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Women's Perceptions of Leadership Roles within a Southern Baptist Congregation

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WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP ROLES WITHIN
A SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONGREGATION

by

TINA COLVIN HOOK

(Under the Direction of William L. Smith)

ABSTRACT

Particular biblical scriptures are used to justify the Southern Baptist Convention's position on leadership, including female ordination. The author uses interviews to examine how women within a Southern Baptist congregation in Southeast Georgia assign meaning to leadership roles and understand particular biblical scripture. The interviews revealed (1) knowledge gaps between the women's stated beliefs and their basic knowledge of their faith, and (2) contradictions between their views and their practices. The interviewees rationalized these gaps and contradictions using explanations of cultural memes and religious male hegemony. The respondents defined leadership in various ways, yet few recognized the power and authority involved in leadership roles.

INDEX WORDS: Southern Baptist women, Ordination of women, Leadership, Gender equality, Knowledge gap, Religious male hegemony, Cultural memes,

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Jeff Hook, and to my children, Chase and Renz Sewell. Without their love, encouragement, patience and support, I would not have accomplished this thesis.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States. It is a powerful voice of religious life in the Southeast and in many other areas of the United States. This religious denomination, however, has not operated without internal disagreements and controversy. Central to many of their disputes is the Convention's refusal to support the ordination of women. One of the major news stories of religious life in the twentieth century was the takeover, or "take back," of the Southern Baptist Convention in the early 1980s by fundamentalists. This "take back" involved efforts to stop a movement by SBC women to ordain women as ministers and leaders of the church.

In 1982, at a *Women in Ministry* dinner sponsored by the Women's Missionary Union, a new organization was formed to carry on the fight for greater gender equality among Southern Baptists (Chaves 1997). This group provided support for "the woman whose call from God defines her vocation as that of minister, or as that of woman in ministry within the SBC, and to encourage and affirm her call to be a servant to God" (Groves 1984:202). In response, at the 1984 annual meeting in Kansas City, the SBC sponsored a strongly worded resolution opposing ordination of women, which passed by a vote of 4,793 to 3,466 (Trull and Trull 2003). This signaled a radical change in SBC attitudes toward women. The resolution declared:

Ordination symbolized spiritual succession to the world task of proclaiming and extending the gospel of Christ and the scriptures teach that women are not in public worship to assume a role of authority over men lest confusion reign in the local church. While Paul commends women and men alike in other roles of ministry and service, he excludes women from pastoral leadership (SBC Resolution 1984).

In addition to denying women the right to be ordained, in many SBC churches, women cannot teach men or boys, cannot chair a mixed-gender committee, stand behind the pulpit, interpret scripture, and lead music (Chaves 1997). Southern Baptist women teach Sunday school for children and other women, organize bible studies, vacation bible schools, church revivals, funerals, weddings, and prepare meals for church functions. They are permitted to nurture their own children in the faith, engage in prayer, attend worship, and fund church events. The duties that are identified as the “woman’s sphere” by the church, are generally duties that fall into traditional feminine categories – nurturing, caring, listening, and performing emotional work (Shaw 2008). Aside from church duties, they are taught, through biblical scripture, that their primary role is in the home; their role is one of submission to their husbands. Church leaders argue that this role is adequate and perhaps even beneficial to women because the role of “devoted mother” has a potential to yield greater rewards in heaven than teaching adults or making financial decisions for the church (Pevey et al. 1996).

Diverse interpretations of the Bible and questions regarding women’s leadership roles, particularly their right to be ordained, have caused debates and divisions within the SBC for years. Some believe that by denying women the right to be ordained, the church is denying them access to important leadership roles. As a result of these debates, the SBC has identified the role of women within the church and home and the positions of leadership open to them. By following these biblical mandates, the church fulfills its divinely appointed tasks. For Southern Baptists, to do otherwise would be to undermine the teaching of scripture (Leonard 2005).

Numerous scriptures are used to define roles for women and men. The most commonly used and broadly interpreted scripture is found in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 of the New Revised Standard Version Bible:

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

This scripture is typically used to explain the order of creation and to reaffirm God's order of authority (Leonard 2005). Southern Baptists believe that God created man first, then woman; consequently, this sequence renders women subordinate to men, and undeserving of authority or leadership over them. They argue that male headship was in the original design of creation. "'The Fall' led to the woman's desire to usurp man's rightful place as ruler and to the man's inclination to 'misuse his rights of rulership'" (Shaw 2008:71). Ordaining women would allow them to have authority over members of the church (including men) and to engage in important decision making processes.

Supporters of women's ordination assert that the biblical text is ambiguous enough to make it intellectually possible to support women's ordination without giving up biblical inerrancy. Galatians 3:28 is used to support their position of equality:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ.

Southern Baptists refute this argument of equality by asserting that the scripture implies equality in Christ, not equal access to positions of authority or leadership (Ammerman 1987). Men and women are equal *spiritually* and both have an equal chance of being saved and going to heaven.

Support for conservatism comes from what members learn at church, the network of social interactions and relationships the church provides, and the way in which ideas and relationships are structured (Ammerman 1987). The pastor is recognized as the authority. He is the shepherd and, he is, of course, male. The symbol for authoritative space is the pulpit and only a man may stand behind it to preach.

Three main beliefs distinguish a conservative denomination from other religious organizations, particularly mainline Protestants. (1) The Bible is infallible; it does not fail in accomplishing its purpose. (2) The Bible is inerrant; it does not contain error, contradictions or inconsistencies for the past, present or future and (3) The Bible should be interpreted literally; the truth is fixed, not symbolic (Barnhart 1986; Ammerman 1987; Chaves 1997; Leonard 2005; Greeley and Hout 2006). Conservatives regard the Old and New Testaments as the divinely inspired Word of God and therefore unswerving and of supreme authority (Chaves 1997).

Although it is well documented how the SBC, the church, and SB men interpret scripture that outlines and defines a woman's role in the home and in the church, less is known about how SB women interpret the same scripture that is used to justify the church's position. What meaning do they assign to leadership? What areas or positions of leadership do SB *women* identify as appropriate?

Religious Authority and Gender Inequality

When it comes to church affairs within the Southern Baptist Convention, women may serve, but they cannot have a position of authority or hold leadership roles entailing ordination. Such a position is reserved for men only (SBC 2008; Ammerman 1987; Barnhart 1986; Leonard 2005) and is justified by scripture (SBC 2008; Cothen 1993;

Schmidt 1989). Denominations endorsing biblical inerrancy argue against female clergy based on a literal interpretation of a select number of biblical passages (Christiano, Swatos, and Kivisto 2002). Women are not to assume a role over men in public worship nor are they to speak from the pulpit or any man's space (Keel 2006).

Women who are excluded from leadership roles within conservative religious denominations are at a disadvantage because they are not allowed access to the power and influence of a leadership role. Women are denied the ability, authority, privilege, and opportunity to influence others in one of the most powerful institutions of cultural socialization (Carli 1999). Particular gender role attitudes are influenced by numerous factors. Life circumstances are one of the primary determinates in how women establish, interpret, and understand gender equality. Employment, family structure, educational level, age, and religious participation help to predict how feminist ideas gain acceptance (Bolzendahi and Myers 2004), yet religious denomination and church attendance tend to be more strongly correlated to gender attitudes than age or education (Brinkerhoff and MacKie 1984).

