

**GOD'S DAUGHTERS IN CONFLICT: AN EXPLORATION
OF THE USE OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS IN CHRISTIAN DIS-
COURSE ON GENDER ROLES**

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Title God's daughter in conflict: An exploration of the use of religious texts in Christian discourse on gender roles	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Feminist scholars and theologians have examined the effects of the dominantly male language in the Bible on the sociopolitical beliefs and attitudes of evangelical Christians on gender roles. However, not much research has been done on Christian discourse, and on how Christian individuals talk regarding said topic. Moreover, I could not find any literature on how Christian individuals use, refer to, and interpret the Bible while in discourse. In my thesis, I first lay out the history of the role that women have had in Christianity and provide a breadth of scholarly research that pertains to my topic. Then, using discourse analysis, I explore how four individuals with different denominations and sociocultural influences use the Bible during my focus group study on the Bible and how it should be added to the field of discourse analysis within Christian studies by emphasizing the agency of the Christian individuals when reading the Bible. I also explore how they discuss a variety of topics.</p>	
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APPENDICES

1. Introduction

As one of the major religions of the world, Christianity has spread its reach to every corner of the world. It would be an almost impossible task to not find Christian influence in some way at any geographic location. As it is so widespread, it also follows that the religion not only provides its followers with a sacred text and divine laws and guidelines by which to live their lives, but also influences the political and social cultures of devout followers.

Today, we can see how individual's religious beliefs have influenced how they think and behave. Specifically talking about the United States, there is a large amount of Christians who are known to believe a certain set of beliefs—these could be summed up and called as fundamentalism. Indeed, fundamental Christian individuals are making headlines and are causing social media outrage with their discriminatory attitudes on the LGBTQ+ community as well as the church's mistreatment of women and girls, and their limitations within the church.

When discussing and justifying their beliefs on such topics, many conservative or, as Kettmann and Marko denotes, fundamentalists Christians point to the Bible, using the verses as evidence for their argument. As they explain, "Fundamentalisms incorporate religiously or metaphysically oriented reality constructions which assume a one-to-one correspondence between the world of today and a textual source regarded as sacrosanct" (Kettmann & Marko, 2005, p. 202). Furthermore, they write that, to fundamentalists, "understanding this textual source is described as being unproblematic and unambiguous" (p. 202). As the Holy Bible is the main text of Christianity, and it is the perceived foundation of the religion, it is the fundamental Christian belief that the Bible is the wholly inspired, literal Word of God. Thus, what the Bible says is infallible true in all circumstances.

Here, I wish to provide a working definition of the word 'evangelical,' which I use regularly throughout this paper and within Christian discourse, is often paired with 'fundamental' or 'conservative.' In the Christian context, 'evangelicalism' is a movement within Protestantism that generally holds a high view of the Bible (Joseph, 2023, para. 2). By 'high view,' I mean to say that 'evangelicals' or people who follow the evangelical tradition, believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible. Therefore, they believe in Biblical inerrancy, which claims that the Bible is without error. Because of the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, evangelicals are more likely to uphold a literal reading of the Bible, as I expand on later.

In my thesis, I aim to explore the link that exists between the Bible and the ideologies of Christians. In doing so, I provide further research on Christian discourse concerning gender roles within the Church. I also look at the Biblical text and determine whether or not the beliefs of Christian individuals might differ if the text were more gender-neutral. I interject here with a note that while a church (with a lowercase 'c') denotes a physical institution where Christians worship, the universal Church (with an uppercase 'C') represents the global network of Christians regardless of their location.

In chapter 2, I present my literature review as a means to showcase the already existing literature on topics relevant to my thesis and to create a background for the research that I conduct. In chapter 3, I present my research method, detailing the theoretical framework of my chosen methodology as well as my data collection process. In chapter 4, then, I discuss my research findings, with a detailed examination of my analysis. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss my findings in the context of previous studies and argue that my research greatly contributes to the field of discourse analysis, particularly in the Christian context. I find this important because understanding how Christians use, refer to, and interpret the Bible will pave way towards a narrower gap between men and women.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter of the thesis, I build up the rationale behind my research, attempting at a suffice justification for my inquiry of gender roles within the Church.

I start this chapter with section 2.1, wherein I discuss the state of and the discourse around the role of women throughout Christian history. In order to tackle the controversial issue of gender roles and treatment of women within the Church, it is important to know from where the issue stems, and the tools that Christian scholars and theologians have implemented in understanding the struggle and plea of women over the years. For this reason, I outline some of the prominent academic thoughts and moments in history that contribute to the overall landscape on which I build my research. In addition, I supply a couple of recent studies that demonstrate that the question of the Church's treatment of women is one that is still prominent and needs to be addressed.

I continue with section 2.2, wherein I discuss the question of gender inclusivity (and the lack thereof) in the Bible. In doing so, I cite several feminist theologians and scholars to argue that the root cause for the negative view of women within the Church is precisely the words used in the Scripture. I further argue that it is the way that Christian individuals use the Biblical text in discourse that create such beliefs.

I finish with the final section in this chapter, 2.3, wherein I focus on previous literature on discourse analysis done on Christian discourse – that is, on the interaction between Christian individuals in casual or formal talk. This section specifically lays out the academic terrain on which I present my research study and that I hope to expand on.

2.1. The history of women in Christianity

Ruether, in her article titled "Sexism and misogyny in the Christian tradition: liberating alternatives" affirms that, "the framework for reading Christian symbols as a sys-

tem of domination derives from patriarchal slaveocracies, the social system in which Christianity was born” (2014, p. 83). Supporting this is Marilyn French’s claim that:

historically, women’s oppression and marginalisation amounted to a form of slavery...women do not have the rights to their own bodies, sexuality, marriage, reproduction, divorce, education, when they are excluded from practising a trade or profession and when their freedom of movement is restricted (French, 1985, p. 16, as cited in Wood, 2019, p. 2).

One could, then, presume that Christianity is borne out of a system that seeks to dominate over certain groups of people. This domination over groups of people is reflected in the work of Christian feminist, philosopher, and theologian Mary Daly. In their review of Daly’s 1968 monogram *The Church and the Second Sex*, Coblentz & A. B. Jacobs (2018) outline Daly’s critique of the Church in their methods of creating a gap between men and women. These critiques include, in the summation of the review’s authors:

the church is an “instrument of oppression”; it deceives women into “passivity”; Catholic moral doctrine is violent to women; the exclusion of women in the tradition “results in feelings of inferiority”; and the church “obstructs women’s transcendence.” (Coblentz & A. B. Jacobs, 2018, p.546).

Ruether goes on to demonstrate that, for many decades and even centuries, Christianity has been used to explain the differences between males and females and the inferiority of females to males. She observes that the Greek philosophical tradition, including that perpetrated by Aristotle, proposes that females did not have autonomous reason and therefore depended on males, who did have autonomous reason (Ruether, 2014, p. 84).

As we move forward in time, we see the same insistency returning in Thomas Aquinas, but in a more radical form. He took Aristotle’s teachings and worsened them (Ruether, 2014, p. 84). Women, in Aquinas’ thinking, are defective in their creation and therefore not capable in the same way that men are (Ruether, 2014, p. 86). This insistence that women are defective is echoed by Padgett (2008), who in his article says of the traditionalist view on gender roles: “the traditional theological view is simply that women should not take up leadership roles in the church or society because they are defective in some ways by their very nature” (p. 22). According to Aquinas, a female is created when the male seed resists the process of forming a human being. Completion of the formation of the seed, then, creates the perfect male (Ruether, 2014, p. 86). This particular argument is reminiscent of the well-known doctrine from Genesis that Eve was made from Adam. This, I would argue, is the foundation on which anti-woman sentiments stand within fundamental Christian circles, and is the reason that, to Aquinas, females are lesser biologically, physically, and mentally, and they have to be under the control of their male counterparts (Ruether, 2014, p. 86). Because of this, it is reasoned, Aquinas and his followers used this strand of thought as justification for why they denied women any roles in leadership in the Church, let alone the priesthood (Ruether, 2014, p. 86).

