ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	SUNDAY MORNING MATTERS: THE PRODUCTION OF GENDERED SUBJECTS IN WHITE EVANGELICAL LIFE
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As evangelical Christian demographics in the United States have increasingly diversified, pundits and scholars have sought to understand the persistent political power of white American evangelicals. This interdisciplinary dissertation argues that a key mechanism of the political formation of white evangelical Christians has been hiding in plain sight: The weekly church worship service in predominantly white congregations has provided remarkable continuity as a means of political formation for churchgoers, particularly through worship rituals indebted to ideologies of gender and race. Drawing on Black feminist thought, phenomenology, and the anthropology of religion, I describe the white evangelical church worship service as an axis of "haunting" across time and space, where patriarchal relations of power built on racialized discourses of manhood and womanhood continue to shape the everyday lives of churchgoing women. I rely on textual analysis of evangelical digital culture and original ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews, with churchgoing women in the southern U.S. to uncover how women's experiences in church structure their consciousness in dimensions of their lives not often considered inherently “religious”—work and labor, sex and marriage, performance and material culture, and the knowledge and discipline of the self. In clarifying this phenomenological process by which churchgoing women become gendered and therefore political subjects, the project identifies the significance of the white evangelical church worship service to white evangelical subject formation and the implication of white supremacy in this process. More broadly, the dissertation calls for a reappraisal of the importance of religious ritual to the construction of identity and difference in and through white American Christianity.

SUNDAY MORNING MATTERS: THE PRODUCTION OF GENDERED SUBJECTS IN WHITE EVANGELICAL LIFE

by

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Dedication

To Rachel Held Evans (1981-2019)

Acknowledgements

Over the years, drafts, and iterations of this project, a wide network of collaborators has supported me and my work.

The women who participated in my research so generously shared their time, thoughts, feelings, and stories with me, and I am deeply grateful to each of them.

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Before I came to Maryland, I trained in folklore in the American Studies department at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. I'm grateful to the faculty there for helping lay the foundation for my current research, including Patricia Sawin, Glenn Hinson, Bernard Herman, and William Ferris. What would eventually become

Chapter 3 of this dissertation emerged in Patricia's Intro to Folklore seminar in fall 2012, and her interest in and encouragement of my work remained steadfast through our conference presentation at AFS in October 2013, her Gender and Performance seminar in spring 2014, and my subsequent applications to doctoral programs.

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Introduction

My mother's mother owns a cookbook called "Favorite Recipes of the Cherokee Church of Christ." Bound by a yellow laminated cover and red spiral spine, the book dates to 1990, at which point it seems likely that someone who attended the church in Cherokee, Alabama, gave it to my grandparents. Opening it reveals a low-quality, black-and-white photocopied image of an older woman, my great-great-grandmother, Bessie Hargett, to whom the book is dedicated. A few paragraphs beneath the photo explain how Bessie "was instrumental in starting the building in which we now meet":

> Mrs. Bessie Hargett told the following story of how the collection for the church-house was kicked off. Mrs. Hargett and Mrs. Ola Miller were talking, and wishing for a church house and Mrs. Miller said, "Why don't we just go out around town and take up a collection for a church house? You can drive, and I've got a big mouth for talking, so why don't we?" Well. Mrs. Hargett and Mrs. Miller loaded up in Estes Hargett's Model A Ford and rode all over town collecting a grand total of three dollars. Upon learning what the women had done, Estes and Brother Moore were shamed, saying, "It isn't the women's place to be doing that!"

Reading on, we learn that the brothers took up a less shameful form of fundraising, soliciting donations from churches in Tennessee, and

> The Church house was finished by the year 1937. A wooden floor was put in but termites destroyed the pine tongue and groove flooring and it was replaced by a concrete floor. Mrs. Hargett said she helped level the slag base before the concrete was poured. She also "drove many a nail in making those first pews."

This story's retelling (and the pleasure and pride with which it is retold) in a cookbook composed by church women for church women offers a glimpse into the paradox of women's place in white evangelical churches: women are both vital to the church's construction and constructed by it. The story's content suggests church women's awareness of their position and their capacity to wield it: the "Well." hints at the way the story was often told, with a conspiratorial pause before we learn how Bessie and her friend Ola broke church ground, in more ways than one, and the transitive verb “shamed” instead of “ashamed” implies both the social consequences of the women’s actions for their husbands and just how tactical the women’s campaign might have been from the get-go. The story’s context—the church’s name, Cherokee Church of Christ, contains a suppressed archive of its own—also gestures towards the way that the church worship service reiterates histories of gender, race, and religion, histories which are then reiterated in turn in the everyday lives of churchgoers. These archives belong at the beginning of this ethnographic study because they are the conditions of its production. I come from a long line of church women. I know that what happens in church does not stay in church. I know this because it is lodged in my own body, my first clue to the phenomenology of church and gender.

As political subjects and members of patriarchal communities, white churchgoing women in the United States have both fascinated and confounded pundits and scholars. Research on the construction of gender in white evangelicalism has focused on Christian media and popular culture; men’s and women’s parachurch organizations; colleges, conferences, family life, and business culture. Meanwhile, the Sunday[1] church service around which so much evangelical life revolves has received much less attention. Without recognizing the ways white evangelical women in the U.S. are produced as women by and within this weekly ritual, scholars of gender, race, and religion risk misunderstanding the process by which these women arrive at their cultural and political orientations. How do evangelical religious practices converge with gender and race to produce the political subject? This dissertation addresses this question by centering the role of the white evangelical church worship service in women's formation. It demonstrates that patriarchal worship practices around who can preach, distribute communion, and so on are much more important to the production of white Christian womanhood than the scholarship has considered.

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[1] With the exception of a few denominations, such as Seventh-Day Adventists and the United Church of God, Sunday is the day of communal, public worship observed in most evangelical Christian churches.

"Sunday Morning Matters" draws on textual analysis of evangelical social media posts, blogs, and podcasts; material culture analysis; and original ethnographic fieldwork and personal interviews with churchgoing women in Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Washington, DC. Following work in anthropology, Black feminist thought, and phenomenology, it establishes the white evangelical church worship service as an axis of "haunting" across both time and space (Gordon 1997). Sunday morning in these churches has been and continues to be haunted by racialized discourses of manhood and womanhood dating to the nineteenth century—discourses that contributed to the gendered division of labor and leadership that persists in white evangelicalism today. This is the context for the main argument of the dissertation: Women's experiences of these gendered and racialized worship practices structure their subjectivity beyond the church building. Across various dimensions of their lives that are not often considered inherently "religious"—work and labor, sexual intimacy and pleasure, material culture and identity performance, and embodiment and desire—the relation of power between men, women, and God in church is reiterated and negotiated. Each chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to exploring the phenomenological relationship between one of these dimensions of churchgoing women's everyday lives and their experiences in church on Sunday.

For the past two decades the study of "lived religion," or the "daily lived experience" of religious laity, has been dominant in religious studies (Griffith and McAlister 2007; Elisha 2011; Orsi 2005). This turn followed the vital critique, made most prominently by anthropologist Talal Asad (1993), that the concept of religion as "belief" is specifically a Christian and Western view. Meanwhile, the notion of religion as primarily a social identity has also become increasingly popular (Woodhead 2011; see Ingersoll 2003; Griffith 1997; Stasson 2014; Bellar 2016; Erzen 2006). These approaches have inadvertently led to a dearth of research on formal settings of worship, particularly in Christian contexts.[2] As a consequence, the relationship *between* Christian corporate worship rituals and the everyday lives of congregants—including the production of gendered subjectivity—has gone largely overlooked. Another reason the relationship between the church worship service and gendered subject formation might have been understudied is the way evangelicals themselves tend to talk about it. Growing up, I heard many remarks from the pulpit that seemed to downplay the place of the church worship service in the practice of faith, usually something like "*Real* church doesn't happen on Sunday morning." It was common to hear that "church" and worship extend beyond the assembly on Sundays—à la "The worship doesn't end when the service ends." At the same time, church leadership strongly emphasized the need for members to regularly show up on Sundays. Upon one of my visits to an evangelical church in the DC area, I listened as the pastor urged congregants to consider rearranging their travel schedules so that rather than weekend-long trips, they would be back in town by Sunday morning in order to see one another face to face. The seeming dissonance in evangelical messaging around church service attendance—on the one hand, minimizing the centrality of the corporate worship service to Christian faith and on the other hand, urging congregants to show up on Sundays—is often actually an appeal for congregants to become involved in church activities beyond the Sunday service. Put more charitably, the idea is that Christian community inheres in everyday relationships and actions, not in attending church once a week. Still, the Sunday worship service is a hub of white evangelical life. In fact, the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study found that 58 percent of white evangelical Christian Americans attend church once a week or more, with an additional 30 percent attending at least once or twice a month; the only more frequent attenders of religious services are Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. Between 2009 and 2019, while the nation's overall rate of religious attendance declined, the rate of church attendance among American Christians stayed the same, according to the Pew Research Center.

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[2] The church service is an important research site for several ethnographies: Anthropologist Judith Casselberry (2017) examines the work Black Apostolic Pentecostal women in Harlem do to embody "a holy Black female personhood" in patriarchal spaces at church, work, and home. Folklorist Elaine Lawless (1988) focuses on how women preachers in white Pentecostal churches in Missouri negotiate the patriarchy of their communities. T.M. Luhrmann's (2012) ethnography of charismatic communities in California is not concerned with gender as a primary category of analysis but combines close attention to how prayer operates in her participants' everyday lives with participant observation in church worship services. Jessica Johnson (2018) reveals the biopolitical power wielded by megachurch pastor Mark Driscoll through church's worship services, classes, conferences, and digital culture, all of which recruited churchgoers into performing "the affective labor of mediating, branding, and embodying Driscoll's teaching on 'biblical' masculinity, femininity, and sexuality" (7). In each of these works, however, the church worship service is a site, but not the subject, of the research.

As I was writing this dissertation, religion researcher Robert P. Jones published findings that offer a hint at the acute relationship between the church worship service and the formation of white evangelical churchgoers. In his book *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (2020), Jones argues that his surveys about structural injustice reveal that "for white evangelical Protestants, holding racist views has nearly four times the power to predict likelihood of [white Christian] identification among frequent church attenders than among infrequent church attenders" (Jones 2020, 184). The experiences of the women in this dissertation suggest that a controlling factor here is indeed the church worship service. The practices and configurations within the white church worship service, repeated each Sunday morning, matter deeply to the formation of the people in attendance.

What We Talk about When We Talk about Evangelicals

As Omri Elisha has noted, "the category of 'evangelical' is a source of debate and contention within Western Protestantism, and it remains a subject of relentless media speculation and scholarly inquiry" (Elisha 2011, 10). Elisha, following Robert Woodberry and Christian Smith (1998), sees "evangelicals" as a subset of the larger category of "conservative Protestants" that includes Pentecostals and fundamentalists, all of whom share a strong emphasis on biblical literalism, a "personal relationship" with Jesus through being "born again," a drive to convert others to the faith, and the belief that salvation is found only in Christ. These four characteristics were first identified by historian David Bebbington (1993) and represent the most prevalent definition of evangelicalism in religious studies and history. Yet scholars have also criticized this definition as overly theological rather than historical or cultural and for failing to actually distinguish evangelicals from other Christians, among other reasons (Noll, Bebbington and Marsden 2019). In response, ethnographers of evangelicalism have turned to models that define evangelical Christianity as a particular epistemology (Harding 2000), psychology (Luhrmann 2012), and type of subjectivity (Elisha 2011). On another front, historical and literary studies of evangelicalism have increasingly relied on affect to describe evangelicalism, following calls to theorize religion as an “affective tendency” (Puar 2014, 200; see also Schaefer 2015).

Despite the warranted complaints that Bebbington’s definition is unduly based in theology or doctrine, the “beliefs” it describes are themselves deeply important *practices* for evangelical Christians. “Religious belief does matter,” Melani McAlister asserts, “and nowhere more so than in the hothouse world of evangelical doctrine clarification” (2008, 875). In evangelicalism, belief/faith *is* practice, object, feeling, ritual, relationship, and experience, as Amy Hungerford writes (2010), and the beliefs outlined in the “Bebbington quadrilateral,” as it has come to be called, certainly play an outsized role in white evangelical life. In the spring of 2019, I participated in a one-off book club with a group of women who attended an evangelical church in Washington, DC. The conversation turned to whether or not the women identified as evangelical Christians. Morgan, who had grown up in a Catholic household and attended Catholic schools before joining an evangelical church, shared that she had come to understand that in evangelicalism, “the Bible was elevated above all else, and it is the end-all, be-all: *All you need to be a Christian is you and your cup of coffee and the Bible.* [It was] so focused on your relationship with Jesus, your relationship with the text.” What Morgan described sounds like belief as *orientation*, to borrow a term from Sara Ahmed (2004). At another point in my fieldwork, I attended a church service where the singing threw me back to my childhood, to songs that felt intimately familiar even though some of them—like “Higher Ground” (“Lord lift me up/And help me stand/By faith on Canaan’s tableland/A higher plane/than I have found/Lord, plant my feet on higher ground”)—I had not sung in years. When the pastor began his sermon, it seemed only fitting that it was about the importance of singing in the worship service, and when he said that a person could come to belief by seeing the expression on someone else's face as they sang, what I heard was a concept of belief as both affect and practice through communal experience.

I offer these examples because I find the various definitions outlined above useful, not absolute. Belief, affect, identity, history, practice—perhaps the mistake would be to assume that when it comes to modern evangelicalism, any one of these can be isolated from the others. For example, the churches my participants attend all conform to Bebbington's description, but they also share something else in common. The churches represent a range of denominations, from nondenominational to churches of Christ, Presbyterian (PCA) and evangelical Anglican (ACNA), and a range of practices and doctrines around women's roles in church. Yet in none of these churches was there any indication that a woman had ever held a regular position as the preaching pastor or as an elder or shepherd, or that those positions would be open to women. (By "women," I mean all women, trans or cis, but none of these churches is trans-affirming.) Indeed, some historians and sociologists have argued that a certain type of patriarchy is definitive of American evangelicalism. Kate Bowler (2019) has catalogued the overwhelming lack of women's ordination across evangelical denominations, a result of prohibitions against women's access to the pulpit throughout evangelicalism's history.[3] Sally K. Gallagher and Christian Smith delineate women’s subordination to men as a “hallmark of traditional evangelical Protestantism” (1999, 212). Julie Ingersoll (2003) suggests that since the 1980s and 1990s, “evangelical leaders have chosen gender issues as a litmus test of orthodoxy” (143) such that a “correct” view of women’s roles in the church and home has “replaced [biblical] inerrancy” (27) as core to evangelical identity. This was also the case for all the churches I describe herein.

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[3] Most evangelical denominations do not ordain women to be preaching pastors, but even in some church cultures where women can be ordained, churchgoing women are often denied the authority granted to men in the church service. One of my research participants pointed this out to me. Bethany's congregation is part of the Anglican Church in North America, a denomination that leaves the decision on women's ordination as clergy to individual dioceses (while still prohibiting women from being ordained as bishops). Bethany is interested in becoming ordained as clergy, and in the course of her conversations with women in the ACNA who have pursued ordination, it has become apparent to her that women's ordination is not necessarily revealing of the social relations of power in a given church: "There are dioceses where the parish does ordain women fully, but they don't actually empower women. And you can see these places where women are not ordained fully, and […] they're given more of a voice, more of that space."

In my experience and fieldwork, I have encountered another wrinkle in the effort to define evangelicalism, which is that lay Christians who attend evangelical churches do not necessarily use the term “evangelical” to describe themselves. They may be members of a church whose doctrines and practices would clearly fall under the rubric used by most scholars of evangelicalism, but they do not think of themselves primarily as “evangelical.” Women I interviewed in 2014 who attended a Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) congregation did not identify as “evangelical,” PCA, or Presbyterian, for example, but only as “Christian.” In American news media and commentary, “evangelical” tends to be synonymous with the overwhelmingly conservative Republican sympathies of white evangelicals, and I found that many of my participants were reluctant to identify themselves with it. Indeed, the fact that the term “evangelical” is most often used in reporting and punditry to refer to *white* evangelicals is an example of partisan politics overcoming doctrine or theology in defining the term. For these reasons, I often use “evangelical” to refer to churches rather than individual people, although in some cases I do use “evangelical women” to avoid clunky or awkward phrasing. I also do not make as much of a distinction as someone like Elisha between “fundamentalists” and “evangelicals.” As Susan Harding (2000) observed nearly two decades ago, the distinction between evangelicals who engage with other types of Protestant Christians or the world more broadly versus "fundamentalists" who cloister themselves has eroded (see also Erzen 2006).

The churches my participants and I attended were not Pentecostal or charismatic, although this is not to say that Pentecostal or charismatic Christians are not evangelical. The role and ministry of the Holy Spirit[4] in the modern age has long been hotly debated within evangelicalism (Noll, Bebbington and Marsden 2019). But what is indisputable at this moment is that the charismatic movement has indelibly influenced forms of Christianity across the globe, affecting even groups that do not profess to be charismatic and reject "signs and wonders," healings, speaking in tongues, and prophecy, which are important to most charismatics. Large nondenominational churches, especially, have "take[n] the spiritual innovations of Pentecostalism and render[ed] them palatable for white, educated, middle-class congregations" (Luhrmann 2012). For many of the women who appear in this dissertation, the Holy Spirit does work in their lives without it taking the more spectacular miraculous form common in Pentecostalism or charismatic traditions. Pentecostalism itself has received overwhelming and perhaps disproportionate attention in the anthropological literature (Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008); as I will discuss later in this introduction, my effort here is to mark white, middle-class Christianity as "religion."

What makes an evangelical church "white"? Multiracial congregations are typically defined by sociologists of religion as churches where 20 percent or more members are of a different racial group than the majority (see Emerson and Kim 2003). With the exception of two multiracial congregations in the DC area, the churches that I visited and my participants attended were all predominantly white evangelical churches. The share of Christian churches that would be considered "multiracial" has grown over the past two decades, yet eighty-four percent of American congregations remain racially monolithic, according to the 2018-2019 National Congregations Survey, and multiracial churches themselves have not become significantly more diverse (Gjelten 2020). In fact, several Black women I interviewed who attend "multiracial" churches still described their churches as "predominantly white." Tara, whose church's Black members make up about one-third of the congregation, told me it is a "white culture church." Alicia's church is a mix of white, Black, and Asian congregants, yet, she said, "I do try to warn Black people that it's not a safe space. And don't misinterpret my presence [in church] as it being a safe space." While I adhere to the prevailing sociological definition of multiracial congregations in the dissertation, I want to acknowledge that this term might be more palatable to the white members of such churches than it is to members of color.

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[4] For most Christians, The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. Many evangelicals understand the Holy Spirit as God's presence in the world and in their own bodies, guiding them and forming them. For Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit provides believers with the gifts of miraculous healings and glossolalia, the ability to "speak in tongues."

Christian Ritual and the Phenomenology of Race and Gender

To arrive at the dissertation's central claim—that, haunted by racialized discourses of gender, the white evangelical worship service plays a primary role in shaping women churchgoers' subjectivities beyond the church building—I draw on Black feminist thought; phenomenological approaches to race and gender; and anthropological theories of religion, the secular, and subject formation.

The dissertation's primary theoretical contribution is its analysis of the role of Christian worship rituals in producing gendered and therefore political subjects. By reestablishing the significance of ritual worship practices to the everyday lives of congregants, the project redefines and relocates the cultural politics of white evangelicalism. It does so in part by engaging the work and legacy of Talal Asad, whose critique of the dominant anthropological concepts of religious ritual might have inadvertently contributed to the depreciation of the church worship service in research on American Christianity. Famously, Asad interrogates Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as a "system of symbols" in which rituals are "symbolic actions" whose meanings are "linked to ideas of general order" (1993, 42); Asad argues instead that religion should be understood as practices and sensibilities in the context of social relations, rather than as "systems of meaning," a view, he observes, that "has a specific Christian history" (42). Tracing that history, Asad excavates a different meaning of ritual which prevailed from pre-modern Christian monasticism all the way up to the mid-19th century when the *Encyclopedia Britannica* still defined "ritual" as a book. Rather than symbolic actions which "require decoding," ritual during this period referred to a manual for the "prescribed order of performing religious services" (58). Asad offers as an example the *Rule* of Saint Benedict, a sixth-century book of instructions for monks. Through performance of the practices prescribed in the *Rule*, monks developed Christian virtues.

Ritual, in this sense, was a script, a series of directions for how to perform a prescribed practice and thereby cultivate virtue. The term's subsequent semantic shift in the nineteenth century reflected the emphasis on religious belief over practice that was a legacy of the Protestant Reformation. This binary of belief versus practice, including ritual, was mapped onto a dualistic view of the mind or soul versus the body.

Evangelicalism, in particular, has historically shied away from more "ritualistic" worship, mostly by rejecting liturgical (more scripted and recitation-based) practices as "hoary tradition, meaningless repetition, useless formality, and extravagant ceremony" (Fagerberg 2015, 455). Evangelicals' antipathy towards liturgy was also racialized and gendered, associated as it was with "the body, the flesh, and the literal" (McDannell 1995, 178; Promey 2014) and the construction of the worshipper reciting the liturgy as a puppet, passive and pliable. As I describe in Chapter 4, however, recently more evangelicals have begun embracing liturgy in their church services in ways that represent a modest break from evangelical Christian history and collapse the mind-body dualism prevalent among the liturgy's critics, marking a return to the premodern Christian understanding of "ritual" Asad describes.

In the early twentieth century, anthropologists began using "ritual" to refer to symbolic (signifying) practices, a concept that relied on the dualistic distinction between "outward sign" and "inward meaning" (60). "Ritual" no longer referred to a book on appropriate communal religious behavior, but to behavior itself, which could be read (by white ethnographers) like a book. To these anthropologists, ritual was not prescriptive or instrumental so much as *representational*. What mattered was what religious ritual *meant*, the cosmic order to which it referred. Between these two definitions—"ritual" as a directive for disciplining the self and "ritual" as readable symbols about the nature of reality—Asad argues there is a "fundamental disparity" (78). For Asad, the problem with the latter definition is that "when religion is conceptualized in terms of communal symbols, it will be isolated from social practices and discourses, and regarded primarily in terms of consciousness," precluding attention to the ways consciousness is formed by and within “material conditions and social activities” (1983, 239). Geertz does submit what seems like a fusion of the two concepts when he asserts that religious rituals produce in the worshipper a “distinctive set of dispositions.” Asad rejoins that by that logic, we should be able to predict a distinctive set of dispositions for the Christian worshipper. This is not the case, because “It is not simply worship, but social, political, and economic institutions in general, within which individual biographies are lived out…. *What are the conditions in which religious symbols can actually produce religious dispositions*?” (1993, 33; emphasis mine).

The research presented in this dissertation suggests that there is less of a disparity between the two concepts of religious ritual than Asad avers. In white evangelical churches, gendered worship practices both represent and realize social relations of power between men, women, and God. In Chapter 2, for example, I argue that the exclusion of women from particular practices in the white evangelical worship service presents men as mediators between women and God, and that in white evangelical culture more broadly, marriage replicates this relationship. Borrowing from Gayle Rubin’s work in “The Traffic in Women,” I show how both the church service and the evangelical concept of marriage rely on the notion that women can only “get” God, they cannot “give” him—at least not formally, not on Sunday mornings. These relations materialize in my participants’ bodies, from the ways they experience sex to how they imagine God.

At the same time, I agree with Asad that it is historical, material conditions that give these religious rituals their power to shape practitioners’ dispositions. Indeed, it is precisely the white evangelical church worship service’s situatedness within social, political and economic contexts—including racialized discourses of femininity, racial capitalism, and colonization—that contributes to its power for both representing and disciplining the gendered self. With the liturgy, for example, its racialized and gendered history combined with the historical discourse of passive and pliable white Christian womanhood gives the liturgy its meaning and power for white churchgoing women. In the liturgy, "passivity" and materiality come together to present a revised form of Christian feminine embodiment. To quote Asad once more, "Religious symbols…cannot be understood independently of their historical relations with nonreligious symbols or of their articulations in and of social life, in which work and power are always crucial" (53). The focus of "Sunday Morning Matters" is on the relationship between communal worship rituals and the everyday lives of congregants, and to appreciate this relationship requires an appreciation of the histories in which they are situated.

One such history, key to my project, is the connection between white supremacy and gendered worship rituals in white Christian churches in the United States. A brief review of histories of white evangelicalism, alongside broader cultural histories of race, gender, and labor, can shed some light on the origins of the current gendered division of church labor and leadership. In the early nineteenth century, white men in the southern U.S. began excluding white women from church governance and eventually from preaching, arguing that women should "confine the exercise of their spiritual talents to the household" (Heyrman 1997, 200). This move was part of a broader shift in the industrial period towards a view of bourgeois white womanhood as "naturally pure" and uniquely suited to domesticity (rather than more "public roles"); the idea was that white mothers should apply their innate piety to their children's education (Braude 1989, 39). Yet this assertion, that (white, middle- and upper-class) women were naturally domestic, depended upon the labor of enslaved Black women, and, post-Civil War, upon the unmarked labor of poor women, Black women, and other women of color who were considered "idle" if they did not perform waged labor and were denied the resources to care for their own homes and children (Carby 1987; Glenn 2002; Hennessy 2000; Hong 2006; Hunter 1993). Just as it rested on the labor of Black and brown women, white women's alleged domestic purity likewise relied on the construction of Black women as pathologically sexual (Carby 1987; Hammonds 1997; Harris 1996; Miller-Young 2014). In fact, the presence of enslaved women in antebellum churches, where biracial membership was common, "actively shaped definitions" of white female honor and identity; "church discipline often provided a spectacle that contrasted white female sexual honor with apparent black shamelessness" (Elder 2016, 109).

Furthermore, the construction of white middle-class women's natural domesticity became integral to U.S. imperialism. In the mid-nineteenth century, the cult of domesticity was "inseparable from narratives of empire and nation-building" and functioned to "turn blacks into foreigners" (Kaplan 1998, 584; see also Kaplan 2002; McClintock 1995) while simultaneously securing white women's status as "citizen-subjects" of the nation-state (Schuller 2018). As I note in Chapter 1, an example of this longstanding collaboration between domesticity, white Christian femininity and colonization is the contexts in which white evangelicalism has historically permitted women to preach. A woman preaching is not in itself an issue in most conservative evangelical churches: women often deliver a lesson or lead prayers in children's worship or at women-only classes and retreats. The problem is the possibility of their preaching to a man—specifically, a *white* man. For women to do that, some form of media—a window, a video, a book—must displace the woman's body as a means by which (white, middle-class, American) men grow closer to God. In short, the exclusion of women from leadership roles in white evangelical churches has its roots in white supremacist, colonialist and capitalist ideologies. This is not to say, of course, that historically Black Protestant churches or multiracial evangelical congregations have abstained from patriarchal church practices and organization, but to indicate that the gendered exclusion of women from public ministry roles in white Christian churches in the U.S. has been embedded in these discourses.

"Sunday Morning Matters" shows how this legacy materializes in white evangelical women's feelings and practices today. I am drawing on the work of Black feminist theorists who have elucidated the material connection between historical relations of power and present bodies and subjectivities (Hartman 2007; Holland 2012; Nash 2016; Sharpe 2016; Wynter 2003), as well as other scholars who have examined this process under the rubric of affect theory and feminist materialism. Elizabeth Povinelli understands the past as "the flesh as it is now arranged" (2006, 38); Sara Ahmed (2014) discusses "histories that get to the bone." Informed by Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Avery Gordon (1997) describes the effects of "organized forces and systemic structures" on our everyday lives as "hauntings." Haunting, Gordon writes, is a process of mediation linking discourse and lived experience. It is "social relations… prepared in advance… linger[ing] well beyond our individual time, creating that shadowy basis for the production of material life" (166).

Following this work, I understand the white evangelical church worship service as an axis of "haunting" across both time and space. Across time, as I have suggested, the history of white supremacy in American evangelicalism “lingers”: it persists in the gendered social relations of the church service which it helped create, and it continues to shape the production of white evangelical subjectivity, including in the way it conceals itself. Across space, this relation of power structures churchgoing women’s orientations, feelings, and senses of self in everyday contexts seemingly unrelated to “church.” In Chapter 2, for example, I discuss how the church worship service implicitly presents men as mediators between women and God, which in turn shapes churchgoing women’s experiences of sexual pleasure with their husbands as admission to a new plane of spiritual intimacy with God. At the same time, these women say that prior to their “sexual awakenings,” sexual pleasure felt “unnatural” to them. In their experiences of their bodies and their narration of it, the women reproduce white femininity as “pure, passionless, and de-sexed” (Hammonds 1997, 96). On another front, which I explore in Chapter 1, women’s experiences of church labor relations define and are defined by their positions as white-collar, property-owning workers. In a continuation of white evangelicalism’s complicity with colonialism, some white Christian women extract spiritual-financial capital through entrepreneurial ventures with Third World women.

These processes are phenomenological, in the broad sense. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines phenomenology as the discipline concerned with “structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first-person point of view, along with relevant conditions of experience.” As I came to understand that women’s experiences in communal worship on Sunday materially shape how they experience parts of their lives seemingly “elsewhere,” I found the framework of “structures of consciousness” particularly apt. Phenomenology not only describes how women’s experiences in church shape their experiences elsewhere, but it also describes how white supremacy "lingers" in the church service and structures the consciousness of churchgoers. It gets at how "ongoing and unfinished histories" become embodied, including whiteness (Ahmed 2007). Here I look to Sara Ahmed, who offers a "phenomenology of whiteness" that intervenes in the classical phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty by drawing on Frantz Fanon. While classical phenomenology is ahistorical and assumes a white body as its "starting point," Ahmed proposes a phenomenology that, like Fanon's approach, considers how histories of white supremacy and colonialism produce the body's orientations, arguing that "Bodies remember such histories, even when we forget them. Such histories, we might say, surface on the body, or even shape how bodies surface" (154). Whiteness, she writes, is the condition of being able to forget about one's body. That is, while women of color are often acutely aware of "histories that get to the bone," white people's lack of awareness of their own embodiment of unfinished histories is one of the *effects* of that history. The phenomenology of whiteness is precisely "whiteness as a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience" (150).

In each chapter of this dissertation, I note various ways in which white women churchgoers understand their spiritual formation as both proceeding from and exceeding the social relations of the church. These attempts to identify the forces that have shaped the women as subjects are limited by the ease with which they can recognize themselves as gendered, but not racialized, subjects. For example, in the wedding ceremonies of white churchgoing women in Alabama and Tennessee, which I discuss in Chapter 3, whiteness is an absent presence; the most the brides did to acknowledge whiteness or wealth as shaping their subjectivities was to distance themselves from either. Yet close attention to the weddings reveals how they are haunted by the legacies of slavery and white supremacy. Similarly, Chapter 4 examines the way liturgy and the Enneagram personality typology offer some churchgoing women epistemologies and pedagogies of the self, methods of tracing their own subject formation. Despite these efforts, the role whiteness has played in their lives—in their identification as women, even—remains out of sight. They live without the perpetual sense of themselves as racial subjects. As Ahmed writes, "white bodies do not have to face their whiteness; they are not orientated 'towards' it, and this 'not' is what allows whiteness to cohere, as that which bodies are orientated around" (156). In each chapter, I also attend to the way whiteness "puts certain things within reach" (Ahmed 2007, 154), whether that is the ability to derive spiritual satisfaction from one's work (Chapter 1), claim that one's sexual awakening is "spiritual" (Chapter 2), re-spatialize "church" on family land (Chapter 3), or locate oneself as a woman within the terms of discourse (Chapter 4).

In characterizing the production of white women churchgoers as *phenomenologically* connected to their experiences in church on Sunday, I am using the term in accordance with its broad definition as having to do with structures of experience and their relevant conditions. I use it to refer neither to only sensory experiences—haptics, hearing, and so on—nor to some grand theory of ahistorical, transcendental structures of consciousness. Rather, I offer a phenomenology of church, gender, and race that describes how the social relations materialized in white evangelical church worship rituals are reiterated and negotiated in women's everyday experiences "outside" church—at their jobs, in their sex lives, through their use of space and material culture, and in their knowledge, performance, and discipline of the self. The "relevant conditions of experience" for this process are not just the church, but whiteness, anti-Blackness, colonialism, and racial capitalism.

The Subject of the Spiritual

For the women in this dissertation, another relevant condition of experience is the presence of God in their lives. What these women describe is *another* haunting, albeit a welcome one, by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God. In Chapter 1, I recount a conversation I had with Erica, who had been a member of her nondenominational Tennessee church since its founding. Erica told me that she understands men's authority and leadership in her church as "ordained by God." I asked her if she thought it would affect her in any way to hear a woman pastor preach. Erica had previously visited churches with women preachers, she said, and "I do find myself feeling, and this probably comes from this pretty clear doctrine view that I have on this, that I experience less authority from women. So when a woman is in the pastoral role, or preaching, I just have this, I don't know, a sense of her having less authority [...]." Listening to what she was saying, I tried to parse whether Erica was critiquing her own intuition, or if she was offering it as evidence of a cosmic reality. "When you say that, do you feel like it's—do you suspect that that intuition is God-given or Spirit-driven," I asked, "or are you saying it's just a personal read that you get?" "Hmmm." Erica paused. "I don't know if I know how to make a distinction between that."

Erica understands that *God*, not just the church or other social and cultural forces, forms and transforms her, shaping her affects, desires, and orientations. As I mentioned, the personal relationship with God—unmediated by the formal structures of the church—

is an important part of evangelicalism. This theological doctrine has a social history, of course, but it is also a reality for the women in this dissertation.[5] Just two months before I talked with Erica, I had a conversation with Heather, a young woman living in the wake of a family tragedy. I had asked Heather if she thought she would have responded in the same way to her situation if she weren't a Christian. She said no; I asked her why. "I guess it's hard to say," she began. "I don't think I would be the person that I am without Christ in my life. I think I would be a much more selfish person. Not that I'm not selfish. […] I don't know how much of me is me and how much is Holy Spirit. […] I feel like I'm infused with Christ now. So there is no more 'me' by myself, and I can't even imagine it." Like Erica, Heather struggles to separate herself from the presence of God in her heart. Unlike Erica, Heather's intimacy with (and indivisibility from) God compels her to question her church's position on women in leadership. "Sometimes I'm like, are we sure we have this right? This whole, 'Women can't do anything.' I feel like I know God pretty well. And what he tells me about myself does not say you're lesser than a man. Ever."

Heather and Erica were among many women who told me they arrived at their feelings about gender roles in church in this way, through their sense of God producing their very selves. They believe that who they are and how they are oriented to the world is at least in part attributable to God. As I discuss in Chapter 1, these claims align neatly with other ethnographic examples of women in their position making tactical invocations of spiritual authority. At the same time, however, perhaps it is worth considering what it would mean to read these claims as something other than merely "instrumental" or tactical. I take this as an opportunity to raise questions about power, subjectivity, and how to account for what constitutes the "spiritual" or religious. How might scholars reconceptualize the role of the divine in religious subject formation? Could the very notion of subjectivity—the degree to which we are produced by the relations of power in which we reside—crack open to include relations of power not entirely reducible to social, cultural, or material forces? And could applying these questions to the experiences of white Christian women intersect generatively with a critique of Western humanism/secularism if it is true that "secularism is a name Christianity gave itself when it invented religion, when it named its other or others as religions" (Anidjar 2006, 62; see also Chidester 1996)? I do not mean to make an ontological assertion that "[the Christian] God exists." Rather, I want to raise the possibility that prevailing conceptions of power and subjectivity might be impoverished by their debt to Enlightenment-derived secular humanism.

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[5] Some scholars trace the concept of a "personal relationship with God" in Christianity to the Protestant Reformation and subsequently, the emphasis on individualism in Enlightenment thought (Bellah 1986).

Concepts of the "secular" and secularism have been historicized by Talal Asad, Charles Taylor, and others, drawing attention to the Christian framework through which "secularism" and modernity were constructed. Several different strands of feminism also have interrogated the genealogies and legacies of Enlightenment-based secular humanism, including the concept of a unitary and transhistorical subject, the invention of race and the European idea of the human (Ahmed 1996; Butler 1990, 2008; Wynter 2003). Western humanism's concept of agency, in particular, has come under critique from various quarters. Feminist materialists and affect theorists have argued that human bodies are guided, moved, and constituted in ways that do not correspond with the

Enlightenment view of the rational, self-contained individual subject (Barad 2003; Bennett 2005; Chen 2011; Coole and Frost 2010; Schaefer 2015; Seigworth and Gregg 2010). The “postsecular turn” (Braidotti 2008) in feminist theory also has focused on the Eurocentric and colonialist origins of feminist models of agency and subjectivity, most prominently in the work of Sandra Harding (2000), Judith Butler (2008), and Saba Mahmood (2005). Building on Asad and Butler, in *The Politics of Piety* Mahmood observes how the Western Enlightenment discourses of individual autonomy and free will have been central to the concept of human agency within feminist and cultural studies scholarship. She argues that despite claims to the contrary, feminist and poststructuralist theory have not wholly rejected what Foucault called the “repressive hypothesis,” the idea that the state or other formations of power suppress individuals’ pre-existing desires. By investigating what agency means in the Egyptian women’s piety movement, “where submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition for achieving the subject’s potentiality” (31), Mahmood makes critical assertions: that even the “desire for freedom” is historically contingent, rather than innate, and that “all forms of desire” are “the products of authoritative discursive traditions” (32), thus setting the stage for her crucial intervention in women’s studies, religious studies, anthropology, and beyond.

Mahmood’s monograph sparked new, and ongoing, interest in the relationship between feminism and secularism. Her critical work continues to inspire debates and inquiries on the value of secularism to feminism, including a recent volume of essays by a multinational collective of feminist scholars. In one of these essays, Alka Arora takes aim at “secular materialism, the view that only the material world is real” (Arora 2018,

33) and suggests that it has suppressed feminism's "secret spiritual history" (47), especially among women of color. Indeed, "black feminist and critical theory [and, I would add, the work of indigenous women writers] have been postsecular for a long time" (Braidotti 2008, 7). M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) writes that among feminist scholars in the United States,

> there is a tacit understanding that no self-respecting postmodernist would want to align herself (at least in public) with a category such as the spiritual, which appears so fixed, so unchanging, so redolent of tradition. Many, I suspect, have been forced into a spiritual closet. Ultimately, then, I argue that a transnational feminism needs these pedagogies of the Sacred…because it remains the case that the majority of the people in the world—that is, the majority of the women in the world—cannot make sense of themselves without it. (15)

To quote Arora, "A postsecular feminism therefore requires us to suspend the automatic distrust of women's accounts that are considered 'irrational' within a materialist metaphysics" (51).

In *The Politics of Piety*, however, Mahmood stops short of this conclusion. Mahmood's critique calls for a wider theorization of agency, but not power. It does not extend to secular-humanist assumptions about the forces that shape the religious subject. Where does the numinous, the divine, fit within "authoritative discursive traditions"? To reduce the divine to discourse (or the social or the material) seems to me to repeat the secular-liberal gesture that Mahmood critiques. Perhaps, to return to Avery Gordon, we should take "haunting" more literally. If the subject is indivisible from (yet not entirely subsumed by) relations of power, might not those relations of power also be, as Gordon writes, "more dense and delicate" than we can imagine? What are the effects of a *force majeure* at the level of the religious subject? Could the divine—to borrow from Susan

Harding's description of the beliefs of fundamentalist Baptist pastors about the Holy Spirit—actually "alter the very chemistry of desire" (2000, 47)?

At another point in my fieldwork, I attended a multiracial evangelical church service in the DC area. It was February, and the congregation was observing and celebrating Black History Month. Before the pastor gave his sermon, he stood up front and announced that he had invited church member Tabitha to deliver a testimony about what it means to be a Black Christian woman. Tabitha ascended to the pulpit. She said she had been reluctant to share her testimony; in many women's movements, from #MeToo to #TimesUp, she said she wonders if Black women's voices are being drowned out. In church, likewise, she said, she has often wondered, *Is this really the space for me?* Given the "history of how my forefathers came to be Christians," she observed, and given the "hate spewed" today by those who profess to be Christians, she has often questioned her participation in this faith. But, she said, in those moments she hears the still, small voice[6] of God reminding her of all he has done for her. Tabitha, unlike my white women participants, consciously grapples with a broader social and cultural history—that is, anti-Blackness, including Christianity's collusion with the institution of slavery—in her account of her faith and where it comes from. What they all have in common, however, is that they understand their spiritual formation as irreducible to social relations of power, in the church or elsewhere.

Obviously, taking these women's experiences seriously at any level poses some methodological difficulties. How could anthropologists, for example, even consider including the divine in their analyses of religious-political subjectivity without needing to offer an ontological argument on whether or not some form of the divine ("God" or otherwise) is *real*, or without credulously accepting any or all of their participants' claims that "God told me x or y"? Several anthropological approaches, namely phenomenological anthropology and the "ontological turn," have attempted to deal with this problem (Knibbe 2020). The ontological turn proposes the existence of radically different worlds or multi/pluriverses; the phenomenological approach eschews making empirical statements about some assumed objective reality in favor of descriptions of people's experience. In her study about women possessed by spirits in Malaysia and Zimbabwe, Mary Keller (2002) takes the tactic of arguing that the possessions accord the women *real power*, sidestepping the question of whether the spirits themselves are "real." Another approach might be to admit that at some broad level, spiritual formation—being shaped by spirits or the divine—can occur for religious subjects. It might mean listening to what one's participants or textual sources are saying about their own formation as religious subjects without always or *necessarily* seeking a functionalist explanation or ascribing false consciousness. And those who find the above approaches alienating could make theoretical and methodological space for worship (along with the social, political, and economic worlds in which it is embedded), at least, as co-producing religious practitioners.