In order for women to deal with perceived inequalities within the church, they must first identify and then understand them. Different strategies for coping with gender inequalities are used. Some women work to change the religious environment in which they participate while others alter their private responses to the environment (Ozorak 1996). Through interviews, Ozorak found that women use cognitive coping in situations in which they feel unable or unwilling to act. They focus attention on less distressing aspects of their religion – things they like about the religion or on more general problems

that are not tagged as women's issues. Such issues as racism and other forms of discrimination are often perceived as distractions from their own issues (Ozorak 1996).

Downward comparison is another strategy used by women who deal with perceived inequality. To rationalize perceptions of gender inequality, they compare their situation to other situations of inequality, such as unequal wages in the corporate world or gender discrimination in the community. This downward comparison may allow women to accept negative aspects of a particular social situation by recasting or reframing it in a more positive light, in contrast to other social situations (Ozorak 1996). The most popular strategy among the women in Ozorak's study was their appeal to tradition or historical context. Finally, a woman might substitute her own words, images, or interpretations for those offered by her church, such as replacing 'Our Father' with 'Our Being.' They appropriate, reinterpret, and subvert the doctrine of their church in ways that empower them (Pevey 1994).

It is common for religious women to experience ambivalence and contradictions, and to be obscure about their religious beliefs (Winter, Lummis, and Stokes 1994). Behaviors often contradict beliefs. This disjuncture between religious beliefs and reported practices was also found by Pevey et al. (1996). Women in their study defended the church doctrine of wifely submission but admitted that they did not conform to it in their own lives. They chose to ignore the official teaching on submission. Women's individual convictions that the Bible is literally true affect their gender attitudes. Women who take the word of God as symbolic are less sexist than women who adopt a literal interpretation (Peek et al. 1991).

Certain social roles are not only influenced by religious beliefs alone, but also by culture; a culture that says women are inferior to men (Schmidt 1989). Social and cultural variations, such as those arising from geographical differences, are associated with feminism or antifeminism and influence the likelihood that a denomination will grant full equality to women (Chaves 1997). Gender equality, as a goal, does not enjoy equal levels of support in all corners of our society. For example, Chaves found that individuals living in the South and in rural areas are significantly less likely to endorse gender equality. Nearly half of those surveyed agreed with the statement that it is more important for a wife to support her husband's career than have one herself, and that it is better for everyone if a woman takes care of both the home and the family. They disapproved of a married woman working if the husband could support her (Chaves 1997).

Leadership

Northouse (2004) defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. In doing so, the process or transactional event is emphasized over the traits or characteristics of the leader. Leadership involves characteristics of both power (to influence) and authority (given or legitimized by the group to the leader). Influence is defined as the effect, either intended or unintended, of one party (the agent) on another person's (the target's) attitudes, perceptions, behavior, or some combination of these outcomes (Yoder 2001). So how do individuals in society and the institutions and organizations within society define and understand leadership?

Individuals use several approaches to define, conceptualize, and study leadership. These include: the trait approach where personality characteristics of a leader are studied;

the skills approach where the essential competencies of leadership are identified; the style approach where the behavior of the leader is identified; and the context approach where the situation of leadership is examined. The latter approach examines contingencies or the rewards and punishments that are exercised, the goals of the leader, and the power relationship between leader and follower (Lau Chin 2004).

Leadership itself is gendered (Eagly, Makhijani, and Kinsky 1992; Carli 1999), and gendered leadership roles are generally stereotypical. Theories of leadership have focused mainly on stereotypically masculine qualities (Rajan and Krishman 2002). Leadership, as a social construct, is a process that occurs within a context - a context that itself is gendered (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Effective leaders are expected to be assertive, dominant, and autocratic, yet women are expected to be nurturing, compromising, and democratic. As leaders, women often are valued less when they demonstrate feminine traits in their leadership styles. They face a double-bind. This double-bind is experienced when gendered stereotypical expectations contradict leader role expectations (Eagly 2007). All too often, behaviors associated with femininity are rated as negative (Lau Chin 2004). Tears, for instance, signal weakness and nurturing leadership styles are viewed as lacking in substance. Conversely, women are also viewed negatively when they adopt styles and traits characteristic of male leaders. An aggressive and direct man is viewed as forthright and taking charge whereas the same behavior in a woman is viewed as overbearing and angry. Yet, favorable changes have taken place in attitudes toward female leaders in the general public. Those that support women's leadership opportunities also endorse less traditional gender roles (Eagly 2007).

Male God imagery also influences the way women view leadership. Conservatives teach that logically God is the supreme leader and authority, and God is male; therefore, leaders should be male (Daly 1968). Pevey et al. (1996) found that Southern Baptist women perceive God to be male, similar to a father figure or a spirit that possesses masculine characteristics, such as power and authority and protectiveness. Some interviewees in the study reasoned that men make better leaders because others are more likely to obey them, just as followers obey God.

Leadership and Power

Women who are excluded from leadership roles within certain conservative religious denominations are at a disadvantage because they are not allowed the power and entitlement that comes with a leadership role; they are denied the ability, authority, privilege, and opportunity to influence others. The types of power that ministers, priests, and religious leaders possess are social, expert, and legitimate.

Social power (i.e. power over others) has been defined as the potential to influence or control others and/or having control over valued resources or outcomes. Expert power is given to individuals who are perceived to have expertise or knowledge in a specific domain. Legitimate power is the right to exert influence over others; it is given to the leader and recognized and acknowledged by followers (Yoder 2001). Raven (1999) identified legitimate power as a resource that an influencing agent can utilize in changing the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of a group. A person with legitimate power has the right to exert influence over others and command their respect. It derives from a person's external status or position (Carli 1999). Legitimate power is *given* to the leader by the group and acknowledged by all members of the group.

Are all leaders, men and women, considered to have legitimate power simply by the fact that they have been appointed to a position? In the Southern Baptist Convention, *legitimate* power is given exclusively to male leaders and denied to women members. This legitimate power, given and acknowledged by the members of the church, entitles men to interpret scripture, set church doctrine, make judgments and decisions, and influence others.

Carol Gilligan suggests that due to a different way of making moral judgments, women are changing the shape and character of culture. Women employ different logic in making ethical decisions compared to men. For men, the typical logic revolves around the application of abstract moral principles to concrete situations, whereas for women it entails placing a premium on assessing the relational or interpersonal implication of any decision (Gilligan 1988). Women use collaborative styles in leadership and tend to use nurturance more often as a way to engage, communicate, and lead. Collaboration creates a more egalitarian environment (Lau Chin 2004). Will these cultural changes and collaborative styles of leadership one day filter over into religious domains?

Gender Inequality in Religious Doctrine

During the “take back” of the SBC, the primary goal of fundamentalists and the Christian Right was to attack feminist ideas and movements (Carmody and Carmody 1990). The Southern Baptist Convention supported the Christian Right and fundamentalists in their push to advocate and promote a nation based on a literal interpretation of the Bible and faith in God (Hill and Owen 1982; Shupe 1989).