In the centuries that followed, many were added to the number of prominent leaders who perpetuated the subjugation of women, as clearly stated by Wood (2019):

The early church fathers used texts from the Bible to legitimate the marginalisation and subordination of women. Texts such as Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:20–23 and Genesis 3:1–24 in the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures 1 Timothy 2:8–15,

1 Corinthians 11:7–9, 1 Corinthians 14:33–35 and Ephesians 5:22–23 were regularly cited and used to oppress women (p. 4)

At the same time, these proinent leaders sought to rewrite the very text from which they derived their justification for subjugating women. As Wood (2019) explains, “women’s leadership [in the Bible] was later declared heretical, and the evidence of their leadership roles was erased and suppressed in many ways: for example, prophetic oracles were destroyed and texts were changed” (p. 4). Undoubtedly, church members of the past, as it still is in the present, is to maintain the narrative that would continue the justification of classing women as inferior.

Interestingly, while this stance on the topic seemed to be authoritative and withstanding external influence in the Christian tradition, the Jewish tradition showed more ambivalence and impartiality (Ruether, 2014, p. 84). This ambivalence is reflected in the Biblical text. In the writings of Apostle Paul, the issue of gender roles and relations seems to be, as Ruether (2014) puts it, confused (p. 85).

In his letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11, the apostle addresses the issue of whether or not a woman should cover her head while worshipping. In arguing that she should, he writes: “But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (New International Version, 2011, 1 Cor. 11:3). It is clear to readers that Paul believes that there is a hierarchy that men and women should follow, and that it’s on a cosmic level. However, further on in the letter, he argues that “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God” (New International Version, 2011, 1 Cor. 11:11–12). In the same passage, then, Paul appears to contradict himself unintentionally.

To correct the confusion that emerged, St. Augustine argues that there is a difference between a woman’s spiritual capacity and her physical and psychological nature (Ruether, 2014, p. 85). As Ruether concludes, it was believed that “the woman in her sexual body is not the image of God, but rather images the body as carnal and prone to sin. As female, even in the original creation in paradise, woman was created to be subject to the male in her sexual roles as wife and childbearer” (Ruether, 2014, p. 85). The need to distinguish a woman’s spiritual status and her physical and sexual body is noteworthy. It, at the very least, points to an issue of conflict over the woman’s role during St. Augustine’s time. This issue of conflict continued to plague Christian theologians and scholars to the present day.

I turn to the evangelical tradition that defines most of American evangelical Christianity because while evangelicalism can be traced to other places where the religion of Christianity prevails, but it is the evangelicalist tradition in the States in particular that has adhered more strongly to gender role beliefs. On the topic, Alan Padgett, (2008) in his article, maps the history of the debate of gender roles in the context of American evangelism. To a similar effect that Ruether (2014) claims St. Augustine to have had, Padgett refers to C. C. Ryrie of Dallas Theological Seminary, stating that Ryrie “does what he can do to point out places where the spiritual role of woman was ‘elevated,’ for example, by Jesus in the gospels” (Padgett, 2008, p. 23). He then goes on to explain that, much like the traditionalist view of old, “Ryrie insists that subordination is entirely different from subjection of inferiority” (Padgett, 2008, p. 23). Regarding a woman’s being, there is a divide emerging between the spiritual and the physi-

cal. There would be a justification made for a woman's equality in her spiritual life, but an inequality regarding her role in the material world; this notion would later become what is known as "complementarianism."

In her 2005 article, Susanne Scholz gives brief definitions of "complementarism," "egalitarian," and "moderate evangelism" which she describes as the three major positions that exists regarding evangelical Christian views on gender roles (Scholz, 2005, p. 83). As she explains:

[complementarianism's] proponents maintain that women and men are equal according to the biblical record, but they have different tasks in church and society. Another position is called "egalitarian," and in evangelical circles the egalitarians are viewed as "feminists." They reject the complementarian notion of "equal but different," because to them the Bible supports women's equal participation in church and society. They struggle against being silenced or excluded from the larger evangelical community, in which the complementarian position dominates. Yet another position contributes to the Christian Right's discourse on gender and the Bible, held by evangelical Christian theologians who do not explicitly affiliate with either the complementarian or the egalitarian position (Scholz, 2005, p. 84).

Much of today's discourse concerning gender roles within the evangelical Christian context relate to the complementarianism-egalitarian spectirum. The studies that I outline here are just two of the numerous articles on the beliefs regarding gender roles and the affects of such beliefs on women in the evangelical Church communities. Again, I focus on the evangelical Christian tradition over other strains of evangelicalism.

In a thought-provoking study, Colaner and Giles (2008) looked at the relationship between gender role beliefs and career aspirations of college-aged women who come from evangelical Christian backgrounds. Through their use of survey interviews and statistical analyses, the authors found that there is indeed a correlations between the two variables. They posit, "...the fact that this group of women is not experiencing tension between their opposing desires may suggest that Evangelical gender role ideologies are more salient for these women than the actual choices they will make in the future" (Colaner and Giles, 2008, p. 531). In other words, within communities that are strongly influenced by religious evangelism, the gender roles set by their religion plays a larger part in shaping a woman's aspirations for her future. This is problematic because it limits a woman's agency to carve her own future. Instead of her own desires, she is thinking of what society would expect of her. As Colaner and Giles (2008) emphasize, "As women are in the idealistic planning phase, they may not be focusing on the practicality of their desires but rather on the ideal based on their particular Evangelical gender role ideologi" (p. 531). This statement is supported by their later finding: "At the same time, Complementarianism did play a role in the formation of mother aspirations in this sample. This discrepancy in the formation of aspiration may suggest a unique emphasis upon mothering in conservative Evangelical communities" (Colaner and Giles, 2008, p. 532). It is suffice to say that their participants' evangelical Christian gender role ideology is a major factor in college-aged evangelical Christian women's career desires and aspirations. As I have mentioned earlier, this does not allow Christian woman much agency when it comes to her own future. In order to ensure a future where women are not bound by religious ideology, said religious ideology about gender roles must be dismantled.

It might be worthwhile to explain that when one thinks of American evangelicals, they normally conjure a picture of white Americans from the South, but I also want to stress the

permeation that evangelical ideas also have had in so-called “ethnic” or “immigrant” churches; even evangelical Asian congregations in America seem to draw their gender role beliefs from Christian ideals, rather than native Asian religions like Confucianism. In her 2015 study, Esther Chan interviews 23 congregation members, all second-generation Asian-Americans, after the split of Hope Evangelical Church (HEC) over theological differences concerning women in leadership. As she discovers, most of the members who left HEC adheres to the complementarianism belief of women being equal but have different roles. One such member, a pastor, founded Covenant Church, to which more ex-HEC members joined (Chan, 2015, p. 436). In her literature review, Chan (2005) outlines two noteworthy articles on a Korean-American congregation and a Chinese-American congregation respectively. In Chan’s (2015) words, “All of these studies suggest that religious subcultures instead of ethnic subcultures may reinforce traditional gender roles” (p. 438). Another interesting point is that while the congregation of HEC was mostly egalitarian, that is, they believed in the equality of men and women, it is the English-speaking congregation whose members more aligned with complementarian beliefs (Chan, 2015, p. 441). A lot can be said about the reach of Christianity, a religion originating in Europe, into Asia and Asian diaspora through the system of colonization, but that is not the purpose of my thesis. I only bring this to light as to argue for the palpability of Christian doctrine, particularly the complementarian and egalitarian beliefs regarding women and their roles.

