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Naming and Re(claiming) Feminism in Orthodoxy: Voicing the Gender and Religious Identities of Greek Orthodox Women

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Naming and Re(claiming) Feminism in Orthodoxy: Voicing the Gender and Religious

Identities of Greek Orthodox Women

A Dissertation in Education
with a Concentration in Curriculum Studies

by

Anne Marie Adams

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of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized, including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according to program guidelines, as directed.

Author Signature _Anne Marie Adams_ Date _04/07/2021_

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a qualitative study of the effects of Greek Orthodoxy on the gender and religious identity meaning-making of five Greek-American women. The emergent themes from this study indicate that participants' gender and religious identities were heavily influenced by the dueling tensions and contradictions between patriarchy and feminism, conservative traditionalism and modernity, and secular life and the religious community (i.e., family and church). Underpinning this study are Narrative Identity Theory and Feminist Standpoint Theory. Portraiture methodology was employed across three semi-structured interviews, as well as three written/video reflection journals to reveal how women, as articulated through their own perspectives, made meaning of their lived experiences at the intersection of their gendered and religious identity constructions. The results of this study suggest that these participants (un)consciously navigate the impact of patriarchal ideology, power, privilege, and oppression by finding goodness in small acts and feelings of connectedness as a basis for the development of their personal agency, voice, and womanhood. Implications for research, Orthodoxy, and practice are discussed.

Keywords: women, Greek-American, Orthodox, gender, religion, womanhood, identity construction, Feminism, faith, spiritual guide, shipwreck, agency, voice, access, equity, Greek culture, patriarchy, Feminist Standpoint Theory, Portraiture

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Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Dedication

To my daughter, Evelyn. You were the inspiration for this study, and I am profoundly grateful to have such an inquisitive, loving, and thoughtful daughter. You represent all that is good in life and I hope you never stop in your pursuit to understand the world around you.

To my son, Trifon: Your sense of wonder and happiness motivate me each day. Thank you for the countless hugs and check-ins you've given throughout this process.

To my son, John: The love you have for the Church and ability to see the goodness in those around you gives me such hope for the future.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I asked my then six-year-old daughter what she wanted to be when she grew up, I was expecting her to say something like *teacher, lawyer,* or *baker*. I was surprised when she told me, "a Metropolitan[1]." I cringed because I knew that within the Greek Orthodox religion, women were unable to be ordained clergy. Trying to move the conversation along with as little damage as possible, I said, "Well, that's the one thing you can't be. You can literally be *anything* else in the world. What else might you want to be when you grow up?" Without skipping a beat, she said, "OK, a priest." Once again, I cringed. Growing up with two younger brothers, my daughter wanted to understand why boys were allowed to hold a particular role and not girls. More importantly, she wanted to know why her mother thought that was acceptable. "I can do all the same things they can do," she insisted, "even better." As the older sister, she saw herself as smarter and stronger. In short, I was called out by my six-year-old for being inconsistent and I felt embarrassed. In our home, my husband and I strive to treat each of our children equally; nobody gets a pass based on gender, and we would support them in whatever career path they chose in adulthood. However, my own daughter's choices proved to be the exception.

Despite being raised Orthodox from birth, notions of feminism and patriarchy had nudged at the door of my consciousness, but I never gave voice to how such matters seemed to contradict what I witnessed in my Greek Orthodox Church. There are at least two sets of contradictions that I recognize: (1) contradictions within the church, itself (related to women); and (2) contradictions within the minds of Greek Orthodox women who must engage with a society that nominally, if not practically, adheres to principles of gender equality. One of the

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[1] In the Orthodox Church, the title of Metropolitan describes a rank and jurisdiction of an Archbishop. For the purposes of this study, the term Metropolitan refers to an individual with ecclesiastical oversight of several states in the Midwest.

reasons for my hesitation in questioning was because it would be seen as controversial, and at that time there were no opportunities available to wrestle with faith-related topics. To question the roles and responsibilities of women within Orthodoxy is sometimes seen as compromising the integrity of the Church. Within my professional life, I expected to be treated as an equal to my male counterparts, and whenever I experienced inequality, I made it my mission to advocate for myself. The conversation with my daughter highlighted the fact that humans are confronted by inconsistent truths each day and it is even more complicated when it is applied to religion. As such, I come to this study in a quest to explore the contradictions between the principles of feminism and the boundaries of Orthodoxy, between faith and doubt, tradition and modernity, and a commitment to a system of beliefs and a commitment to developing one's own mind through critical thinking. My explicit intention is to stay close to and aware of these tensions and contradictions without trying to resolve them.

This study does not present a singular woman's voice, but rather the voices of five women who have shared their life stories, thought faithfully about the roles of women inside and outside the Orthodox Church, and are concerned about its future. I examine a select group of Greek Orthodox women in light of the cultural and institutional contexts within the church and church ministries. The study seeks to understand how these women make meaning of their lived experiences at the intersection of their gendered and religious identity constructions. In my preliminary chapters, I examine the development of women's leadership roles within the Church and notions of womanhood with an emphasis on equity, access, and voice. Exploring the roles and responsibilities of women would allow the Orthodox community to better support women as they navigate the "constant interplay between religious and secular spheres of life" (Kunkelman, 1990, p. 2). As someone who is actively involved in lay leadership roles in my church and

Metropolis, I have acquired access and am in a position to ensure that the voices of women are heard.

Contextualizing Greek Orthodoxy

There are nuanced differences between words like *faith, religion, and spirituality*, which are sometimes used synonymously. For the purposes of this study, faith relates to the belief in God and doctrines of Orthodoxy—the relational or personal side of religion in which people focus on *being* rather than *doing*. When referenced with a capital F (Faith), it can refer to the Orthodox Faith—the actual physical practice of the Orthodox religion in an individual's life. Throughout parts of this study, faith is referenced in the context of people who, "confidently engage in the activity of faith in their ongoing meaning-making, testing, trusting, and acting" (Parks, 2011, p. 45). In this study, religion refers to [Greek] Orthodox Christianity. The mission of Orthodoxy and the Archdiocese of America is to "proclaim the Gospel of Christ, to teach and spread the Orthodox Christian Faith, to energize, cultivate, and guide the life of the Church in the United States of America according to the Orthodox Christian Faith and Tradition" (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, n.d., para. 6), whereas spirituality can be described as one's lived experience and practice of the soul (Kallis, 2020). Faith, religion, and spirituality are deeply intertwined and present for Greek Orthodox women of all ages.

Involvement in the Orthodox Church following baptism can be measured according to an individual's participation in ministries. Ministries for Orthodox youth begin as young as toddler-age and span through adulthood. Considering the amount of time spent at church and in various ministries, this study examines how participation in church activities impacts each subject's perception of womanhood. For Orthodox, it is common for adult women to be actively involved in church ministries in addition to working inside or outside the home. The church instills

ideology through education (i.e., ministries, teachings), where children begin to assimilate the political and cultural Orthodox ideologies. While many women choose to teach Church School classes, the most common ministries for women revolve around philanthropy and outreach to raise money for various causes, feed the poor, and host events. For the women who are active stewards of their church, how they understand womanhood and the way it has been impacted by their religious experiences varies. Additionally, I posit that the way participants of this study feel about the principles of feminism and the boundaries of Orthodoxy fluctuates based on age.

Contextualizing Identity Construction

Cerulo (1997) expounds upon the study of identity with a focus on an individual's formation of *me* as a cornerstone of modern sociological thought, and the ways in which sense of selfhood is impacted by interpersonal interactions and relationships. Current discourse surrounding identity has shifted from the individual to the collective (Cerulo, 1997) and this study unpacks both the individual identity meaning-making of Greek Orthodox women, as well as the collective understanding of what it means to be a Greek Orthodox woman. An important distinction in this framing is that identity construction is a *process* rather than *being* and focuses on the process of becoming within the institution of the Greek Orthodox religion and within secular institutions like education. Both the concepts of gender (i.e., the process being sexed in a patriarchal structure) and womanhood (i.e., the socio-cultural process of being a woman) are viewed as a process of historicized-socialization (de Beauvoir, 1949/2014; Butler, 1990). In this study, I examined the regulatory practices of feminism and Greek Orthodoxy as they relate to womanhood and the complex and contradictory process of *becoming a woman* across stages of life and in varying contexts.

To facilitate understanding of how this religious context impacts the process of gender construction and becoming a woman, this study focuses on the ethnic identity narratives of Greek Orthodox women. Kunkelman (1990) asserts that, "Ethnicity to the Greek is as much public as private; the church-centered community provides the stage on which ethnicity is publicly played out" (p. 161), and that ethnicity, similar to religion, "reflects situational priorities" (p. 163). Growing up, Greek-American children experience church as the stage from which they display and perform their ethnicity, or Greekness. When leaving home for the first time or entering the workforce, individuals take responsibility for their beliefs and can intentionally choose a form of religion or spirituality that meets their needs (Fowler, 1995; Stoppa, 2017). For women, navigating the secular world means encountering contradictions between what they were taught within Orthodoxy and their lived experiences.

As such, this study may aid clergy and lay leadership, educators and administrators in their attempts to understand the religious identities of Orthodox women. The study may also provide a higher-altitude view of the ways these women understand gender equality and gendered roles inside and outside of the church. Understanding the stories of participants, this study highlights the positive and negative experiences of their female parishioners. For Greek Orthodox women, it may lead them to think more critically about their role in the church and, for some, their role as mothers.

Statement of the Problem

When Orthodox women transition from college into adulthood, they are subsequently exposed to diverse ideologies, facing myriad spiritual, social, and mental challenges. This study considers the relationship between the responsibility and discipline of religious practice and the paternalistic nature of the Greek Orthodox culture. Parks (2011) describes early adulthood as a

time of meaning-making, which she defines as "the activity of composing a sense of connections among things: a sense of pattern, order, form, and significance" (p. 19). This includes, "(1) being critically aware of one's composing of reality, (2) self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and (3) cultivating a capacity to respond–-to act—in ways that are satisfying and just" (p. 12). Understanding the formation and reformation of religious identity and how they impact experiences is of interest to this study. One might expect that religion gives women strength to make *good* choices or, conversely, that religion keeps youth from taking risks that might result in positive or negative experiences. Thus, the present study examines the social tensions that arise during various stages of life and whether they propel or impede personal and religious growth and empowerment.

Regardless of what women do for a living or the stage of life in which they find themselves, they must balance their roles inside and outside of the church, as well as navigate contradictions between female equity and their roles as religious women. I am thus curious about how the experiences of religious identity formation impact an individual's understanding of womanhood throughout multiple life stages.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand how the experiences of practicing Greek Orthodox women influence gender and religious identity construction, as well as the impact gender and religious identities have on the development of womanhood. A secondary purpose is to examine my own experiences as an insider, including the urge to resist confronting the tensions between the authentic contradictions of my own feminism and religion. I, too, have experienced conflicting thoughts and feelings because of the waring pull of my religion and an attempt to operate as a feminist in a secular society.

The study's focal research question is:

- How do the religious experiences of Greek Orthodox women influence identity construction, particularly womanhood?

Sub-questions include:

- How do Greek Orthodox women understand and make meaning of their lives in light of their religion?

- How do Greek Orthodox women navigate the tensions between feminism and Orthodoxy?

- How does the Greek Orthodox religion and culture shape the ways these particular Greek Orthodox women express selfhood, agency, and womanhood?

This examination of Greek Orthodox women through the lens of Narrative Identity Theory (Ricoeur, 1984, 1992; McAdams, 1985), undergirded by Feminist Standpoint Theory (Harding, 2004), and with adapted methods of Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), should be useful to clergy and laity who work with women to (re)imagine the ministries, various programs and roles that are offered to women. Further, it will provide the insights necessary to engage women in more meaningful and equitable ways. This study is also meant to inform clergy, lay leadership, and faculty and administrators at universities beyond the Greek Orthodox community regarding some of their religiously conservative students and stewards. I encourage these individuals not to shy away from the genuine contradictions that Greek Orthodox women face. It is the world they are living in. Instead, it is a call to embrace the stories of resilient women, in their own words, and encourage others to confront these tensions boldly.

Scope and Significance

Insights from this study could inform religious, academic and social support curriculum for women, as well as women's ministries in Orthodox churches. While women are held in high esteem by the Church and comprise half of the parish community, their voices are not always represented and at times are intentionally excluded. Based on her research, Gilligan (1982) contends that when women "feel excluded from direct participation in society, they see themselves as subject to a consensus or judgment made and enforced by the men on whose protection and support they depend and by whose names they are known (p. 67). Exclusion of women in the Church can be seen, heard, and felt literally and figuratively. Men can hold positions of power and women cannot. Young boys and men can actively participate in worship services and young girls and women cannot. These traditions are upheld by the (male) clergy designated to lead parishioners toward *theosis*, which is the purpose of human life (FitzGerald, 1999). This contradiction in access is widely accepted as the norm.

One way in which Christian women view and experience faith and religion is through their focus on a loving and personal relationship with God (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991). In Gilligan's (1982) rendering, acknowledging that women define themselves based on their relationships means that gathering insights from Greek Orthodox women are important to the development of support curriculum and ministries. It is thus the aim of this study to provide an opportunity to explicitly hear the voices of a few of these overlooked Orthodox women, and to understand their religious experiences and how such experiences contribute to their perceptions of womanhood.

Researcher Subjectivity

Raised in a conservative Orthodox household by Greek-American parents, my social and academic experiences were informed largely by my religious and cultural upbringing. I spent multiple nights each week at church for youth ministries and attended services nearly every Sunday. During the summers, I attended a camp ministry, which offered youth (grades 6 to 11) the ability to share their religion and culture. It was during my years in these youth groups and summer camps that I met my closest and dearest friends, women whom I consider religious, strong, and resilient. As I reflect on the years leading up to my post-secondary education, I realize that much of my lived experiences were enveloped in my identity as a devout Greek Orthodox woman, and I began to understand how religion impacted the decisions I made throughout my life. From time to time, I have wrestled with the inconsistencies that I see within the practice of Orthodoxy and have questioned these tensions because they have affected my presence and participation in the life of the Church.

It seems that women of today have greater competing interests and higher demands put on them than ever before. Through concessions to the establishment, women have often gained access to opportunity but have not been relieved of any of the labor (domestic, mental, or emotional) associated with womanhood. Whether they are in the workforce or stay-at-home mothers, women carry the burden of the invisible labor they are so often expected to quietly juggle.

Women have needs that are unique to them that can only be fully understood by an *insider* (Harraway, 1997). They continue to have unique skill sets and talents to offer the Church, yet there continues to be a lack of significant roles for women. I wonder how the experiences of other Greek Orthodox women are similar to my own. To echo Bettis and Adams (2005), I am

curious how "the in-between spaces and places found within and outside the formal domain" of Greek Orthodoxy play a central role in "how girls make sense of themselves" (p. 5). In other words, I want to know how the experiences of Greek Orthodox women impact their identity and their understanding of what it means to be Orthodox women in 2021.

This study illuminates the experiences and identity constructions of Greek Orthodox women in the shadows of their religion using a feminist theoretical framework. It is important to note that while Orthodoxy occupies complex positions of power and patriarchy, America in general remains, practically speaking, a patriarchal society. Thus, it is difficult to throw into relief one or the other. My purpose is most certainly not to take a pejorative stance against Orthodoxy. At the core of my Orthodox Christianity is a belief that some things related to religion are beyond our understanding and comprehension, and that Orthodoxy is guided by the Holy Spirit working through a process of *synergistic development*. This means when human beings open themselves to it, the Holy Spirit works within individuals and God's grace is interwoven with free will.

Although I maintain a palpably deep belief in Orthodox theology, my intention is to come to terms with how my study participants manage the uniquely paradoxical tensions of being feminist (i.e., belief in gender equity) and the practice of being Greek Orthodox, specifically how they locate themselves in various contexts, including social, academic, domestic and religious. I am interested in how the participants reconcile their understanding of womanhood with the co-existence of their religion and personal lives; how the study participants grapple with factual truths and emotional honesty of the contradictions they face within their faith. I have thought about my own views of gender and religion related to identity construction. I frequently find myself comparing what I know to be a principle of feminism (i.e., gender equality) to what I feel

emotionally about the principles of Orthodoxy as it relates to women. They are both complex, intertwined and worthy of exploration. Failure to allow myself and others the space to consider issues related to women in Orthodoxy undermines the mission of the Church and adds to its inertia, preventing its growth.

Some readers may assume that applying a feminist framework to Orthodoxy is an impossible marriage of diametrically opposed contradictions. I do not see it that way. Again: I am not looking to resolve this tension, but rather to explore the tension itself as part of my own religious praxis. While supporting the Orthodox faith and its development, I embrace the theology as it has been for thousands of years and how it will remain. As a practicing Orthodox woman, wife and mother, my desire is to promote the voices of women. This understudied population deserves to have their voices amplified, as it can inform how ministries and opportunities for engaging women are developed in the future and bring the Church closer to Christ.

Conclusion

Growing up in a Greek-American family, my parents' home was the hub for family events. Sunday night dinners were reserved for grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins to gather. I vividly remember watching how animated my relatives were when they told stories; hands were used for emphasis, voices carrying from one room to the next, and there was always a punchline to every story. My family was passionate when they told stories and the laughs that permeated around the dinner table are unforgettable.

From my earliest days as a child, I remember being intrigued by words and storytelling. Whether it was in relation to the rules, a current event, or how the news was presented, I understood the importance of messaging. From the ways in which we tell stories to the words we

attribute to any given situation; it is no wonder that words have always been of interest to me. I studied communication at the undergraduate and graduate level and I now work and teach in a School of Communication. To this day, I am still intrigued by words and find myself exploring the profound: why are we who we are? What and who defines us? How do words (and their interpretations) shape those definitions? And how is language used for varying agendas to include and exclude?

Orthodoxy is a religion steeped in tradition and symbolism, and each Orthodox church in the United States has a different sense of culture and community. The one constant is that the church is full of women who are in the process of identity formation that is undoubtedly impacted by their religious and life experiences, both inside and outside the church. From this standpoint, I am interested in delving into Orthodoxy from three perspectives: inward, outward and upward. Inward refers to how women understand themselves and make meaning of their lives as Orthodox Christians. Outward represents how women express Orthodoxy in their day-to-day lives and navigate the secular world. Upward refers to women's Orthodox religious literacy and their own relationship with Christ. My hope is to compel dialogue that centers the voices and experiences of women in Orthodoxy.

The following chapter is a survey of the current body of scholarship on Greek Orthodox history, culture, and women, followed by a review of literature on identity construction and identity meaning-making. In Chapter 3 I discuss the theoretical framework and methodology of this study. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of this study through five Portraits and highlight emergent themes for each. In Chapter 5, I detail the study's emergent themes and synthesize the data as it relates to current scholarship. In Chapter 6, I render my conclusion, providing

implications – for research, women, clergy and spiritual guides, as well as for my own practice.

Lastly, I offer recommendations for further research and my final thoughts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter synthesizes critical literature on Greek Orthodox history, zeroing in on women's roles, how individuals maintain cultural identity and the education of Greek Americans, identity construction, and the construction of the religious and spiritual self. This chapter also includes a review of social science literature on identity development and the social construction of identities, as well as feminist writings on the construction of privilege, oppression and power. The critical overlap of these interdisciplinary bodies of literature allows for us to construct a framework for unpacking the experiences of (self) identity meaning-making constructions within the Greek Orthodox religion. It is necessary to understand the basics of Orthodox history and culture in order to understand the present study participants, who all hail from a Greek Orthodox Church. It is not an overstatement to say that *to be Greek is to be Orthodox*. The two are fused and many of the cultural norms are derived directly from the religion. In order to understand the contextual nuances in which the research questions undergirding this study are situated, it is necessary to begin with a discussion of Greek Orthodoxy history.

History of Orthodoxy

Orthodoxy comes from the Greek word ὀρθοδοξία, or *right believing*, and is a major doctrinal group of Christianity. FitzGerald (1995) notes that in the United States, Christianity is identified with four major religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. The Church's origin dates back to when it was called into being by Jesus Christ and enlivened by the Holy Spirit over 2,000 years ago. It is Orthodox belief that God revealed Himself to humanity by coming to earth born to the Theotokos, or Virgin Mary, in a form both human and divine (Kallis, 2020). Christ was devoted to ministering to the world, teaching followers how to live a life centered upon love (FitzGerald, 1995). He later died by crucifixion, only to conquer death by

rising again to life, sanctifying all of humanity, and assuring that all have the opportunity to live in paradise eternally. Forty days after His resurrection, He ascended into heaven, commanding His disciples to spread the news of the Gospel to all nations, which is the great commission of the Christian Church. Ten days later, on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was sent down upon the apostles and all people, and this was the beginning of the Christian Church or the day the Orthodox Church was established (Kallis, 2020).

The Church was originally structured into five patriarchates—Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem (FitzGerald, 1995). Rome considered itself preeminent over the Orthodox Church, but with the rise of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople asserted itself as equal to Rome and the first among the patriarchates, which fomented tension between the two cities (FitzGerald, 1995). The Western Church (Roman Catholic) and Eastern Church (Orthodox) separated during a time called The Great Schism due to varying views on liturgical practices, views on authority and theological differences. While attempts were made in 1274 and 1439 to restore fellowship between the two churches, the Orthodox Church remained at an impasse due to papal claims of universal jurisdiction and infallibility, which the Orthodox Church disputes to this day (FitzGerald, 1995). Today, the Eastern Orthodox Church represents millions of followers across nine patriarchates: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Bulgaria, Georgia, Jerusalem, Russia, Romania, and Serbia (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, n.d.).

It is important to recognize that Orthodox theology asserts equality between men and women and calls upon all Orthodox to a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5-10) in which they are invited to witness Christ through their actions through ministry (Prassas, 1999). In this context, *ministry* refers to an individual's actions throughout their life in service to Christ bearing witness of His love to the world. There are three Orthodox teachings that support this belief: 1) all

humans are made in the image and likeness of God which applies to both genders. 2) the goal for all Orthodox Christians is *theosis*, or union with God, which includes salvation and redemption. This is achieved over the course of a lifetime through religious praxis. 3) the Holy Spirit makes Christ present in the world. By participating in ministries or doing the work of the Church, Orthodox are moving toward theosis.

Equality of woman and man. The Christian roots of humanity, followed by male and female genders, can be traced back to the Book of Genesis, 1:26-27:

> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and over the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

The story of Creation illustrates that humanity was created first, which was comprised of man and woman, who were made identical in nature, which makes them equal as separate human beings with no gender hierarchy. In the English translation of the New King James Version Bible, it is common understanding that God made woman from man. However, the Bible was first written in Hebrew, and as Mowczko (2013) explains, the words do not necessarily read, "Let us make man" in the sense that we understand the male gender. Instead, the Hebrew word for man *(adam)* can mean "human being," not necessarily a male human being[2]. God first created

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[2] From curriculum studies (Pinar, 1978, 2013; Malewski, 2009) and translation studies perspectives (Bühler, 2002; Riccardi, 2002), understanding the historical, cultural, political and structural influences in which the interpretation and curriculum was rendered is critical to understanding the biases of the knower (i.e., the translator or teacher) as their standpoints influence their knowledge (re)production (Fraser, 1981). Koster (2002) asserts that translation is always two things simultaneously "that of an independent text" ...and "that of a derivative text: a translation is a re-presentation, or a re-construction" that simultaneously produces meaning (p. 31). Similarly, Riccardi (2002) holds that a translation is never literal but an interpretation laced with the knower's personal standpoint and worldviews. On this rendering, the interpretation of the word adam (i.e., humanity) versus Adam (i.e., a masculine proper noun) is worthy of analysis as its common interpretation as "male" is a pillar of myriad ministry curriculum. This taken-for-granted interpretation demonstrates how Creation has been taught to generations of Orthodox Christians and may be an area of divergence between the perfection of theology and practice of stewards. This study has sought to glean that which is implicit in curriculum and interpretation through the lenses of equity, access, and voice to close the gap between theology and practice.

a gender-neutral humanity, and male and female pronouns did not appear until He made a "help-mate" (Genesis 2:18; Pentiuc, 2021) for "humanity." The original Hebrew, Genesis 5:2 holds that humankind, men and women, are both referred to as "adam" by God. Further, that helpmate was not taken from a rib, but from the side of the existing human (Eslinger, 1979; Järvinen, 2008; Mowczko, 2013; Pentiuc, 2021). This demonstrates that the original translation shows man was not created first; humanity was created first then divided. In the split between man and woman, there were inherent differences between male and female with the pair making a whole human. The Septuagint is the earliest Greek translation of Hebrew texts, and while Greek and Hebrew are vastly different languages linguistically, the Septuagint transliterates the Hebrew word *adam* into the proper noun Adam that is seen in many Bibles today (Eslinger, 1979; Järvinen, 2008; Mowczko, 2013; Pentiuc, 2021).

Across various iterations of Christianity, it is generally accepted that Eve was the reason for Adam's wrongdoing in the Garden of Eden, while Adam was responsible for his actions, which resulted in blame being shared equally between the two sexes. Adam and Eve chose to seek knowledge and life a part from God. The result of this is referred to as the *Fall* and led humanity and the World to a life cut off from God (Kallis, 2020). It is Christian belief that the Fall is what brought sin into the world, disrupting the existence of paradise in God's creation of humanity (Karras, 2008). While man and woman were created equal and perfect before the Fall, everyone inherits the consequence of Adam and Eve's sin, but not the sin itself or the guilt associated with sin. It is Orthodox belief that humanity is born into a fallen world as a result of their sin. The consequences of the fallen world include human mortality. The consequence for women was the Lord saying:

I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;

In pain you shall bring forth children;

Your desire *shall be* for your husband,

And he shall rule over you. (Genesis 3:16)

This is from where notions of women being subject to their husbands originates. To Adam He said:

Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it':

"Cursed *is* the ground for your sake;

In toil you shall eat *of* it

All the days of your life.

Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,

And you shall eat the herb of the field.

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread

Till you return to the ground,

For out of it you were taken;

For dust you *are,*

And to dust you shall return. (Genesis 3:17-19)

This passage can lead to different interpretations of roles of male and female, husband and wife, which can lead to cultural stereotypes.

While the male and female were originally created equally in God's image (and this is true from an inclusive sense), this feature of the account of creation has not influenced the roles

and responsibilities of women in the contemporary practice of the church. Karras (2008) offers a timeline of the Orthodox development of humanity:

Stage 1: God's eternal plan for humanity before creation (ahistorical ideal humanity);

Stage 2: God's creation of humanity and its existence in paradise (prelapsarian humanity), which need not be understood literally;

Stage 3: humanity on earth, after the fall and the expulsion from paradise but before Christ (postlapsarian humanity BC);

Stage 4: humanity on earth after Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection (postlapsarian humanity AD); and

Stage 5: humanity in its resurrected state after Christ's second coming (eschatological humanity). (p. 123)

In 2021, we are currently in Stage 4: humanity on earth after Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection. The five stages represent the fulcrum where a critical misinterpretation leads to the liturgical practice of marginalizing and excluding women from ordained ministry. Karras (2008) contends that decisions regarding ordained ministry should not be made from the standpoint of Stage 3 because humanity is no longer in that stage. With Christ's teaching on earth and redemption of humanity, we have advanced in Stage 4 (Ephesians 2:1-22). Understanding the timeline of human development that is accepted by Orthodoxy is important in reviewing the differences between men and women in the church—both from a theological and practical standpoint. Many of the commonplace liturgical decisions are due to humankind's understanding of maleness and femaleness throughout each stage of development.

Biblically documented role of women. Women have had a significant role within the Church, which has been documented in the Bible. Despite Mosaic Law and the cultural norms,

Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald (1998) recognizes that Jesus demonstrated on many occasions the importance of women through his interactions with them:

> Jesus ate with women and taught women (Lk. 10:38-42). As the story of the woman caught in adultery shows, Jesus defended women and honored their inherent dignity (Jn. 8: 3-11). As the story of the woman with the issue of blood shows, Jesus affirmed the faith of women (Lk. 8:43-48). As the story of the Samaritan woman shows, Jesus welcomed women who desired to follow him, and he received those women who were thought by others to be "unclean" and "outcasts" (Jn. 4:7-45). As the stories of women who anointed the feet of the Lord show, Jesus accepted the offerings of women (Lk. 7:36-50; Jn. 12:1-8, cf. Mt. 26:6). (p. 2)

Additionally, God chose the witness of women to spread the Gospel; the Myrrh-Bearing women were the only disciples with enough courage to go to Christ's Tomb and were the first to hear the Good News of the Resurrection; and it was the women who spread the news to the Apostles (Christoforou, 2019).

Orthodoxy recognizes women disciples as followers of Jesus, including Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna (Kollontai, 2000). There are women in the early Church like St. Thelka and St. Nina who are referred to as "Equals to the Apostles[3]," for their preaching and missionary work. The most venerated saint and woman in the Church is Jesus's mother, the Theotokos or Virgin Mary, without whom Christ would not have entered the world (Christoforou, 2019; Kollontai, 2000). It is the Theotokos who is responsible for the first teaching, protecting, and nurturing of Christ (FitzGerald, 1998) and accepted as the person closest to God (Kollontai, 2000). Additionally, the Theotokos was present for Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection as she was

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[3] St. Thelma and St. Nina are referred to as "Equal to the Apostles" in the Synaxarion, a book of all the saints.

among the Apostles when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost (Acts 1:12, 2:4; FitzGerald, 1998).

The responsibility of the Theotokos is so significant that the role of women is typically represented through the interpretation of Eve-Theotokos, with the role of man expressed as Adam-Christ (Kollontai, 2000). Orthodox believe that Adam and Eve are representative of fallen humanity, and that "Christ is the new humanity and brings salvation for all, while the Theotokos became the cause of salvation for all of humanity, through the birth of Christ and her obedience to God" (Kollontai, 2000, p. 167).