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[6] This is a reference to God's revelation to Elijah in the form of a "still small voice" as recounted in 1 Kings 19:11-13 (NKJV).

Yet I acknowledge that in my own case, this process is fraught for another reason: the subjects of my research are, overwhelmingly, white Christian women, and juxtaposing Christian spirituality with Western secularism elides the historical relationship between the two. Scholars in religious studies and cultural theory have argued that Christianity actually "invented the distinction between religious and secular"

(Anidjar 2006, 32), revealing how secularization was an Enlightenment project indebted to Christian ideology (Anidjar 2006; Asad 1993, 2003; Said 1983). For example, according to Asad (2003), the very concept of the "natural world" versus the "supernatural" emerged in early modernity from Christianity. Following Edward Said, Gil Anidjar (2006) describes how Christianity was applied and invoked in the process of colonization, with Christianity standing for "civilization" and "religion" for "primitive" colonized subjects: "secularism is a name Christianity gave itself when it invented religion, when it named its other or others as religions" (62). Indeed, Anidjar goes on, "To uphold secularism today is to erase the fact that secularism continues to serve inequality. It serves mostly, and certainly it has historically served, one particular religion" (65). Christianity is to religion as whiteness is to race, Anidjar writes: it is unmarked, invisible. In inventing religion as the "imperial realm" which needed to be "civilized," Christianity effectively created Orientalism as well. This raises a question: Is a critique of the secularist impulses of humanities scholarship, if it is based in research with white Christian women, necessarily a *bad faith* critique?

If such a critique can re-mark Christianity as "religion," while still recognizing the Christian origins of the secular/religious binary, then perhaps it is not entirely paradoxical. My research with white American Christians subverts the ethnographic testimonial narrative in which white anthropologists witness spiritual, divine, or supernatural events or effects in formerly colonized nations, especially in Africa. These accounts tend to reiterate the distinction between the Enlightened West and "primitive," "irrational," and "nonmodern" colonial subjects, in keeping with the history of the field (Asad 1933). For example, prominent anthropologist Edith Turner (1994) opens her description of witnessing a spirit form emerge out of a woman's back in Zambia thusly: "Africans are acutely conscious of spirits" (71). What these narratives do slightly differently from their ethnographic forebears is that, in the researcher's recounting of their own paranormal experiences, they stealthily establish the degree to which the ethnographer has supposedly penetrated the culture and experiences of their subjects. In Ghana in 1967, anthropologist Bruce Grindal attended a death divination at a Sisala funeral:

> Near midnight came a moment in which I saw before my eyes and felt within my body a phenomenon totally unnatural to my previous experience—I "witnessed" the raising of the dead. …To proceed further would be to describe the experience itself, and to do so I must first say something about my situation as an anthropologist in the field, particularly the circumstances which led to this moment of perception, or "seeing." For it is from this experience that I have proceeded with my tortuous inquiry into the heart of Sisala culture and experience…. Those who have worked in the tropics can attest to the importance of discipline. Without it one can unravel in an environment of strange faces, intense sun, and the perpetual buzzing of stinging insects. (Grindal 1983, 60)

Leaving open the possibility that what he witnessed was not real but a product of his own "altered state of consciousness" due to a disruption to his routine and the psychological imprint of the climate, Grindal also offers up his story as evidence of his own credentials as an ethnographer who reached "the heart of Sisala culture." He concludes that "to understand death divination, one must know and be a part of the naturally and culturally constructed events which create the experience. The best way to accomplish this is through the ethnographic art of participant observation" (76). The function of narratives like Grindal's and Turner's is not to call into question secular Western epistemologies and ontologies, but to demonstrate ethnographic authority in a way that is premised on an Orientalist notion of the secular and the religious.

Rather than employing an encounter with the "Other" as the basis for a critique of secular humanism, in this dissertation I pay serious attention to the claims of divine formation made by white American evangelicals. I am seeking to call attention to the limits of a secular-humanist framework for the experiences of women attending predominantly white, largely middle- and upper-middle-class evangelical churches that are not (directly) part of the charismatic movement. As I explained earlier, the churches my participants attend are evangelical, but not Pentecostal or overtly charismatic—there is no "speaking in tongues" or visible manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as miraculous healings. This matters because charismatic or "spirit-filled" worship has been racialized and gendered in popular discourse, and, as I explain in Chapter 4, this means Pentecostalism is often figured as Christianity's internal "other." At the same time, the Holy Spirit is still very much a presence in the lives of nearly all the women in this dissertation. I consider their experiences worthy of "postsecular" feminist study as a corrective to the anthropological trends, especially when "public discussions on the postsecular condition tend to concentrate almost exclusively on Islam" (Braidotti 2008, 4). My hope is to raise broad questions about whether and how scholars should account for the "divine" in the formation of the religious self and in theories of power and subjectivity, and by raising these questions in regard to white evangelical American Christians, to interrogate and refuse the colonial construction of the secular-religious divide.

Methodology

Ethnographic research requires, at least in general, "the use of the self" (Buch and Staller 2007), the movement of the researcher's body into the site of research. My body has always been located at the site of my research: As a white woman who grew up in a conservative evangelical Christian family and church in small-town Alabama and went on to attend a conservative Christian college as an undergraduate, I am the product of the forces I investigate in this project. This was literally brought home to me multiple times during my research. Early in the summer of 2018, I was beginning my fieldwork in Alabama, staying with my parents, and I joined them for a small church worship service in my hometown. Before the service got underway, I ran into the father of one of my high school classmates and fellow youth group member. He said that seeing me always reminds him of the hit 1995 contemporary Christian music song “Jesus Freak.” It was unclear if this was because he remembered how much I had loved the song when I was in middle school and high school, or because as a young person I had embodied the idea of a “Jesus Freak” to him—or both. Either way, I found myself at a loss for a response.

My positionality as someone who has been entrenched in white evangelicalism but also finds it incredibly alienating has inspired my research questions and facilitated the actual performance of the research. It has simultaneously complicated my research. In one of my notes from early in the process when I was conducting and transcribing interviews, I wrote, “I’m fighting the urge to constantly argue in my head with the women whose words I’m putting down.” I found myself dispirited in cases where my participants’ views on gender seemed rooted in patriarchal essentialism, not because I was looking for resistance on their parts that I could use to mount an argument, but because it hurt me, at some level. I have had to consistently confront my reticence to engage with the record of these conversational moments, and the process has pushed me to expand this project in ways that I believe have improved it: moving from an external gaze in my research focused on “surprising” readers to considering how my own affective experience of my participants’ words was inflecting my analysis. Ultimately, I believe I arrived at an appreciation of the (for me at times painful) complexities of the world in which these women live and move and have their being.

In admitting my “presence” as the researcher in my work, I acknowledge that my view is “a view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body” (Haraway 1988, 589). Feminist anthropologists have argued that the intimacy of the personal voice can “do important epistemological work” by locating the speaker within relations of power (Pratt and Rosner 2012, 9). This need not entail a continuous report on the feelings of the ethnographer. As Ruth Behar argues, reflexivity “doesn’t mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to” (1996, 14). Throughout the dissertation I place my experiences alongside those of other women for analysis. I do this “homework” (Visweswaran 1994, 104) most substantively in chapter 3, wherein I examine the material culture and performance of my own wedding alongside the weddings of other women who were raised in white evangelical churches in my hometown and elsewhere in the southeastern United States. In the dissertation, I also describe examples of the discourse of white Christian womanhood, a discourse haunted by anti-Blackness. I am implicated in and by this discourse.

This was made clear to me most poignantly in the course of my research and analysis for Chapter 4, “Immaterial Girl,” when I realized that my scholarship was suffering due to my investment in whiteness and my related urge to avoid looking closely at anti-Blackness in the formation of white Christian womanhood. In one section of

"Immaterial Girl," I assert that some of my participants see their Enneagram type as a product of the ways the church has shaped them as gendered subjects. In an earlier draft of the chapter, I briefly argued further that there were additional ways in which the women "acknowledge how their positionalities might shape their personalities," and I quoted one of my participants, Bridget. Bridget had told me that she is an Enneagram Six, the "Loyalist," and as is characteristic of people with her type, she "always know the exits" and what to do "if something bad was happening" in any given physical space. But, she said, she "attribute[s] that to being a woman and living in the city."

In the early draft of the chapter, I left the phrase "living in the city" unexamined, knowing at some level that it deserved scrutiny. Meanwhile, in the very same draft, I wrote that even the white women who recognize that the church has shaped them as gendered subjects "have the privilege of living without a perpetual sense of themselves as racial subjects—as white." I noted that "it is easy for them to remain unaware of the degree to which their own formation is and has been predicated on the discursive denial of personhood to Black and brown women." I described the passivity and pliability that defines a certain form of white Christian womanhood. The irony escaped me.

I was confronted with my complicity when I read a comment on the chapter draft from a member of my dissertation writing group. She saw the "living in the city" quote and immediately connected it to the larger arguments of the chapter, noting how the phrase's racialized subtext actually presented "an interesting segue into the construction of white Christian feminine subjectivity—as passive, helpless, subject to violence by possibly non-white males. And then who gets rendered invisible here? Black women. ...It's hard to see it as an example of how these women 'acknowledge how their positionalities have been shaped' when it sort of sounds like the opposite." My colleague's feedback gnawed at me. I was reluctant to take her advice and use the quote as a segue to the chapter's broader points about white Christian feminine subjectivity, but I also suspected that to simply excise the quote from the dissertation would be its own hypocrisy. Where were these dueling impulses coming from? Was I hesitating because I did not want to single out my research participant? I felt some *responsibility* to her as my participant, but where did my responsibility really lie? How much of what I felt towards Bridget was a sympathy driven by the fear of what might be revealed about someone with whom I identify? Who or what was I really protecting?

I eventually decided to reach out to Bridget and offer her the chance to reflect on and respond to the point my colleague had made. She agreed to a follow-up interview in which she shared with me some stories about how she came to those words, a narrative that both complicated and revealed the persistence of Blackness to her sense of safety and danger in her surroundings. Listening to her share those stories, and then again while transcribing them, I felt overwhelmed at the prospect of incorporating the entire saga into the fourth chapter. That was when my dissertation advisor reminded me that something that started so small—just a few words left unquestioned and unexamined—spoke volumes about my positionality and methodology as a researcher. It also left me with a question, a question posed by Bridget herself about the point of these types of conversations: "I'm curious what the goal is, then. What's the end? There's that awareness. And then where does that leave us?" She was asking these questions more of herself than about my dissertation, but I felt them keenly: Where does it leave women like Bridget and myself—"us"—white women? Where does this leave me as a researcher? It is not enough to simply acknowledge the ways in which whiteness limits and defines what enters our field of vision. Yet the methodological practice of having these conversations might be a very small beginning. If, in just this one interaction with one my participants, I glimpsed "the ways in which the ghost drives the machine," as Toni Morrison (1988) puts it, then what might this project as a whole reveal about the centrality of Blackness to the construction of white Christian subjectivity more broadly? I am committed to the hard work of continuing to ask this question in my work now and in the future.

Methods and Sources

The bulk of my fieldwork for this project took place between 2018 and 2020. I also draw on research I conducted from 2012-2014 as part of my master's coursework in folklore at the University of North Carolina. During these periods, my fieldwork consisted of participant-observation at the Sunday worship services of evangelical churches in Alabama, North Carolina, and the Washington, DC, area, as well as participant-observation at book clubs and weddings in these states and Tennessee where white evangelicals were in attendance. I conducted open-ended interviews with thirty-eight women, three of whom I interviewed twice. I began by reaching out to women I knew from my hometown and from college, relying on referrals to expand my participants. I chose to focus on women between their mid-20s and early 40s because I expected that younger women would be more likely to follow and share current evangelical cultural texts via podcasts and social media, another source of my research. These women were married and unmarried, some with children and some without. Thirty-two were white; I also interviewed four Black women and two other women of color in order to bring into sharper relief how race comes to bear on women’s subjectivity in these churches. Initially, I believed it would be easiest to find women of color comfortable speaking to me about their church experiences if they were members of multiracial congregations, rather than women whose positions as some of the few people of color in a white church might make them uneasy about being identified as research subjects. In the end, I found that the Black and brown women I interviewed who attend predominantly white congregations not only had a great deal to say to me, but were most clearly in conversation and contrast with my white participants’ experiences in those same churches. The interviews took place throughout the southern U.S., in Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Washington, DC, in my participants’ homes, numerous coffee shops, an office, a church counselor’s meeting room, and at a playground.

The project’s multi-sited fieldwork highlights the differences and commonalities in worship practices in evangelical churches across a region and denominations. Evangelical social networks are often denominationally diverse, and evangelicals of various stripes follow authors, pastors, and bloggers who themselves span the evangelical spectrum, as well as “exvangelicals” who now identify as ecumenical or mainline Protestant Christians. The multi-sited approach is therefore in keeping with the way that most of my participants experience their religion. Even as members of local congregations, they count themselves part of religio-social assemblages: a conservative Christian college in Arkansas (where I went to college), a medium-sized evangelical congregation in northern Alabama (where I grew up) and a Christian blogger who lives in rural Tennessee (whom I and other churchgoing women follow) together form a religious assemblage in which component parts are contingent on the whole and vice versa

(DeLanda 2016; Bennett 2010). This assemblage, as I show in the dissertation, includes intimate or unexpected places and experiences in churchgoing women's lives, from their office buildings to their bedrooms. It is also, of course, sustained in part by digital media—podcasts, social media, blogs and articles, and other cultural texts including evangelical books and music.

This brings me to my secondary research method: throughout the dissertation, I conduct close readings of digital media created, consumed, circulated and/or cited by churchgoing women. I trace my participants' engagement with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, podcasts, blogs, and other digital cultural texts, which offer a window into how churchgoing women debate, discuss, and narrate their experiences and positions in their communities with other churchgoers. Following the most recent wave of digital religion research, I recognize the integration of "online" and "offline." One binary that digital religion studies still takes for granted, however, is the separation of the "religious" and the "secular." Much of the literature focuses on digital media's affordances for the "reimagining of religion" (Campbell and Lövheim 2017, 16), including the effects of new media on religious authority or patriarchal hierarchy. At its worst, this approach assumes the secularization thesis as well as the liberatory potential of digital technology. Narrow definitions of the religious sphere pervade the burgeoning field: for example, Cheong et. al. (2008) describe religious bloggers as "operating outside the realm of the conventional nuclear church" (125). I would tender that a "nuclear church"—one whose borders are clearly defined—has never existed. Rather, I treat digital space as already part of a religious assemblage. Social media spaces are sources or sites of my study; what women say there and how what they say relates to the church worship service is my object of analysis.

Chapter Overview

The chapters that follow trace how women's experiences in the church worship service condition their experiences, feelings, and actions in everyday contexts seemingly unrelated to "church." Each chapter takes up one such context, while also considering how discourses of white womanhood come to bear on the women's experiences to produce their subjectivities. The degree to which my participants are formed by the church is a question with which these women grapple, and the chapters all also attend to their efforts to discern the sources of their subjectivities.

Chapter 1 establishes that the devaluation of women's labor in their churches matters deeply to their experiences as laborers in their workplaces and homes. Relying on participant-observation, interviews, and textual analysis of podcasts, Instagram posts, and other evangelical digital media, I describe women's role in the social reproduction of the church and how their labor for church is figured as domestic, reproductive, and service work, producing less "spiritual" value than the work performed in/for church by men. The ways churchgoing women contend with this devaluation of their church labor and reconcile it with their positions within neoliberal racial capitalism are contradictory and overlapping. Some women, especially those with greater social and class privilege, turn to their paid labor for spiritual inspiration and value. Some women see the church's gendered relations of labor commuting into their roles as wives and mothers. Some advocate for gender parity in church work by invoking what I call "theoliberalism," or the idea that church labor should be divided according to the divine distribution of spiritual skills—echoing neoliberalism’s faith in the market. Finally, some white evangelical women extract surplus spiritual value from the labor of other, marginalized women.

In Chapter 2, I demonstrate how evangelical men’s symbolic status in the church worship service as mediators between women and God is replicated in the way some churchgoing women experience sexual pleasure with their husbands as spiritual pleasure. Through interviews with my participants and analysis of popular Christian websites, I recontextualize a 2016 sociological study of evangelical women’s sexual awakening narratives as evidence of the relationship between evangelical sexuality and what happens in church on Sunday. Conservative white evangelicalism constructs men as gatekeepers who represent God in a unique way to women. This relation repeats across the contexts of the church service, domestic dynamics, and sexual intimacy, not only binding pew and bed together but also revealing how the two are mutually constitutive. Yet my participants still find intimacy with God in their own bodies, as well, and attempt to parse what parts of themselves are products of religious discourse, and what is from God. As white women, their experiences of sexual pleasure are not divorced from the historical construction of white femininity. Returning to the sexual awakening narratives from online Christian forums, I identify the racialized discourses of sexual purity that materialize in the depths of bodily intimacy.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to religious women’s conceptions, performance, and discipline of the gendered self in relation to the worship service. Chapter 3 analyzes the wedding ceremonies of white churchgoing women in Alabama and Tennessee, weddings which offer implicit commentary on the subject positions the brides occupy at church on

Sunday morning. I examine the material culture and performance of the weddings, from food to décor to music, as well as how the brides reflect on their choices, to argue that the weddings reterritorialize "church" and the production of the gendered religious subject. The weddings are laden with contradiction: They reference an imagined past, but are not "traditional." They are personalized, but also mimic strangers' weddings profiled on blogs like Style Me Pretty. Their elements, from Southern food buffets to vintage décor, read alternately as concessions to white heteropatriarchal visions of faith and family and/or subversions of them. Yet the weddings are best understood as microcosms of the competing, colluding, and combining forces that shape these women as subjects: they both dramatize and realize the production of their authors as white Christian women.

In the final chapter, I look at two trends in white evangelicalism, fascination with the Enneagram personality typology and the adoption of liturgical worship, as epistemologies and pedagogies of the self that give some churchgoing women a means of tracing their own subject formation through divine grace, the church, and other social relations. In much of white evangelicalism, church leadership structures and worship practices construct the ideal form of white Christian womanhood as passive, pliable, and disembodied; disavowing this form of Christian womanhood, my participants seek revised forms of religious subjectivity in the liturgy and the Enneagram. Through the participatory passivity of liturgical recitation, they allow God to shape their desires directly while engaging in a collective church practice whose history in evangelicalism is inflected by racialized and gendered characterizations of its materiality. This history and the liturgy's emphasis on the body transfigure "passivity" and "pliability"—hallmarks of the form of white Christian womanhood suggested by the typical white evangelical worship service—into a new form of embodied religious subjectivity for my participants. The Enneagram, meanwhile, offers women who attend white evangelical churches a communal, Christianized form of self-knowledge and self-improvement in relief to the self-negating ideal of white Christian womanhood that the church worship service plays a part in constructing. In both the liturgy and the Enneagram, however, the women's whiteness makes it hard for them to see how their own formation relates to other(ed) women. They are able to recognize themselves as women without having to wrestle with their whiteness and its legacy beyond their own biographies.

This project speaks to an ongoing preoccupation of much of the scholarship on white evangelicalism. Following the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency in 2016 with the help of the vast majority of white evangelicals, the sights of political pundits are fixed more than ever on how these Christians vote, lobby, and govern. Yet this can obscure the way politics more broadly are constructed *within* evangelical communities. If "every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics" (Deleuze and Guattari 2005 [1987], 213), the stakes of this dissertation lie in establishing how religious subjects become political subjects through the cultures of everyday life. The formation of the gendered subject is the formation of a political subject. As Joanna Tice Jen remarks in a 2015 podcast interview about her research on evangelical political thought, "[I]f you're told to vote a certain way, that's a sort of superficial engagement between religion and politics. If you are told you are a certain type of person, and you exist in a certain type of universe, and you move across a certain type of time, your entire being is sculpted and shaped…" (McMahon 2015). I would slightly revise the focus of Tice-Jen's remarks: the process of political subject formation is not merely about what we are "told," but about how experience and consciousness are structured through both practice and representation, that is, through worship rituals that both represent and perform social relations of power. Long before they get to a voting booth, the women in this dissertation are subject to this haunting.

Just six months after my grandmother gave the Cherokee Church of Christ cookbook to my mother, who showed it to me, I was on my way to the first stop in my fieldwork, a church worship service with two friends who are members of a nondenominational congregation. We walked up stairs and under white columns and were inside the old brick church building, where warm yellow light streamed through large windows trimmed in stained glass. There was a low buzz as we made our way past pews crammed with white people in their 20s and 30s, casually dressed, and as we sat down, I felt some small discomfort at just how intimate it felt to go to my friends' church with them. (I was also given a jolt when I looked down the aisle and saw no fewer than four or five moleskine notebooks just like the one I had in my lap for field notes.) I watched as a young woman led the band and congregants in worship, lifting up a prayer as the service commenced, later leading the congregation in the recitation of the Nicene creed. Then the preacher ascended the stage. His sermon reminded us that the Bible is not organized "topically," and neither is life. I scribbled rapidly in my notebook his next words: "How could one thing in your life be possibly isolated from another?"

Chapter 1: Relations of Spiritual Production: Women and Work in White Evangelicalism

When Bailey's North Carolina church opened up the category of "things women can do during the worship service," she was unimpressed. During worship on Sunday mornings, women were now invited to lead prayers or pass communion trays, jobs previously reserved for men. So many congregants objected to this change, however, that in an effort to retain members the church leadership (all men) instituted multiple worship services on Sunday, each with varying levels of women's participation.

The fact was, Bailey told me from across her dining table, women had long been leading the church, but in a nearly "silent undertone."

> And they're not fully able to lead. And that's where the oppression for me comes in. You have women with these beautiful gifts, and they just do their best to use them within this structure that men have created, which is why for me, it's almost a cycle of power and control. Even, now, women can say a prayer, do communion, X, Y, Z in one service. But it's this controlling, "You've been in this cage, and we just made your cage a little bit bigger. And now you can fly around in some ways in this service, but not in the other."

Minutes later, Bailey was describing her job as a supervisor at a nonprofit counseling program. One of her mentors had reminded her that she should use her spiritual gifts wherever she can. "You've got Monday through Friday, so focus on that," her mentor told her. That advice has been Bailey's "saving grace":

> I feel like God totally blessed me and gave me so many opportunities from a work standpoint to be able to lead, when I haven't been able to do that from a church standpoint. […] So in some ways, I feel like that's more my ministry than anything at church, because I don't have the ability to do it there. […] I just, I often look at it as, this is just God's gift to me. He knew I needed, he knew he had given me gifts, and he knew I was going to want and need a place to use them.

Bailey's embrace of her paid work as her outlet for ministry is clearly informed by her experience of women's labor in the church; her job, in turn, informs her orientation towards her church. As Bailey’s experience attests, the gendered division of labor and leadership in white evangelical churches can matter deeply to women’s production as laboring subjects in their workplaces and their homes. These women’s formation as spiritual subjects is likewise inflected by their positions as workers and consumers within neoliberal capitalism. At the same time, my participants attest that their own spiritual subjectivities are beholden at least in part to something not contained within discursive formations.

The ways these women contend with life in the backlight of the church’s valuation of their labor and reconcile it with their positions as subjects of neoliberal racial capitalism are contradictory and overlapping. Some women, especially those with greater social and class privilege, find spiritual inspiration and value in their paid labor. Some describe ways that the gendered labor politics of the church commutes into their roles as wives and mothers. Some make claims to gender parity in church work by invoking what I call “theoliberalism,” or the idea that church labor should be divided according to the divine distribution of spiritual “gifts,” or talents. Finally, some white evangelical women extract surplus spiritual value from the labor of other, marginalized women. The gendered division of labor in white evangelicalism has roots in the American history of white supremacy; today this legacy also is embodied in white evangelical women’s feelings and practices around their work and labor.

Spiritual Value: The Gendered Division of Labor in Evangelical Churches

The division of labor in predominantly white evangelical churches varies by denomination and congregation, but it is also consistently gendered in that there are always some roles that are reserved exclusively for men. The recent changes in the worship service at Bailey's congregation are examples of what I call "front of church" labor, arguably the most visible labor that goes into the production of the evangelical church worship service and of the church itself. This is the labor of leading the worship service on Sunday—whether that means leading a prayer, leading the congregation in song, delivering a sermon or facilitating communion. Church members who perform this front of church labor tend to overlap somewhat with those who perform "executive" labor, the business of church leadership, which involves decision-making around church vision, organization, finances, and so on. In many evangelical churches the official church leadership is comprised of the preacher (also called the pastor or minister) and a group of men often known as "elders," shepherds, or, sometimes, pastors or senior pastors.

In some evangelical denominations, women are very involved in church leadership and administration, but cannot be ordained, and therefore cannot preach, perform baptisms or officiate the Lord's Supper (communion). In other, often nondenominational churches, the reverse is true—both women and men distribute communion during the worship service, but only men can be elders. In certain very conservative evangelical churches, only men perform front-of-church labor and hold official leadership positions. In none of the churches I visited for my research or that my participants attended (which included nondenominational churches, churches of Christ, Presbyterian [PCA] and evangelical Anglican [ACNA]) was there any indication that a woman had ever held a regular position as the preaching pastor or as an elder or shepherd.

There is another, vital form of labor in these churches, and that is the social reproduction of the church, the labor that keeps the church running. From the administration of church logistics to the relational and affective labor of caregiving within the church community, this labor tends to be the least visible during the Sunday worship service—and more often than not, it is mostly performed by women.

The Social Reproduction of the Church

When I was in my early teens, I went to weekly Bible studies my youth minister hosted in his small, white-walled office at my family's evangelical Christian church in a rural part of northwest Alabama. I was a regular at these Bible studies; I enjoyed feeling like I was contributing to a slightly more grown-up dialogue than I had encountered up to that point in my life. But in all those weekly discussions, my youth minister, a white man somewhere in his late 30s at the time, said just one thing that would lodge in my memory. That evening we were talking about why women could not be preachers or elders, why they could not lead a prayer or read Scripture or lead singing during the church worship service. My youth minister said the reason God reserves these roles for men and not for women was that "if he didn't, women would do everything in the church." It was a compliment to us women, really; God knew how weak men were and he factored that into his designs for his church, to force them to step up to the plate.

As my youth minister's comment suggests, it is an open secret—if it can even be called a secret—that women, more than men, are responsible for the social reproduction of the church. In my interviews this came up again and again. Many of my participants described the work women do for the church as "domestic" or "service-oriented," including childcare and children's education; delivering meals to parents of newborns or people caring for sick family members; and cooking, setting up, and cleaning up after shared meals at the church building. In the most conservative evangelical churches like the one in which I was raised, women's service to the church can become full-blown self-sacrifice much more easily than does men's. This was apparent from my conversation with a group of women in Alabama one summer evening at Lacie's studio apartment, where Elise, Katelyn, and Nora were settling down into the sofa and oversized armchair, and I made an effort to prop up my audio recorder so that it would catch everyone's voice. Lacie flitted back and forth between us and the kitchen, the source of the scent of baking cookies. We had been talking for about an hour when I asked, "What comes to mind when you hear the words 'Christian woman'?"

Nora took the floor. "You're going to be kind of submissive and you're going to be a servant heart—and not that there's anything wrong with those people, but I feel as women grown up in the church, this is what we are conditioned to become." She went on,

> And it's very, nobody wants to clean the building but nobody else is going to do it. So you should probably just lay yourself down and take this job and throw yourself on that grenade. Or you've got your dissertation to defend and your career to work on and this and that, but you should probably take time to make a dish for the potluck. Things like that, that it's just like, there's nothing inherently wrong with any of those things, but it is, I feel, very much like, as Christian women this is the role that we play and it's very important and very crucial and we all need to do it.

Uttered in a singsong voice, Nora's last words were not an imperative, but a critical reflection on how it feels to be a woman in a conservative evangelical church faced with the pressures of its social reproduction. Her experience testifies to the irony of an evangelical tradition that preaches self-sacrifice, but expects it most of women (Snarr 2011).

Cleaning and cooking are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to labor of socially reproducing the church. When I asked my participants what, if anything, they felt was "expected" of them as church women, I heard a common refrain. Women plan the Sunday worship service, arrange wedding showers and baby showers, manage mission trips, coordinate the coat drive, organize the fall festival, run the audiovisuals for the worship service, oversee the homeless meal service and prepare communion each week. This is not unusual for conservative evangelical churches. Born and raised in her North Carolina congregation, Bailey has grown frustrated with both the expectations for and the limits on what roles women can perform in the church. I joined her at her dining table early one weekday morning before she left for work. She filled me in:

> I've been told multiple times—and it's not been, I don't think, intentional—but it's like, "Women, you should plan and organize. Plan and organize. Plan and organize." I think women are viewed as, they're going to organize and plan this thing, and then the men step up and lead it the day of. […] Worship services—women are going to help plan, they're going to have these great ideas. You have great ideas, help us plan this, and you're planning for the man to get up and quote unquote "lead" by speaking or whatever it is.

For women like Bailey who attend churches where their participation in front-of-church or Sunday service labor is limited, the labor of social reproduction can feel less visible and valued in church culture. In some cases, as Bailey attests, the women are even expected to be the authors of their own erasure. This can be seen most overtly and stereotypically in the labor of women who are married to men in leadership roles, such as elder or pastor, in the church. On this subject, the commentary from my participants ranged from the mild observation that an elder's wife is just as involved as he is in organizing church life to outrage that the wife of the pastor, elder or youth minister is expected to do the same amount of work as he is, but without pay or title. Then there is what Esther has witnessed: “Probably at least a dozen times, I’ve heard something like—especially [from] guys who aren’t preachers, but who are getting up there to do something else that involves talking, and they basically say, ‘My wife wrote this,’ and then they realize, ‘Oh, I shouldn’t have said that.’” Esther paused. “My mom was ghostwriting sermons for a while, and I remember being really angry about that.” This ghostly labor takes a toll. Esther recollects telling her mother, “I would love to lead singing, I would love to read Scripture.” Her mom replied, “I would love to have less things that I’m expected to do at church.”

While the administrative labor women do in churches is devalued, it is not always unpaid.[7] Church secretaries or administrative assistants are almost always paid, and they are almost always women. Esther, who grew up going to a church of Christ like myself, even bet on it during our interview, saying she “would pay you $100 right now if you could find a church of Christ secretary who is a man.” Shelly, who had been a part of her nondenominational church in Tennessee since it was first planted over a decade ago, had recently been involved in the hiring process to bring a new staff member on board as a church administrator. Shelly told me they needed someone with a different temperament from the leading pastors, both men: “Somebody to keep them [the male pastors] in check, more of a nurturing side to them. […] Somebody who can really be in the details and the numbers. In my mind, women do that better than men.” The gendering of detail-oriented, relational and affective labor in the church clearly applies to both paid and unpaid church labor. To put it in the words of Shannon, a longtime member of a church in the Nashville area, the pastor's lack of administrative skills meant that "We ended up deciding […] we really need it to be a woman. It has to be a woman." But those positions, while paid, are not recognized as spiritually authoritative in the church.

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[7] Overall, what is recognized as valuable labor in church culture does not necessarily align with whether or not it is paid: Preachers are usually paid (and are usually full-time); elders typically are not.

My participants seemed to be gesturing at a hierarchy of spiritually valuable labor in their churches. Seminary graduate Samantha described to me something along these lines when we met in her office on a Friday afternoon. Her colleagues were long gone, off enjoying the weekend, as we sat down and talked about her life in churches—the more egalitarian evangelical church she attends now, and the church she was raised in. About the latter, she said to me, "I think the church might expect more of women than they do of men." I asked what she meant. "Service-wise," she said. "Because I think they expect women to run things and men to just sit there and do the things, now that I think about it." I prompted her, "And by run things you mean…?" "Like serve well. Do registration tables. Serve coffee. […] I think that they expect more of women actively and outwardly than they do of men. And I think they probably expect more spiritually of men than they do of women." Sam's implicit distinction between "service" work and "spiritual" labor in her home church is important. "Service" work, deemed less spiritual, is labor performed most often by women. It is not exactly hidden or invisible—in fact, as Sam puts it, this type of church work is "active and outward," in contrast to the more "spiritual" labor expected of men. Given that the work that evangelical women are expected to do for the church is most often "domestic," affective, administrative, or relational, Samantha's remark points to a mind-body dualism, a binary that defines spiritual labor as more intellectual or cerebral ("inward") and bodily, relational labor (“active and outward”) as less spiritual or spiritually productive—and as it is in the evangelical church’s wider social and cultural context, this binary is gendered.

To be clear, this delineation of “service” work from “spiritual” labor is not an explicit distinction in Samantha’s church or in evangelical churches in general. I would be hard-pressed to find a Christian attending an evangelical church who would argue that service work is not spiritual, or that it is “less” spiritual than front of church labor. But in practice, what Samantha observes is an implicit delineation that treats the work most often performed by women (on Sunday and every other day of the week) as less spiritually valuable or productive than, say, the delivery of the sermon by the preacher on Sunday morning.

The Subject of Value-Producing Labor

Despite the ease with which most of my participants could describe “women’s work” for the church, I struggled to identify a pattern in the various kinds of labor women could perform across different congregations and denominations. In some churches, mostly churches of Christ, women’s labor took place mostly off-stage, behind the scenes of the Sunday worship service. In others, women’s involvement ranged from serving on church leadership teams to leading the worship team, praying during worship or officiating communion, all roles with varying degrees of visibility during the worship service or of input into church management. Still, across different church contexts there was always a limit to what kinds of labor women could perform—particularly preaching, eldership, and officiating baptisms and weddings. Where was the line between what was considered valuable labor and what wasn’t, between what was deemed “productive” versus “reproductive,” “service” versus “spiritual” labor?

A casual aside by one of my participants redirected my attention. Wendy told me that at her Alabama congregation, women had recently been recruited to offer testimony before communion, lead singing, and participate in "passing the plate" (i.e., passing trays of crackers and grape juice from row to row of churchgoers) during the Lord's Supper. This is somewhat unusual for a church of Christ; in most of these churches, only men pass communion trays during the Lord's Supper. Given this fairly dramatic shift in women's participation during the worship service, it is interesting that Wendy still classified their church roles as "service" work: "Women's roles here are the service-based roles, like teaching class and cooking, serving the Lord's Supper—I see that as a service role. Cleaning the building, stuff like that. And then the point where you get up and talk, like the Lord's Supper talk, leading worship. But we do not, nobody [female] preaches."

Read in light of feminist scholarship on gender and labor, Wendy's words offer a clue to the hierarchy of valued labor in evangelical churches. Wendy described the passing of trays during the Lord's Supper as a service role, akin to social reproductive labor like cleaning or cooking that is primarily "women's work." As Marxist feminist scholars have argued, in capitalism reproductive labor is represented as "nonvalue" (Vora 2015, 31), and what constitutes reproductive labor is crucially linked to labor's feminization. As a result, feminized labor is socially devalued *by virtue of its feminization*. Colonialism, slavery, and "the Protestant heteropatriarchal household" have all configured racialized and feminized labor as hardly labor at all, discounting its value and thereby "obscuring subjects of value-producing labor in support of the subject predicated by labor power in the capitalist market" (Vora 2015, 32). White Protestant churches have long participated in this process. In the early 19th century, white men in the southern U.S. began excluding white women from church governance and eventually from preaching, arguing that women should "confine the exercise of their spiritual talents to the household" (Heyrman 1997, 200). This move was part of a broader shift in the industrial period towards a view of bourgeois white womanhood as "naturally pure" and uniquely suited to domesticity (rather than more "public roles"); the idea was that white mothers should apply their innate piety to their children's education (Braude 1989, 39). Yet this assertion, that (white, middle- and upper-class) women were naturally domestic, depended upon the labor of enslaved Black women, and, post-Civil War, upon the unmarked labor of poor women, Black women, and other women of color, who were considered "idle" if they did not perform waged labor and were denied the resources to care for their own homes and children (Carby 1987; Glenn 2002; Hennessy 2000; Hong 2006; Hunter 1993). The construction of white middle-class women's natural domesticity was also "inseparable from narratives of empire and nation-building," and in the mid-nineteenth century United States it simultaneously functioned to "turn blacks into foreigners" (Kaplan 1998, 584; see also Kaplan 2002; McClintock 1995) while securing white women's status as "citizen-subjects" of the nation-state (Schuller 2018). In short, the history of the domesticity discourse reveals how the domestication and devaluation of women's labor for the church in white evangelicalism was sanctioned by racialized constructions of gender. And while many historically Black Protestant churches or multiracial evangelical congregations have excluded and continue to exclude women from church leadership in similar ways, my point here is that the relegation of women in white evangelicalism from front of church labor, such as preaching, to domestic/service work, such as the religious education of children, is rooted in racialized constructions of gender.

What Wendy said suggests that the gendered division of labor in the church continues to conform to capitalism’s valuation of reproductive labor. Whether or not members of the church thought of passing the plate during communion as “service” or even “domestic” labor when only men could do it, the likelihood increases that it is thought of in those terms once women participate. The question, then, is not *what kinds* of church labor are perceived as value-producing or less so. The question is *whose* church labor is perceived as producing spiritual value. Who is considered a productive laborer for God? The answer to my earlier questions about the line that divides productive from reproductive church labor is that it shifts depending on the gender of the person doing the labor. Remember that my participants discussed with some frustration that the wives of pastors are expected to do the same amount of work as their husbands, but without pay or title. Even paid administrative positions held by women—including in children’s ministry—are typically compensated at much lower rates than pastoral roles held by men and, more importantly, do not grant those women spiritual authority in the church. Ultimately, when my participants talk about their labor being devalued in church, they are referring to *spiritually* valuable labor. As Sam noted, in her home church “they probably expect more spiritually of men than they do of women.” Men’s labor for the church is constructed as spiritual value, as “productive.” Meanwhile the labor women do is “domestic,” “reproductive,” “service,” and devalued, like it is in capitalism at large. My participants frequently described the labor they performed for the church as “domestic” not only because many of these tasks resemble labor that has fallen on women’s shoulders in their homes. It was also because domesticity is “both a space and a social relation to power” (McClintock 1995, 34).

In addition to asking *whose* labor is valued in churches, we can also consider whose labor *performed on behalf of whom* is constructed as value in evangelical churches. For example, a woman preaching is not in itself an issue in most conservative evangelical churches. Women often deliver a lesson or lead prayers in children’s worship, at women-only classes and retreats, or on occasion in mission fields outside the United States. The problem arises when women preach to (white) men. In the vast majority of white evangelical churches, men mediate women’s relationship to God in several ways: only men can preach in church on Sunday; only men can baptize new Christians or officiate weddings; and only men can oversee the church body as elders or shepherds. Despite the Protestant (and particularly evangelical) emphasis on the direct relationship between the believer and God that is mediated by Jesus alone, in practice womanhood rends the tie that binds the believer to God through Christ. At one evangelical church I visited, the only women who can distribute the bread and wine during communion are the ones married to an elder, whose status grants their wives some measure of authority as well. At another church one of my participants attends, women are occasionally invited to do something akin to preaching during the service—but when they take the stage, they are consistently “anchored by a male body,” as Leah puts it. When Leah, who has a degree in theology, was herself invited to speak one Sunday at her North Carolina church, “even then, my husband was invited to the stage. So he was like, sitting behind me. There’s this picture on Facebook of me standing up talking and him sitting there, like, ‘You know, I’m just up here.’” In both churches, the labor of producing more and/or better Christians through preaching is not something a woman can do for men unless her affiliation with a man can serve as a visual and affective reminder of her position, simultaneously tempering and legitimating her labor.

This does not apply only to the Sunday worship service. A controversy recently arose at the evangelical Christian school where Jacqueline teaches in Alabama over women teachers who pray for each of their students aloud in the classroom. “I’ve been praying [in my classroom] for years and years,” she told me, “and I didn’t realize that there were people who felt that strongly about women not praying when young men who might be baptized were present.” A more codified form of this happens every year at the annual Lads to Leaders convention, a program by churches of Christ that offers children and preteens the chance to be evaluated and compete in events like Bible reading, speech, song leading, and other components of a typical worship service in the type of church in which I was raised. Every year in my northwest Alabama hometown, a cadre of Christian boys and girls from local churches heads off to the annual Lads to Leaders convention. For girls, there is “Lads to Leaderettes,” where young women are invited to perform in all the same categories as the boys—just with all-female judges and fellow participants. I know many women who participated in Lads to Leaderettes when they were young. Esther, whose home I visited for an interview late one summer afternoon in Alabama, is one of them. We sat on child-sized furniture in her daughter’s room while she played games nearby. It had been nearly twenty-five years since Esther had competed in the program, but when I asked her what she felt she learned from the church about being a woman, she summoned up the memory in a flash.

> I vividly remember being eight years old and doing my song leading at Lads to Leaders, and all of the dads stood outside the room and watched through the

> window. They totally watched, but only the moms, or the women, could be in [the room]. And it was a classroom, right? It wasn't a church service, you know, it was on a Saturday. My dad was the one who taught me how to lead my song. Like we picked out the song, he practiced with me over and over, he coached me, and then he and the other dad stood outside and peeked in the window. I remember thinking, This is silly.