2.2. Gender inclusivity in the Bible

When I started my research, I focused on the linguistic sexism found in the Bible. Anyone familiar with Christian doctrines, whether a religious scholar, member of the Church or otherwise, will be familiar with the fact that most of the words that reference God and Jesus in the Bible are male. Not to mention, whenever the Bible refers to human creation, the text uses male pronouns. Most English translations of the Bible found today use the male pronouns ‘he,’ ‘his,’ and ‘him’ when alluding to or referencing God and Jesus. In addition, when talking of the Holy Spirit, the third of the trinity, Christians usually use the same male pronouns. All of this could be said of many Bible translations, including multiple translations in Korean and Spanish, two other languages I am most comfortable with.

It was recently that scholars began considering the linguistics of the Bible, specifically the exclusivity that the language of the Bible possesses. Among other things, “this endeavor has included the exposure and critique towards male-gendered imagery and metaphors for God, male-gendered grammar for God and exclusive gendered language in reference to humanity” (Wyk, 2018, p. 2). In the process, scholars have brought forth the history of Christianity and the intrinsically patriarchal nature of the English language. As Wyk (2018) writes in her article:

[the endeavor] presented serious challenges to a history and theology derived exclusively from male (and mostly white) experience and subsequently created awareness of the varying contextual experiences of a diversity of people worldwide, and the correlation between experience, language and the reality that language creates, and, finally, provided different starting blocks, arguments and suggestions towards changing practice” (p.2).

Within the study of sociolinguistics, it has been hypothesized that language holds power. I bring up the Foucauldian thought regarding language use. To Michel Foucault, language is not only a means of communication but also a system of structures built to maintain a hierarchical order and distinguish between the powerful and the powerless. Feminist scholar Dale Spender, among many others, agrees with Foucault. In her 1980 book *Man Man Language*, Spender explains how language, specifically the English language, has been constructed and used with the purpose to dominate. Additionally, she argues that through the societal order of patriarchy, there are rules that have framed our worldviews (Spender, 1980, p. 3). These rules, according to her, are made artificially by human beings—by men—and are enforced by many factors including language (Spender, 1998, p. 3). This sentiment is echoed in Deborah Cameron's (2005) "Language, gender, and sexuality" in which the feminist scholar, regarding how a patriarchal system results in the division between men and woman, writes, "as the results of a patriarchal socialization which produced the two groups as different and unequal" (Cameron, 2005, p. 485). All of this would explain, then, that the discrimination and subjugation of women is, at least in part, due to the language that we use.

Furthermore, language is also a means of expressing and sharing social norms, views, values, and ideologies with others. Among these, of course, gender ideologies stand out as permeating strongly throughout society. Many scholars and theologians have written about the notion that the language within Christianity is heavily skewed towards male-dominant language and male-dominant concepts of God (Howard et al. 2018; Wyk 2018; Whitehead 2012, 2014). In these various literature reviews and studies, it has been determined that individuals who have strong religious fundamentalist views would likely also hold the belief of Biblical inerrancy and would have a strict and literal interpretation of Scripture (Howard et al., 2018, p. 58). They would also hold gender traditionalist views and have male images and conceptions of God (Hoffman and Bartkowski, 2008; Bartkowski and Hempel, 2009). Indeed, Howard and colleagues were able to conclude that this was the case in their qualitative analysis. Bartkowski & Hempel also reached the conclusion that male conceptualizations of God correlate with higher religious fundamentalism. Interestingly, they also explored the different results among their participants, as divided by their gender. It was found that female Christians, through their adherence to Biblical inerrancy, maintained gender traditionalist views. Biblical inerrancy, then, as well as Biblical literalism, is an indicator of gender traditionalist views not only for men but also for women. This was similarly discovered by Peek and colleagues as well as Hoffman and Bartkowski. In addition, Hoffman and Bartkowski, in their 2008 article, surfaced a reason behind some conservative women's traditional gender roles. In their article titled "Gender, Religious Tradition, and Biblical Literalism" the authors point out that many Christian conservative branches that adhere to a strict literalist view of the Bible tend to be the ones that deny access to church leadership and pastoral positions (p. 1249). Therefore, "conservative religious women's greater tendency to embrace literalist schemas is a compensatory mechanism that aims to offset their exclusion from positions of authority in patriarchal religious organizations" (Hoffman & Bartkowski, 2008, p. 1246). In light of the history of the gender role debate, and where it is at now, it is useful to look at the language in the Bible, as well as language use in church settings in order to dive into the creation of gender role ideologies and elucidate a way towards a gender-equal landscape.

2.3 Discourse Analysis on Christian Discourse

In the field of Discourse Analysis specifically on discussion among Christian individuals, there is a small pool of literature from which I could draw sources from. It was recently that scholars have started to shift the focus from solely the language found in the Bible to the use and interpretation in discourse about certain topics, and so not much has been written on this topic. However, this does not mean that the scholarship is non-existent. A handful of studies and scholarly articles deal with the more individual, reader-based interpretation movement of Bible reading and meaning-making.

One such article is that of Esa Lehtinen. In his 2009 article, Lehtinen brings forth the reader-response theory, a theory that was promulgated by Stanley Fish. As Lehtinen states, the reader-response theory insists that “the meaning of texts are constructed by readers” (Lehtinen, 2009, p. 233). This is true in all cases, but especially true, as Lehtinen would argue, when it concerns religious or sacred text. As “tradition is not a thing but a process” (Boyarin, 1989, p. 412, as cited in Lehtinen, 2009, p. 233), and with religion being the most prevalent tradition within a society, the different societal and cultural meaning-making that happens from written text shifts with every reading or verbal iteration of the text (Heath, 1982, as cited in Lehtinen, 2009, p. 233). This would, then, signify that with each individual reading the Bible, they would glean something different from the same text. Put another way, each individual has a unique relationship with the text.

As Lehtinen (2009) lists in his article, there are several methods Christian individuals use in reading the Bible and deriving meaning from the text. While he expounded on two (recontextualization and inferences), there are other ways people can connect what they read to their own lives. Nevertheless, the end goal of Bible study—and Bible reading in general, I would argue—is always the same; “they [Christians] confront a Bible text and must find an application” (Lehtinen, 2009, p. 244). Lehtinen sees this as the most important task of Bible study. He further adds:

Through doing that finding, time after time, the participants of the Bible study display their ability and skill as competent Bible readers. It is, also, through the accomplishment of the task that the applicability and relevance of the Bible are constituted (Lehtinen, 2009, p. 244).

In my own experience of attending churches of different Protestant denominations, I can attest to the importance placed on the Bible and the knowledge that individuals can gain from it. The Bible study is also a feature of the Pentecostal, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches that I have myself attended. In fact, the emphasis placed on reading and studying the Bible is so great, that Christian individuals are encouraged to engaged in devotionals, a usually daily “quiet time with God,” during which they would read a Bible passage and extract from it a real-life application. The Bible study, then, is important for all Christians, particularly those of evangelical backgrounds.

