yes, if so, how?

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your early religious experiences
2. How have your early religious experiences influenced the way you currently think about religion (sermons, lessons, watching people interact)?
3. How do you think that the religious beliefs and practices you had while growing up influenced how you felt about yourself?
4. Have your beliefs changed over time? If so, how?
5. How do you think that your present religious beliefs and practices influence how you feel about yourself?
6. Have you ever really doubted your religious beliefs? If so, what made you feel doubtful? What effect do you think questioning beliefs has in the long run?
7. The church and/or the Bible speaks of women in various roles. What do you feel is said about a woman's role as wife, mother, church worker, older women, working women, and education.
8. Does your church teachings include restrictions on women's attire? How do you feel about it?
9. What is your personal opinion of women in church leadership positions such as ministers? Other positions such as deacons? Does it differ from your church stance? If so, how?
10. Do your personal beliefs about women's role in the church differ from what is taught in your congregation? If so, what are the differences? Also, why do you believe differently?
11. If you had to teach a group of kindergarten girls about womanhood, how would you complete the sentence, Women are _____? (positive and negative traits, different from men)
 - 11.b When did you know you were a woman?
12. What women would you consider to be influential in your life? Why?
13. Are there any Biblical women that you relate to or inspire you?

14. Have you ever felt that your religion didn't treat women the same way as men? If so, what was your reaction?
15. Is the role of women in your religion/congregation currently an issue for you, or not? If so, in what way, and what is your response?
16. Do any church activities focus on women's issues? Why are/are not you a part of these activities?
17. Which church duties are women/men currently in charge of?
18. Does the pastor defer to anyone when making major church decisions? If so, who?
19. How does the church go about deciding its leadership?
20. Do you feel that women within your religion/congregation have control over the direction of the church? If so, how is this accomplished?
21. Did your religious training or your experience of worship suggest anything to you about what your role in the community should be?
22. How did you feel about the role[s] that was suggested to you?
23. Did it make a difference that you were woman? If so, in what way?

APPENDIX D

Definition Discussion

After reading the following definition of Womanism, answer the questions below. Use of other materials or persons, while not prohibited, are not encouraged. Your opinion is what matters most. Use the back of this sheet if more space is needed.

1. From *womanish* (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You are trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.
2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Ans.: “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”
3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.
4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.

Based on this definition, would you consider yourself a womanist? If so, why or why not? Would you consider your actions, attitudes or beliefs to be in line with the definition of womanism? If so, how or how not?

APPENDIX E

Discussion Scriptures

Please give YOUR interpretation of the following scriptures. You may read the entire chapter if further reference is needed. Use of other materials or persons, while not prohibited, are not encouraged. Your opinion is what matters most. Use the back of this sheet if more space is needed.

1) Proverbs 31: 10-28 10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. 12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. 13 She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. 14 She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. 15 She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. 16 She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. 17 She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. 18 She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. 19 She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. 20 She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. 22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. 23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. 24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. 25 Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. 26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. 27 She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. 28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

2) Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord (KJV)

1 Peter 3:1-7 1 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; 2 While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. 5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. 7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (KJV)

3) 1 Timothy 2:11-15 11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. 15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

I Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. (KJV)

4) I Timothy 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach (KJV)

Acts 6:2-4 2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. 4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

5) Deuteronomy 22:5 The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

1 Timothy 2:9-10 9 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; 10 But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

1 Peter 3:3-4 3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; 4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

6) Titus 2:1-5 1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: 2 That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. 3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

7) Galatians 3:28 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

VITA

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EDUCATION

Ph. D. Sociology, Texas A&M University, August 2007
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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor, *Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement*, Texas A&M University
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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Academic Advisor 2004-Present
 Texas Christian University, Neely School of Business
- Interim Coordinator of Student Activities 2003-2004
 Tarrant County College, Southeast
- Academic Advisor, Graduate Assistant 2001-2002
 Texas A&M University, General Academic Programs
- Program Advisor 2000-2001
 Texas A&M University, Memorial Student Center
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PRESENTATIONS

Church/Organization Leadership Training
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COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

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