Later, thinking about Esther's story, I recalled my own confusion as a young girl over the eponym "Lads to Leaderettes." Something along the lines of "Ladies to Leaders" would have made a lot more sense, I remember thinking. But now, as I felt myself, like Esther's dad, looking in on the entire phenomenon as through a glass, I understood why what seemed like a much more obvious rendering of the girls' program title was never an option: The program could not be called "Ladies to Leaders" because in churches of Christ, ladies cannot, in fact, be official leaders. More accurately, they cannot lead men in any official capacity—they can lead children's church or other women, but not men. (Informally, women lead these churches through their disproportionate involvement in service, administrative and relational labor, as Nora reminded us during our group interview at Lacie's apartment. "I think they are seen as leaders whether or not they're preaching," she said. But this leadership is rarely formalized or formally recognized in the most conservative evangelical congregations.) The FAQ page on the Lads to Leaders website offers this assurance: The goal of Lads to Leaderettes is to equip girls to lead "young children…as well as other women at ladies' days and in ladies' classes." It also clarifies that "these events are designed to train girls for service in the church," another example of the gendering of "service" work in church as safer, less authoritative, and less markedly "spiritual" than labor only men perform.

In Esther's case, it was not the song leading itself that was off-limits to women, but the possibility of a man being led by a woman in worship to God. So why could her father watch her through the window? The Lads 2 Leaders website FAQs answers the question, “Why are males not allowed in the event rooms at the convention when young ladies are giving speeches or leading songs?” thusly: “Males are not allowed in the young ladies event rooms at convention in order to prevent any miscommunication concerning women’s roles in the church…Recordings of these events allow those not in the room to view the event later.” Tellingly, popular evangelical author and preacher John Piper offers a similar workaround on his podcast, “Ask Pastor John,” when a listener submits the question, “Do you use Bible commentaries written by women?” Piper responds, “There’s this interposition of this phenomenon called book and writing that puts her out of my sight and in a sense takes away the dimension of her female personhood. Whereas if she were standing right in front of me and teaching me as my shepherd week in and week out, I could not make that separation. I think the Bible says that women shouldn’t take that role in the church.” It seems that the problem for Piper and Lads to Leaders is the possibility of an actual woman with a physical body “leading” a man to God. The somewhat tortuous resolution they arrive at is that some form of media—a window, a video, or a book—must displace the woman’s body as the means by which men grow closer to God. In this process, women quite literally become authors of their own erasure.

In the most conservative evangelical churches, women’s bodies can take up space only in certain ways. The church Leah went to growing up was like this. “Even in a classroom setting, a man could be up in front, and a woman could talk as long as she remained seated.” She added wryly, “But if she stood up to talk, WHOA, what’s happening?” This consternation over a woman’s body being visible over the rest of the mixed-gender congregation or class is certainly particular to very conservative evangelical churches, but it carries a lot of power for the women who are a part of them. It manifests in how Christian womanhood itself is conceived of by these women. Take Megan, who grew up being told, both implicitly and explicitly, what she needed to become to be the ideal Christian woman: gentle, meek, "sweet, slightly passive, but a strong Christian prayer warrior." In this most conservative context, a Christian woman is defined by her private and relational labor before—but never public correspondence with—God.

Even women who grew up in slightly less conservative evangelical environments, however, also shared with me the feeling that their gendered embodiment is problematic in the church. Bethany, who along with her dog welcomed me into her home on an early fall evening, cycled through a mix of mainline and evangelical milieus with her family as a girl, then went on to a prominent evangelical college. "My entire adult life I've found myself in a church situation where I agree with so much, but I also feel frustrated about who I am as a woman," she said. "I feel like I'm a threat on some level to—I don't know whether it's to the individuals, my individual pastors, or more institutionally. And that's hard to live with." In her experience, "Christian womanhood" has been defined by the church as being totally non-threatening. As recounted to me, her experience also suggests that the church's gendered division of labor shapes not only ideas about Christian womanhood, but also Christian women themselves.

Church-Work

Paid Work, Privilege, and the Proverbs 31 Woman

Women who attend predominantly white evangelical churches employ various frameworks in contrasting and comparing the church and the workplace. For some, their paid work offers them the value they do not feel in church, while others do not enjoy that privilege. Other women who told me they felt deeply valued in their churches lingered less on their paid employment as a foil to church. But regardless, it was clear that the way women feel about/in their labor in church affects the way they feel about/in their paid work—and everyone I interviewed had some type of paid job.

I have known Ashley for years as someone who seems a bit withdrawn at first glance but is not shy about expressing her opinions on subjects she cares about. Inside a Panera air-conditioned against the warm Alabama evening, Ashley recounted to me multiple instances in which being a single woman has been held against her by church folks—including a time at her church small group meeting where her expertise was discounted in favor of a less-qualified man. She told me what happened that night, and then she juxtaposed it to her experience in her places of work:

> I left there [the small group meeting] feeling so upset, so upset. And feeling so invaluable, so unworthy, and so less than as a woman. There've just been different instances like that where, yeah. But I think in the workplace I've always so quickly gone into leadership positions and had a lot of respect. Like as a twenty-two-year-old I was put in charge of three coffee shops. I was managing people twice my age. And had respect from people twice my age. […] And had, as this twenty-two-year-old single female, so much respect in the workplace, and did not have that in a church setting. As I'm talking more and more, I'm like, I *am* upset about this.

Ashley was not simply contrasting church and work. Remembering aloud the recognition and respect she enjoyed in the workplace actively stoked her frustration at women's lack of authority in the church.

Remember that Bailey, conversely, found spiritual solace in her work: "I feel like God totally blessed me and gave me so many opportunities from a work standpoint to be able to lead, when I haven't been able to do that from a church standpoint." She identifies her work as her ministry despite or even because of her frustration with the limitations on women's involvement in the church worship service and leadership. This was also Alyssa's experience. I had come to know Alyssa as a dedicated, organized, and earnest member of an evangelical church in North Carolina's Research Triangle. Over the past few years, Alyssa had endured a series of frustrating work situations before finally landing in her current job, a resume she recounted to me one afternoon in her apartment: "So I took my current job, and was in a role finally where I was being challenged and was given responsibility that was appropriate to my abilities, and was also on a team that was very empowering of people to take up responsibility and ownership over things and to question the status quo and to ask questions and do stuff. And so I learned some skills that I was like, Oh, this can apply to my work with church." At that point, Alyssa said, she met with one of the church pastors to go over some of her ideas for how the church could better manage certain ministries. "I think it was part of taking the job that I [have now] and feeling like I actually have things to say and I should say them, instead of waiting for someone to ask me," she said. Alyssa's time at her job had inspired an entire reorientation of herself in church.

Ashley, Bailey, and Alyssa are white, salaried women, in a position in which it is easy to find meaning, respect, authority, and even the ability to ask questions in their paid work. Their privilege at work inspires their varying levels of confidence in, frustration with, or toleration of their role as laborers in the church. It is telling that I heard less about paid work as an avenue for spiritual empowerment from my white middle-class participants in places like Alabama and Tennessee, many of whom were working in service or caregiving jobs. I also heard a slightly different story from Tara, a Black woman who goes to a multiracial evangelical church in the DC area. As a marketer for a major hotel chain, she is constantly fighting a battle for her talent to be recognized in the workplace due to a cocktail of misogynoir and her own perfectionism, according to her. Over the hubbub of a crowded coffee shop, she explained:

> …[T]here are so many people who are surprised that I'm smart, or surprised when I have opinions. Or like more than rap music. People who try to whittle me down to one thing. […] And that really carries over with me at work. Work is a drain for me right now. But it's always kind of turned into that. When you are a perfectionist, it means you expend more of your energy than you should expend on something that is small. […] So it's hard, and I always end up in leadership roles at work without a title.

Tara's line of work might be white-collar, and her paycheck solid, but white supremacy precludes easy access to recognition of her labor's value—and that makes it harder for her to derive or leverage a sense of spiritual value from her work. Indeed, the legacy of enslavement and anti-Blackness in this country has rendered spiritual empowerment through labor more available to some than to others: "for the descendants of slaves," Paul Gilroy wryly observes, "social self-creation through labor is not the centre-piece of emancipatory hopes" (1993, 40).

Many of my participants who do enjoy that privilege also find in it the means by which they push back against the church's gendered division of labor. These women, most of whom are professionals in the Washington, DC area and North Carolina's Research Triangle, referred to theirs and other women's professional status as a reason they should not be expected to take on the social reproduction of the church. Camille noted that in her church, men and women share that type of labor mostly equally. But it wasn't always like that. Several years back, she said, women got fed up with the expectation they host the cookie baking for special worship services, leading to "a bit of an uproar." (This apparently historic "uproar" came up in more than one of my interviews with women who attend the church.) As Camille put it, the cookie controversy and things like it arose because "We're in Washington, DC. Women work in serious roles in the city. Women in our church are sitting in the situation room. They are in the intelligence community. And they are physicians and lawyers. We have households where we have working moms and stay at home dads." Tara, who goes to a different church in the area, had this to say about the women in her congregation: "…[T]hese women are engineers, they're doctors. They run their own practices. They're lawyers, they're pure professionals. So at some point, you can't just tell women to plan a party."

I am confident that none of my participants would say that a more equitable division of labor in their churches should be a class privilege. At the same time, they link church women's level of education and income to their consciousness about their unequal and unjust responsibility for the reproduction of the church. Ironically, these comments reflect capitalism's recruitment of privileged women subjects into its ongoing devaluation of social reproduction while also revealing the intra-action (Barad 2003) of women's experiences in their workplaces with their labor in the church. One common conversation piece in my interviews was a passage of Scripture known to evangelical Christians as "The Wife of Noble Character." Chapter 31 of the book of Proverbs describes an idealized woman who brings her husband "good, not harm, all the days of her life" and "gets up while it is still night" to feed her family and servants. This "Proverbs 31 Woman," as she is called, is often touted as a model for a good wife and mother.[8] But part of the passage that has been less remarked upon in white evangelical circles lauds the woman for buying a field and using the earnings to plant a vineyard, as well as "supplying the merchants with sashes." This is the side of the Proverbs 31 Woman invoked by several of my participants, including Noelle. We were sitting on her apartment deck in camp chairs, beers in hand, on an early evening in the Tennessee spring. I had turned off my recorder just moments before Noelle brought up Proverbs 31. She looked at me. "You know that she's a—" We blurted in unison: "A businesswoman!"

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[8] One example of white evangelicals' selective interpretation and application of this passage can be found in the Lads to Leaders official event rulebook for 2019. One section of the rulebook describes "Keepers," a year-round event for girls designed "to foster practical homemaking skills." Each of its 15 categories are based on verses from Proverbs 31, including cooking, based on verse 15 ("she provides food for her

These verses, which have been often recited in service of a vision of white feminine domesticity and submission, are being read differently by some evangelical women. Long after my conversation with Noelle, I was in Andrea's DC apartment, where she described the Proverbs 31 woman similarly. "She is making money!" she exclaimed, waving her finger. "She is a businesswoman, an entrepreneur, she is dressed well." To Noelle and Andrea, the Proverbs 31 woman affirms the correlation of productivity with prosperity. The shift in this passage's interpretation among white evangelical women seems to correspond with the professional trajectory of white middle- and upper middle-class women in the U.S. over the past few decades—from 1950s-era adulation of white feminine domesticity to our current corporate "Lean In" rhetoric. Interestingly, of my participants who brought up the Proverbs 31 woman's entrepreneurial pursuits, only one observed that the "Wife of Noble Character" is also still handling the reproduction of her household. The evening I went over to Alicia's house for our interview, she was trying to

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household"), sewing (verse 13, "she seeks wool and flax"), ironing (verse 25, "she dresses herself with strength"), laundry (verse 21, "all her household are clothed in scarlet"), and money management (verse 11, "He [her husband] will have no lack of gain"). Of all of the verses referenced in the category descriptions, two from this passage that are not indexed are "She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard" (verse 16) and "she sees that her trading is profitable" (verse 18).

get her kids to bed—and to stay there. When I asked her what she imagines when she hears the words, “Christian woman,” she said, “The Proverbs woman, working.” She continued, “Working your fingers to the bone by the lamp, while giving a BJ and cooking and cleaning and making 40k, 80k, I don’t know what kind of salary at the same time.” I snorted. She kept going, “You’re supposed to be Wonder Woman. And pray. And make sure the children know their verses. Yeah.” She laughed. “I am that woman.”

Alicia’s frank assessment of the expectations for Christian womanhood sheds some light on why some of the professional-class women I interviewed find themselves so overwhelmed with the demands of their paid and unpaid labor outside of church that they have little energy or interest left in challenging the church’s division of labor. For example, Ashley finds her job meaningful, but also exhausting, leaving her with hardly any desire to take on more authority or work in the church, even when it is available to her. “I’m in a leadership role all day, every day, at work,” she said to me. “And so I think I kind of enjoy not having that role in church. […] I feel like church on Sunday is more of a break and a breather for me.” Her instinct is a good one; I heard from other women who did have unpaid leadership roles in their churches that it could be more taxing than their actual jobs. “When we went on vacation in August, I felt, I was like, I really need to rest, but I don’t actually think I need rest from work,” said Bethany, who served a recent stint on her church leadership team. “I realized the thing that was much harder for me that I needed to experience Sabbath practice from is actually more in church.”

“She Holds Our Life Together”: Reproducing the Church through the Christian Home

If the narrative of white feminine domesticity has historically equipped white evangelical men to exclude women from preaching and other front-of-church labor, then what does it mean today, when all of my participants hold some form of paid employment? Perhaps unsurprisingly, the gendered division of labor in the evangelical churches my participants attend still relies on and extends to the household labor performed by women. “When I hear [the words] ‘Christian woman,’” Lacie said between bites of warm cookies, “I think Beth Moore Bible studies, women with blonde hair that is perfectly fixed. Manicures, pedicures, really nice clothing.” We were in the close quarters of Lacie’s studio, with Elise, Nora, and Katelyn chiming in. Nora grinned: “They’re Christian women and also subscribers to Southern Living magazine.” Lacie again: “They have immaculate homes.” “And can cook well,” Katelyn added. As this composite image of a Christian woman came into focus, looking less and less like the women I was speaking with, Nora added, a bit more seriously, “When you say Christian woman, I think of, it sounds really mean, but doormat-servant type of person.”

The ideal conjured by the women at Lacie’s place is complex. This woman is hardly aspirational for my participants, but her hold on their imagination is real, and it is rooted in this reality: The social reproduction of the evangelical church depends not only on women’s labor cleaning the church building, throwing baby showers, or running the coat drive, but also on the social reproduction that women perform in their homes, of their husbands and children. The church then naturalizes this labor as feminine, eliding the wear and tear it effects, which produces the incongruous image of a perfectly coiffed doormat-servant. This is a woman who cleans and cooks, presumably for her husband and children, while presenting herself without a shred of evidence of this labor. In all its manicured, immaculate domesticity, the image is also classed and raced—the legacy of the hand-clasp between white evangelical gender ideology and white supremacy. This construct is so prevalent that Tabitha, who is Black and attends a multiracial church in the DC area, also pictures the implicit whiteness of the "Christian woman." I met her at her condo on a Tuesday evening after work, the sun lowering as we talked, and a half hour into our interview I asked her the question. "The first thing that popped into my head is a housewife," she said. "Another thing that came to me when I was thinking about it was 'meek' for some reason, because I think, at least I've noticed in more traditional Christian households, if there is a housewife and the man or the husband is the head of the household." But Tabitha does not resemble this woman she envisioned. As the sky grew dusky in the window behind where she sat on her sofa, she told me, "I wouldn't consider myself necessarily meek. I'm outspoken about things that matter to me. And in terms of the other profile [housewife], I'm not a white woman." In just a few words, Tabitha invoked the construction of Christian womanhood that aligned it with domesticity—and whiteness.

This discourse of Christian womanhood, which helped shift the relations of power in Protestant Christian churches and paved the way for the gendered division of worship practices, also has material implications for churchgoing women's everyday lives today. Sometimes I asked my research participants if they have "worshipful moments" outside the corporate worship service. Their answers point to just how deeply their *individual* experiences of worship, of connecting with God, might be implicated in the discourses of race and gender that have shaped the communal worship service. Several of the women I interviewed described worshipful experiences while spending time in nature, exercising, listening to religious podcasts, singing in the car, and even doing mundane daily chores. Most consistently, women talked about their children as facilitators of worship—

worshipful moments while nursing a baby quietly in the dark, describing God to their children, reading their children to sleep at night. Shelly told me about a worshipful moment she had with her son when he was an infant:

> So there was a moment in the kitchen—a lot of my worship does happen in the kitchen […] I think because I want to be present to look for it […] to know that the Lord is just as present when you're doing the dishes as he is in your church service. And so there was a moment with my son where I was doing the dishes, and he crawled up to my feet. […] I just sat on the floor and I hugged him and I rocked him back and forth. […] In that moment, my words were, "He is yours. This boy is yours. He is a gift to me, but he is completely yours." [….] The water was running in the sink. I could hear my daughter playing. I was kind of singing to my son as I was rocking him back and forth, and I think it felt worshipful because […] I felt satisfied in a way that I also feel during a church service. But something like that in the home, where you're living your everyday life, is really beautiful. I felt His spirit for sure in that moment, and that was worship to me.

There is so much texture in Shelly's recounting of this moment. Her contentment, her gratitude, her sense of the presence of God inside of a minute, everyday moment—and her sense of domesticity and motherhood as vessels for religious experience. The kitchen, the dishes, the home, the children: reproductive, domestic labor is worshipful for Shelly. And not just for Shelly: childcare was the most-cited source of worshipful moments among my participants, and not far behind was household chores (Erica, who told me she has worshipful moments listening to Christian podcasts, said she listens while she's cleaning). What these women experience as worshipful outside of church actually reminds us of the connection between the corporate worship service, the discourse of femininity in white evangelical life, and churchgoing women's subjectivity.

For several of my participants, domestic labor is less a site of spiritual satisfaction and more of a source of frustration. Yet their experiences in that respect are connected to the gendered division of labor and leadership in the church worship service just as much as Shelly's. A marriage and family counselor in Alabama, Michelle is a deeply empathic and sensitive person who has witnessed firsthand the effects of the church's division of labor in both her counseling sessions and her own social life. She joined me in a Starbucks booth a few hours before my group interview at Lacie's apartment, and very shortly we were discussing the structural barriers to women preaching in conservative evangelical churches like the one she attends. She seemed grieved as she said,

> Even if it was asked of women to preach, nobody would because they've never had that experience. It's scary and vulnerable doing something that you spent your whole life thinking was not your place. And so having those skills to be courageous, and for myself, combating this constant, how can I speak with authority. […] So that makes me really angry. And I see how it affects me so much because I see that translating in marriages. I see it translating in families.

She continued,

> So they're cleaning, these things that take more time than big decisions, than leadership decisions. […] It affects, I see it affecting the wife's ability to have a voice when she is upset by her husband's behavior. I cannot tell you how many times I've heard my friends say they "just have to be submissive." Which ultimately hurts her and her husband. […] So it affects marriages in this—when we go out with our friends, it's always the wife that's taking care of the kid and the guys that are able to catch up, and it's always the wives that are cleaning up, always cooking. Frazzled, stressed, trying to do a million things at once. And there are the husbands outside, drinking beer, and smoking their cigar, and it's 2018.

In detailing the ways the church's relations of (spiritual) production are replicated and simultaneously reinforced in the domestic space, Michelle also suggests another difference between the labor women and men in evangelical churches perform: women's work is *more*—more time-consuming, more tedious, more tiring. While all their cooking, cleaning, and planning social engagements evokes compliments from the women's husbands ("'Oh, she holds our life together'," Michelle said, mimicking evangelical husbands), they also produce intense stress and exhaustion. The labor of church leadership is less demanding than the tedium of minute, everyday chores and decisions to which women regularly attend, Michelle argues. Her observation clarifies why some of my participants frame the overall mental labor of planning, organizing, and reproducing a household as “leadership.” For example, Erica describes herself as a “natural leader” whose tendency is to “be the first line of defense” on household responsibilities and parenting strategy. But when, as co-leader of a church small group with her husband, Erica found herself always sending out the notification emails, choosing whether to do a group meal, and deciding who would lead the discussion, she concluded that she was not giving her husband the “space to own his authority because I was always doing it.”

When Erica first said this to me, I tried to hide my chagrin at the invocation of male authority. But when I thought some more about what Erica had said, I realized that she was implicitly using the doctrine of male headship in the household to mitigate her own labor load. Asking her husband to take on more initiative in the mental/managerial labor of the household serves a dual purpose for Erica, who concluded, “I think that part of the reason why I have felt really stressed in life lately is because I’ve been taking on too much of that stuff.” Sometimes, the labor of managing and leading is labor that women would rather not have to perform. I was reminded of this during my group interview in Lacie’s apartment. I had asked everyone what they think the church expects of women. “It is the ‘do all, be all,’ Superwoman mentality,” Lacie replied. “It’s like, Oh, you’re here in children’s church and you brought your casserole and you got all of your kids dressed…” She was thinking of her mom, she said, who she sees as “really wrung out and tired.” Lacie and I were talking again the next morning, just the two of us, when she returned to a question from the night before. “What does a Christian woman look like?” she mused. “It’s like, never resting.”

Months after my interviews with Erica and Lacie, I was in a Sunday worship service at a DC area church, joined by a couple hundred people, almost all of them white. Standing in the pew at the start of the service, I felt a fluttering sickness in my stomach. I knew what today's sermon topic was—"Gender and the Gospel"—and was anxious at the thought of listening to a presentation of "Christian womanhood versus manhood" for 40 minutes. Thankfully, that was not the case. In fact, by the end, the sermon had taken an interesting and ultimately strange turn. The pastor, Tommy, described how his idea of himself as a progressive, egalitarian husband and father was recently challenged by conversations with his wife and other women in the church about the enormous "mental load" women carry. Tommy rattled off six or seven household responsibilities his wife is always managing, from "We have to sign up the boys for soccer, today is the last day," to "We need to change the furnace filter." Hearing the pastor's confession was surprisingly gratifying for me. In Tommy's next breath, however, he brought up "headship." Headship is a popular evangelical doctrine about men's role as the leaders of their households, based on several verses in the New Testament that state that "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5:23 NIV). Tommy concluded his sermon thusly: "I think about this idea of headship, and what does it mean to be a spiritual head. And men asking themselves, 'Am I called to be the head of the family?' If that's the case, can I imagine being the head of any other institution or organization and being that out of touch with daily operations?"

Erica had leaned on the doctrine of headship, or male leadership, to shift some of her reproductive labor to her husband. Tommy was also attempting to reconcile a more equitable division of domestic labor with the doctrine of headship. To justify this move, he appealed to a model "outside" the church—the corporation—and in so doing gestured towards the capitalist context in which the church's gender and labor politics are forged, while leaving the gendered structures of the church and family intact.

Corporate Worship as the Theoliberal Marketplace

The discourse that binds white evangelical Christianity to capitalism has received a good deal of attention from historians (e.g., Bederman 1989; Lincoln 2003; Moreton 2009; Bowler 2013). This literature has demonstrated how white evangelical constructions of gender are deeply imbricated with political economy. In the early 20th century, for example, white evangelical culture repeatedly adjusted its gender ideology to changing industrial culture: with the rise of consumer culture in the U.S., white Protestant men sought to realign religion with the market (and therefore masculinity) rather than with the previous, now-feminized ideals of thrift and self-restraint (Bederman 1989). Later, in the postwar period, a conservative Christian "service ethos" rationalized feminized labor in the growing service economy (Moreton 2009). Today, neoliberal ideologies of free markets, private property, and entrepreneurship provide models that structure the ways some of my participants and the churches of which they are a part understand and manage church labor. For the women for which this is the case, their experiences as white-collar, property-owning workers are the conditions by which they come to understand and inhabit church labor relations in these terms, what I call theoliberalism.

The first example of theoliberal discourse that I heard from white churchgoing women was the rhetoric of "spiritual gifts." The term itself is not new, originating with the Pentecostal movement and its emphasis on miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. The way my participants used it is much broader, but also more conservative, referring more to “the natural talents that a person [brings] to the Christian life” (McIntosh 2017), and to the ways that women’s spiritual gifts are often squandered because of limitations on what women can do in church. As we sat in a busy coffee shop in north Alabama, Jacqueline told me about a Sunday a few weeks earlier when she realized there weren’t enough names on the sign-up sheet to serve communion. For a moment, she said, she thought about signing her own name, but then thought better of it because her father is an elder, and for his sake she didn’t want to stir the pot. But she remained vexed about what she sees as her church’s arbitrary restrictions on women’s participation and labor for the church:

> There’s a disconnect for a lot of women, where I feel like their gifts, their God-given gifts and spiritual gifts, are not being allowed to be used to the fullest. Because of the traditions and constraints that we put on women. God has given us each unique talents. That we are born with. That he expects us to use to glorify his kingdom. […] And I believe that when we tell a woman that you may not use your spiritual gift in this setting, and you let a man do something just because of gender alone, that we’re hindering God’s work being done.

As Jacqueline sees it, the way her church divides church-work according to gender doesn’t align with the variety of spiritual gifts or skills that women might have. And she was far from the only woman I interviewed who talked about spiritual gifts in this way. Heather said to me, “I have a lot of good gifts I don’t feel like I can use [in church].” Bailey frequently invoked the language of gifts, arguing that “When God gives a woman a gift, [churches should] let her use it. Who are we to stifle God’s gifts?” Shannon said God has given some women the gift of leadership, and “if that is the case, then absolutely she should be able to use those gifts in the capacity that she feels is appropriate and has been given by God.” And multiple other women referred to their “giftings.”

These women clearly maintain that God's distribution of spiritual gifts is not necessarily gendered, which challenges complementarian evangelical ideologies about the inherently different spiritual makeup, authority, and responsibilities of men versus women. On one reading, this counter-theology of spiritual gifts is tactically shrewd, a way for these women to displace agency from themselves to God while arguing for greater gender parity in churches. Even the term "giftings," common among my participants, shifts the word's connotation from the property of an individual to an act of God. More overt examples support this reading, like when Samantha told me she frequently explains why she chose to go to seminary by saying, "Jesus made me do it." This tactic would be in line with what Elaine Lawless (1988) found in her work with Pentecostal women preachers in rural Missouri who frame their "call" to preach as unwelcome but ultimately inevitable, since it comes from God.

This is a fair and plausible interpretation of my participants' frequent invocation of "gifts." It is also crucial, however, to consider what the rhetoric of spiritual gifts obscures. The argument that women have been given spiritual gifts of preaching or leadership and should therefore be able to use them in church rests on the assumption that any given church member's gift or calling will be apparent and irrefutable within the church community. But this logic does not account for the fact that spiritual gifts or callings are socially constructed. I do not mean that there are no real spiritual gifts from God. Rather, some members of a church are not given the opportunities to develop gifts or the possibility of being recognized as gifted at all. For example, several women I interviewed who attend a D.C. area church where a woman has never preached (and where the leadership is divided over whether women *should* preach) described a double standard being applied to the "gift" of preaching. When a woman was ordained as a deacon, the pastor told the congregation that there would be a period of discernment to determine if the new deacon also had the gift of preaching. But as church member Adana observed, in the past the church had appointed male deacons who had all preached, "and they would use that as a training ground for preaching. […] I don't know that all of them were imbued with the gift of teaching and preaching." Amber agreed: "We have lovely and wonderful, talented pastors, but they weren't always good at their craft of speaking…it's like we have one set of requirements for women and one set for men." This practice seems to suggest that, as Adana put it, "women have to discern whether they have the gifts of teaching or preaching, but men are just going to get thrown up there, whether they are terrible or not."

This is not just a question of who can be regarded as "gifted," but also who has the power to identify and attest to the spiritual gifts of others. According to Camille, a single white woman in her 40s, when she was younger she struggled to point out what she saw as spiritual gifts in men because she did not want to be "perceived as flirting." Meanwhile, according to Tara, her giftedness has been rendered invisible by her Blackness in her church and elsewhere: "I've always been gifted and talented and it's ruining my life. And it's always awkward because of the body I live in." Tara's experience testifies to the inverse of Sara Ahmed's (2007) assertion that "Whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach."

Giftedness, in short, is something that certain congregants are socially excluded from. Certain gifts are not accessible to all members of the church. In overlooking these structural differences, the proposal that giftedness should guide the division of labor in church resembles the neoliberal conception of the labor market as a “meritocracy” where “the best jobs, and the most spoils, go to the most skilled” (Strombeck 2006, 175). Faith in the church as a neutral space where any laboring subject can participate based on their gifts (skills) mimics neoliberalism’s faith in the market as fundamentally egalitarian and ignores the structural inequities that prevent this from actually happening. It assumes that the performance of pastoral or sacramental labor will be divided according to the (divine) distribution of spiritual skills, when, in reality, social relations of power are the matrix out of which labor is marked as such, valued differentially and distributed unevenly, reproducing those very social relations. It is possible, in fact, that one reason some evangelical women’s campaign for equal status as spiritually productive laborers has not been more successful is the historical legacy of white feminine domesticity, in which white women were constructed as naturally skilled at educating children and managing a household, while white men assumed the “public” roles of leaders and preachers. In this way, the women’s efforts to change church culture and practice according to the language of spiritual gifts, like faith in the “market,” neutralize their goal. This logic is not a simple parroting of neoliberal ideology, but it can be understood in light of the intra-action between church-work and churchgoing women’s experiences as privileged laborers in the capitalist labor market.

This brings us to the second example of theoliberal discourse: the significance of property ownership to full church membership. Not only were many of my participants white-collar workers, but they were also homeowners.[9] Along with their race and gender, these positions are crucial conditions under which they find resonance with theoliberal ideology. Over the course of my fieldwork, I began to notice this connection between property ownership and church membership, or faithful Christian subjectivity, being made by my participants, by pastors, and in the Christian media my participants consumed. For example, Bethany told she feels some social pressure in her church for members to become homeowners, with the expectation being, “If you’re really committed [to the church], you’ll buy a home or you’ll buy a condo. Although we’ve tried to affirm the importance of renting.” Camille, who goes to the same church as Bethany, echoed her: “There’s this underlying expectation and hope that people grow up, get married, and buy homes and live out their days in the city.” In a video update emailed to their church, Tommy, the pastor, described future plans for a permanent church space, assuring congregants that “We want you to know if you buy a home that’s within walking distance of the church, it’s going to be there in five years or 10 years.” What Bethany and Camille sense, and what Tommy (almost certainly unintentionally) implies, is that congregants’ commitment *to* and *from* the church is linked to their stake in the housing market.

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[9] I use “homeowner” to refer to women who have a mortgage on the property where they live, while recognizing that “homeownership” can be precarious and that in actuality, the lending bank owns the property until the mortgage is paid in full.

Lacie is a member of a church several hundred miles away from Camille and Bethany, and in her mind, her own home-buying experience was deeply connected to her commitment to her church, or, more accurately, to God. Specifically, she saw a correlation between her family’s faithful giving to the church and God’s provision of money for a down payment for a house. That year, she and her husband had committed to giving a certain amount of money to their church every month, an amount based on their projections for what Lacie’s fledgling self-owned business would bring in. After a successful launch, however, her work stalled just a few months in. Lacie and her husband made a decision: Despite the dry spell, they would continue giving the monthly amount to which they had originally committed. In an email, she wrote,

> When we began tithing 10% [of our income] to the church, we started tithing with what I HOPED I would make factored in. That was obviously far more than what I was making at the time. And ever since we started doing that, I've hit my numbers every month with ease and we have met the 100% budget goal that matches that 10%. I have no other explanation except God is honoring the money we are tithing and helping my business grow and be sustainable. …[N]ow we have a down payment for our house that we would have had a much harder time with, otherwise.

Importantly, Lacie does not see this series of events as transactional, but as an instance of God's provision for those who faithfully obey him. When I followed up with her about this, she recommended a Christian podcast hosted by a husband-and-wife team who contributed $1,000 to their church when they were struggling financially. Later, as they relate in the podcast episode, they sold their home and made a $100,000 profit, which they believed was God rewarding their faithful giving of the $1,000 when they were hard-up.

What struck me about the podcast hosts' understanding of these events is that their story highlights one investment (their donation to the church) while eliding another: their down payment on the home. The fact that the couple had the resources to purchase property (and therefore invest in the market) gets glossed over in favor of a narrative that casts them as investors in the kingdom of God. I would argue that their story is not a deliberate obfuscation of privilege or capital, but ultimately the account does conflate—or more accurately, convert—investment in the market into investment in the church. Stories like these proclaim a less-charismatic version of the prosperity gospel, which is a theology that teaches (to use the language of *Time* and Pew survey pollsters) that "God increases the riches of those who give" and "the faithful receive health and wealth" (Bowler 2013, 6). What my participants describe, experience, and consume softens the prosperity gospel, making it slightly more palatable and slightly less "miraculous." As it is, the prosperity gospel has long appealed to a wide range of people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Kate Bowler (2013) observes that while "scholars often portray the prosperity gospel as a poor people's movement, an expression of believers' longing for (and distance from) socioeconomic stability, …There are some reasons to think that historically many American prosperity believers already enjoyed a comfortable standard of living" (233). This means that for wealthy Christians who profess it, the prosperity gospel is less an aspiration than a rationalization. Indeed, one underexamined thread through Bowler's prosperity gospel archive is the prominence of home ownership, along with property "protection" and expansion, in prosperity gospel rhetoric. The very anecdote on which Bowler closes her book speaks to this theme, although this is not explicated by Bowler. It is a story told by a megachurch pastor about praying with her husband for God to prevent a coming storm from crossing their property line.

I bring up the history of the prosperity gospel because it might help us understand why white, property-owning women might feel at home using the terms of theoliberalism to argue for women's equality in church labor and leadership. While women's labor in and for the church is and has been devalued, now, more than ever, white professional women are property owners.[10] If some churches implicitly align homeownership with true “commitment” to a church, that is, with the fullest form of membership, then homeownership might take on a spiritual valence for some women in part because it offers them a potentially better route than their church labor to feeling valued as a churchgoer. Whether or not this is the case, my point here is that in some church cultures, property ownership is signified and experienced as spiritual, and churchgoing women’s affinity for theoliberal discourse might rest in part on their own positions as stakeholders in the market.

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[10] Another way to look at this is that white women's property ownership might have always been one of the most promising avenues by which they could establish their spiritual value in evangelical churches. As Stephanie Jones-Rogers (2019) documents, white women made up around 40 percent of slave owners. We also know that in antebellum churches, where enslaved people were often members, white female honor and identity were established in part through the church's discipline of enslaved women (Elder 2016).

Where the prosperity gospel affirms the marketplace as inherently moral (Bowler 2013; Anker 1999), theoliberalism goes one step further, applying the market’s terms to the church itself as well as its management and division of labor. In this third example of theoliberal discourse, the way a church operates and is understood and embodied by its members is defined by an entrepreneurial ethos. This was especially true for one large nondenominational church I visited for which “startup culture” seems to be the model. Based in Alabama, this church has planted smaller “campuses” throughout the state, including the one I visited on a hot and humid summer Sunday. I was ushered from an endless parking lot into a large, dark, windowless conference room, where I felt a shock of cold air and my eyes adjusted to take in countless rows of people filling nearly every padded chair, even with several minutes to spare before the service began. A track of pulsing music, slowly growing louder, kicked off the worship service (I would later learn that underneath the music is a clap track). The lights went down in the house and the stage was illuminated with bright pinks, blues, and greens as a team of three women and seven men—all white, well-dressed and sculpted—led us in worship by singing and playing various instruments. After that opening, the campus pastor, himself white, young, and built, ascended the stage to welcome us and announce that the campus had experienced such rapid growth that they were adding a third service on Sunday mornings. Later in the service, we watched several slick videos produced by the main campus.

Before I left, a friend who has been attending the church introduced me to Kara and Kyla. I set up interviews with each of them. The next day, after Kara and I sat down together at a local coffee shop, I asked her how she would describe a Sunday worship service at her church. “Do you mean from the moment that you drive onto the property?” she queried. “Sure,” I said.

> Okay. You drive onto the property, the first thing you see is our parking team. They’re smiling and directing you where you need to go so you’re not wondering what to do. You get to the door, there’s greeters there. They’re pointing towards the direction of where you need to be. […] Then you get in the auditorium, and we have a pre-roll, which has a clapping thing on it. It’s a programming we use, from the creative side, to acclimate people to the beginning of worship.

Kara went on to explain the church’s “Enthuse” program for training worship leaders. “We use that as a vetting process, for this is where your skill level is, this is where your relationship with Jesus is, now let’s figure out which one needs more time.” She told me that staff and volunteers are “always being challenged to raise up a new leader. ‘Who’s the next you?’” It does not take a close reading to see how this church simulates Silicon Valley culture and jargon, including its approach to its workforce and volunteers. Unlike the corporate world, however, in the church context, training your own replacement becomes spiritual outreach, a form of evangelism. While American evangelicalism “has historically seen entrepreneurial success and influence as a measure of spiritual success” (Strombeck 2006, 183), the innovation at Kara’s church is its own *corporatization* as an entrepreneurial venture, extending into the very fitness of its staff. Kara shared with me that the church’s staff/volunteer system is “completely gifts-based. We do a spiritual gifts analysis, and we do a personality profile during the Grow Track class. And that basically tells us that our design determines our destiny." *Spiritual gifts—that is how church labor is divided,* church leaders can say; *we let* God *determine the division of labor*.

Kara told me later in the interview that she believes "women are into details" and more emotional than men, and that God designed men "to take care of things, and women are designed to take care of our relationships." This is why women on staff submit themselves to the authority of senior male leadership and occupy "coordinator roles," as Kara put it, while men unite the team around a vision. Even with the allegedly gender-neutral language of its spiritual gifts analysis, giftedness in Kara's church is still socially constructed. This suggests another reason why the logic of "spiritual gifts" has not led to more equally valued work between men and women in church. In this setting, where power and labor in the church are divided unequally, "gifts-based" relations of production ultimately function to sanctify the inequity as God's plan for each individual worker.

Theoliberal Globalization

As Samantha and I were wrapping up our interview in her office on Friday evening, she mentioned that earlier that day she had been listening to a podcast called "Going Scared" hosted by Christian entrepreneur Jessica Honegger. "Do you know what Noonday is?" Samantha asked. It's a jewelry line, she said, founded by Honegger, and its products are "made by women all over the world that need jobs. It's a really cool concept."

Weeks later, I was looking up the podcasts recommended to me by Samantha and other participants. I was able to locate transcripts from Honegger's podcast, in which the host interviews an entrepreneur, usually a woman, whose work has had some sort of "social impact." Neither the podcast nor Honegger's website is explicitly evangelical or even Christian, but any regular follower of hers on Instagram would encounter regular references to her faith. Honegger's "About" page evokes familiar tropes of white evangelical womanhood: transformative encounters with global poverty, international adoption, and in her case, the belief that "economic empowerment is absolutely what rises [sic] women out of poverty and into freedom" (Honegger, Episode 47). According to Honegger's personal website, her company's origins can be traced to her and her husband's efforts to fundraise for their adoption of a boy from Rwanda: "Through friends, I got connected with two talented Ugandan jewelry designers named Jalia and Daniel who were living in poverty but just needed access to a marketplace to truly thrive."

NGOs affiliated with evangelical Christianity have long touted this idea about people in the Third World (McAlister 2018). Many scholars have commented on the concurrent missionization of Third World communities with their "integration into the capitalist market" (Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins 2008, 1149). Honegger's podcast and her brand demonstrate that some white evangelical women have managed to extract value—both spiritual and material, to indulge a binary—for themselves from the labor of Third World women in a global marketplace. Is it possible that the spiritual value and purpose white Christian women have leveraged through the labor of marginalized women in the Global South is itself related to the labor of church, to Sunday morning? If history tells us anything, the answer is probably yes: the spiritual labor of white American women missionaries traveling abroad has historically been less proscribed than that of women in the church service precisely because they were not preaching "to white, middle-class American men" (Ingersoll 2003, 130). This was attested to by my participants, including Erica, who said her church has "sent several single women into longer short-term missions," and Tara, whose church's medical mission trips are led by a woman.

In the twenty-first century, white Christian women have found a way to be both entrepreneurs and missionaries by identifying Third World women as a source of spiritual-financial capital. Still, Honegger's social media posts indicate that there are limits to the degree to which white women can take on these entrepreneurial ventures and successfully perform the "Christian womanhood" the church asks of them. On an Instagram post from January 2019, Honegger shared the following caption:

> …Then I started Noonday, and suddenly I wasn't spending much time at home at all. I have travelled more these past 8 years than my whole previous life combined. Recently, Joe became the primary home maker and I let the pendulum swing. I don't think I prepared one meal in 2018 and I definitely didn't match a sock. […] This year, my intention is to invest in my home. My body is my home. My family is my home. My Noonday community is my home. My friends are my home. My church is my home. I am actually God's home which truly blows my mind…

"Investing" in social reproduction, Honegger applies the formula equating entrepreneurial and spiritual success to a venture less global, but no less embedded in religious-capitalist power relations.

Working for the Lord and Not for Men

While my participants' experiences as laboring subjects in their churches, in their workplaces, and in their homes are mutually constitutive of one another, they are not comprehensive. For these women, there is another relation of power within which they are situated, one that exceeds the church, capital, or indeed, any other discursive formation.