Many early fundamentalist leaders clearly viewed women less as partners and more as a threat, a destructive influence to be silenced and subordinated. Without serious

restraints, they believed women would impede the quest for doctrinal purity, a pursuit that required the work of trustworthy men (Daly 1968). Saint Thomas Aquinas defined women as “something deficient and by chance” (Sochen 1971:81). This contempt for women helps to explain why they cannot become clergy, and why theologians, religious education classes, and marriage manuals highlight the supposedly inferior and passive qualities of women, who should naturally subordinate themselves to men.

The energy behind the continuing debate over feminism is not entirely theological; it lies in that murky area where sincerely held doctrinal beliefs meet unexamined cultural attitudes toward gender (Bendroth 1993; Chaves 1997). For decades, fundamentalists have elevated masculine leadership, depicting women as theologically and morally untrustworthy. Many argue that women are incapable of being rational when their emotions are involved. Some Baptist theologians used an article by Letha Dawson Scanzoni, titled *Women’s Place: Silence of Service* that was published in 1966 as justification for this argument (Cochran 2005). The article drew attention to the inconsistencies within the church. Leaders prevented Scanzoni from teaching a mixed Sunday school class of men and women at the church, but allowed her to lead an all-male group of inmates in bible study. Scanzoni’s claims of inequality and inconsistencies were dismissed as overly feminine emotions.

Chaves (1997) argues that formal rules about women’s ordination and gender equality are judgments influenced by outside sources. The church’s policy on women clergy is an important part of its public identity, one that is a symbolic display of resistance to gender equality rather than a policy intended to regulate the everyday reality of women inside the organization. In other words, formal denominational policy has a

symbolic significance that is not reducible to the pragmatic internal operations of the organization. Resistance to women's ordination also symbolizes a broader resistance to liberalism. Particular dynamics, such as biblical inerrancy, are in place to construct and maintain the church's identity.

For Baptists, the Bible is the absolute truth and God is in total control of the world, including each individual's world; therefore, the Bible is not just to be believed, it is to be lived. Knowing what is right and wrong, what is God's plan and what is not provides structure. Obedience, trust and discipline are the virtues that God rewards (Barnhart 1986). As Ammerman (1993:52) points out, the world that Baptists construct is maintained through a constant application of biblical "mortar." God assigns leadership and headship to the man in the church and home and does not want women to rule men. If the marriage is a Christian marriage that adheres to church doctrine, the husband has all the authority. So in what ways do Southern Baptist (SB) wives submit to their husbands? Barnhart (1986) found that SB women are both powerful and powerless in a variety of ways. In the household, they have the power of persuasion and are often involved with the everyday details of the family. They learn to influence family decision making while still deferring to their husband's authority. For wives who cannot conform to the rules of submission, they suffer silently rather than deviate from the Christian ideal of submission. Abiding by conservative rules for marriage was cited as the way to keep peace at home (Ammerman 1987).

During the anti-feminist period, the religious conservatives used various tactics to recruit new participants to their cause. They realized that strength comes in numbers. Ammerman (1987:147) asserts that the activities and tactics that were used to recruit

others and were most valued were “witnessing to unsaved souls.” To enlist potential participants, they invited them to church, social events, revivals, parties, cookouts, and camps. They tried to convince and persuade others that the path to salvation ran through the institutional church. Emotional appeals, such as threats of hell and fire, were used to convince potential members to be saved, join the church, and fight for moral values and righteous living; the need to defeat the feminists was grave. It was a righteous fight because God ordained it through the church. Feminists claimed that rather than being concerned about saving souls, the Religious Right recruited to further their cause (Ammerman 1987). They blamed the conservatives for continuing the myth that has influenced doctrines and laws. These laws concern women’s status in society and they have contributed to the mind-set of those who continue to grind out biased male-centered ethical theories that discourage women to think for themselves (Daly 1973). Feminists assert that for religious inequalities to be resolved, they must be recognized. Their preconditions, forms, and dynamics must be understood, an alternative must be proposed, and a reality must be reconstructed (Berg 1994).

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This study examined how women within the Parity Baptist Church (PBC) assign meaning and understand biblical scripture that is used to legitimize the church's position regarding leadership roles, particularly about the ordination of women. PBC is located in a rural county in southeast Georgia with an estimated population of 60,000. PBC was chosen because its location within the "bible belt" offers a suitable comparison to other Southern Baptist Churches throughout the nation. PBC is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention; it recognizes and adheres to the stated resolutions and doctrine set forth by the organization. Approximately 1,200 PBC members attend services at least once a week.

Grounded theory informed this project. Grounded theory is a systematic research methodology in social science that emphasizes the generation of theory from data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). It is an inductive approach that utilizes constant and consistent comparative analysis. Symbolic interaction and feminist theories also informed the data analysis and assessment.

Symbolic interaction theory asserts that people create and maintain meaningful worlds. It examines ways social phenomena are created, institutionalized, and made into tradition by people acting on their interactions, interpretation, and knowledge of their social worlds (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Blumer 1969). Understanding the cultural tools people use to make sense of their world illuminates how they construct reality (Swindler 1986) – including their explanations of inequality (Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink 1999). Feminist theory maintains that there is a relationship between gender and

power which permeates all spheres of social life. It recognizes the emotional and inter-dependent dimensions of everyday life. It asserts that gender has a pervasive influence in culture and shapes basic beliefs and values that “cannot be isolated and insulated in social processes” (Gilligan 1982:14).

Personal interviews were conducted with 15 members of an adult Sunday school class at PBC. The purpose of interviewing is to derive interpretations from the talk and thereby assemble the meanings that respondents make of their experiences and social worlds (Rubin and Rubin 1995). The criteria for participant eligibility included any woman 18 years of age or older who is a member of the church. Each participant was given a letter of invitation that identified the thesis topic. The letter described the purpose and importance of the project and assured them that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point without penalty. It explained that no monetary or material compensation would be offered, that pseudonyms would be used for each interviewee, and that their answers would be kept confidential. Each participant was required to sign an interview consent form giving permission to be audiotaped.

Participants were selected through personal acquaintances and contacts. Additional participants were solicited through a snowball sampling method, in which each subject interviewed was asked to suggest additional people for interviewing. The snowball sampling method is based on the idea that members of a particular population, who might be particularly difficult to locate, know one another, and therefore can provide the researcher with additional members of that target population (Singleton and Straits 1999). Because this study used convenience sampling, the ability to accurately represent and generalize to a larger population was limited.

Participants' ages ranged from the mid-twenties to mid-seventies, with the average mean age of 41. Of the fifteen interviewees; ten were married, two were divorced, two were single, and one was widowed. Participants' education level ranged from high school to post graduate school. Of the 15 interviewees, 1 had a high school diploma, 3 had some college, 6 had bachelor degrees, 3 had master degrees, and 2 held doctoral degrees. All of the interviewees, except the two single women, had children ranging in age from infants to mature adults. Two of the participants were homemakers, four were self-employed, and nine were employed in occupations such as nursing, teaching, and sales. All of the participants had been members of the PBC for at least 15 years. Most (14) had been members for at least 40 years.