For thousands of years before the birth of Christ, civilization in the Mediterranean basin was dominated by men. Women were seen as inferior in intellect and ability compared to men in the Greco-Roman world and this was upheld under Mosaic law which made it impossible for women to have influential roles in society (Koukoura, 1999). Men were viewed as protector and provider, yet at the same time were the oppressors of women - objectifying them as matters of convenience. Women were conditioned to be silent, have self-restraint and abide by strict moral codes established by men (Koukoura, 1999).

Various economic, political and educational factors have been invoked to minimize the role of women throughout history and can also be applied to the church (Deicha, 1999). Historically, women began with little to no formal education while men had access; women were restricted from holding public office or government roles while men were able to choose freely; and women's rights have long been restricted with less opportunities than men. Deicha (1999) holds that, "these distinctions were not only the consequences of socio-economic and political factors, but also of religious prejudices" (p. 40).

Modern role of women in the Church. Orthodoxy refers to the primary worship service of the church as *Divine Liturgy*. The word *liturgy* comes from the Greek, λειτουργια, which means "work of the people," and while there are priests in the Orthodox church, liturgy requires participation and engagement of parishioners who are in attendance:

> For the Orthodox, it is the primary way we experience, understand, express, and transmit our faith. It forms our identity as persons made in the image of God and called to grow into His likeness, helps to nurture us along the way, and ultimately gives us the opportunity to be transformed. (Regule, 2018, p. 37)

In terms of liturgical worship, women represent half of the Orthodox faithful but are prohibited from being ordained to the major orders of deacon, priest, or hierarch which results in sexed-based exclusion. In terms of tradition, women are typically not permitted to go behind or serve within the altar of an Orthodox church (Kollontai, 2000).

The reason that women are not permitted to be ordained priests relates to traditional arguments strictly related to gender (Kollontai, 2000). There are also differences among vocations for men and women to fulfill within the church. The majority of theologians believe that the Church's ecclesiastical position on why women cannot become priests is because:

> (i) Christ did not select women as apostles, (ii) the Theotokos did not exercise sacramental priestly functions, (iii) the Apostles in the early church never ordained women as priests, (iv) the Apostle Paul taught fundamental principles concerning the place of women in the Church according to their spiritual charisms, (v) nowhere in scripture or in Church history have there been women priests or bishops. (Kollontai, 2000, p.173)

Additionally, as Karras (2008) notes, it is the postlapsarian BC model (stage 3) that gives a list of reasons centered on the Fall account in the Book of Genesis that "support male domination over women in church and family life and significant limitations on women's liturgical participation" (p. 152). Karras believes this to be inegalitarian and argues that using Genesis as the reason for disallowing women from participating is a result of making "our fallen condition, and specifically our fallen condition from *before* Christ, normative for the Church" (p. 153).

Despite differing opinions as to whether or not women should take more active liturgical roles, they have served the Church in traditional ways: the teaching of Sunday school, reading the epistle during liturgies, becoming a godparent, serving on parish council or as a youth advisor, volunteering in the church, and making offerings for the sacraments (Karras, 2008), among others. And outside of women's monasteries, women rarely ever serve as acolytes (those who assist priests in religious services) because of their inability to serve within the altar (Karras, 2008). FitzGerald (1995) notes, however, that a growing number of theologically educated women now represent their parishes at conferences and ecumenical meetings, which was uncommon decades ago.

Notwithstanding some opportunities for involvement, there is lay participation more widely available to men but not to women, including altar servers and assisting with the distribution of communion. It is important to note that there is precedent for awarding religious leadership roles to women. Women were, for example, fully ordained deacons in early Christianity and in the Byzantine Church. However, this is no longer practiced (Karras, 2008). According to Karras (2008, p. 117), "there is no evidence of female deacons' participation in public worship beyond their ministry in women's monastic churches," except for their ordination to the rank of Deacon and their reception of the Eucharist (communion); the Eucharist having

been received by sick women who were bound to their homes, and for the physical assistance needed during the baptism of an adult woman convert; and chanting of the matins in the church of Hagia Sophia. With regard to the ancient order of ordained deaconesses, FitzGerald (1995) explains that "At a Pan-Orthodox conference held in Rhodes in 1988, the delegates from all the regional churches formally called for the full restoration of this ancient order so that the pastoral needs of the contemporary church may be served" (p. 124). FitzGerald (1995) further contends that there remains tension between the role of women in the church and Old World cultures, including the Orthodox faith: "Many Orthodox theologians in America today recognize that these critical issues deserve greater theological investigation and pastoral sensitivity so that the influences of earlier cultures can be distinguished from the fundamental convictions of the Orthodox faith" (p. 124). FitzGerald (1995) refers to cultural norms and traditions from earlier historical periods, which have prohibited women from greater liturgical participation. Kollontai (2000) argues also that the reason progress has not been made on the reestablishment of deaconesses is due to dominate cultural ideas and norms regarding the role of women, which is counter to the notion of men and women being equal in God's plan for humanity. Kollontai points out that the ministry of women as part of the clergy is met with "suspicion and even hostility by many Orthodox Christians, because it is seen to be the product of feminism" (2000, p. 172), which, in their view, goes against Orthodox Christian thought and doctrine.

Critique of Women's Experiences in the Contemporary Life of the Church

> Should we not—for the sake of every poor and oppressed woman – work together to challenge our churches to break the shackles of patriarchy and to help raise the prophetic voices of the gospel of justice and liberation? (Assaad, 1999, p. 160)

Setting aside whether or not women should be ordained to the priesthood, as that argument is not the intent of this study, the results of sex-based exclusion have made a direct and indirect impact on the lives of women in the church. Some Orthodox women have been so conditioned to accept this standing that the mere imagining of equitable practice feels taboo and is actively resisted for fear of being labeled feminist or a heretic. For some Orthodox men (i.e., those who benefit from and are most empowered by the patriarchal structure of the church) the discussion of the ordination of women to the priesthood elicits negative visceral reactions. For example, Fr. Alexander Schmemann, an Orthodox priest, described the ordination of women to the priesthood as, "tantamount for us to a radical and irreparable mutilation of the entire faith, the rejection of the whole Scripture, and, needless to say, the end of all dialogues" (Moore, 1978, p. 78). Similarly, Fr. Thomas Hapko, states that the ordination of women involves a "fundamental and radical rejection of the very substance of the biblical and Christian understanding of God and creation" (Moore, 1978, p.77).

Strikingly, both men have been considered esteemed theologians who were "progressive and open-minded" by Bishop Kallistos Ware (as cited in Moore, 1978). Yet, the most notable woman throughout Orthodox history was the Virgin Mary and without whom salvation would not exist. Her role throughout history is so important that every Orthodox church has either a full or half-length icon (*platytera[4]*) of the Virgin Mary with Child Jesus that is behind the altar facing all parishioners. Each week attendants look to the altar and see a beautiful icon or mosaic because her role was that critical to salvation. And yet, for some, the idea of a woman in a position of authority (e.g., altar server, ordained clergy and the like) is unimaginable and elicits the mutilation of the entire religion.

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[4] *Platytera (ton ouranon)* means wider than the heavens.

As referenced previously, all Orthodox Christians are called to a *royal priesthood* in which they are invited to witness Christ through their actions through ministry (Prassas, 1999). Women's ministries throughout Orthodoxy have been recorded to include, "disciples, apostles, evangelists, deaconesses, miracle workers, missionaries, teachers, healers, founders of churches, monasteries and philanthropic institutions, saints, martyrs, and spiritual mothers" (Prassas, 1999, p. 46).

The work of women throughout Orthodoxy has been well-documented. Most Orthodox women are faithful and loyal to the teachings of the church. Ana-Lucia Manolachi, a Romanian Orthodox theologian has written, "The Orthodox woman is by far more Orthodox than men, more submissive, more full of mercy toward the poor and more faithful to the message transmitted by the clergy" (Manolachi as cited in Becher, 1986, p. 176). Similarly, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (as cited in Assaad, 1999), an Orthodox professor in Paris writes:

> Women feel at ease in the warm liturgical atmosphere of the parish; they are in a comfortable cocoon and ask no questions as if the social life outside had no connection with the rituals of the liturgy. It is out of laziness rather than Christian humility on their part that women do not bother to ask themselves whether their Christian responsibility does not require them too to play a more active part in the spiritual guidance of the community. (p. 187)

While the social life is connected to the rituals of liturgy, I maintain that for many women to question the liturgical practice of the church is not something they have ever considered as they have never known the church differently – it is not in their consciousness to question. To think critically of the Church's practice is seen by many as radical, feminist, and antithetical to the foundation of church dogma.

In recent years, women across the secular world have had the courage to speak out against gender discrimination and are identifying systemic oppression that they have experienced. For the purposes of this study, the term *oppression* refers to the way certain groups are privileged or disadvantaged because of their gender. To maintain structures that restrict women from physically accessing spaces in the church and being able to express love for the religion (i.e., prohibited from going behind the altar, not being able to be an acolyte, inability to be ordained), is oppressive. When this is done over the course of thousands of years, the consequence is that it undermines the work of the church and it is felt by generations of women – whether or not they feel comfortable expressing their feelings.

A 1985 World Council of Churches study titled *Women, Religion and Sexuality* found that "cultural and political contexts play a more influential role in determining the practice of the churches towards women than do theology and tradition" (as cited in Assaad, 1998). The study, which included 250 World Council of Churches member churches and roughly 500 women's groups found how all religions (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Christian – Orthodoxy, Protestant and Roman Catholic) have been interpreted by men. The study revealed that while women make up more than half the parishes, they are virtually nonexistent at the top of the hierarchy. According to Assaad, while religions were vastly different (e.g., truth claims, nature of God, holy texts, etc.), the consistent thread came from the marginalized rights, roles and responsibilities of women:

> All religious traditions include teachings which in theory elevate women to the highest
> level; in practice, women are relegated to a lower position in both church and society […]
> when it comes to teachings about women, all their religions were influenced by the

patriarchal values that have always dominated relationships, particularly in religious

institutions. (p. 156)

When examining Orthodoxy specifically, some theologians have long acknowledged that

the traditional masculine language and male-gendering of God is a matter of translation

(and thus human interpretation) that permeates all praxis and is used to relegate women to

lower positions.

In another essay (Becher, 1986) stemming from the data on religion from the

World Council of Churches study, Assaad (1999) asserts that oppressing women does not

promote Orthodox theology:

A theology of sacrifice and suffering when applied only to women, imposed on women

and taught in order to keep them subjugated, is harmful to women and dangerous for the

ideology of the church. It hinders women's liberation and in turn men's liberation, and it

distorts the purposeful will of God. (p. 158)

The patriarchal interpretations of scripture permeate the Church and most often go unexamined.

"The primary claim of Christian feminist theologians could be postulated as such: patriarchal

interpretations of the Bible have been utilized to develop doctrines and theology that

marginalize, oppress, and perpetuate violence [e.g., mental, emotional] against females" (Moder,

2019, p. 1). The restrictions placed on Orthodox women is not unique to Orthodoxy. Assaad

further notes:

When the churches do not support women in their struggle against patriarchal values,

some of these women, although remaining faithful to the church as their spiritual home,

will take their struggles outside church structures. They join other men and women in

civil society who believe in their mutual liberation from the shackles of patriarchy that

has ruled the world and our religious life for far too long. We need to help free our gospel

teaching from the cultural influences that have shrouded its true message as Ariarajah

(1998) states, 'one gospel that frees us all, men and women, and makes us precious and

equal in the sight of God.' (p.160)

The notions of women being equal in God's eyes and believing in the sacrality of the biblical

text do not have to be diametrically opposed. Christ lived a life dedicated to the service of all

people and proselytized strong messages about equality. It is clear from His messages that

humans are fallible and with great humility we should examine any practices that inhibit any

person's religious and spiritual lives. Despite the differences of opinion with regard to whether

or not women should be ordained, we can and should scrutinize why so few women hold other

prominent positions of power within the church. There are additional opportunities for women to

fulfill God's high call to them and to contribute to the maintenance of their Greek Orthodox

heritage and religion.

Maintaining Cultural Identity and the Education of Greek Americans

Since the first Orthodox Christians arrived in North America in 1794, the Orthodox

Church has grown to 260 million worldwide (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, n.d.).

The size of an Orthodox parish can range in size, but most maintain 200-to-500 parishioners

yearly (FitzGerald, 1995). From the 1960s to the 1980s, there was an influx of parishioners who

moved from the major cities of New York City and Chicago to the suburbs, resulting in a number

of newly built or renovated churches.

The theory of assimilation (Harris & Verven, 1996) states that ethnicity disappears with

time and contact with a dominant culture. Preserving Greek heritage was of importance to

immigrants, both in terms of proximity and time as a means of retaining customs and cultural

norms. As Greeks began to immigrate to the United States, people focused on establishing

churches to maintain a connection to their homeland (FitzGerald, 1995) and finding ways to

circumvent the effects of acculturation (Cunning, 1976; Harris & Verven, 1996; Scourby, 1980).

People moved to areas that were located near Orthodox parishes for convenience, and while

people secured jobs outside their neighborhoods, they remained insulated within their Greek

communities (FitzGerald,1995). In the 1920s, afternoon schools were established to teach

children the language and culture of Greece, and during the 1930s and 1940s, these schools

moved to local parishes (FitzGerald, 1995). Teaching their children Greek as a means to combat

assimilation to American culture was also a means of active cultural resistance (Mendoza &

Martinez, 1981).

  Harris and Verven (1996) developed a Greek-American acculturation scale to understand

the extent to which an individual is immersed in their culture and the effect of acculturation on

Greek-derived attitudes and behavior patterns. Their sample included 138 Greek-Americans (69

men, 69 women) and 97 Anglo-Americans (55 men, 42 women), and it found that those who

were the least educated had not been as acculturated as their more educated counterparts.

Further, acculturation for this population was related to gender in that men were more

acculturated than women. One reason for this, according to Harris and Verven (1996), was that

some studies (Georgas, 1989) have found that Greek-Americans tend to maintain traditional or

hierarchical family structures. In such depictions, the husbands/fathers make all of the important

decisions and the wives/mothers take more subservient and self-sacrificing roles for the good of

their family. Since men find employment outside the home and are largely in settings with other

cultures and Americans, they have more exposure to dominant cultures, while women tend to

manage the home and family life. Harris and Verven (1996) also posit that the findings may be a

product of the ways boys and girls are raised in their Greek-American culture. Whereas boys are raised with more freedom than girls in their formative years, girls are held to a higher standard, which governs what is (in)appropriate behavior for the sexes (Harris & Verven, 1996, p. 608; Kunkelman, 1990). Finally, their study found that participants showed tendencies to identify with traditional Greek patterns.

A shift in the Orthodox Church from that of immigrants to first generation parishioners happened when immigration to the United States slowed. The membership of the Orthodox parish grew to include second and third generations, and parishes expanded into the suburbs (FitzGerald, 1995). During this time, the use of English during liturgical services increased as well as the importance of religious education programs for children and classes for adults. While education for immigrants was used to maintain identity and heritage, it has since grown to encompass much more. While the primary function of the church has always been a place of worship, most parishes have religious education programs and ministries for people at all stages of life. Today, in addition to Sunday School and Greek School, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America offers dozens of youth, young adult, and adult ministries (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, n.d.).

Within the Greek culture, family is extremely important, and Greeks frequently perceive their understanding of family as different than the American understanding of family (Kunkelman, 1990). It is through culture and family that Greeks establish their values and choices. In addition to doing things the *right way* and it being a point of cultural pride, on an individual level, doing right is having others acknowledge that they think highly of you, which is central to the culture. In describing family, Greeks often refer to what is considered to be lacking in mainstream American families, including "cohesion, concern for and support of other family

members, and the idea of the family as an integrated unit" (Kunkelman, 1990, p. 54). It is not

uncommon for households to have multiple generations of extended family under one roof.

While usually considered traditional and patriarchal in first generation homes, family structures

have moved toward egalitarian practices with each generation that passes. First generation

women may have demonstrated deference to their husbands, but women ultimately became the

decision makers when it came to the home, children, finances, and religious matters

(Kunkelman, 1990).

In terms of familial relationships, Greek-American children feel a sense of responsibility

and obligation toward their parents as a result of their upbringing. Greek families are child-

focused and foster intense emotional attachments (Kunkelman, 1990). It would not be

uncommon for the parents of middle-aged children to offer them advice as though they were still

teenagers. Children are expected to maintain certain values and traditions. They are expected to

do what is *right*, maintain close ties to family and the larger Greek community, attend church,

and develop respectable reputations (Kunkelman, 1990). Greek tradition also involves extensive

storytelling with "utterances" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293) or phrasing that has distinct cultural

connotations and purpose. Bakhtin (1981) writes that "words bring with them the contexts where

they have lived" (p. 293); this notion is ever present in Greek storytelling and Greek families.

These culturally influenced responsibilities, habits, and practices are so deeply rooted that they

are felt to be as reliably identifiable as one's DNA.

Identity Development and the Social Construction of Identities

Psychology's study of identity development has historically focused on males and has

placed females outside the boundaries of normative behavior (Bettis & Adams, 2005; Gilligan,

1982). Erik Erikson (1968), the preeminent foundational psychology theorist, was the first to

conceptualize the identity development process. When speaking of identity, Erikson was referring to men, but in relation to women he wrote, "I think that much of a young women's identity is already defined in her kind of attractiveness and in the selective nature of her search for the man (or men) by whom she wished to be sought" (Erikson, 1968, p. 283). Considering the sociohistorical context in which Erikson found himself, he has been viewed as socially progressive with his departure from Freudian training and his involvement in progressive social issues (Jones & Abes, 2013). This highlights the fact that men were the center of research and privileged as the norm in many fields and therefore structures and outcomes of previous literature on identity development and the social construction of identities are limited to the experiences of men. Dill (1983) posited the importance of examining the structures that impact women's lives, providing "us not only with a means of gaining insight into the ways in which race, class, and gender oppression are viewed, but also with a means of generating conceptual categories that will aid us in extending our knowledge of their situation" (p. 208).

Erikson's notion of identity development involves a series of tasks that correspond to age-related, developmental stages which range from infancy through maturity. To progress from one stage to the next, individuals must engage with certain developmental tasks which typically involve a "crisis" or decision-making point (e.g., divorce), in which individuals must move one way or another—thus the term *identity crisis* (Erikson, 1994). Each of Erikson's (1994) stages of psychosocial development is based on a psychosocial virtue (hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care and wisdom) coupled with stages representing polar orientations and crises. Erikson's fifth stage, identity versus isolation, is often times viewed as the transition from childhood to adulthood. In the fifth stage, individuals are considering the answer to the question, "Who am I," which is a fundamental development task of later adolescence (Erikson, 1994).

Similarly to Erikson, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) discussion of identity focuses on what happens during the years in which individuals begin to discover themselves. Chickering and Reisser (1993) theorize that identity is a core passage that students must go through during higher education and beyond. The Seven Vectors of Development (1993) emphasizes the journey toward individuation, which includes each person's iterative process toward discovering who they are, including the ways in which they interact with other individuals and groups.

Table 1. Chickering and Reisser's Seven Vectors of Development

Vector One	Developing Competence (intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal)
Vector Two	Managing emotions
Vector Three	Moving through autonomy toward independence
Vector Four	Developing mature interpersonal relationships
Vector Five	Establishing identity
Vector Six	Developing purpose
Vector Seven	Developing integrity

Adapted: Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CS: Jossey-Bass.

While Chickering and Reisser (1993) cover all stages of identity development, they are particularly concerned with the state at which a person develops a sense of self: "At one level of generalization, all the developmental vectors could be classified under the general heading, 'identity formation'" (p. 78). All seven vectors lead an individual to a discovery and understanding of self. The fifth vector, Establishing Identity, relates to an individual's comfort with their appearance; comfort with other dimensions like gender, sexual orientation, as well as

social and cultural contexts; and an understanding of self-concept and self-acceptance; as well as an awareness of internal and external perceptions of self (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) acknowledge that development along the vectors is not linear, and that students do not always pass through these stages as if on a ladder or in lockstep. This fact will influence their movement along the vectors and determine the ease or difficulty with which they navigate their college years. Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggest that some of the vectors are generally developmentally sequential in the sense that they build off one another, so working through earlier vectors is needed before individuals can move onto later vectors; moving past vector five, establishing identity, requires individuals to resolve the preceding vectors. Additionally, undertaking tasks in each vector can vary based on racial and cultural background and can include additional tasks like developing a spiritual identity (Jones & Abes, 2013). The order of vectors can vary by group, such as gender, and some individuals delay development in one vector to work on another (Fassinger, 1998; Pope, 2000; Straub & Rodgers, 1986; Taub & McEwen, 1991). This change from Chickering and Reisser's theory leads to the focus on the importance of the construction of social identities in identity development.

The social construction of identities. The study of socially constructed identities necessarily arose out of previous, canonized psychological literature on identity development, which prized the White male and White female perspective and failed to engage with many other individuals and groups. In contrast to studying identity from a development standpoint where individuals move from stage to stage often tied to physiological and biological growth (e.g., age), acknowledging the social construction of identities is important when seeking to understand the influence of culture and context on how individuals perceive themselves and others (Jones & Abes, 2013). The term *social identity* was first coined by social psychologist Henry Tajfel

(1982), who defines it as: "That part of the individuals' self-concept [personal identity] which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 2). Tajfel (1982) posited that social identity can never fully encapsulate the complexities of the development of identity, but that a person's perceptions of self are influenced by membership in social groups.

According to social psychologist, Kay Deaux (1993), understanding the tension between personal identity and social identity is an important factor of conceptualizing social identities. Brewer (1991) and Turner (1987) describe personal identity as one feeling different from others, and social identity is when individuals focus on shared characteristics of a given group. Deaux (1993) believes that personal and social identities are interrelated and that separating the two is misleading. She states that "Personal identity is defined, at least in part, by group memberships, and social categories are infused with personal meaning" (1993, p. 5). Deaux (1993) overlaps personal and social identities rooted in the social and personal worlds with the meaning individuals make of their experiences.

Rita Hardiman and Bailey Jackson III (1997) also developed a stage-based model of social identity construction. On their rendering, social identity includes attributes that are common among agent (i.e., those who hold power) and target (i.e., those who are marginalized) groups which are included in the identity construction process. The stages of social identity construction include: (1) naïve or no social conscious, (2) acceptance, (3) resistance, (4) redefinition, and (5) internalization. Within this model, individuals move from not being aware of their social group to accepting norms of the group, to resisting and redefining themselves independent of systems of oppression, to internalizing their understanding into redefinition (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Together, Hardiman and Jackson describe race and gender as

socially constructed. Their model grew out of psychological and positivist theories and focused on racial, cultural, and ethnic identity.

Another identity construction model was conceived by Jones and McEwen (2000), who created the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI), an outgrowth of Jones' dissertation, *Voices of Identity and Difference: A Qualitative Exploration of the Multiple Dimensions of Identity Development in Women College Students* (1995). Their model draws upon scholarship in the areas of student development identity theories, underrepresented groups, and socially constructed identities and intersections (Jones & Abes, 2013). Identity is illustrated at the center of the MMDI, with personal characteristics or attributes on intersecting rings that represent multiple social identities. These characteristics and attributes can include culture, sexual orientation, religion, gender, social class, and race. The importance of each social identity is represented in this model (Figure 1) by a dot on the ring and the proximity of the dot to the core or personal identity of an individual (Jones & Abes, 2013), and has been used in student affairs scholarship (Chavez et al., 2003; Davis, 2002; Hauenstein, 2018; Love et al., 2005).

Figure 1. Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity
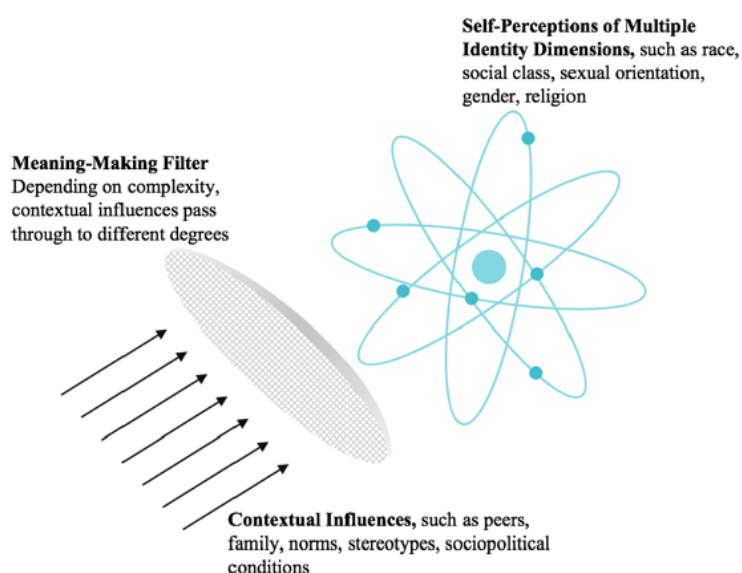
The MMDI transcends student development and is relevant to any critical study with a focus on identity construction because of its inclusiveness in understanding the impact and influence of context, as well as the agency of individuals to ascribe meaning-making to the identity process. When considering the contexts in which individuals find themselves it is important to evaluate where and why their identities are most salient. It is also necessary to understand where (and if) they come into conflict or enter into identity crisis (Erikson, 1964) and how individuals navigate the disequilibrium of cognitive dissonance.

Psychologist Leon Festinger established the Cognitive Dissonance Theory in 1957. Cognitive dissonance is the "distressing mental state caused by inconsistencies between a person's two believes or a belief and an action" (West & Turner, 2018, p. 2000). Festinger posited that when an individual experiences dissonance the discomfort they experience psychologically will motivate them to reduce dissonance in order to achieve consistency. In addition to attempting to reduce dissonance, individuals will actively "actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase dissonance (Festinger, 1957, p. 3). When someone experiences dissonance, they can lower the level of dissonance they experience by changing their belief, the action, or the perception of the action (West & Turner, 2018). Cognitive dissonance, when coupled with identity construction, can lead to individuals affirming or re-establishing their notions of who they are.

Understanding the answer to "Who Am I?" is a task central to the fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development, which is often experienced by college-aged adults. "Who Am I?" was also at the foundation of Jones' work (1995), but she expanded on influences of power, privilege, and voice. Jones was influenced by Josselson (1987), who, in acknowledging that the study of women in comparison to men was vague, said that women "orient themselves in more

complicated ways, balancing many involvements and aspirations, with connections to others

being paramount; their identities are thus compounded and more difficult to articulate" (p. 8).

For Jones and Abes (2013), underrepresented groups was also a result of understanding

that identity is impacted by various social contexts, and not just an unconscious process. Studies

with underrepresented groups often include systems of privilege and oppression, social norms,

and societal expectations (Torres et al., 2009). Insofar as socially constructed identities and

intersections are concerned, Andersen and Collins (2010) recognize, "Race, class, and gender

matter because they remain the foundations for systems of power and inequality that, despite our

nation's diversity, continue to be among the most significant social facts of people's lives" (p. 1).

In the context of this study, I place the social construction of identity squarely upon religion

matters as well. Andersen and Collins (2010) suggest that the categories of race, class, and

gender intersect with impactful experiences. This framing acknowledges that an individual

maintains both oppressed and privileged identities (e.g., White and woman) (Crenshaw, 1995;

Collins, 2010).

Realizing that the MMDI focused primarily on one part of identity construction, Abes et

al. (2007) developed a *Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity* (RMMDI).

The expanded, more comprehensive model includes cognitive and interpersonal development

and includes a meaning-making filter between context and identity (Hauenstein, 2018). It allows

for cultural contexts to be considered far more heavily and a person's agency to be examined.

RMMDI was developed using Kegan's (1994) theory of lifespan development and Martha

Baxter Magolda's (2001) young adult development research toward self-authorship. Kegan's

theory (1994) outline five orders of consciousness representing meaning-making structures that

dictate how individuals perceive and organize their life experiences.

Kegan's (1994) five orders of consciousness include: impulsive mind, imperial mind, socialized mind, self-authoring, and self-transformation. Magolda (2001) contends that it is the third order of consciousness that is most relevant to meaning-making structures of college students. In this order of consciousness, meaning is made through "concrete relationships to which one's own interests are subordinated" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 4). The notion of self-authorship is the ability for an individual to define their beliefs, identity and social relations. It requires, "an ability to construct knowledge in a contextual world, an ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and an ability to engage in relationships without losing one's internal identity" (Magolda, 1999, p. 12). It considers the social contexts and institutional norms and narratives at play in the construction of identity.

Social identity construction of gender. Constructions of gender and gendered social interactions have been largely shaped by white, Western, middle-class, heterosexual worldviews but ideas about gender vary across social and cultural settings (Davies, 2003; Goffman, 1981; Jackson & Scott, 2002). The concept of what makes someone a "girl" or "female" is a social construct that changes based on discursive practices and societal norms (Adams, 1999; Bettis & Adams, 2005; Budgeon, 1998; Inness, 1998; Mitchell, 1995), which makes it difficult to define as it cannot be universally understood or agreed upon. Articulating the importance of context when discussing identity construction, Josselson (1996) posits, "Identity is what we make of ourselves within a society that is making something of us" (p. 28). In essence, we name and perform gender according to social norms (e.g., beauty standards, domestic labor, and the like) that have already categorized and operationalized us without our consent. For example, organized religions are one institutionalized framework that operationalize *doing gender* or

"creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137).