A member of her nondenominational Tennessee church since its founding, Erica was one of a handful of my participants not dissatisfied with the gendered division of labor in her church. I tried not to squint in the late summer sun warming the patio where we sat while Erica told me she understands that men’s authority and leadership in the church is “ordained by God.” Regardless of women’s exclusion from positions of authority, she said, women’s labor is valued and recognized in her church, the labor of its social reproduction shared equally between women and men. “Do you feel like it would affect you in any way to hear from a woman pastor?” I asked. Erica had visited churches with women preachers in the past, and she responded to my question speaking from experience: “I do find myself feeling, and this probably comes from this pretty clear doctrine view that I have on this, that I experience less authority from women,” she said. “So when a woman is in the pastoral role, or preaching, I just have this, I don’t know, a sense of her having less authority, if that makes sense. I’m never conscious of that unless it’s a church where she’s the pastor. […] I do think that something would have to change actively in my mind and heart to go to a church where there was a woman as the head pastor. Because of that sense I’m talking about.” She picked up this thread again a few minutes later when I asked her how she would compare her roles at home, at work, and in church. “Even though I don’t feel like it’s as clearly defined as a church or family structure, I still think at work I didn’t want to hold to that ultimate authority role,” she responded. “I definitely answered to women that were in that role—I didn’t feel like, in [my work] setting, it was totally dysfunctional if a woman was in that role—but I also appreciated when men were in those roles."

At some level, the lack of authority Erica senses from women both at church and at work is yet another example of an intuition, an orientation, that reveals how church labor and other labor become inseparable in women's bodies. But our conversation took an interesting turn. As Erica was describing her intuition that women in pastoral roles lack authority, I was trying to parse whether she was being self-critical or if she was offering her experience as evidence of a cosmic reality. "When you say that, do you feel like it's—do you suspect that that intuition is God-given or Spirit-driven," I asked, "or are you saying it's just a personal read that you get?" "Hmmm." Erica paused. "I don't know if I know how to make a distinction between that."

Erica's comment threw me back to my conversation just two months earlier with Heather, a young woman who was living in the wake of a major upheaval in her family life following a tragic accident. I had asked her if she felt like she would have responded in the same way to her situation if she weren't a Christian. She said no; I asked her why.

> I guess it's hard to say. I don't think I would be the person that I am without Christ in my life. I think I would be a much more selfish person. Not that I'm not selfish. […] I don't know how much of me is me and how much is Holy Spirit. Would 'me minus Holy Spirit' still [respond in the same way]? I would feel like yes…But I don't know if that's God's love being perfect in the situation or, I don't know. I feel like I'm infused with Christ now. So there is no more Me by myself, and I can't even imagine it.

These are powerful words from Heather and Erica. On one read, they are tactical invocations of spiritual authority, relying on the evangelical hyper-trope and experience that is one's "personal relationship with God." This interpretation dovetails with reams of ethnographic writing on evangelical women, and it would not be entirely wrong. It would be reductive, however, to frame these women's accounts in solely instrumental terms. A vital condition of their experience is the presence of God in their lives. They understand God, not just the church or political economy or other social and cultural relations, as forming and transforming them. Setting aside the ontological question of whether or not a divine force not reducible to discourse does indeed shape these women as subjects, what they have to say reveals friction and diversity at play within the operation of religious power. That is, even as Erica instinctively rejects women as pastorally authoritative, she assumes the authority of the Holy Spirit of God to do so. Meanwhile, Heather finds that her intimacy with (and indivisibility from) God leads her to question her church's position on women in leadership: "Sometimes I'm like, are we sure we have this right? This whole, 'Women can't do anything.' I feel like I know God pretty well. And what he tells me about myself does not say you're lesser than a man. Ever."

Heather is not the only one of my participants who has arrived at this question in this way. When I asked Wendy how her feelings on women's roles in church have changed, she began, "I feel like I've talked to God about it and he's just given me peace about feeling differently and it being okay […]." Shelly, likewise, told me that watching her church grow over time, she went from anxiety about how things were changing to feeling "okay about it all. That's the Lord. Because that's not my personality." Megan, whose relationship with her church's doctrine on gender and other issues has been a fraught one over the past few years, mused, "What does it mean to not just fall in line with everything that your church believes?" She told me that as she "brushed up against" particular interpretations of the Bible that she disagreed with, she would think, "This doesn't really seem to align with the God that I know." When describing her own spiritual leadership skills, Samantha told me, “I guess I’m pretty intuitive, and part of that, I think, is the gift of the Holy Spirit in the sense that he lives inside of me, but part of that is personality and giftings.”

Current formulations of the politics of religion and dominant theoretical concepts of subjectivity could both better account for the spiritual experiences of women like these. As laborers in multiple contexts, the process of subject formation for these women is part of an intricate assemblage of church, work, and home, each not only blurring but becoming mutually constitutive of one another in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Yet the women also have faith that there is a process of formation in their lives that exceeds the church and other relations of subordination.

Chapter 2: Carnal Incarnations: Where Worship Meets Sex in Evangelical Life

When I was about 11 or 12 years old, my church invited a woman from another local congregation to teach all the girls on the cusp of youth group about the meaning of sex. We met once a week in a small room next to the church kitchen and sat with our backs against the walls as our teacher told us, rapturously and repeatedly, how *holy* and beautiful sex is when it is between a married man and woman. According to her—and the Christian dating books that would soon pile up on my bedside table—sex between a husband and wife was an act of "worship."

Almost two decades later, sociologist Kelsy Burke (2016) discovered a similar refrain on Christian sexuality websites where married, monogamous, cishetero and primarily white evangelical Christians offer and seek advice on sexual experimentation within their marriages. Burke found that on message boards like the ones on the forums of Between the Sheets and Lusty Christian Ladies, "the pleasure of religion and the pleasure of sex are considered to be two sides of the same coin" (155). Unlike the Christian sex education I received, these sites host commentary and debate over the spiritual validity of sexual activities ranging from vibrator usage to pegging. Yet in an echo of my church's version of sex ed, several Christians on the forums describe sexual pleasure within a monogamous, heterosexual marriage as "a way to praise God" (126) and "literally a part of the divine" (38). One man even recommends "praying before, during, and after sex" (37).

Burke also noticed a particular genre emerging on these forums. Women's "sexual awakening stories" on sites like Between the Sheets (BTS) follow a clear before-

and-after trajectory that mirrors religious conversion testimonies. In the "before," the women write, they inhabited a dualism in which their minds knew sex was "*supposed* to be" (108) enjoyable, but their bodies did not. The climax of these stories is, plainly, climax: Many of these women declare that the first time they experienced an orgasm during sex with their husbands, it was more than a pleasurable experience: it was *spiritual*. What made the experience spiritual was that it strengthened the woman's relationship with her husband—and this, in turn, strengthened her relationship with God.

Burke's read on all of this is that evangelicals on the Christian sex forums imagine a "holy trinity" formed by husband, wife, and God. This observation echoes religious studies scholar Amy DeRogatis's analysis of Christian sex manuals, in which "spiritual marital sex always involves three parties—husband, wife, and Holy Spirit…The three become one" (2015, 74). It also speaks to a broader consensus on the convergence of the spiritual and the sexual in evangelical history and culture noted by a range of scholars (see Erzen 2006; Fessenden 2001; Gardella 1985; Kintz 1997; Moslener 2015). Even the evangelical concept of sex as an act of worship has been traced to the early 20th century by historians (Gardella 1985, 144). Yet despite all this attention to the spiritual-sexual matrix within white evangelicalism, Burke and the wider literature overlook the possibility of a relationship between evangelical sexuality and what happens in evangelical churches on Sunday morning.

What do the sexual awakening narratives of women on Christian sex forums have to do with church? At the Sunday worship services of predominantly white evangelical churches, in the words of women who go to those churches, and through a re-reading of Burke's findings, I find evidence that the mutually constitutive relationship between church and home goes deeper than scholars have considered. Less a "holy trinity" than a lopsided love triangle, the relationship between men, women, and God posited by the church is asymmetrical: in the church worship service, men act as symbolic mediators between women and God. Marriage, in turn, is meant to replicate this relationship, and sex between a Christian husband and wife follows suit. This link between white churchgoing women's experience of spiritual-sexual pleasure and men's status as gatekeepers in the church is the focus of this chapter, and it reveals just how inextricably, materially connected the everyday lives, bodies, and subjectivities of churchgoers are with the church worship service.

I also emphasize, however, that the ways Christian women experience God do not map cleanly onto the church's relations of power. The production of subjectivity is a contradictory process, unfixed, multifarious, and overdetermined (in the sense Gibson-Graham [2006] use it), a process that exceeds the church. My participants understand that their own formation is not defined only by the church. They contend that at least in part, they are being constructed by distinctly *divine* forces. Yet another, more hidden context of white evangelical women's experiences of sexual pleasure is whiteness itself. Reviewing the sexual awakening narratives recounted by Burke alongside my interviews with women in evangelical churches, I locate testimony to the ways racialized discourses of sexual purity materialize in the depths of bodily intimacy.

Anchors and Vessels: Men, Women, and God on Sunday Morning

On Easter Sunday at Heidi's Presbyterian church in Tennessee, a long line formed in front of the communion table in the center of the airy community center space the church rented each week. On most regular Sundays, the pastor waited by the table with bread and wine in his hands. This Sunday, Heidi had been invited by the pastor, Walt, to serve communion alongside him and her husband Caleb, since Walt anticipated a larger crowd for Easter. He was right: the church was packed, the line for communion was long. Walt stood on one side of the communion table, Caleb on the other, leaving Heidi in the background, tucked behind both men. From my position in the line I could see how parishioners kept moving towards the pastor and Caleb, and I could see Heidi, standing and waiting with wine and bread in hand. After a few minutes that to me seemed like an eternity, Walter and Caleb stepped back so that they stood flush with Heidi, and soon people were moving forward to receive communion from all three.

I asked Heidi about this moment a few weeks later. "I don't think at that point I was thinking, 'Is this because I'm a woman?'" she reflected. "It was because I'm kind of standing off to the side, this positioning is kind of awkward." But looking back, she told me, her gender probably did play a role in worshippers' reluctance to receive communion from her rather than Walter or Caleb. If she had been a man in that position, she said, "I think there would have been less [hesitation on the part of churchgoers], because you have to make an extra effort, but then it's also this person who doesn't usually serve communion, so it's hard to know." Despite the rocky start, once she began distributing the bread and wine, Heidi relished pronouncing "The blood of Christ shed for you, his body broken for you" over each person who tore from the loaf she held in her hand and drank from the cup in the other. "It was cool to offer that to people," she said. "Kind of empowering in some ways. Just to be a vessel through which that blessing was being given […] Just being a participant in that."

Being the vessel through which the blessing is given in communion is normally a role reserved for men in the Presbyterian Church in America, the type of church Heidi attends. In most evangelical churches, in fact, only men can preach in church on Sunday, baptize new Christians, officiate weddings or oversee the church as elders. In many, if not most churches, only men can distribute the body and blood (bread and wine) of Jesus during communion. Communion is one means of production of Christians: like baptism, consuming the bread and wine of communion not only marks the believer's transformation into a member of the body of Christ; it is also performative in that it accomplishes the believer's transformation into a part of the body of Christ as a sacramental act of obedience. Heidi's choice of words—"vessel through which"—might sound deflective, but it actually nods at the significance of this role, where the person performing it enacts a sacrament on behalf of God and thereby becomes symbolically aligned with God. At Heidi's evangelical church, men usually perform this role. Even when Heidi distributed the Lord's Supper, her husband was invited to do so alongside her. In another evangelical church I visited during my fieldwork, the only women who distribute communion to worshippers are the wives of church elders. Their proximity to their husbands grants them access to this role.

In general, women in evangelical churches like this one symbolically approach God through men: men who perform baptisms, men who give communion, men who preach, and the men who are their husbands. Men, much more often than women, appear during the worship service on a stage, behind a pulpit, before a cross, or beside the communion table. They enjoy greater proximity to symbols of the sacred. These arrangements implicitly position men as important facilitators of women's correspondence with God. To reiterate, this is not an explicit spiritual hierarchy; evangelicals of nearly all stripes maintain that in God's eyes and in the church, men are not spiritually superior to women, and the vast majority would argue that men are not inherently "closer" to God than are women. But, Leah told me, "I would say there is still some part of me that receives a message of, something like [I am a] second-class citizen." The summer morning Leah and I met for her interview, she was on childcare duty, and we convened at a playground in small-town North Carolina to talk while her kids explored. As I related in chapter 1, Leah once delivered a talk during her church worship service—with her husband seated onstage behind her the whole time, doing nothing but mitigating her gendered presence on stage. Another story Leah told me further demonstrated that women at the front of her church must always be "anchored by a male body": Her church's pastor had invited a woman who is "a really gifted preacher" to speak, and "to our preacher's credit, he knows that and wanted her to come. But I guess he had gotten the advice or something—so pretty much the whole time she preached, he was standing there beside her and every now and then would ask a question as if it were an interview."

In all of the churches my participants attended, only men can occupy the highest reaches of leadership, such as senior pastor. Yet women's degree of participation in worship rituals and pastoral ministry varies by denomination and individual congregation, and this matters. Heather, a young Alabamian, attends a more conservative evangelical congregation. Heather's faith in the face of an unexpected traumatic event that respun the fabric of her life has garnered her a sizable evangelical following on social media and invitations to speak at some area church events. Through all of this, however, Heather has never spoken on a Sunday morning during her church's worship service. "A couple of times, I spoke on a Wednesday night at my church," she said. "Sometimes it's just Ladies' Days, in which case nobody is going to have an issue. […] In both instances, though, I was not in the auditorium [where the Sunday worship service takes place]. I was either in a small chapel or a gymnasium or something." Come Sunday, Heather recedes into the appropriate "women's role." "I feel like we're very passive members on a Sunday. Just singing, walking around, I get passed a [communion] tray. […] For me, I'm not that way. That's not my personality." And yet members of her church and other Christians follow and respond to Heather's story on Facebook and Instagram regularly. "And it's like, this is so weird, because I can't do this here at church, really, but I can do it on different media, and it's acceptable and people can hear my message," she said. "It's strange. So that kind of gave me a great sense of not being so passive." In Heather's church context, a woman's words—but not her body—can do the work normally reserved for men on Sunday. The Word and her flesh must remain separate.[11]

Meanwhile, more than half of my participants regularly see women reading Scripture, praying, and offering testimony "up front" during the Sunday worship service, and this can temper their sense that women are "less-than." "I do think it matters to me to see women up there reading Scripture, praying," said Ashley, who attends a non-denominational church in Alabama after spending years in more conservative churches of Christ. "That women have a role is important to me. […] As a woman in the church I feel like my presence, my role, my value is more significant, that I have more of a voice." In fact, quite a few women who attend various evangelical churches shared with me similar feelings, while simultaneously asserting their own convictions that women should not be head pastors. A few others disagree. Alyssa, who has struggled with the ways her church limits women's roles in worship and leadership, told me, "Obviously a pastor is not God." But if a woman at her church were to fill that role, she said, it would serve as a reminder that "God is not a man. I'm trying to continually bust this image in my head of God being a gray-haired man." What Alyssa is trying to deconstruct is an image shored up by evangelical churches and culture, an undercurrent that, like one evangelical ex-gay program tells its participants, "Masculinity equals Christ, Christ equals masculinity" (Erzen 2006, 104).

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[11] John 1:14 (NIV): "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." This verse refers to the incarnation of God in Jesus; evangelicals often use "the Word" to refer to the Gospel or good news of salvation through Jesus. See also my discussion of John Piper in chapter 1.

The semiotics of the church stage matters: it is both representative and performative, in that it *realizes* the relation between men, women, and God that it represents. That realization occurs in the bodies of the women witnessing and participating in these worship rituals—in feelings of grief, in sensations of discomfort, in intuitions and orientations. Since the Easter Sunday when she held the bread and wine, Heidi has wondered why "they don't draft more women" to distribute communion regularly. "It kind of bothers me that we don't," she said. "That it isn't just more routine." The words that Heidi so joyfully said over each worshipper as they ate the bread and drank the wine have left a bitter taste in her mouth, soured slightly by the knowledge that other women have not had access to the same experience. Amber, at her church hundreds of miles away from Heidi's, has tasted that same disappointment. "Whenever we have the Easter vigil or any ordination service, every year that I've been a part of the church, […]

it’s always just white males in their white robes and their beards. And for some reason that makes me feel really sad. It causes me to grieve every year.”

When they do see women performing roles that were normally reserved for men, some women who have grown up in conservative evangelicalism experience a visceral reaction. Last year, Larissa’s evangelical church ordained a woman as a deacon for the first time. As Penelope, the new deacon, took her ordination vows before the church, Larissa was surprised to find herself fighting back tears. “I think some of it was the power in that ordination service of the deacon laying down before the cross,” she told me months later, over the low drone of cicadas in the humid air outside her living room window. “That’s a very powerful image. And when others have gotten ordained, I remember that being very powerful, but it didn’t move me to tears. And in some ways, I feel like that action was a recognition of something that is already happening and has been happening for women in ministry. Because often women are doing the work of deacons and are not being recognized for that. So it was powerful in that way. It was also powerful in that it was actually happening.” While it was still true that only men could be pastors or bishops at her church, Penny’s ordination mattered deeply to Larissa.

Having felt in the moment a sense of her words’ importance, I found myself returning to what Larissa had said and was moved again each time I read the interview transcript. Earlier that summer, I had visited a different evangelical church on a Sunday morning. I had walked in from the Alabama heat to rows of white churchgoers in padded chairs facing a small stage with a plexiglass podium. Throughout the service, men traversed the stage, offering prayers, making announcements, leading worship, officiating communion and delivering a sermon. There was no sign of church women near the stage, with its large wooden cross and warm spotlight. Yet in Larissa's church, the public alignment of a woman's body with the cross, bowing before it, but also reenacting and embodying the laying down of Christ's body upon it, was powerful because it posited a particular type of relationship between her and Christ.

On the other hand, some women experienced a visceral reaction when they first encountered women preaching or performing some other significant, symbolic role during worship. Nora, who grew up in a conservative church of Christ, remembered how it felt the first time she went to a nondenominational church and "saw women passing communion trays": "I was like, 'Why do I feel that? Why is this raising the hairs on the back of my neck? What is my deal here?' Because I'm a woman and I know I love the Lord and he loves me and I have things to offer people, spiritually." Amber had a similar story. A few years back, Amber worked for an ecumenical Christian organization affiliated with a progressive church. She was on the clock one Sunday when a woman pastor was preaching in the church service downstairs, and Amber happened to overhear snippets of her sermon. "It was just this weird experience where I was like, 'Oh wow...Why is this so strange, that she's preaching?' Just hearing a female voice preaching—I was like, 'I haven't heard a woman preach.'" Amber remembers how she attempted to parse her reaction, thinking at the time, "This is obviously important to me, and it's also disturbing how strange it is."

These types of reactions—hairs raised, a sense of the uncanny—were common. Yet women's read on their discomfort varied. For some women, such as Nora and Amber, their experiences revealed a dichotomy within themselves, feelings they disavowed yet could not dispel. Other women were aware of these feelings, but less critical of them. I asked Andrea if she could imagine what it might feel like for her to hear a woman preach or distribute the bread during communion, since at her church women are not permitted to do so. We were sitting near her apartment window, her neighbor's cat stalking the sofa for the best patch of sun. She sighed. "I mean, I think I'd have a lot of questions. Which I probably don't about male pastors. I'd be like, Is she married? What does her husband do? Is he okay with this? Is he just as strong as she is in terms of her faith? Or if he's not, why? I just feel like there'd be a lot of questions that I don't necessarily have when I'm listening to a man preach." "Is your sense that [those questions] would arise out of the fact that it was so unfamiliar or something else?" I asked. Part of me expected Andrea to unpack her hypothetical skepticism, to attribute it to patriarchal influence. Instead, she told me her questions were basically "vetting."

Unlike Andrea, Erica doesn't have to speculate about feeling skepticism towards women preachers. As I recounted in Chapter 1, Erica told me that when she visits a church where a woman is preaching, "I just have this, I don't know, a sense of her having less authority." For Erica (and, hypothetically, Andrea), spiritual authority is constructed in part through her bodily response to other women's bodies in church spaces. Even as Erica trusts her gut, her intuition, that women have less spiritual authority than men, in order to make this determination she accords authority to *her own body* and its felt distrust of other women's spiritual credibility. Of course, Erica went on to say that she does not know if she can discern whether this intuition is God-given or just "a personal read," as I put it to her. Erica suggested her intuition could be from God, yet Nora and Amber found their reactions to women preaching and distributing communion suspect, as something potentially attributable to their formation as gendered subjects shaped by sexist church practices.

I will come back to this distinction, but for now, these examples reveal how a persistently gendered symbolism creates that which it implies, manifesting in women's feelings about who has spiritual authority and the right to serve as God's proxy. While most evangelicals would vociferously argue that excluding women from church leadership does not position men as somehow "closer" to God or more like God than women, these gendered worship practices have material implications for congregants' feelings, orientations, and imaginations.

Always the Bride, Never the Bridegroom: Husbands, Wives, and Spiritual Mediation

Many white evangelicals understand the Christian family as a microcosm of the church. In Chapter 1 I discussed the relationship between the gendered division of labor in the church and the gendered division of labor between Christian husbands and wives. Here, I turn our attention to the way men's spiritual leadership, or the idea of men as spiritual authorities in the church, also animates the white evangelical construction of marriage. What happens in church does not stay in church; it exists in mutual contingency with the construction of family, marriage and sex. Specifically, both the average white evangelical worship service and the dominant white evangelical construction of marriage grant men the unique position as proxies for Christ.

It was the tail end of summer in Tennessee when I met Erica for our interview on the patio of a small coffee shop, and minutes into our conversation, I was sweating, trying not to be distracted by the heat and my dampening back. I asked her how she felt about women’s roles in church. “I do expect there to be a man as, in the pastoral role and in the elder roles,” she said. “And even in my marriage, I do look to my husband to have an authoritative role.” She explained how she and her husband are trying to work out a strategy for him to take on more leadership in their family. I asked her then if she could say more about the connection between male leadership in the church and in the family. She laughed a little, saying she wished she had studied the topic before our interview.

“I feel like there are pretty specific Scripture about roles, both in marriage and in the church, that describe men as taking a more authoritative role than women.” She went quiet for a few seconds. “The one about marriage comes to mind more readily, about, what is it—”

“‘Wives, submit to your husbands’…,” I offered.

“Yeah, and like how husbands are compared to Christ, being the head over the church. And then women are compared to the church.”

The biblical passage Erica and I were referencing is from the book of Ephesians, a letter by the apostle Paul: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands” (Eph. 5:22-24, New International Version). This verse came up directly or indirectly in quite a few of my interviews. It was also common for my participants to slide from discussing women’s roles in the church to their role in their families. Elizabeth told me over the hush over her infant son’s napping that “I do think even in marriage there are different roles for the man and the woman. I actually don’t think that a woman should be the head pastor of a church.” I asked her what those different roles look like. “I think more so than me, I think my husband will have to answer to this, the health of this family. And it’s his—” She paused. “I don’t even know where I’m trying to go with this. He, at the end of the day, he’s responsible for the health of this family.” She continued quickly, “Even though I fully feel that responsibility too. But when I hear of men walking out on their family, I’m like, That’s your job. That’s your role. To love me. And by extension, our child. Like Him [Jesus].”

The term many evangelicals use to describe men’s role in their families and their churches is “spiritual leadership.” During my interview with Kyla in a trendy coffee shop in Nashville, she cited the concept of men’s “spiritual leadership” as the binding agent between the gendered organization of the church and of the family. “In the Bible, and in Christian churches, you’re taught that the man spiritually leads the family, that the man is the head of the household,” she said. “So I feel like in any kind of role in the church, […] you visualize that man as a spiritual authority.” A few days earlier, in a crowded Starbucks in north Alabama, Jacqueline had made a passionate case for why women should be able to use their “spiritual gifts” in the church worship service. But then she pulled back. “Now, God did give us some structure,” she stipulated. “When he talks about Christ being the head of the church, and there’s definitely structure. In my home, I want my husband to be a spiritual leader of our home. I think God’s very clear about the man doing that.”

While men’s “spiritual leadership” is an evangelical shibboleth, however, what it looks like in practice is not clearly defined by most church communities and varies from household to household. I found quite a range of opinion among my participants—and even within individual women—on the idea that husbands should be “spiritual leaders” of their wives and children. Lacie had no qualms saying that she is the spiritual leader of her household. Shelly, on the other hand, went from describing her adherence to the doctrine of wifely “submission” to contesting the notion of spiritual leadership in a matter of seconds. “If there was something that my husband felt very firm about, and I sought counsel about—if I disagreed about it, I would seek counsel and talk to friends and be in prayer about it—but I would be there to submit to what he has for our family.” Then she continued,

> “The man has to be the spiritual leader”—I don’t think that’s necessarily true. I think churches in the past, that’s how they’ve taken those verses. But the woman is just as much the spiritual leader of the home. I would not say that my husband is the spiritual leader of the home. Now if he was encouraging me to read these different things and praying for me, that’s great, but I’m not holding him to be the spiritual leader of the home.

Shelly rejects the idea that her husband must be the “spiritual leader” in her home, but she also believes in male “headship,” or the idea that wives should submit to their husbands’ authority on making decisions that involve their family. But for Erica, “headship” and spiritual leadership are linked. “My husband and I trade off leading the discussion [in our small group meetings]. If he’s out of town, I’ll lead the discussion. But I think if all the guys in our home group only looked to me for leadership, that would probably be kind of weird. I can’t—that wouldn’t happen.”

Erica, Kyla, and Jacqueline understand men’s authority in the church and their authority over their wives as mutually constitutive. In the process, they refer to a scriptural analogy in which husbands correspond with Christ and wives with the church. This construction, the evangelical micro*cosmic* marriage, presents husbands as the proxy or surrogate of Christ, and wives as the symbol of the church, the recipients of their husbands’ love and sacrifice. Crucially, evangelical Christians understand Jesus as the mediator between them and God, his sacrificial death on the cross purifying humans of their sin so that they can approach God. The evangelical microcosmic marriage therefore positions husbands themselves as mediators between their wives and God. In performing this role, husbands (and preachers, and church elders) in effect become spiritual gatekeepers, conduits, vessels, by which women experience God, whether through tasting Christ's body and blood in communion consecrated by a male pastor or through their husband's sacrificial love. Husbands are meant to resemble Christ, and as they *approximate* him in their interactions with their wives, they are also constructed as being more *approximate to* him.

The common "equation between men and the anthropomorphic image of the Creator" and the ways evangelical women and men have responded to it has been described by Linda Kintz (1997, 53). As Kintz and other scholars of American Christianity have noted, evangelical women have often cited their own resemblance to Christ through their submission and service. Yet this "feminization" of conservative Christianity has in turn spawned reactionary men's movements (Kintz 1997; Bederman 1989) seeking to realign the religion with masculinity. Building on this work, I want to emphasize here the Christ-imitating role evangelical men inhabit as mediators in both the church worship service and in marriage. This vision of marriage as salvation surrogacy, with men acting as intercessors on behalf of women before God, appears both in popular Christian media online and in the words of my participants. A December 18, 2017 article from DesiringGod.com, the popular website founded by prominent evangelical pastor and author John Piper, urges husbands to "get their wives ready for Jesus." The article begins by quoting a passage from Ephesians 5, precisely where I left off earlier: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27, English Standard Version). Author Bryan Stoudt draws on these verses to argue that "husbands have the staggering privilege of getting our wives ready for Jesus, their true husband." He elaborates, "God calls husbands to be instruments of his sanctifying work in the lives of our wives…. Husbands are uniquely positioned by God to play this role." According to this article, husbands function as mediators between their wives and God, performing priestly sanctification of women in an imitation and fulfillment of the promise of Jesus.

Another example of the men-as-mediators discourse appeared in my Facebook feed, where young evangelical women in their early 20s were sharing blog posts from the Christian website Girl Defined. The site is hosted by two sisters whose YouTube channel had more than 150,000 subscribers in September 2019. On their site, a 2014 article critiques the "trend" of men taking their wives' last names when they married. Bethany Beal writes,

> I want to focus in on God's incredible design for marriage and why you as a girl should shout for joy to take on your future man's last name, and not the other way around. Marriage isn't about political correctness or social acceptance. It's about representing Christ and His relationship to the Church …. Christ is the bridegroom and we as the Church are the bride. It's very clear throughout Scripture that we as girls represent the Church and guys represent Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27) …. How foolish would it be for you to accept Christ as your Savior and then expect Him to take on your name? Or your identity? Pretty foolish. In the same way, as a Christian girl, it's just as foolish to demand that your future husband (or current husband) take on your last name. How does that reflect the gospel in any way, shape or form? It doesn't!

In Beal's application of Ephesians, women are like the church, saved, and subsumed, by Christ/their husbands.

This reading of the husband/Christ and wife/church analogy underscores the stakes of heteronormativity in evangelical communities. Yet quite a few of my participants offered striking critiques of the heteronormativity of their church's emphasis on marriage and the spiritual status it accords women in the church. "Sometimes I look at the [church] bulletin and think, man, if an alien was just reading this bulletin, they would think this entire thing was about creating and preserving nuclear families," Esther told me. After going through a divorce in her hometown in Alabama, Esther has looked askance at her church and all that it had promised her. "I mean, it's not what we say, but it's the latent work." In Leah's church worship service in North Carolina, "There's such an emphasis on childbearing and mothering—even from the people that are 'liberal,' our preacher being one of them. A lot of times, when he talks about the strength of women, he'll talk about it in terms of maternal strength." Esther, Leah, and other women see this "latent work" as binding Christian womanhood to marriage and childbearing. The commentary I received from single women who attend evangelical churches was especially attuned to the church's privileging of married couples. Several unmarried women shared with me that in their church communities, they feel like they don't quite perform Christian womanhood correctly. "There's still a pedestal for marriage. And there's still a pedestal for motherhood," said Adana, who attends a D.C. area church. "In so many different subtle ways, the message is sent that married people are more people than a single person." Tara, who goes to another church in the D.C. area, put it even more bluntly: "We're not considered people until we're married."

The takeaway for some evangelical women is not just that their membership status in the church is contingent on their marital status; it is also that their relationship to God is incomplete until they are married to a man. When I asked Ashley what she thinks of when she hears the words "Christian woman," her response was along the same lines as the other unmarried women I interviewed, and even more telling. "Let me see—image of a Christian woman…" she mused.

> I think the initial response is "stay at home, you're providing for the kids, the husband, you're supporting them." Just kind of this image of you teach Sunday school and that kind of homemaker. And that's not at all what I think a Christian woman is. But I feel like that's what was ingrained in me growing up. And also a lot of what I saw modeled. And also what even many people in my family also modeled. And yeah, definitely married. And popping out babies. And then I very much do not fall into any of that. I've definitely felt, with not being married, this sense of I am less than as a Christian woman. And I'm just waiting for my journey with God to begin.

Despite herself, Ashley sometimes feels like real spiritual intimacy with God is contingent on marital intimacy with a man; even as she soundly rejects the idea, she struggles against her own affective investment in the notion that marriage to a man is perhaps the primary venue for spiritual growth. Like Nora and Amber, who were troubled by their own reactions to seeing women serve communion or hearing women preach, Ashley has feelings about marriage and spirituality of which she is both aware and critical.

Others of my participants were less critical of the evangelical construction of microcosmic marriage and its asymmetric positioning of men as proxies for Christ. "Wifedom" was the discussion theme the night I joined Reagan, Lindsey, and a couple other women from their church small group in Lindsey's airy living room in western Tennessee. Reagan read a passage from 1 John, which was, she told the group, about obedience through love. She said it reminded her of how the church and God are in a marriage relationship. Because of this, wives should obey their husbands. “And,” she added, laughing, “somebody’s got to be in charge.” In response, Lindsey confessed that after years of marriage to her husband, she still had not changed her last name to his; her surname was a part of her brand, and more than that, a precious connection to her ailing father. But, she concluded, she felt “like God said” the right thing to do was to take her husband’s name.

Thinking about the way these women, and the articles from popular Christian websites, described marriage between Christian men and women sent me back to a decades-old but groundbreaking feminist text. In “The Traffic in Women” (1975), Gayle Rubin locates an “implicit theory of sex oppression” in Levi-Strauss’s theory of kinship, specifically in his discussion of marriage as a form of gift exchange. Rubin posits that in marriage, women become gifts exchanged between men. Men profit from this exchange by gaining male status, but women rarely have the opportunity to profit from it because women cannot be givers, only gifts or recipients. In conservative evangelical churches, likewise, women can only “get” God, they cannot “give” him—at least not formally, and especially not on Sunday mornings. At most of the churches my participants attend, women cannot give the body of Christ in communion; they cannot bury new Christians with Christ in the “watery grave” of baptism; they cannot preach the Word—and “the Word is God” (John 1:1, NIV). In short, they cannot be the vessel that delivers the official blessing of God to their fellow Christians in worship. It is no wonder, then, that the dominant evangelical construction of marriage replicates the relation between Jesus and the church along gender lines. In this implicit (and sometimes explicit) marital ideal, men represent Christ and his sanctifying work. That is their "unique position."

Spirit in the Dark: Pleasure, Gender, and God

The concept of marriage between a man and a woman as a microcosm of Christ's relationship to the church might seem abstract to some readers and obvious to others. Moving past both the abstract and the prosaic, I turn here to the ways this power relation manifests in women's bodies. At the beginning of this chapter, I described Kelsy Burke's research on Christian sexuality websites, where women on the forums asserted that their sexual awakenings (during sex with their husbands) were also *spiritual* awakenings. There is a lot to unpack here, and much of it goes unexplored by Burke.

First, what the forum users in Burke's study have to say about their sexual pleasure as a spiritual experience reveals how the evangelical church worship service and sex between conservative Christian husbands and wives are not only reciprocal, but actually mutually constitutive experiences. The asymmetry of the forums' testimonies about sexual awakenings follows the pattern of male mediation between women and God in the church and in marriage. As Burke notes, married women who experienced their first orgasm during sex with their husbands felt that it strengthened their relationship with their husbands, which strengthened their relationship with God. Importantly, as Burke observes, men on the forums tended not to describe their own orgasms in those terms. Instead, the men understood their sexual pleasure as natural and inevitable. They certainly did not depict their orgasms as sexual or spiritual awakenings. In contrast, women frame their sexual awakenings with their husbands as an experience of God, as their spiritual intimacy/ecstasy with their husbands allows them to access a new plane of spiritual intimacy with God. These gendered experiences of sexual pleasure have a lot in common with what happens during the Sunday worship service: in both, men function as mediators between women and God. Sex offers one more venue for the microcosmic role-play in which men facilitate women's encounter with God. This is further demonstrated by the ambivalence around masturbation on the forums. Between oral sex, vibrator use, anal sex, and masturbation, the latter had the lowest rate of users who thought it was "not at all wrong," according to a survey conducted by Burke. In other words, masturbation was the sexual practice that provoked the most consternation among the evangelical Christians on the forums. This stems from masturbation's connotation as a solo activity. Both the women on the forums and popular evangelical Christian sex manuals emphasize that "Once women learn how to orgasm on their own, they should apply their knowledge to their marriage" (Burke 2016, 123). For these women, masturbation only qualifies as a spiritual act if it ultimately functions to improve sex with their husbands; women should not turn to masturbation alone on an ongoing basis. The spirituality of their sexuality has everything to do with their husbands.

Meanwhile, men's sexual desire is naturalized. This construction locates men as gatekeepers not only between women and God, but also between women and women's own bodies. Because white evangelical culture constructs men as inherently sexual, the assumption is that they do not "need" a sexual awakening. White women, however, are constructed as lacking sexual desire, in need of men to help them access it. "Even though it feels sort of embarrassing to admit this, I think I thought that my husband held all the knowledge of my pleasure and was going to bequeath it to me when we got married," Megan told me. Having grown up in evangelicalism and waiting to have sex with her husband until they got married, Megan knew very little about achieving sexual pleasure. And Megan is not unique. Her assumptions about sex and pleasure when she got married are shared by many of the evangelical clients seen by Michelle, who met with me on a weekday in between her scheduled counseling sessions. One theme that has emerged in her sessions with couples clients is the way that men's spiritual authority in the church as the "head" of their families merges with a particular sexual affect:

> It's this narrative of, "I'm the man and I should know what pleasures you." So even talking about it is shameful. So you [here Michelle adopted the voice of a Christian husband] moving my hand, or just telling me what feels good—I think it's that, the authority, the leadership that I should have, and that I should know, and when I am vulnerable and told that that's different than I thought, that is crushing. […] So oftentimes I think women don't do that because of that. They know that is such a shaming thing, or it has happened and it didn't go well.

Based on what her clients have told her, Michelle understands that the authority accorded men in the church and as "spiritual leaders" of their homes also materializes in the performance of their sexuality with their wives—whose own sexual pleasure then becomes even more elusive in this double act of gatekeeping by their husbands. In all this, spiritual and sexual authority are fused, and the relation of power that positions men between women and God in the church and in marriage becomes embodied and reproduced even in some evangelical women's embrace of their own sexual pleasure with their husbands as a spiritual experience.

Many evangelical churches themselves implicitly acknowledge the asymmetric spirituality of sex in their teachings about baptism. In evangelical traditions where infants are not baptized, the term "age of accountability" is often used to designate the age at which a person is mature enough to truly repent and accept Christ in baptism. Yet just what the "age of accountability" actually is or should be has been up for debate. As the author of a 1999 article in the flagship evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* observed, “Historically, most churches that practice believers’ baptism have emphasized the adult character of this decision, making baptism a post-puberty rite” (George 1999, 62). The conflation of “adult” with “post-puberty” is interesting, since that is not necessarily a foregone conclusion. Still, in my own growing up in evangelical churches, the unspoken expectation was that if you were a believer, you would be baptized sometime between ages ten and thirteen or so. This is why in many evangelical churches, women can teach mixed-gender groups younger than tweens or teens in Sunday school, but cannot teach men in any setting who are older than that. (This also explains the controversy that arose in the Christian school where Jacqueline teaches in Alabama over whether women teachers could pray aloud “when young men who might be baptized were present.”) Meanwhile, most evangelical churches show little compunction over a man teaching a class where young adolescent women are present. That men’s role as spiritual gatekeepers is implicitly fixed to their sexual coming-of-age—at which point adult women must cede spiritual authority to them—is just one more testament to the ways Sunday morning is incarnated.

Through these discursive practices, white evangelical churches perpetuate an idealized white femininity that has long been white women’s historical privilege and a weapon of white supremacy. Beginning in the 19th century, the Protestant cult of domesticity de-sexualized white womanhood while using Black women to “delineate its limits” (McMillan 2015, 91). In this “binary opposition” of black and white sexuality, “white women were characterized as pure, passionless, and de-sexed, while black women were the epitome of immorality, pathology, impurity, and sex itself” (Hammonds 1997, 96; see also Carby 1987; Harris 1996; Miller-Young 2014). White women's sexual purity was seen as crucial to maintaining racial purity and, thereby, white nationalism (Moslener 2015; Schuller 2018). Meanwhile, to be "pure," white women needed to be domestic, and as I noted in the previous chapter, white middle- and upper-middle-class women's ability to be domestic and nurturing was contingent on the hidden labor of Black women and other women of color. White women's innocence, in other words, required the symbolic foil and material labor of Black women.

This discourse persists, including in white evangelical church practices and culture, and it is the other context missing from Burke's analysis of the sexual awakening stories on Between the Sheets and elsewhere online. As Burke notes, the (mostly white) women on the Christian sexuality forums claimed that sexual pleasure did not come "naturally" to them before their spiritual-sexual awakening. In these narratives Burke identifies a common trope, in which the women's bodies get in the way of the sexual satisfaction they desired. In addition to downplaying the role the women's husbands might be playing in this process, this trope traffics in a mind-body dualism in which women must "rediscover" (Burke 118) their bodies. As one BetweenTheSheets.com user wrote, "For the longest time I thought something was wrong with my body. I tried multiple times to get my body to orgasm, but it just wouldn't do it. I thought that there was something wrong with me" (qtd. in Burke 120). The women say they knew sex is "*supposed* to be" (108) enjoyable, but their bodies did not. Their experiences and their narration of those experiences raise questions about how the white evangelical church's[12] construction of gender and desire seeps into subjectivity. How might this discourse inform white evangelical women's claim to the right to sexual pleasure alongside their insistence that it is "unnatural" for them, that their bodies were getting in the way of experiencing an orgasm? As Sharon Holland argues, "there is no 'raceless' course of desire" (2012, 43). In both their experiences of their bodies and their narrations of those experiences, the women on the forums reproduce white femininity as "pure, passionless, and de-sexed." At the same time, the ability to claim a "sexual awakening"—and be adulated for it—as well as to frame such an awakening as "spiritual" is a function of whiteness (see Carby 1987; Higginbotham 1992; Hine 1989).