The individual interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to two hours, but most lasted one-hour and thirty minutes. The interviews were conducted at the interviewee's personal residence or a location that was preferable to the interviewee, such as a local coffeehouse. Each interviewee was asked approximately 27 questions. Open-ended questions were developed to focus attention on the circumstances that influence and shape the emphasis of the study. Follow-up questions were asked when it was necessary to clarify something. Each interviewee was asked to interpret three biblical scriptures that are used by the SBC to define a woman's role in the church. These particular scriptures are also used to justify the church's position on the ordination of women.

The audiotaped interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and coded. Coding allows researchers to be systematic and creative and to identify, develop, and relate concepts (Glaser and Strauss 1967). It also allows the researcher to identify conditions, interactions, consequences, inter-related connections, and/or linkages between concepts.

The transcripts were coded first (open coding) for underlying properties and characteristics that seemed to relate to particular concepts. Codes were based on categories and themes that emerged from the interviews. The categories and themes were then examined for commonalities, differences, and connections to identify regularities in the data and construct meaningful patterns (axial coding). By implementing this technique, dominant themes throughout the text were identified. Once the themes were identified, I was able to determine if the experiences of those interviewed in the south Georgia area tended to follow national trends and patterns that have been documented in existing academic literature on Southern Baptist women. I was also able to evaluate new themes and issues that emerged from the data.

From the data analysis, four major themes emerged: *a knowledge gap, contradictions (and the use of historical and cultural explanations to reconcile those contradictions), male religious hegemony, and cultural memes.*

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

The goal of the interviews was to gain insight into how Southern Baptist women assign meaning and understand biblical scripture that is used to define leadership roles within the church. For women, the SB tradition teaches a doctrine of submission, a doctrine that is justified with particular biblical scriptures. SB women are offered leadership roles, but these roles are marginal or subordinate to senior leadership positions which are held by men. Primary leadership roles, such as preacher and deacon, are reserved exclusively for men. The interviews revealed that (1) knowledge gaps existed between women's stated beliefs and their basic knowledge of their faith, and (2) considerable contradictions existed between their views and their practices. These gaps and contradictions were often reconciled in two ways (1) by explanations of cultural memes –ideas or practices that are generated within subcultures and transmitted by repetition from one generation to another or from one individual to another (Blackmore 1999) and, (2) by explanations of religious male hegemony. The respondents defined leadership in various ways, yet few emphasized the power and/or authority involved in leadership positions.

Knowledge Gaps

A majority of the women interviewed (12 out of 15) had no knowledge or limited knowledge of the church doctrine and/or biblical scripture that is used to justify the church's position on the ordination of women. A gap existed between the women who are familiar with this religious issue and those who were not. Those who lacked information had selective exposure to the issue and were usually not concerned with their

lack of knowledge. When asked “what knowledge or understanding do you have of the Southern Baptist *doctrine* concerning women and equality in relation to leadership roles?” those who lacked knowledge typically responded:

Not a whole lot other than my gut feeling that women in the home should be submissive to their husband. At the same time, a man treats the woman with respect and so she wants to be submissive.

I’ll be honest with you, I didn’t know, or I’m not aware there was any scripture relating to women or leadership roles in the church or in the Bible. I guess that I am not a good Southern Baptist.

Others not only lacked knowledge but misunderstood the doctrine. They based their understanding on personal experience or assumed that past restrictions were no longer relevant:

Being in church, a Baptist Church, to my knowledge, the women are just as equal although there are no women deacons, but in all other leadership roles, they are equal.

I don’t really, um...¹ I would say in this day and time, that...I don’t think women were allowed a long time ago to voice their opinions, but not now.

Probably not, I probably don’t know the doctrine the way I should. I do not. I probably have never sat down and really read the doctrine. I go to the Baptist Church because that is where I was raised.

It is interesting that the women who had extensive knowledge about these issues also had earned at least a master’s degree yet strongly differed in their beliefs. Two of the interviewees sharply disagreed with the church. Mary² was unique among the respondents in flatly rejecting the church doctrine of submission and female subordination. She emphasized the importance of women during the time of Jesus. She explained:

¹ ...indicates an extended pause in the interviewee’s answer.

² Pseudonyms were used for all interviewees.

Well, I have years worth of knowledge. I grew up in church and have always been a member of a Southern Baptist church, so my knowledge is extensive and deep. Yes, In the Baptist faith and message of 2002 - I think it is absolutely horrid...I want to offer my apology about quoting scripture, but if you have read this passage, you know, that says women should be subordinate because they are second in creation and first in sin. So they are taking that Genesis scripture quite literally, yet they didn't say that women were last at the cross and first at the empty tomb – first to recognize Jesus as the savior and son of God. [laughs]³ and the resurrected Jesus choose *women* to appear to first. Only in the 2002 statements was the practice affirmed as tremendously biblical!

In contrast, Anna fully supported the church doctrine:

Well, I don't know which article number it is in the constitution, but I've been serving for 42 years, and we're having a case right now in the state of Georgia where a woman has been ordained in a Southern Baptist Church, and I've been watching as the situation unfolds...and how they have decided to handle that situation. I've never known a woman to be ordained in the SBC. I don't think they should be. This is my first experience with this. Well, you know the Southern Baptist churches are autonomous, each church can make their own decision, and the way the Georgia Southern Baptist Convention has decided to handle this is, they are not going to come down on that church even though many, if not the majority of them, in that institution of leadership don't agree...they have decided to not accept their money in the program. So women can teach, just not preach.

A knowledge gap was also found in the interviewee's ability to identify *biblical scripture* that defines a woman's role in the church or one that is used to support the SB doctrine that a woman cannot be ordained. Regardless of their belief, the interviewees with more education had more knowledge to support their view. Those that had no knowledge often responded with short answers such as:

None that I know of supports that

No, I'm sorry I can't

They probably use one of these that you have⁴

I'm not familiar with any that say that.

³ Brackets are used to indicate nonverbal communication or to clarify a quote.

⁴ This interviewee had seen my copy of the biblical scriptures used by the SBC to justify their position.

Others who lacked knowledge of scripture that defines a woman's role in the church offered limited explanations and related them to other topics:

Not specific, I have studied this before in Sunday school. What I remember, the woman needs to be somewhat in the home...like in church, it's the same - the man is the head. The men are more the preachers.

I don't know because I have not looked into that. I don't know what scriptures that they are basing that on, but I feel like that will change over time.

That talk about only men being ordained as pastors, no I can't. There are many examples of women in the bible being priest or priestess.

I don't know...there is [scripture] about serving – just serving in whatever capacity.

Those who had knowledge of biblical scripture answered with clarity and used specific examples. Of the 15 interviewees, two identified a specific scripture that represented their personal view. It is interesting that the two scriptures cited differ from the ones the SBC uses to support its position and both refer to the role of women in the home rather than in the church. Lydia stated:

In Proverbs 31 – the scripture that talks about the way you should be with your husband also applies to the church, in the New Testament.