For Torres et al. (2009), "One's sense of self and beliefs about one's own social group as well as others are constructed through interactions with the broader social context in which dominant values dictate norms and expectations" (p. 577). Similarly, Cahill (1986) notes that gender identity construction is a "self-regulating process" (p. 176) where gendered members begin to monitor and conduct their actions with regard to gender norms. West and Zimmerman (1987) hold that gender is a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction that is not only:

> The appropriation of gendered ideals (by the valuation of those ideals as proper ways of being and behaving) but also *gender identities* [sic] that are important to individuals and that they strive to maintain. Thus, gender differences, or the sociocultural shaping of "essential female and male natures," achieve the status of objective facts. They are rendered normal, natural features of persons and provide the tacit rationale for differing fates of women and men within the social order. (p. 142)

This is particularly true within the Greek families, culture, and Orthodoxy. Davies (2003) writes that gender expression is socioculturally constructed as well. She asserts that "masculinity and femininity are not inherent properties of individuals, . . . they are inherent or structural properties of our society: that is, they both condition and arise from social action" (Davies, 2003, p. 283).

One of the first psychologists to explore the dilemmas of socially constructed gender identities was Kenneth Gergen (1991), who believed that identities are constructed through relationships individuals have with others and the context in which they find themselves, which leads to identities being disconnected. The relationships with others and fragmentation of

identities impact the multiple layers of identities and makes it difficult for anyone to know who

they really are (Gergen, 1991). The notion of identity and their interconnectedness to

relationships in women's studies has focused on race, class, and gender, with women like

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) leading the way to understanding the impact of female identity and

the effects of ideology, power, privilege, and oppression.

Social identity construction of womanhood. Founded on de Beauvoir's (1949/2014)

rendering, this study uses a phenomenological description of womanhood. De Beauvoir states

that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 13). Becoming a woman is a process of

socialization and an effect of socio-cultural forces, whereas female beings "are made *woman* in

the society" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2014, p. 73) *and* in part, by their biological-based experiences

(e.g., menstruation, child-bearing), and how those experiences and performances are historically

connected (de Beauvoir, 1949/2014). Butler (1990) writes:

> When de Beauvoir claims that "woman" is a historical idea and not a natural fact, she
>
> clearly underscores the distinction between sex, as biological facticity, and gender, as the
>
> cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity. To be female is, according to that
>
> distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have to become
>
> woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of "woman." (p. 273)

Butler (1990), who continually draws on de Beauvoir's distinctions between the cultural and

biological, holds that gender is *freely chosen*, casually and expressively, through the plurality of

actions and practices that constitute the meanings of being *woman*. Butler (1990) asks then: "To

what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the

internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person?" Womanhood,

therefore, can be researched and explored to understand how it is its own entity and how it transforms what is the performance itself.

Ideology, privilege, oppression and power. Donald and Hall's (1986) theory of ideology identifies meaning as socially constructed and claims that there exists ideological logics that limit the way in which people understand the world. Hall (1986) defines ideology as, "the mental frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (p. 29). Hall contends that unconsciously absorbed ideologies are what produce individuals' lived realities. Makus (1990) notes that:

> Because ideologies are embedded within social formations and within the structures of language, they are resistant to change and thus to the introduction of alternative perspectives. There exists a structural constraint against alternative perspectives to the degree that they may be seen as violating the common sense of a culture. (p. 500)

Makus (1990) points out that Hall does not suggest that alternative perspectives are unable to change. The problem is that, "by thus stigmatizing those outside its consensus, dominant society encourages conformity to its norms and produced and reproduces consciousness" (p. 497). This is what makes it necessary to question who represents the dominant (or agent) group, who holds the power and what ideologies are (re)presented, as these/they are what aids in creating reality and truth systems that become commonplace.

In an attempt to understand underlying power dynamics, Gramsci (1971) used the term *cultural hegemony* to capture the development of ideology related to the dominance of society through social class as part of his "philosophy of praxis" (Cox, 1983, p. 163). Bourdieu (1989)

developed a theory of culture and power which introduces a complex class system in which individuals compete for social positions, which creates hierarchy. Bourdieu's theory is often applied to educational systems as an example of the ways in which social hierarchies legitimize the power relations between classes. Gramsci (1971) contests that this power is not just related through physical dominance, but through the acquisition of cultural capital (e.g., education) and social capital (e.g., relationships -- Bourdieu, 1989). Gramsci (1971) referred to the efforts and abilities of the ruling class to legitimize their influence through these types of capital, and that their influence became so embedded in culture that it was accepted as the status quo. According to Gramsci (1971), it is these false conceptions that lead to cultural reproduction that is not in the best interest of those outside of the ruling-class. Gender is one such cultural and political commodity in this socially constructed cultural ideology in Orthodoxy.

In order to understand the construction of social identities, privilege, oppression and power must also be acknowledged and centered in feminist research (Kohli & Burbules, 2012). "Key components of feminist criticism [have] included unpacking the connections between knowledge and power, and the valuing of subjective personal experience as an undeniable aspect of knowledge and knowing" (Kohli & Burbules, 2012, p. 4). Numerous personal and ideological standpoints must be considered in order to embrace "the view of subjectivity as discursively constructed and multiple" (Nicholson, 1997, p. 5). Cole (1993) reminds us that we must interrogate "who and what are being excluded from the domain of philosophical discourse, and for what reasons" (p. 13). This is certainly the case when one's own standpoints are seemingly contradictions (e.g., the notion of womanhood in society versus womanhood within the church), which makes the need to examine the, "political and social construction of knowledge and the process of knowing" (Kohli & Burbules, 2012, p. 37) even more central to feminist critique.

Individual experiences, particularly women's experiences, are inextricably linked to social structures (Anzaldua, 1990; Bettie, 2003; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1995; Hauenstein, 2018). Crenshaw (1995) writes:

[Intersectionality is] the view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of this include race, gender, class, ability, religion, and ethnicity. (p. 1245)

The dynamic interplay of ever-changing dimensions of identity can be understood through the lens of intersectionality when all the dimensions related to structures of power, privilege and oppression are considered in specific contexts (Johnson et al., 2011). One such context is within the institution of religion.

Power and oppression reinforce one another and exist simultaneously (Collins, 1990). The vast majority of Greek Orthodox women hold racially white identities (i.e., power) while maintaining gender marginalization (i.e., oppression). Peggy McIntosh, an American anti-racism activist and feminist described her whiteness by saying, "Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit in turn upon people of color" (1988, p. 102). McIntosh (2003) coined *conferred dominance*, which are the situations in which groups are systemically over empowered. *Unearned entitlements* are privileges that should be experienced by all individuals. McIntosh (2003) illustrates how whites are conditioned not to recognize white privilege in the same way that men are not conditioned to recognize male privilege. McIntosh identifies privileges white people encounter on a daily basis,

which are attached more to skin-color than class, religion, ethnicity, or other factors, but all are interconnected (Crenshaw, 1995; Collins, 1990).

The dynamics of identity and privilege are further complicated by the standpoint of others (Harding, 2004). Johnson (2006) describes how the paradox of privilege as:

> Received *by* individuals, the granting of privilege has nothing to do with who those individuals are as people. Instead, individuals receive privilege only because they are perceived by others as belonging to privileged groups and social categories. (p. 34)

Johnson (2006) illustrates one complexity of identity and its impact on privilege. An individual's privilege can be lost if others do not believe they are part of a particular group—as can be the case of a straight woman who is presumed otherwise. Privilege can also be held even though it is not possessed. For example, a White woman from a poor family may experience life differently based on her social class identity.

Johnson (2006) describes oppression as the opposite of privilege, but similarly, it results from the relationships of various privileged and oppressed socially-constructed categories. These notions of unseen, unearned, relational privileges relate to other oppressive, colonial-settler norms embedded within U.S culture: white, male, heterosexual, cisgender, temporarily-abled, Christian, English speaking, middle/owning class, US citizen oppress any "other" identity categories. In order to disrupt these systems, they must be made visible (Collins, 1990). "Vital to the study of identity construction is analyzing the convergence of power and resistance so as to confront, complicate, or, if possible, to dispel oppression" (Hauenstein, 2018, p. 32). Yet, surfacing privilege and oppression can feel disorienting, uncomfortable and disruptive, but without a commitment to do so, we "will keep producing inadequate, incomplete, unwarranted,

and biased accounts of the world" (Kohli & Burbules, 2012, p. 45). Robin DiAngelo (2018) argues:

> The key to moving forward is what we do with our discomfort. We can use it as a door out—blame the messenger or disregard the message. Or we can use it as a door in by asking, why does this unsettle me? What would it mean for me if this were true? (p. 14)

Holland et al. (1998) write that people act as "social producers and social products" (p. 42). Both our conscious and unconscious relationship with privilege, power, and oppression impact the individual's perceptions of self and their identity construction process.

Constructing the Religious and Spiritual Self

For Parks (2011), an important development that occurs at the dawn of adulthood is the growing awareness of one's own assumptions, and the subsequent attempts to broaden and deepen one's own epistemological and ontological beliefs. Referring to Perry's (1970) study of nine shifts in young adults' relationship to knowledge, Parks (2011) condensed the shifts to four forms of knowing: authority-bound, unqualified relativism, commitment in relativism, and convictional commitment.

Authority outside of the self is the first form of knowing. This can be knowledge accessed or received from a parent, religious leader, friend, employer, or any particular person. When individuals rely on authority-bound knowing, Parks (2011) claims that people cannot look outside of their perspective or be critical of their own thought as a result of their knowledge being "inextricably bound up with the power of the trusted Authority [sic]" (p. 72). This form of unexamined ways of knowing can be dualistic in nature and consist of a world in which binaries exist, good and bad, right or wrong, true or false, us versus them. In this form of knowing, the inner self is mainly composed by others, which can include expectations set forth by family

members, and it is not always certain that someone will move beyond an authority-bound way of knowing (Parks, 2011). While recognizing that individuals move from one stage of knowing to another at their own pace, higher education can facilitate the movement from authority-bound knowing to disconcerting discovery.

When an individual begins to realize that their former way of thinking does not correspond to their lived experiences, they shift into *disconcerting discovery*. Parks (2011) claims this transformation can exist when students learn that one professor's comments contradict another's. In order to negotiate the tension between these comments, individuals may compartmentalize the views to ensure there is no conflict. Parks argues that the individuals may also use hierarchies of value within disconcerting discovery to determine what is truth or opinion, right or wrong, good or bad.

As individuals navigate new experiences and realize that "knowledge becomes relative, meaning that all knowledge is shaped by, and thus relative to, the context and relationships within which it is composed," (Parks, 2011, p. 75) they move into the midpoint of Parks' ways of knowing, called *unqualified relativism*, which was taken from Rupp (1979). In this stage of knowing, one realizes that context matters and if they were born to different parents, of another religion, in a different town, or attended a school with different resources, their way of thinking could be drastically different than what had been established. In this stage, one becomes aware that those who were authority-figures also composed their own reality within their given contexts. At this point, individuals question the authority-bound and dualistic thinking and become more receptive to critical thinking, questioning the reasons for their beliefs (Parks, 2011).

What is difficult about unqualified relativism is that while someone may now feel freedom and power of their views of previously held assumptions as one of many views or reflections, it is sometimes at the cost of previous certainty. To combat this feeling, people may say, "I have my truth, you have your truth, and they have their truth. It doesn't matter what you think, as long as you are sincere" (Parks, 2011, p. 77). In this particular example, the desire to maintain certainty of any truth is difficult to reconcile as it becomes the object of opinion which varies from person to person, especially if it is not based on reflection and observation. To move into qualified relativism, one must become "increasingly aware that discriminations can be made between arguments based on such principles as internal coherence, the systematic relation of an argument to its own assumptions, external data, and so forth" (Parks, 2011, p. 77). Since being reflective does not always guarantee certainty, individuals must find ways to compose their realities.

In describing the search for meaning of life choices, Parks (2011) argues that one may start to regard ways of composing truths and making moral decisions, which she presents as a commitment to relativism. This is achieved through consciously engaging in metacognition about what is worth knowing, while recognizing the limited nature of all convictions. Fowler (1995) describes this shift of knowing as moving from a tacit form of understanding the world to a more explicit system that is bound by a desire to make sense of the world in which one lives. Parks (2011) argues that this move to critical thinking from tacit to explicit systems is a feature of becoming an adult in faith or meaning making that arises during emerging adult years.

Since Perry (1970) focused his research on students in the undergraduate years, his forms of knowing concluded with the commitment to relativism. Similar to Fowler (1995), Parks (2011) believed that another form of knowing existed, *convictional commitment,* but that it does

not develop until midlife. This form of knowing is very different than that which is authority bound. Those with convictional commitment embody "a sense of deep conviction with a quality of knowing that we recognize as wisdom, whether or not we concur" (Parks, 2011, p. 79). A person who possesses the wisdom that accompanies convictional commitment embraces complexities and paradoxes and has the ability to hear the opinions and beliefs of others while still maintaining their core sense of self (Parks, 2011).

In an attempt to get to convictional commitment as a way of knowing, one must pass through the first three steps: authority-bound, unqualified relativism, and commitment in relativism (Parks, 2011). Parks further argues that the first three stages can be completed during the four years in which students are in college as students come to college with their authority-bound assumptions and ways of knowing and begin to question their conventions and discover new ideas, propelling toward a commitment in relativism.

In comparison to Parks' first three stages of knowing, Fowler's (1995) theory of faith development describes these stages as a movement from a synthetic-conventional faith (stage three) to individuative-reflective faith (stage four). To understand these stages, it is necessary to understand that they came from the Mythic-literal faith (stage two). Fowler's belief of faith is that which can be experienced as a result of children thinking in concrete ways. During the mythic-literal stage, children experience faith as stories they are told and customs that they practice. According to Fowler, when God is an important part of someone's life during Mythic-literal faith, He must be:

> re-imaged as having inexhaustible depths and as being capable of knowing personally those mysterious depths of self and others we know that we ourselves will never know…the adolescent's religious hunger is for a God who knows, accepts and confirms

the self deeply, and who serves as an infinite guarantor of the self with its forming myth

of personal identity and faith. (1995, p. 153)

Until this point, much of what an adolescent knows is based on authorities located externally to

the self. During the stage of synthetic-conventional faith, which people generally begin around

the age of 13 and continue until they are 18, people begin to think abstractly. Additionally,

people experience layers of meaning within stories and symbols of faith, while claiming faith as

their own instead of what they have been told by family or those with whom they most come into

contact.

This recognition of knowledge being acquired first by family relates to Bronfenbrenner's

(1979) Model of Human Development, which depicts five environmental systems (individual,

microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) with which individuals interact, which

impacts an individual's relationships. Bronfenbrenner posits that the microsystem, which

includes family, peers, neighborhoods, church, and schools, most directly impact a child's

development. Acknowledging that much of what individuals learn is from family, Fowler (1995)

believes that a person in synthetic-conventional faith is able to verbalize, defend, and reflect

upon their values and normative practices. People in this stage are pulled in a myriad of different

directions—by family, peers, media, and religion. Faith, according to Fowler, must be the

cohesion to values and provide the foundation for identity and outlook. In this stage, individuals

can be tempted to conform to the expectations and judgments of those around them, since the

individuals do not fully grasp and understand their identity enough to maintain a consistent

perspective. Fowler (1995) notes that people at this stage claim their ideologies, which represent

their values and beliefs, but they have not been reflected on it in an introspective way.

Navigating this stage can prove challenging for several reasons: if a person begins to question

those who provide authoritative influences; if the systems and policies which had previously been in place change; or if one becomes more self-reflective in trying to understand exactly what they believe and why. Fowler (1995) acknowledges that leaving home can cause this type of self-examination and cause movement within stages.

Whereas in stage three people have a difficult time separating symbols representative of meaning, stage four (individuative-reflective faith) is characterized by the possibility of a demythologization (Fowler, 1995). At this point, meaning can be separated from the symbols they represent (e.g., Eucharist, Church, priest and the like), and people are most self-reflective on their beliefs and outlook of the world. Fowler (1995) notes that it is during the transition into this stage that people must face certain unavoidable tensions:

> Individuality versus being defined by a group or group membership; subjectivity and the power of one's strongly felt but unexamined feelings versus objectivity and the requirement of critical reflection; self-fulfillment or self-actualization as a primary concern versus service to and being for others; the question of being committed to the relative versus struggle with the possibility of an absolute. (p. 182)

While in this stage, people are discovering that their sense of self, which was previously developed and defined by those around them, is no longer prescribed by others. In order to maintain the new identity, people create a new, "meaning frame [that is] conscious of its own boundaries and inner connections and aware of itself as a 'world view'" (Fowler, 1995, p. 182). People become responsible for their beliefs and values in relation to the self-reflection that takes place during this stage (Fowler, 1995; Parks, 2011).

Fowler (1995) and Parks (2011) both address the self-awareness and introspection that develop in their middle-stages of knowing and faith. They hold that when in this stage, people

are brought to (dis)equilibrium and need to explore new and retained identities on their way to affirming their evolving sense of self. As people transition to new ways of knowing or stages of faith, they will undoubtedly find themselves in situations in which their views and assumptions are challenged, and their worldview can begin to unravel. Fowler's theory shows movement from synthetic-conventional faith toward individuative/reflective faith during the emerging adult years. This agrees with Parks (2011) who illustrates that students' way of knowing moves from self-authored to a more intentional way of knowing, and one way they arrive at this stage is through *shipwreck*.

In describing the transformative nature of the experience of faith, Parks (2011) refers to Niebuhr's (1972) use of the metaphors of shipwreck, gladness, and amazement. Throughout *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* Parks illustrates that a metaphorical shipwreck may occur when someone or a new experience questions our perceptions and how they were presented or taught throughout life. To undergo shipwreck, according to Parks, "is to be threatened in a total and primary way. In shipwreck, what has dependably served as a shelter and protection and held and carried one where one wanted to go comes apart" (2011, p. 40). Parks goes on to say that in surviving shipwreck, there is eventual gladness in a better understanding of life which can result in transformation. Through this transformation, faith can be discovered as an activity and can assist in identifying a deeper purpose and meaning. This new level of reflection and (re)contextualizing advances as critical thought becomes more normative.

In a study on the identity formation of emerging adults in universities, Stoppa (2017) examined the actual experiences and ways in which spiritual identity developed in students of diverse religious backgrounds throughout the college years. Using a qualitative, narrative approach, Stoppa compared the experiences to various theoretical models conceived by such

theorists as Fowler (1995) and Parks (2011). The study, which consisted of thirteen participants—eleven women and two men—supported previously established theoretical models. Additionally, Stoppa (2017) reports that nearly all of the students stated that their experiences before college were significant in laying a foundation for their spiritual identity formation. Acknowledging that their spiritual identity was external to their sense of self and was authority-bound during pre-college years, the students in this population shared that it was not until they transitioned into college that they felt intensive spiritual identity negotiation took place (Stoppa, 2017). As such, student development and the transition into post-secondary education requires further dialogue.

   Authoring of self. Socially constructed self-identities are fluid and dynamic (Abes et al., 2007; Magolda, 2009), and one way to access the socially and culturally situated self is through self-narratives (Bakhtin, 1986; Daiute, 2014; Hall, 2001; Hauenstein, 2018). Self-narratives, or stories, are an important component of identity construction, particularly in times of uncertainty or change (Alvesson & Karreman, 2007; McAdams et al., 2006), because "[t]he *I* tells the story of the self, and that story becomes a part of *Me* [emphasis in original]" (McAdams et al., 2006, p. 3). Self-narratives and narrated identities operate to allow for people to construct meaning about themselves (for themselves and for others) and to make sense of who they are with both internal and external discourse (McAdams et al., 2006).

   Magolda (1999, 2009) further expounds that the authoring of self allows for us "to construct knowledge in a contextual world, and [that] ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and [the] ability to engage in relationships without losing one's internal identity" (p. 12) often develops during late adolescence and young adulthood. This notion of holding others' expectations of ourselves as separate from our inner voice is critical to

this study. However, to further add to the complexity of identity construction and identity narratives, both often develop outside our consciousness (Hoedemaekers, 2010; Benwell & Stokoe, 2010; Hollway & Jefferson, 2005) and therefore the practice of the explicit telling of stories can help make the unconscious subtext visible (Ninivaggi, 2010). For emerging adults, going to college may be a context in which gender, religion, and spiritual identity constructions move from an implicit knowing to the forefront of consciousness (Stoppa, 2017).

This study is concerned with young women who are likely to have their ideologies and internal self-narratives challenged in ways they have not encountered previously or in dialogue. This study also attempts to understand how a specific group of women arrives at their ideologies. James Donald and Stuart Hall (1986) define ideology in the following manner:

> The frameworks of thought which are used by society to explain, figure out, make sense of or give meaning to the social and political world.…Without these frameworks we could not make sense of the world at all. But with them, our perceptions are invariably structured in a particular direction by the very concepts we are using. (ix-x)

Being removed from intimate, insular communities and exposed to different systems of values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality, can be disruptive to one's sense of self (Magolda, 2009). In concert with Gramsci (1971), McLaren (2015) writes that ideological domination is rarely an exercise of "sheer force, but [happens] through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites, such as the church, the state, the school, . . . and family" (p.140). An important question driving this study concerns what happens to personal meaning making and the authoring of self when the maintenance of domination is replaced.

Conclusion

The writing on the experiences of Greek Orthodox women is nearly non-existent. Similarly, few studies exist focusing on religious identity construction of women, even fewer as it relates to Greek Orthodoxy. This review of literature focused on the overlapping spheres that ground this study: the bodies of literature on Greek Orthodox women's identities and identity construction, and the construction of the religious self. Unpacking the dynamics of identity construction and the Greek Orthodox religion is essential if the church continues to develop programming, ministries, and support systems for women.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks, Methodology, and Methods

The previous chapter summarized the recent scholarship related to this study and elucidated the gaps that exist. It synthesized the history of the Greek Orthodox religion and culture, the foundational scholarship of identity construction, and the construction of the religious self. It is the task of this chapter to provide an overview of the theoretical frameworks, methodology and methods used to conduct my research and analyze data related to the lived experiences of Greek Orthodox women.

As previously expressed, I am interested in the lived experiences of Greek-American women in various stages of life who are active members of a Greek Orthodox parish. I want to understand their religious identity formation as articulated through their own perspectives, with an aim of understanding the impact those identities have on the development of womanhood. As such, my research questions call for a qualitative approach that helps me to synthesize the experiences and views of participants. The theoretical underpinnings of this study are Narrative Identity Theory and Feminist Standpoint Theory. These theories provide the lens through which I viewed the data. From the data collected, I analyzed themes that arose from in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2013) with the hopes of shifting the participants' epistemology to the forefront of discourse surrounding programming and ministries of Orthodox women.

Qualitative Research

The research questions that drove this study warranted employing a qualitative approach. Qualitative research seeks to understand how "individuals experience and interact with their social world" and the "meaning it has for them" (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Within this study, I sought to understand the meaning my participants constructed and how they have made sense of their lives in light of their religion. According to Patton (1985), qualitative research "is an effort

to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. … The analysis strives for depth of understanding" (p. 1). In an attempt to better understand and (re)present the meaning-making to the participants' identity process, my findings were derived from the data that included words and stories as shared by participants.

Theoretical Frameworks

Employing a constructivist perspective (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 2005), I sought to understand the socially constructed meaning-making that Greek Orthodox women experience across contexts—socially, religiously and through church involvement. Undergirding the study is Narrative Identity Theory and Feminist Standpoint Theory.

Narrative Identity Theory. Paul Ricoeur's Narrative Identity Theory (1984, 1992) suggests that individuals make sense of themselves and their lives through the stories they can and cannot tell (Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005). His concept was in response to understanding how identity can represent both change and stability by dividing identity into two categories: idem and ipse. Idem refers to identity based on Sameness, while ipse which is described as Selfhood, can include change and is analogous to narrative identity. Ipse involves "the telling and reading of a life-story, whether factual or fictional, such that the figure of identity that emerges offers a new insight into the self" (Crowley, 2003, p. 2). Accordingly, the way individuals know themselves is through the narratives that are constructed to be positioned in a specific time and place. Ricoeur describes the interplay between historical action and interpretive imagination, both of which are required to form narratives.

Ricoeur (1984), viewing his work as hermeneutic, conceives a cycle of interpretation that lived experience must come before a narrative can be established, and that narrative shapes

practical action. For narrative and action to occur, Ricoeur (1984) contends there must be a process of prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration. According to Ezzy (1998):

> The narrative imagination prefigures lived experiences by providing a symbolic structure and temporal schema of action. These events are then configured into a story with a central theme or plot.... This story, or text, then encounters lived experience again in the world of the listener or reader who refigures the story as it influences his or her choices about how to act in the world. (p. 244)

Ricoeur (1984) asserts that it is through narrative that the self is discovered, and the story a person tells oneself, or others, about oneself, becomes a part of that person's actual history. Narratives are time-specific as they make up the events of the past, present, and future to make a "narrative whole" (Ezzy, 1998, p. 245).

The first full theoretical model of narrative identity was established by McAdams (1985). The formation of identity through constructing stories has evolved from the humanities and social sciences (McAdams, 2001). Within psychological science, researchers examine internal dynamics of private life narration and external factors that shape how people articulate stories about themselves. This can be done by asking participants to share stories about periods in their lives and coding their responses (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Narrative identity "reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future in such a way as to provide a person's life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233). This allows individuals to articulate their autobiography—who they are, how they came to be, and what their future might entail. According to McAdams (2011),

> Complete with setting, scenes, characters, plots, and themes, narrative identity combines a person's reconstruction of his or her personal past with an imagined future in order to

provide a subjective historical account of one's own development, an instrumental

explanation of a person's most important commitments in the realms of work and love,

and a moral justification of who a person was, is, and will be. (p, 100)

While the notion of narrative identity begins in late-adolescence and emerging adult years, the

story of the self never ends. Narrative identity is an evolving and cyclical process as people make

sense of their lives and the context of their lives with others through narrative. As an internalized

story of the self, narrative identity lends itself to Erikson's (1963) main questions around

identity.

The fifth stage of Erikson's (1963) life cycle model of development focuses on identity

versus role confusion in which the locus of inquiry is individuals' answers to questions of "Who

am I," and "How do I fit into the world?" To answer this, one must analyze their models of

beliefs and values. According to McAdams (1993),

In order to know who I am, I must first decide what I believe to be true and good, false

and evil about the world in which I live. To understand myself fully, I must continue to

believe that the universe works in a certain way, and that things about the world, about

society, about God, about the ultimate reality of life, are true. Identity is built upon

ideology. (p. 81)

Research suggests that life-narrative accounts show thematic coherence as people move

from late childhood through adolescence into clearly formed narrative identity (Habermas & de

Silveira, 2008). In a study done by Tavernier and Willoughby (2012), the psychological well-

being levels of high school seniors who found positive meanings in their narration of crises, were

higher than those who were not able to construct narratives with crises and positive meanings. A

sociocultural model was developed by McLean et al. (2007), which has guided the development

of narrative identity research. Using a Vygotskian lens, the model suggests that narrative identity is a slow, cyclical process where people tell stories about their experiences to others, and "over developmental time, selves create stories, which in turn create selves" (McLean et al., 2007, p. 6). As stories are told and retold, an individual's experiences are "processed, edited, reinterpreted, retold, and subjected to a range of social and discursive influences, as the storyteller gradually develops a broader and more integrative narrative identity" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 235). Once stories are told, meaning-making becomes central to the development of narrative identity as the storyteller begins to draw semantic conclusions about themselves through episodic information (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Meaning making can be a difficult process as adolescents and emerging adults take note of the contradictions of life experiences and navigate the pressure of determining who exactly they are within their environments.

Narrative identities are performed throughout an individual's life based on whatever contexts surround the individual (Shotter & Gergen, 1989). In other words, narrative identities are revised with the passing of time and in response to fluctuating situations. As individuals move into adulthood, they seek unity and purpose and try to make sense of their lives as a whole, and narrative identity assists in that process (McAdams, 2011). McAdams and Pals (2006) assert that there are three layers of human personality and that narrative identity makes up the third layer. The first layer includes dispositional traits, which signify behavioral styles from one situation to another. The second layer includes values, goals and other characteristic adaptations that account for more socially contextualized and motivational aspects of individuality. McAdams and Pals (2006) determined that neither traits nor values nor goals can signify what a person's life means, but narrative identity could capture that. They found that narrative identity

makes up the third layer of human personality and it is layered over adaptations and traits. Their research on the layers of human personality shows that a full understanding of personality requires "examination of broad dispositional trains, characteristic adaptions, and integrative life stories—a unique design for each person, evolving, multi-layered, and complexly situated in the social ecology of a person's life" (McAdams, 2011, p. 103).

In describing the conjoining of *I* and *Me* to make a full *Self,* James (1963/1982) created three different forms of self: self as actor, self as agent, and self as the self-author. Human development demonstrates that infants begin as social actors. Around their second birthday, the *I* begins to understand what makes up the *Me*. Later in childhood, individuals see themselves as *agents* with desires and goals in place of the *Me.* Finally, in adolescence and young adulthood, the *I* becomes an *author* as well, which situates *Me* into a self-defining story. This is what Chandler (2001) describes as a *narrative rendering of selfhood*. The narrative identity describes "what the social actor does, what the motivated agent wants, and what it all means in the context of one's narrative understanding of the self" (McAdams, 2011, p. 103). It is through narrative identity that the self-author begins to take shape in adolescence and extend into young adulthood and beyond.