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[12] I am not suggesting that a sexual purity ethic has been absent from black Protestant churches. However, as Amy DeRogatis observes, African American pastors like Juanita Bynum and T.D. Jakes take a different approach to sexual purity than white conservative churches, offering "a more realistic sexual gospel"

I did not explicitly ask my own participants about "sexual awakenings," but I did talk with some of them about sexual pleasure, the church, and the idea of sex as an act of worship. About pleasure, many of the white women I interviewed emphasized the church's framing of women as sexless and men as having an "uncontrollable [sexual] pleasure urge," as Michelle put it. In her job as a marriage counselor, Michelle has seen many cases of vaginismus. "It's this thing that couples come in and say, I know that we don't have sex, and I want to do that *for him*. And there's no pleasure involved at all for her. And she doesn't think that she needs—that she can." Other women also affirmed the construction of (white) women as "passionless and de-sexed." Jacqueline referenced the "his needs, her needs" cliché in church culture, the way women's sexual desire is downplayed while they are expected to fulfill the sexual demands of their husbands. Lacie, who waited to have sex until she and her now-husband were married, told me that "I think when we were first married, especially, I was almost scared to experience a

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(DeRogatis 2015, 149) than their white counterparts. My larger point is the hegemony of the binary Hammonds describes and how white evangelicalism has colluded with and perpetuated it.

certain amount of pleasure because it almost felt wrong." When I asked Megan about things in her life that bring her pleasure, she mentioned food and drink and close friendships. Then she paused for a few seconds. "Pleasure." She said it almost like it was a question. "This is such a complicated word for women." For white evangelical women, sexual pleasure is complicated in a particular way.

Christian Women vs. Godly Women: Subjects of the Discursive and Divine

Thus far I have focused on the church's attempts to mediate women's relationship with God through men in the worship service, in their marriage dynamics, and even in sexual intimacy. But even as this relation of power materializes in women's feelings, senses, and orientations toward themselves and their husbands, it does not encompass them as subjects. My participants' experiences of God are both inextricable from this context and intimately idiosyncratic. They are within but somehow not wholly determined by these "specific relations of subordination" (Mahmood 2012, 29). Indeed, they both acknowledge their position as subjects of the church and allude to a source of subject formation beyond social, cultural, or material forces.

I return here to moments in which my participants expressed a sort of dissonance between their thoughts and feelings, instances of experiential mind-body dualism: Ashley's hard-to-shake sense about needing a husband to begin her spiritual journey, despite her fundamental disagreement with that premise. Nora's experience of women distributing communion as literally "hair-raising"—and her questioning of that reflex, especially given her felt closeness to God. Amber, disturbed by how "weird" and "strange" it felt for her to hear a woman preach on Sunday. Other women also touched on this same dissonance within themselves in our interviews. When I met with Shannon in her Nashville home, I could sense this same inner struggle in her speculation about what it would be like to hear a woman preach or to receive communion from a woman at her church. "I would *notice* it as something that's not the norm in my repertoire of experiences," she said. "And I would probably be frustrated with myself for feeling uncomfortable with it, because if I were really honest, I think I'd probably at first be like, 'Is this okay?' Which is so conditioned. And I hate even admitting that, really, but I honestly think that would be my reaction." Shannon said that in the past, when she visited a church where a woman was preaching, she has "even prayed about it in a way that was like, 'Is there something there? Why did I feel that way? And God, what do you really think about that? This is your *child*, who you gave this word to.' And I think that we should be way more open to what God is doing through women than what historically we grew up with. So just working through that [...] just because of how I was conditioned to think." Shannon has turned to God to parse her feelings of discomfort, asking for clarity about where those feelings come from. In the end, she leans towards attributing those feelings to her subject formation in the church.

All of these women attempt to identify the parts of themselves that are products of religious discourse. They intuit a fault line between their fraught reflexive responses to seeing women in positions of spiritual leadership or authority in church and their sense of their own proximity to God. In this they diverge from Erica, who, as I described in Chapter 1, understood her bodily response to seeing women preach as impossible to separate from the Spirit of God within her. These women, on the other hand, ponder what in themselves is a social construction of the church, and what is from God. This was best typified in my group interview participants' distinction between "Christian women" and "godly women." At Lacie's apartment, Nora, Elise, and Katelyn were mulling over my question about what they see or think of when they hear the words "Christian woman." As they described a "doormat-servant" with coiffed blonde hair, an "immaculate home" and excellent cooking skills, the more it became clear that this woman looked nothing like any of them. More than that, for the real women in front of me, this image was alienating. "I think if the term were 'godly women,' it's completely different," Lacie reflected. "I grew up with a lot of nominal Christians. […] But 'godly'…then I think of all these people I'm like, I want to be you. People who are earnestly seeking God and are genuine and caring." Nora agreed: "I feel like so much of the hopes and dreams and goals for us were to be good Christian women. And that's a very different connotation from godly."

The "Christian woman" is a "good submissive wife" and a "homemaker" and a "mother," according to Nora. But she is not who Nora, or the other women, aspire to be. They do not want to be "church ladies." They want to be godly women. I read this contrast two ways: first, a "Christian woman" is a subject of the church. She is who Christian culture expects her to be. A godly woman, however, is subject to God alone. For my participants, the binary represents a divide between discursive and divine subject formation; it is also a divide they feel within themselves. About the "Christian woman," Nora said this:

> That was my mom for such a long time, and then when it wasn't, I questioned whether or not she was a good Christian woman. You know? A few years ago she left my dad and for a long time, I was just like, Do you love the Lord? Does he love you? I don't know. And it was like, she was definitely more career driven, and that was hurtful to me. It's so funny, because I'm like, "Oh, this 'Christian woman,' falling into all these things we want her to be," and when my mom didn't fall into that, I was like, who is she? Is she even a believer? Again, the dichotomy within myself is just outrageous.

Despite this struggle, the women also have faith that there is a process of (trans)formation in their lives that is not contained by the church or other social relations or even the physical world. It is a spiritual process, one which includes the church and other "specific relations of subordination" and the material world around them, but also exceeds those things. They believe that there is a power at work in them and in their lives that is not reducible to discourse. Discerning what parts of themselves are "from God" or are not is the rub, and it is not an endeavor I will attempt here. But that these women make the effort is worth attention, not least because it is one effect of admitting the possibility of a source of subject formation beyond the social. At the end of our interview, I asked Shannon if she wanted to speak to anything else. She said, "I would hope […] that I don't come across as being like, Oh, this is the way to be. I'm in flux. I'm learning, and growing, too. So just wanting God to continue to work on me and change me in the areas that need changing."

The second implication of the Christian vs. godly woman binary is, simply, that godly women are like God. This assertion carries more weight than it might seem. In a religious context in which "guys represent Christ" (as Beal writes) and are cast as heads of the church and their families, when women struggle to "bust" the image of God as a man from their imaginations, an emphasis on women embodying God is significant. This is not simply rhetorical, but something women actually experience, as two different examples from my interview with Bethany attest. I came over to Bethany's house one evening, and after her dog had sufficiently greeted me, she and I settled down in opposite crook of her sofa. Eventually our conversation wound its way to one of my last questions. Are there times, I asked, or places or circumstances, that are particularly worshipful for you? Moments of worship that happen organically during the week, apart from the church worship service? Without hesitation, she began listing moments of her week: running, walking her dog, singing in the car. And then:

> I would say gardening. Yes. Working in my yard, which you can't tell that I enjoy it right now, because it's so overgrown. But weeding is mostly what I do. Mostly I just try and keep things alive. It's just, it's very meditative, it's using your body. And tending ground just feels powerful. And I think of these beautiful metaphors and analogies for how we are tending our world and our work and ourselves and God tends us. So I would say—That's not usually a thing where I'm like, Oh, I had this great spiritual insight. But it feels very worshipful.

Bethany sees the work she does in her garden as one embodiment of the work God does tending the world. In this material metaphor, Bethany *represents* God. She is not the passive recipient of the saving work of God, but God's vessel, God's representative, a manifestation of the spirit of God. This is worship, for Bethany, and both on the surface and underneath, it looks different from Sunday morning. When I asked Bethany if she would describe sex as an act of worship, her response was similarly telling. "I've found some sexual experiences to be healing in my relationship with God," she said. She said she and her husband often talk about how sex helps heal wounds in their own relationship, too.

> I had a really terrible miscarriage [a few years ago]. And all of that experience of physical brokenness obviously cannot be extricated then from my sexual experiences. And in some ways that's been really hard, and at some points it's been really helpful and healing. And even just for me personally, in understanding, in terms of bearing the suffering of Christ within my body. I think women who have experienced loss within their bodies, and I'm sure a lot of other physical experiences, can share that too, but I think there's a lot tied up with my relationship with God and my relationship with my body. And obviously sex is a part of that. So I think if worship is a thing that heals us, too, then yes.

When Bethany says her sexual experiences (with her husband) have been healing in her relationship with God, she sounds a lot like the women on the Christian sex forums that

Burke studied. But then she departs from that narrative: she says she understands the emotional pain she experienced around sex following her miscarriage as the incarnation of the suffering of Christ. Months later, I sat down with Bethany again and she told me more about her miscarriage and how it formed her as a Christian. “I didn’t realize it, but I was carrying the products of conception for around six months,” she told me.

> I was almost at my original due date when I finally passed it all and had a D&C [dilation and curettage]. I remember it just hit me one morning when I woke up, “I’m carrying around death in me in a way that I can identify with Christ.” And no one was giving me this thing, “Oh, here, feel better about your pain.” It was like Christ saying to me, “Here is where I am. You can actually know me better because you can know this loss and this suffering and this death.”

This is not the usual husband-as-Christ, wife-as-church analogy. Her particular experience of bodily loss and suffering is what brings Bethany closer to Christ. This recognition, on its own, is the beginning of healing. And it is healing contingent not so much on Bethany’s husband as it is on her relationship with her own body.

Conclusion: Anxiety and the Ecstasy

Conservative white evangelicalism constructs men as mediators between women and God who represent God in a unique way. This relation repeats across the contexts of church service, domestic dynamics, and sexual intimacy, not only binding pew and bed together but also revealing how the two are mutually constitutive. Yet the power of this symbolic relation is not totalizing; my participants’ experiences of God are embedded within but not contained by it. Instead, they find intimacy with God in their own bodies, seeking to parse what parts of their subjectivity derive from social relations of power and which have a distinctly spiritual source.

It should seem hardly coincidental at this point that many evangelicals would call sex an “act of worship.” But that is not exactly how all the married women I interviewed saw it. My question about whether or not they consider sex an act of worship prompted an outright “no” from a couple women. Several others turned the question over in their minds, eventually arriving at the idea that sex *should* be or *is* an act of worship, but wryly qualified that that is not exactly how they are thinking about it when it happens. Larissa, on the other hand, didn’t bat an eye. “Yes, I do,” she said, and paused. “I have not thought about it in those terms in a long time, so—I mean when we were first married we would talk about that a lot. […] Now if I were to think about it in those terms, and in thinking about the Imago Dei, it’s like this expression of God’s image.” She added quickly, “I think there’s definitely a way of thinking about it being an act of worship that is inhibiting and a way of thinking about it as an act of worship that is beautiful, and maybe even more pleasurable because of that, because it’s connected to something much larger than just this moment.”

Perhaps imagining or experiencing sex-as-worship could be inhibiting for some evangelical women because the worship service itself is inhibiting for them. In fact, some of my participants expressed discomfort about using the word “pleasure” to describe their experience of the church worship service. This was especially common among women like Jacqueline who attend conservative white churches with sedate worship styles. “When I think about traditionally, how we express our emotions, there’s an element in which it’s expected that you have constraint,” Jacqueline said. “You need to hold back. There’s not a freedom to express emotion, or physical enthusiasm. So that could have implications for all areas of your life. I’m supposed to withhold that, contain that, restrain that emotion or that feeling." Jacqueline hints at the difficulty of severing evangelical women's experiences in church from their sexual experiences with their husbands and the racialized expression or repression of pleasure.

Yet so many women in white evangelical churches also find pleasure in worship. For them, Sunday morning is a space of refuge, joy, and satisfaction that does not feel mediated by anyone other than Jesus. Perhaps not coincidentally, those experiences often come from material interruptions in the texture of the service. "I think I do feel delight in it, and joy," Larissa said about the church service. "And that comes from various places. Some of that is when all babies start crying at the same time for whatever reason. I enjoy when things feel very human and real and not staid, by the book." Other times, that delight comes from the congregational reading of Scripture, as it does for Elizabeth, or "lifting your voice in song with other people," as it does for Tara. Bethany had shared with me that for her, being a woman in the church worship service feels at some level like "you and your person are a threat." And yet despite that feeling, Bethany said that there are times when the worship service brings her pleasure: "When I'm emotionally present and when I have a sense of being met by God in that, with other people […] yeah, I would say, I would call that pleasure."

Pleasure truly is complicated for these women. Traversing the space between sex and Sunday morning, their bodies both produce and are produced by their experiences in each. This is just detectable in Leah's reflection on pleasure and the worship service. I give her the last word: "I would say it's evident that there are people who are taking a lot of pleasure in worship [at church]. And finding a lot of, almost something like ecstasy in that. […] Still, interestingly, I have some negative reaction to that in terms of the way I was raised. I think that I've definitely inherited from our tradition, and even maybe from my own upbringing […] a kind of suspicion of pleasure." She continued:

> So personally, I feel like I've come a long way, at least, in terms of the way I see bodily pleasures. […] There is certainly that interesting reaction I have to those outward expressions of it that I see [in church] that almost sort of repulse me or disgust me a little bit. […] And I have some theological objections to it, not just personal or affective. I think there can be written into it a kind of expectation that we experience God always in terms of enjoyment. Or always in terms of jubilation or always in terms of excitement. And I think it actually takes me a long time to get there. And so I actually very rarely experience my faith that way. But woven into that is probably, if I'm honest, some kind of thing in the back of my mind that's just like, "And we're just not supposed to be having that much pleasure."

Despite this apprehension, and despite the anxiety Leah feels over the limits on women's role in the worship service, she said, "There are moments where I'll forget all of that. And there will be a genuine worship experience that will occur. And that's usually at some point every Sunday."

Chapter 3: Siting the Subject: Performance, Material Culture, and Church in Southern Evangelical Weddings

Mallory and Alan's wedding invitations featured hand-drawn, stick-figure depictions of the bride and groom holding hands in front of a downtown streetscape in the small Alabama city where they met. Just to their left towered the art deco façade of Rogers Department Store, a landmark in our northwest Alabama hometown since it was constructed in 1910. The actual store was gathering dust more than a century after it was built, having sat empty for decades. But on a sweltering May evening not long after its centennial, the building that used to house a local clothing retailer sprang to a fleeting second life for my friends' wedding.

I arrived at the wedding early and made my way to my seat, past a "biscuit bar" and a buffet of homemade pies resting on vintage kitchen scales. I grabbed a program from a wire basket on top of an old wooden cable spool, sat down, and looked it over. On the back there was a note that "This department store was family-owned for four generations, was where our mothers and their mothers shopped…" Soon the ceremony was underway, the highlight the moment when all the guests joined together in singing a hymn, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," as the wedding party gathered to pray around the bride and groom.

A few months after the wedding, I asked Mallory if she thought of her wedding as "traditional." "No!" she laughed. Traditional weddings are "church weddings," she said, and church weddings are "about order and rhythm, not having too much of the bride and groom's personalities showing through, no personal vows, etcetera. Basically, it's where you could just insert another couple into the ceremony and it wouldn't be any different."

When I asked Mallory about the thinking behind the details of her wedding, from the venue to the invitations, she said, “Everything in our generation is really customized, really unique.” She wanted her wedding “to be where people would come and say, ‘That’s so Mallory and Alan.’ That’s why we had the biscuits and all that kind of stuff. I just think […] it should be a celebration of the two of you, of who you are.”

Mallory’s concept of her wedding as a celebration of the identities of the bride and groom seems hardly unique. Over the past decade or so, many trendy, Pinterest-powered brides in the U.S. have embraced personalized nuptials, seeing their weddings as a space for the performance of their own identities as well as their romance with their soon-to-be-spouse. For women like Mallory and others who grew up in conservative white evangelical churches in the American South, however, their participation in this “trend” must be understood in light of the site where the weddings did *not* occur: the church. From food to décor to music, the weddings and their ephemera offer implicit commentary on the subject positions the women occupy at church on Sunday morning. Through their weddings, the brides relocate “church” and spatialize, materialize, and actualize their identities more broadly. Performative, recursive, and laden with contradiction, the weddings are microcosms of the competing and colluding forces that shape these women: They reference an imagined past but are not “traditional.” They are personalized, while sourcing from other weddings featured on social media and blogs like Style Me Pretty. Their elements, from Southern food buffets to vintage décor, read alternately as concessions to white heteropatriarchal visions of faith and family and subversions of them. In what follows, I show how the weddings both dramatize and realize the production of their authors as white Christian women.

The Veiled Self: Women's Identity Performance in Church and in the Wedding

Why would Mallory and other white Christian women like her choose to get married somewhere other than the church building when that was where generations of women in their families were married? While self-consciously personalized nuptials were widespread in the 2000s and 2010s, as Mallory alluded to, it is the interaction between this trend and my participants' experiences in their home churches that in large part compels them to plan wedding ceremonies outside the church. These women's experiences in the church buildings are crucial to understanding why they might choose to get married somewhere else, particularly because they want their weddings to be performances of identity.

Like Mallory, other churchgoing Southern women I interviewed told me they saw their weddings as opportunities to express their identities—not just their own, but also their shared identities with their partners. Laken said about her wedding in Tennessee, "I think I just wanted people to know we were outdoorsy, we loved nature." Lucy and Peter bonded over a love of old country music and congregational hymn-singing, and they wove this motif throughout their wedding festivities in Alabama. Even though her mother, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers had all gotten married inside a church building, Lucy "definitely did not want" that for her own wedding. Instead, she said, "we tried to go a different route and stay true to ourselves." In language like this—"true to ourselves," "celebrate the two of you," etc.—these women make clear that they wanted their weddings to speak to and instantiate what the bride and groom had in common, representing and realizing their mutual passions, which presumably bind them to one another. Most of these women were not subsuming the groom's interests into their own:

Mallory and Alan really do share an equal passion for great Southern food, vintage home décor, and the city's small but historic downtown where they met and dated, for example.

Even in cases where the wedding told a story about the relationship between the bride and groom, however, it was still primarily *produced* by just one of them—the bride. If the groom helped with wedding planning, the bride did the bulk of it. Not only is the bride the wedding's producer or author, but in evangelical Christian wedding culture, the bride is also widely understood as the wedding's protagonist. Heteronormativity centers the bride as the wedding's social focus, the thing to be looked at; take, for example, the big reveal, in which everyone stands when the bride appears and marches down the aisle on the arm of her father. These young women were not unaware of this social reality. Furthermore, the concept of the wedding as a performance of the bride's identity has a long and broad history, one that pre-dates Pinterest. According to Elizabeth Freeman, over the course of the nineteenth century Anglo-American brides' costumes became more and more distinct from their bridesmaids, while grooms began to dress more and more like their groomsmen. By the twentieth century, "the groom became increasingly irrelevant as the wedding became a more and more lush means for both the remaking of the female body and for feminine expressivity…. In fact, for some women, the wedding has clearly come to signify self-completion, extension, and world-making even in the absence of a groom" (2002, 32). Today, in the social context in which the women in this chapter get married, the wedding is still understood as a feminized form of self-expression. The fact that some of the women in this chapter frame their weddings as a performance of shared identity might represent their desire to push back against a "separate spheres" approach to marriage, to express that their lives and their interests are shared with their partners, but still, there is a mutual understanding between the bride and the guests that the wedding itself is a performance about the formation of the protagonist—the bride. It comes as no surprise to her guests that in this production in which she is both producer and star the bride would celebrate her relationship with her soon-to-be spouse. Ultimately, the women in this chapter put themselves—not just the parts that overlap with their partners—into these weddings. As Laken told me, she wanted her wedding to reflect her own creativity: "I like being a creative person, and I didn't want it to feel like a cookie-cutter wedding. An element of whimsy."

To these brides, the concept and staging of the weddings as performances of identity or forms of self-expression felt incongruent with the church building. This was not just a matter of aesthetics, although it would be easy to assume that the brides' respective choices to hold their weddings outside a church building were simply about the look of things. Leslie, who grew up in the same conservative denomination as Mallory, Laken, and Lucy, even told me that most of the denomination's church buildings in the area "are kind of ugly." (The day of our interview happened to fall exactly eight years after Leslie was married on her parents' front yard in Alabama.) In addition, the fact that the weddings were not explicit rejections of Christianity—indeed, they functioned as performances of the couples' religiosity, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter—does make it seem as though the brides' choice to forgo the church building as a wedding venue was just a matter of appearances. This explanation is incomplete on several fronts: it discounts the politics of aesthetics and taste; it does not fully reflect the depth of thought and feeling with which the brides planned their weddings; and, relatedly, it focuses on the visual aspect of the weddings and their venues to the neglect of the practices that produce space. This chapter explores, rather, how what goes on *inside* church buildings every week has a great deal to do with these women's disinterest in them as wedding venues. I asked Leslie if she thought she could have achieved what she wanted with her wedding inside a church building—any church building. "I don't think so," she said. "It's interesting, because there was always the possibility of it getting rained out. And so the backup was [a local church], and I actually think it's a pretty space." Familiar with this church building, I agreed: "It *is* pretty." "It would have been fine," she said. "But it would not have had the feeling I wanted."

Theories of space and place have addressed the mutually constitutive nature of the materiality of a structure or landscape and what happens within and around it (Cresswell 2002; Williams 1991; Lefebvre 1974). As Timothy Cresswell writes, "place is constituted through reiterative social practice—place is made and remade on a daily basis" (25). This is certainly true of the church building. I bring up Leslie's comment—which I will explore in more detail in the next section—to suggest the way women's experiences within these church buildings, and the accumulation of feelings and practices that produce these spaces, create a sense among the women in this chapter of the incompatibility between their wedding visions and the church space. In other words, whether or not a location is appealing as a venue is as much about how the women feel about and in that space as it is about how it will be photographed or "viewed."

Regardless of the specificity of any woman's vision for her wedding, what all the former brides in this chapter have in common is that they understand their weddings as an opportunity to perform their identities before multiple communities at once. Yet when it comes to women's self-expression or identity performance, the church building has not exactly been accommodating. Lucy, Mallory, Leslie and I all grew up in Alabama attending churches of Christ, conservative evangelical congregations in which preachers and elders are exclusively men and women are expected to “remain silent” (1 Corinthians 14:34, NIV) during the church worship service—that is, they are restricted from vocally or visibly leading the congregation during collective worship (e.g., leading a prayer, preaching, serving communion).[13] Around the time of our weddings, nearly 15 percent of people residing in the northwestern Alabama county where they took place attended a church of Christ.[14] During the public worship service in the majority of churches of Christ, women’s voices are not heard except when they are absorbed into congregational singing, or in conversation with their neighbors during a brief “meet and greet.” As I have described elsewhere, women in these churches rarely take the stage or occupy the pulpit. While women certainly express themselves in church, from the way they sing to the way they dress, they are working within a more limited framework than in most other parts of their lives. The subject position the church produces for women on Sunday inclines more toward self-sublimation than self-expression. Should it come as a surprise that churchgoing women might find the church space inhospitable to a “celebration of who [they] are?”

The asymmetry over who can “speak” or lead during the public worship service in evangelical congregations like these means that the church building is not a blank canvas or empty stage on which these women could mount a performance of their identities. And it produces a gendered subjectivity that is perhaps most pronounced in the church building itself. I interviewed a group of women who attended a west Tennessee church of Christ that had recently loosened restrictions on women's vocal and visible participation during worship: now women offered testimonies, passed communion trays, led prayers and music. After going on two hours in the close quarters of Laken's apartment on a July evening, I put one of my last questions to the group. "How might you compare how you see your role at church to your role in your workplace and at home?" There was some patter among the women before Elise interjected: "I'm much more outspoken at work and definitely at home….I feel more comfortable that way. I don't feel as comfortable just speaking out at church. Even in Bible class. There have been times when I'm like, I could say that, I could say that, but I don't. I don't know why. Because I would probably say something in a meeting at work. And I would definitely say something at home." Others in the group noted that they have observed a shift in themselves in church as women's participation in the church service has opened up to new roles. Katelyn mentioned that growing up in a more conservative church of Christ, "I don't remember anybody saying, 'Women can't do this stuff.' They just didn't." "We just never talked about it," Nora agreed. "So yeah," Katelyn continued, "I feel like I've grown a lot in the past two years, just in realizing, women can do that stuff. Women can share in front of everybody, and it's okay, they have just as much valuable things to say as a man does. But it's been a learning curve for me just because of how I was raised." As Katelyn and Nora recall, the common prohibition around women's roles in the church service is something that is often intuited without necessarily being made explicit; it is sedimented through practice and feeling. It becomes a mode of subjectivity that is not bound to, but is heightened in, the church building.

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[13] A product of the American Restoration Movement, churches of Christ have no formal denominational oversight, so each church is technically autonomous, creating a “decentralized polity” that “has allowed for a number of factions to develop over various beliefs and practices” (Melton). A hallmark of churches of Christ is that most (but not all) sing without instrumental accompaniment. In a small minority of churches of Christ women can lead prayers or serve communion during the worship service.

[14] Only Southern Baptists were better represented, at nearly 22 percent of residents. The next highest adherence rate belongs to United Methodists at 7 percent (Association of Religion Data Archives 2010).

This might take the form of struggling with the confidence to fully express oneself during church, as it did for Elise, but other women who currently attend churches of Christ also related to me their feelings of unease or discomfort over simply “being” themselves in church. Laken told me that growing up in a more conservative congregation, “church had never been a safe place” for her “because it meant that you were invisible.” Esther, who was also raised in the church of Christ, is experiencing this now more acutely than she ever did as a young woman. Going through a divorce has sharpened Esther’s sense that her whole self is not welcome in church. Unlike her mother, for whom “church is this safe space where you’re completely yourself and you’re just totally open with everybody,” Esther braces herself before walking into the Sunday service. “There’s just all these expectations. You want to have a worship experience, you want to have some kind of spiritual openness, but literally that closing yourself off to—the feeling of steeling yourself precludes that openness in worship.” The feeling of closing oneself off, of holding part of yourself back, is something Leslie explicitly linked to the gendered relation of power in church. “I know that the more I experience women doing more [in church of Christ spaces…],” she told me, “the more ease I’m going to feel about who I am. And I do sort of long for that.”

Most conservative evangelical churches, including churches of Christ, emphasize the figurative “death” or denial of the self. Yet this ideal has long been selectively applied. As far back as the 19th century, Methodist suffragists decried “the dogma that self-abnegation, self-effacement…are ideal female virtues” (Snarr 2011, 89). Humility and selflessness are valued in and expected from churchgoing women in particular (Ingersoll 2003, 78). Citing Judith Plaskow, Darlene Fozard Weaver argues that over time in Christianity, “the virtue of sacrifice became linked closely to cultural definitions of femininity which women have internationalized to such an extent that self-abnegation has become basic to women’s experiences” (2002, 63). The women in this chapter are heirs to this discourse, and as brides they sensed a dissonance between it and what they want to accomplish in/with their weddings.

Lucy and Peter were married in the backyard of Lucy’s grandparents’ former home in north Alabama. Like Mallory, Lucy told me that she didn’t think of her wedding as “traditional.” In a traditional wedding, she pictures a bride and groom in a church, with “just the traditional wedding vows, ‘For better or for worse, richer or poorer.’ [….] I see a veil over the bride’s face, always over the face, so you can’t see her face. […] There’s a preacher, always a preacher. […] It’s just so sterile to do it inside a dark church.” For women like Lucy, the church building connotes both figurative and literal *self-effacement,* as in the traditional church wedding where there is “a veil over the bride’s face, so you can’t see her face.” It is, to borrow Lucy’s words again, a “sterile” environment, and to attempt to personalize it with more than simple flowers or candles would be unseemly and even bizarre. Like Lucy, Mallory alluded to just how normative and depersonalizing this space can feel for women when she said that a church wedding is “about order and rhythm, not having too much of the bride and groom’s personalities show through, no personal vows, etcetera. Basically, it’s where you could just insert another couple into the ceremony and it wouldn’t be any different.” By contrast, Mallory and the other women whose weddings I discuss in this chapter are intent on using their weddings to “celebrate who you are.” But their experiences have brought them to the recognition that as women, they cannot fully celebrate who they are in church. These women understand implicitly that the church precludes women from being “completely themselves.” It is no coincidence, then, that they juxtapose the traditional church wedding to “going a different route and staying true to ourselves,” as Lucy describes it.

I met with Helen in a coffee shop in east Tennessee, near where she had married her husband four years earlier in an outdoor ceremony featuring songs by the Beatles and with a reception in a cedar barn. I asked Helen if she thought she could have accomplished what she wanted with her wedding inside a church building. “No, I don’t think so,” she replied. “I don’t think I would have used the same music. There are certain parameters that I associate with church buildings, [more] than I would want there to be—a little bit more uptight, I guess.” She added, “You’re communicating [in your wedding] that this is my family now and we’re doing our wedding the way that we want. Some of our grandparents were not totally thrilled that we had dancing at our reception, and I was like, ‘I’m sorry, but this is our wedding, and this is our life.’ And we were sort of differentiating ourselves.” (Some churches of Christ preach that dancing is sinful, a not-uncommon view among church members, especially older ones.) When I asked Helen if the aesthetics of church of Christ buildings played into her decision not to get married in one, she responded, “I think it was more about loving the outdoors and feeling more connected to myself and I guess, to God, in nature than in a building.” I noticed later that quite a few women I interviewed felt this way. Maddie, who was married at a rustic outdoor venue in Tennessee, told me she wanted to have her wedding outside “because that’s where I feel the most connected to God.” Leslie: “There’s something about nature, the possibility of being married in a natural setting that felt almost more sacred to me than the building." Laken, responding to my question about choosing a wedding venue that was not a church, had this to say:

> Honestly, I think I was angry at church. I think I was mad—because up until that point, church had never been a safe place for me. […] I felt like it was fake. It was a place to go and pretend like everything's fine. I just didn't want to feel restricted by rules in a church. Or "you can or can't do this, you can or can't do that." I think I was just mad. Even thinking about it now, I'm like, yeah, I was definitely irritated at church. And outside—obviously, I felt much more at home outside, it's beautiful. I think that's where I feel closest to God, in a lot of ways.

I think Laken's anger with the church and the bad feelings that the church building evoked in her are not merely coincidental to the fact that she feels closest to God in "the great outdoors." All of these women—Laken, Maddie, Leslie, Helen, Lucy, Mallory, and Esther—suggest just how difficult it can be to feel close to God in a place where you are closing off a part of yourself, the sensation that Esther said she feels when she walks into church on Sundays. And Helen clearly said that she felt "more connected to myself and, I guess, to God" in nature. At some level, for my participants feeling close to God seems related to feeling like *themselves*. As Helen put it, one of her disappointments with her church's worship service on Sunday is the discrepancy between who she imagines herself to be and who she is expected to be during worship. "I feel like [women] are very passive members on a Sunday," Helen said. "Just singing, walking around, I get passed a [communion] tray…That's not my personality." Certain "parameters" and practices in the church service prevent these women from actively and visibly performing their identities there without fear or discomfort—and from connecting to God with ease.

In Chapter 2 I discussed the ways the evangelical church worship service implicitly presents men as more proximate to God than women. Given this relation, it is not surprising that women churchgoers might feel closer to God elsewhere, especially outside or in “nature,” which is socially constructed as, well, *not* socially constructed. As I also wrote in that chapter, it was difficult for my participants—white women who attended predominantly white, non-charismatic evangelical churches—to think about the worship service in terms of “pleasure.” This represents one more part of themselves that is closed off during church, and of which I was reminded when I talked to Maddie about her wedding. She told me over coffee that she decided to get married in an outdoor setting not only because that is where she feels “most connected to God,” but also because “I wanted it to be joyful, a party. We just don’t know how to do that well in the church of Christ. Because that’s the fear of pleasure, right there.” If white women experience the repression of pleasure in their predominantly white churches, it is even more fraught for the women of color, especially Black women, who attend these churches. In the context of racialized sexualities, both the experience and expression of pleasure can become perilous (Harris 1996). In her predominantly white congregation, Larissa often feels like her voice is “filtered,” she told me one October morning in her living room. “Historically, Black women are the most silenced out of all people in church,” she said. “Or any sort of emotion is viewed as over the top. So […] I don’t ever want to be viewed as the angry black woman. And a white woman is not going to have that same dialogue around her anger.” For Larissa, church is bound up with an acute sense of surveillance and the felt need for constraint. If feeling close to God in church has something to do with feeling “yourself” in church, Black women in predominantly white churches face a steep uphill spiritual battle.

Helen, Maddie, and the other white churchgoing brides in Alabama and Tennessee who held their weddings somewhere other than a church building were not simply choosing a trend over tradition. Their relationship to the church building is troubled by their gendered experiences of repression, confinement, unease, and self-abnegation within it, thousands of pew-bound hours that have taught them that their ambition to celebrate their identities could not be realized in a church wedding. While one vital part of these women's identities is their Christian faith and practice—and their religiosity figured enormously into their weddings, as we will see—their weddings speak to more than their experiences in conservative white evangelicalism. The objects and performances in their weddings reveal and accomplish the brides' own multifaceted, complicated production as subjects. And almost despite themselves, they also reveal the role that race, class, and sexuality play in this process.

The Wedding and/as the Production of the Religious Subject

My wedding was not that different from the ones I have mentioned. It took place on my great-grandparents' farm in a rural part of Lauderdale County, Alabama. Framed wedding photos from multiple generations of my family and my fiancé's family hung from a pine tree behind the ceremony site, and nearby, my great-grandmother's handmade quilt served as a makeshift photobooth backdrop for guests. I wore the hairpiece my grandmother wore at her wedding in 1958. My grandfather officiated the ceremony. My dad baked the wedding cake. But I also drew inspiration far from the family tree: I bought dessert plates from Goodwill, vintage postcards for a guestbook and a $19.99 lace dress off eBay. I collected old books and cameras for centerpieces at the reception as a nod to my fiancé's work as a video producer and our shared backgrounds as English majors. Our wedding invitations featured our silhouettes in profile, framed like nineteenth-century cameos—a personalized image, but one whose design I had lifted from a stranger's wedding featured on the blog Style Me Pretty. In fact, the source of many of my ideas for my wedding décor was other women's weddings. For months I had closely followed wedding blogs, where images from other people's weddings served as templates for my own.

Elizabeth Freeman describes the modern Anglo-American wedding as performing a "set of incommensurate wishes," such as "a wish…to draw boundaries that would demarcate one's own particular social space—but also a desire to be officially recognized, to address spheres of power beyond family or nation" (2002, 43). This strikes me as true for my own wedding and for the weddings of my participants, events that were knotty with contradiction. Our weddings seemed to both repudiate and invoke "tradition"; unlike our mothers and grandmothers, we forewent church weddings, but we did incorporate and heavily emphasize Christianity, from singing old church hymns to serving communion. Our weddings offered homages to an imagined yet intimate "past," but much of the décor had no particular or personal history that we knew of since it was sourced from sites like Etsy, eBay, and thrift shops. Our weddings invoked constructions of the "South" as, alternately, inspiration and foil. And our "personalized" weddings? They appropriated elements from strangers' weddings whose photos we had encountered online.

The performance and material culture of our weddings reveal the myriad, sometimes conflicting social relations that produced us as women. As Freeman writes, "the wedding seems to work as an emblem for the condition of belonging to constituencies beyond (if also sometimes constitutively connected to) the male-female couple…Yet…the wedding often inadvertently plays forms of belonging against one another, so that the icons of one social configuration question the centrality of another" (4). Our weddings materialized social relations from genealogy (pedigree) to geography (place), history (past), the culture industry (political economy), and spirituality (piety), all with an inconsistent and vexed nostalgia. Both dramatizing and materializing the intra-related contexts/spaces the brides recognized as vital to the production of our very selves, the weddings became performances about the production of the performer—the bride. At the same time, the weddings elided social relations that we brides did not perceive as vital to our production: namely, race and class. The weddings also reiterated this imagined and incomplete process of subject formation by directly contributing to the ongoing production of the women at their center. That is, each wedding was not only a performance *about* the formation of the performer, it was also performative *of* her (as is fitting for the scene of J.L. Austin's paradigmatic example of performative speech). As a performative performance, the wedding affirms the active role of the subject in her own creation, even as it is always in dialogue with, but not entirely defined by, the setting where it does not occur: the church building.

The first context of subject formation that is both performed and instantiated in the weddings is genealogy, or what I have only half-jokingly called "pedigree." Nods to "family" and "family traditions" were everywhere in these weddings, both behind the scenes and more openly marked for wedding guests to note. Leslie, Lucy, and I chose as wedding venues our parents', grandparents', and great-grandparents' homeplaces, respectively. Family photos, objects, and even baked goods announced implicitly and more overtly the importance of family history to the brides' identities and the venture of marriage itself. At Lucy's wedding, her grandfather's guitar was propped next to the guestbook table, and her father's bluegrass band played at her reception. A spread of cakes and pies all made by Lucy's aunts took the place of a single wedding cake. "Both our families have always placed a lot of emphasis on family and the home and what that means, so it just felt very appropriate for us to make our ceremony reflect that," Lucy told me. While having family that owns property with the space for a large wedding is already a class privilege, it is true that a family member's property is a more affordable wedding site than a venue that charges a rental fee; asking family members to contribute to the menu or décor can also be a cost-saving measure. But many brides chose to underscore their wedding's "family" theme in their conversations with me as a matter of self-expression as much as, if not more than, budgetary restrictions. As Leslie, married in her parents' front yard, told me, "I thought it would be kind of meaningful in the place where I grew up." Even the empty department store building where Mallory and Alan were married was conscripted into the family, so to speak, in the note in the couple's wedding program that pointed out that "This department store was family-owned for four generations, was where our mothers and their mothers shopped…" At Lucy's wedding, guests walked through a pair of free-standing French doors, their white paint peeling, into the aisle, which was anchored by a wooden mantle up front and center. Windows with wavy old glass hung along the outside of the seating area. When I asked Lucy how she thought her wedding did or did not fit the "traditional model" she had described, she said, "It was more about our family, and our family traditions, than it was about our church. We tried to honor that a lot. […] We tried to make the ceremony look like a house, we had a doorway at the front, windows down the side. We wanted it to feel like people were coming home and they could feel comfortable."

The juxtaposition Lucy makes between family and church might imply that the weddings' repeated references to family, home, and genealogy served to "make people comfortable" about where these women's allegiances lie. They were, after all, detaching the marriage ceremony from the church building. All this signaling—the language, the venues, the music, food, and heirlooms—could be construed as legitimizing the couple's union to their guests by ensconcing them in a lineage of heteronormativity. For the most part, the weddings observed patriarchal customs like fathers "giving away" their daughters and the groom kissing the bride, not to mention all the allusions to the heteronormative ideal of family. To think of these details as outright attempts to offset the weddings' ostensible minimization of the church, however, is to overlook the formative role that heteronormativity has played in these women's lives. In the previous chapter, I outlined the ways the relationship between men, women, and God presented in the evangelical church worship service is replicated in marriage, including in sex, for some married Christian women. In most white evangelical churches, the heteronormative family is often conflated with the church itself, and a woman's marriage to a man is understood as a model for the church's relationship to God. As I described, this construction materializes in some women as an unwanted suspicion that marriage to a man grants them a higher-level relationship to God. A more complex reading of the weddings' "family" framework might recognize, then, that the heteronormative construction/perpetuation of "family," both literal and figurative, has served as one way these women feel "connected to God." The wedding does spiritual work.

The second and third themes of the weddings were “sense of place” and, accompanying it, an imagined past. Multiple weddings offered homages to the “American South” and its history, and how these contexts have shaped the brides as (white) Christian women. In several of my interviews, women described their weddings as Southern, almost ineffably so: “It was definitely Southern,” Lucy said. “And it’s hard to say how, because I just felt like it was in every way. With the cakes and pies [made by her aunts], that was truly Southern. It was all so Southern—with my dad’s bluegrass band playing […].” For Lucy, the music and food were Southern because they were forms associated with the South, but also because they involved family. For Mallory, what made her wedding particularly Southern was its emphasis on local history. She took pains, however, to clarify that her wedding represented the “New South”:

> One thing that is traditional in Southern weddings is the ode to the past—it’s like your tree with your family weddings on it—it’s celebrating this sweet history of marriage in general. With our space, we wanted people to feel thrown back in time. That’s why having uber-Southern food, that was important to us. We wanted it to reflect the South we love so much, the South that is taking off your shoes to dance on the bare floor, not the fifty-thousand-dollar country club South. More New South.

Nostalgia for “the past” is certainly owed to the brides’ whiteness and their privilege to be selective in the history they evoke. At the same time, Mallory also stresses that her wedding was not an example of old money or, implicitly, the Old South. What “past” and which “South” are these young women referencing, exactly? Their weddings, and their reflections about them, owe much to the history of competing conceptions of white Southern identity.

The term “New South” has a long and complicated record. Coined by *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry Grady in the period following Reconstruction, the “New

South" Creed was a vision for regional industrialization promulgated by white Southern elites including journalists, financiers, and former Confederate officers. Despite its name, the New South Creed actually embraced the myth of the "Old South" and its "Lost Cause," an ideology that celebrated "an idyllic antebellum plantation kingdom" in which slavery was a benevolent institution and enslavers had justly pursued secession in support of state rights (Cobb 2005, 62). Post-Reconstruction, this myth gained not only regional but also national traction. In the midst of labor unrest and the rise of unfettered industrial capitalism, many white northerners found the mythical image of aristocratic and gracious plantation owners appealing. Early New South propagandists traded on the Old South myth's appeal to white northerners in their attempts to lure business interests to southern cities, making it "one of the region's most exportable commodities" (77). Their calls for industrialization were not so much balanced as boosted by their emphasis on maintaining white supremacy and class hierarchies; some later New South advocates even argued that twentieth century capitalists might look to antebellum planters for lessons in labor management.