Anna explained that because the Bible instructs a woman to be submissive to a man, a position of pastor would negate the necessary position of subordination:

Ephesians 5:24 – as the church submits to Christ, wives should submit to their husbands...it means that a woman has to be submissive to a man...so, if a woman is ordained and is the senior pastor, who is she submissive to? This creates a problem. God instructs that we be submissive.

Mary believed that the church misinterprets scripture through faulty translations and fails to emphasize scripture that would *support* the role of a woman as leader. When I asked her what biblical scripture supported the church's position, she described passages that supported her view instead:

I do not think any [scripture] supports that doctrine... [there are] Many examples of strong women during the time of Jesus... and Paul....So, yes, Eunice and Lois raised Timothy in faith...there are daughters who prophesized, who preached. Lydia held church in her home and she was a business woman...there were women who were described as deacons, although, when it's a man, the translations say 'deacon' and when it's a woman, they say 'servant'. So there is evidence in the New Testament of women being deacons, of women being preachers and of women teaching men.

Contradictions

When asked if they believed in equality between the sexes, a majority of the respondents answered yes. They believed that women and men should have equal opportunities and privileges and that all institutions should endorse and/or advocate equality. Tabitha and Anna both believed that men and women should be treated equally and that all institutions should advocate equality.

Tabitha: Yes, I believe we are equal in all ways...and all institutions, especially in the workforce...it should enforce equality.

Anna: Yes, definitely, women should be treated equally...I think all institutions should, and I think Southern Baptists are realizing that in today's society and how we should support equality.

Yet, when asked if SB women should be allowed to be ordained, Tabitha and Anna contradicted their earlier views on equality. This contradiction supported the church's position. It occurred when equality as an ideology was applied to religious doctrine. Equality was negated when authority and power were considered:

Tabitha: In the Baptist Convention, if that is the Baptist doctrine, if that is how it is written, I do not have a problem with women not being ordained. Women should not have authority over a man because the way that God describes Eve when he created her, is that she would be a helpmate, as well, after the fall, God described that man would always be over the woman.

Anna: No, because ordination puts them in a position to be able to marry others, to be able to do funerals, to lead in ways that I think...I just think there are some things only men should do...in ultimate roles and positions of authority.

A majority of the interviewees (12 out of 15) believed in equality and were consistent in their view. When asked “do you believe women and men should have equal opportunities and privileges, and if so, which institutions should endorse or advocate equality for men and women?” Mary stated:

Yes, absolutely, all of them. The government certainly and the churches, and other religions – other institutionalized religions other than the Christians. And, perhaps claiming that it is God’s way, many of the churches marginalize – no, they don’t – they *depend* on women to do the work but men want to make the decision. And I’m reading some things that that was true in the construction of the New Testament.

When I asked her if women should be allowed to be ordained, she replied:

Absolutely, and in some churches they are. Often then, those churches are thrown out of the SBC. And you do know about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship? A couple of months ago, there was a magazine with five SB ministers on the front of it, it was a Christian magazine, those women were ordained and were telling their stories. The Southern Baptists took the magazine off the rack and put it behind the counter⁵...as if it is pornography....and this is suppose to be the 21st century we are living in.

All the interviewees believed that the Bible as a whole should be interpreted both symbolically and literally. Literal interpretations included examples of biblical events. Interviewees believed that Moses parted the Red Sea, that Moses received the Ten Commandments, that Jesus died on the cross, and that Noah built an ark for the flood. Other literal interpretations included instructions for Christian living that are given through scripture such as honor your mother and father and give your worries to God. Examples of symbolic interpretations included the New Testament parables and various passages from the book of Revelations. It is interesting that two women gave the same example of biblical passages that should *not* be interpreted literally and that contradict the

⁵ Mary is referring to the cover story of the *Gospel Today* magazine, Sept. 2009 issue, in which SB female pastors tell their stories.

SB's position. These passages are from Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3 and are used by the SBC to explain the order of creation and therefore, the role of a woman. Mary explained:

They [SB leaders] will not permit me to believe that there is a creator in connection with evolution but it has to be that way. That God created the individual, Adam and Eve, and that all humans sprang from them up fully grown, like Minerva from the Heaven Jupiter...it is ludicrous. I say, evolution is the way that God creates. I think that Genesis is a beautiful, beautiful, symbolic story that says that however the world was created there was a creator. At the time that man in evolution came to know that he was a spiritual being, and came to believe in a creator, that is the time of the Garden of Eden. God made a man out of the dust of the earth...No; I don't think it is that way.

Martha reiterated the same point:

I think intelligent people know that the Bible is a historical piece of work that has been ripped up and re-done so many times. It is symbolic. I truly believe that the principles are there, absolutely. But I do not think that...like the apple, in the Garden of Eden. Do I think that was an apple? No. I think it was sex. I think that is what was meant by that.

Two biblical passages the church uses to argue against female ordination were interpreted symbolically by most of the interviewees. The two passages are 1st Timothy 1:11-13 and 1st Corinthians 14:34-35 (*see Appendix A*). Perhaps the most interesting contradiction came from Anna, who is single and was the most conservative of the women. She was one of three women who did not believe women should be ordained or be deacons. She believed in both a literal and symbolic interpretation but for different time periods. She explained that Paul's scripture was literal for biblical times, yet symbolic for the current time period:

Symbolic, because there are so many things that are literal in the scripture and we never do them. We don't gouge our eyes out, if one eye causes us to sin. I probably lean towards the second, but both of them, if that is an option. It was literal to their time, maybe. The ways that Paul suggested that women not speak in worship, that was literal to that time, and that church he was speaking to, but not to me today, I'm not going to take those words literally. I'm going to take that as

history and as a symbol of what was going on at that time. So it was literal for them, but symbolic for us.

Anna contradicted herself by explaining that the historical context of scripture should be considered to find the true meaning:

We find scripture and we don't focus on what's around the scripture. What's the history of that woman who can't talk and worship? And people get in ditches. It causes churches to split. That is what is so sad about it.

Yet when she justifies the church's position on female ordination, she does not focus on the historical context of the scripture:

Just as the church submits to Christ, wives should submit to their husbands. So that means that, first of all, we are all submissive, even today. I think God gave us this very general, loose set of leveling, levels of authority, and that is probably why I'm so confused in my own life right now, because I'm not under anyone...and a woman should come under a man.

Knowledge gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions were reconciled in two ways. The respondents used cultural memes and male religious hegemony to explain why they believed SB doctrine discriminates against women and why their behavior contradicts their beliefs.

Cultural Memes

Cultural memes are practices or ideas that are generated within subcultures and transmitted by repetition from one generation to another or from one individual to another (Blackmore 1999). Memes are propagated, transmitted, and spread by cultural and traditional practices that become normalized and accepted through socialization. These ideas or principles are not often examined, explored, analyzed, or scrutinized, yet they are transformational. A group of mutually supporting memes form an organized

belief system - such as in religion – that often change with time and from one generation to another.