Hammack (2008) and McAdams (2013) describe how cultural narratives about national history, ethnicity, religion, and politics shape the personal stories people live by, and how personal stories can sustain or transform culture" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 237). Reflecting on cultural norms and the stories that culturally immersed individuals narrate provides meaning-making across contexts and is worth exploring among Greek Orthodox women. One such cultural identity relevant to this study is Greek womanhood, which is deeply tied to both church and home contexts. Gender is central to this study and to the way women are situated

within the religion. For this reason, Feminist Standpoint Theory is a lens used in this study. According to Haraway (1997),

> gender is always a relationship, not a performed category of beings or a possession that one can have. Gender does not pertain more to women than to men. Gender is the relation between variously constituted categories of men and women (and variously arrayed tropes), differentiated by nation, generation, class, lineage, color, and much else. (p. 28)

The narratives in this study are (re)presented from the standpoint of Greek-American Orthodox women. The feminist acculturation of Greek Orthodox women in other parts of the world is likely different than those experienced by Greek-American Orthodox women because of intense multiculturalism in the United States.

Feminist Standpoint Theory. I acknowledge that there are many types of feminism—intersectional feminism, liberal feminism, radical feminism, black feminism, cultural feminism, etc. For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to focus on a more reflexive type of feminism that searches for claims to knowledge to understand the voices, power, and agency of women, which has historically been accessed through male discourse (Kohli & Burbules, 2012). From the standpoint of women, I believe much can be learned from my participants by, "unpacking the connections between knowledge and power, and the valuing of subjective personal experience as an undeniable aspect of knowledge and knowing" (Kohli & Burbules, 2012, p. 4).

Feminist epistemology calls for women to be at the center of the research process, highlighting the experiences of women as they have experienced them. Due to the patriarchal nature of religion, women's voices are often silenced or underrepresented. Additionally, we live in a society that has oppressed women and has been dominated largely by White heteronormative discourse. Both aspects of religion and society as a whole leave the opportunity for knowledge

building by women. Brooks (2007) posits that Feminist standpoint epistemology is a philosophy of knowledge building that challenges us to "(1) see and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women and (2) apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change" (p. 55). Studying this population of women will offer a critical lens through which we can understand the experiences of women as *they themselves* experience life in the shadows of their religion. For those who engage with Feminist Standpoint Theory, understanding society through women's experiences allows them to question things like how society functions as a whole, and whether or not women's experiences and the knowledge gained from those experiences offers unique perspectives and insights into the world around them (Brooks, 2007).

Understanding the experiences of women offers an avenue for social change that is developed directly by women's encounters. In 1963, Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique*, a landmark work of feminism about being a middle-class, white housewife in the United States. She challenged conceptions of what it meant to be a housewife at that time and averred that many women suffered from boredom and were frustrated with their lives. During that time, it was normal for women to blame themselves for their despair, but Friedan's writing helped women to realize how pervasive these feelings were among women. Ultimately, the book motivated women to challenge societal norms that inflexibly sealed women into their roles as little more than dutiful housewives (Friedan, 1963). Centering the experiences of women who have experienced sexual abuse and exploitation, slavery, or myriad of other societal constraints can be used to confront unspoken norms. Additionally, Brooks (2007) claims that by sharing their experiences, "women acquired a heightened level of consciousness about the issues and began to interpret their own experiences from a new perspective" (p. 53).

Within Feminist Standpoint Theory, a form of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903/1989) is believed to exist for women as the result of heightened awareness of the lives of the dominant group (men) in addition to their own lives (Brooks, 2007). Due to their oppressed position in society, women are likely to be more objective and unbiased than men. Nielsen (1990) posits that women have the ability to be cognizant of the dominant worldview of a given society in addition to their minority perspective. Throughout their everyday lives, women move through the world with double consciousness as a means for navigating their socially constructed roles (wife, mother, daughter, student) in order to thrive. What knowledge is brought to the forefront of women's experiences with double consciousness can help to identify social inequalities and injustices, as well as the ability to find solutions to these problems (Brooks, 2007).

As members of the ruling class who control and produce knowledge, men are not as able to have a clear representation of reality as women. This is a result of their need to protect interests and maintain power in the world in which they live. Alternatively, due to their subordinate status, women "are likely to develop a clearer and more trustworthy understanding of the world" (Jaggar, 2004, p. 62). Feminist standpoint theory contends that a clearer level of objectivity exists from the standpoint of women and is less biased than the standpoints of men as a result of double consciousness. The more oppressed a group is, the stronger their level of objectivity. According to Harding (2004):

Each oppressed group will have its own critical insights about nature and the larger social order in order to contribute to the collection of human knowledge. Because different groups are oppressed in different ways, each has the possibility (not the certainty) of

developing distinctive insights about systems of social relations in general in which their

oppression is a feature. (p. 9)

While there are no two identical standpoints, it is the female perspective that can provide us with

more reliable information about society and encourage us to accept each lived experience as a

unique perspective. Feminist standpoint theory gives voice to oppressed groups—in this case,

Greek Orthodox women—and to understand the knowledge they have gleaned from their lives.

Methodology: Portraiture

Within qualitative research, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) developed a methodology

called Portraiture as a means to interpret the character and depict the culture of her subjects in a

deeper and more meaningful way as an

effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and

organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and

experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—

their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social

and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject,

each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. (p. xv)

Portraitists collect data through in-depth interviews, building and maintaining relationships with

subjects, observations, and document analysis and (re)present them as cohesive narratives. The

drawing of the portrait[5], or the way the information is presented, is through dialogue that

includes social and cultural context. Dialogue is traversed with both portraitist and the actor[6],

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[5] Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) use the term *portrait* as another name for the finished product or findings that are presented as a story. This can be done in writing or as a painting, drawing, etc. For the purposes of this study, I will use *portrait* and *findings* interchangeably.

[6] Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) use the term *actor* to represent the *subject* or *participant*. I will be using the terms *actor*, *subject*, and *participant* interchangeably.

whereby both parties shape the discourse and evolving image (Hall, 2001). This is accomplished through the telling of a story in a way that (re)represents the subjects' narrative, in this study presented as a story. The portraitist[7] aims to make meaning of their actors' stories and present it through *portraits* as narrative with thick descriptions so as to paint with words (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Portraiture is distinct from other qualitative methods in that it has been described as "an ethnographically oriented method of inquiry that seeks to capture and explain the ever-changing complexities of life and experience" (Burton & Johnson, 2010, p. 378) with the "role of the researcher as an artist" (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 276). The research questions that have grounded this study coupled with Greeks' history of storytelling (both Biblical and cultural) as well as my background as an Orthodox woman, made Portraiture an appealing methodology. Telling the stories of these Orthodox women through Portraiture was a perfect complement to honor their history.

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot, Portraiture's locus of inquiry is *goodness* and things that are strong, resilient, and worthy in a particular situation. This is in contrast to what can be seen as a general tendency of researchers to focus on a weakness, failure or the abnormal, rather than what is good and resilient (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). By focusing on the negative or failures, Lawrence-Lightfoot argues that views of the social world become magnified and do not consider the goodness in a particular situation; identifying only failures can lead to blaming the victim, feelings of cynicism and a lack of effort if the subject believes that things are as bad as they seem; and it can lead to superficial research in that it is easier to diagnose a problem than to find what is redeeming. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot, "Portraiture resists

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[7] Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) use the term *portraitist* within this methodology as another name for *researcher*. Throughout this study I will be using *portraitist* and *researcher* interchangeably.

this tradition-laden effort to document failure. It is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections" (1997, p. 9). For Portraiture to be effective, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) identified useful five elements, which can overlap and are not independent of one another:

1. Context: portraitists provide rich descriptions from a macro to micro level of the "physical, geographic, temporal, historical, cultural, aesthetic" (p. 41) settings researchers find themselves in as part of the study, which becomes a part of the portrait's framework. The context of a portrait is also a space where the portraitist can interpret the subject's behaviors and thoughts in a setting that is familiar to them.

2. Voice: the voice of the researcher is laced throughout the portrait through her dialogues and interpretations. This includes her "assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative" (p. 85). While the portraitist's voice is present throughout the portrait, it does not overshadow the voice of the actors.

3. Relationships: the relationship(s) between actor and portraitist is vital to creating a portrait. Through these relationships the portraitist is able to gain access and trust, as well as data for the portrait. In the search for *goodness* as Portraiture presupposes, the portraitist's position is one of "acceptance and discernment, generosity and challenge, encouraging the actors in the expression of their strengths, competencies, and insights" (p. 141). This is not to say that portraitists are only looking for the goodness in situations, but they start from the standpoint of understanding what is working well and the reasons

behind it. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016) believes that in focusing on the goodness, the imperfections that weaken success or performance will show themselves naturally.

4. Emergent Themes: by using an Impressionistic Record (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), or daily reflections, the portraitist can begin to identify their interpretations and changes in perspectives, as well as a plan for anything that needs to change with the next set of visits. Emergent themes begin to take shape in the Impressionistic Record as a result of the data gathering and interpretations. Within Portraiture, ongoing coding is an iterative process, and it can reveal real or unconscious forms of bias. Additionally, there is another stage of analysis that occurs when the researcher reviews all of their data, including documents, interview transcripts, and observational narratives. To construct the emergent themes, the portraitist listens for repetitive refrains, "resonant metaphors, poetic and symbolic expressions that reveal the ways actors illuminate and experience their realities," (p. 193). The portraitist also listens for themes shared in cultural rituals; uses triangulation to bridge the data from various sources; and creates themes among "perspectives that are often experienced as contrasting and dissonant by the actors" (p. 193).

5. Aesthetic Whole: weaving together context, voice, relationships, and emergent themes aids in putting together the aesthetic whole. This is done through conception of an overarching story; using scaffolding of emergent themes; the form, or way the story is told; and the cohesion, which includes the unity and integrity of the portrait.

Portraitists have dual roles within Portraiture, to find the origins and expressions of goodness, and to understand and document how their subjects define goodness through their own perspectives (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016). Portraiture invites readers into a perspective they may

not have considered previously, and it offers the subjects the opportunity to truly feel seen

through a (re)presentation of their narratives. Whereas ethnography is seen as, "neither 'theirs'

nor is it 'yours" (Agar, 1996), portraiture requires the portraitist to identify and select a story to

share and help it to take shape. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) assert that portraitists are a

part of the portrait, acknowledging what they see from their "perch" (p. 50), how they see it,

their biases, and the impact their presence brings to the those in the portrait.

Portraiture contends that the history, character, and identity of the portraitist is critical to

the methodology, and their role is more visible than any other research form. Lawrence-

Lightfoot and Davis (1997) contend that the portraitist's involvement is, "not only in defining the

focus and field of the inquiry, but also in navigating the relationships with the subjects, in

witnessing and interpreting the action, in tracing the emergent themes, and in creating the

narrative" (p. 13). The portraitist must be aware of ridding themselves of personal biases that

could impact the narratives they share. A critique of Portraiture is that "there is no external,

independent referent for ascertaining the truth-telling capacity of the portraitist because the

definition of truth is circular" (English, 2000). This critique is recognized within this study but is

navigated by collecting and triangulating data to construct a credible portrait.

Methods

Sample Selection. This study used purposeful sampling, which is a technique used in

qualitative research for "identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are

especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas et al.,

2015, p. 2). Merriam (2002) argues this is appropriate for studies where the researcher wishes to

seek information from a particular group of people. To access the populations best suited for this

study, a flyer was posted with permission from clergy at a local parish in an area where Greek

Orthodox women stewards routinely socialize. There were a few criteria: the women must be 18 years or older; be a steward of a Greek Orthodox church; and self-identify as female. The flyer requested that interested women who met the criteria email me for more information. Follow-up emails and conversations were held as approved by my Institutional Review Board (Appendix A) to confirm participants desire to enroll in the study and collect formal consent. To protect the identity of participants and maintain anonymity, participants chose pseudonyms as part of the initial interview.

Participants

Five participants met the criteria, enrolled, and completed this study between February – May, 2020. To provide context for the findings, I introduce the participants in Table 2.

Table 2. Introduction to Participants

Participants	Age	Stage of Life
Laura	54	Married, one high-school age daughter; twin middle-school age daughters
Lia	28	Single, no children
Maria	21	Single, no children, junior in college
Mary	46	Married, one high-school age daughter; one high-school age son
Tina	67	Divorced, one adult daughter

Data Collection

Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) requires the portraitist to understand the *essence* of each subject, that is their qualities of character, which goes beyond the traditional researcher/participant relationship. Davis (2003) supports this notion by explaining that once the portrait is complete, the subject should be able to say to the portraitist, "You may look and see because I know that you will not betray me in your expression of your vision" (p. 209). To fully capture each subject, I will be employing several methods throughout this study.

"Who Am I" Questionnaire. Before the initial interview, I asked the participants to complete a "Who Am I" questionnaire (Appendix C) (Cushner, 1999). The objective was for participants to complete the statement, "I am a(n) _____," 20 times. This was an opportunity for the subject to get in the mindset of thinking about their socially constructed identities. What emerged from the questionnaire was an ability for the portraitist to see which socially constructed identities were at the forefront of their consciousness before we started talking about their identities.

Interviews. To understand the experiences, feelings, opinions, values of participants, three semi-structured interviews (Bailey, 2018) were employed with each participant using interview protocols (Appendix C). I arranged individual interviews to be held at a location that is familiar and comfortable to the participants, as is common practice when employing Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the second and third interviews with participants were conducted by Zoom with approval from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes and fieldnotes were taken. As a portraitist, observation allowed for validation to occur from the interviews (Emerson et al., 2011; Maxwell, 1992). While fieldnotes were taken during each encounter, the

interviews were video and audio recorded and transcribed through a web company (Rev) for accuracy. The recordings were housed in a Box file that was password protected, to which only I had access. Any hard copies of fieldnotes were stored in a locked filing cabinet within my locked office for which only I had a key. The recordings and field notes will be kept for three years after the dissertation is complete then destroyed. As emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) arose, I shared my findings with participants and employed member checking as a way to ensure that I am (re)presenting their words accurately and authentically.

Reflection Journal: Video or Written. All participants were given the option to engage in the use of video or written diaries as another way for me to collect data and for participants to continue to reflect on our conversation (Appendix D). The purpose behind a video diary was for participants to record their thoughts and experiences in real-time and not have to attempt to recall things later. Video diaries can capture a different sense of what it is like to be an adult that other methods like questionnaires and semi-structured interviews do not have the ability to convey (Cashmore & Scott, 2010). I gave general prompts to avoid over-direction and to encourage unscripted responses. The aim was for the video diaries to supplement the rest of the data collection with what participants are thinking or feeling at any given moment in their personal space. Given the nature of the deep and personal conversations required for this methodology, I recognized that the participants may have thought of something they wanted to add after our interviews. Video diaries allowed them the space to capture those moments. All video recordings were uploaded to a shared Box file and were transcribed by a transcription service then checked for accuracy. Only I had access to the file. Participants were *i*nformed that this is an option but that they would not have to do a recording if they did not feel comfortable doing so. Instead, I

asked them to do a short reflective writing journal after each interview. Those writing were also kept securely in a private, password protected file.

Recognizing that some of the women in this study may not be comfortable with video diaries, I offered the option of a reflective journal. This was another way of gaining the essence of the participants after an interview was conducted. I gave them the option of using prompts or doing a free write of whatever they were thinking about after our interview related to women, identity construction and Orthodoxy. In the event they think of something after we meet, I again wanted them to have the space to record and share their thoughts.

Impressionistic record. Throughout my research, I used an Impressionistic Record (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to log my thoughts, perceptions of interviews, encounters with participants, and other information related to the study. As a researcher with an insider perspective of this phenomenon (Willig, 2014), I believed it was important for me to be aware of my thought process and it also kept an audit trail for this study.

Data Analysis

Data was collected for this study through interviews (Bailey, 2018), a questionnaire, and reflection journals. As data were collected, I looked for emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Once all of the data were collected, I used Excel to record hand-coded analysis whereby I analyzed and coded thematically (Bailey, 2018; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) further for patterns and emergent themes that framed each participant's collection of narratives (Appendix E). Careful analysis of "topics, content, style, context and the telling of narratives will reveal people's understanding of the meanings of key events in their lives or their communities and the cultural contexts in which they live" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 27). After coding within portraits, I recognized several key phrases that kept surfacing in various forms. I then identified broad

themes and subthemes that arose in and across all portraits. Since every narrative was unique to the subject, each portrait reads differently, and the subject's voice is at the forefront of their portrait.

Study Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of this study include the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted the ability to interview participants in person and to observe them during a ministry. As a result, interviews 2 and 3 were done via Zoom. I updated and received Internal Review Board approval for protocol changes (Appendix A). Having participation of only women, and not men, is a delimitation of this study. All participants were born in the United States, raised Greek Orthodox from birth, and all were college educated. Social class varied, but all came from middle-class to upper-class backgrounds.

Quality Criteria

Maxwell (1992) identifies five categories that reflect one's ability to understand qualitative validity, or the accuracy of data and how it is obtained and maintained throughout the research process: descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability, and evaluative validity. For the purposes of this research, descriptive validity was employed as interviews were recorded and transcribed, and notes from interviews were reviewed immediately following the interviews to create more detailed notes. Interpretive validity ensures accuracy between the meaning of the participants' behaviors and the participants' perspectives. Understanding that interpretive validity is also impacted by the way in which data is analyzed, emic accounts will be used throughout the research as I am an insider to the participants as a Greek Orthodox woman.

The ability to explain the phenomena of the study and make connections to existing theory is established through theoretical validity. The literature review associated with this study along with the theoretical framework is appropriate and supports the explanation of the data. This study provides sufficient detail and context so readers can determine if its findings are also pertinent to other settings (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 1992; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Evaluative validity is established when researcher judgment is absent in describing and understanding the data. Attempts were made throughout this study to use neutral terminology and a writing partner who could help me consider my word choices as an ethical check. Reflexive exercises in anticipation of and throughout the study aided in validity constructs like credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Maxwell, 1992; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Throughout my research I kept an audit trail of my process including detailed notes, memos, and journals, which was stored in a password protected Box file. Hard copies were stored in a locked filing cabinet within my locked office for which only I had a key. In order to affirm that my findings accurately represent the participants' experiences, I engaged in member-checking (e.g., validation from participants)—after the first interview to ensure I captured their initial thoughts accurately—and as I analyzed my findings to know whether or not my interpretation accurately reflected their experiences. I also employed presenting thick descriptions of the data and context and confirming that the methods used align with the core concepts of my study. Self-reflexivity aided in understanding ways in which my own implicit biases may have impacted the way I interpreted data. To engage my preliminary assessments, a peer reviewer was used.

Ethical Considerations

As a member of the Orthodox Church and community from which I sought some participants, I was aware that the participants would be sharing personal information with me. I was conscious of the evolution of the relationship between participant/researcher and actor/portraitist, both from an ethical and quality standpoint. In terms of ethical practice of research, I was cautious not to do anything that might influence the data that is collected. However, I was aware that my role as researcher and portraitist to my participants, or individual actors, makes for a delicate dynamic, and one that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) recognize as "potentially meaningful and significant to the lives of the actors." It is a situation in which both the portraitist and the actor must work together to make their dynamic "comfortable, respectful, and benign." She continues: "We want the actors to feel our full attention, our deep engagement, and our challenge—and we want people to leave the encounters feeling safe and whole" (p. 141). The way in which I framed the conversations with participants gave them the confidence to know that I wanted their honest responses and wanted to be sure they fully understood portraiture in terms of the way I collected and presented findings.

Effective Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) calls for rich and personal details of the subjects; however, this can make it difficult to ensure confidentiality. To work within the parameters of Portraiture, I discussed it in detail with participants and explained that this was a standard form of narrative research and the purpose was to invoke their uniqueness and experiences throughout the portrait. I explained to participants that throughout the interviews I would be using pseudonyms of their choosing. Other identifying facts, such as their home parish, hometown, current and/or past university also had pseudonyms.

Another ethical consideration is that of informed consent. Participants provided written consent as part of the recruitment process. Participants were informed that if at any point in time they feel uncomfortable answering a question or discussing a specific topic, they could have chosen to decline to answer or stop participating in the study without repercussions. In an effort to maintain internal-facing transparency, all dimensions of the study were shared with participants, including the goals of the study, the process and timeline, and their roles and responsibilities, as well as my role and responsibilities. As the researcher, I was forthcoming about my positionality within the context of the study and emphasize the goals of the research.

Role of the Researcher - Positionality

I was once in a workshop where I was asked to complete a "Who am I" (Cushner, 1999) questionnaire and exercise. The objective was for participants to complete the statement, "I am a(n) ____," 20 times. Without hesitation, my first few answers were "Greek," "Orthodox," and "woman." While my recognized socially constructed identities also include mother, wife, able-bodied, cisgender, White, educated, and middle-class, being a Greek Orthodox woman has very much been a part of my unconscious identity and is the basis for my interest in this population. As the daughter of Greek Orthodox parents, I was raised in a spiritually-nurturing community where weekly worship, Sunday school, Greek school, and youth ministries made a positive influence in influencing my growth into adulthood.

Looking back, I recognize that my parents found comfort and an outlet in the fellowship of other Orthodox couples managing the weighty responsibility of raising children in this culture and religion. My young life was surrounded mostly by other Greek families. As an adult, I recognize that nearly all of my friends are Orthodox as well. My husband, who is also Greek Orthodox, and I have made the conscious decision to continue to serve our Orthodox community

in the same capacity as previous generations as we raise our young family in the Faith. Similar to many of our parents' generation, we are socially grounded in the Orthodox community, and the foundation of our marriage remains our faith.

While I have thought about the impact of Orthodoxy on my life from time to time, it was not until I had a daughter of my own that I began to consider her development and that of other Orthodox females. They are growing up in a faster moving world than what I experienced and will be faced with different challenges. I wonder how their identities will be shaped by the Greek Orthodox religion. It is my belief that when I went through college, Orthodoxy propped me up to make certain decisions. Throughout my career I have noticed that my responses to life's vicissitudes and my choices for action have been, to this day, rooted in Orthodoxy. Such a realization has made me wonder—as a woman who believes in gender equality—exactly how Orthodox women of today navigate a world of contradictions between being Orthodox and operating in the secular society. What stories do we (myself included) tell ourselves to be able to reconcile these contradictions?

For the participant of my study who is currently in college, I suspected there would be an inherent power differential in our interactions. For the women who are in my age range or older, may have been a power differential in our interactions which I acknowledge. For all of my participants, I addressed my role as researcher/steward of the Church with participants and specified the separation of each. I also emphasized that my role as researcher was very different than that of steward.

I sought to have authentic conversations with the women to minimize authoritative positioning, and had informal conversations with the women prior to interviewing them, finding commonalities between us. I knew several of the participants in my study, and recognize that

some participants may have felt guarded due to a power differential in their conversations with me. As a starting point, I assumed that the upbringing of participants paralleled my own experiences. What remained to be seen was if their experiences shape identity construction, most specifically their understanding of womanhood. This study not only aided in understanding the experiences of other women, but it was self-reflective in how my cultural heritage has shaped my leadership philosophies and behaviors.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the theoretical frameworks, methodology and methods employed throughout the study. The selection of each was based on what would best inform this study's focus of understanding the lived experiences of religious identity formation of Greek Orthodox women as articulated in their own words, with an aim of understanding the impact those identities have on the development of womanhood. In the following chapter, the findings of this study are discussed.

Chapter 4: Portraits

In this chapter I will present portraits of five Greek Orthodox women; Maria, Lia, Mary, Laura and Tina. Each portrait is presented in its entirety with the most salient emergent themes noted at the conclusion of each portrait. The full coding matrix is included in Appendix E. The themes are: authoring of self, agency and voice, and womanhood. The subthemes of authoring of self includes family, church, spiritual guides and secular world. Subthemes of agency and voice include tensions and contradictions, the omnipresence of cultural norms, disadvantages of non-conformity, and shipwreck. Finally, the subthemes of womanhood include care ethics, leadership, evolution of self and voice, and future focused. A deeper discussion about the ways the themes surfaced will be held in Chapter Five.

Maria

Maria is a 21-year-old junior who attends a prestigious, predominantly white university in the Midwest. She greets me at the entrance of her sorority house dressed in a white sweater and jeans and walks me back to a formal dining room where we sit at a rectangular table. Maria closes the doors of the room and settles into a chair at the head of the table. Maria's light brown hair is parted down the middle with much of it covering her face. I'm reminded of my grandmother who would tell me as a young girl to "stop hiding your face!" In that moment it hits me that Maria has a striking resemblance to what my daughter would look like as a college student. I'm surprised by this realization but quickly settle into the task at hand.

Maria was raised by educated parents in an upper-class town located near the university she attends. Maria credits her parents for teaching her and her two younger brothers the importance of compassion, to be self-sufficient and self-reliant, while valuing family and family time. Maria tells me that she is passionate about relationships and that "investing time in

relationships is one of the best things you can get out of life." As a mother, listening to Maria's description of her relationship with family members is humbling: she refers to her brothers as her best friends; she frequently talks to her parents; she was raised to "value understanding of other people's perspectives and the role I can play in making the world a better place for people that maybe haven't had the same privilege as me." Maria says that there has never been a part of her identity that she felt she couldn't share with her parents. Maria acknowledges that she comes from a middle-class home but recognizes the privilege of being born into a white family from one of the most segregated towns in the Midwest. She understands that she has had opportunities that are not readily available to others. I'm instantly struck by Maria's self-awareness. For a young adult, she is nuanced in her description and understanding of complex concepts like privilege, inequity, and injustices of the world. She weaves these in and out of our conversation with ease.

Maria describes herself first as "very argumentative, but in a good way." She enjoys spirited conversations and appreciates feeling listened to. As a result, listening is something she tries actively to practice with others. She prides herself on her intellectual curiosity and genuinely wants to know more about the world and other people's expectations. She feels that people tend to be insular, focusing only on the day-to-day. She goes on to say that "I think the world becomes more worthwhile when you understand things outside your own bubble."

Maria's awareness of the world around her and self-described intellectual curiosity prompts me to ask how that translates into Orthodoxy. Maria shares that her father is Orthodox and mother was raised Unitarian. Attending church as a child was mandatory and is something she typically does with her dad and brothers. As a child, church was something that she attended and would participate by read along with the liturgy, but now describes it as a time "that I use for

critical self-reflection." As a family they would have conversations around sermons and what was learned in Sunday School. While her mother did not go to church very often, she frequently discussed religion with Maria, who describes their mother-daughter conversations as "more as a space of learning, um, about compassion and loving everyone." While these conversations were taking place in her home on a regular basis, Maria was actively involved in her church through youth groups and sports.

Concerning the role of women in the church, Maria shares that she has "always paid attention to it. Um, and like women were mainly the ones who were setting up our coffee hour and things like that […] definitely was more of a—the traditional role." While she isn't as involved in church now that she is living away at college, Maria says that she uses prayer as a means of reflection. When thinking about the teachings of the Church, she acknowledges that the teachings from the New Testament align with "virtues I try to live by" and understands the ways in which "institutions are subject to human error." When she sees contradictions between teachings of the church and actions of members of the church, Maria says that "So, I try to live more by the teachings and when things are said that I don't agree with—like for example in the church—I don't use it as a means to justify not believing in the faith." Throughout our interviews, Maria often circles back to the topic of reflection, and her comments reveal an impressive grasp of Orthodox theology. For a young woman, she is mature and knowledgeable beyond her years. I ask her to provide an instance in which she disagreed with something in the church.

Maria shares a story about the priest at her parish who was memorializing a tragic day, thousands of years ago, when many children were killed. It was just Maria and her dad that day, who attended church. The priest recognized the tragedy that happened years ago, but pointed out

that there are modern day "tragedies like this that happen all the time. For instance, millions of children were murdered last year at the hands of abortion." Maria and her dad heard this and they were aghast. Maria believes that you can hold a conversation about being pro-life or pro-choice, but this was different because the priest was in a position of authority as the leader of that parish who used his position to project a controversial view that was alienating people in the room. For Maria, the priest's words villainized those in attendance who might have undergone an abortion or had family and friends who had abortions, instead of spreading the virtues of the faith" that our teachings abide by.

In the moment I feel sorry for Maria. While she's an adult, I feel a sense of responsibility for the religion and the need to apologize on behalf of the Church. Even though Maria is highly self-reflective and can separate theology from imperfect practice or messaging, not everyone can, which leads to people leaving the church. I push my thoughts aside and ask how she ended up reconciling this part of the sermon with her own ethics.

After hearing that sermon, Maria reached out to Clia, a theologically-trained youth worker who had been a spiritual guide for Maria. She describes Clia having done a "perfect job" explaining that the Church values all life—in the same way that we're also against the death penalty, war" and that, most importantly, "we don't have the right to judge every woman's choice or a person's choice or denounce them as being further from their faith or unholy." Frequently throughout our interviews Maria would reference Clia and the impact she has made on her life. To some extent, I gather that Clia's ability to help apply theology to Maria's experiences has kept Maria involved in the church.

Maria describes herself as a thinker, activist, political commentator, and a progressive. In thinking of the relationship between those identities and also being a "Child of God," Maria says

that being "a member of the church since I was young instilled a robust moral code that" from which she values love over everything else. She references relationships with spiritual guides as the conduit for her involvement in the Church. When asked about tensions between any of the identities she holds, she references there not being conflict between her relationship with God and political leanings. What she does say, however, is that there "is a pretty good amount of tension I think for obvious reasons between the institution of church and religion." Maria continues her story by explaining that she has often times been asked by friends to explain how she can be religious and liberal at the same time. She shrugs her shoulders and recounts her typical response: "The parts of human institutions that I see as wrong are not reflective of God's power or will, in my opinion." Maria explains that she is able to find the goodness in systems that are oppressive and broken, which might otherwise be prohibitive for others.