From the 1920s on into the mid-20th century, a small cohort of white southern liberals known as the "Agrarians" pushed back against the New South Creed, citing northern imperialism and southern assimilation. In the process, they indulged in their own romanticization of antebellum life. Despite their efforts—and much more accurate contemporaneous critiques by W.E.B Du Bois—the New South Creed reigned for several more decades through the years following World War II, at which point the urbanized, industrialized New South envisioned by its early apostles was finally realized. The rise of country clubs in the South is part of this development. After the Civil War ended, white plantation owners “began new ventures” including country clubs and golf courses (Glassman 2005). Post-World War II, however, urbanization, suburbanization, and the lingering mythologization of antebellum hierarchies merged the country club landscape with new gated communities. The “Country Club South” is therefore an application of the New South Creed. As Walker Percy said in a 1980 interview with James Atlas, “My South was always the New South. My first memories are of the country club, of people playing golf” (Cobb 2005, 252).

The nesting dolls of one “New South” after another attest to the ongoing re-generation of self-referential regional narratives that have always been underwritten by white supremacy and capitalist exploitation (see Guerrero 2017). The resurrection of the term to refer to the 21st century South has not necessarily played out any differently. From the annual “New South” awards in *Southern Living* magazine to a September 17, 2018, *New York Times* opinion piece entitled “Reading the New South,” about progressive Southern-based publications that sprung up in the 2010s, the popular notion is that today’s “New South” is hipper, more progressive, and more diverse than ever—a claim that whitewashes the decades-long progressive activism of African Americans and other people of color in the South as well as ongoing white resistance to it.

So, when brides referenced the “New South” or how they wanted their wedding guests to feel “thrown back in time,” what particular era of Southern culture were they trying to evoke? If anything, it would seem like the agrarian wedding sites, vernacular religion references, vintage décor, and early 20th century architecture drew on romantic notions of the pre-industrial South and a pre-commodified folk culture not unlike the vision of antebellum life conjured by the Agrarians. On the other hand, the women’s reflections on their weddings and what made them “Southern” were decidedly not rooted in impressions of an actual historical period. Rather, they sought to evoke a feeling, a relation—more specifically, a feeling about relations, i.e., relatives, and class. Although Lucy found it “hard to say how” her wedding was Southern, she mentioned the cakes and pies her aunts had made and her dad’s bluegrass band playing her reception, emphasizing the home-made and hand-crafted rather than store-bought. Mallory described the “South” represented in her wedding as “the South that is taking off your shoes to dance on the bare floor, not the fifty-thousand-dollar country club South,” an image of informality, the opposite of fancy or buttoned-up. To say their weddings are “Southern” in these particular ways is also to suggest what the women and their families ostensibly are not: rich.

There was a self-consciousness about money and class in both my interviews with former brides and in the weddings themselves. Nearly every bride I spoke with told me she navigated budgetary constraints in the wedding planning process. Some brides saved money by asking friends and family to make desserts rather than paying for a cake from a bakery. Several of us chose venues without rental fees, and nearly all borrowed furniture from friends and family or bought used items from thrift shops for wedding décor. Brooke found tree stumps on Craigslist for free and her friends and family cut greenery from their yards to use for reception table centerpieces. “I was like, how can I do this and save the most money?” she told me. “I mean, it was beautiful and I loved it, but it was more about what’s budget-friendly.” Still, to throw a wedding and a reception for one hundred guests or more, as we all did, is no small financial feat—food, rentals (chairs, tables, even tents at a couple of the weddings), and professional photographers are expensive. All of these women were in their twenties when they got married, some in their early twenties. My understanding from our conversations is that all of us relied on our parents to pay for most or all of our wedding costs. Clearly, the privilege to "celebrate who we are" through our weddings was precisely that. How much of ourselves could we afford, literally, to produce publicly? The brides' capacity to dramatize and realize our production as Christian women through our weddings was contingent on our access to our families' economic resources.

Given this context, the contrast drawn between a wedding at an old department store and a wedding at a country club is telling. Not far removed from the plantation and segregation, the country club is an emblem of the relationship between whiteness and wealth in the United States, especially the South. It makes a useful foil for white Southerners who would prefer not to be associated with that legacy. For these brides, contrasting their "New South" weddings with the "country club South" telegraphs not only that they are not rich, but also that they are not racist. While many white Southerners enjoy a selective memory wiped of the violence carried out in the name of white supremacy, this is not exactly what is happening with my participants' descriptions of their Southern weddings. Rather, the narrative we told ourselves (I certainly include myself in this) about our "Southern" weddings was at some level an attempt to exempt ourselves from that violence, to lift our roots out of that soil. In that effort, we offered counter-histories allegedly extricated from overt exploitation and brutality. Rather than the broad history of a region, we invoked the hyperlocal histories of our families and hometowns, celebrating a "sweet history of marriage" with family photographs, heirlooms, or food, "throwing guests back in time" by temporarily reviving our small town's long-dormant icon, the former department store. Yet our unwitting exceptionalism was, of course, a fiction unsupported by history. Those of us who were able to have our weddings on land—on lawns, at farms, in barns—that our family members have owned for multiple generations were heirs to the material wages of whiteness, in particular the ability to have a particular economic and emotional relationship to land (see Harris 1993; Hong 2006). White property ownership and the wealth that accrues through generations as a result of it were crucial to many of our weddings. Even the question of who could shop in the department store during its heyday is enmeshed in the legacies of slavery and segregation. Not to mention that almost all of the brides in this chapter had all-white wedding parties (bridesmaids and groomsmen), another vestige of the not-so-new South.

Ultimately, the most that any of us brides did to engage or acknowledge race and class as shaping our subjectivities was to distance ourselves from either. Yet unbeknownst to us, our weddings reiterated that we are both consumers of Black culture and complicit in its continued erasure in Southern historiography. Bluegrass, for example, was a "synthesis" of "diverse folk and popular traditions, sacred and secular, black and white, and urban and rural, combined to form an altogether new strain of American music" (Cantwell 1984, qtd. in Lee 2019, 220). Many of the Southern foods we were excited to serve our guests likely originated with enslaved Black women and ingredients brought from West Africa by abducted men and women. At one wedding reception I attended, we danced to songs by Adele, a white artist whose sound "conjures historical jazz and blues singers" such as Ethel Waters and Josephine Baker (Edgar 2014). What's old was new again, again.

In addition, the language my participants used to talk about what was “Southern” in their weddings was marked by ambiguity and a commutability that reveals just how the various social relations performed in the weddings—past, place, pedigree, political economy, and piety—are mutually defined. Bluegrass and buttermilk biscuits make ready Southern signifiers, but some of the women’s ruminations on their weddings’ “Southernness” strayed far from the obvious and suggested how class, race, religion, and regionalism are inextricable from one another. A note in Mallory and Alan’s wedding program read, “It is our prayer that you will hold us accountable to this marriage covenant—a covenant made not for law or Southern heritage, though we respect both, but to symbolize Christ’s love for the church,” making a point to extricate the couple’s Christian faith from “Southern heritage,” the implication being that the two could easily be confused or conflated.

A similar fungibility between church, class, and geography emerged in my conversation with Leslie, when I asked her if she had a particular aesthetic in mind when planning her wedding. She said that she remembered thinking that “if there were any aesthetic at all, I wanted it to feel almost like a ‘tent revival.’ I know that’s odd but that’s what I was probably kicking around there. When I imagined the tents and the—I wanted it to have that old Southern, kind of like the roots of our church, really. So that it didn’t feel Southern in like an Old South kind of way, but Southern in more of the low-brow, low church. But pretty, somehow, too.” Leslie went on, describing how church buildings, no matter how pretty, would “not have had the feeling” she wanted in her wedding. She explained what she meant by that:

> I wanted it to feel antique in a way. Like to have a sort of layer of that feeling of tradition or heritage […] There’s some part of the really, really low church that

> appeals to me. That we can do this out under a tree. And the hymn singing. And so that's kind of the feel I wanted. And I feel like in a building, that would have been hampered by the walls. Or it would have felt more stuffy, or more—it would have been hard to evoke that history.

Antique, roots, tradition, heritage, history—are these words being used in reference to religion, class, or region? They all connote "authenticity," but the slippage between what is being signified by them is perhaps reflective of the reality that these social constructions are mutually constitutive, and as contexts of subjectivity they cannot really be separated from one another. It is also worth noting that the church building that would serve as an alternate location for Leslie's wedding in the event of inclement weather was constructed in 1923. Parts of the building could even be called "antique." Yet Leslie stresses the blue-collar, rural origins of her church tradition and suggests that her own experience in churches of Christ has felt far removed from that. For Leslie, the church building represents a "more stuffy" setting than outdoors, "under a tree." This might have to do with class, with gender, or with an overall sensation of constriction inside church walls. Regardless, it seems that for Leslie and Mallory, church buildings might have more in common with country clubs than with authentic, original religion.

In fact, quite a few brides designed and described their weddings as scenes of true religion, emphasizing the importance of their faith and their religious communities to their formation. For example, many brides with a church of Christ background incorporated ritual practices of their church traditions into their weddings—including group acapella singing, which is the norm in most church of Christ worship services. The guests at Mallory's and Lucy's weddings were invited before the vows were exchanged to sing old hymns dating to the 18th and 19th centuries, respectively; Brooke, who grew up in and attends a church of Christ in west Tennessee, had guests sing a medley of two hymns (one older, one more contemporary) during her ceremony. Because of the strength of their church of Christ ties, the brides could safely assume that most or many people at their weddings would know the hymns and be able to sing along.

As with the other wedding motifs, these touches were not intended only to compensate for the brides' rejection of a church venue and demonstrate their piety. It is true that Lucy's mother, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, as well as everyone else in her home congregation, all had "church weddings." And Lucy did feel like she was "betraying [her] church in a weird way" by not getting married in the building. Her decision to have a "congregation" hymn singing during her ceremony reflected her feeling, but also her biography in which church, and church singing, has been central. When I asked Lucy about the decision to have a "congregational" hymn singing during her ceremony, she began by saying, "We didn't want to exclude how important our faith is to us." She paused, then continued.

> I don't know if we were trying to make up for something. [….] We both grew up in very traditional churches of Christ, and we still really value that raising and those songs that had those lyrics that were so much deeper, and we tend to gravitate toward those songs more than modern-day hymns. It was really important that we incorporate that, because so many people who were at the ceremony had a big part in our faith, and we wanted to make sure that we honored that.

As Lucy puts it, having a hymn-singing in her ceremony was not necessarily about proving their piety to their church communities and their families as much as the indelible impact those communities, and those songs, had in their formation as people.

Mallory's decision to include a hymn singing during her ceremony was, by her own admission, in part the result of a compromise. Mallory's original plan entailed her bridesmaids reading Scripture aloud during the ceremony, but in deference to guests who were members of churches of Christ and might object to women reciting Scripture aloud in the sacred setting of a wedding ceremony—remember, women are to "remain silent" during the church worship service—Mallory went a different route. She told me she had always wanted there to be singing, and while she would have preferred to ask one of her girlfriends to lead a song, she settled on a more communal singing instead. Later that night, however, Mallory's wedding reception culminated in a high-spirited dance party, despite the common view among many church of Christ congregants that dancing is a sin. That dance party was fueled by Adele and sweet tea alone, because there was no alcohol served at the wedding—or at mine, Lucy's, Brooke's, or Leslie's. Many conservative churches of Christ condemn drinking as sinful. Dancing is only slightly less controversial, but several of us chose to conclude our wedding celebrations with dancing—"so some tradition, and some pushing the limits," as Mallory remarked.

Certainly, there was compromise between what we brides wanted and what would be morally agreeable to our guests and families. But the weddings' religious elements were not only instrumental gestures meant to appease conservative Christian family and friends. On this issue, the difference between the weddings of brides raised in churches of Christ and the weddings of my participants from much less conservative evangelical backgrounds—by which I mean churches where women have a degree more flexibility in the roles they can take on during the Sunday worship service—is revealing. Shelly grew up in a mainline Presbyterian church and currently attends an evangelical, nondenominational congregation; she designed her wedding ceremony as a "worship service" and included communion in the ceremony. As a member of an Anglican church, Bethany’s ceremony essentially replicated a full Eucharistic worship service that closely resembles what happens in her church every Sunday.

It might seem like there is little difference between Shelly’s and Bethany’s use of religious liturgy, hymns, and language in their weddings and what Mallory, Lucy, Brooke, or Leslie did in theirs. Yet none of the women raised in churches of Christ replicated the Sunday worship service in their weddings. They reimagined it. At Brooke’s wedding, the hymns she selected for her guests to sing were accompanied by guitar, a somewhat provocative choice since the majority of churches of Christ eschew instruments in the corporate worship service. At another point during Brooke’s ceremony, the families of the couple stood up and surrounded them for a shared prayer. “I feel like church was at our wedding, if that makes sense,” Brooke reflected during our interview. “God was there and it didn’t have to be in a certain structure.” She said that singing the hymn together as a community was important to her because “Church, to me—there is a facility where the church meets, but church is not the building. And maybe that’s partly because I’ve never felt like that’s where I’ve used my spiritual gifts.” Brooke, Lucy, Mallory, Leslie, and I all wrote our own vows, which was not an option for Bethany in her more liturgical ceremony. If “church was at our weddings,” then by writing our own vows, we authored liturgy. We determined the “order of worship” for the ceremonies, incorporating hymns of our choosing and group prayers in addition to our vows. “I wanted it to feel like something worshipful,” Leslie told me. “I wanted it to feel sacramental in some way. And so I actually wrote the entirety of what I wanted the officiant to read, and I told him he could riff on it some.” While Leslie did walk down the aisle on the arm of her father, she had arranged for something different from the usual "father gives away the bride." When the officiant asked, "Who gives this woman in marriage?," her father responded, "Actually, I don't own her," and went on, in Leslie's words, to "expound on that in his wise way. Which I found—that was a really sweet part of the wedding to me."

In this way Leslie's wedding presented a revision of the church worship service and the gendered norms embedded within both church practices and common marriage rites. This was also the subtext of her description of her wedding to me. Leslie told me she wanted a "feeling of tradition or heritage" that called back to "the roots of our church," a feeling that "would have been hampered by the [church building] walls." Both invoking and rejecting church tradition—tent revivals and church weddings, respectively—Leslie presented her wedding as more in keeping with the church, with authentic religious practice, than contemporary church worship services. In other words, her wedding stakes a claim to "church" itself. Unlike what happens inside the church building on Sunday, the wedding was a worship service whose liturgy was by a woman. Perhaps "church weddings" were the more conservative option, but brides like Leslie, Brooke, Lucy and Mallory turned their weddings into church.

Like the weddings overall, the process of planning the "liturgy" of the wedding ceremonies both represents the process of subject formation and realizes it. Lucy's comments about loving old hymns speak to the multiple layers of this process and her role within it. To return to her words:

> We didn't want to exclude how important our faith is to us. I don't know if we were trying to make up for something. We both grew up in very traditional churches of Christ, and we still really value that raising and those songs that had those lyrics that were so much deeper, and we tend to gravitate toward those songs more than modern-day hymns. It was really important that we incorporate

> that, because so many people who were at the ceremony had a big part in our faith, and we wanted to make sure that we honored that.

Lucy's desires and orientations—what she gravitates toward—are embedded within particular social and cultural relations, and in the act of honoring one aspect of that context she acknowledges that the line between it and herself is extremely difficult to discern. She senses that who she is and what she wants is historically contingent rather than innate (Mahmood 2005). At the same time, Lucy and the other women who offer a revision of the church service in their wedding ceremonies see God as a formative force in their lives, a force that exists outside the formal church structure (literally and figuratively) and the other relations of power in which they reside. Brooke told me that the hymn singing at her wedding "was important to me because I wanted it to be more about how great is God that he would bring us together and allow this union and teach us so much through it." The various spiritual/religious rituals and practices in the wedding ceremonies were meant to attune guests to the significance of God in the brides' lives and identities, but they also were intended to accomplish the spiritual formation of the bride. In this performative process, the bride is an active participant.

Unlike genealogy, geography, history, and spirituality, political economy was not deliberately thematized in the weddings as a social relation that the brides recognize as formative. Yet it was certainly a subtext, the weddings haunted by the legacies of slavery and white supremacy, from property ownership to the brides' concepts of Southern identity, as I discussed. Commercialism was also one of the conditions of each wedding, especially in terms of the wedding industry that shaped our aesthetics and guided our choices. Indeed, our weddings were made possible by our participation in that industry. While we insisted on the weddings as performances of our identities, we relied on

Pinterest and wedding blogs for inspiration, or even duplication, from the weddings of others. Our weddings were defined by what Elizabeth Freeman calls “the paradox of consumerist self-making: by collaborating, in both senses of the word, with a production process rather more like the Fordist system for manufacturing automobiles and Taylorist system for disciplining the body of the worker, the bride actually gains access to a new kind of personhood and sense of connection to other such persons” (32). Writing before the advent of Pinterest and other online wedding sites, Freeman describes how, from the nineteenth century on, wedding announcements and ladies’ magazines allowed women to feel part of an “unseen collectivity,” an “imagined community of brides” (27). Now the unseen can be seen from anywhere: social media and online wedding magazines establish not only visual cues for what a wedding should look like, they also establish which wedding “content” should be photographed and how. This in turn shapes how a wedding is designed, documented, and even remembered. My wedding invitation design? I used a stranger’s wedding invitation that I saw on a wedding blog as a template. My family photo “gallery tree”? I got that idea from a photo on a blog, too. From table settings to floral arrangements and personal vows, our weddings drew on images from other women’s weddings.

If we brides were seeking to share an “authentic” performance of our identities with our guests, “the paradox of consumerist self-making” ostensibly complicates our efforts to “stay true to ourselves,” as Lucy said. But these aspects of the weddings only increase their accuracy as performances about the making of the brides, in that they reflect our enmeshment in both the culture industry and more intimate social connections alongside the other relations referenced in the weddings. As pastiche or bricolage, the weddings further illustrate the contradictions of life under capitalism and the difficulty of delineating "popular culture," "mass culture," "folk culture," etc. The brides assembled the weddings from various sources: most of the actual material culture of the weddings was not purchased "off the rack" but was comprised of used items from thrift stores, friends and family, eBay and Etsy. We even drew on one another's weddings in ways both tangible and intangible: Mallory told me that the dancing at my wedding reception, one year before hers, emboldened her to have dancing at her own. The wooden, hand-painted "Wedding" sign pointing the way to my wedding site had directed guests to Leslie's one year earlier. And Lucy and her now-husband actually *met* at my wedding three years before their own ceremony. At the same time, the look and style we adopted in our weddings would shortly come to dominate the home décor market, from "farmhouse" furniture to new objects designed with a fabricated patina of age, part of a decades-long trend of commodified "country" or "rustic" aesthetics.

The weddings' relationship to this trend was heightened by their regional context, recapitulating the complexities of identity and commercialization in the American South. From the Agrarians in the first half of the twentieth century to the arrival of "redneck chic" in the 1970s to the rise of "Southern studies" in the 1980s and 1990s, white southerners have sought a distinct concept of southern cultural identity, primarily by looking to an imagined past. These campaigns have often pushed back against the "cultural homogenization" that presumably comes with commercialization yet have simultaneously participated in the "selling of southern culture" (Cobb 2005, 231). Although the cultural markers might have changed from the "Redneck Beer" of the 1970s to today's hot properties such as Sean Brock cookbooks, Billy Reid apparel, and Butch

Anthony prints, “upwardly mobile southern whites” continue to be “not only able but eager to consume their own regional identity as rapidly as commercial marketers could commodify it” (228). My point is that the weddings were less indicative of a tension between consumer culture and so-called folk culture than they were subject to the signifiers of white Southern identity: Even if the objects in the weddings were not themselves “commercial” goods, they signified what they did because of a (white) *Southern* culture industry.

To conclude this section, I return to the question of whether or not we brides deployed the material, ephemeral culture of our weddings to soften the appearance of subversion that our choices to get married somewhere other than a church might have generated. My own belief is that our decisions were not so instrumental or calculated. True, we all made compromises in the wedding planning process to negotiate religio-social norms. To some degree these elements of the weddings speak to our “self-identification with the hegemonic forms” (Williams 1977, 118). And our weddings certainly seemed to participate in tradition as Raymond Williams defined it: “a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present” (116). Odes to the past are common refrains in white evangelical church communities in which members imagine themselves defending conservatism against allegedly encroaching forces of change. (What better symbols for this sense of beleaguerment than “distressed” vintage objects, for example?)

Yet Williams also tells us that tradition is vulnerable for the same reason it is powerful: selective versions of the past have at their heart a lacuna. What does this mean for the weddings? If we look closely, we might discover that like “tradition,” the wedding spaces and objects were hollow. For example, the vintage décor, like my lace dress, from Craigslist, eBay, Etsy and Goodwill: these pieces were not family “heirlooms” or even necessarily “local.” These objects were fetishized, stripped of their history and production and repurposed as symbols of our identities and love stories. Another example: Mallory and Alan’s wedding venue was an abandoned department store, a shell of the past left empty for decades. For one day and one couple only, it became a wedding venue; one week after the wedding, a local sporting goods shop began construction to convert the space into one of their storefronts. What potential, then, might lie in the lacunae within the weddings’ material citations of the “past,” of place, of pedigree? For the brides, hidden within the hollows of these objects and spaces is an opportunity. They are vessels that can be filled with meaning. It is possible that as bricoleurs, the brides intuited that these objects and spaces might evoke warm feelings in our guests while simultaneously functioning as Trojan horses for the production of our subjectivities apart from the church’s norms about who can perform their identities and when. For Williams, tradition is a “selective version” of the past, a process that “reinterprets or dilutes or converts” (116) the past into forms that support current power structures. It is the “most evident expression” of hegemony. The means by which hegemony deploys tradition resembles the means by which the women deploy the material culture in their weddings, yet to slightly different ends. With the weddings, the result is not so clear-cut, and one could even argue that the weddings’ deployment of “hollow objects” turns tradition inside-out by recruiting hegemonic cultural forms to contest the hegemony of the church. Think of the department store, the perfect Trojan horse: as a wedding venue, it referenced multiple contexts of Mallory’s and Alan’s production as individuals, as a couple, and as members of communities, but its own past became a palimpsest on which the couple inscribed their identities independent of those contexts. While Mallory and Alan's wedding program did graft the store into their genealogies ("This department store was family-owned for four generations, was where our mothers and their mothers shopped…"), the note concluded thusly: "Today the store will be remembered for something else: hosting its first and final wedding." What was important to Mallory and Alan was that the store represented their uniqueness as individuals and as a couple.

Unlike the vacant department store, however, other wedding venues posed more of a challenge. Lucy's grandparents' home, Leslie's childhood home and my great-grandparents' farm seem like more difficult spaces to revise or recast, situated as they were in/as the heart of our respective family legacies. But it should be noted that even these choices were met with some objections from family members. Churches are "safe" spaces for weddings, on multiple levels ranging from weather to rental costs to the more intangible cultural meanings. Yet, ultimately, our preferred wedding venues were not met with embargo, which, as young women who depended on our parents to pay for a significant part of our weddings, was a real possibility. In these locations, we had more freedom to communicate our self-concepts, "decoding fragments of consumer culture—a style here, a 'look' there—and reassembling them to create [our] own personal code" (Lears 1985, 590). To some degree, this meant exploiting the void behind the veneer of the "past" to dramatize a different subjectivity than our religious communities tended to imagine. By commandeering nostalgia, we made people more comfortable, as Lucy put it, but we also managed to successfully relocate the performance and production of our subjectivity outside the church. By crafting our own wedding liturgies, we even offered revisions and relocations of “church” itself. Ultimately, we created the right conditions for “a moment in subjective flux when social subjects (individual or collective) produce accounts of who they are, as conscious political agents, that is, constitute themselves, politically” (Johnson 1986, 69).

Wedding Receptions

Up to this point, I have explored how former brides with conservative evangelical backgrounds understood and devised their weddings as performances of their own formation, performances which were, crucially, spatialized outside the church. This analysis is not complete without considering another question: How were the women’s efforts received by their audiences? How did our wedding guests, our friends and families, read the weddings?

Our guests received our self-production not with censure but with wholehearted delight, and the implicit message of the weddings, our performance and production of self, did not escape them. Six months after my wedding, my mother called me to tell me she had just opened a wedding invitation from a family member that closely resembled my own wedding invitation design, featuring cameo-style silhouettes of the bride and groom. My mom was worried that I would be offended by the apparent plagiarism. I told her I couldn’t be, because I had borrowed the design from a stranger’s wedding I had seen on a blog. In my mother’s mind, the silhouettes were a signature, and on my relative’s invitations the motif felt like more than design theft; it verged on identity theft. Her reaction to the “knockoff” invitations suggests that my own wedding read the way I hoped it would. Later, I heard similar takes from wedding guests about Mallory’s and Lucy’s weddings—the “That’s so Mallory and Alan” response Mallory hoped for.

As productions that relate their own provenance, the weddings testify to the complexity of subject formation for women like myself who were raised in the conservative evangelical milieu of churches of Christ in Alabama and Tennessee. The weddings detailed and literalized the various social, cultural and spiritual forces that had produced us, but they were also *productive* of us, performative, even apart from the "I do's." In orchestrating the weddings, we brides asserted our own accounts of who we were, relocating the production of subjectivity from the church's terms to our own. Of course, at points in these celebrations of "who we are," compromise becomes indistinguishable from "coding," and who we are becomes inseparable from where we come from. Like other material and ephemeral culture, "in truth all that can be done…is to refine and clarify its paradoxes" (Glassie 1977, 42). Weddings are particularly ripe scenes for paradox; as Elizabeth Freeman argues, while the modern Anglo-American wedding appears to instantiate the inevitability of the privatized, domestic, male-female couple form, it also contains within it "promises that marriage breaks" (42). This is because "using the wedding to link people and objects seems also to create a space of permission to publicize other social ties—friendships, extended family, nonparental intergenerational commitments, subcultural alliances, and so on" (3).

I will close by offering one more wedding paradox. As community affairs, the weddings were productive of more than just the individual women who were getting married. My wedding and my mother's wedding, which took place at a church of Christ in northwest Alabama nearly forty years ago, could not have been more different. In contrast with my obsession over the details of my own wedding, my mother was not preoccupied with her wedding planning process—in fact, she reminisces that she walked into a bridal store and purchased the first dress she saw. When I told her I wanted there to be dancing at my wedding, she told me she and my father were not going to help pay for a dance floor or otherwise endorse dancing at the wedding, largely out of concern for how my grandparents and other older guests would respond to something so maligned in conservative churches of Christ. But something changed the evening of my wedding. One of my most treasured photos from that night in May—an image not prescribed by any wedding blog—reveals the power of performance not just for myself, but for my mother as well: in the middle of the dance floor, her arms raised, my mom dances with her mouth open in a cheer.

Chapter 4: Immaterial Girl: The Liturgy, the Enneagram, and Forms of White Christian Womanhood

The email in my inbox began, “Hello friends, I am about halfway through Rachel Held Evans’s newest book, *Inspired*, and am really enjoying it and thought it would be good to discuss with others.” Alyssa’s proposal reminded me that I had been planning to read *Inspired* since it came out eight months earlier. For years I had followed Rachel Held Evans on Twitter and her blog, where she charted her spiritual journey from deep entrenchment in conservative evangelicalism to more ecumenical Christianity and a politically progressive standpoint. Her latest book from Christian imprint Thomas Nelson was described on the publisher’s website as Evans’s “quest to better understand what the Bible is and how it is meant to be read.” In between chapters that mix memoir with synthesis of progressive scholarship on biblical interpretation and context, *Inspired* contains creative interludes: in the form of poetry, a screenplay, first-person narrative and more, Evans retells and reinterprets stories from the Bible.

These interludes were the first topic of conversation at the book club Alyssa had proposed via email. Seven of us, all white women in our late 20s and early 30s, showed up on a cold March evening at Alyssa’s apartment, which was lit warmly against the dusk that had fallen an hour earlier. Balancing bowls of chili on our laps, we settled into the living room and began sharing our immediate reactions to the book. While some of us agreed that Evans’s attempts at fictionalization in the interludes were clumsy or strained at times, others found them moving. “I agree that none of the stories stick with me,” Holly offered. “But I felt like it was a form of midrash, and so I thought that was nice….it invites you to just sit down, write a story, place yourself in it, think about the characters.” *Midrash* is a method or genre of biblical interpretation and commentary with a complex history in the Jewish religious tradition. In *Inspired,* Evans defines midrash as “those imaginative explorations and expansions of Scripture that serve as the most common form of biblical interpretation in Jewish traditions” (22). For example, several of the book’s interludes revisit biblical stories from a woman character’s point of view that is otherwise not explicated in the biblical text itself. One of the earliest interludes is told from the point of view of Hagar, a woman enslaved by Abraham and Sarah and who bore Abraham’s son Ishmael. Evans focuses on the period when Hagar, pregnant with Ishmael, flees to the desert to escape abuse by her mistress. In the story, Hagar directs her address to the male Jewish authors of history: “Your scribes will remember it as a silly woman’s spat, an anecdote to explain how this cursed land grew populated, but your scribes never carried a baby through the desert.”

“Her midrash story with Hagar and Abraham—I made a note about it,” Holly said. “How Hagar was like, ‘Well, your scribes never asked for my view of it.’ It’s like, Oh my gosh, yeah.” A murmur of assent rose up from the group. Quickly, she went on, “We need these reminders that the Bible was incredibly biased, right? Because it’s stories that are being told by particular people in particular times. It was not a time where, for example, women got much of a voice. […] That’s another reason I like the idea of the midrash, of putting yourself into these perspectives in the story that weren’t written down.”

“I did appreciate that too—[Evans’s] essential thesis that there’s space for you too,” Kelly agreed. “No matter where you fall on the spectrum, there’s still space for you in this.”

Like Kelly, many women who attend predominantly white evangelical churches look for the reassurance that there is space for them not just in the stories of the Bible, but also in the churches built around it. Sunday morning in their churches remains a time when women lack “much of a voice,” to borrow Holly’s phrase. As I have described, men are consistently more visibly and vocally authoritative than women in the Sunday worship service, occupying literal positions of power like the pulpit, the baptistry, and the communion table and performing the associated acts of worship. By contrast, the church service offers little in the way of an active model of Christian womanhood. Indeed, in the worship service “Christian womanhood” is defined in relief to the actions of men: passive, silent, submissive, almost disembodied. This is a racialized form of Christian womanhood that is impossible to embody, but materially productive, in that it shapes actual churchgoing women—including in their quest to find alternative forms of Christian womanhood.

This chapter reveals the relation between the form of Christian womanhood prescribed in the typical white evangelical church worship and other forms: forms of worship, personalities, and stories. The flesh-and-blood Christian women in this chapter do not recognize themselves in the form of Christian womanhood they are expected to inhabit in the worship service and, sometimes, in evangelical Christian culture more broadly. Disidentifying with this figure, they seek forms of subjectivity that revise and rework the primary traits of “Christian woman” discourse. Two burgeoning trends in white evangelicalism present them with alternative forms of gendered Christian subjectivity they can inhabit as a part of their church communities: the use of formal Anglican liturgy in the worship service, and enthusiasm for the Enneagram personality typology. Like the speculative interpretation of “midrash” that revises canonical biblical narratives, churchgoing women find space for themselves—their embodied, desiring selves—in liturgical worship and the Enneagram.

The first section of this chapter describes the racialized form of Christian womanhood prescribed in the traditional white evangelical worship service and in the ideology of white Christian femininity. Next, I turn to the adoption of formal liturgy in some white evangelical churches. The seeming “formlessness” or informality of most white evangelical worship services has not granted women the opportunities that it has men. The Anglican liturgy, meanwhile, is a form of worship long criticized by evangelicals for its materiality. The history of racialized and gendered characterizations of liturgical worship comes to bear on the meaning and power it holds for white churchgoing women as they participate in it, transfiguring “passivity” and “pliability”—hallmarks of the form of white Christian womanhood prescribed in the church service—into an embrace of embodied Christian subjectivity.

The last section of the chapter turns to white evangelicals’ booming interest in the Enneagram personality typology, which presents women with a communal, Christianized means of self-knowledge, self-narration, and self-improvement. Organized around individual desires and drives, the Enneagram provides another alternative to the self-negating form of white Christian womanhood prescribed in white evangelical churches. In the liturgy and the Enneagram, white churchgoing women find new and approved forms of Christian subjectivity in which they can embrace embodiment, engage their wills, and acknowledge and cultivate desires (within limits). Furthermore, as epistemologies of the self, they give some women a means of tracing their own subject formation through God, the church, and other social relations. In both, however, their narration of their formation is rendered unreliable by their whiteness. Their position makes it hard for them to see how their subjectivity relates to other(ed) women, to see "the objective historical connections between some women's desires and other women's needs" (Hennessy 2000, 196). Through these recast forms of white Christian womanhood, white churchgoing women are able to recognize themselves as women without having to wrestle with their whiteness and its legacy.

Church and the Negative Space of White Christian Womanhood

Ashley and I met on a weeknight at a strip mall café in a Birmingham suburb. We had been there for over an hour and a half, talking about the worship service at her current church and in the more conservative churches she went to growing up, when I asked her if she felt like she had learned anything from being in the church worship service about what it means to be a woman. "Not much," Ashley said. "And that is sad, isn't it? That I didn't." I was surprised at her response. I thought about some of the stereotypes of white Christian femininity cited by several other women I had interviewed in response to similar questions. But Ashley's next comments were clarifying:

> In more recent years, when I do hear a woman sharing a testimony or thought or prayer [in church], I do see glimpses and visions of what a Christian woman is and is meant to be and I do learn from that. But not seeing that at all growing up, I did not get that from a worship service at church. I did not learn what it meant to be a Christian woman other than I'm quiet and sitting here and not doing anything. I saw a lot of, oh, this is what Christian men are. This is what Christian men do. And not at all what Christian women do or are.

This vision of Christian womanhood *in the negative* was striking to me, not least because it seemed so blank next to the big-haired, pearls-wearing, Beth Moore look-a-like "Christian woman" described by some of my other participants. But what Ashley was saying had more in common with that form of white Christian womanhood than I at first realized. In reviewing the ways other women said they experienced dissonance between this figure and who they are, I began to see Ashley's response as emblematic. In this model, the "Christian woman" is silent and passive, her body is a problem, and her whiteness goes unmarked. Very few evangelical women resemble her, and few aspire to be her. Yet actual churchgoing women live "within" this discourse, in that their actions and feelings are informed by it even in their disavowal of it. And there is perhaps nowhere this form of Christian womanhood is more prescribed than in the weekly worship service.

Not long after my conversation with Ashley, I started asking other women I interviewed about what comes to mind when they hear the words "Christian woman." I asked Andrea this question during our interview on a Sunday afternoon in her living room. "When you hear the words 'Christian woman,' what is your gut reaction?" I asked. "As opposed to 'explain to me theologically what it means to be a Christian woman,' I'm more interested in what is the image that springs to mind when you hear those words." Andrea began by describing a "Christian woman" as humble, graceful, modest, gentle, kind, and understanding. I asked her how she felt like she aligned with that image. She said that growing up, she was "a little bit of a rebel": "I confronted authority and patriarchy quite a lot," she told me. "[…] I was just very outspoken and quick on my feet. And I would often go to the pastor and push back on stuff he would say, or to the youth director or the orchestra guy. […] I feel like I was always very active and visible and outspoken." According to Andrea, this behavior was tolerated when she was a girl, but she was unsure "how that would work if you were a grown woman doing that."

It is telling that Andrea locates her divergence from her description of a Christian woman in being “active and visible and outspoken.” Technically, a person could be humble, graceful, modest, gentle, kind, and understanding as well as “active and visible and outspoken.” Yet Andrea sensed that her outspokenness, in any context, was what divides her from the ideal. She was not the only woman I talked to who felt this way. During our interview at her home in Tennessee, Elizabeth told me that when she hears the words “Christian woman,” she thinks of “someone who goes to women’s retreats and Bible studies and reads Beth Moore and likes artwork with scripty Bible verses. Someone who’s very feminine.” “Do you feel like you align with that image?” I asked her. “No, I do not,” she said. “I don’t have much of a filter, I’m super opinionated, I have a hard time—something I need to work on—thinking before I speak.” Again: a “Christian woman” who goes to women’s retreats or likes Bible verse artwork also could be, conceivably, a woman who is opinionated and assertive, but to Elizabeth, she does not align with this image because she is opinionated. Adana articulated it more directly. Her gut reaction to the words “Christian woman”? “Not a good one,” she said. We were sitting across from one another in her living room, glasses of wine on end tables next to our chairs. She elaborated. “I think the Christian Right has done so much to create this—I mean, it’s this person who for the sake of being gracious, and under the cover of the word grace, doesn’t have agency or opinions.” Yet, Adana added, she doesn’t actually know anyone who truly embodies that figure.

As Adana’s comment reveals, the silence, passivity, and lack of agency characteristic of the “Christian woman” discourse does not accurately describe the vast majority of actual Christian women. When I asked Shelly about her gut reaction to the words "Christian woman," she alluded to this by saying

> I feel like my answers might be a little bit different, because I have been under good teaching and rich, deep community. My life is so intertwined with church and work and home—we live across the street from each other, like three houses across the street are all our best friends. We all go to church together, I know their kids, we work together, we work out together. […] So I feel like that is rare. So when you say "Christian woman," because I've had such good, wonderful Christian women who are vulnerable and open and have shared their lives with us, when you first said that, the phrase that came to mind was openhanded. Because that's something that we talk about a ton […] We often just talk about how we want to live our lives openhandedly. […] Starting your day with, "Lord, my hands are open to what you have for me. And what do you have for me today?"

For Shelly, the words "Christian woman" evoke warm feelings about her churchgoing friends who share their lives with her and who are open to what God has planned for them. Yet even she feels like her own positive image of a "Christian woman" is "rare." She is aware of a different figure of Christian womanhood whose influence is real even if it does not match how most churchgoing women see themselves.

This figure tends to be meek or quiet, and, equally importantly, her thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are internally consistent and in line with the views of church leadership. Even though Amber didn't grow up in an evangelical Christian family or church, she eventually encountered the figure of white Christian womanhood when she decided to join the Baptist Student Union in college after becoming involved with a nondenominational Christian church during high school. The study she joined, based on the "Proverbs 31 woman," was strange to her. The Proverbs 31 woman is a feminine archetype, often called "The Wife of Noble Character," whose virtue and labor on behalf of her household is described in the thirty-first chapter of the book of Proverbs. This idealized woman is a cultural commonplace in white evangelical circles. "I was like, I have never heard any of these things before," Amber said. But for the other young women in the study, all of whom had grown up in conservative Christian homes, "it was the air you breathe, the wallpaper on the walls, you don't necessarily even notice that there's something weird about it. But for me it seemed very strange—the way that it was talked about, what it meant to be a woman. And I was like, I'm not going to be able to do any of those things." "Do you remember some of the specific messaging that you felt dissonance with?" I asked. "Just that you're supposed to be quiet," she said. "And I'm not a loud person in general, but I think there was something about it, you're supposed to be following the lead of these men." "I think the biggest thing that that stereotype that I have in my head is very—accepting of things," Bethany told me.

> Somehow convinced about who they are and what they should be doing and, this is a stereotype, I'm not saying this is real, but they are like, "Yeah, this is what I should be doing as a woman, this is who I should be. And I'm rooting that all in my Bible study and I am perfectly in line or perfectly submitted to the authority of my church and what it tells me and all I need to do now is act out of that and inhabit the space that I've been given and do that really well." And none of that resonates with me, you know? […] I'm constantly like, What do I think? I don't know. I'm not a deconstructionist, by bent, but I have a lot of concerns. And I constantly live with alarms going off in my head.

Bethany's questioning and ambivalence over her faith, her church's doctrinal positions, and what it means to identify as a Christian woman are what she sees separating her from her stereotype of the Christian woman. In every sense—in her person, in her beliefs, in her practices—this figure is neat and contained, inhabiting only the space she has been given. Like Bethany, Bailey also thinks of constriction and containment: "It feels boxed in when you say 'Christian woman.'"

Shut up and boxed in, passive and pliable, void of "agency or opinions," this form of Christian womanhood is defined more by absence than presence, like a perfect vacuum in which no friction can exist. It is disembodied and dematerialized. Again, these are not characteristics of actual Christian women, yet nearly all the Christian women I spoke with conjured some version of this form of Christian womanhood in response to my question. This has to do, in part, with the tenacious ideology of white feminine purity that has long permeated white evangelicalism. Historically and today, in white evangelicalism women's bodies are often framed as a form of materiality that must be hidden and minimized so that they do not present sexual "stumbling blocks"[15] for men. In a 2013 blog post, Rachel Held Evans asserts that evangelical modesty culture treats women's bodies as "inherently seductive" and "something to be overcome." Evans recalls spending her adolescence "trying desperately to cover up the shape of my breasts, which despite all my turtlenecks and layers and crossed arms insisted upon showing up early. When I caught a male classmate's eye on them, a wave of guilt would rush over me—Oh no, he noticed me! I've made him stumble. To this day, I have to deliberately avoid folding my arms in front of my chest because I made such a habit of it in my youth." Evans's sense of her body as shameful or problematic and her attempts to contain and obscure it correspond to a theme sociologist Kelsy Burke identifies in the sexual awakening narratives of women, most of them white, who post in online Christian sex advice forums. As I describe in Chapter 2, these women see their own bodies "as the obstacle" to their sexual pleasure and feel disconnected from their bodies (Burke 2016, 120). During my group interview at Lacie's apartment, Elise said that, to her, the image of a Christian woman is “a woman with long hair, and a long dress… Covered up. I don’t know what that is. I think there’s some kind of meaning to that.”