Cultural memes were used in two ways: (1) to explain how biblical scripture was relevant to the era it was written in and (2) to explain why SB members adhere to church doctrine. When asked what their beliefs were based upon, common responses were:

“well, I was raised to believe that,” “my parents taught me that,” and “I heard it in church.” Priscilla perceived a woman’s role of being in the home and a man’s role of being outside the home. She elaborated:

I was raised as a Southern Baptist to believe that the woman should be at home more, so that’s my belief... as far as the family, to be run like God really wanted it to be, women should be at home caring for children and the man should be the bread-winner. Going back to my mom’s day and time, if you have issues, then you can’t pay attention to the man as much and it causes problems. I was taught the primary preachers, the disciples, were all men. Women are more the helpers, the caregivers...help with the meals, the babies, and you know, family type stuff.

Priscilla’s response is an example of an accepted cultural meme that was not questioned because it was taught to her by her parents. When she was asked to elaborate on specifically *why* she believes as she does, she replied:

It goes back to scripture and how I was raised. I don’t really have a good reason, I mean isn’t that terrible. My daddy always said women can use God’s calling in a different way instead of the pulpit, maybe missionary work or some other area. So from what I’ve learned, I would rather see a man.

Eunice made the same point, yet in a different way. She believed that the older generation and the uneducated are less likely to question cultural ideas. She explained:

Certain leaders can say one thing and then people will just follow that just because that person said it and this tends to be the uneducated followers. It is generational. Women’s voices are not heard because the majority of the active church members are our parents, the older generation, the less educated. They are more involved than our generation and they were taught...and saw...it that way and just thought it was suppose to be that way, it is normal for them. That’s why we need to teach our children differently.

Eunice also related the religious ideology of equality to other cultural issues prevalent in the South, such as racist beliefs:

There have been situations where they said that women cannot stand up in the pulpit, cannot preach, can't do this, can't do that, but I think that it goes back to the people on the Board of the SBC, they are from my parents generation and it comes back to the way they grew up and the way they see things and how they can't see past the fact that she is a woman to listen [to her], just like they can't see past a person's skin color. Same thing, both are discriminating against others.

Cultural memes were also used to explain how biblical scripture is relevant to the era. Tabitha was asked to interpret 1st Corinthians 14:34-35, a scripture the SB use to substantiate their position. Rather than explain what meaning the scripture had for her, and if she agreed with the church's interpretation, she focused on the tradition and customs of biblical times:

I know that in the Jewish faith, when the law was given, the women were not even allowed to go into the synagogue or into the temple, only the men. This was in keeping with what the social mores were at that time. It didn't matter. Was it going to determine their salvation, no, but it was so that they were not offensive to others, in the faith, of the Jewish faith. It would have been offensive in the Jewish faith and that is where they were coming from – their tradition. The men in the temple had their area and the women and children had their area- they were not even considered human beings, they were considered property.

As a follow-up question, she was asked if she believed that scripture should consistently be interpreted according to the cultural practices of the time, and if they are currently relevant. She did not clarify *when* one should consider the culture or historical context of biblical scripture. She felt that the culture, not Paul, put women in subservient roles. She explained:

I think there are times when you definitely need to consider the historical context that the scripture was written in. When Paul was writing so the Jewish people understood what he was talking about, his usage of words, they knew what he meant. There are times when you should look at the whole – when was the book written, what was going on, where was the church at that time, it may have been

that the women were taking leadership roles and the men needed to do it. I don't think that Paul was trying to put women in subservient roles.

Martha, a young educated mother and an outspoken critic of church doctrine, reacted differently. When asked about 1st Corinthians 14:34-35, rather than explain how she would interpret the scripture, she explained how she personally violated church norms of female subordination. She provides an example of how a cultural meme, that women should remain quiet and not question male leadership, is changing among younger generations. She answered:

Well, that's bullshit because I wrote a letter and sent a copy to all 30 deacons about our preacher and his sermon against gays...and I didn't ask my husband's permission. He doesn't know as much about religion and the history of religion, and the Bible as I do, so I'm not asking his opinion. Do I think that the church thinks like this now...some may, and I think that a lot of these men are married to women now that are like this...there are not enough women who speak up. I had so many women come up after the fact and say I had bigger balls than most.

Eunice, another young church member had a similar response:

This does not apply to today. I also think that at this time, women were not educated and if they wanted to know anything, they had to ask their husband. If they had spoken, it would not have been an educated [person] speaking, because she did not have knowledge at her fingertip. I don't believe that this should be considered now, it is not improper for a woman to speak in church.

Male religious hegemony

Professional religious leadership seeks to give order and structure to how a particular religion is lived over generations. These leaders hold the authority to determine what is a legitimate belief or practice and, more importantly, what is not. Religious leaders also regulate who can speak authoritatively for the denomination and who is authorized to interpret doctrine and tradition. This strategy maintains consistency with the religion's core precepts. For SB, this authority is legitimized through ordination and is held exclusively by men.

Religious hegemony is the predominant and accepted religious authority or influence of one group over another (Ammerman 1993). Many of the interviewees recognized that men hold the power in the church and the power to interpret scripture, even though some believe the scripture is misinterpreted. Mary makes this point, as she refers to the decision makers of the SBC as the “power boys”:

And the foundation of passages from Paul, for the inequality of women... They know, the “power boys” know, [uses hand gestures in the air signifying quotation marks] that those passages are very likely **not**⁶ Paul, very likely additions – almost incontrovertibly. Southern Baptists practice that subordination of letting the women do the fundamental work of the church and the men take the glory.

Her disagreement with the doctrine was evident as she indicated that the current position of male hegemony is outdated. She suggested that exclusive power has the potential to corrupt. She explained:

I believe they [women] should be pastors and deacons, which is the center of power or the center of leadership and is the center of work... Baptists who believe even that women should not teach a mixed bible class, they should not teach men under any circumstances – those people are Neanderthals. They [men] hold the power and they need to be wise in using that power – they should be very careful not to make that adage come true – absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Eunice also recognized the power and influence that SB leaders hold:

Leaders have a certain amount of power. It is a role of being ahead of others, like to influence them, not monetarily, but they get to influence others, and set policies others aren't in the position to do. And unfortunately, it is that way in the church.

She explained that the current male leadership is legitimized by the primary social roles that women have occupied in the past. When I asked her why she felt women adhere to the church doctrine of female submission, she replied:

It goes back to the fact that women used to stay home and raise the children. Men went out and worked and as head of the house, whether he was right or wrong, what he said went. The women did not have the money or independence to have

⁶ Word was strongly emphasized by interviewee by elevated voice pitch and tone.

a voice, they had no way out. I think that is why things have not changed in the SBC with women – the leaders still think it is that way.

Lydia and Martha both reiterated the argument that male religious hegemony affects current belief systems:

Lydia: A lot of the scripture has put the man on top – but I think that is because it has always been a man's world, even throughout the Bible, it was all written by men, so that can sort of tell you a little something there...they got to write Christian history really from their perspective.

Martha: I personally believe that people in leadership positions tend to have some sort of a God complex. They need to have people to lead. They are the decision-makers and the one's that everybody is trying to please. I think it is a big-man-on-campus kind of mentality, and they need that to feel justified.