When I ask Maria about what it means to be a woman, she talks about the impact of having a mother who worked full-time at a successful career. Maria has always thought of womanhood as "using this identity as a means of empowerment and as like an opportunity to excel." Her mother is employed in a powerful position in a predominantly male institution. Largely because of this example, Maria is able to recognize the power women can have while also recognizing the systems of oppression her mother has had to overcome. Maria is methodical when she speaks, intentional about word choice: "As a white woman, like, I have different experiences of womanhood than people with more [oppressed] identities." To Maria, being a woman means that, "you kind of always have to be on. And I think that a lot of us, from my discussions with my friends and family members like even though like things are better than they once were, we still kinda feel this inherent need to prove ourselves. Especially in traditionally masculine spaces."

Maria's comments about traditionally masculine spaces makes me wonder how she understands the church's description of the roles and responsibilities of women. She once again references Clia and explains much of her knowledge has grown from her relationship with Clia. Maria appreciates that Clia understands the (secular) role of women. Maria purses her lips and tells me that she and Clia see the role of women in the church to be the same as men. Women can do whatever they want, but there are certain roles that "tend to be different" (referencing ordained ministry). Acknowledging women have "less power in the church," Maria tells me that is an "old tradition kind of thing" which isn't going to change anytime soon. Sex-based exclusion for ordained ministry is something she has had to come to terms with. She confidently tells me that outside of ordained ministry, she feels her personal role in the church is the same as her brothers.

While analyzing the different relationships she has with clergy versus Clia, and while she has been disappointed by some views that don't align with her understanding of theology, she says, "that's not a reflection of my own spirituality." To her, being an Orthodox woman means, "having a relationship with God that makes me a better person and guides my day-to-day interactions in a way that emphasizes, um, love and selflessness and empathy." For Maria, she associates being Greek with family history and traditions that are practiced, which is separate from the religion. In terms of putting her religion into practice, she uses her faith to justify what she's fighting for and to analyze her decisions and understanding when she does something that doesn't align with the theological teachings in her studies.

Maria accepts Orthodox theology as perfect. It is the attempt by church authority to put theology to practice, however, that she is not afraid to critique She says there are certain things on broad-range levels that do not sit well with her, which she views as "an interpretation of

God's word in a political lens." To expand on this, she explains that when people are expressing opinions about various social issues that she does not agree with, she tends to think that if anyone is arguing for certain people to have less rights, that is when Maria knows they are wrong. She will listen to the opinions of others who can try to change her mind, but Maria tells me that she "never uses religion to justify what I see as a closed-mindedness."

I ask Maria if she has always been this thoughtful and such a critical thinker. She credits her parents and says they guided her with a sense of morality that it was "pretty easy to see what was, what I now see as right or wrong." She acknowledges that not everyone has parents who are as open-minded as hers and says she is still surprised by some of her friends who hold views that she believes are antithetical to the teachings of the Church.

When I ask her to imagine the church without taboos or restrictions, forgetting everything she knows to be true, Maria describes what ought to change about the church without hesitation: "The whole women can't be priests thing, because I think that's like, it's just an old sexist tradition that men have to be kind of the figureheads of the Church." She equates this patriarchal tradition with sexism. As Maria describes these inequalities, her voice becomes unusually strong when she tells me that the fact that women are unable to hold the highest position in a church is "some deeply rooted sexism." From her standpoint, women are generally revered and respected in the church for the role they play. She views any sort of difference between genders as outdated and says "I guess I see that more in the church" than at home because while both of her parents work, it is her mother who is the breadwinner. Maria shares that from a young age she knew that her parents' dynamic has countered a lot of gender stereotypes. The fact that in church women do more of the cooking and "men are more in leadership...that just never really rubbed me the right way."

Maria operates from a space of inclusion and talks about the need to emphasize the tolerance and acceptance of other lifestyles that may not be accepted by all. For Maria, notions of womanhood include advocating for one's self. Seeing the inequalities of the world—whether it be advantages afforded to white people that are oppressive to black and brown communities, insufficient healthcare, or lack of educational resources—is truly frustrating for her and she struggles to see how people can be "brainwashed into thinking that everything is okay."

Despite the fact that Maria views the church as a sacred place, she has also reconciled the fact that it also upholds "outdated and problematic norms" which is truly antithetical to who she is, what she believes, and the person she wants to become. She once again talks about the importance of seeking guidance from Clia. With irritation and some exhaustion in her voice, she tells me, "the only explanation we hear is more like 'it's just how we do things.' And I generally don't really like that defense of things." I can tell that Maria has more to say—her cadence picks up, her voice is strong and she's less measured than she has been previously. I tell her that I've frequently heard a version of "it is what it is" with regard to religion and womanhood and I ask her how she would finish that sentence. Without hesitation, and a little uncharacteristically, Maria says, "It is what it is, but that's stupid" and laughs. She continues:

> The only reason "it is what it is," is because we constructed it that way...It wasn't like this greater force. It's an arbitrary thing that is coming from a time period in which the roles of men and women were seen as so different that men were seen as the unquestioned leaders, you know what I mean? There's a reason that men could vote before women. There's a reason that we've only had male presidents, and it's not because men are better suited, it's because we've had this, you know, defense of just the way things are...Imagine

if women not being able to vote was defended by, "Well, they've never voted before." It's

like, "Yeah, well..."

Describing the tunnel vision people have when it comes to the way things have been, Maria

recognizes that things are granted legitimacy because they are so engrained in what is considered

the status quo.

The last few minutes of our exchanges make me wonder how the inequality that she so

clearly sees impacts her relationship with God and what drives her to tolerate it. Engaging in

cognitive reframing, Maria shares that she has to view the religious institution as separate from

God. "The Holy Spirit is one thing and the institution is another." To her, spirituality and her

relationship with God are separate from the flawed interpretation and practice of the institution. I

think I know the answer, but I cannot help but ask if she would tolerate inequality in other parts

of her life. She quickly tells me, "Definitely not. But also, I think that's because in like these

other contexts, like it is all institutional—it's not a human interpretation of something else." Her

ability to separate the religious and divine from that which is of a fallen world and institutional is

something Maria has thought about previously and is laced throughout our conversations.

Maria discusses the ways in which Orthodoxy has shaped her as a woman by indicating

that it has influenced her value system and ability to think critically about things. She is not

afraid to critique the institutions and systems that she is a part of—whether it be within

Orthodoxy or her secular life, as evidenced through her reflection journals, which she recorded.

Maria first shares a story related to identity and gender in the context of the Bible and how the

Bible defines man versus woman. During the Sunday School class, her teacher (Clia) showed a

video that was meant to illustrate that there aren't genders beyond *male* and *female* because you

cannot change that part of your identity. Feeling that this stance invalidates the experiences of

trans people and non-binary people, she tried to explain to those in the class that "gender is not the same as the sex you're born with, and gender is more the social responsibilities and constructs that are associated with the different sexes. And, and, more than that, I, I brought up the point that as Christian people, who are we to judge what other people's truth is?" While acknowledging that she has always felt welcome in the church and her specific church is one that she considers to be progressive, she reflects that her ability to talk to Clia about her stance helped Maria to always view Clia as a resource she can rely upon. For Maria, the Sunday School discussion and her interactions with Clia "illustrated, like, the good parts of our church, which is that I have people like Clia I can go to, but also the negative parts, which is some of the closed-mindedness people can have." The relationship with Clia is one that Maria mentions more than almost any other throughout our conversations. Her ability to be a resource to Maria and help answer questions and situate theology in her life has impacted the woman she has become, especially her ability to constructively question Orthodoxy.

I asked Maria to describe a shipwreck in her life, a time when everything she knew to be true, fell apart. She recorded a reflection journal that described attending her university. Maria graduated from a predominantly white, upper-middle/upper class high school. She quickly realized upon entering college that while she thought previously about race, privilege, wealth and equality, she really never knew or had "friends on the other side of the spectrum." It wasn't until she went to college that she made friends with people of color and those who came from various socio-economic backgrounds. She quickly learned that much of what she was taught was "a very white-washed version of history that does not display the plight that people of color, and especially black people, have had to face in this country—just in the fight for basic human rights." Issues of school funding, minimum wage, generational wealth racial inequalities,

government policies and voter suppression were all brought to the forefront of conversations Maria was having with classmates. Keenly aware of the danger of perpetuating societal norms, in this case white supremacy, Maria says that as a white woman, "it's my job to fix these issues 'cause I have the power at my side," so much so that she wants to pursue a legal career.

I feel profoundly grateful to have met Maria. She truly represents what is good about Orthodoxy and, more importantly, what Orthodoxy can be if we are intentional about the ways in which we teach children to critically analyze the messages they hear. Ministering to youths also requires reflection about the ways leaders collectively and independently deliver messages. She has shown that with the right encouragement, young girls can learn to think ethically and to recognize and ask difficult questions, yet still remain close to Orthodoxy.

Emergent Themes

Authoring of Self & Spiritual Guide. Maria is constantly analyzing her relationships and institutions. Multiples times throughout our interviews she references the importance of relationships: "I can track my personal development also like by how I'm able to learn from other people." Growing through relationships with others is of great importance to Maria. She values her father's personal and moral advice, her brothers are her best friends, and her mother is someone she admires as a professional and as a mentor who taught her about love and compassion. Most impactful for spiritual and intellectual growth was her relationship with Clia.

Agency/Voice & Tensions/Contradictions. Maria regularly identifies tensions and contradictions between practicing a patriarchal religion and being a self-described progressive woman. She understands cultural/religious norms of Orthodoxy and is able to engage in cognitive reframing by researching and studying theology. She is comfortable advocating for others, especially those with marginalized identities. When she finds tension or contradictions in

Orthodox practice, she does not carry the burden alone or get frustrated by personal disequilibrium, but instead faces them directly and grounds herself in what she believes are the true teachings of the church.

Inward, Outward, Upward

Maria demonstrates an ability to find the goodness in theology and the way she makes meaning of her life as an Orthodox woman. She believes in equality for all humans. Maria is extremely aware of complex systems of knowledge (i.e., Orthodoxy), and critically and consciously experiences tensions between Feminism and Orthodoxy. Using the lens of Orthodox theology, Maria is compelled to ask difficult questions and requires answers to be grounded in faith. What is beautiful about her Portrait is that Maria is able to separate the principles of Feminism from the boundaries of Orthodox practice, much of which is accomplished in collaboration with a Spiritual Guide. It is through this reconciliation of disparities between Orthodoxy, practice and feminism that she is able to locate herself. I was continuously impressed by her desire and ability to critically engage systems that are, at times, antithetical to who she is, all while narrowing her focus to Christ's teachings.

Lia

Lia lives with her parents in a small town, Marrynville, in a center hall colonial-style home located on a tree-canopied street in a quintessentially midwestern suburb. It's a dark, brisk night and as I tread the path to her home, I notice that all of the lights are off. I ring the doorbell and a few moments later the foyer light is turned on, and Lia opens the door to greet me with a hug. Wearing a sweatshirt from her alma mater, hair fastened in a ponytail, Lia walks me down the center hall where her mother is cleaning the kitchen after their dinner. Lia's mother makes small talk about a recent event that took place, an event Lia helped to plan and execute. As Lia

and I settle into the pine-colored rectangular kitchen table and begin to chat, her mom continues to wipe down the counters and put items away. She asks if we need anything before turning off the rest of the lights on the first floor and leaves us to chat.

Lia describes herself as organized, someone who loves to stay busy, and is involved in many activities as an adult. She claims, "I like to get my hands in a lot of different things. I like to get involved in something and own it.... I get to the point where I'm leading it instead of just being a participant." This made me think of an earlier story when Lia in her childhood used to play on her own and move toys and school supplies around in her room to make her small world better organized. She had described this as a need that has never left her, and one that has served her well in all of her various activities. She often talks about starting fresh and feeling a sense of accomplishment by being able to reset everything as a way of being in control.

Lia is the only child of a father who was born in Poland and a mother who is third generation Greek-American. It is apparent that her family is close, as many of Lia's stories revolve around family experiences. Lia is fairly soft-spoken, measured in her responses and deliberate in the ways in which she shares her stories. Lia says that her parents instilled family as a priority and that "faith is huge, and it's really the center of everything." She tells me that she always remembers to step back and thank God for what she and her family have. Lia describes herself as a "somewhat regimented" child:

> I was attending Greek school every Saturday, attending church, and Sunday school every Sunday. Um, from about kindergarten on, I played the classical piano. I was practicing about six days a week for about a half hour a day, um, with my mom's (laughs) guidance and oversight. So I think there, that sort of schedule and regiment really built in a lot for me in terms of how I value my time, how I spend my time.

Shifting in her seat, Lia tells me how she has always attended liturgy with her parents and

Sunday School, but not the social aspects of the Church. Lia explains that because she didn't

attend social activities, she felt disconnected from the church community: "I felt very invisible,

very quiet . . . so it was an interesting way to kind of forge my path." Despite the disconnect, Lia

shares that she was grateful that church gave her the "foundation to see church as first and

foremost the most important thing and the social as being secondary." It wasn't until later in life

that she became more involved in ministry. In college, Lia joined a club for Orthodox Christians

and found it easy to relate to its members because of their similar experiences and mutual

understandings connected to the church.

Lia recalls from childhood her father's involvement in various ministries, from teaching

Sunday School to planning and organizing the annual summer Greek festivals, and her mother's

involvement in Philoptochos[8] and baking, helping others and teaching Sunday School. Lia is

proud of her mother's leadership role as a Sunday School teacher. It was seeing her mother so

active that solidified her desire to be involved in the church. With a sense of pride, Lia shares

that she is currently involved in six committees at church and in leadership roles in almost all of

them. Lia pours her heart into everything that she does as evidenced by the stories she shares and

the way in which the inflection in her voice changes when she's telling them. Lia's stories are

full of ways she contributes her skills to the greater community. She tells me about a time in

which she and her friends were waiting for the priest to arrive at an event to cut a turkey. The

priest never came, and they were in a pinch so she decided to proactively roll up her sleeves to

carve the turkey:

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[8] *Philoptochos (Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society)* is a women's philanthropic arm of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Part of me is always a little bit sad or frustrated by the end of the night that I didn't just

sit around and talk to people and enjoy myself. But I also am grateful that things got

done, and that things were kind of taken care of, and somebody was on top of it. It was

me.

Lia is proud of her contributions. Furthermore, her ability to take the lead on a project comes to

the fore. It is clear that measurable outcomes give her a sense of accomplishment. Lia did not

carve the turkey for the recognition, but to be helpful to others. Instead of inaction, she identified

a problem and *was* the solution. I smile as Lia told me this story because based on my previous

interactions with her, I could very easily see her rolling up her sleeves to get the work done. This

is something that I have always admired about her.

Lia identifies more with her Greek inheritance than with her Polish roots. While she was

raised in a religious home, studying the Greek language offered another avenue to her culture.

She describes what she values most about church: "It's a reset button. It's a way for me to step

away from any chaos or frustration in my life and reset and sort of find peace again." As she is

describing her experience in the church, Lia closes her eyes for a brief moment and says, "I love

going there and knowing that I don't have to think, I don't have to speak. I don't have to. . . . I'm

not expected to do anything. I can just be." Clearly, church is cathartic for her, a safe haven

where she can unplug and leave her cares behind. I smile because I too understand the feeling

she describes.

Perhaps most profound of all, Lia describes how Orthodoxy has shaped her as a woman.

She tells me that it has given her a path to follow and that: "It was sort of ingrained in my brain

that these were certain traditions to carry out throughout the year. And it taught me, um, oh my

gosh, what's the word? Restraint, I guess . . . it gave me a sense of self-sacrifice and a focus that

is important, and Sunday is for church." As she talks about people who are thinking about getting married and starting families of their own, she describes Orthodoxy as "part of my DNA. And I would say it shaped the way that I operate, the way that I think about things, the way that I view and look at certain topics, um, and it's, it's almost part of my subconscious versus my conscious now."

Lia views Orthodoxy as a set of guiding principles in her life. Lia reflects that throughout her life she has not had many experiences that would make her want to question many things. Lia said, "I feel like it's been very easy for me to just fall in line." I understand the weight of her words when she said she has fallen in line, but I am reminded of the myriad ways she has also *stood out* from the crowd. She has helped organize 200+ person events, she is on committees and is in lay leadership roles in her parish. While Orthodoxy has given her structure, Lia's stories show how she has leaned into her leadership skills to continue to build community.

When I ask Lia to describe the role of women in the church, she describes it as a very "small role" and "unfortunately I've seen it as sort of that motherly housekeeping type role of, you know, the women are kind of the support system in the background, but certainly not the prominent, um, you know, characters in the play." Lia quickly acknowledges that some women have moved into various roles like Greek School teachers, Sunday School teachers, helping with the annual fest and Philoptochos, but not into a position of authority. These women, along with several priests, are important figures who have gained her admiration and respect when it comes to their knowledge of the religion and the moral and emotional support they offer.

As we begin to speak about women in the church, Lia mentions her godmother, who was a Sunday School Director for over 20 years, and another woman, Catherine, who is well known at her parish. Lia explains that "Catherine doesn't go to Bible study; she runs Bible study. She

doesn't go to Coffee Connection, she leads it." Lia references Catherine often throughout our conversations, with admiration for her dedication to the church. While her parents never pressured her to be more involved, Lia attributes her desire to "step up and lead, to be a more important part of the church community" as coming from "within." Lia admires women of that guild, the doers who roll up their sleeves, take responsibility, and speak about relevant and relatable topics. As she describes the women who have made an impression on her, I think to myself that Lia is only a few years behind them. There's no doubt from hearing her stories that she will continue in their footsteps to make an impact on her church community.

Lia notes an instance in which she felt cognitive dissonance at a conference she attended earlier in the year. She was listening to a theologically trained speaker who specialized in youth and young adult ministries. The speaker, Jessica, facilitated a session on "The Church's Stance is _____." The premise of Jessica's session was to teach on a high-level that positionality and context matter in all situations, that things are rarely black and white, and that there are no one-size-fits-all answers. Sitting through Jessica's session made Lia uneasy:

> I think the Church does have a stance and they do have a perspective. I'm not saying it's always right but it's—they have, they have a view on "this is how you should be living your life" and I align with that. And to me, maybe I could be more open-minded in certain regards, but I like that the church has a path and rules, per se, I like structure. I like structure in all aspects of my life, but if the church for me is too open ended or wishy-washy, I feel like it loses some of that, that structure that gives it a frame. Because I think at the end of the day people want to be told what is right and what is wrong. Sometimes you're gonna disagree, but I think it's very hard to just say there's all this grey and you have to figure it out.

As previously noted, Lia acknowledges that she does not feel comfortable when solutions are ambiguous and incomplete. She continues: "like there's just a certain baseline, um, values that I think really important. And if you stray too far from that, I think you're straying from faith." Lia wants to hear about same-sex marriage, abortion and other hot topics. She is more animated when she shares that she started to have a "reaction" when another attendee questioned if the hierarchs of the Church listen to and make space for women. Lia feels strongly that the comment was unfounded because "that's not how the church has been." She acknowledges that she may be naïve, but explains that she's "all about going the conservative route and staying traditional." Lia goes on to say that

> it's a lot of times the people who are asking these questions are the people who aren't in church and who aren't, who aren't actively present like in the faith. They're more what I would call "social Orthodox." They're there for the fun aspects and the...and not that there's anything wrong with having that...So I tend to steer away from conversations with people who are like that about the faith because I don't feel like it's a—a true conversation if you're coming in and saying 'well the church is wrong but I'm going to show up if there's pizza.'

Listening to Lia analyze this impactful event that still gives her pause makes my own mind wander. There are so many layers of complexity to her story—so obviously the mark of a developing identity, from her growing wisdom that comes with age to interactions with people of diverse experiences, cultural and religious norms, and the avoidance of questioning the traditional stances of the Church. Throughout the telling of her stories, Lia sometimes retreats from situations that confront Orthodoxy to shield herself from the discomforts of cognitive

dissonance in the cloak of conservatism. In that moment, I empathize because I have found myself in that situation many times. Framing much of the story, Lia shares that:

> I'm in a profession where 80% of the time, there's a right and a wrong. Um, for accounting, there's definitely some gray area where you have to look at, look at guidance and have some interpretation, but walking out of that particular seminar, I felt like it was, it was like 25% right and wrong, and the rest is- is judgment. And that- that didn't sit well.

Lia's comments resonate with me and I can understand more of her discomfort with contingency and how she arrives at her truths, whatever they may be. For someone who thrives in a structured environment, which has served her well throughout her career, I can relate to how the seminar would have been frustrating for her. As Lia shares the disequilibrium she experienced during the conference, I am reminded of the shipwreck she describes in her reflection journal. Lia recognizes that in reflecting on her past experiences, she finds it "rather difficult to pinpoint a time when I felt like things I knew to be true fell apart," until the outbreak of COVID-19.

> In her reflection journal, Lia points out that prior to the pandemic, she experienced only a "series of small, passing frustrations." But the pandemic, according to Lia, has

> truly changed my outlook on nearly everything I previously knew to be true about my life and life in general. I have found myself changing in ways I never expected and what's most frustrating is that it feels like things are truly out of my control, which is a new feeling for me, someone who loves to be in control and on top of things....now that church services are only available via streaming online, I find myself very sadly losing the strong faith I've had for so long now....the sense of personal connection is strained and there is certainly a feeling of everything being surreal....It is certainly scary to think about how quickly things have changed and that my faith has been tested.

Lia's shipwreck brings things full circle in understanding her better, and it highlights the impact of disequilibrium on her life and the comfort she has previously found in her religion. The desire for stability makes it easier to compartmentalize and organize her life accordingly.

As our conversation progresses, I had the sense that Lia is having moments of critical self-reflection with the recognition that there is more to contemplate. The next chapter of her developing story will be to understand *what* she believes and *why*. Understanding the need to question but not having had the opportunity to do so, Lia sighs, "I think this is the part where, I, I feel kind of bad 'cause I don't feel like I've, I've learned enough of the teachings to question everything." Like many Orthodox, she acknowledges the desire to learn more about the religion so she can think more deeply about various topics.

As we conclude our third interview, I am left inspired by Lia and how deliberate she is in thinking about what is next. Lia reveals a great deal of wisdom, intelligence, and awareness of how difficult it is to deeply understand complex systems of knowledge. A moment of self-reflection came for Lia in our conversation when she acknowledged that there is so much more she wants to learn about Orthodoxy. Despite knowing Lia for the last few years, I realized in this moment how much I did not know about her life up until this point. She has taken on countless leadership responsibilities at her parish for the betterment of others. After our interviews I had a better understanding of the impact of family, church and cultural norms have made on her life.

Emergent Themes

Authoring of Self: Church, Family & Spiritual Guides. Lia currently defines herself in womanhood, to some extent, by the definition espoused by the Church; she acknowledges that she does not have a strong enough grasp of the actual theology to question things. As a result of not being very involved in ministries as a child, she was a passive hearer of a sermon and not an

interactive participant with her peers. Lia receives direction within the structure and culture within the church. In many regards, her voice is the same as the Church's voice. Lia frequently refers to Orthodox theology as having structure, rules, and a path for how to live her life and having a profession and religion in which lives her life in a way that protects her from disequilibrium.

Womanhood & Leadership. Throughout our interviews, Lia recalled a number of stories in which she was in leadership roles and felt comfortable taking charge of a situation. Some of this is due to her personality and strengths, but I perceive that there was also an underlying sense of duty in service to the Church that resonates with Lia as a result of her upbringing. To some extent, leadership is an action that is shaped by cultural norms and experiences of her mother and other women she has admired throughout her life.

Omnipresence of Cultural Norms & Disadvantages of Non-conformity. Lia is working to establish her agency and voice. It is clear with age and experience that she has recognized the need to develop her own critiques, understanding, and personal development and growth through the omnipresence of cultural norms. There was a certain level of an inability to even imagine what Orthodoxy might look like in terms of the roles of men and women, but that did not seem to bother Lia. She does not get sidetracked by any inequalities because she is confident within Orthodoxy and has found her purpose.

Inward, Outward, Upward

Lia finds goodness in Orthodoxy no matter the context. Orthodoxy is very much a part of who she is and describes it as part of her subconscious. Despite acknowledging gender differences within the church, she has chosen not to focus on that because she has created a path for herself to stay involved and to help others. Servant leadership has been critical in the way she

lives Orthodoxy which is reminiscent of Christ's teachings. While she knows there is much more to learn about the Faith, everything she does is because her faith is "the center of everything" which allows her to continue to be confident in herself within Orthodoxy.

Mary

I settle into the church library eager for Mary to arrive. She suggests that we meet at an Orthodox church near her home because her mother is getting older and has health issues that would make it difficult for us to speak uninterrupted. I knew Mary's husband in a professional capacity and have gotten to know Mary through volunteer work over the last two years. I have a high regard for both of them. When I joined a volunteer board in the Midwest, Mary was one of the first people to contact me with the purpose of getting to know each other over a cup of coffee. Since that meeting, we have developed a friendship that I truly value, both because of her experience as a mother and her involvement in philanthropy.

Mary walks into the library, Starbucks coffee in hand, and we exchange a hug. She pulls out the black leather office chair and settles in across the table from me. Strikingly beautiful, she is as fashionable and self-possessed as always. She's wearing black pants and a black flowy cardigan with a cross around her neck. We make small talk about our kids – Mary has a son and daughter who are in high school. After settling in, we begin with her telling me about her life story. Mary describes herself as "dedicated to the things that I do, whether it be my family, church, work, whatever it is."

Mary grew up in a middle-class town in the Midwest as an only child to a mother who was born in the United States and a father from Greece. In the second grade, Mary's family moved back to Greece for a year where she cultivated fluency in the Greek language. Mary describes her parents as protective and adds that she spent much of her childhood surrounded by

adults because she didn't have siblings. Mary explains that her father was "kind of like the strong figure in my family. My mom was the nurturing kind of, you know, um, person, and my dad kind of made most decisions." Speaking of her mother, she says "she always put others first, she put me first, she was always just very sweet and kind to everybody. Never said a bad word in her life." She credits her parents with teaching her humility, integrity, and making her feel empowered, the latter a function of her father's efforts. Knowing the Orthodox faith and culture, as well as passing the language down through the generations was important to her father. She laughs when she says that her parents were "smothering" with love but never without "very stern rules." Much of Mary's childhood focused on the importance of family which she has carried with her throughout her life. Mary acknowledges that there were expectations set forth for her as a young girl. She raises her eyebrows when she says that she "spoiled" her parents because of how well she behaved. Reflecting on being an easy-going child who followed the rules, Mary says "the way they kind of brought me up, I don't think that I kind of had a pathway out of that. So, it was kind of like embedded in what I did anyway."

Mary slouches her shoulders and leans forward in her seat when she speaks about her mother, describing her daily interactions. "I have to care for my mom. There's a caregiver, but usually I'm the one who prepares her medicine, her breakfast, her you know, if she's up before I leave, I get her dressed and ready, hygiene things." As I listen to Mary speak, I'm reminded that, during all of our discussions about her mother and how she cares for her, I never heard Mary complain about the mental, emotional, and physical load that she carries as an only child with an aged parent. I admire Mary's commitment to her mother and the way she cares for her. It is an authentic moment when she talks about her mother and the appreciation she has that she can see her kids off to school each day. "I feel blessed to be able to do that." Mary continues to talk

about her mother and credits her Greek Orthodox roots for the care she gives her. "You care for the elderly. You care for your family, you kind of keep them under your wings and take care of them." Mary describes herself as loyal. While she reflects, I'm reminded of the loyalty and dedication to her family, one of the many sides to her identity.

Mary's favorite memory from childhood is being in Greece with family and immersed in her Greek culture, with many traditions that included going to church with her mother. Her father was not much of a church goer, but she had accompanied her mother to the services. For her mother, Orthodoxy's focus was religion, and for her father, it was about the culture. Mary's hand gestures are animated as she recalls cooking, dancing, and Greek music throughout her childhood. Mary was in the choir, attended youth group, helped with setting up coffee hour and other events, and describes "anything that had to do with church—that was my extra-curricular activity." Because her parents had one car, Mary had limits on what she could attend. She smiles when she tells me that mother was involved with the PTA at the Greek school.

When they moved back to the United States from Greece, they settled into a home located closely to St. Phoebe, the parish she attended as a child. Mary explains matter-of-factly that her father always felt a sense of safety living near a church or school. With parents who owned the three-flat where they lived, "I always grew up with a lot of family around," as Mary's godmother lived in one unit and her mother's sister lived in the other unit.

After attending an all-girls Catholic high school, her father told Mary that for college, she "needed to go to school somewhere here somewhere that I can commute with my friends. So, wherever they were going, I should go too." Thus, Mary attended a university nearby with all of her friends. Mary's father was an important part of her life. As she speaks about him, she leans

her head to the side and speaks a little softer than she had previously. She beings to recount his advice when she told him she wanted to pursue medicine:

> Well, I want you to really understand what you would go into if you went into medicine and understand like the dedication of time and then the, the fact that if you do that, then you might not be able to be an active part of your family on a day-to-day basis just because your career would kind of take over.

Taking her father's advice, Mary pursued a career parallel to the medical field and went on to earn her doctorate. Mary wanted to help other people which is what made her want to pursue a career in medicine. She still feels that she is helping people in her role and feels thankful for the advice she was given. Mary reflects that this was a solid career choice for her as she has been with her company for a long time and it offers the flexibility she desired to be with her family.

Mary tells me that it was during her time in college that she met her now husband, Chris. She was 18, a freshman, and Chris was a senior. Mary and Chris have been together for more than twenty years. I couldn't help but smile when she talked about her marriage. It is with true joy, love and admiration for Chris when she says that she treasures their marriage. She coyly shrugs her shoulder and gives a big smile when she says "We're best friends. He's kind of everything and I really appreciate that. But I also got to meet a lot of people in his life that I wouldn't have met that I know were special to him."