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[15] This rhetoric seems to be based on Romans 14:13 ("...make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister," NIV) and 1 Corinthians 8:9 ("Be careful, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak," NIV).

The control and diminishment of women’s bodies in white evangelicalism does not only occur in reference to sexuality. In evangelical fitness and diet culture, for example, “slimness has acted as a crucial marker not simply of physical health or superior religious health but, more importantly, of true Christian womanhood” (Griffith 2004, 222). This vein of white evangelical biopolitics includes “the ideal of the bourgeois woman who could mute the very presence of her body” (Schuller 2018, 18). The “Christian woman” imagined by Lacie, Katelyn, and Nora, for example, conforms to this white, bourgeois figure, contained and controlled (and made so in part by the labor of other women): “Women with blonde hair that is perfectly fixed. Manicures, pedicures, really nice clothing.” (Nora added, more seriously, that when she hears “Christian woman,” she hears “Doormat.”) Writing about how American Christian women have historically used their bodies as media to proselytize for their faith, Pamela Klassen and Kathryn Lofton note that “for these women, face-to-face witness in a church was sometimes more difficult to perform than a disembodied broadcast through paper or airwaves. Mediation might allow the listener or reader to forget, in part, that they were listening to or reading a woman” (Klassen and Lofton 2013, 54).[16]

Over the bustle of nearby tables at the restaurant where we met for our interview, Camille told me that one way she feels like she deviates from the “Christian woman” archetype is that she goes salsa dancing on the weekends, even though she often goes with friends from church and doesn't see it as "scandalous" in any way. Camille implicitly recognized the incongruity between the ideal form of Christian womanhood and her participation in a racialized dance form: Salsa dancing is physical and sensual, refuses constriction and passivity, and certainly does not conform to the hegemonic construction of white womanhood as "passionless and de-sexed" (Hammonds 1997, 96). In fact, Camille was the only white woman I interviewed who noted the whiteness of the "Christian woman" archetype. She was part of a church small group that met weekly to discuss "Race, Class, and the Gospel," she told me, and her group had been pondering "…what does it mean to be a Christian woman, and what does that mean from a race standpoint?" In pursuit of the answer, she learned about "a lot of the hurt that people of color have experienced in the evangelical world when a lot of times being a Christian woman is also associated with being sort of this, partly with being white." She added, "I heard someone recently say, 'White women can't even live up to the standard.'"

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[16] For a more recent example of this body problem in white evangelicalism, see my discussion in Chapter 1 of John Piper’s podcast on using Bible commentaries written by women. His remarks indicate that only if a woman’s body can be disappeared—if she can be effectively disembodied—can she be a means by which men are led to God.

If so many Christian women sense their own failure to inhabit this particular model of white Christian womanhood—and some, like Adana, say they don't even know anyone who *does* inhabit it—then what sustains it? The historical construction of white feminine domesticity, passivity, and purity, of the ideal woman who "could mute the very presence of her body," is indeed tenacious, and one site where this discourse is implicitly reproduced is the weekly church worship service. Well into the writing of this chapter, I shared some of my main ideas with Bethany. Her response elucidates the role of the church service in this process. She told me that, growing up in white evangelicalism and attending a Baptist high school, she was often taught that "the essence of what it means to be female is actually 'extremely strong.'" She remembers

> my biology teacher talking about how women had more synapses [than men] in their brains, and that made them smarter. That actually helps them make connections, and their intelligence is multi-dimensional. And also a couple of my high school friends, guys, who were like, "Women are just better Christians than men." So […] when it comes to faith, specifically—or when it comes to emotional intelligence—those things are what makes the world move and work. Women take a leading role in that. But then, they're limited in these ways that's like, this catch-22 we're in. So a lot of the angst that I feel is the limitation—and even being in the church that I'm in right now—the limitation of what it means for women to be in leadership. And the way that limits our imagination of who we are. I think my experiences, be it in my family, my churches, in my schools—a lot of Christian schools—actually gave me a very high view of what it means to be female, but it was just like, "But we don't have space for that. Because we have a lot of space for male-ness."

Bethany points out that in white evangelical culture, women receive incompatible messages: they are lauded for being strong, "emotionally intelligent," and "naturally" spiritual, yet the church itself does not grant them the latitude or authority to exercise their allegedly superior traits in positions of pastoral leadership. Who can preach, who can bless and administer communion, who can help guide the church as an elder—these are not spaces open to women.

I began this section with my question to Ashley about what she learned from the church service about being a woman. "Not much," she had said. It is not that women do not participate in the worship service. After all, even in the very strict church tradition in which Ashley was raised, women still sing during the worship service alongside men. They are part of the congregation. But women are rarely in literal positions of power—the pulpit, the baptistry, the communion table. Their bodies are more closely regulated than men's in terms of what they can do and where they can go in church. A young woman like Ashley growing up in this context saw that women could not speak aloud during church and that they could not make their bodies visible to and separate from the congregation at large by preaching or leading prayers or administering communion. Even in less conservative white evangelical churches than the ones Ashley grew up attending, men are consistently more visibly and vocally authoritative leaders in the worship service than are women. Consequently, the pattern of womanhood prescribed in the Sunday service is defined in relief to the actions of men. Ashley had absorbed that in church, women were what men were *not*. In church, the prescribed form of Christian womanhood was barely a form—it was simply the negative space around what men could do. "Negative space" is an art and design term for the area that surrounds the subject of a work of art; similarly, the negative space of the worship service surrounds men, men who take on the active, visible, embodied and outspoken roles in the service. Limited to occupying this negative space, "Christian womanhood" appears passive, pliable, silent, disembodied.

Of course, my participants find this form of Christian womanhood totally inadequate to describe themselves and other Christian women in their lives. At the same time, the ideology of the passive, pliable, and disembodied Christian woman plays a part in some women's relationship to their bodies, including their capacity for bodily pleasure (or at least the terms in which they understand it) and the feeling that they are a "threat" to the church. But perhaps most importantly, this form of Christian womanhood can also be a straw woman my participants disavow. By setting themselves up in contrast to that form of Christian womanhood, the women make a claim about what *real* Christian women are. Their disidentification with this figure becomes its own form of religious and gendered subjectivity, as they produce a different form of Christian womanhood by indirectly offering themselves up as evidence for it—they *are* Christian women, after all.

This move might well be enabled by the broader evangelical cultural and theological discourse of individualism and its fusion with American therapeutic culture, in which one's experience of a personal relationship with God is a primary source of piety. But in communal gatherings of churchgoers—in the worship service and elsewhere—women look for other forms of subjecthood within which they can know, improve, and express themselves as Christian women.

The Liturgy

The worship service at Church of the Advent is a far cry from Sunday mornings at most other evangelical churches in the United States. It begins with a cross-bearer holding up an ornate wooden cross on a pole as they walk down the aisle, followed by a procession of ministers in priestly vestments. One pastor swings an incense burner known as a thurible, and the other holds aloft a large Bible. Meanwhile the congregants rise and sing along with several musicians at the front of the church. I glance around; I am sharing my pew with a handful of other white people in their 20s and 30s. Today we are singing an 18th century hymn, "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name," which itself derives from a fourth century Latin hymn. The last words we sing are "While in essence only one/Undivided God we claim Thee/And adoring bend the knee/While we own the mystery." As we conclude, the minister ascends the stage and says, "Blessed be our God." The congregation responds, "Now and forever. Amen." Together, we move into reciting a scripted prayer called a collect, based on words written by Thomas Cranmer in the Book of Common Prayer in 1549. Throughout the worship service, the congregation communally recites multiple prayers and creeds. For the Eucharist (communion), the reverend adorns himself with an embroidered stole.

All of this is markedly different from most white evangelical church worship services (both charismatic and non-charismatic), where the procession; communal recitation of collects, creeds, and confession; lectionary readings; and use of incense or priestly vestments are not only uncommon but one foil against which American evangelicalism historically fashioned itself. Evangelical worship services have been defined by a more informal style, extemporaneous prayer, and little communal recitation (and certainly not of pre-written, extra-biblical collects, creeds, or confession). By contrast, American Christians tend to use the term "liturgical" to describe something like what happens at Advent—a worship service in which the congregation collectively recites prescribed prayers and creeds drawn from long Christian tradition, particularly the Book of Common Prayer. Evangelical Christianity, with its emphasis on belief and the personal relationship with God, has historically repudiated this type of elaborately scripted worship as "hoary tradition, meaningless repetition, useless formality, and extravagant ceremony" (Fagerberg 2015, 455). Liturgy, however, can refer to any "form of public worship" (OED 2017). In this case all religious worship services are liturgical regardless of how elaborate or prescribed their form. Still, "non-liturgical worship," as a rejection of formality, has come to be characteristic of much of American evangelicalism.

And yet liturgical worship has also been making a recent comeback among evangelical Christians. Melani McAlister (2008) presciently describes how, in an effort to "'re-enchant' their own experience," many evangelicals have either joined growing charismatic churches or, in the case of young evangelicals, embraced a "(re)turn to ritual" (883). In the late 2000s into the mid-2010s, headlines in evangelical publications like *Christianity Today* pondered "Why many evangelicals are attracted to that strange thing called liturgy" (Galli 2008) and popular bloggers wrote think pieces along the same lines: "Confessions of a High Church Millennial: Is Liturgy a Fad?" (Parker 2015), "Young Evangelicals Are Getting High"[17] (VanDoodewaard 2013), and "Woman, why are you weeping (when your kid becomes Episcopalian)?" (Peterson 2015). In 2014, evangelical megachurch Willow Creek even incorporated some aspects of Anglican liturgy into its experimental new worship program (Niequist and Carter 2014). In 2017, Dallas megachurch The Village announced it would observe Advent, Epiphany, Lent, and Pentecost, seasons and festivals not typically celebrated in white evangelical churches (Sanders 2017).

How did evangelical Christians arrive at this point? The liturgy has been controversial among Protestant Christians for centuries, sparking ongoing debates revolving around materiality, embodiment, and agency, a legacy that has not unfolded so much as made hairpin turns to attain its current meaning for women in white evangelical churches. These debates about materiality have been inflected by white supremacist and colonialist constructions of race and gender, and the past repudiation of liturgy as well as its more recent popularity in evangelicalism is not removed from these discourses. Meanwhile, the seeming "formlessness" or informality of most white evangelical worship services has not given women in these churches the same opportunities as it has men. For the women in this chapter, the formal liturgy, with all its history entails, invites them into an alternative form of Christian womanhood in which embodiment is embraced and passivity is participatory.

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[17] "High church" is often another way of saying a church's worship service is highly liturgical.

The current meaning and power of the liturgy for women in predominantly white evangelical churches is embedded in the history of the liturgy's place in evangelicalism. By the early 17th century, the Church of England had been established as distinct from the Catholic church, and the Book of Common Prayer was adopted as the foundation of public worship. Around this time some critics of the Church of England objected to the recitation of prescribed prayers. John Milton, one such critic, wrote that "to follow a published text when praying is to submit one's inner spirit to the 'outward dictates of men'" (Keane 2007, 1). For Milton and many other Protestant dissenters from the Church of England, liturgical recitation turned the congregant into a puppet, lacking self-direction or self-governance. It turned what was supposedly immaterial—the soul—into a dependent on a material text. A truly autonomous believer, they held, would pray a "sincere" and "spontaneous" prayer rather than put their faith in a material object.[18] Puritans like Milton were attempting to distinguish between religious practice and religious belief—and privileging the latter (Asad 1993). This binary of practice vs. belief mapped onto a dualistic view of the body vs. the mind or soul, as Mary Keller points out, and in this way "Protestant criticisms of ritual practice coincided with the reflections of Enlightenment philosophers and theologians" (Keller 2002, 57). Privileging "belief" went hand in hand with a "more carefully wrought attitude of detachment toward the flesh" (Griffith 2004, 27).

Milton's lament that "to follow a published text when praying is to submit one's inner spirit to the 'outward dictates of men'" combines Enlightenment dualism and individualism to read liturgical recitation as a form of ventriloquism. By relying on a material object (the Book of Common Prayer) to participate in a collective ritual, the congregant surrenders their will and agential integrity. This philosophy resembles the logic of racialization described by Sianne Ngai as "animatedness," in which the racialized body is compared "to an instrument, porous and pliable, for the vocalization of others" (2005, 97). This logic, of course, has many iterations. For example, the idea that some subjects willingly submitted themselves to control by others would also undergird the acrobatic discourse that rationalized racial slavery in the United States (Hartman 1997; Castronovo 2001; McAlister 2001).

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[18] Of course, this notion "seems to deny that language and its power originate beyond the individual speaker" (Keane 2007, 194).

To Calvinist Christians, especially, the Church of England's reliance on the Book of Common Prayer bordered on "fetishism" or idolatry and smacked of the ritual practices of the native and indigenous people their missionaries were attempting to convert. These missionaries were troubled by what they saw as native people's faulty attribution of agency and desire to material objects, failing to properly distinguish between humans and inanimate things. As Webb Keane (2007) argues, detachment from materiality would come to define human progress for these Protestant reformers, creating a "moral narrative of modernity" that defined which beings have agency. The implications of this discourse would be a hierarchy that placed racialized, gendered, and colonized subjects at the bottom. And for many Protestant dissenters from the Church of England,[19] the liturgy would come to be associated with "the body, the flesh, and the literal" (McDannell 1995, 178; Promey 2014)—which were, again, gendered and racialized.

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[19] While Calvinists were especially hostile toward Anglican ritual worship ceremonies, other Protestants who separated from the Church of England in the 17th and 18th centuries were more ambivalent. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, had high respect for the Anglican liturgy but also great enthusiasm for extemporaneous prayer; in Methodist worship services he distinctively combined the two (Firth 2013; Grosclaude 2017). George Whitefield, Wesley's collaborator, close friend, and a Calvinist Methodist, strongly preferred impromptu prayer to relying on the Book of Common Prayer (Prichard 1991).

Many of the ideas about agency and materiality that led English dissenters to spurn the liturgy so long ago still persist and can be found in the rhetoric of white evangelicals in the U.S. and elsewhere. R. Marie Griffith (1997) observes that women in Aglow Fellowship, a Pentecostal para-church organization, believe that following the liturgy is "misguided," and the spontaneous prayer that is so central to Aglow meetings is thought of as an "anti-ritual" (77). The Colombian evangelicals in Elizabeth Brusco's (1995) study stress that for them prayer is "never *rezando* (reciting)" (21); their churches are unornamented, and they mock their Catholic neighbors for blessing inanimate objects—continuing the long tradition of Protestants disparaging others for their supposed "misattribution of agency, responsibility, and desires to objects" (Keane 2007, 180). In a 2017 op-ed for the *Dallas Morning News*, pastor Ryan Sanders observes that in previous decades, "most evangelical churches eschewed formal liturgies as rote, empty ritual. The emphasis on a personal relationship with God allowed church leaders to focus on free and personalized expressions of prayer and worship."

These ideas also surfaced among my participants, including those who attend liturgical churches like Advent. Both liturgical and evangelical, Advent is a descendant of the established Church of England as well as its dissenters.[20] One Sunday when I was there, Advent's pastor opened up the floor to anyone from the congregation who would like to pray aloud, commenting, "Anglicans sometimes get freaked out by open, extemporaneous prayer time, but we're taking the liturgical leash off." Yet there are also some members of the church who come from much less liturgical backgrounds and who still harbor some ambivalence over the liturgy's value. Alyssa told me that what she likes about the liturgy at her church is that "from the first service I attended, I could be involved in that way. They had everything written out so you could participate." But at the same time, she said, "sometimes I feel like it can just wash over me and I don't think about it as much as I should. And at a metaphysical level, what does it mean to pray something if your heart is not engaged in it?" Alyssa recalled organizing a prayer session for church members following the white nationalist rally in Charlottesville in 2017 and looking to the Book of Common Prayer for guidance. "And there was a prayer in there for peace and justice. And I felt that was useful, to have something to pray that we didn't have to craft on our own." But, she continued, "I wish we could pray extemporaneously more about things that happen that are horrible. Sometimes using language from the past can feel like we're not—the grief is not authentic or something." Andrea experienced similar misgivings when she first came to Advent. Growing up, she was taught that "high church," as in Orthodox Christianity, was "dead religion." "All the rituals, any rote practices, the incense or even having crosses up in church, all that […] was not good and not real Christianity," she said. "So having to say the same prayer every week, and having to respond the same way, everybody's doing it, you're just going through the movements, that made me very uncomfortable, and I was like, My parents would freak out if they knew this was the church I'm coming to."

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[20] The Church of the Advent in Washington, DC, is part of the Anglican Church in North America, a faction begun in 2009 by former Episcopalians (U.S.) and Anglicans (Canada) who objected to what they saw as the growing liberalism of their denominations (including the church's welcoming of gay priests and blessing of gay marriages) and sought to combine conservative evangelical doctrine with sacramental, liturgical worship. Many of the dissenters placed themselves under the oversight of Anglican churches in the global South. Advent, in particular, is part of an ACNA diocese ranging from North Carolina to Maine that was founded by Rwandan missionaries from the Missionary District of the Anglican Church of Rwanda. For more on the relationship between East African Anglicans and American evangelicals, see McAlister 2018.

The notion that liturgical recitation might just be "going through the motions" is, ironically, not unlike charges made against charismatic or more "Spirit-filled" worship, like that in Pentecostal churches in the U.S. and around the world. In general, Pentecostalism is characterized by its emphasis on the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, which is the presence in the world of the Spirit of God. In many Pentecostal churches, this takes the form of miraculous healings and glossolalia, or "speaking in tongues," when the worshipper is almost possessed by the Holy Spirit and speaks in divine languages unintelligible to humans. That the kinship between liturgy and speaking in tongues has been largely erased speaks to the complicated history of race, gender, and worship styles in Protestant Christianity. One dominant historical narrative about Protestant Christianity in the U.S. context has juxtaposed the emotional expressiveness and bodily movement common in Black Protestant churches with the "aesthetic of decency and order" and "gestural and emotional restraint" in white churches (Haldeman 2007,126; see also Williams 2017; J.H. Evans 2014; C. J. Evans 2008; Holmes 2004). As theologian James H. Evans, Jr. writes, "The presence and prominence of the Holy Spirit in African American Christianity has often been cited as the root of the more emotional and energetic aspects of some forms of African American Christian worship" (Evans 2014, 166). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that even more than liturgical recitation, the practice of speaking in tongues has been vulnerable to the gendered and racialized characterization of the body as an "instrument, porous and pliable." Glossolalia and spirit-filled worship more generally, especially by Black Christians, has been figured as "animatedness," evidence of a lack of self-control, autonomy and agency. One such case is identified by Sianne Ngai in her close reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ngai observes how Stowe assigns animatedness to Uncle Tom, whose spiritual fervor as he offers a prayer infused with Scripture is presented as “language from an outside source that ‘drops from his lips’ without conscious volition” (97). Similarly, historian Ann Braude quotes a Union army lieutenant who “concluded that the ‘negro character’ was ‘intuitive, inspirational, religious, and altogether mediumistic,’ implying that blacks share with women the characteristics that made them susceptible to spirits” (2001 [1989], 29).

While, as Braude notes, this particular religious subjectivity was both racialized and feminized as “susceptibility,” Kyla Schuller (2018) argues that in the same period white women were distinguishing themselves from “uncivilized races” through a discourse that Schuller calls “sensorial discipline.” According to Schuller, “sensorial discipline” was the ability to regulate feeling, modulate impressibility, and establish one’s mastery of oneself and therefore one’s civilized status. It is reasonable to say that this discourse lingers in the “gestural and emotional restraint” popularly associated with predominantly white church worship styles. It is also borne out in the experiences of two of my participants. Tara is a Black woman who attends a multiracial (yet still majority white) non-liturgical evangelical church in the DC area. On Sundays at Tara’s church, “I don’t feel compelled to clap, and I never want to clap,” she told me. “And often I feel people are looking at me to lead clapping. Or perform some sort of spirituality […] I don’t perform worship. Worship is very internal for me.”

Tara’s experience in her multiracial, non-liturgical church is not that different from Larissa’s experience in a predominantly white liturgical congregation. The child of a Black military officer, Larissa told me she was raised in “conservative white spaces,” including church. At the time of our second interview, she had been a member at her church for more than a decade and was occasionally invited to sing with the worship team on Sundays when they departed from their typical fare (often ancient English hymns) to try new, upbeat, gospel-inspired songs. She is fairly certain this was because she is Black, which left her feeling like her voice was “filtered.” “I appreciate that they want my literal voice,” she said. “[…] But I also, at the same time, am like, ‘But it’s only because I’m Black.’ And it’s a double-edged sword.” Like Tara, Larissa was confronting racist expectations that she would lend just the right amount of “spirit” to the church’s typically more sedate worship.

From English church dissenters to modern-day evangelicals, there is a strong tradition in American Protestantism of deriding the liturgy for diminishing the worshipper’s spiritual autonomy, especially through the “fetishistic” recitation from the Book of Common Prayer. While it would seem that this compels comparison between liturgical and charismatic worship, the common *juxtaposition* of formal liturgy with charismatic worship styles itself reveals the racial ideology that informs how Christians and others respond to one form of worship over another. It also raises troubling questions about the recent resurgence of liturgical worship among white evangelical Christians in the U.S. when there is a concurrent explosion of Pentecostalism throughout the world, especially in the global South. What motivates some white evangelicals towards, rather than away from, liturgy?

To make things even more complicated, the lineage of many of the worship practices used in Larissa’s predominantly white liturgical church and in other churches like it has been suppressed and forgotten. As Larissa informed me, “In our church context, it’s very contemplative, or at least, makes a lot of connection to contemplative practices. And many of those practices were originated by the desert mothers and fathers who were people of color. But those practices have, in large sense, been whitewashed, because those [white] people had the power and access to write and get published. And own those practices, in a way." Larissa had recently started reading *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, by Barbara Holmes (2004). Holmes observes that because "black church worship is known for its heartfelt, rhythmic, and charismatic character, …contemplative practices remain a subliminal and unexamined aspect of black religious life" (xix). In the book Holmes sets out to rectify this omission, tracing, in Larissa's words, "contemplative practices of Africans in West Africa, through slavery, through the beginnings of the black church, and civil rights movement, and Black Lives Matter movement." As Holmes points out, these communal contemplative practices have been obscured by the "exigencies of struggle, survival, and sustenance" (xv). This last point is especially resonant for Larissa.

> When you think about the history of African Americans generally, not just in the church context, it is overtaken by struggle and not by other realities. And that's something to really consider and be self-reflective of in my own spiritual practice. How much are the practices that I'm so comfortable with because I've just grown up in such a white context, and how much of them, unwittingly, are connected to a deeper connection to my African roots?

Because Larissa was raised attending predominantly white liturgical churches, she has often felt a disconnect with gospel music. When the church worship leader would program gospel music on Sunday and ask for Larissa's help, she often felt caught in a strange irony. But there was also something else: "Something that I'm recognizing is that, the more gospel music I listen to, the more I feel this deep sense of connection to it. It's in my bones somewhere, but it wasn't in my immediate experience. And I'm intrigued by that. I'm really curious about why that is, and how can I cultivate that."

Multiple legacies are alive in the liturgy and in Larissa. To allow the liturgy to shape her, she must first ask questions of it and herself. Which of these legacies is being honored and even reproduced in her church? More than a year passed between the first and second times I interviewed Larissa, and she started off our second conversation by noting that much had changed for her in the intervening time. I asked her how the changes in her life had been reflected in her relationship to church. "Yeah, it feels…" she paused. "…fraught." Then in what seemed to me at first like a change of subject, she went on,

> I've been reflecting a lot on Harriet Tubman, and just in awe of, and wondering, how it is that she was able to re-enter her trauma time and time again to rescue enslaved people. It's just mind-blowing. And wondering how, what compelled her to do that. What sustained her. What were the spiritual practices that sustained her to be able to not go crazy doing that work? Because it wasn't just physically taxing to go all of those miles. It was psychologically taxing, I'm sure, to be haunted by her experience of enslavement. But she was willing and compelled to do it. […]

Only later did I grasp the significance of Harriet Tubman to Larissa's personal experience in her church. She had told me she lacked "Black pastoral care" in her life. The absence of Black spiritual mentorship and support at her church was starting to wear on Larissa after years of her own dedicated involvement, turning what had been a source of wisdom into something more hollow, even traumatic. This was the liturgy's context for her. A couple months after our second interview, I found out she and her family had left the church she had called home for so long.

While the formal liturgy itself is neither inherently inviting nor inherently inhospitable, clearly so much depends on context, on who leads the liturgy, on which historical affects have settled into the bones of its participants. One of the most common themes in my conversations with white women of Advent was the notion that participation in the liturgy unites Christians across time and space, that it provides a sense of the Christian collective. Andrea has come to believe that “there’s value in the history and the tradition, and people all over the world are saying this prayer, or people all over the world are reading this write now, or this prayer was said by the early desert fathers.” Emma also expressed the importance of the collectivity and historicity of the liturgy to her: “I see it as this beautiful prose that’s been purified by the church over centuries. To me, there’s so much more depth in the worship to use those words than to have a worship leader or pastor who’s like, ‘Um, um…’.” She laughed. “And I just feel like it’s so much richer than relying on one person’s expression of worship to God as what leads us through the service.” (Remember that that “one person” is always or usually a man in most white evangelical churches.)

Shannon, who like me was raised in a very conservative evangelical church with few ceremonial elements or communally recited prayers, said that when she and her husband started their search for a church home, “we were not looking out for Anglicanism. But we fell in love with it. And a lot of it has to do with liturgy.” We were in her living room, clutching mugs of tea and speaking quietly so we wouldn’t wake up her baby sleeping upstairs. “Being connected to the faith in such a deep, ancient way has given me chills on multiple occasions in the service,” she went on, “and I just feel like, that’s something I never felt in church growing up.” The liturgy as a collective and historical practice matters to Shannon, literally: it materializes in/as her body.

The liturgy’s collectivity also leads some evangelicals to cast it as a democratizing force in the worship service. At one Advent service I attended, Tommy, the pastor, remarked that “The beauty of liturgy is that it makes possible the participation of everyone in the room." In Ryan Sanders's 2017 op-ed for the *Dallas Morning News,* he quotes a pastor from The Village Church who says, "…we were really drawn to the idea of liturgy being the work of the people. These sorts of things call our people to be more involved and take ownership. It creates less of an atmosphere where you can just come be a spectator." For some churchgoers who were not raised in Christian churches, such as Adana, the repetitious nature of the liturgy can grant them purchase on the worship service. Adana's family is not Christian, but when she was a young woman of color growing up in the South, she often visited the white evangelical churches her friends attended. Years later, her experience at Advent was different. "At the beginning it was definitely, 'What's going on?', but at the same time, because it's the same 'What's going on?' every week, it did actually make it easier," she said. "[…] I feel like over my entire lifetime I've been to a lot of different denominations, but sometimes it's a lot harder to figure out which end is up when there isn't liturgy." Yet even the women who love the church's liturgy understand it is not always inclusive of "everyone in the room," and that it keeps some people from coming into "the room" to begin with. Liturgy "can be inhospitable to people who are not very educated and maybe who don't speak English," Shannon acknowledged to me. "There's a lot of things we could say about the liturgy that makes it not very welcoming."

Among those who do find the liturgy inviting are many of Advent's white women churchgoers. The mass recitation of the liturgy and its purportedly democratizing effect in worship might be particularly appealing to women, but the liturgy is also compelling to the women of Advent for another reason: it does transformative work in their lives, despite—or rather, through—their seeming passivity as vocalizers of it. Through women's participatory "passivity," the materiality of the liturgy recasts white Christian womanhood as a vitally embodied form of subjectivity; furthermore, it does so through a collective form of worship—the corporate worship service itself.

The formative power of the liturgy is both emphasized by Advent leadership and experienced by white women churchgoers. One Sunday at Advent, I listened to a sermon from Jeff Bailey, a guest preacher who serves on the pastoral team for one of Advent's sister congregations. I squirmed when Jeff announced his topic—"Christianity and Citizenship"—but the lesson went in a slightly different direction than I expected. Jeff's main argument was that as a church, we should "allow the liturgy to shape and form us politically […] Otherwise the liturgy of the state will."[21] In urging the congregation to be shaped by the liturgy of the church rather than the "liturgy of the state," he offered the following examples of the latter: Pledging allegiance to the flag is a liturgy, he said. Singing the National Anthem before a baseball game is a liturgy. Eighth graders' pilgrimage to the U.S. capital, to stand at the feet of Abraham Lincoln inside his temple, is a liturgy. Meanwhile, he went on, because Christianity is concerned with a vision of human flourishing, and the liturgy bears witness to that, the liturgy of the church is also inescapably political. He offered the example of the Eucharist—during communion, all people regardless of their background approach the table "in exactly the same posture, bringing nothing apart from outstretched hands to receive." This portion of the liturgy has political, social, and economic implications, Jeff argued, because the table of communion levels hierarchies and brings different people together in the unifying act of breaking bread—an affective posture that should inform how Christians interact with other people beyond their fellow churchgoers. In other words, he seemed to be saying, politics and liturgy are inseparable because liturgy produces (or should produce) the subject in particular relation to other people.

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[21] The word "liturgy" has been traced to the ancient Greek leitourgia, which denoted acts of public service that were required of wealthy Greek citizens (Lewis 1960). In its original sense, then, to speak of the "liturgy of the state" would be redundant. The contrast the preacher made between the liturgy of the church and the liturgy of the state is also rendered somewhat ironic given that the liturgy Advent uses is based on the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, which was prescribed for congregations by the Church of England in the sixteenth century.

A few months later, Advent's worship pastor sent a church-wide email thanking everyone for following the lead of an ASL translator during part of the liturgy the week before. "Because we desire to be generously hospitable," Dan's message read, "we'll also continue to do some liturgy in Spanish. I got the idea from…a former member of Advent. She's remarked that it's nice to be able to learn some liturgy in Spanish, but more importantly, the regular use of Spanish in our liturgy is *formative*, enlarging our conception of the Body of Christ, and reminding us of our neighbors whom Jesus calls us to love as ourselves" (emphasis in original). Dan's concept of liturgy, like Jeff's, might call to mind theories of *habitus*—in particular, Aristotle's theory, more than Bourdieu's. As Saba Mahmood (2012) explains, the Aristotelian notion of habitus referred to "a specific pedagogical process by which a moral character is secured" (135). In this model, prayer, for example, is a "performative act," an act that creates (rather than proceeds from) the character of the supplicant. Egyptian women in the Islamic piety movement understood prayer in this way, as Mahmood details. Similarly, for some of my participants, reciting the liturgy is a pedagogical process. "I think a lot of the pushback to liturgy I always heard growing up was, Oh, it's just rote, it doesn't mean anything," Bethany told me. "And I'm like, Well, my extemporaneous prayers are not necessarily what God wants. And I think when God says, "A broken and contrite heart I will not reject,"[22] a lot of times being given a pathway to that is the best way for me to actually experience contrition." As Bethany sees it, following the path cleared for her in the form of the liturgy is what humbles her, transforming her desires. This approach to liturgy and experience of it is significant because it represents a modest break from recent evangelical Christian history and a return to the premodern Christian understanding of "ritual" as a script "directed at the apt performance of what is prescribed" (Asad 1993, 62). Unlike the modern dichotomous view of self and behavior, i.e., of mind (or heart) and body ("at a metaphysical level, what does it mean to pray something if your heart is not engaged in it?"), this "what's old is new again" approach understands the ritual of liturgical recitation as directing and producing virtuous desires rather than representing them.

Camille grew up Episcopalian, attended an evangelical Presbyterian church in college and eventually made her way to Advent. Our conversation one breezy October evening turned quickly to liturgical worship at the church. Camille's relationship to liturgical recitation has changed over the course of her journey from the liturgical non-evangelical church of her youth to the non-liturgical evangelical church she attended in her 20s to, finally, Advent: a church that is both liturgical and evangelical. "I think as a high school and college student, I was like, Oh, it's just this rote activity that you do and it's not meaningful," she said. But now, looking back at her participation in the liturgy as a teen, when she recited the same prayers and creeds that she says every Sunday at Advent, she said, "It's cool to see how my own heart and mind were being shaped by these things before I could even conceive of what they meant. And so it's been really beautiful to come back."

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[22] Bethany is referencing Psalm 51:17: "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" (NIV).

Despite her lack of intention at the time, Camille believes her heart *was* engaged by the performative act of reciting the prayers and creeds that seemed so meaningless to her teenage self. Bethany had a similar story. When I met Bethany for our interview in her home on a late September evening, she had just put her daughter to bed. We started by talking about her personal history in churches, and I asked her what she liked about the liturgy at Advent. She said she appreciated the "way we do the same things over and over again. With our bodies. Saying the same confession every week." She proceeded to tell me about how, a few years ago, she was involved in a conflict with a family member, "this person who's gone to church their whole life [but who] had a hard time confessing their own sin and their own brokenness. And I remember thinking, I do that every week [during the church liturgy], and I think that has really shaped me. And I would have never told you that, just every week I did it, 'I'm doing this because it's going to help me own my own brokenness.' But I think it actually drives those things down deep if we let it."

According to Bethany and Camille, the pedagogical process of the liturgy formed them even without the deliberate application of themselves to this goal. This concept of the liturgy collapses the mind-body dualism that has prevailed among its critics. In framing the liturgy as formational regardless of intentionality, it also diverges from Aristotle's formulation of habitus, which emphasizes intentionality and discipline. To some degree, it evokes Bourdieu's theory, which is focused on the "unconscious" development of bodily dispositions as a result of social structure (Mahmood 2012). Even when they do not approach the liturgy pedagogically, even when they have not deliberately sought to be transformed by it, Camille and Bethany understand that their participation in it still produces them as subjects. Because the liturgy is imbued with the power of God, they imply, their own "will" becomes a product of the simple acts of speaking aloud certain prayers or creeds, lifting up hands and consuming the bread and wine of communion, an act in which their bodies are incorporated into the body of Christ. In this way, they embrace the idea of their bodies as instruments, as pliable by "external" forces. This process is both passive and participatory. The power of the liturgy to develop and transform these women derives not simply from the words of the liturgy or the history and social context that brought it to their lips. They speak the words, they participate in the sacraments—with or without intentionality—and God transforms them as subjects. The place and power of God in the process of self-cultivation for religious women like Bethany and Camille is crucial; for them, the key to the process of "self"-formation is that it is not purely a result of their own practice. While the liturgy invites them to cultivate their dispositions and desires through participation in it, the driver of this process of transformation is ultimately not the self but God. The grace of God shapes these women even, to borrow from Judith Butler, in their "failure to repeat" those liturgical practices, from the moves of the Sunday worship service to the practice of devotion in the mundane everyday, as Camille reminded me: "I think when we talk about liturgies and talk about forming these habits, I think the grace to not follow through on those things is really important. Those things shape and form us, absolutely. But I also think that the grace that comes when we don't follow through on those habits also forms us. And so it's really important. I don't think that one should be mentioned without the other." What Camille describes is the power of God's grace to transform the subject even in her passivity and "failure."

On the surface, Camille's and Bethany's participation in the liturgy does not look different from men's participation in it, or from its historical practice. It hardly seems like they are finding new subjective forms in their liturgical recitation. Yet the meaning and power the liturgy holds for them is different than it is for men precisely because they are white women—that is, because of the form of white Christian womanhood prescribed in the traditional white evangelical church service and in white evangelical culture more broadly. Bethany had said she appreciated the liturgy because of the "way we do the same things over and over again. With our bodies." While the form of Christian womanhood the church worship service offers women is symbolically disembodied, the liturgy emphasizes the body and its senses (through bread, wine, posture, movement, incense, and words recited from a book and spoken communally[23]). One reason my participants might find the liturgy so meaningful, then, is that its overt materiality affords them bodily affirmatio, in contrast to the form of white Christian womanhood prescribed in most white evangelical churches. Another reason might be that it actually transfigures one of the hallmarks of white Christian womanhood into an affirmation of the body's importance to God: In the liturgy, passivity and materiality come together into a revised form of Christian womanhood that actually relies on embodiment for spiritual transformation. As I described, a major part of Camille's and Bethany's experiences with the liturgy is their perceived passivity, their pliable bodies that become instruments of God through their participation in the liturgy as well as their occasional *failure* to participate in liturgical practice. The very subjectivity that the Church of England's dissenters (and white supremacist and colonialist ideology) labelled "void of agency" allows these women to be formed by God. The perceived passivity in liturgical practice converts one of the primary qualities of the form of white Christian womanhood suggested in most evangelical worship services into a reclamation of the body and its inseparability from our subjectivities, as key to God's presence in our lives.

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[23] After all, language is material, corporeal, and embodied (Chen 2012).

I find further evidence for this in a March 2017 article in the National Catholic Register. In "How Eucharistic Faith Aided Recovery of My Eating Disorder," Emily Stimpson Chapman chronicles the connection between her religious journey and her struggle with an eating disorder when she was in her early 20s. While Chapman contrasts Catholicism's approach to communion and its doctrine of transubstantiation (the idea that the bread and wine transform into the literal body and blood of Jesus) with that of most Protestant churches, we can infer a broader distinction in her essay between liturgical and non-liturgical worship. Chapman is worth quoting at length:

> In college, I'd fallen away from the Catholic faith (a faith I'd never really understood to begin with) and fallen in with a group of Protestants. [To them,] matter was just matter, never graced, never a means of God pouring out his life to us. …In short, the ideas my Protestant friends embraced couldn't thwart my eating disorder. …[Their theology] didn't challenge all the wrong ideas I had about my body and the universe. Nor, without the sacraments, could it connect me to the grace I needed to heal. All it could do was make me feel guilty for abusing my body—something obviously not pleasing to God. …The more Eucharistic my faith became, however, the more my vision changed. I started seeing how much God delighted in matter: He made it, he sustained it in being, and he used it to give his life to us. …That, in turn, helped change how I saw my body…I started seeing my body—not just my soul—as the image of God.

Chapman's struggle was not just with the fact of her embodiment, but with her embodiment as a woman. She notes earlier in the essay that before she returned to her Catholic faith, she sought to erase her "feminine form," repulsed by her body's curves.

But Chapman's participation in material sacraments changed her relationship to her own materiality. Transubstantiation aside, the liturgy, with its material sacraments, clearly can have powerful implications for those who participate in it—especially white women. From the discursive production of white Christian femininity to the even longer history of racialized and gendered discourse around the liturgy itself, whiteness is inextricable from the process by which the liturgy grants some women a more welcome form of Christian womanhood than the traditional evangelical worship service. For these women, the liturgy offers a pathway to embracing their embodiment, cultivating their desires, and participating in the social dramatization of the gospel.

Earlier I noted Andrea's initial discomfort with the liturgical worship style at her church, coming as she had from a Protestant Christian tradition that disparages liturgy for simply going through the motions. She told me that her discomfort evaporated, however, when she attended an event where the speaker described the liturgy "like you are going to a play and everybody is playing their parts and retelling the grand story. So the call and response, the up and down, this prayer and that prayer, is, you're just repeating the story that's been told for centuries. And you're just actively playing a role in it. And that just stood out very beautifully to me. And I kind of came to peace with what it is as an act of participation and retelling of a story." Andrea described her participation in the liturgy—moving "up and down," repeating recited prayers—as playing an active role in the ongoing production of the Christian project. Here, alleged "passivity" is rendered as active participation in redemption. This retelling, like the stories in Rachel Held Evans's *Inspired*, gives Andrea a chance to place herself in this narrative—in the communal worship service. For Andrea, the liturgy is midrashic. It makes space for her. Through the act of bodily participation in the church worship service, Andrea stitches herself into a "grand story" of the faith in a present, active, corporeal form of Christian subjectivity.

The Enneagram

The Enneagram is a personality typology whose origins are unclear—it has been attributed to Sufi oral tradition, an Armenian mystic, a Bolivian philosopher and Jesuit priests, among other groups—but in its current iteration gained widespread popularity among white American evangelicals in the 2010s. Myriad headlines on evangelical sites attest to the growing interest in the Enneagram: "What All Christians Need to Know About the Enneagram" (Relevant magazine, September 2017); "What is the 'Enneagram,' and why are Christians suddenly so enamored by it?" (Religion News Service, September 2017); "An Evangelical's Guide to the Enneagram" (Christianity Today, October 2016), to name just a few. In 2016, the evangelical InterVarsity Press published Ian Morgan Cron and Suzann Stabile's *The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery*, a bestseller that quickly became a foundational Enneagram text for many evangelicals and spawned an accompanying podcast that ran for two years.

I was first introduced to the Enneagram in 2013 by a friend who attends a nondenominational evangelical church. Within a few years, I had read *The Road Back to You* and was intimately familiar with all nine personality types and their descriptions. Unlike personality inventories like the Myers-Briggs test, the Enneagram is not organized according to how people process information or social interactions. Instead, the Enneagram classifies personalities according to primary drives and desires, what psychologist Andrew M. Bland calls "character orientations" (2010) that are understood as dominant for a person with the respective type. For example, according to the

Enneagram Institute, Type Nine (known as the Peacemaker) is driven by the desire for inner stability and the fear of loss or separation. The Enneagram Two, the Helper, is driven by the need to be needed; Type Three, the Achiever or Performer, by the need to be successful; and Type Four, the Individualist or Romantic, by the need to be special (Cron and Stabile 2016). Other Enneagram types are Type One, the Reformer (driven by the desire to be good); Type Five, the Investigator (the desire to be competent), Type Six, the Loyalist (the desire for security), Type Seven, the Enthusiast or Epicure (the desire to be satisfied, or the fear of being deprived), and Type Eight, the Challenger (the desire to be in control).