In contrast, Tabitha used scripture to rationalize the church's position. This is a particularly vivid example of how male hegemony is used to explain why the SB doctrine subordinates women:

Women should not have authority over a man because that is the way that God describes Eve when he created her... is that she would be a helpmate, as well, after the fall, God described that man would always be over the woman.

When asked why she felt some women adhere to the church doctrine of female submission, and if she believed it would change over time, her answer indicated that she believes it should not change, even as culture and social circumstances change:

It is because of the way we are made, we are the weaker sex. It is what it is. We will always be that, not to be condescending. There is a natural order to things. God created Adam first; he did not create us first. He created Eve so that Adam would have a helpmate...so that is what we are to be, helpmates to our men.

A majority of the women recognized that men control the decisions. They pointed out that it was not always what was best for the church. They believed that women are often more organized and efficient at completing certain tasks. To make her point,

Elisabeth referred to a local highway project that has been under construction for many years in her area:

Women show that they are capable of getting things done...they can go to work, keep the house, take care of the children, pay the bills...all the multi-tasking...and I believe that if a woman had been in charge of the four lane highway between Augusta and Savannah, it would have been completed a long time ago.

Eunice and Lois reiterated the point by explaining that women should be allowed to preach because they may approach preaching differently:

Eunice: They [women] are able to communicate through bible study and touch other women where a man can't. They offer a different perspective, because things affect a woman differently. They reach people differently, one is not better than the other, just different. When a man's voice is heard louder than a woman's, it is because of our social background.

Lois: I don't think they [men] are better, sometimes I even think that women can speak more eloquently to get the point across.

Sometimes a man's voice can be heard louder than a woman's because of our social background...they are used to a man being in charge.

Does one's sex solely dictate the role of a leader? Should ability, competence, expertise, or knowledge determine if someone can be an effective leader? Martha believed that women can be called into the ministry and have spiritual gifts to share. Her response indicated that she believes that religious leadership is often determined by what type of anatomy one possesses. She explained:

If God gives you a gift, why not use it. Why are you going to not use it because you have a vagina? I'm sorry but having a penis is not primary criteria to lead... I just want to be blunt. The older I've gotten, the more I have seen how hypocritical Christians can be. We're going to love everybody but you better not be gay, and you better not be this, but we have an adulterer sitting on the front row and being a deacon. Ok, so tell me, you know, thou shall not commit adultery is in the Ten Commandments, thou shall not be gay is not. So, I struggle with that a lot.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Northouse (2004) defines leadership as a process that gives one both the power to influence others and legitimized authority. Many of the women interviewed lack an understanding of the privileges and power leaders possess. Rather than defining leadership as a position of power and authority, many described personality characteristics of an individual leading others. They identified attributes such as organized, patient, calm, knowledgeable, well-rounded, humble, honest, trustworthy, able to listen, able to communicate, has integrity, and is self-motivated. Four women defined or identified a leader as one who has the power to influence and they also acknowledged that the leadership position afforded them privileges and opportunities. They understood that church leaders have the ability to set church doctrine, interpret scripture for members, control key decisions, and implement church policy.

However, when issues of power and authority were discussed, some of the respondents relinquished leadership to men exclusively, as if women cannot be powerful and authoritative. Leadership involves power and authority that is given or legitimized by the group to the leader (Northouse 2004). Legitimate power can best be conceptualized as a form of entitlement. This power derives from a person's external status or position. Carli (1999) found that legitimate power is a mechanism for social control that is often used by conservative religions. The religious denomination uses scripture as an ally to gain compliance because the Bible serves as a book of norms, a historical window into the 'oughts' and 'ought nots' of culture (Raven 1999). Women's actions, decisions and the church doctrine are justified through *their* interpretation of scripture.

Most of the women interviewed lacked knowledge of biblical scripture or church doctrine that is used to justify the church's position on female ordination. The interviewees who supported the church's position on female ordination were unable to identify scripture or doctrine to support their view. They supported their position by explaining that they were reared to believe women should not be preachers by their parents and by the church. The interviewees were not different from the population at large regarding their knowledge about their faith. In a study of religious beliefs and practices, Gallup (1996) identified what he called a knowledge gap. A difference exists between what people claim to believe and the knowledge they have about their faith. Wuthnow (2006:106) asserts that "believing in the Bible appears to be an item of faith, more than something grounded in knowledge." Religious beliefs are also more a matter of faith than of factual evidence or logic and are maintained mostly by being around other people who believe the same way. Wuthnow explains that Christians often engage in *cognitive bargaining*. Religious beliefs are never as systematic or consistent as theologians would hope. Rather, "religious beliefs are negotiable – everyone has the authority to make up their own mind" (Wuthnow 2006:93).

Eighty percent (12 out of 15) of the women believed that SB women should be allowed to be ordained. This is consistent with the 2000 Gallup Poll that showed that 71 percent of SBs favor women serving as pastors (Religion and Social Trends 2009). Support for this issue has increased over time. In 1977, 42 percent favored female ordination, compared with 71 percent in 2000. Catholics have also increased their support for women in leadership roles. Research shows that more than 80 percent of Catholics support women as altar servers, Eucharistic ministers, parish administrators, and even

deacons, while over 60 percent support the ordination of women as priests (D'Antonio et al. 2007).

So how can all members be heard when one group subordinates the other? What strategies of negotiating gender ideology do SB women use to rationalize religious inequality? The two most common explanations used were cultural religious memes and male hegemony. An attitude of 'things have been done this way for generations,' 'we have always taken a back seat to men,' and 'men are in control' were prevalent in the interviews. Indoctrination of cultural religious memes or ideas takes place in the home, schools, and church (Barnhart 1986). Barnhart asserts that children are indoctrinated with one dominate framework or a network of beliefs and values. The process narrows the range of learning and interpretation to the "inculcation of one viewpoint and tends to distort and misrepresent rival viewpoints, if they are represented at all" (Barnhart 1986:82). Bartkowski (1996:262) further explains that people approach scriptural texts "with biases which are conditioned by their social, historical or cultural location." The interpretation is biased because it accepts certain assumptions while excluding others.

Chaves (1997) argues that women's ordination reflects the extent to which a denomination is centralized. Its various subcultures create political influences and pressures and determine how the denomination interacts with surrounding secular cultural influences. In other words, denominational conditions reflect the surrounding cultural philosophy. This is evident in the SB denomination by their resolution that states biblical scripture affirms that pastors of the church are called by God to lead the church, and that followers should obey their leaders. Hebrews 13:17 is used to justify their position:

Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.

SB pastors are the authority on biblical interpretations and how scripture should be understood (Leonard 1990). Members are to follow the preacher, and the preacher must be male. This subculture of male hegemony shapes how SB women approach their religious life and their views on female ordination. The ways in which religion and hegemonic masculinities consolidate one another remain poorly explored. Most sociological studies of religion and gender focus on 'marked' femininity rather than 'unmarked' masculinity (Woodhead 2007:573).