Consider this quote, however:

This task [confronting and finding application] can be illuminated through comparing it with Ammerman’s (1987) description of fundamentalists’ use of the Bible. She describes how they, when confronted with problems in their everyday life, find a text that applies to that situation. In the Bible study the participants

have an opposite task: they confront a Bible text and must find an application (Lehtinen, 2009, p. 244).

In my own research, I follow Lehtinen in exploring the discursive practices that Christian individuals would implement in their talk of the Bible and of different matters. In doing so, I hope to shed light on the necessity for more discourse-orientated look at the issue of gender roles within the Church. In the next section, then, I detail the processes through which I gathered my research participants and conducted a focus group study.

3. Methods

After my literature review in the previous chapter, in this chapter of my thesis, I present my research study that I conducted in order to gain data and insight on my topic.

In section 3.1, I explain the methodology of my research, that is, the logic behind the methods and tools that I used during my data collection and analysis process. I justify my decision in conducting a focus group interview, choosing this particular interview method over others. I also justify my method of analysis, the discourse analysis, by explaining its utility in such research, in which I focus on the social dynamics and individual, meaning-making of my research participants.

In section 3.2, I write about the process of choosing my research participants, detailing how I chose them as well as providing information on the process of scheduling and then conducting my focus group study. It is in this section that I also explain my relationship with Christianity and my participants. As a scholar, researcher, and a Christian, it is crucial that I remain neutral during my research study. I use an emic voice only insofar as to explain terms that are specific to Christianity and Christian contexts, and to merge the world of my participants with the world of academia, keeping them separate and embracing their unique complexity (Krebs, 1999, synopsis, as cited in Beals et al., 2020, p. 597) but allowing both worlds to illuminate my findings in a dual context.

3.1. Methodology

Because the core of my research centers on individual and collective meaning-making and negotiation of faith and doctrine, I found it essential to maintain a sense of social dynamic that would truly be a collective and not an individual. This led me to the qualitative research method of the focus group discussion. As Tracey (2013) defines in her article on focus groups, focus groups are normally done with a small group of research participants and generally defined by interactive discussions guided by a set number of questions, with optional physical or verbal activities that may encourage insight on a specific topic (p. 167). While one-on-one interviews may consist of the same things, there

are several points that distinguish one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews that appear to be invaluable to my research.

First, participants of a focus group “show less inhibition, especially when they interact with similar others” (Tracey, 2013, p.167). This is because of a phenomenon known as the “group effect” (Carey, 1994, as cited in Tracey, 2013, p. 167) and the “therapeutic effect” (Lederman, 1990, as cited in Tracey, 2013, p. 167). When any group of individuals, be it a small or large group, have a thoughtful discussion together, they gain a sense of trust and comfort when with others who think or behave alike. To my advantage, my research participants have already found a basis of comfort and security around each other, as I explain in section 3.2.

Second, having multiple individuals participating in the same discussion produces more talk—particularly a talk that resembles “a kind of ‘chaining’ or ‘cascading’ effect in which each person’s turn of the conversation links to, or tumbles out of, the topics and expressions that came before it” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 183, as cited in Tracey 2013, p. 167). Because I would be interviewing not a single individual but four, I was reliant on the natural cascading of conversation between my research participants, which, as I hoped, would also “produce insightful self-disclosure that may be hidden in one-on-one interviews” (Tracey, 2013, p. 167). Furthermore, as I am the researcher, I would act as the moderator of the focus group study and I expected to mostly observe and guide my participation through discussion. In focus groups, the participants not only create discourse but support one another. As Tracey (2013) writes, “...in hearing each other talk, focus group participants learn from, and support one another. In this way, focus groups can be transformative—raising participants’ consciousness about certain issues, or helping them to learn new ways of seeing or talking about a situation” (p. 167). In a similar way, Morgan (1998) asserts that “the methodology [focus group] offers the researchers ‘a way of listening to people [participants] and learning from them” (p. 9). Instead of the focus group being spearheaded solely by the researcher or moderator, the participants are allowed to take the discussion into their own hands.

This method of research is especially suitable for me since, as alluded to previously, the reader-based nature of Bible reading implies that it is the individual themselves who creates their own meaning and interpretation of the text. My research participants, being Christian, read the same Bible, but each have their own set of predispositions and methods of interpretation. It follows, then, that the method of the focus group would match the separate discourse of my participants while at the same time, add to a shared conversation that will shed light on the inequalities which the Church.

Discourse analysis, as a form of analysis, “examine the function of language in how people construct their worlds” (Carey and Asbury, 2012, p. 84). Because of the separate perceived worlds of people but collaborative meaning-making of focus groups, it is conceivable that such a study would call for a method of analyses that focus on said meaning-making. In his book *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, Silverman quotes fellow academic Tim Rapley:

“As you speak and write you produce a world. So the interest for those analyzing discourse is on how language is used. The focus is on what specific version of the world, or identity or meaning is produced by describing something in just that way over another way; what is made available and what is excluded by describing something this way over an alternative way (Rapley, 2007, p. 2 as cited in Silverman, 2014, p. 318).

The purpose of my research is to look at how Christian individuals use the Bible in talk about gender role ideologies. Against Rapley's statement, my participants' worlds that I study is that influenced and affected by Christianity. The discourse that emerge during the study, then, would be the production of a world that is familiar to both my participants and myself, with each person participating from their own "fundamental orientations and ideas (held truths)" (Silverman, 2014, p. 207). Adding to my justification of using discourse analysis, I again turn to Silverman, who cites Potter in stating:

Potter points out that DA studies have considered the way in which such inequalities [gender inequalities] are constructed, made factual, and justified in talk, and they have also considered the resources ('interpretative repertoires', identities, category systems) that are used to manufacture coherent and persuasive justifications that work to sustain those inequalities (Potter, 1997, p. 148 as cited in Silverman, 2014, p. 319).

In section 2.2, I explained how through language, certain groups of people may exert power and dominance over others, since language, from a sociopolitical perspective, does not stand alone but ties itself to various social, cultural, and political context from the world around us. As such, the language that my religious participants use will undoubtedly convey, overtly or latently, how their beliefs might have emerged within their contexts. In chapter four of my thesis, I provide a look at just how my participants construct and create mutual understanding and discussion while talking about their interpretations of the Bible and standing firm to their beliefs on the issue of gender roles.

3.2. Data collection and processing

My research participants are four young adults in their 20s and 30s whose beliefs are evenly distributed along the conservative-liberal spectrum. In her article, Massey (2021) provides an understanding of what it means to be conservative or liberal:

The foundation of conservative and literalist hermeneutics is biblical inspiration and inerrancy. In contrast, liberal theology is defined by a critical and academic approach to biblical studies (along with spiritual reverence), challenging traditional views, embracing scientific theory and discovery, and adjusting interpretation and praxis according to growing knowledge and discernment (p. 104).

Based on this definition of what conservatism and liberalism accounts for, my research participants would not be all leaning on one side or the other. I have specifically chosen to have my participants spread out on this spectrum to yield more fruitful, deep, and thought-provoking discussions.

I interject here briefly to provide some reflexivity, since I myself am Christian. It is important for the reader to understand where I stand as a researcher. Having been born into a Christian family, I grew up attending weekly services. In my adulthood, although my family is of the Presbyterian tradition, I have gone to Baptist, Pentecostal, and Evangelical churches. Nevertheless, I do not personally subscribe to any specific denomination. Instead, I opt for the much more general categorization of 'Christian' which allows me to cultivate a range of different beliefs while simultaneously staying open-minded. As for where I stand on Massey's conservative-liberal spectrum, I position myself on the liberal end. I believe that the

Biblical text is indeed useful for guidance on everyday living; however, I take an interpretative lens while reading.