As Mary begins to speak about her earliest memories of the church, she describes sitting in the pews during Easter services and the feeling she had as a child, hearing the hymns, "you feel the warmth, you know, you feel more connected to God. I feel pride in the fact that I'm Greek Orthodox and this is special." Understanding the feelings she describes, I ask Mary if going to church was important to her as a child and she said, "It felt like it was something that I

wanted to do, but that I should be doing. And that, um, I think I felt like, like going to church I would be a better person, so I really wanted to do that." We shift our conversation to the present and her current involvement in the church:

> Confession—I am not, I'm not there every Sunday. Which is unfortunate, but a reality.
>
> Yeah, I wish, I kind…I kind of like, that's one of my things that I kind of don't feel good
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> about myself. That kinda has fallen by the wayside a little bit. When I go, I participate, in
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> the activities and want to, I try—I try and help because I want to support my parish.

I understand Mary's feelings because I know what it is like to be pulled in so many directions, but I am also reminded of all the volunteering she does for parishes on a weekly basis in addition to her professional life. Mary is being fairly modest in terms of her involvement; I know firsthand what an asset she is to the parishes of the Midwest. Mary was asked to become more heavily involved in supporting parishes a short time after her father passed away. She told me that she felt that it was a sign from him telling her to support the Church because it is struggling, so she embraced her calling and told me that she felt the "onus and feels the responsibility" to help parishes. Mary's words remind me of the term "loyalty" that she used earlier to describe herself.

I ask Mary what she values about the Church and she tells me that when she thinks holistically about the church, she values the fact that "there's something bigger than what we are living right now, and I, and I look forward to that. So, I kind of feel like I'm constantly thinking of—am I living my, my life in a way that it'll take me to, to heaven? So, I kind of feel like we believe in something bigger than life." Mary talks a lot about how faith/Orthodoxy has impacted her life:

There was always like something in the back of my head that was leading my decisions.

Um, and that was always my—my parents on one side and my—my faith on the other.

And kind of guiding me in the decisions I have made, you know, through marriage,

through all those things. Um, so it...how I raise my kids, when I got married, not living

with my spouse before we got married, you know, sex, like all those things. Like I feel

like my faith definitely was one of, one of those things in my mind that kind of resonated.

She goes on to describe the feeling of being "taken care of by my faith." I ask her to describe that

feeling and she says it has been a security blanket. "I feel like it's something that I can always

fall back to, or you know, go back to at a time of, uh, weakness, or that's uh, when I'm

celebrating something, when I'm grieving something. I also feel like it gives me hope when

things look kind of grim." Hearing Mary speak, the way she describes her faith sounds like a

protector and I'm once again reminded of the special relationship she had with her father and the

way in which she describes her relationship with Chris. Relationships are a critical part of her

identity, and the relationship she feels through the Church is no different. Mary's words highlight

the way in which Orthodoxy has been a roadmap for how to live her life and gives her strength.

Thinking about Mary's upbringing in the Church, I am curious about times when she has

experienced contradictions where what she was taught religiously did not match experiences in

her day-to-day life. Mary references the need to be inclusive and to be cautious of being too

strict. For example, "when we have our period as females, we're not supposed to take

communion. And so I struggle to understand that. And my mom would always tell me 'well,

you're not pure, you're not, you're not clean.'" Mary explains that this practice never made

much sense to her but she never questioned a priest it. She talks to me about *why* this would be a

common practice. Mary finds some of the practices hypocritical when she talks about the

requirement of fasting before receiving communion. She tells me "I didn't eat eggs or you know, dairy or meat, but I was lying and if I was lying or stealing something. Like what? So what is more valuable?" Mary is referencing the fact that Orthodox are supposed to fast before receiving communion. She goes on to say that if her kids are hungry she tells them, "okay, you can have [food] and it's fine." Mary points out that if someone fasts but are lying, robbing, or stealing in their day-to-day life, does that still make them a good person? If her kids are good humans but have something small to eat before they receive communion, is that really a sin? On any given day she weighs the benefits and downfalls to all religious practices and is trying to do what is best for her family.

This conversation leads us to a discussion on womanhood. Mary proudly tells me that she has always felt empowered as a woman and has never felt that she has been "stripped of any opportunity" because of her gender. She explains that, "Even though my mom was always more subordinate than my dad, my dad always said to 'get your education, you need to stand on your own two feet.'" I nod along as this is something that I've heard shared by others, especially within our Greek community. She went on to say that her father told her, "You never know what may happen in life. You need to support your family; you need the tools to be strong enough to live on your own." In this way, Mary never felt inferior for being female. Mary acknowledges that she and Chris raise their kids the same way but says that:

> In church, I—I kind of respected certain boundaries as a female. Like you don't go
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> behind the altar. Um, you don't, you're, you, you don't have the opportunity to be a priest
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> if you wanted to…So there's certain boundaries, but I never, I—to be honest—never
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> bothered me. I just knew that there were certain things, like there's always certain

boundaries and certain things I didn't challenge. I don't—I never challenge that in my

mind or practice.

Knowing that Mary is a peacekeeper, I'm not entirely surprised by her flexibility but I am struck

by the word "boundaries." To some extent, the way in which she views and describes the ways

she accesses Orthodoxy is *boundaryless;* she can access prayer and community at any point; her

upbringing was rooted in the Greek culture; she donates time, talent, and treasure according to

her strengths and abilities.

Mary tells me that as a working mother "you're struggling to be strong; you know—

career-oriented female. But you're also wanting to be a strong mom. So, we have this tug of war

of trying to be the best that we can in the field that we're in." This is a harsh reality, Mary

explains, and it is something she struggles with and believes that her daughter will as well. "And

so, as she's picking a career path, I just, I feel like my dad talking to her, telling her to be wise in

your choice because you want that balance." Thinking about the role of women in the secular

world, I am curious about Mary's thoughts on the role of women within Orthodoxy.

While believing that Orthodoxy does not explicitly define the role of women, she

describes women as having "more supportive roles." Mary laughs when she compared roles to a

movie – "there are the leads and the supporting roles." She follows-up by saying that she does

not know that there are any messages targeted toward woman, "or at least I'm not a part of that

distribution," but acknowledges there are groups specifically for women like Philoptochos and

choir. Referencing that she is not bothered by men-only behind the altar, Mary explains, "I think

we can easily find ways to engage and be a part of the service that doesn't necessarily mean a

priest." Mary accepts that hierarchical decision-making is male-driven, but fully contends that

within the faith and community, women are respected, which is "Why I feel more comfortable

with the fact that this is like traditionally what our church has laid out." Mary's tone is optimistic. She is able to find the goodness in the institution of the religion, I believe, due to her involvement in the Church across the Metropolis.

Throughout our interviews, Mary says that Orthodox theology needs to be explained in a way that is easier for people to understand. She believes much is preached but there is no advice in terms of the practical ways to implement theology in one's day-to-day life. While much of the religion is up for interpretation, "which is not a bad thing," Mary says that she wants more ways to be respectful and to embrace more theology into her daily life. When talking about the way she feels about Orthodoxy she tells me that she has "blind faith." Mary explains, "We don't know that there's heaven, but we believe in heaven. We didn't meet Jesus, but we believe in Jesus. . . . so uh, I, I have had that blind faith in the fact that I can't go behind the altar, and that's okay." Despite knowing that there's more that she wants to learn about Orthodox theology and her involvement across multiple parishes, Mary respects the amount of work that priests have. She shares that she wishes she had a stronger relationship with her priests. Mary feels that priests are pulled in "50 different directions," and wishes she had "more of a direct line to someone within our, our church community that I could reach out to and get some guidance."

Mary describes the inequality that she has seen in the church. Aside from gender, there are also class differences. Referencing councils that have had more male representation, Mary says it is getting better, but they are still male-dominated. Throughout the interviews, Mary is extremely future focused. She is concerned about what she sees as decreased attendance in church and recognizes the need for there to be adequate funding to support the churches. Mary raises her eyebrows and tells me she knows that some clergy "gravitate to the people that fund them and turn a blind eye to certain things that they may, you know, do or say just to be able to

get funds." She understands better than most that often times non-profits must rely on external funding, which frequently come with strings attached. I ask why she tolerates the inequality of class and access. She tells me simply that, "if I don't, then I wouldn't be going to church, or I wouldn't, you know, I, I—it would be taking away something for me that is just as [much] mine as it is anybody else's." I admire Mary for her dedication to the Church and being able to find the goodness in any situation. Once again, notions of "loyalty" come to mind. Mary is concerned about the impact the COVID-19 pandemic will have on parishes. With optimism in her voice, she says "I'm afraid that through this, that'll [gravitating to people with funds] be more prevalent, because our churches are going to be more desperate. *But we can do better.*" Mary tackles problems as they come and believes that God has a plan, so she focuses her time and attention on what she can achieve and influence.

Looking toward the future, Mary is primarily concerned about the growth of the Church. She finds purpose in teaching her children and is worried about losing tradition and language. Mary is optimistic about the future and the current leadership structure which includes a new Metropolitan who addresses controversial topics. She believes he is more inclusive of parishioners and Mary has hope in the future under his direction. She believes the Orthodox church is at a "tipping point and can't hold out much longer." she believes it needs to be based on a "faith that is more inclusive instead of exclusionary." Understanding that priests and parishioners will come and go, Mary explains that:

> To me, the church is literally bigger than, you know. It's Christ, it's what we believe in, it's greater than any one person or thing. So that's what helps me get through it. And I think that what's hard is the fact that it's hard to change some of the things that have been

set in stone for years. And I don't think that we can do it all at once. But I do think that we're moving in the right direction, and that gives me hope when I get frustrated.

Mary continues to find the goodness in any situation. Thinking about the future, she says she "just wants the church to be full again" and sees more change coming: "mixed marriages, interfaith relationships, you know, gay couples, people that may have, may have left and want to come back, and people not excluding them." Again, Mary is focused on building community and sees their value in terms of the church's ability to grow.

Toward the end of our final interview, Mary tells me that she joined another parish's Philoptochos. Her explanation, relating back to community, is not surprising: "These are the people that I want to be a part of. It's this network of women, because they can relate to me, and I can relate to them, and we have things in common." I know the feeling Mary describes and feel grateful that she's a part of my community and circle of women whom I believe can relate to me, and I to them.

Emergent Themes

Womanhood & Evolution of Self. For Mary, Orthodoxy and faith or spirituality are synonymous and have less to do with actual theological teachings which she acknowledges that she does not completely understand. Orthodoxy offers a filter through which to live her life and through which everything is seen; it is not a space or an activity to take place but is about the feelings and the relationship she has with God.

Omnipresence of Cultural Norms. There were times throughout the interviews where Mary would accept religious or cultural norms above her self-interest and attributed it to the way things have always been, which did not seem to bother Mary. Instead, she was able to forge her own path, parallel to that of the typical experience of Orthodox women.

Authoring of Self & Secular World. Throughout many of our conversations, Mary speaks to the impact her parents, particularly her father, had on her life story. She is future focused and imagines a better world for her children and the Church. She affirms her religious identity through her network of Orthodox friends and family, the icon she has in her office at work, or how she invites her non-Greek friends to learn more about her culture. Mary carries Orthodoxy with her always. She does not separate or compartmentalize her Orthodox-self from her secular-self yet Mary acknowledges the competing ideologies of the secular world and how she has seen them impact the identity construction of her children.

Inward, Outward, Upward

Mary is a self-described "peacemaker." She described finding peace and fulfillment in the "doing" of service in the church community. She consciously and unconsciously does not get entangled in the minutia of the church (or its practices) which reflects the way she operates and protects her energy and spirit in the secular world (i.e., recognizing the tensions exist but not being an active participant in them). Throughout the stories she narrated, she does not get caught up in differences between gender as it relates to the Church. She's proud of her culture and religion and has risen above, in some ways, from acknowledging any gender differences. Instead, she has found opportunities for lay leadership where she has gotten involved and is making a difference in the lives of others. She finds goodness in situations and others, even when they're flawed, and I was inspired by her story. The goodness and beauty of Mary's Portrait is that Orthodoxy is at the foundation of who she is and how she was raised, and it has provided a guide for how to live her life. She accesses Orthodoxy throughout her day-to-day interactions – whether it's at work, or at home with her husband and kids – it remains an integral part of her life.

Laura

Laura lives in one of the most idyllic suburbs of the Midwest; Chesterton is an upper-class neighborhood with stately homes ranging from those built in the 1800s to newer construction, with beautiful front porches and manicured lawns. As I drive down the tree-canopied streets, it strikes me that Chesterton offers a sophisticated hometown feel where residents can drop their car off to a mechanic, visit a family-owned restaurant, pick up their dry cleaning, and meet a friend for coffee all without leaving town. Practically speaking, it is a livable, family-oriented neighborhood with some of the most desirable schools in the country.

As I walk up the sidewalk to Laura's home, a young child zips past me on his bike while his mother walks a few steps behind, Starbucks in hand, apologizes and says, "it's one of those days!" I smile, understanding all too well what she means, and watch her continue on and wave to a familiar passerby. I walk up the steps and ring the doorbell. Laura opens the door and greets me with a big hug and apologizes for keeping me waiting. As I walk in, Laura explains the sounds of pounding and carpentry in the house, and that she's been busy with her three daughters. With a set of twins who are in middle school and another daughter in high school, Laura is always on the go and today is no different; Laura suggests we move into the basement because construction workers are finishing their kitchen remodel.

We settle into the basement on a large, comfortable couch. With dark brown hair and a petite frame, Laura sits casually with her knees up to her chest, relaxed in her jeans, a grey sweater, and glasses. I ask Laura to tell me about her life story and notions of womanhood. Laura takes a bite of her toast, nods, and begins talking about what life was like growing up as a second-generation American in Morrison, a town in the Midwest. Growing up in a small, middle-class town, Laura beams as she describes her parents. Her father was "scrappy." He

received an accounting degree and worked full time, then went to law school at night. In a town with heavy mob influences, Laura speaks of admiring her father for not compromising his morals. She clasps her hands together as she tells me he was one of the most respectable and honest attorneys out there. Out of what seems to be modesty, Laura stops just short of admitting that her family was one of the wealthiest among her middle-class neighbors.

Laura considers herself similar to her mother in terms of values and how she has raised her own children. She acknowledges proudly that her mother worked, went to college and left home. It was not until her children were grown that Laura's mother went back to school to pursue one of her interests, the arts. Later in life her mother became a docent. Despite being progressive, like many women during that time, Laura's mother paused her career and took on the responsibility of raising the family. Laura shifted her posture and continued:

> She had a lot of interests. Um, main priority was her family. Um, she, uh, wasn't one of these moms that, um, was out and about running around all the time. She picked and chose where she could, cause—because her main focus was her family, she picked and choose where she would have the greatest impact with her free time.

Laura is an animated fast talker, like me; she is thoughtful in her responses, drawing you into stories as though you were a part of the interactions. Laura acknowledges the double standards she experienced growing up: she was treated differently than her brothers and there were different expectations for her in terms of education and profession, but that was a sign of the times, she observes. When referencing expectations and being brought up in the Orthodox Church, Laura says, "And you didn't want to disappoint your parents because they worked hard—this and that. So, it was part of being good, but it was also of that time." Growing up, Laura's mother always told her to "Just go, go live somewhere and get a job. Get out of here,"

because she did not want Laura or her brothers to be stuck in a town with little-to-no

opportunities. Laura reminisces about the ways in which her mother raised her family:

> She was, she made sure we got to Sunday school. She made sure, you know, we got to
>
> G.O.Y.A[9]. She was, she was a G.O.Y.A advisor, you know. Like, anything that a woman
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> could do at the time in the church, my mom did. And I think she did it for herself and to
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> make sure we stayed a part of the church. And I think we saw that it was a great way,
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> way to be raised. And we're hopefully, hoping to replicate that with our kids.

Laura's mother was progressive but still had a "first generation mentality," as Laura recalls.

When it came time to buy a condominium as a single woman, Laura sighed and said her mother

did not understand at the time why she would want to buy a condo because, "You're going to get

married." Again, Laura attributes these contradictions as a result of a different generational

mentalities.

In speaking of values, Laura quickly noted that throughout her childhood her parents

reinforced notions of a strong work ethic, sense of family, and honesty. Laura talks a lot about

the impact of seeing her parents' work ethic and the way they would help others. In a town in

which not everyone had money, people would often barter with what goods and services they

had; someone who could hang a painting, do electrical work or offer up a car in exchange for

legal services. This sounded idyllic in many ways—a great way for people who are (cash) poor,

but skilled, to have their needs met. Laura continues:

> One thing I liked about where I grew up is nobody knew who had and who didn't have.
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> You didn't know whose dad was working in the mills, you didn't know whose dad was,

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[9] G.O.Y.A stands for the Greek Orthodox Youth Association, which is a ministry for teenagers across America.

you know, doing hourly. Everyone was treated the same and everybody kind of respected

everybody and I liked that.

I ask Laura what family life was like growing up in Morrison and she described what it

was like growing up in a Greek community where many families immigrated because of more

opportunities. With a sense of pride for her parents, she shares that her father was on the building

committee to have her home parish moved from the city to the suburbs, and her mother was

actively engaged in Philoptochos. The connection with family and other Greeks has deep roots in

Laura's family. With particular attention to Sundays as family days, Laura recalls how

> Everything was closed on Sundays. There were no stores open. I remember, we'd have
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> big family meals after church, and my mom on Saturday would be like, "I hope we have
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> everything." You know, like because maybe a gas station was open and that was it.
>
> Sundays, we got up, we went to church. There were no excuses. You went, 'cause there
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> was never anything else to do. We didn't have homework demands. We didn't have any
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> activities on Sunday. It was church. You put your clothes out the night before. Somebody
>
> polished my dad's shoes. We went to church, we went to Sunday School. Always went to
>
> the social hour. Then we came home and hung out.

Daily life was an extension of church on Sundays. Laura's parents were active in the church and

laughs as she describes that part of her life as "structured." She and her brothers would go to

Sunday School, Greek School, and G.O.Y.A. "But looking back," Laura avers, "those

relationships are life lasting. My best friend is from church. And I don't have a sister. That's as

close as I'm going to get to a sister." I ask Laura about relationships and what it was like

growing up in the Greek community. She explains that people would always say to her, "You

Greeks stick together." I asked how that made her feel and Laura said it used to bother her, but

it's nice that she can go anywhere, meet a Greek and right away have a bond. She tells me that's what she is trying to make sure her kids have through Fanari[10]. They go to Junior G.O.Y.A.

Notions of community and desire for connectedness come to light as Laura explains that she wants her daughters to know that they have family to fall back on. "I want them to go to church. I had my friends at school, but my church friends . . . you know it's just, looking back . . . even though I was in school all day, the most impact I really got was from my church." I ask Laura to elaborate about what she values most about the Church, to which she cites critical reflection:

> I value everything. There are times that I wanna go to church, sometimes I go by myself, that I don't listen to anything. I just need a place to go. Sadly, I don't think it's a place I could go if I needed help. With the current situation of our church. Um, I think our church, though has too many ministries. They're all good, but what's lacking is something that brings us all together.

Hearing Laura say that she doesn't think she could go to her church for help is striking. I ask Laura to expand on whether or not the values of the church represent what she values in life and Laura explains that "there are some things about our church—I don't know where we stand." Laura explains that for her Catholic friends, they know where they stand on various social issues like abortion, homosexuality, and divorce. Laura goes on to say, "well, I'm sure the abortion issue. Um, but it's not gonna make me leave my church." Laura is personally pro-life but believes in a woman's right to choose. She acknowledges that with all of the "craziness of our world, things are different." She teeters on whether or not the church needs to "change" but says they "have to be more accepting." She is focused on the future of the church and maintaining the

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[10] FANARI is a summer camp ministry for youth entering sixth grade through their senior year of high school.

number of people who attend church. Laura gives an example about change and says that if someone is gay, "you still have to let them take Communion. You know, to me, it's just—we can't lose people." Laura maintains a people-first approach to Orthodoxy that reflects not what is best for her (personally), but what is best for the greater good.

As we begin to talk about women in the Church, Laura shifts in her seat, leaning her right arm against the back of the sofa. I ask her to describe the role of women in the church. Without skipping a beat, Laura purses her lips and says, "Philoptochos." I was not surprised by this as it is something I have thought myself and have heard other women say. Laura is referring to women being a part of the philanthropic arm of the Church that is known for women in more traditional roles – cooking, serving, raising money for the poor. While many women acknowledge the extraordinary work of Philoptochos, many view it as a stereotypical relegated role for women. What strikes me is the way in which Laura's business background surfaces in thinking about women as underutilized resources. Laura explains that women run the grade school program and Sunday school which she acknowledges are important. She goes on to say that, "There are so many talented and smart women out there, but again, utilize, people are your best resources. They need to start off saying like, what can these people do? How can they help our church? Don't discount them just because they're female."

Laura acknowledges Philoptochos as the "workhorse" of the church and the amount they do for cooking for shelters, servicing shelters, raising money for charities, visiting elderly and shut-ins, collecting backpacks for children, and says what they do "really impacts people who are in need." But then she poses a rhetorical question: "Does our church have a men's organization that's out there servicing the communities? No." Knowing that Philoptochos used to be all about

bake sales, Laura thinks others need to see that "women just do what they need to get the job done." With a get-'r-done attitude, Laura continues:

> And we're not going to go complain and say, "We wanna be in the altar." I don't think that's right. I think that there's a time and place. I mean, like, I don't think it's necessary for a girl to be an altar boy. I mean, that's me personally. But I do think that we can get our women, girls involved more in church, so they feel more of a connection. There, there has to be something else that they can do, right? I'm not saying go back and change the ways of the church, I'm just saying, let's be more accepting of what we are doing.

It strikes me that Laura teeters between issues of modernity and traditionalism, knowing that women should be acknowledged for the work they do, but not pushing the boundaries of what has been established by the Church. Laura tells me that it's a fine line between what the Church believes and what her beliefs are. She tells me that for her, "if it's not what my church believes, I'm not going to hold it against my church and say, 'forget it, I'm not going to be Orthodox anymore, right?" While acknowledging the lack of opportunities for women in the church, Laura sticks to traditional roots, saying that, "certain things are there for a reason, and there are some things we need to stick to." I admire Laura for the way she articulates her beliefs and stands for what she thinks is right.

As we talk, notions of increased visibility of women comes to the fore throughout our conversations:

> I do like the social aspect.... we're all cut from the same cloth and I think that, right . . . when you meet somebody at church, that is one special thing. It provides good support....[But] what is the future of our church? I do think we need to get more women involved. . . . Why can't every Sunday the kids choir sing instead of the old chanter?

Why can't we get kids involved? Why can't we get the girls involved? I think that you know, the boys have the altar. And they have that nice bond. As women we have Philoptochos. I'm like, *how many bake sales can you do?* And, not only that. It's like, I'm a member of Philoptochos. I can't give as much now. That's when my kids are gone. Well, that's kind of too late . . . cause my kids, like...like we need to get....We need to get the girls involved early.

I want to understand more of Laura's experiences as a mother in today's world and she explains the struggle of having three children in three different schools. Laura drives them to practices, volunteers as much as she is able, and acknowledges that "I think now is the time I really need to be at home. Just my presence." With three kids, a husband who works a great deal and travels a great deal for work, Laura seems to be the traffic controller of the family making sure everyone is where the need to be; it is clear her focus is on others more than herself. Speaking of marriage, Laura says, "'Cause I think there's this understanding, when you marry a Greek girl, right? Regardless of—she's goin' to stay at home, or if she's going to work. There's still those expectations that men have on that...on the wives. And actually, we do more than most."

While acknowledging the juggling she must do, Laura says that her day-to-day life is "boring" but relishes it because her kids will be off to college soon. She tells me, "I just want my kids to be happy. And healthy and mentally okay to be able to go away to college." There's a sense of selflessness and care that radiates from Laura; I can sense the love and devotion she feels for her daughters, and she means it when she says she just wants her children to be happy. The balancing act she faces as a mother is apparent when she says, "but I'm one person. So I just kind of . . . on my tombstone it will say, 'she did the best she could.'" Laura laughs as she says

this, but it is a very real and honest comment and her words struck me as something so many women feel on a daily basis, including myself. Laura continued, "You know, it's staying on top of the homework, staying on top of the house, cooking. It's just again, I, I kind of revert back to, like, I'm becoming . . . I am my mom." Laura goes on to describe some of the invisible labor mothers are so often called to do and wishing there was more appreciation, but acknowledges, "I'm just trying to keep my head above the water, really."

Laura now begins to tell me about her professional career before deciding to stay home and raise her daughters. Laura found success in the world of finance, but it did not come without its challenges. Laura tells me of how difficult it was to be a woman in a male-dominated business. She recalls stories of being treated horribly in her career: "even if they needed me, I was treated horribly." Laura was once sitting with the president of her division and eager to share that she landed a deal. His response was, "Why do you even care? You're gonna get married and make babies soon." Laura shook her head silently after she shared the story. She paused for a moment, acknowledged that colleagues felt she handled herself well and said,

> I could've sued. But I was single. I didn't wanna be that woman. And I needed to work. So, it's hard. It's hard. Because now that women are coming out and saying, "This is what was done to me," [and] they're screwed. And so, it's not gonna do you good. So, do you sit and take it? Or, are you labeled? Because that label's never gonna go away. So if anything, I think it's harder than it was before.

As I sat listening to Laura, I could feel her frustration and a sense of exhaustion she experienced sharing what it was like to cope with the vicissitudes of her career. I imagine some of her resignation in the face of old-school sexism is generational and understanding that it's sometimes in a person's best interest to keep her head down and work.

As I drove home from my first interview with Laura, I now had a better understanding of her life experiences and what shaped her into the woman she is today. Family is important to her and much of the way she was raised has impacted the way she is parenting her daughters. Orthodoxy, in terms of culture, custom and community/heritage was a consistent theme throughout our time together, more than religious study, which was common for first-generation families.

In our second interview, Laura speaks about the demands of women in today's world; she avers that she has evolved as an American woman and that the church needs to progress. She acknowledges that some men have helped women, but, on the whole, the double-standards remain:

> The expectations of being the homemaker, being the primary care provider to the kids, 'cause we are. You know, nothing is taken off of our plate. We're just getting more and more, more and more. And maybe there's some support, but it will never be 50/50. Our salaries are still... they're still the glass ceiling...when it comes to equal pay....If a woman speaks up for herself, she's a bitch. If a man speaks up for himself, he's doing a good job because he's getting what he wants. So, this double standard really hasn't gone away. But yet, we as women, we're smart enough and we're capable, but we have to actually fight harder for everything. We're willing to do the work.

Laura speaks with a sense of vigor and I briefly imagine what she would have been like to work with in a professional setting. Having known Laura for almost two decades, I have always sought her council with regard to my career, and in this moment, I am reminded why. She has an ability to compartmentalize or tackle situations as they come and finds the goodness in situations to accomplish what needs to be done.

I turn our discussion to Laura's experiences in Orthodoxy. She explains that she has tried to get more involved with Philoptochos and acknowledges all of the impactful things they do with regard to philanthropy: "If that's how I can give for my church, that's what I'm going to do." For Laura, the friendships she has built through church and, more specifically, Philoptochos are most important to her. When I ask Laura her thoughts on the messages she receives about being an Orthodox woman, she tells me it's "all what make of it," and acknowledges that the church is at a crossroads of how to move forward. Laura purses her lips before telling me, "we need to work harder, and we need to actually reach out to more women to try to get them to come to church and to be more involved." Laura sees the possibility for growth in the church as a result of a Metropolitan who is leading one of the Metropolises in the Midwest.: "I'm very optimistic. I think that he sees that there needs to be change in a good way." Laura tells me that she has heard Metropolitan speak publicly and that he is operating in a more realistic time than what has been seen in the past from Hierarchs. She believes strongly that he knows what needs to be done in the future to keep the faith "strong and growing.

Laura is future-focused when she talks about her concerns about the Orthodox Church. She wants to be sure that the church is viable, and as she speaks, she inspires me to want to do more in my community. Throughout our conversation, Laura says that women "just do what they need to get the job done." Referencing a conversation with the Metropolitan that was aired on social media the week prior to our conversation, Laura said:

> I think women are just like—we get it but we're not going to go out there and whine, bitch, moan and complain to be on that council. We're just going to do what we need to do to make an impact. And I mean, and try to get the job done and for, for the true need of what needs to be done to help people. Yeah. I don't think that's progressive. I just

think if—your people are your best resources. You have talented people, you have talented women who gave up careers and professions that could be adding so much [for the sake of staying] home with kids, that have bright minds that can be adding so much value if you just tap in and ask them. We use your expertise—to help.

As she speaks, many of Laura's previous stories about her professional career come to mind. She is passionate about the need for change and for women to be actively engaged, but she seems to understand the framework in which she finds herself. Much of what Laura describes about her experiences and how she feels about the church is in reference to what the future might look like for her children, and it once again strikes me as Laura is speaking, that she is really selfless and the most basic desire is for there to be more in the Church for her daughters. Thinking of future generations, Laura reflects that she is trying to follow the church in the way she raises her kids. For her, it was a great guideline and it gave her perspective. She tells me that having children changed her perspective because once you get married and have kids, you need help raising your children and the Church instills certain values that you want to instill in your children. Laura talks about the importance of being in a community where people have the same values as her and how that has helped throughout the years raising her children.

As Laura and I wrap up our final interview, I am left thinking about how differently various generations of women can experience life, personally, professionally, and religiously. Laura is in her 50s and her family life clearly shaped her understanding of Orthodoxy as a mechanism for culture, heritage and community, more than a source for actual theological teachings.