The interviewees' responses reflected the essence of symbolic interactionism and feminist theory. Their answers showed how people created explanations and assigned meaning based on their individual experiences, interactions, and perceptions. Their language and interpretations were influenced by a religious culture of male authority and power. Swindler (1986) argues that strategies of action are cultural products. Beliefs and ritual practices directly shape action for the community that adheres to a given ideology. Such ideologies are however, in competition with other sets of cultural assumptions. This was evident in the interviewees' explanations for female ordination. Most of the women believed in equality, in the right for women to be ordained, and that all institutions should endorse equality. Yet, their current beliefs often contradicted the ideas that were instilled in them by their parents and by the church. Swindler also argues that culture has enduring effects on those who hold it, not by shaping the ends they pursue, but by providing the characteristic repertoire from which they build lines of action. The respondents of this study used cultural memes and examples of male hegemony to explain why the church's current position still subordinates women.

Carli (1999) found that life circumstances are one of the primary determinates in how women establish, interpret, and understand gender equality. The younger and the more educated respondents tended to be more assertive in their views about equality and more supportive of ordaining women. Other responses suggested that their interpretations reflected an interest in doctrinal purity and maintaining congruence with scripture (Pevey et al. 1996) even when their explanations of leadership and ordination were overlapping and often inconsistent. A combination of explanations or particular aspects of each strategy, cultural memes, and male hegemony were utilized.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study has contributed to the research literature by examining the issue of gender ideology within a Southern Baptist congregation in Georgia. It examined how women assign meaning and how they understand biblical scripture that is used to define leadership roles, particularly the ordination of women. These in-depth interviews compliment earlier broad and extensive analyses of gender role attitudes in religious denominations (Pevey et al. 1996; Ammerman 1987; Keel 2006). This research identified particular views and beliefs SB women have about the ordination of women and found that SB women are mixed in their beliefs and support.

Women fell along a continuum from liberal to conservative. Of the 15 interviewees, 3 were against female ordination. These respondents also felt that women should be submissive to men, that it is God's will, and that a woman's position is outlined by the order of creation - an order that affirms authority (Leonard 2005). The four women who strongly favored equality believed that church doctrine should be changed and that scripture has been misinterpreted by men for the benefit of men. They are hopeful that change will take place over time and they are willing to have their voice heard to bring about change. The remaining eight interviewees were in the middle, believing that women should be allowed to be preachers and be deacons if they wanted but did not feel personally affected. These women felt that it was a non-issue, not a big deal, not worth leaving the church, fighting, or starting a movement over. They were the most likely to use explanations of cultural memes and male religious hegemony to explain why they believe as they do.

Through interviews, I found support for the ordination of women. Although behaviors often contradict beliefs (Pevey et al. 1996), most thought that church doctrine will change as social changes take place and women attain equality in other institutions. Most respondents interpreted key biblical scriptures differently than the church. They take both a symbolic and literal interpretation of the bible and explain that the cultural and historical context should be considered to properly understand the meaning intended. This is consistent with what Ozorak (1996) found in her interviews - to rationalize religious inequality, the most popular strategy among women was their plea to tradition or historical context. Few interviewees had knowledge of biblical scripture or of church doctrine that is used to justify the church's position on the ordination of women.

Future research should examine *why* SB women continue to support the church through attendance, membership, work, and financial support if they do not support or agree with the church doctrine. One possible answer is that they do not feel subordinated directly by the church because they have no personal desire to hold the position of deacon or preacher. Another possible explanation is that they are not aware that women are denied particular leadership roles. Future research could also measure the level of importance SB women put on religious equality and why a lack of biblical knowledge on the topic exists. What value do they place on the issue? Is equality as an ideology relevant to their lives, and if so, how?

All the interviewees were white, middle class, and had at least a high school education. Future research could examine women of different racial, class, regional, and educational backgrounds to determine if similar views and beliefs exist among other subgroups within the SB denomination. SB men should also be interviewed to determine

if they hold similar beliefs or if inconsistencies and contradictions exist between their beliefs and practices as well.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions:

1. What is your marital status?
 2. How old are you?
 3. Do you have children?
 4. If so, how many? What is the age (ages) of your child/children?
 5. How many years of school have you completed?
 6. What is your occupation?
 7. How long have you been a Southern Baptist?
 8. How long have you been a member of this specific congregation?
 9. Have you had any previous affiliations with other denominations? If yes, what denomination and for how long?
 10. In what ways do you believe that men and women are equal or not equal?
 11. Do you believe women and men should have equal opportunities and privileges?
 12. What institutions should endorse and/or advocate equality and equal opportunities for men and women?
 13. How do you define leadership?
 14. In your opinion, what benefits and/or privileges do leadership roles entitle one to?
 15. What leadership roles or positions do you currently hold or have held in the past?
 16. What leadership roles do you believe women should have in the SBC?
 17. Do you believe in a literal (that truth is fixed) or symbolic (truth is representative) interpretation of the bible?
---Can you provide an example of a literal and/or symbolic scripture?
 18. What role does the bible have in your personal beliefs?
 19. Were certain biblical beliefs instilled throughout your childhood by your parents?
 20. If so, please provide an example or two.
 21. Has personal experience changed or altered any of those beliefs?
 22. What knowledge or understanding do you have of the Southern Baptist doctrine concerning women and equality in relation to leadership roles?
 23. Can you identify any biblical scripture that defines a women's role in the church?
 24. What do the following scripture passages mean to you?
- 1 Timothy 2:11-13 --- 11 Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness 12 but I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet 13 For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.
- 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 --- Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

Galatians 3:28 --- There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ.

25. Do you believe that the church encourages you to suppress your true feelings about equality regarding leadership roles within the church? In what ways? Or why not?
26. Which scriptures do you think support the church doctrine that women should not be ordained?
27. Do you believe that women within the Southern Baptist church should be allowed to be ordained? Why or why not?

APPENDIX B

Interview Invitation

Date:

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student at Georgia Southern University, seeking a Master's degree in Social Science. My area of interest is gender and religion. I am doing research in this area to further the knowledge and understanding of women within the church. The title of my thesis project is "Women's Perceptions of Leadership Roles within a Southern Baptist Congregation."

Your participation in this project will aid me in fulfilling my degree obligations as well as provide a deeper social understanding and knowledge of women's perceptions about leadership roles within the Southern Baptist church. Your contribution is valuable.

You will participate in a one- to- two hour private interview to be conducted in your home or a place that is comfortable and convenient for you. No monetary or material compensation will be offered. You will be given a pseudonym to ensure that your identity will be protected and that your answers will remain confidential. If you agree to be interviewed, you will be asked to grant permission for the interview to be audiotaped. You will be able to review both your tape and the transcript of the tape before it is used. If you wish, the tape and transcript will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research. You will not be required to answer questions that you do not wish to answer and you may withdraw from the project at any time. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep for your records. There is no known physical, mental, or social risk for the participants; however, possible discomforts may include uneasiness or nervousness with the issue.

I hope that you will consider participating in a one to two hour interview for this project. You will have the right to ask questions about the study and/or contact my advisor. You can contact me at the phone number or email address below. I have also included contact information for the university's Institutional Review Board which has approved this project as meeting federal criteria for the Protection of Human Subjects. I will greatly appreciate any assistance you might be able to provide.

Sincerely,

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