I have known all of my participants for at least one year and a half, since August 2021, when I started my studies and first attended the same Christian fellowship that my participants also attend. I have had a lot of time to get to know them as individuals and as Christians. In the past, I have found my own beliefs in opposition to some of theirs, and others in congruence. Regardless, my research participants never voiced judgment or ill will toward me or anyone else whose worldview and beliefs clashed with their own. I was confident that the individuals I have chosen to study would be able to be firm yet understanding in a serious discussion on a rather sensitive topic. In fact, all of my research participants, at one point, have expressed their opinion that constant discussion on such matters is important to have, and necessary in order to keep things moving forward sociopolitically.

All four of my participants all read the Bible in more than one language: Finnish, English, and Chinese. When it comes to the English translations that they read, they all utilize three main translations: NIV (New International Version), ESV (English Standard Version), and NASB (New American Standard Bible). My participants use their translations interchangeably and complementarily—that is, they would use all of the translations available to them in order to understand the Bible passages. In addition to these English translations, my participants use other kinds of resources in order to aid their Bible reading: sermons, Biblical commentaries, and counsel from local church pastors and other Christian individual in order to attain the goal, which is two-fold: to understand the meaning of the passages, and to discern what God wants them to glean from the passages or to “hear what God is saying.”

In the Christian context, “hearing what God is saying” refers to the process by which a piece of wisdom, advice, or direction is revealed to an individual from God through a form of worship, prayer, or other activities including reading the Bible. Also referred to as “knowing God’s will,” this process differs for each Christian. It also changes, depending on when an individual reads the material; reading the same text at two different moments in time, for example, would yield a different meaning for a single individual.

Considering the personal nature of deriving meaning from the Biblical text, that the Bible has been translated into many languages and many translations, in a lot of cases, has no bearing on how Christian individuals attain their convictions, let alone their ideologies regarding certain topics like gender roles. In their 2020 article, Shaw and his colleagues remind readers that multilingual individuals would communicate in one language over another based on their ability to convey a desired message with the lowest amount of energy (Shaw et al., 2020, p. 47). They also state that many languages could be used in the same utterance to most effectively transfer information from speaker to hearer (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, p. 125, as cited in Shaw et al., 2020, p. 47). It could be said that the same concept applied when reading a written piece of language. There is no one language that encompasses even the Biblical text (Shaw et al., 2020, p. 47).

Initially, I had invited eight individuals from the same fellowship group to participate in my focus group study, giving them information about the topics of discussion as well as a general structure of how the study would progress. I also gave them a set date, time, and duration, so that they could make their decision based on their availability. However, four of them responded, informing me that they could not make it. The other four responded, agreeing to participate. All four were enthused. Later on, the date that I had set would no longer be viable due to unforeseen circumstances on my part, but I quickly set up another date and time. Because all of my four participants each had their own schedules, I figured

that an easy way to gather up some possible dates was through a Doodle poll. A Doodle poll is a tool that allows users to give suggestions via dates and times, and send the poll out;; the recipients of the poll, then, would check their available dates and times based on the preset dates and times.

After I have confirmed the dates and times with my research participants, and of course their participation itself, I sent each of them a digital copy of a privacy notice, a research notification, and a consent form. The privacy notice is a several-page-long outline of how I would be processing my data, including their information, and the data that I would collect during the focus group study, according to the European Union's GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). The research notification gives a detailed overview of my Master's thesis and research. In it, I write about my interest in examining how and why there are conflicting views on gender roles in the Church and what I hope would be the academic and social outcome of my work in the broader sense. Lastly, the consent form notifies my participants of their rights to participate or to not participate or withdraw themselves and their data at any point. While I sent them a digital copy, I also printed out hardcopies for them to sign at the beginning of my focus group study because there would have been a week or so between my sending them the digital copies and the focus group study, and I did not want myself or my research participants to forget about what everyone's rights are.

Later, after I conducted the focus group study, and while I was transcribing the audio recording, I came across one point of confusion, as I will touch on again below. Because this, to me, was not a case of differing views or convictions, but a case of misreading the text, I wondered whether Peter would want to revisit the verse he was speaking on. I wanted to ensure that all of my participants, regarding whatever they expressed, were not working off an erred perspective. After getting advice from my supervisor, I reached out to Peter and asked if he was okay with me asking him a couple of follow-up questions. I informed him that the same regulations from the privacy notice and the consent form applied, and that he was free to decline.

The focus group study lasted two hours, and was held during the morning of the 3rd of March, 2023. I chose one of the many rooms at the university's library, on the second floor, because there aren't many students or staff milling about at the time. It was important to me that the room was not too big as to not be able to have an intimate discussion, and that it was not too small as to become stuffy and uncomfortable. I had my participants seated near the corner of the table, two on each adjacent side, so they were facing toward each other and also toward me, who sat across from them all. I started the study by, after pressing record on my audio recorder, once again informing my participants of the study, giving them a brief outline of the topics, and notifying them that the study would be semi-structured. I had a set of questions to ask them, that I expected them to answer, but I also wanted to allow some discussions that might evolve from the questions. I would only be the moderator, ensuring that the discussions would remain civil and without too much pause.

Admittedly, I did not sit with the data I collected and process what I have found or reflected on the study after the focus group study, like all of the scholarship concerning how to conduct qualitative research advise. Instead, I opted to take a break for several hours before I would return to the data. Had I written an after-study reflection, I should perhaps have remembered more of the finite details of what had transpired. However, my audio recording was sufficient in supplying me with what I had hoped to attain.

I transcribed my audio recording and then performed preliminary coding of my data, taking care of points of the talk that seemed most noteworthy to me, in relation to Biblical use and interpretation and discourse of gender roles. Then I read through my transcript

again, refining my list. What resulted was a list of seven themes, including the three that I write about extensively in the next chapter. The other themes that I found were: multi-denominationality—that is, that my participants all subscribed to and attended different affiliations and churches throughout their lives—the use of external sources like sermons, commentary, and counsel from trusted Christian individuals, mostly elders within their church, the fact that my participants used Bible translations in multiple languages in conjunction, and that the context of Biblical genres should be taken into account when reading and interpreting the Bible. Over the next chapter, I expound on the themes that I found to be most related to my research: my participants' literalist and interpretative readings of the Bible, the concept of reading in the Holy Spirit, and a discourse technique that many Christians use, prooftexting.

4. Results

In this chapter of my thesis, I lay out three themes that resulted from my data collection and analysis processes. As I outlined in 3.1, I have chosen to use discourse analysis because of the focus that discourse analysis has on the social, cultural, and political contexts of produced talk, which proves useful to me because of my aim to explore the gender role ideologies that Christian individuals develop and maintain through discourse.

As a brief overview, I define each of the themes. In section 4.1, I look at my participants' method of reading the Bible; that is, I explore the extent to which they take the text at face value. Conversely, I also explore the other end of the spectrum: how much of an interpretive reading is valid? The scholarship has proved that close readings of the Biblical text is positively correlated to conservative or fundamental beliefs and ideologies regarding, among other things, the role of women in the church. That some Christian individuals choose to take literal readings of the Bible also implies that, it is possible that a rearranging of the text may lead to these individuals' ideologies changing so long as the words do not use strictly male-dominant language.