Emergent Themes

Authoring of Self: Importance of Community. Throughout our conversations it was clear that Orthodoxy was the foundation of her upbringing and the way Laura is now raising her daughters. Her parents were involved in the church in various philanthropic ways, which was a way to advocate for the religion. It was through the Orthodox Church that Laura met some of her closest friends, women she relies on for support, and part of what she hopes will be the future for her daughters. What did not come up in our conversations were specific references to Orthodox theology, except to reference an unawareness as to what the Orthodox Church's stances is on various social issues. Laura had averred that being Greek Orthodox was just "what I AM in a sense" and that because she was born and raised Greek Orthodox, it's "a way of life." Orthodoxy is who Laura is at her core, but that is supported by the community to which she belongs.

Care Ethics. Laura found success professionally and worked in male-dominated industries in which she recounted various instances of sexism. With almost a sense of pride, Laura referenced that she could have sued, but didn't. She talked about women being labeled for the rest of their lives and acknowledges how hard it is for women. In her personal life, Laura has progressive views in terms of certain social issues and the opportunities women should be afforded. Yet, she has traditional roots deeply embedded in her religious life. Laura references the need for women to have more visibility and options in the Church but is quick to dismiss notions of female altar servers or clergy because, in her mind, it's "not necessary" to quibble over women's roles when there are so many other ways to contribute. The juxtaposition between progressivism and traditionalism is showcased throughout the interviews. Laura references the ways in which women roll up their sleeves and get the job done without complaining and in the way that builds a sense of community among women.

Leadership. Women in leadership are extremely important to Laura and came up frequently. Her professional life was highlighted throughout the interviews and it is clear that she was a respected leader in her industry. Laura references people being the best assets of the church but does not feel that they are utilized nearly enough, and there were several occasions in which Laura discussed people needing to invite people to be involved. Laura understands that people have so many talents that can be put to use which makes them feel valued and needed. What better way to keep people invested in the church – living through leadership instead of being passive recipients of Orthodoxy.

Womanhood: Future Focused. Understanding the impact of Orthodoxy on her own life, including the friends she has made along the way, Laura is future focused concerning her community and, more directly, her daughters. She wants them to be involved in the Orthodox community which provides a socially safe, welcoming and supportive environment that is a grounding force in their lives. In terms of the Church, Laura talked about the need to utilize people as their best resources, and the importance of growing church attendance.

Inward, Outward, Upward

Laura's interviews and Portrait were laced with goodness. While she does not always agree with practices in the church (e.g., not strategically including women in lay leadership roles, not tapping the right talent for the right tasks, etc.), she does not let them impact the way she lives Orthodoxy, which is deeply rooted in community. Gender inequality and exclusion was not a primary concern of Laura's; instead, she used a business lens on her concerns which are related to growing the church. Following our interviews, I could not help but think about her thoughts on people being your ("an institution's") best assets. She balances it all and is someone who I have the utmost respect for – not only did she have an incredible career in the workforce, but she

holds a strong leadership presence for her husband and daughters. Laura has her struggles like everyone else, but she is a resilient and resourceful woman role model by showing her kids how to lead in whatever context they find themselves. Throughout our conversation it was clear that Laura is someone who could be a tremendous leader in the Orthodox community but whose value has not been realized by some of the people around her (specifically the church). Laura had strategic ideas and long-range insights on the potential of the church – both for kids and adults. Even though she is no longer working outside the home, she is a leader who knows how to recognize talent in others and make appropriate use of it.

Tina

As I navigate my way through the streets toward Tina's home on a sunny afternoon in February, I'm reminded of how my relationship with her has evolved throughout the years. One of Tina's nieces is one of my closest friends, and I have always referred to Tina affectionately as "Auntie Tina." She was a constant throughout my childhood and emerging adult years, always at family parties, asking how school was going and what my interests were. As an adult, we reconnected through a Greek Orthodox Church. During this time, our interactions evolved into more of a relationship between equals rather than a relationship between an inexperienced girl and her sage elder. While I knew Tina in my formative years, I did not know much about her background, so I was excited when she expressed interest in taking part in my study; someone I knew for years was willing to share their stories, thoughts, and feelings about Orthodoxy and womanhood with me, a topic we had never discussed before.

I park my car in front of Tina's condominium, and as she buzzes me up to her floor, I feel surprisingly nervous, wondering what would emerge from our time together. Tina greets me with a familiar hug and kiss, and as we walk toward the kitchen, I notice pictures of her family

hanging on the walls, many of folks I have known personally—her daughter, mother and father, and her sister's family—prominently displayed in the hallway. At once, she offers me something to drink and we settle into the kitchen. The condo's interior is penetrated with light, with its open floorplan and large windows. I see chairs gathered in the family room, which is connected to the kitchen, and facing the front door. That evening, it turns out, Tina had hosted a Homeowner's Association meeting. As I retrieve my recorder and papers, I notice Tina's artistic photographs hanging on the green walls of her condo: the Cloudgate Bean, a sailboat on Lake Michigan, and photographs of her many travels, many that I had first glimpsed on social media. In recent years, Tina had taken an interest in photography and now her talent shone through in these pictures.

Tina grew up in a city in the Midwest and acknowledges that many Greeks associate themselves with their churches. Tina grew up going to St. Sophia Church in the heart of the city and attended its school. Much of her childhood was spent near family; her aunts, uncles and friends grew up near each other and most of the community was comprised of Greeks. She was raised in a home with a father who worked long days as a snack-shop owner, her mother did not return to work until Tina was in fifth grade and her older sister was in eighth grade.

As Tina describes what it was like growing up on her block, she flashes a bright smile and her cadence quickens as she remembers that the doors were never locked, and people were coming in and out of houses. Tina is a self-described action-oriented leader who is easy going, cheerful, and always needs to be busy. As a child, she says she always wanted to be a doctor, but with a humorous shrug of her shoulders, Tina discloses, "My mom was not in favor of that. She says, 'what are you gonna do, how are you gonna make house calls when you're married?' and all of that. So, that wasn't really encouraged a lot." She continues, "But at the same time they always bought me the science kits I wanted."

As a child, Tina says the values her parents taught her were respect, the importance of education, and faith. She always knew that family was important and knew there were expectations placed on them, "They expected us to act a certain way." Tina went on to describe the importance of showing respect in the way they acted towards their elders. Tina chuckles as she describes a time in which her non-Greek friend came over for the first time. "She kind of like just flopped on the couch, and it was the first time my mom met her and I . . . she didn't do anything wrong, but I knew later I was gonna hear about it. And so, I did hear about it later." Tina also knew there were expectations with dating, for example, that Greeks were preferred over non-Greeks. With a nervous laugh she says, "Of course my sister married a non-Greek and I married a Greek. . . . and I'm divorced and she's not. So, there you go."

Tina describes a time in her life when she was struggling in her marriage. Despite doing everything the way she and everyone around her thought it should be, Tina struggled to keep her marriage together and finally separated from her husband. However, she didn't share news of the separation with her family for seven years. Carrying the burden of such a secret was because she was worried it would "blow up into something else." Despite knowing that a divorce was best for her family, Tina acknowledges that she, "probably would've just forced my way through it forever. I knew that I could just make it work, but I didn't think I could make it work and be okay" [for her daughter].

When asked about her reasons for keeping such a secret, Tina responds that she wanted to be a "really successful family person." She wanted to be a successful Greek Orthodox mom and did everything "according to what it was supposed to be." She tells me stories of having family over for dinner each week and kept coming back to "the way things were supposed to be." I

notice that she laughs nervously when she tells me this story and I can tell she is reliving parts of her marriage that ultimately did not survive.

Tina's divorce is her major shipwreck, which she acknowledges as having a powerful impact upon her life. Tina's tone conveys the sacrifice she was willing to endure for others. As a wife and mother, her raw honesty cuts to my core. I feel a sense of physical and mental exhaustion for her and what it must have felt like to carry such a burden alone in spite of all of her best efforts, just so that others would not be disappointed in her. Tina pauses and explains that she was concerned that she failed in her marriage and her family. She sacrificed a part of herself for seven years and would have willingly continued to do so if it would have benefitted her daughter. That is a sacrifice that is all too familiar for many women, particularly Orthodox women.

While attending church was a parental mandate not to be questioned, she describes her experiences in the church as a child and emerging adult with enthusiasm. She was actively involved in the choir, G.O.Y.A., and Maids of Athena[11], but the most excitement in her voice comes when she describes what it was like each year during Holy Week. "It felt like home to me," she declares, as she explains that she practically lived in the church during Holy Week. During that time, the girls and boys were expected to clean the church and she describes it as a great time working together.

When I ask Tina what she values most about herself, she says she enjoys helping other people. This does not come as a surprise as Tina has spent her entire career helping others. Looking down at her kitchen table, Tina humbly describes her professional career; she was a teacher for 16 years, one year as an assistant principal, 12 years as a principal, and four years as a

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[11] *Maids of Athena* is an international philanthropic and fraternal organization which promotes sisterhood, citizenship, Hellenism and family. www.maidsofathena.org

curriculum director. With a laugh, she explains that after retiring for just one week, Tina went back to work for another four years as an interim curriculum director. When asked what it means to be her most authentic self, Tina says it's to be, "considerate of others. . . . I think showing people that there's always hope and there's always something to be grateful for.'

Helping others and demonstrating hope and that there is always something to be grateful for extends to Tina's now-retired life. She keeps herself busy volunteering at a food pantry each week, attends book and art groups, and is a member of various church ministries. In recent years, Tina has become more connected to the church, describing herself as someone who is actively learning more about the faith than ever before. Tina tells me that she values learning and that even though she went to church a lot as a child, she now realizes that she did not learn much. Tina did not understand many of the lessons or know Bible stories. Only now that she is an adult, is she learning more and able to connect theology to her life. Tina lets out a big laugh and tells me that "My cousin George sits next to me in church [each week] and our big joke every time we learn something, [is that] "who knew that?'" With a shrug of her shoulders, Tina ponders, "Maybe I wasn't ready to receive it, I don't know.... The culture was more the emphasis. So now, learning the religion has been fascinating to me."

As we begin to talk about what contradictions she experienced between her personal and religious life, Tina's vacillates between knowing what she was taught as a child to what she experienced as an adult. She tells me a story about an exchange she had with her now ex-husband. When a married couple separates, they are not permitted to receive communion until they receive an ecclesiastical divorce. "So, my thing is, I don't believe Jesus would say that. Because He reaches out to the least of them. So, I took communion every Sunday. My ex would not. He would not, absolutely not." She smirks and says "he couldn't believe that I would. And I

said, 'Unless the priest stops me, and if he stops me [then] I'll go to another church, they won't know me. Nobody's stopping me from going to the Table." Tina shrugged her shoulders lifted her palms upward and gave me an indifferent look. Some of Tina's rebellious side was showing and I can tell that she is proud of the stance she took.

As she spoke, her tone changed from admitting something she did was wrong according to Church tradition to being more confident and unapologetically authentic. Tina recognizes that being taught not to take communion does not align with her understanding of the importance of receiving communion and is therefore able to rationalize her actions. She quickly goes on to explain another contradiction that she once wrestled with:

> I have a very strong problem with the fact that – that they won't even allow girls to hold the antidoron[12] baskets. I mean, those kinds of contradictions are just beyond my understanding. It's just prejudiced for one but it's, there's nothing in the Bible that says that that's not allowed. There's—you know, that's all made up stuff. You know, there were deaconesses way back, that's a whole other story. But you know, this business about girls not going behind the altar. Fine. They can even be altar girls because you could bring sticks out to them, they don't have to go behind the altar. There's lots of ways to do it. But we're disenfranchising them even more than the boys.

Tina is passionate when she speaks, shaking her head and often times lifting her hands and waving them off in annoyance. Clearly frustrated with parts of the liturgical practice of the church, Tina describes the roles of women in the church to be weak and says in an exasperated tone, "women have so much to offer that they're not—not *allowed* to give." She again shakes her head, and I can see the look of frustration in her eyes.

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[12] Antidoron is blessed bread that is distributed by the priest at the end of a liturgy.

Despite her frustration with the lack of ministerial opportunity awarded to women, Tina is quick to praise individuals around her who have made a positive impact on her spiritual growth. Aside from Tina's parish priest, who she visits to discuss various topics concerning faith, she frequently describes two other women, Sophia and Rose, who have made "profound" impacts on her life as spiritual guides who mentor, encourage and challenge her on her quest to seek answers concerning the Church. Sophia runs several ministries at Tina's church and has the uncanny ability to take teachings of the Bible and make them applicable to Tina's life and has played a significant role in her religious education. Sophia, who is theologically trained and a well-respected scholar in the Orthodox community, offers insights that are impactful on Tina. "I never leave her Bible class without a thought that's given to us that doesn't carry me through the week. To think about or to, to reflect on."

Tina acknowledges instances in which women have done significant work and that seems to give her personal satisfaction. Tina shares that much of this knowledge stems from Sophia who has shared instances in the bible in which Peter gets credit, but Martha was the first to say it. Rose, on the other hand, is Tina's "spiritual guide," who does not question the role of women in the church and does not seem to be bothered by it. Tina's relationships with her priest, Rose, and Sophia have contributed to her desire to "always turn toward the church," and this was in large part due to the connections she made with them.

At the end of our interview, Tina shows me her spiritual art journal, a space for listing her thoughts and feelings, as well as graphic representations of her experiences in the Church. The pages are bright and reflective, and the amount of time she has spent working on the journal is apparent. On my way out, I thank Tina for spending time with me. She gives me a hug and says she hopes she was helpful. As I get on the elevator, I think of the word *helpful* and how

conditioned women are to want to be of service to others. I learned more about Tina in the last 90 minutes than I had in the last 20 years. I drove away thinking about notions of tensions or contradictions of being a woman who is, at once, a feminist and traditional. Tina made me wonder how strong women can embody the religious and cultural norms of Orthodoxy while accepting the undesirable subordinate roles imposed upon them, all while continuing to deeply love the church.

During our second interview, Tina's awareness of the contradictions Orthodox women can experience is evident. She rubs her fingers against her forehead when she recounts a story that many of us have seen on a regular Sunday in church. A boy was sitting with his family when he was not serving in the altar. If the church is crowded on a week this boy is not scheduled to be in the altar, he will go into the altar even though it is not *his turn.* Tina explains that on one Sunday, "the little sister just started crying and crying and crying because, why does he get to do something all the time?" When I ask her how it made her feel to see that, she lets out an audible sigh and says, "it crushed me, you know? I get so tired of hearing it." She continues to question the traditional role of women in the Church: "I was sitting there thinking, why can't young girls be the ones holding the andiron basket? Why can't they be the ones holding the cloth at communion? What can that hurt?" Wading in the waters of contradictions, frustration and helplessness has weighed heavily on Tina, and she has reached her limits of accepting certain restrictions imposed upon women.

Tina has subtly pushed against religious and cultural norms of Orthodoxy. With a hint of sarcasm in her voice, Tina explains to me that in the Old Testament women played a "critical" role of making prosfora for liturgies. "Great. Women traveled with them and made the bread. OK, it's 2020. It's just like we can't still use olive oil even though it's not kept in animal skins

anymore. . . . well I use them anyway!" I ask if this is how she's fighting the patriarchy of religion and Tina quips, "we're supposed to raise money for the charities. We're supposed to bake. Bake, cook, serve. The only time I—my opinion I feel is valued is in Philoptochos." I pause and let the gravity of what she just said sit with me. From her standpoint, the "leadership" roles delegated to women in the church has been reduced to *bake, cook, serve.* This is a woman who has spent her life helping others, who would do anything for those around her, genuinely loves her church, and knows that she is forever limited based on her gender. I feel the inquire where these messages about being a woman in the church originated.

Tina pauses and I can tell she is struggling with what wants to say when she finally blurts out: "I do believe they respect women...but I still feel they want the male to maintain the power. They're just as afraid as anyone else. So the female message doesn't hold as much strength and it bothers me." Each time Tina questions or acknowledges the omnipresence of cultural and religious norms, she lets out a nervous laugh and it makes me think of the ways in which language can be used to conceal anything uncomfortable. She has thought about these stories in the past and it continues to be something she struggles with. Despite her best efforts to separate what she believes to be religiously true and what she believes intellectually or emotionally about the difference in roles between men and women, Tina finds herself discounting her feelings despite the frustration. She sees the contradictions yet shoulders the burden because from her standpoint, there are no other options. She references times in which she has tried to separate her feelings but acknowledges that as she gets older, nothing changes. Tina tells me that each generation is trying "to be respectful of the service and respectful of the faith," but we keep losing generations by inaction.

Tina worries about the sustainability of the church if more is not done to help the youth stay involved. In an ideal world, she wants to see girls more involved. The intonation in her voice throughout our interviews signals that this is something that she continues to try to situate in a way that gives her peace. I ask Tina how she finds goodness in the church when she can feel so frustrated at times. She pauses and gazes out the window. "I mean, you walk into our church and as soon as you walk in, you feel the spirit of it—the icons, you know? You're walking into a setting of spirituality . . . and it becomes the community of that moment." She pauses again and says, "So for me, it's, um, the goodness is the—you have a safe space to be with Jesus."

During our final interview, Tina reflects on her life story and experiences within Orthodoxy. Over the last month I thought a lot about Tina's spiritual guides and the ways they have impacted her life. I begin by asking Tina if she feels she has learned more from the physical church (liturgies) itself or if she's learning more from the relationships with her spiritual guides, Rose and Sophia. Nodding before I even finish my question, Tina goes on to explain that "it's really the spiritual guides because it's also the discussion that happen because of the additional information they give within the discussion." Tina tells me about the positive interactions she had with her former parish priest and how he could provide history and context around any and all topics related to a particular idea or passage of the Bible. She talks about adoring the former priests and the connections she had with them, but expresses guilt for taking their time, even though it was helpful in her spiritual growth.

Despite having thought about the roles of women and men in the Church, it is clear that, until this point, Tina has not given herself much time to think about the possibilities of what Orthodoxy might look like in a utopic world without any taboos or restrictions. Throughout this

exchange, Tina vacillates on the idea of whether or not there is gender inequality within Orthodoxy:

> I don't believe everything has to be the same. Like, okay, a boy does this and we should have a girl doing this, and a boy doing this. I think we can involve females in lots of things. And it doesn't necessarily have to be the same things, you know? Um, like do they even have to be altar girls? I don't think it would be harmful, I'd love to have altar girls. If they're not altar girls, there's parts of "altar boying" that girls could be doing, you know, the andiron of the cloth. The boys don't, why can't a girl hold the cloth at communion? There's no oath the boys take for holding the cloth you know. . . it doesn't have to be equal…In other ways, you know?...I'm not totally into the one for one thing. Uh, I would love to hear female voices like the chanting, you know, I love when the female comes up and does—But I love the male voices too. I don't want it to be gone, you know?

Our conversation drifts into a taboo topic within Orthodoxy – female clergy – and how she would feel to see a female priest serving in the altar. After expressing the desire to see more involvement of young girls and women in the church, Tina says that she could never imagine a female priest because she has heard male voices for so long.

Tina raises an eyebrow and tells me about a time in which a priest told her that women have an important role in the church: making Prosfero. Tina smirks and says, "I know he didn't mean it that way, his point was the Prosfero centers the most important part of the Eucharist, you know? But the way he started out, I almost threw something at him" [laughs] "cause I don't want to be important for baking, you know?" I nod along because so much of what Tina says resonates with me and how I have felt. It makes me wonder why Tina and I had not talked about any of this sooner.

Tina quickly addresses the future of Orthodoxy and where she sees inequality to be most prevalent. In a very matter-of-fact tone, Tina acknowledges that if Orthodoxy does not do something for young women, "they're [women are] going to go somewhere else to find it. They're getting too smart now." She is aware that women are hearing more about female inequality and can spot it easily. Young girls will look around the church thinking, "Where do I belong?" She is frustrated when she explains that the ways of the church will backfire and that the priests "don't get it." As Tina becomes more frustrated, she speaks more with her hands and I feel her sense of passion for the youth and the desire to leave the Church in a better place than how she found it. Tina acknowledges that some women may be wondering why they would stay in an environment of inequality.

Picking up on all the feelings Tina is experiencing, I ask if the inequality she sees impacts her relationship with God. She is swift to exclaim

> No, because it's not God. It's the males that are in charge [laughs] in my mind…And, and I don't like that they use their power because Jesus, I believe, accepts all. Now, granted in His time, the disciples were all, well, according to, you know, the 12 were, were males, but there were always females there. They're just never acknowledged, or they're never painted in the pictures, or they're—you know, but they were there. Um, so I don't blame Him, I blame whoever is the macho in charge, [laughs] in these various levels over the years.

Despite being somewhat soft-spoken, Tina's fiery spirit comes alive as she is speaking. It is a side of her that I have not seen before, and I feel appreciative in the moment that a woman of an older generation is so aware of the plight of women and wants to see them advance. When I ask Tina why she tolerates the imperfect practice of religion, she tells me that it is getting harder to

tolerate: "it really does. And I'll—I'll be honest, if I had a young daughter now, I'd be burning down things right now." I am in awe of the feistiness coming from a woman I have known for the last 20 years, but did not *really know* until now.

As we close our final interview, I ask Tina what, as a Greek woman, she knows for sure. With a serious look on her face, she says that she could survive anything. She acknowledges that she has God and family, but what she says so beautifully and thoughtfully is that, "if a big tragedy struck, there would be . . . this sounds kinda—there would be another Greek woman there to step up and help me. . . . it's like you have a giant safety net around you." Given the story she told me previously about her marriage ending and keeping it a secret for fear of disappointing others, I ask if it is a comforting feeling to know that she would always have women around her to support her. Tina nods slowly and with a peaceful smile says that the circle of women around her is important because they're the ones who "gather around you, that listen, that only give advice if you ask for it." She smiles and shakes her head then says, "They will step in if they know you're desperate for advice and you'll never go hungry or not have a place to live until you get on your feet again." Tina stops and looks out the window for a brief moment as though she's deep in thought. She shakes her head at whatever she is thinking and I ask her what advice she'd give young Orthodox women: "keep having your voices heard in the church, whether in big ways or little ways."

Consistent with our interactions up until this point and when thinking about the future, Tina mostly thinks of others instead of herself; she would like to see a Bible study for young women; more classes taught by Vasiliki, a woman in her parish who has been actively involved in youth ministries for years; classes to understand the history of Orthodoxy; to explore the history of women in Orthodoxy; and female altar servers. While acknowledging the need for new

ministries, Tina says, "I don't expect anything to be done for me," and I immediately wonder, *why not? She's worthy of being administered to (through ministries) as well.* I push her on this, and I understand that she is referencing anything social for those who are divorced.

As the final interview with Tina ends, I find that (re)imagining change is difficult for Tina, but it's clear that she is reflecting on her epistemological beliefs and how she has arrived at her truths. Tina believes leaders Hierarchs "need to be willing to make changes and those changes need to put adult women in role model positions" and that "they need to put young ladies in invisible roles" throughout the year. In the days after our interview, I read Tina's final reflection journal and am left with her final words as a critical point of self-reflection of my own involvement or stance within Orthodoxy: "I just want women's voices to be heard as much as men's voices have been heard for years, and we have knowledgeable people—women and men who can work together to develop and grow this movement." After spending time with Tina, I am left in awe of her desire to help generations of women who come after her, the willingness to seek answers to that which she does not fully understand, and the determination to make a change in the Orthodox world.

Emergent Themes

Authoring of Self: Family & Spiritual Guide. So much of Tina's stories involved family, whether it was being with or near family, the relationship she had with her parents and sister, the ongoing relationships with her daughter and niece, etc. Family is an ever-present part of her life. Throughout Tina's life, she received implicit and explicit messaging on values, expectations, social values and hierarchies. As she moved throughout her life, Tina found an intellectual curiosity within Orthodoxy that she has explored through Bible study, spiritual guides and close relationships with clergy.

Agency/Voice & Tensions/Contradictions. As she gets older, Tina is seeing some of the contradictions in the Church and they seem to bother her more, particularly the role of women. With the prospect of having a granddaughter or great-niece, Tina is seeing gender inequality and is less willing to tolerate it. To combat the inequalities she encounters, Tina has taken part in quiet forms of resistance, which is evident through many of the stories she tells. One that comes to mind is when her ex-husband was surprised that she would receive communion without an ecclesiastical divorce. Tina said that if the priest tried to stop her, "I'll go to another church, they won't know me" because "nobody's stopping me from going to the Table." Her agency seems to come with confidence and age, and it is inspiring to witness. Despite the contradictions she sees in her life, she is resilient and finds the goodness in all situations, even the frameworks which she finds stifling at times.

Agency & Voice: Shipwreck. While Tina spoke at length about her divorce and framed it as her main shipwreck, what struck me was her desire to not want to disappoint family. In order to protect family and save face, she carried a great mental and emotional load. She also referenced her father's gambling in a thoughtful reflection journal and the way she internalized her father's missteps. Tina said, "I never shared my knowledge with anyone. Isn't that what Greeks / women do? Family stuff stays in the home. Maybe it is never revealed or dealt with. Maybe it surfaces later in one of our lives." Tina openly discussed how she was able to trace this shipwreck throughout her life, marriage and ultimately her divorce. Tina doesn't discuss it directly, but despite not being as confident in her earlier years as she is now, she is an admirably strong and dedicated woman. While she internalized information, she also finds growth to be a motivating factor of her life.

Womanhood: Love & Evolution of Self. When talking about what it means to be a woman, Tina referenced "strength" and that women of today have it much harder than years ago. It was clear she understands the difficulties of raising kids, working full-time and trying to be committed to various activities. Tina's evolution as a woman went through various stages, from receiving information from her parents to getting married and divorced, from being a teacher and public speaker to a single mom raising a daughter, and now a retiree with an adult daughter. Tina's confidence and ability for self and religious exploration have increased considerably. While Tina referenced family throughout the recount of her life, she acknowledged the network of Orthodox women who are spiritual pilots, women who have become her safety net to support and guide her.

Inward, Outward, Upward

There was so much beauty and goodness throughout Tina's interviews and Portrait. Especially throughout her retirement, she has focused on the evolution of self as it relates to Orthodoxy. Tina felt she had a superficial knowing of theology previously – either through what she had retained or by what she had access to knowing. Given her background as an educator, it's not surprising that she has dedicated time to deeply pursue understanding Orthodox theology through intentional study. She has sought Bible Study groups, Christian friends from other denominations, a Spiritual Guide, and devotes time to her own inquiry and reflection. Tina has deep abiding love for the Church, but is wrestling with the tensions of feminist principles and boundaries of Orthodox practice. She shared examples of times in which she has made decisions that she thought were right, regardless of what she had been taught from an Orthodox perspective. She does not apologize for wading in the waters of ambiguity and contradictions as it relates to Orthodoxy. Tina was animated and articulate about what she thought were

inconsistencies and is staying true to her roots as an educator to keep digging for meaning and (mis)understanding. Despite her frustrations she does not leave an institution that she sometimes views as flawed. Instead, she keeps making attempts to understand the motivations behind the teachings, the theology itself, and her own faith in order to live it more fully. I was truly inspired by her dedication to critically learning and am so proud to have her in my life.

Conclusion

The findings from the portraits highlight how each participant navigated the tensions between feminism and Orthodoxy. Interviews and reflection journals revealed that participants knowingly and unknowingly, evaluated where and why their identities were most salient as is made apparent by the RMMDI. They were able to narrate instances in which their identities came into conflict and how they navigated the disequilibrium of cognitive dissonance. While in varying contexts and differing circumstances they all told stories of facing tribulation, contradictions, and obstacles through lenses of strength, faith, and love. They expressed relying on their relationship with Christ through inward self-reflection, outward with spiritual guides and their religious practices, and upward through prayer.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) contend that "not only do portraits seek to capture the origins and expression of goodness, they are also concerned with documenting how the subjects or actors in the setting define goodness" (p. 9). Despite any tensions they experienced within their religion, all participants were able to find the goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) in Orthodoxy which contributed to the way they perceive and organize life experiences (Kegan, 1994). This goodness was evident in how they viewed their religion, their culture, and themselves.

As researcher/portraitist, the process of collecting data, identifying emergent themes and drafting portraits and the discussion in Chapter 5, allowed me to find the goodness (what is happening with each of these women, what is working and why). I was able to shift from a focus on weakness to each participant's strengths, and from deficit model analysis to additive abstraction. In doing so, I was able to consider the feelings I have experienced as I have navigated the tensions between Orthodoxy and feminism. Chapter 5 layers the findings with the study's research questions and existing literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

My research sought to better understand the lived experiences of these five Greek

Orthodox women as a means to amplify their voices for the purposes of grounding the creation

of ministries to meet women's needs. Additionally, as the mother of a young daughter, I care

deeply about the identity construction and equity of future generations of Greek Orthodox

women.

This study explored the research question: How do the religious experiences of Greek

Orthodox women influence identity construction, specifically womanhood? I also investigated

the sub-questions: How do Greek Orthodox women understand and make meaning of their lives

in light of their religion? How do Greek Orthodox women navigate the tensions between

feminism and Orthodoxy? And how does the Greek Orthodox religion and cultural heritage

shape the ways these particular Greek Orthodox women express agency, selfhood, and

womanhood?

The participants in this study shared stories from their lives in a series of three interviews

and written and/or audio reflections. Throughout the interview process and with follow up and

probing questions, the storytellers made meaning of many cultural norms and, perhaps, brought

to the surface unconscious processes (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Haraway, 1997). The use of

Portraiture allowed shared meaning-making between participants and the researcher as

instrument (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Consistent with the methodology of Portraiture,

narrative data collected from the five participants was analyzed for emergent themes through

open coding (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Three primary

themes emerged: authoring of self, the development of agency and voice, and the construction of

womanhood. This chapter expounds on the emergent themes and subthemes from my coding

matrix (Appendix E) as evidenced within and across portraits and situates the findings within the current bodies of literature framing this research.