Even before I began my fieldwork for this project, I noticed that my Instagram and Facebook feeds had become awash in Enneagram-related content, primarily from women who attend predominantly white evangelical Christian churches. Multiple women I follow shared a completed "this or that" quiz in their Instagram stories called "Just My Enneatype" that was based on their "number" (Enneagram-shorthand for which of the nine personality types an individual has). One woman posted about a monthly Enneagram workshop she was attending. Some composed lengthy posts on Facebook about the importance of the Enneagram to them, including one woman who posted a video on Facebook about an upcoming seminar she was hosting for women at her church entitled "The Enneagram: Your God-Given Bent." In the video she asks, "What are your core motivators? What are your core fears?... [The Enneagram]'s been very eye-opening for me personally….It allows you to take ownership over yourself and be self-aware." The Enneagram also came up in almost half of my interviews, my participants often broaching the subject themselves.

A Nov. 26, 2019 think piece from the Medium.com publication Forge surveys the Enneagram explosion in evangelicalism and argues that its popularity is likely due to its message of "self-acceptance," an inroad of American therapeutic culture into evangelicalism by way of Millennials. Because conservative Christianity preaches the total sinfulness of humans, author Allegra Hobbs explains, the ideology of self-acceptance presents a counter-theology to the fallenness of human nature—and self-acceptance holds particular appeal for young Christians who buy into spiritual-but-not-religious industries like wellness and astrology. In addition, Hobbs argues, the Enneagram's roots in contemplative spiritual practices might attract young people jaded by the megachurch industrial complex and its culture of spectacle.

This last point is the most insightful in the article. Overall, however, Hobbs frames the trend in largely theological terms: the doctrine of sinfulness, or "total depravity," versus self-acceptance. Perhaps the Enneagram does represent a form of counter-theology for young evangelicals, but two contexts for the trend are elided in an interpretation that overly privileges theology: first, the longstanding relationship between American evangelicalism and neoliberalism (and more broadly, racial capitalism); second, the form of white Christian womanhood prescribed in predominantly white evangelical churches. The former is important to acknowledge in any discussion of the Enneagram and subject formation. Attention to the latter reveals why the Enneagram may be resonant for white churchgoing women for a different reason or to a different degree than it is for churchgoing men. Like liturgical worship, the Enneagram offers churchgoing women a form of Christian womanhood different from the one they are expected to occupy in the typical white evangelical church service. It is not just a matter of there being nine different personality types, none morally superior to another, with which women can identify. It is also that the Enneagram frames self-narration as a religious endeavor, in sharp contrast to the self-negation so intrinsic to the passive and pliable form of white Christian womanhood suggested in the worship service. What's more, the self-knowledge and self-description the Enneagram provides is something churchgoing women can and do share with other evangelical Christians. Organized as it is around concepts of drives and desires, the Enneagram presents them with an "appropriate" language through which they can accept, express, and explore their selves and (non-sexual) desires with other members of their church communities. Some white churchgoing women even discover in the Enneagram a heuristic for understanding how the church has contributed to their production as gendered subjects, although whiteness remains nowhere to be found in their accounts—despite its being equally (indeed, inextricably) formative as church.

While some churchgoing women find a revised form of Christian womanhood in the Enneagram, it is inaccurate to suggest as Hobbs does that the Enneagram somehow disrupts white evangelicalism. The Enneagram is a form of therapeutic discourse, which is more of an outgrowth of white American evangelicalism than a departure from it (Moskowitz 2001; Rossinow 1998). Trafficking in the rhetoric of self-acceptance and self-improvement, therapeutic discourse often "supports a wholly privatized notion of individual self-fulfillment" (Foster 2016, 109). This discourse dovetails neatly with the neoliberal gospel of personal responsibility (Foster 2016; Rose 1990). Given the well-documented reciprocity between neoliberal ideology and white American Protestantism, which I call theoliberalism, it should come as no surprise that therapeutic individualism permeated American evangelicalism long before the Enneagram arrived on the scene (Smith and Denton 2005).

Personality typologies have proved a useful tool within neoliberal capitalism, from their introduction following World War II as a strategy to manage the booming labor force (Emre 2017) to today. The Enneagram was a later entry to this genre than other personality typologies like the MBTI, but in the twenty-first century its chief use has been "forming more harmonious and productive workplaces" (Bland 2010:26). Yet personality tests are also understood by the people who take them as a way to make themselves more productive, or more agreeable, or just "better" people. This is overwhelmingly the case with the Enneagram. Its popularity among white evangelical churchgoers differs from its application in corporate settings because of its grassroots circulation, spreading primarily through word-of-mouth and social media, with Instagram accounts like @enneagramandcoffee boasting upwards of 575,000 followers as of early 2020. In cases when it has been institutionalized in church settings in the form of Enneagram classes or church-sponsored workshops, it is often initiated by lay people and led by women.

This does not mean that the Enneagram is not biopolitical or disciplinary. As Majia Nadesan (1997) notes, personality typologies "allow individuals to 'know' themselves" (191). This notion is key to how Foucault defines subjectivity: becoming aware of oneself in terms of an "identity," that is, being categorized by discourse as a certain kind of subject and becoming attached to that identity. It is how the Enneagram functions in the accounts of my participants and, frankly, in my own life as well. Despite understanding the Enneagram's status as pseudoscience and its biopolitical effects, I have come to think of myself and others in the Enneagram's terms. I identify as an Enneagram Four, the Individualist, also known as the Romantic. After someone else shares their type with me, I find myself expecting certain behaviors from them or explaining their behavior according to the type description. When I am around other people who know the Enneagram well (almost always Christians), I tend to pepper my conversation with comments like "I'm a [type] Four, so…" At one point during my interview with Shelly, she was saying, "My personality is, I'm like, no conflict, I'm not going to question—" when I jumped in: "Are you a Nine on the Enneagram?" (Shelly laughed and confirmed that she is.)

As we can see, this process of identification produces subjects by shaping self-knowledge and behavior. During my interview with Andrea, I asked how she would describe the roles she sees herself performing at church, work, and in other parts of her life. "So I'm a recent Enneagram convert," she began. We were in her DC apartment, her neighbor's cat padding his way across the sofa to bask in late summer light from her large window. "It's been revolutionary for me in terms of what it means for my life. [...] I'm just on an Enneagram kick. I'm reading it, I'm listening to podcasts, I'm making other people take it [the test]. I'm listening to songs about it, everything." She went on to tell me that learning about her Enneagram type had motivated her to move out of her apartment, start a new job, and look into getting her very own cat. "There's a boldness that comes with knowing how you function, and this is why you don't function well, because of these things," she said. "So do something about it." Like the confessional technology described by Foucault, the Enneagram "provides the individual with a system of statements, a vocabulary, for knowing him or herself' (Nadesan 206)—and for improving herself.

As a pedagogy of the self, the Enneagram differs from contemporary personality tests in that it explicitly addresses morality. My conversations with Christians who are particularly well-versed in the Enneagram often eventually wind their way to words like "growth," "stress," "health," and "unhealth"—terms used by psychologists who founded the Enneagram Institute to describe what different types are like at their best, average, or worst. This aspect of the Enneagram is also why some of my participants find it especially meaningful. "As Christians, we believe in the process of sanctification," Adana told me. "And if you can articulate a framework and set of tools to help you understand, 'Here's what I'm like when I'm in the depths of my sin, and here's what I can be like when I'm looking toward God,' I think that's a helpful rubric." Similarly, Bethany told me that the Enneagram is valuable to her for recognizing both "the good and the bad of those parts of who I am." Even when Enneagram-related content is not explicitly Christian or moral, it is still prescriptive. Andrea told me she is a type Two, the Helper. According to prominent sources like the Enneagram Institute and *The Road Back to You*, one problem for Helpers like Andrea is that they have difficulty acknowledging their own needs. It was this recognition that spurred her to reassess her entire life situation, get a new job, and move to a new apartment. As an Enneagram adherent, Andrea both identified with the typology and "disciplined" herself accordingly.

In addition to providing a pedagogy of the self, the Enneagram also offers a particular epistemology of the self. My participants frequently attributed their feelings about women's position in church to their "true self," i.e., their Enneagram type, and multiple women credited their Enneagram type with their attitudes towards spiritual "headship" of husbands in marriage. Shannon, for example, told me that when she and her husband were newly married, she was frustrated that he wasn't more of the "spiritual leader" of their household. In their relationship, the "typical roles that you would think of in a traditional Christian home have almost been reversed…I, for the longest time, have been the spiritual leader just because I had more background in it, I had more experience in faith." We were sitting on her living room sofa, speaking in hushed tones to avoid waking her baby sleeping upstairs. "At first," she said softly, "I kind of wasn't okay with that, because I was just looking at what I had been socialized to believe was how you should be in a marriage, especially a Christian marriage." She took a breath. "And I think this is another area where personality type comes into play. My personality is just more assertive and leader oriented, and his is more—I don't know if you know the Enneagram at all, he's a Six and I'm a Seven." Enneagram Sixes, the Loyalists, are described by the Enneagram Institute as cautious, often unsure of themselves, while Enneagram Sevens, Enthusiasts, are bold and optimistic. For Shannon, the Enneagram not only explains the difference between her marriage and the complementarian model of men's spiritual leadership, but it also *ratifies* it.

Other women referred to the Enneagram to explain their feelings about women's roles in the church. A recent seminary graduate, Samantha told me that she thinks women should be able to preach and serve on pastoral teams in churches, but that she is more hesitant about women being head pastors of a congregation—but, she said, this is due less to what the Bible says about church leadership and gender and more to the sexism of the culture at large. Much later, in the final recorded minutes of our interview, I asked Sam about her Enneagram type and she again brought up her views on women in church leadership. “I’m a Six,” she said. “Which makes sense as to why I’m probably like, ‘Women shouldn’t be head pastors because it’s a little dangerous.’ I’m like, worse-case scenario: how do I get out of this room?”

Bethany is an Enneagram Six who comes down on the other side of the issue from Sam. She was describing to me how formative the Enneagram has been for her when she brought up her relationship to authority, which is especially pertinent for Enneagram Sixes. In *The Road Back to You,* Cron and Stabile describe two kinds of Sixes who manage their anxiety and need for security differently: phobic Sixes are very loyal to authority figures, while counterphobic Sixes are “wary of authority figures” (195). Having long struggled with her evangelical congregation’s proscription of women’s ordination, Bethany told me, “My relationships with authority have always been pretty fraught. Or I’ve just arranged my life where I don’t really have to deal with a lot of them. So I’m not actually a good church member, sometimes, in that way.” Bethany locates one source of the conflict she has experienced with her pastors in her own personality type. At the same time, to my ears her comment that this tendency makes her a bad church member was layered with wryness rather than self-flagellation or self-discipline.

In a different interview about three weeks earlier, I had found myself turning to the Enneagram to explain Shelly’s sentiments. Shelly and I met at a coffee shop on a Saturday morning, where, over the clinking of cups in saucers and the buzz of nearby chatter, we spoke about women’s roles in her church. “I feel good about how we do things at our church,” she said. “It doesn’t rub me the wrong way, I don’t feel like we’re [women] being slighted in any way.” However, she added, she does not have a problem with women being church pastors, but her personality shies away from conflict and questioning the status quo. This is when I jumped in to ask if she was an Enneagram Nine, the Peacemaker. “Yeah, I’m a total Nine,” she acknowledged. “And I think that probably plays into some of that. I have friends who would probably have very specific opinions about women in the church, but to me I’ve never had any type of conflict with that or have never had a personal experience with it where someone was questioning it or upset about it. So I’ve never really given it much thought, but I just had never really had to reflect on it.”

In cases like this, the Enneagram turns a collective concern—women’s positions in church—into a matter of individual personality. Shannon, Bethany, Sam, and Shelly all rely on the notion of an inherent, fixed, and God-given identity, their Enneagram type,[24] to explain their feelings and behavior, including about women’s position in church. This circumvents the need for theological or social argument about controversial church issues and to some degree abdicates the women of responsibility for their attitudes about those issues. In this respect, the Enneagram functions like other personality typologies and forms of therapeutic discourse that obscure social relations of power by presenting an atomizing and ahistorical view of the self (Nadesan 1997). Like the rhetoric of “spiritual gifts” that I explore in Chapter 1, this particular use of the Enneagram is an example of theoliberalism at work. As I explain in that chapter, some women’s faith in the church as a neutral space where labor will be divided fairly according to each person’s spiritual gifts resembles neoliberalism’s concept of the free labor market as a meritocracy where the best jobs go to the most skilled laborers. In both the women's assertions and neoliberal ideology, the social relations that determine who are considered "skilled" laborers or "gifted" church members disappear from the conversation. Similarly, the autonomous "true self" in therapeutic discourse like the Enneagram overwhelms any concept of the historical and social power relations that shape the self as the source of one's actions, habits, and orientations (Nadesan 1997). This is clearly one way that churchgoing women understand it.

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[24] While this interpretation is common among evangelical Christians, it is not necessarily representative of how counselors and psychologists describe the Enneagram. Psychologist Andrew Bland refers to Enneagram types as fluid “character orientations” (2010).

That personality typologies participate in this discourse—of the self-contained, self-directing individual subject—is certainly true, but it is also not exactly how all my participants understand or relate to the Enneagram. In both my interviews and in casual conversations with Enneagram buffs who attend evangelical churches, it was not uncommon for someone to mention that women raised in white evangelical churches are disproportionately Twos or Nines (Helpers or Peacemakers, respectively). According to the Enneagram Institute, Helpers are "friendly, generous, and self-sacrificing, but can also be sentimental, flattering, and people-pleasing." Peacemakers are "accepting, trusting, and stable"; they can "also be too willing to go along with others to keep the peace." Of all the Enneagram types, the sentimentality, self-sacrifice, and people-pleasing qualities of the Helper and the go-along-to-get-along quality of the Peacemaker perhaps most resemble the ideal subject of white Christian womanhood—and this did not go unremarked upon by my participants. Some women told me they think other churchgoing women tend to "mistype" as Twos or Nines—that is, as women answer test questions or read type descriptions, they may find themselves responding aspirationally, so to speak, but not in recognition of their *true* type. Erica is an Enneagram Seven (the Enthusiast), but, she said, “I feel like every time the discussion about Enneagrams comes up in a group of women, more than half of them are like, ‘I’m a Nine.’” I agreed with Erica, nodding: “A Two or a Nine.” “Right!” Erica said. “And I don’t—I think *some* of them are genuinely Twos or Nines.” Erica thinks that some women identify or test as these types because that is who they believe they are supposed to be.

While acknowledging the religio-social context in which church women come to know themselves, this “mistyping” trope is still based on a divide between the internal “true self” and external social pressures, a form of the repressive hypothesis. But not everyone I spoke with explained the gendered prevalence of Helpers and Peacemakers as a result of mistyping. After Nora took an online Enneagram test, she said, her results “were definitely a Nine, but next to it was the Two. And my friend was like, ‘That’s because you’re a woman raised in the church.’” Hums of agreement rose up to meet this statement. We were in Lacie’s studio apartment near downtown Birmingham, Nora, myself, Lacie, Elise, and Katelyn. “That’s it,” Nora went on. “You’re going to be kind of submissive and you’re going to be a servant heart—and not that there’s anything wrong with those people, but I feel as women grown up in the church, this is what we are conditioned to become.” Unlike in therapeutic discourse, in Nora’s formulation, the divide between the self and the social is attenuated. She and the other women at Lacie’s place that evening understand their Enneagram types—their dispositions, desires, and drives—as produced at least in part by their experiences in church. They are not true, inherent, God-given essences, but rather the measure of the effects of social relations of power on women’s subject formation. In other words, their assumed Enneagram type reveals the conditions of their own production as women within their religious context.

These women's take on the Enneagram as a function of their status as gendered subjects of the church complicates the therapeutic (neoliberal, individualistic) discourse of personality typologies. In effect, it reverses the etiology of personhood from "self as source" to "self as product." The self as produced by…what, exactly? My white women participants who interpret the Enneagram this way focused on the role of the church, not other contexts, in producing them as gendered subjects. This might have had something to do with what they knew about my research topic and the fact that most of my questions were related directly or indirectly to church. But I believe it is also facilitated by their whiteness. For Larissa, who is Black, the Enneagram serves as a heuristic for her formation in/by the church, but also so much more. Over the past few years, Larissa has begun a journey of reckoning with the "over-accommodation of whiteness" in her past. She grew up absorbing lessons from her military dad: "There's a way of being the model minority that you have to be in order to be successful in the military," she said. "So that was transferred to me as 'This is how you operate in the world as a Black person: Minimize your Blackness and amplify your other qualities.'" In more recent years, Larissa has found the Enneagram helpful in the process of embracing her Blackness. Larissa is an Enneagram Four, the Individualist, a type described by the Enneagram Institute as "maintaining their identity by seeing themselves as fundamentally different from others," and learning this about herself has given Larissa cause to question her affinities:

> As I think through my identity, as the Four, I like not being able to be pigeonholed into this certain way of being human, or a woman, or Black. I often prided myself on the things that I do enjoy or did enjoy because it was not typical for someone like me. And I think that that definitely plays into the way I've worked out my identity and thinking, "Oh, I should totally reject that now, because I shouldn't like that." I'm trying to identify with my Black heritage, and

> me liking Bob Dylan feels incongruent with that. […] And I've been wondering, is this something that I really liked, or is it something that I liked because I was being different? Or because I felt like I should like it because of the context that I was in, to fit in, in some way? And I think there's really no way of me fully knowing that. But I think to consider that possibility, and to feel a sense of, "I see how this formed me. And I don't need this to form me anymore." And putting that aside. Or, "I see how this has formed me, and it should continue to form me." And hold onto that. That's hard work. To thank it and send it away. Or to thank it and keep receiving. It's hard to parse those things out.

Wrestling with the source of her inclinations, her very self, Larissa recognizes something that white women have been trained not to see in themselves: a sense of her subjectivity within ongoing histories of race and racism. At her church's retreat a few months before our interview, Larissa went on a run through the woods of West Virginia. As she ran through the pine trees, "[…] it was just this really surreal experience of thinking about all of these ancestors of mine who were probably running in those same woods for a completely different reason. Not for recreation, but for survival and liberation. And in a sense, that's how I view my running, but it's not the same—I don't have the same hounds chasing me in the same way." Larissa is acutely attuned to the broad, ongoing histories and contexts that have contributed to her production. But the nature of the project of white supremacy is that it denies itself. While some of my white participants identified their own dispositions (per the Enneagram or the liturgy) as products of their experiences in church, they have the privilege of living without a perpetual sense of themselves as racial subjects—as white. They live without constantly seeing ghosts.

Even more, their realization that their Enneagram types—i.e., their dispositions, drives, orientations—are related to being churchgoing women is itself implicated in their whiteness. It is implicated in whiteness because of the fantasy of white Christian womanhood that becomes all too real for these women as they see it embodied in themselves, but that is not all. It is also implicated in whiteness in another way, in the ease with which they can recognize themselves as women, as subjects within the very terms of subjectivity. This is an ease of recognition which is not afforded to Black women. In fact, it is easy for white women to remain unaware of the degree to which their own identity formation as “women” is and has been predicated on the discursive denial of womanhood—and personhood—to Black and brown women. Here I am drawing on the work of Hortense Spillers, Toni Morrison, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, read together by James Bliss (2016). Bliss argues that Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality describes the discursive production of Black women as un-subjects. Black women, Bliss writes, “appear in the space of subjectivity as its negative condition of possibility…. Blackness is the scandal to categories that makes categorization possible” (740). Bliss refers to Spillers’s insight, from “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words” (2003), that the Black woman inhabits “the paradox of non-being.” Bliss also cites Morrison’s 1971 essay, “What the Black Woman Thinks about Women’s Lib,” in which Morrison observes that the Black woman “had nothing to fall back on: not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality she may very well have invented herself.” Where within discourse do Black women find themselves?

Larissa had said the Enneagram has been a tool for self-epistemology, of discerning when to hold onto the culture that formed her and when to let go. Parsing her subjectivity—the degree to which who she is has been produced by the relations of power in which she resides—is, for her, occasioned by anti-Blackness, which refuses to align Human with Black with Woman. Her desire to confront the sources of her feelings, her orientations, her affects, and re-shape herself accordingly, calls back to Morrison: out of the desolation of this reality, Larissa may invent herself. That is why the work of discerning the genealogy of her feelings and orientations is so important. For her own spiritual health, she makes hard decisions about whether to cultivate or send away the texts and practices (whether that is listening to Bob Dylan or participating in formal church liturgy) whose meaning in her life is fraught. Meanwhile, this process opens up new possibilities, new forms of subjectivity. Remember that earlier I described how Larissa was discovering a "deep sense of connection" to gospel music: "It's in my bones somewhere, but it wasn't in my immediate experience….I'm really curious about why that is, and how can I cultivate that." The hounds of history might still chase her, but in her bones there is another history, that of "invention under impossible conditions" (Bliss 2016).

Unlike Larissa, white women do not have to locate themselves within terms that deny their existence. Rather, they contend with a form of white Christian womanhood that denies desire or the expression of desire. The Enneagram's appeal for white churchgoing women is therefore situated in their reaction to this ideal form of white Christian womanhood even as its whiteness is invisible to many of them. Remember that the Enneagram typology defines each type according to "basic desires" or drives, and none of the types is presented by the typology or its mainstream purveyors as morally superior to any of the others. Being driven by the desire for stability (like Type Nine) is not spiritually "better" than being driven by the need to be successful (Type Three) or the need to be right or good (Type One), for example. One common Christian spin on this is in keeping with something Adana told me: "I think a biblical way of looking at the

Enneagram is that there are these arbitrary nine personality types, but they all reflect a certain facet of God." Of course, as I noted earlier, this does not prevent white evangelicals from tacitly understanding certain types as "more Christian" than others—or perhaps even more commonly, as more "feminine" or "womanly" than others. To this point, we can refer again to Erica's comment that she thinks some women test as Helpers (Type Two) or Peacemakers (Type Nine) because they believe that is who they are supposed to be as Christian women. But it is precisely because of the ideal form of white Christian womanhood that some women find the Enneagram's "intrinsic" impartiality so legitimizing. In white evangelical churches, where self-denial and self-sacrifice is expected more of women than of men (Snarr 2011), the Enneagram reframes self-description—including one's longings, aspirations, inclinations and ambitions—as a spiritual exercise, one performed with other Christians.

When I asked Erica about her reaction to the words "Christian woman," she responded, "There seems to be this cultural-societal picture that is meek and gentle and interested only in homemaking, parenting things, that I have never felt like I necessarily matched up with. And my personality, sometimes I feel like I come on a lot stronger than that image." A few seconds passed and then she asked if I was familiar with the Enneagram. We proceeded to have our aforementioned, excited exchange about Christian women "mistyping" as Enneagram Twos ("Helpers") or Nines ("Peacemakers"), and Erica told me she is Type Seven, the Enthusiast. "Can you think of particular settings where you feel the pressure of that [meek and gentle] expectation?" I asked. "This is silly," she began, "but baby showers and weddings showers and stuff like that. One of the things that comes to mind is, *Now we all have to politely sit on things and wear pretty* *dresses*. And I just feel pretty out of place in those settings. And I often leave—not book club—but organized discussions, whether it's a mixed gender group or with a group of women, feeling like I talk too much. I shared my opinion too much. I gave too much advice." Unlike these spaces and events so obviously tied to the heteronormative family project of white evangelicalism, Erica's book club is a time when she feels completely at ease to be herself. She meets weekly with other women from her church to discuss recent fiction and nonfiction, embodying a different sort of womanhood alongside other Christian women: "We're kind of raucous, and we interrupt each other a lot, we talk very strongly about politics and culture and our opinions about literature, and I love that." Over time, Erica has learned not to be so hard on herself about her assertive outspokenness. But at other points in her life, she has wondered, "Why can't I just shut up?"

When Celia, a friend of mine from college, shared a post on Instagram about how important the Enneagram has become to her, she specifically called out conservative Christian culture. The image for the post featured a quote from Jo Saxton, host of a podcast about the Enneagram and an evangelical Christian author and speaker. "We need women who lead," the quote read. On Saxton's Instagram that same day, the post ran with the following comment: "If you are a woman who leads, let me say this. I see you…. And we celebrate YOU, because we don't want to reduce your God-given identity and purpose to a mold that silences your voice and limits the contributions you bring." Celia took this to heart. In her own Instagram post she wrote that she is a Type Eight (a Challenger), what the Enneagram Institute's website describes as "the Powerful Dominating Type: Self-Confident, Decisive, Willful, and Confrontational." According to the site, the “basic desire” of an Eight is to “be in control of their own life and destiny.” As an Eight, Celia wrote,

> My entire life I have fought this fire that is within me, not understanding why I couldn’t just shut up and not have so many opinions or not be so passionate about things or not just follow the rules and be like all the other southern women around me….We welcome these qualities in men, and try to snuff them out in women…. I have been called too many names to count. Some I laugh at like “Fire Dragon” that the boys in my youth group used to call me…. This year I have stopped apologizing for my opinions, for my loud voice, and for my passion.

As I read Celia’s post, someone else’s words rang in my ears: Erica’s “Why can’t I just shut up?” Celia refers to her “youth group,” a common term in evangelicalism for a church’s ministry for high schoolers. The context Celia chose to highlight in her post was not corporate America, about which it is almost cliché to say that white women are often punished for qualities for which their male colleagues are praised. Rather, she focused on white Southern evangelicalism. And women like Celia who identify as Challengers might just be the least likely to resemble the white Christian woman ideal. Where the ideal is passive, submissive, silent, contained, the Challenger is dominating, assertive and “willful.” *Willful* is an especially important contraposition of the white Christian woman complex. If to be full of will is the opposite of the ideal, the ideal is defined by the absence or meagerness of will. Through the Enneagram, however, Celia found a way to see herself as a Christian woman not in spite of those traits, but because of them. She concluded her Instagram post thusly: “If that offends you, good. Step up and start caring about something that actually matters in this world.”

In the Enneagram, Celia found spiritual legitimacy for her willfulness and desire for control despite the constraints of the form of Christian womanhood that the church worship service implies—“passionless,” passive, pliable, silent, submissive. The

Enneagram appeals to Celia and other white Christian women like her not as a counter-theology, but as an opportunity for self-knowledge, self-narration, and self-improvement that is affirmed within evangelical churches. At the same time, the focus on self-knowledge, self-acceptance and self-improvement in therapeutic discourse like the Enneagram can preclude any sort of collective resistance or organizing on behalf of women in the church. But what it does provide them are revised forms of white Christian womanhood. Within the terms of the Enneagram, at least, women like Celia find reassurance that "there's space for" them in evangelical church culture. It is midrashic, in that way. What Kelly had said in our book club about Rachel Held Evans, midrash, and the Bible applies equally as well to what the Enneagram has come to mean for white Christian women like Celia: "No matter where you fall on the spectrum, there's still space for you in this."

Post-Script

Like what midrash does for canonical Biblical narratives, the Enneagram and the liturgy present alternative methods by which Celia and other women can locate themselves in narratives of Christian womanhood and trace and narrate their own gendered and religious subjectivity in turn. In their accounts of what makes them who they are, however, whiteness ultimately renders them unreliable narrators.

About halfway through my interview with Larissa, after she had talked about her church's forays into gospel music, we got onto the subject of a particular part of the liturgy, the prayer following communion. At this predominantly white Anglican congregation, part of a diocese that was founded by Rwandan missionaries, this prayer comes from the Anglican Church of Kenya: "O God of our ancestors, God of our people, before whose face the human generations pass away; We thank you that in you we are kept safe forever, and that the broken fragments of our history are gathered up in the redeeming act of your dear Son, remembered in this holy sacrament of bread and wine." I told Larissa that I feel some unease as a white person reciting words like these so clearly written in and for a postcolonial African context. "I get that," she said.

> Actually, that might be one of my most favorite prayers, because I feel it in a very real way. …I can see how other white people [reciting the prayer] are removing themselves from a much larger history, and thinking about their own personal history and can resonate with it on a very individual level. Which is another problem of the church in America, is that it is so rooted in individualism, and our sense of communal responsibility and history is so—we've pushed that aside because it's too painful to actually reckon with, and we don't know how to.

While white churchgoing women can conceptualize their place as subjects of "Christian" history and as part of a Christian collective, repeating this prayer requires they forget or are unconscious of their whiteness or any relation to white supremacy. That is, for white people to speak of "the broken fragments of our history" without pause, "history" must narrow and "our" must become "my." We could even call this move midrashic, albeit more sinister than the "midrash" practiced by Rachel Held Evans and the *Inspired* book club. It is an insertion of one person into language that is meant as a refuge for another, an insertion that requires an erasure and gives another meaning to the "negative space" of white Christian womanhood.

Conclusion

I had completed my fieldwork for this dissertation and was deep into the writing process when much of the world shut down in response to COVID-19. As a patchwork of state and local stay-at-home orders went into effect across the country, evangelical churches were making headlines for holding communal worship services, refusing the new COVID-related restrictions. *The Guardian*, April 5, 2020: “The US churches and pastors ignoring ‘stay-at-home’ orders.” Reuters, April 10, 2020: “Some defiant U.S. churches plan Easter services, ignoring public health guidelines.” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2020: “Churches Were Eager to Reopen. Now They Are Confronting Coronavirus Cases.” The fight waged by some white evangelical churches to continue to meet in person, indoors, often without enforcing mask mandates or physical distancing rules, culminated in multiple Supreme Court cases in which church representatives argued that “church is essential,” as one megachurch pastor said in a statement. The pastor was applying the “essential” category *not* to the church as a group of people who make up a particular religious community, but to the corporate worship service, the weekly gathering of people in geographic proximity under the roof of the designated church building.

The degree to which the weekly worship service matters to the production of religious subjects is made clear in these claims—claims that the communal worship service inside the church building is *essential*. Yet many churches also went virtual, hosting online services via Facebook Live, YouTube, and even Zoom. This swell of virtual church services has prompted pundits to speculate that “things will never be the same” for church life following the pandemic (Gjelten 2020). Still, a Pew Research

Center survey conducted in July 2020 found that more than 90 percent of regular church attenders pre-COVID expect that once the pandemic is over, they will return to attending in-person services as often as they did before (Cooperman 2020). As I write, it remains to be seen if and how the swell of virtual church services and streamers changes church overall for the long term. In terms of women's roles in the worship service, however, it seems unlikely that things will change dramatically. I attended several online worship services in the first few months of the pandemic; what I saw suggested that streaming and Zooming does not necessarily change the relations of power in white evangelical churches—who preaches, who leads. When churches meeting online return to in-person rituals—baptisms and communion, especially—will all of this have changed who presides over, who performs, these practices?

"Sunday Morning Matters" has endeavored to show how this weekly worship service and the practices within it become essential to the phenomenological production of white churchgoing women. Drawing links between church worship practices, women's everyday experiences, and the "ongoing and unfinished histories" in which they are embedded and which they embody, the dissertation has revealed how racialized discourses of gender that helped shape the social relations of power in white evangelical churches also shape women churchgoers' structures of consciousness. The evidence of this relationship between ritual worship practices and gendered subject formation calls for a critical reappraisal of the importance of communal worship in white evangelicalism and of "ritual" in American Protestantism more broadly to the construction of identity and difference. By uncovering how women's experiences in church are formative of their experiences elsewhere—of work and labor, sex and marriage, and the spatialization, materialization, knowledge, and discipline of the self—the dissertation sheds light on where and how white evangelical cultural politics are circulated, both “hidden in plain sight” in the church service and, less obviously, harbored in women’s bodies.

Such an approach could easily be overly structuralist and deterministic. Yet throughout the dissertation, I have also elaborated the various ways in which women churchgoers are not circumscribed by the church. Many of my research participants are themselves interested in parsing the various forces that have produced them as women. Some understand their own dispositions, drives, and orientations as a product of their experiences as churchgoing women; many understand parts of who they are as the work of God, a function of the Holy Spirit living within them. Those who seek to discern the difference look to various epistemologies of the self, turning to their own feelings, the Enneagram, or the distinction between “godly” and “Christian” women. They also participate in their own formation through pedagogies of the self (the Enneagram or the participatory passivity of the liturgy) and the performance of the self (the Alabama and Tennessee weddings). By attending to the ways these women conceptualize and narrate their own political subjectivity, “Sunday Morning Matters” redirects the critical conversation around women in religion from a focus on identifying forms of agency and resistance to the conditions by which such women can and do recognize the relations of power in which they reside.

For my white women participants, whiteness tends to obscure itself as a condition by which they can recognize themselves as women. White women churchgoers rarely have to think about the way their own whiteness has produced them and how it constructs “womanhood” in their religious context, unlike my Black participants, who are acutely aware of the “ongoing and unfinished histories” of race and gender that contribute to their formation. This should come as no surprise to scholars of American studies and women’s and gender studies. What is less obvious, however, is what all this has to do with the corporate worship service in white evangelical churches. Looking to Black feminist thought, phenomenology, and anthropological theories of ritual, I have described the white evangelical church worship service as an axis of haunting across time and space. By “spatial” haunting, I mean that women’s experiences in church permeate aspects of their experiences far from the church building. But over time, as well, white supremacy has haunted churches’ gendered worship practices and social relations, which it helped create. This is the phenomenology of church and white womanhood. As the discipline concerned with structures of experience and their relevant conditions, phenomenology provides an apt framework for both the spatial and temporal dimensions of this haunting. Anti-Blackness is very much a relevant condition of gendered church worship practices, including the historical relegation of white women to domestic rather than “public” space of church leadership and pastoral ministry; the notion of women’s submission to male leadership in both the church “family” and the so-called nuclear family; the form (or alleged formlessness) of the worship service, and more. This matters: the discourse of white femininity materializes in white churchgoing women’s bodies, in how they experience dimensions of their lives that are not considered inherently religious, in how they conceive of, perform, and narrate their womanhood.

As I write this conclusion, I sit about six miles from the U.S. Capitol, which was stormed four weeks ago on January 6, 2021, by white nationalists attempting to overturn the presidential election. White evangelicals again made headlines, this time for their coordination of and significant presence at the “Stop the Steal” rally that turned into the siege of the Capitol. *The Atlantic*, January 8: “A Christian Insurrection.” *USA Today*, January 12: “‘No regrets’: Evangelicals and other faith leaders still support Trump after deadly US Capitol attack.” Associated Press, January 28: “Christianity on display at Capitol riot sparks new debate.” Reveal News in partnership with *Rolling Stone*, January 30: “How the Christian Right Helped Foment Insurrection.” While most press photos showed men with bare chests cavorting inside the Capitol complex, women also played an important role in this assault. Sarah Posner writes for Reveal that a Christian right group, “the Jericho March,” which helped “lay the groundwork for the insurrection,” was created by two federal workers, one of whom was Arina Grossu, previously of the Christian-right advocacy group Family Research Council.

As an example of Christian nationalism (Whitehead and Perry 2020), which is also white nationalism, it is difficult to get more paradigmatic than the Jericho March. Most of my research participants, on the other hand, are not Christian nationalists. They are not QAnon believers, and most were not Trump supporters. Yet, I believe, what I have presented in this dissertation can help us understand how the cultural politics of white evangelical Christianity at large are constructed. By paying attention to how “even” liberal or moderate white churchgoing women become gendered subjects through church, we might also learn something about more conservative, white nationalist evangelicals. In fact, as Robert P. Jones (2020) has shown, for white evangelicals the relationship between white Christian identity and holding racist views is dramatically bolstered among more frequent church attenders than less frequent church attenders. The church worship service might be key, then, to understanding the persistent political power of white evangelical Christians even as evangelical demographics have diversified (see Wong 2018). “Sunday Morning Matters” suggests that the white evangelical church service has provided remarkable continuity as a means of political formation for white evangelicals, and that racialized and gendered practices in the worship service are one vital part of that process.

In early summer 2020, I stopped attending online church services. My reluctance to continue was in part a result of my disappointment at the church leadership’s response to the rising tide of Black Lives Matter protests across the United States. On the one hand, many church leaders and members, both men and women, had embarked on a six-week Zoom book club on Jemar Tisby’s *The Color of Compromise*, a historical and sociological review of the many ways white American Christians have been complicit in anti-Blackness. But other messages from church leadership, including during the online worship service, complicated such efforts. A June 3 email letter from the pastors mentioned the “open wound of racial injustice in our society” exposed by the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, yet the same email also urged unity, noting that “Our congregation includes people on the political left and the right, people of color and law enforcement, etc.” Just two weeks earlier, one woman of color who attends the predominantly white church wrote to me in a text message that “there’s been a slow trickle” out of the church of Black and brown people and those who “care deeply about such issues.” What would it have meant for me to stay?

Earlier in my research process, I found myself moving from analysis directed toward an imagined non-evangelical reader to reflection on how my positionality and affective relationship to my participants was inflecting my analysis in the first place. Now

I found myself convicted by what I had learned—compelled not only to reflect on the implications of my positionality and affective relationship to my participants, but also to change that positionality, however so slightly. It meant I could not continue attending the church I had been attending, or churches like it. I had to recognize that what was at stake in this decision was not just the issue of my tacit endorsement of decisions church leadership made with which I disagreed; what was at stake was my own formation as a gendered and political subject of the church. I cannot erase how I have been shaped by church, but I could choose how I continued to participate in it.

As state violence against Black Americans surged to the surface of public discourse, pundits and scholars found occasion to call out the imbrication of white supremacy and white Christianity in this country. "Sunday Morning Matters" highlights how integral white evangelical patriarchy has been to this partnership and that church worship practices have been one of its primary mechanisms. It contributes an answer to the question of how white churchgoing women become who they are, and the role white supremacy plays in this process, through close ethnographic attention to how white Christian womanhood is constructed in the patriarchal structure of the church worship service. It also raises theoretical and methodological questions about the capacity of critical theories of power and subjectivity to address spiritual subject formation, including whether or not secular humanism has too narrowly defined the types of forces to which we may be subject(s).

Future research might pursue these questions and others more comprehensively, including hammering out the methodological fine points of how to describe and analyze claims of divine intervention, so to speak, as well as the philosophical ramifications of taking the spiritual more seriously as a source of subjectivity. At another level, one limitation of focusing on patriarchal church worship practices is that I have devoted less time than I would like to the relationships between and among churchgoing women. There is certainly more to be said about what in the church service works for some women and not others and how women discuss, debate, negotiate, and resolve these differences among themselves. For example, Leah told me about a young woman new to her conservative congregation who "has really wanted to kickstart this, like, 'What are our next moves for equality?'" Leah then found herself in the odd position of moderating this young woman's ambitions.

> In talking with her, I really am mindful of the fact that so many women in this congregation don't want to be "liberated." And so that's where it gets really complicated. And that's where I start, sometimes, feeling like I get stuck in a—what's next, right? Because in this kind of community, where so many women feel just fine with how things are happening, […] and they have built a life for themselves within the parameters of the conservative tradition and feel that we've moved far enough in terms of "Now women can do all these things"… that's where I get stuck. So I want more, but I also want it to happen in a way that is best for all.

Again, in this dissertation I have not attempted to ascertain churchgoing women's degrees of "freedom" or "agency"; Saba Mahmood has written what I consider the critical text on these concepts and the Western discourses that have defined them. Neither is this dissertation intended to be a simplistic argument for women's "inclusion" (see Ahmed 2012). Rather, I have argued that practices in the white evangelical church worship service both represent and perform social relations of power that produce gendered and racialized subjects. This relation of power is not lost on even some of the youngest women in these churches. During my conversation with Leah, who has an advanced degree in religion, I asked her if she had read Mahmood's *Politics of Piety*. She had, and we talked about it for a few minutes before moving on to other topics. A half hour later, Mahmood came up again, this time in the course of another of Leah's church stories. "So, a young woman recently—she's actually pretty young—she asked her dad, a friend of mine, why men are more important than women," Leah said. "And he was like, 'What are you talking about? They're not, they're not.' And she said, 'Well, at church they are.' And so that made him really question whether they should leave." This got Leah thinking about her relationship with her own young daughter in the context of church. "And I thought about how I'm going to handle that when—like, what are we going to do when we get to that point? Because I know how I work through all this. But how do you explain Mahmood to your daughter?"

Church never *explained* to Leah's friend's daughter that men are more important than women. Very few evangelicals would even agree with that statement. Yet something about the worship service left the girl with that impression. The gendered worship practices in her church, like the churches to which my participants belong, relay the micropolitics of white American evangelicalism, shaping the consciousness of churchgoers at a deep level. These practices are tangled up in white supremacist, colonialist, and capitalist ideology, such that church as white evangelicals know it came into being through these discourses. The cozy relationship between white supremacy and white evangelicalism is therefore not simply a by-product of evangelical "individualism" or the "personal relationship" with God, as some scholars have suggested. It is also sustained by gendered relations of power, including worship practices, in white evangelical churches. To confront more visible white evangelical politics (such as white nationalist insurrections), and for white evangelicalism to truly reckon with its history, would require a transformation of church itself.

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