In section 4.2, I explore my data concerning "reading in the Holy Spirit," an emic phrase that, to Christians, signifies that a reading is done with the presence of God. That is not to imply that God is the only one responsible for the reading. In fact, it is the experience of an individual's reading that is imbued with God's meaning that is what is called a reading. My participants speak to this marriage of individual and the Holy Spirit in interpreting using their own linguistic repertoires that demonstrate the believer's own convictions with the help of the Holy Spirit. While it seems that the individual has no agency here, it is within my focus group study that I encountered a connection between agency and how close of a reading is accomplished.

Finally, in section 4.3, I delve into prooftexting, a process wherein Christians, in discourse or in writing, cite the Bible in order to support, argue, ponder about, or to further an argument. By the definition of this technique, prooftexting is clear indication that an individual takes the words of the Bible at greater value, since instead of interpreting the text, they turn to the

text and ensure that they have evidence for what they are discussing. As I will explain, proof texting proves to be an important tool for fundamental or conservative Christians, for whom the text is highly valued. Together then, I hope to guide the reader through the findings of my research study and provide insights which might shed light on how Christian individuals' ideologies and discourse interplay.

4.1 Literalist and interpretative readings of the Bible

One aspect of my participants' spiritualities that I was interested in seeing is whether my participants read the Bible literally or take a more interpretative approach to the word of God. I also wondered whether the process of reading itself is a fluid spectrum or a definite polarity. During the focus group study, it was agreed on by my participants that certain passages and verses are important to read and interpret literally as a Christian – the cornerstones of Christianity – but others, mostly those passages concerning culture or history, they aren't applicable to our time, so my participants have concluded that reading those in the same literal way isn't so important.

Even so, these verses is still pertinent to modern-day Christians, according to my participants. See a quote from Aaron below:

Aaron: For example, when it's something about culture and history and so on. I have to admit...but still I see that it brings some more context, some information to us so that we can understand in what times Jesus lived and what was the environment and so on. It just creates more understanding about those times and about this applying to our time or something like that.

Here, Aaron confirms that while being less relevant in the modern day, these particular verses together create a backdrop of understanding, against which Christian individuals view their own lives. By looking at Jesus and the world he lived in, they catch a glimpse of what he was like and what, in turn, they should be like. Furthermore, Aaron acknowledges that while reading some verses, he realizes that they may not be applicable in the modern culture, especially in the Finnish context. Still, he maintains that these same verses provide historical context which Christian individuals can use to understand the Bible and God better.

Even so, some take great stock in the words, while others do not, and this at times creates a conflict in an individual reading of a passage. I demonstrate this through my participant Peter, who speaks about 1 Corinthians 11, in which the Apostle Paul writes about women wearing head coverings during worship.

Peter: But if the context would make it say it's cultural, then of course. But it's not easy thing like this head covering thing, for example, in the 1 Corinthians 11. In the church context, has the women in the church or the worship

service have to wear their scarf or not? ...It's the tricky passage for me because it looks like there's no... The immediate context that there would be a cultural argument in that, that it shouldn't be done anymore. But then there's this holy kiss also in, should we do that? Or washing our feet? I would think the holy kiss thing... I would say that it's a cultural thing in that way because it was a custom in that days to do that. We have a different culture. Maybe they will do that in some other cultures as a Christian, but in our culture it's not a custom in that way. It's not easy thing.

This occurred during my participants' discussion of my questions:

How important are the words written in the Bible to you? That is, do you take a literal reading or an interpretative reading? How do you interpret the Bible?

When talking about different instances and methods of interpreting the text, Peter brought up a concrete example from the Bible. While he confirms that the context of the passage is important to consider, the context also has to be present in the Bible. This leads him to question the relevance of head coverings. To him, since "there is no context," culturally or otherwise, in the passage, there is no indication that modern-day Christian should follow this tradition. He iterates his point later during our follow-up interview on WhatsApp:

If the verse would say that pastor has to be a woman then of course pastors have to be women and not men on at all

Peter, like so many conservative Christians, values the literalism of the Bible, taking each word in the text at face value. This perspective could be solidified by his claim that he would follow the text even if it did indicate that the verse in question (1 Timothy 3:2) would be different. It would, then, be suffice to say that he prefers taking a literal reading of the Bible rather than an interpretative one, even if it would be "led by the Holy Spirit." This phrasing "led by the Holy Spirit" is an emic feature, which is classified as any kind of discourse particular to a group being studied. In the case of this paper, "being led in the Holy Spirit" is an emic phrase that all Christians know to refer to being guided by the Holy Spirit. This will be further explained through the next section.

Before continuing to the next section, however, I remind my readers of the significance of the ways that Christian individuals read the Bible. Since the adherence to a literal reading of the text is linked to a stricter and more conservative view of gender roles, it is important to note that whether Christians prefer to take a literal or an interpretative reading.

4.2. Reading in the Holy Spirit

In the world of Christians, the Holy Spirit is the “voice of God.” When Christians read the Bible, listen to a sermon, or pray, it is the Holy Spirit that reveals to us some kind of truth. The Holy Spirit is also responsible for gifting us with knowledge and revelation about a particular issue or event (Noyes, 2022). One part of the trinity, the Holy Spirit is considered essential to live as a Christian because it is the “presence of God” (Noyes, 2022) and so “dwells in our midst” (New International Version, 2011, 1 Corinth. 3:16). Without it, it’s almost inconceivable that an individual would be able to “follow the will of God” – that is, obey God.

So, while reading different Bible verses, it is considered a viable reading, whatever it may be, when the Holy Spirit is present, since this would mean that God is “speaking” to us through the text.

Consider the following statement:

Lucia: when in the Bible you read that Jesus is saying something or [...] It's the passion towards those verses and maybe the Psalms and maybe some of the Proverbs where you can see that the Holy Spirit is actually speaking there

In her statement, Lucia implies that the “passion toward those verses” is the result of the Holy Spirit being present. By saying this, Lucia draws on an emic metaphor to argue that Psalms and Proverbs must be full of the Holy Spirit and therefore, infallibly useful in the lives of Christians. Here, she equates the presence of the Holy Spirit with utility to Christians.

Sally provides another piece of evidence of the importance of the Holy Spirit:

Sally: I think...it also depends on what is leading our heart. I agree sometimes it could be God or the Holy Spirit giving me inspiration, for example. And then there are different good and great things

As Noyes (2022) describes in her online article, the Holy Spirit grants us pieces of revelation or wisdom. Here, Sally speaks on the ability of the Holy Spirit to “lead our hearts,” another emic phrase that denotes the pull of the Holy Spirit towards a conviction.

Here is yet another quotation:

Peter: Yeah, you need the Holy Spirit to open the Word and it's active like the Hebrews 4 said, that it's sharper than the two edged sword. It's really speaks to you. It really speaks to you, it refutes you, it comforts you, it educates you with other things.

Compare Peter’s response to Lucia’s statement:

Lucia: I believe that the word is alive. So it's holy. It's not like a normal book. So it can really speak to you in different situations in a different way. I feel like the same passages, for example, for me personally, have been meaningful in very different ways in different points of my life.

Here, “the word is alive” is another emic phrase that Christians often use to mean that the Holy Spirit is working in the text, that it is active. Notice that Lucia uses the phrase “speak to you” when referring to the Bible, which I have already connected to the Holy Spirit. Both Lucia and Peter attest to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Here is another comment, taken from a conversation between Lucia and Peter, to which I will again refer to in the next section.

Lucia: I honestly believe that the Holy Spirit can't go against God because Holy Spirit is part of God. He's God. Okay, we can have false emotions. We can feel like God is telling us something that he's not telling us. But I wouldn't go so far as to say that someone's calling is not real.

Leading up to her statement, I had asked my participants for their thoughts on whether women could be “called” to priesthood. Again, “to be called” is an emic term that here means that one has been convicted of a certain direction they are to take in their life. Here, Lucia voices her belief that the Holy Spirit need not correspond to the Biblical text. To her, the Holy Spirit and God are intrinsic, so one cannot negate the other.

The agency of an individual in reading and interpreting the Biblical text is seen as a feature of Lucia's talk. Someone's “call” to do something denotes a mission or vocation that an individual will obtain through their interpreting. Lucia, who by Massey's definition is more liberal than conservative, joins other liberal readers when she expresses her belief that the text does not always define the trajectory of one's faith or path in life. Lehtinen's and Fish's words on reader-based interpretations and reader-response theory would help buttress Lucia's point, bringing the argument of individual agency versus adherence to the text forward and highlighting the stark differences that Christians have regarding important matters such as a life's mission sent from God.

4.3 Proof texting the Bible

While in discussion, there has been many references to specific Bible verses, mostly coming from Peter, who has been the most unwavering of his opinion that the Biblical text should be taken as literally as possible. This resonates strongly with Kettmann and Marko's (2005) article entitled “But what does the Bible really say?” In their critical analysis of fundamentalist discourse, the authors explored the referential and interpretative tools that fundamental Christians would use when talking about the Bible and certain topics. According to them, “the fundamentalist discourse

of the Religious Right in the USA is marked by so-called manifest intertextuality" (Kettemann & Marko, 2005, p. 204). Manifest intertextuality, as defined by Norman Fairclough, occurs when, while either writing or speaking, bits of texts or quotes are drawn from other texts, in order to further one's argument. Another name for this technique, especially in the evangelical Christian context, is proof texting. Much like an academic cites their sources to their claims and observations, Christians, while casually or formally discussing religious matters, will proof text the Bible in order to make their stance.

In their article, Allen and Swain (2011) gives a key reason for proof texting: "...the assumption was that theology is a sacred science, whose "first principles" are revealed by God alone and therefore that constructive theological argumentation must proceed on the basis of God's revealed truth" (p. 589). For most evangelical Christians, the Bible is the word of God, inspired and breathed out by Him, so why should they not refer to the Bible for citations of the truth?

Affirming this stance, Peter quotes 2 Timothy 3:16:

Peter: I'm just going to say that I believe the whole Bible is word of God and like second Timothy 3:16 said that all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reprove, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped with every good work. I think every word, every sentence in the Bible is relevant to us. It's just matters that I don't personally understand everything in the Bible and nobody asked to do completely. But it still doesn't mean that we can't learn from all scripture the things we ought to learn.

When discussing the importance of the Holy Spirit (refer to 4.3), Peter quotes Hebrews 4:16:

Peter: Yeah, you need the Holy Spirit to open the Word and it's active like the Hebrews 4 said, that it's sharper than the two edged sword. It's really speaks to you. It really speaks to you, it refutes you, it comforts you, it educates you with other things.

Later, while, answering the question below:

Do you believe that women can be called to become pastors?

Peter once again cites the Bible:

Peter: I see clearly in the Bible that elders and overseers should be men. 1 Timothy 3 says that the saying is trustworthy. If anybody as far as the office of overseer, he is allowed to His desire and self-control well tasked. Therefore, an overseer must be about approach the husband of one wife. So over minded, self control, respectful, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a love of money. He must manage his own household well with dignity, keeping his children submissive, and on and on.

He goes on to provide more arguments for his belief against female pastors:

Peter: But if it goes against the word of God and you feel you are called to pastor, I would honor the word of God and say that I'm not supposed to be a pastor. But I think people can be offended by that. But I think it's Christ honouring. It's honouring God's word and following God's word that we only have men as pastors in the Church. If we would have women pastors, we don't have any qualification for women in the Bible to be a pastor because it says you have to be one man wife.

Compared to my other participants, Peter was the most steadfast about quoting the Bible both as a defense of his own arguments, and a counter against others. It is interesting that he brought his Bible with him to the focus group study while nobody else thought to bring theirs. It is clear that Peter is more strict about being faithful to the text. However, my other three participants have also referenced the Biblical text in their discussion, albeit not directly quoting it.

Take a look at Lucia's and Peter's interaction, which developed from Peter's statements above:

- 01 Lucia How about the prophets in the Bible, female prophets.
02 What do you think about those?
- 03 Peter Yeah.
- 04 Lucia I honestly believe that the Holy Spirit can't go against
05 God because Holy Spirit
06 is part of God. He's God. Okay, we can have false emotions. We can
07 feel like God is telling us something that he's not telling us. But I
08 wouldn't go so far as to say that someone's calling is not real.
- 09 Peter But what if it goes against the word of God?
- 10 Lucia Here I would say it's a cultural thing, honestly.
- 11 Peter What would be your argument about the pastoral thing here in the
12 passage?
- 13 Lucia The exact thing that Alex already told us about the culture of...
- 14 Peter But is it saying in the text that it's cultural thing?
- 15 Lucia No, obviously not, because it's not written for 21st century Finnish
16 people.
- 17 Peter So it doesn't mean that you have to be one husband...
- 18 Lucia You do know that the Bible also tells you not to wear jeans?... If I
19 had that calling, it would be a huge struggle. Obviously, you have to
20 be asking God all the time, is this really what you want from me?
21 And if it is, I will honor you because that's what I've been called to
22 do. And I wouldn't go against someone who believes it's God's will f
23 for
- 24 Peter Yeah, but the testimony of the Holy Spirit...if someone is feeling
25 that she's called to be a pastor, would it go against God's word?
- 26 Lucia I don't think it would
- 27 Peter Okay

In addition to examples of prooftexting, I wanted to bring to the reader's attention a handful of things. However, I will start with the examples of prooftexting.

First, we see that in line 01, Lucia cites the Bible, though not in the form of a concrete passage. Regardless, her provocation of the text brings to Peter's attention that there is evidence of women being in positions of leadership in the Bible (Miriam, Esther, and Ruth, to name a few). Although Lucia, by Massey's (2021) definition, is the most liberal of my participants regarding the text, she sees and matches Peter's perspectives in order to make her case.

Second, Peter in line 14, refers to the text, questioning whether Lucia's opinion is coming from a Biblical source. As before, he stands firmly in the words in the Bible and seeks a literal source for the discourse. In line 17, he asks for clarification on what 1 Timothy 3:2 *says*. Peter's intent on the literalism of the text strongly opposes Lucia's more interpretative stance. In line 15, Lucia argues that the text was not written for the modern day and so should not be taken at face value. Later, in line 18, she brings forth the issue of women being forbidden in the Bible from wearing trousers. Although she does not cite the verse, she insinuates that she draws from the Bible. For the reader, the verse in question is Deuteronomy 22:5 and it reads as follows:

A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God (New International Version, 2011, Deut. 22:5).

Having been in discussions myself with Christian individuals whose views on Biblical interpretation strongly differs to my own, I observed the interaction between Lucia and Peter with intrigue, especially in the way that Lucia offered Peter quotes from the Bible. Because he has previously identified with a reading that is firmly grounded in the text, Lucia also cites the text. In doing so, she and Peter create a joint effort in understanding one another. Although Lucia does not believe the same as Peter, she negotiates her techniques of talking after her prior method rose pointed questions on the part of Peter. Her negotiating of discourse conveys a way in which she and Peter add to a shared conversation about the topic at hand.

5 Discussion

The basis of the focus group discussion has been the link between the Biblical scripture and the culture of the Church as it is today, mostly in the social, cultural, and political spheres.. At the birth of this research, the idea was that the literal words of the Bible directly gave way to Christian's thoughts and attitudes toward women.. However, as my research objective became clearer, I turned to how Christian individuals use the Bible—how they read and interpret the words of the Bible, which then gave way to their beliefs.

As we have found out, the level of conservatism of an individual has a direct relationship with the proximity to a literalist reading of the Bible an individual takes—the more conservative one is, the more literal of a reading that they will have of

the Bible. In addition to Massey (2021), there have been many studies that speak to the direct correlation between conservatism and the belief of Biblical inerrancy (Kettemann and Marko, 2005; Whitehead, 2014; Bartowski and Hempel, 2009; Peek et al., 1991; Perry, 2015) and thus a higher adherence to traditional gender role beliefs (Bartowski and Hempel, 2009; Hoffman and Bartowski, 2008; Whitehead, 2012, 2014). Furthermore, it has been found that a higher level of fundamentalism indicates a higher level of prooftexting (Gabaitse, 2015; Kettemann and Marko, 2005).

As an example from my focus group study, Peter brought his NASB Bible. As a result, I was able to observe him constantly seeking out a particular verse or passage that would pertain to the discussion at hand. While all four of my research participants enacted the technique of prooftexting, Peter was the only one who was able to use full and correct Biblical verses, and who has clearly communicated before and during the study that staying true to the text was an important ideal for him.

Linked to an individual's reading of the Bible and the Christian discourse method of prooftexting is the Christian hermeneutical practice of "reading in the Holy Spirit." In his article, Nel (2021) provides a brief overview of the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of Biblical reading:

[Reformed and Pentecostal] believers both accept the fact that the Holy Spirit is in some sense not only the author of the written word but also the only one who can explain its meaning effectively to readers (Vanhoozer, 2005, p. 344 as cited in Nel, 2021, p. 1)

Although Nel writes from the Pentecostal perspective, note that this explanation is applicable to other Christian denominations and traditions. As such, the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in imparting to Christians that which would inform and convict their unique readings and interpretations. To this end, Nel (2021) refers to John Calvin, one of the main figures from the Reformation, when he says: "His [Calvin's] angle is that Christ leads people through his Spirit to understand the Bible" (p. 2). Studies on individual-based Bible readings and interpretation, then, could be paired with the intrinsically unique nature of the Holy Spirit in order to provide a clearer picture of the process of belief formation among Christian individuals.

My research study, then, adds to the aforementioned literature by confirming what previous scholars found regarding the connection between the Bible and traditional gender role beliefs by offering methods that Christians utilize in order to make their beliefs known in discourse. I also hope that my research encourages more studies into interactional discourses that further investigates the organic production of meaning and beliefs. By delving more into Christian discourse on gender roles, the Church may, in the future, be able to address issues of sexism and mysogyny with a better understanding of the causes of said issues.

Given that Biblical literalism and prooftexting are two marks of conservative beliefs regarding gender roles, it is my belief that a change in the way Christian individuals read and interpret the Bible will also allow for more diverse thinking. I also believe that a more accepting view of the role of the Holy Spirit would offer new perspectives on a variety of issues; understanding that the Holy Spirit is merely God's presence in someone and not an authoritative figurehead by whom all Christians must abide would, for example, allow different people to take on diverse callings

and roles within the church, especially those individuals to whom otherwise the Church would not give the opportunities.

6 Conclusion

6.1. Limitations

There are a few limitations to my research. One is that during my research, I only conducted one focus group study, and while that yielded some fruitful discussion, I would, given more time, conduct more interviews, both group and individual, because my research topic is something I have been passionate about a long time; growing up, I noticed the social injustice that exist within and from Christian contexts and, as a result of my progressive and liberal stance, I have seen this as a major problem that needed to be fixed. Leading up to writing my thesis, I have heard many remarks from other Christians regarding women and their societal role including how they should dress and conduct themselves in public. As a movement, feminism has been around and prominent for several decades, and while I support all of the vocal women and men fighting the cause, most of the issues has been presented to me has been from the Christian perspective, and that is why I believe that it is a problem that can be looked at from a Christian perspective alongside secular or non-religious lens.

Another limitation is that, for my research, I limited my scope to the issues of sexism and misogyny within the church, and did not dwell into the issues concerning homophobia, transphobia, and anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes that many conservative Christians hold with much detail and depth. In his 2014 article, Whitehead explains that a major reason for these anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes is that same-sex relationships fall outside of the traditional, God-given relationship ideal of one man and one woman (p. 481). Additionally, "Gender traditionalists view gay men and lesbians negatively because they are believed to exhibit traits commonly associated with the opposite sex" (Whitehead, 2014, p. 481). This too is deemed to be located outside of the traditional gender role and relationship ideal set at the beginning by God. According to evangelical conservatives, gay men and lesbian woman live an "alternative" (Whitehead, 2014, p. 481) to what God has ordained and the Church hold sacred. Through my research, I have come to a theory that Christians' disapproval of an "alternative" way to the "natural" order of society may be the same cause of the belief that women are not suitable for leadership roles or for the priesthood, especially if one considers this against what Aquinas had proposed about a woman's natural deposition. God made woman second and therefore submissive to a man, and thus cannot have any sort of dominion over where men worship or preach. Given more time, I would delve into research that would marry both of these issues and perform a discourse analysis study which would further solidify my stance on how Biblical interpretations is created by Christians individually and as a collective.

6.2. Future Research

After I have laid out the limitations to my research, I now turn to possible avenues for future research. I concluded section 6.2 with my proposal that gender role conflicts within the Church drives from the same root belief which endorses anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes. As my research does not center primarily on this issue, I do not have sufficient information on the literature or studies that would pertain to the issue. Therefore, I do open up this specific venture for those inclined.

I now turn back to the issues that my research aims to explore. Through my focus group study, I focused on the beliefs and thoughts on women in leadership roles within the church, but I have admittedly abandoned a variety of other issues, and that is what happens when conservatism takes precedence over social justice. Globally, we see social consequences that stem from a strict form of conservatism that affects the lived experiences of many women and girls in and out of the Christian faith.

One such social consequence that affects women and girls within conservative Christianity is the endorsement of child marriage. One article on this topic is one titled "Child brides to the patriarchy" by Jennifer Stitch. In her writing, the author realizes the analogy between the Catholic ritual of Communion and the occurrence of child marriages, arguing that the former is a kind of instigator and a cover-up for the latter. Although not from the Protestant perspective, the same delicacy placed upon young girls and their sexual purity and fragility holds true. The result, then, is an over-protection that easily leads to objectifying and demanding them. This view of women could be again traced back to what the Bible says; my research, then, would be helpful in that it provides a guide on how one might look into the problem of child marriage through discourse analysis of Biblical interpretation and verbal discourse that occur among the clergy and the congregation.

With all of the limitations and areas of further research, I conclude my thesis by stating that while work has begun in the way of bettering women's livelihoods as they live out their faiths in a seemingly anti-woman environment, there is a lot yet to be done. My research barely scratches the surface; if there is hope in feminist theologian scholars and Christian women to pave their own identities and paths, there is a path forward.

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APPENDICES

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

If you subscribe to a certain denomination, which do you subscribe to? Which English-language versions of the Bible do you use?

How important are the words written in the Bible to you? That is, do you take a literal reading or an interpretative reading? How do you interpret the Bible?

How do you interpret Bible verses that seem outdated and not applicable to modern-day Christians?

Do you believe that women can be called to become pastors?

Do you think that there is a link between the Bible and how women are treated by and within the Church?

What would happen if women were in control?

Should the church change as the world changes?