Authoring of Self

As I stated in the introduction "to be Greek is to be Orthodox," yet within and across the narratives, each participant discussed the origins of her sense of self. This sense of self was always attributed to external powers or influences within the contexts (Abes et al., 2007; Deaux, 1993; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) they find themselves, which were all relatively insular (FitzGerald, 1995). Often this sense of self came from the shared culture and language of *being* Greek, which first and foremost included a relationship with the church and other Greeks. The interpretations of what the church represents varied, including how it influenced the authoring of *who they are and how they came to be* who they are. Under the primary code of *authoring of self*, four distinct subcategories emerged: family, church (community), spiritual guide (guidance), and the secular world.

Family. *Family* contributed to the authoring of self through the shared culture, customs and heritage that took place in the home and at church. Participants noted that traditional hierarchical family structures instilled Greek Orthodox conservative values, expectations (often gendered), and an understanding of obedience or reverence to elders (Georgas, 1989; Harris & Verven, 1996). These shared social values and hierarchies were evidenced in both family and social circles. They created outer boundaries of available contexts within which participants shaped their identity narratives (Kunkelman, 1990). Extended "family" was thought to be members of the same parish or others who became family through fellowship (Kunkelman, 1990).

Participants discussed the importance of family and memories of their childhoods filled with family gatherings. Being with extended family during the week and weekends, as well as living in neighborhoods with other Greeks was commonplace; there was a sense of security and comfort families felt when living near other Greeks. The first layer of understanding the world came from those who taught their children compassion, to have a strong work ethic, the importance of education, and the need to maintain their Greek Orthodox heritage and religion. The relationships participants had with their parents, specifically the influence of their fathers, were highlighted throughout interviews. Fathers were typically seen as the traditional heads of family—those who made decisions on finances, were the primary breadwinners, and carried influence with their daughters. Participants spoke of the reverence they felt for their fathers and that they sought their advice on matters related to family and future professions. Multiple participants shared that their parents, specifically fathers, suggested they be cautious when choosing a profession to ensure that they would be able to raise children with whatever path they chose. Participants felt a sense of appreciation that they were guided in that way and retrospectively indicate that they are happy that they are now able to spend time with their children. Growing up, participants knew what was expected of them, even if it was not explicitly stated. Most participants indicated growing up in traditional, conservative homes. As females, they often took on the domestic roles in the home and credited family for influencing some of the choices they made in terms of relationships (i.e., not engaging in premarital sex, not living with someone before marriage).

As parents have aged, participants noted the role reversal in which they need to take care of their parents. One participant shared that her father passed away and that her mother was living with her. As an only child, the participant does not have siblings to help her, which is

difficult. She did not express frustration for having to care for her mother, but cited her upbringing saying, "It's my roots—you know, like you care for the elderly. You care for your family, you kind of keep them under your wings and take care of them. That's always in the back of my head. Like my dad is in the back of my head. What would he do? I know he would, he would try and care for her in the house." The need to make others proud and to carry on their legacy was prominent throughout interviews, and participants attributed their success in life to their parents and upbringing.

Family shaped the ways these Greek Orthodox women expressed who they are by wrapping them in a tight-knit, rich, historied blanket of rituals, mores, and stories of what it means to be a Greek woman. To the women it felt warm and comfortable and loving. At the same time, this allows for little room for personal agency, or unconventional, nonconformist attitudes. Both negative (e.g., the fear of disappointing family) and positive (e.g., having a safety net) deeply influenced the participants' actions and personal development.

Church (community). The *church (community)* was impactful in the participants' lives and was a predominant force in each narrative identity (Cunning, 1976; FitzGerald, 1995; Harris & Verven, 1996; Scourby, 1980). Participants spoke to their communal experiences growing up, ranging from sitting in the pew next to their parents, and being surrounded by family at holiday services and in ministries, to bonding with peers who would become life-long friends at social events (Behr-Segil, 1999). They described finding various entry points into the church community in a number of ways (e.g., liturgical services, ministries, committees, or even simply space for solitude, etc.) (Prassas, 1999).

All participants articulated the importance of being Greek Orthodox. Some grew up in close proximity to the church and it became a communal gathering place. Participants noted

attending youth ministries throughout their childhood and how that helped them stay connected to their religion. The parents all shared stories about ministries they were a part of and that they wanted that for their children. One participant noted that, "I'm doing this for them," so that they would stay connected to the Greek Orthodox community and have similar life experiences.

For these participants, Orthodoxy was more about the culture than the religion. Some participants cited the church as a central part of their lives but did not once mention actual Orthodox theology. Rather, they mentioned the importance of building upon their culture and community. For them, the Orthodox Church represents a physical structure and a place for them to visit for private prayer, reflection and community.

Other participants viewed the church as a moral compass and authority on how to live their lives. One participant noted, "I love going there and knowing that I don't have to think, I don't have to speak. I don't have to . . . I'm not expected to do anything. I just can be," and went on to describe the space as a refuge to get away from the burdens of day-to-day life. For some, they expressed the need for structure in their lives, which the church provided; they cared less about critical thinking and required more concrete lessons. For these women, comfort was to be found as passive receivers of information from the Church, upon which they could rely for its clear stance on all social issues.

Finally, some participants revered the Church as a sacred institution but realized that it is also, at times, flawed, while the Holy Spirit is not. One participant noted, "There are gonna be people in the institution that I disagree with or that I think aren't doing things in a truly, like, just way. But that's not a reflection of my own spirituality." For participants who had a deeper understanding of the tenets of Orthodoxy, they carried Orthodoxy at the center of their lives and let that guide them in their day-to-day interactions in a way that emphasized "love, selflessness

and empathy." They appeared equally as Orthodox in their daily encounters, whether inside or outside the church.

Church community affected participants' sense of selfhood. They shared the notion of community (i.e., their church) to be a literal space and also a concept of ethos or the spirit of the culture (Brewer, 1991; Turner, 1987). The church community, for them, was where participants affirmed their moral code and found/gave care. In rare instances this was taking a stand against the views of the church (Parks, 2011).

Spiritual Guide (guidance). Many participants came to understand themselves through their relationship with someone who served as a spiritual guide. This was not always clergy but often someone who had a deep connection with the Church, and who was willing to spend time in fellowship with the participant (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This person aided in their religious literacy or where the person went when they were struggling to understand the scripture and connected with participants through the sharing of stories (Bakhtin, 1981), conversations and generous listening. They sought spiritual guidance when they themselves were seeking answers or confronted with a challenging life circumstance (Fowler, 1995). Often the spiritual guide was referred to as "my person" or in some cases, was a trusted advisor within a study group or ministry where their conviction had been recognized (Parks, 2011).

Spiritual guides were a critical element of the authoring of self. Participants noted that, especially during spiritual challenges, guides helped them situate tenets of Orthodoxy into their lives. Despite being a patriarchal religion, participants noted that in most cases, they learned more about theology from their spiritual guides than clergy. The ways in which participants viewed the clergy of their home parishes varied greatly. While some participants felt they could talk to their clergy, especially those closer to them in age, others found clergy to be

unapproachable and uninterested in getting to know them; some felt guilty bothering clergy because they're so busy. Considering the occasional absence of meaningful relationships with clergy, participants found Bible studies and ministries led by women provided the opportunity to ask questions and wrestle with different faith topics.

Some participants noted that spiritual guides were scholars who held doctorates in Theology or a Master of Divinity, credentials that are not seen across every parish. These women were leading multiple ministries and devoting hours of their lives each week to the advancement of others, typically through religious literacy. Despite noting how busy clergy are, multiple participants noted the same spiritual guide as other participants. Female spiritual guides who are theologically educated and trained are not common. For those spiritual guides, they are carrying the burden for others with little to no acknowledgement from the Church as a whole.

One participant shared a story in which a priest, without context, compared abortion to murder during a sermon and this frustrated the participant who was pro-choice. To her, the priest was addressing a controversial topic and was acting as a spokesperson for the Church, thereby "alienating people in the room and villainizing the person as opposed to spreading the virtues of the faith that our teachings abide by." To vilify one group of people while supporting the hypocrisy that is seen in the church was antithetical to her views on Orthodoxy, so she reached out to her spiritual guide who was able to help situate Church teachings in the conversation.

Allowing for questions to be asked of some of the most controversial topics, new experiences, or perceptions of logical fallacies was meaningful to multiple participants, especially as it related to specific needs of women (Niebuhr, 1972; Parks, 2011). The way in which the spiritual guide came to be important to participants did not matter (or even for how long they were involved with them). Rather, it was the notion of spiritual guidance through

dialogue (McAdams & McLean, 2013) that explicitly helped participants construct who *they are* as faithful, Orthodox people, and as women (Parks, 2011).

Secular World. Several participants noted that the *secular world* has also impacted who they have become. Education or work contexts shaped their identities (Jones & Abes, 2013). Those who are or had been married noted how the institution of marriage impacted the way they see themselves and their roles in the world. Similarly, those with children spoke to the pressures of raising children to be Greek Orthodox in a secular world (Harris & Verven, 1996; Mendoza & Martinez, 1981). They expressed how raising children added to their understanding of who they are (and are not) and through their autobiographical accounts (past, present, and future) narrated an inseparable multigenerational viewing of the world(s) they occupy (FitzGerald, 1995; Harris & Verven, 1996; Mendoza & Martinez, 1981).

All participants, with the exception of one who is in college, remarked that they have carried Orthodoxy into professional contexts. Whether it was having an icon at their desk or using the tenets of Orthodoxy as the foundation to how they approach their work and work-related problems, all shared that it remained an important part of their lives. Participants noted that meeting other Orthodox people in their professional lives made them feel as though they shared a connection with the other person, and that there was an "unspoken bond" with them based solely on their religion.

Laura shared stories of her professional successes before staying home to raise three daughters. She worked in male-dominated industries where she found success but also experienced sexism and harassment. There were several times throughout interviews when a participant would cite inequalities she experienced in her professional life but acknowledged the double standard women face. Laura, for example, talked about women not being paid the same

as men, despite working just as hard: "If a woman speaks up for herself, she's a bitch. If a man speaks up for himself, he's doing a good job because he's getting what he wants." Yet when talking about any inequalities in the church (i.e., men in leadership positions on councils), her response was, "I think women are just like, we get it but we're not going to go out there—whine, bitch, moan and complaining to be on that council. We're just going to do what we need to do to make an impact." To Laura, her business acumen was woven into and informed her religious life. The importance of people as a parish's best resources came up frequently in our interviews.

Two participants echoed this sentiment (those who found the most professional success) and whether consciously or not, they were intent upon distancing themselves from being seen as those who identify sexism or gender inequalities within their religion. They showed an easy indifference to inequality in the church and were unwilling to act upon or complicate their view. Both participants viewed church in terms of authoring of self as a physical space that allows for community to be built and sustained more than for formal religious education or growth. The way in which participants accessed feminism varied. All were founded on the idea of equal access, but their views on feminism as they related to the church varied and it was not clear if this was due to age, experience, or social class.

Mothers shared how difficult it is for women to raise children and have a career. Participants cited anxiety, depression, and drugs as concerns that they might impact their children. The three participants who are mothers spoke of the ways in which their upbringing in Greek culture and Orthodoxy formed the foundation for the ways they parent. Participants talked about the invisible labor they do for their husbands and kids. Feeling unappreciated was common and one participant said she felt she wasn't respected enough: "My tombstone—it will say, "She did the best she could." Some participants noted that they were turning into their mothers as the

ones doing all of the cooking, the cleaning, taking care of the kids, and carrying the mental and emotional loads for their families.

Whether they would claim the noun *feminist* or not, all of the women in this study would qualify as feminists in the secular world according to the Britannica (2020) definition: the belief in the social, economic, and political equality of women. They demand equality in all areas of secular life for themselves, their children, and their families. To some degree, all of the women in this study consciously and unconsciously compartmentalized Orthodoxy as it pertains to the secular world and called upon it in certain circumstances where they privately employed its use. Similarly, they were willing to compartmentalize their feminism with regard to the Church.

Reflections on the Portraits: Authoring of Self. The narrators elucidated that their interpersonal bonds formed before they were able to fully assess the desirability of these life shaping influences. Despite being fully immersed in the religion and culture that are flush with "sameness," the indoctrination was only a small segment of acculturation. Both acculturation and indoctrination have defined who they see themselves to be in the past, present, and future (Cunning, 1976; Harris & Verven, 1996; Scourby, 1980)—in part because they love their religion and also because as one participant admitted that "disentangling from it would be too great of a loss."

Development of Agency and Voice

While there are many definitions for personal or individual agency, the purpose of this study most aligns with Britannica's definition of *Feminist Theory of Agency* as "an account for individual action and choice; to live in ways that reflect one's own genuine needs and concerns" (Feminist Theories of Agency, 2020). Similarly, this study views *voice* from Gilligan's (1982) rendering that our voices are a complex interplay of our intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, and

ethical selves. Within this theme, it was clear that the amount of dissonance a participant felt was directly related to the inequality lens through which they view Greek Orthodoxy (Harding, 2004; Kohli & Burbules, 2012; Brook, 2007). Under the primary theme of *development of agency and voice*, four subthemes surfaced: tensions and contradictions, the omnipresence of cultural norms, the disadvantages of non-conformity, and shipwreck(s).

Tensions and Contradictions. Participants described developing agency and finding their voice (Gilligan, 1982) when confronting *tensions and contradictions* (Niebuhr, 1972; Parks 2011) in their lives as Greek Orthodox women. Frequently they alluded to experiencing cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) between secular life and normed Greek Orthodox culture, whether around gender inequality and/or other social issues (e.g., same-sex marriage, abortion, etc.), that required them to examine the contradictions and decide for themselves where they stand (Parks, 2011). Participants openly acknowledged that they would absolutely not stand for gender inequality in the workforce. However, they did not demand it of their church; nor could they justify this exception, except with the oft-repeated phrase, "that's just the way it's always been." These women have been forced to measure what they believe in personally versus the doubts that they may carry on some of the church's stance (Erikson, 1994). Facing the contradictions of contrasting systems, like modernity and traditionalism, was persistent in the portraits, but outcomes were varied.

For some participants, tensions and contradictions within Orthodoxy impacted the development of agency and voice by highlighting differences in their secular and religious lives, as well as the tolerance they have built towards separating those identities from each context (Abes et al., 2007). Notions of modernity versus tradition, belief and doubt, as well as gender inequality were commonplace throughout the interviews. For example, some participants noted

obvious signs of gender inequality within the church and instances in which teachings or sermons did not align with what they knew to be true teachings of Orthodox scripture. These women continued to seek goodness despite their awareness of the inconsistencies in contemporary life in the church (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). They were able to identify the inequality but remained strong in their faith and role within the church by continuing to read scripture and seek answers to affirm their understanding that the inequality is rooted in practice rather than theology.

Omnipresence of Cultural Norms. The *omnipresence of cultural norms* within Greek-American culture and Orthodoxy clearly deterred the development of agency and voice (Bourdieu, 1989; Harris & Verven, 1996; Makus, 1990; McLaren, 2015). Participants shared stories in which they consciously accepted subordinate roles, double standards, and decisions that went against their own interests as something that will "just never change," a phrase repeated across every portrait (Donald & Hall, 1986; McLaren, 2015). It was common for the women in this study to undervalue their own entitlement (Bettis & Adams, 2005; Gilligan,1982). Additionally, many of the women expressed an inability *to even imagine* it differently, let alone for gender equality to become a reality in the church (Gramsci, 1971).

"Supporting role," "small," "motherly housekeeping," "domestic" and "cook, bake, serve," were all phrases used to describe the role of women in the church. Participants were able to identify instances of inequality in the Church, but some were quick to state that they were not advocating for more equality or that things had to be fair. For those women, pushing against the norms and traditions of the religion was unimaginable. When discussing issues of inequality, participants would frequently laugh throughout their responses to presumably conceal that which was uncomfortable. After sharing a story in which someone questioned the leadership of the

Church, one of the participants explained that, "There's just a certain baseline, um, values that I think really important. And if you stray too far from that, I think you're straying from faith." Consequently, the mere idea of developing a critique of the church was uncomfortable and meant someone must be straying from the faith. Those participants could not articulate a theological reason for the inequalities that they experience but leaned into notions of tradition.

For those who accepted religious hegemony, they found meaning and purpose by working wherever they were placed, most notably in lay leadership roles. All participants discussed Philoptochos, the main women's ministry across the United States. Philoptochos is the philanthropic arm of the church and one that the participants noted was the primary opportunity for ministry involvement outside of worship services. The participants recalled that when they were children, their mothers and other women volunteered to be a part of Philoptochos where they would set up for events, fundraise for various causes, and serve domestic roles within the church. As a result of Philoptochos being the primary ministry for women, it was difficult for some participants to imagine other opportunities that could exist.

The most notable point of frustration for participants related to the omnipresence of cultural and religious norms was the inability for women to be ordained clergy or participate in services in the way of men. While most acknowledged this as a norm, some cited that there was no theological basis for this practice. One participant said that not allowing women to be ordained clergy is an "old sexist tradition that men have to be kind of the figureheads of the church." To her, the only reason for the imbalance is due to the way the religion is practiced:

> The only reason it is what it is, is because we constructed it that way. Like—like it wasn't
> like this like, greater force. It's like an arbitrary thing that is coming from a time period in
> which the roles of men and women were seen as so different that men were seen as the

unquestioned leaders, you know what I mean? Like, there's a reason that men could vote before women. There's a reason that we've only had male presidents, and it's not because men are better suited, it's because we've had this, you know, defense of just the way things are. And also like, imagine like, imagine if women not being able to vote was defended by, I know the magnitude is different, but women not being able to vote was defended by, "Well, they've never voted before." It's like, "Yeah, well . . ."

Despite how advanced some of the participants were along the continuum of intellectual knowing and religious theology, there was a point in which they all accepted gendered differences within the church as something they would not be able to change. They accepted the marginalization of their agency, selfhood, and voice. At times they simply said aloud "we can't change it" and shrugged, or they used language or story to rationalize or diffuse the tensions around these contradictions (Alvesson & Karreman, 2007; McAdams et al., 2006). As this became a prominent thread throughout the portraits, it also was apparent that silencing of *voice* through story, a cultural norm of Greek Orthodox women handed down through generations, was used to conceal or dismiss anything uncomfortable or oppressive.

Disadvantages of Non-conformity. The development of agency and voice was also stunted by the *disadvantages of non-conformity* with regard to any notion that women's positions within the church can or should evolve (Donald & Hall, 1986; Magolda, 2009; Gramsci, 1971; McLaren, 2015)*.* Most of the women in this study admitted to having visceral reactions to disobedience and confrontation, as well as a weariness of the instability and "unbearable loss" that change would cause (Festinger, 1957; West & Turner, 2018). The fear of the potential loss of "heritage" that might happen if they were to develop a critique of the institution (capital C – Church) as being sexist and overtly (and covertly) oppressive to women (Bourdieu, 1989).

All of the participants were born into Orthodoxy and the practice of the religion was a part of their upbringing and what they considered to be normal. Across multiple interviews, participants described a type of "warmth" they feel within the church and that they felt safe within the confines of the church proper. For some participants, the Church represents structure and stability, and to question the higher authority afforded to the Church was unimaginable. Participants were hesitant to criticize the Church or practices and when the slightest critique arose, they told stories and used qualifiers to situate and rationalize the inequity.

When asked why they tolerate any inequalities that they see within the Church, participants all noted that they would never leave the Church; instead, they accept the way that it is. To take a stance against the Church, for some, would be a loss so tragic they would in essence sever their relationship with God. Rationalizing inequality arose in three layers. At the most basic level, one participant described the disadvantages of non-conformity. She noted that she likes that she doesn't have to think when it comes to the church, because it offers her a reset and a roadmap for how to behave, what to think, and how to approach different situations. She said, "I think at the end of the day people want to be told what is right and what is wrong. Sometimes you're gonna disagree, but I think it's very hard to just say there's all this grey and you have to figure it out." The participant noted that due to many of her social identities, "I've never had to contradict" the church. For her, she acknowledged that she had not learned enough of the teachings of the church to question things. For some, the comfort of being told the answers to life's bigger questions, outweighed the discomfort of ambiguity.

The second layer of tolerating inequalities came from participants who acknowledged an uneven playing field and lack of opportunities, but saw the Church as a communal space where relationships, heritage, and traditions are built and sustained. For these participants, the Church

represents a physical space to worship and gather. To leave would mean losing their social networks.

The final layer of inequality comes from participants who expressed a deep understanding of the theological practices of the Church. These participants viewed the Church as a sacred space and yet acknowledged that it "upholds things that I consider like, outdated and problematic norms." Because their understanding of the church was so vast, they were able to separate practices they saw as antiquated and contextualize them as "not reflective of God's power or will." By their account, they focus their energy on religion as a point of critical self-reflection, see it as a moral code and a way by which to live their lives. Even as they recognized inequalities, they refused to reject the religion, but nevertheless resisted conformity with smaller levels of dissonance. For these participants, non-conformity comes in the form of resilience in their quest to seek answers to more complex questions and to have a deeper understanding of Orthodox theology. By understanding proper theology, participants are able to identify instances when the practice appears inconsistent and names it as such. Multiple participants have done this in large and small group settings—whether in a Sunday School class, Bible Study, or in interactions in their secular lives. Participants are able to point out inaccuracies and defend what they believe to be true. Advocating for themselves through non-conformity and going against the grain was shown to be a source of pride for participants.

As we delved deeper into these conversations, the women were pragmatic in their approach to minor or moderate change within the system versus a radicalist approach that would be met with great resistance (Josselson, 1987); these small wins seemed to be enough for each who mentioned them (Torres et al., 2009). In all cases, the participants noted that the disadvantages outweighed their own interest in seeking to be seen as equitable stewards of their

respective parishes in relation to male stewards (Behr-Sigel, 1999; Cox, 1983). They were masters of cognitive reframing (West & Turner, 2018) with acts of outright avoidance to preserve their self-efficacy in a culture that can be perceived as prescriptive in terms of gender roles and dynamics (Gramsci, 1971; Jones, 1995). The indoctrination of the patriarchal status quo appears to be so embedded that it masquerades as natural (Blaffer Hrdy, 2009).

Shipwreck. Those who had experienced *Shipwrecks* (Parks, 2011) asserted that their most profound developments concerned agency and voice. The personal disequilibrium, as told by the participants, forced their self-development and personal evolutions (Dill, 1983; Erikson, 1994; Jones, 1995). They could not reduce or ignore what was happening. They described being transformed personally and spiritually (Parks, 2011). They noted that they were able to critically evaluate their faith in ways that led them to a deeper purpose and meaning of themselves and their relationship with God (Fowler, 1995; Parks, 2011).

Shipwrecks varied across interviews, but the consistency throughout was the ability for participants to rise from their experiences with a deeper sense of purpose and ability to focus on the future. One participant talked about her daughter experiencing years of verbal sexual harassment. Despite feeling helpless and frustrated over what her daughter endured, the participant and her husband credited their faith with the power to overcome such a difficult time. The participant explained that she had conversations with her daughter and told her that "God has a plan and that it will work out the right way, the way it should. I would stay up many nights thinking about this as did my husband. I would pray that God would make this right and God answered." For her, this came in the form of a coach being fired for sexual misconduct.

Another participant shared her experience of going away to college. Coming from a predominantly white and upper-class town, the participant went to college and met friends from

different socio-economic backgrounds and races, and she realized what a "white-washed version of history" she had been taught. While her shipwreck was highlighted in the reflection journal, this participant discussed systemic injustice throughout our interviews. The shipwreck she experienced was a catalyst for a paradigm shift. It altered the way she viewed the world and provided a better understanding of herself and how she fits into a world set up to benefit people like her. It also solidified her desire to follow a career path that will enable her to help others. It became clear that her views are grounded in Orthodoxy, which has provided her with a "robust moral code" through which to live her life.

One participant recounted in her reflection journal how her life changed when she realized that her father had a gambling problem. He was her hero and everything she knew up until that point was changed—specifically the way she viewed her father and her parents' marriage. The participant confessed that she never told anyone about her father's gambling issues. She said, "I never shared my knowledge with anyone. Isn't that what Greeks/women do? Family stuff stays in the home. Maybe it is never revealed or dealt with. Maybe it surfaces later in one of our lives." Carrying such shipwrecks alone was something that the participant had done later in her life. The participant and her husband separated but waited seven years before sharing this with her family. Worried about how others would respond, she did not want to upset anyone. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that the divorce was her shipwreck:

> I really wanted to be a successful Greek Orthodox mom (laughs) you know? I mean, I
> tried everything, you know. I did everything according—our wedding was according to
> everything it was supposed to be. I did Greek meals the way it was supposed to be. I had
> family over all the time—the way it was supposed to be, you know? (laughs). Everything
> according to what I thought it was supposed to be. And it didn't work out.

Despite knowing that things were not working out, she shared that, "I probably would've just forced my way through it […] I knew that I could—I could just make it work, but I didn't think I could make it work and be okay" for her daughter. The disequilibrium she experienced was life-altering, but she would have kept self-sacrificing her happiness if it would have benefited her daughter. Instead, she followed through with her divorce and proceeded to focus on self-discovery, which later in life translated to an understanding of religion that she had not previously been exposed to or experienced.

As shipwrecks occurred, each woman compartmentalized their pain and, in many ways, carried the burden alone (Gilligan, 1982), which is yet another trait or notion of silent sacrifice and suffering imposed on women by generations of Greek Orthodox women (Assaad, 1999). The women in this study expressed fearing the shame or disappointment that they might bring to the very community they had claimed was their safety net or "always there to fall upon" (Kunkelman, 1990). Although the stories related to shipwreck were laced with trauma and pain, they led to monumental religious and spiritual growth from the telling of the women of this study (Jones & Abes, 2013; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Reflections on the Portraits: Agency & Voice. In starkly different ways, each narrator grappled implicitly with relevant questions: *how is it possible for women to live in male-dominated societies/institutions in ways that reflect their genuine needs and concerns?* Positively embracing life's dualities (Du Bois, 1903, 1920; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) rather than trying to eradicate them became a clear and consistent thread in the search to understand how the religious experiences of these women influenced their identities. The women of this study developed their agency, selfhood, and womanhood through the process of reestablishing equilibrium (Alvesson & Karreman, 2007; Magolda, 2009; McAdams et al., 2006).

Womanhood

Womanhood for Greek Orthodox women is an almost indiscernible mix of honoring the Church, embracing heritage and culture, matriarchal duties and motherhood, and faith and worship through care-giving, service and action. The participants' narratives elucidated the myriad forces that are shaping their construction of Greek Orthodox womanhood. The women in this study are at different ages and stages of life and bring to it various viewpoints (Cole, 1993; Harraway, 1997) that are inextricably linked to the social, cultural, and political structure of Orthodoxy (Anzaldua, 1990; Bettie, 2003; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1995; Hauenstein, 2018), which has influenced their knowledge and knowing of womanhood (Kohli & Burbules, 2012). Under the primary theme of *womanhood*, four subthemes rose to the top: ethics of care, servant leadership, evolution of self and voice, and future focused.

Care Ethics. The notions of love, selflessness, caring, and empathy are inextricably tied to womanhood as described through a lens of *Care Ethics* (e.g., unidirectional caregiving, moral responsibilities, child-rearing, etc. -- Gilligan, 1982). Care ethics suggest that women are more likely to express a perspective that values intimacy, responsibility, relationships, and caring for others, as opposed to the more masculine ethic of justice, which values autonomy, rights, and power and perceives the values within care ethics as weak (Gilligan, 1982). Throughout the interviews and reflections, the women in this study narrated their lives and aspirations with an orientation to an ethic of care.

Participants spoke indirectly about volunteer work, the care they provide for family members who are older, and the invisible labor that is done for their husbands and children. This work is done without complaint and comes from a place of selfless love for others. The women

are empathetic and attribute the care they provide to their upbringing. It was evident through their stories that these women typically put everyone else's needs ahead of their own.

When participants spoke about inequalities they see within the Church, whether it was opportunities that don't exist for women or frustration with church leadership, the participants shared stories that highlighted their resilience. One participant shared a story in which she could have sued her employer for gender discrimination but declined. She explained that in recent years women have been sharing their experiences with discrimination, and proclaimed, "They're screwed. And so, it's not gonna do you good. So, do you sit and take it? Or, are you labeled? Because that label's never gonna go away." Instead, she continued to focus on her work despite any discrimination she endured. Women have coped in the workplace, showing strength by not complaining or drawing attention to themselves, keeping their heads down and looking forward. This type of self-care was just one-way participants handled obstacles that also transferred to their church life. Three participants who saw inequalities within the church, due to both gender and socio-economic status, practiced care ethics by engaging in various degrees of cognitive reframing. Instead of focusing on their limits within their professions or within the Church, they directed their attention to opportunities that were accessible and devoted themselves to those causes.

Other participants engaged in a more developed type of care ethics in which they focus on their personal spiritual development. Participants discussed the love, selflessness, care and empathy that is the foundation of Orthodoxy, and the ways in which they try to apply that to the relationships they have outside of their Orthodox network. For these participants, they intentionally seek out opportunities to demonstrate the fullness of Orthodoxy in their relationships. Participants noted the hypocrisy they have seen within the Church, from clergy and

parishioners alike, but separated these practices from the religion, itself, because they do not represent Christ's teachings. Some participants focus on actual theology to lead them over cultural and religious mores they view as flawed. For example, some participants practiced self-care by continuing to receive communion, despite not yet having an ecclesiastical divorce; or by advocating for the LGBTQ community in a Church School class by reminding fellow parishoners of Christ's love. By living their lives according to the tenets of Orthodoxy as they know it, participants are able to free themselves of the confines or restrictions of practice. They center their lives upon Christ's love and are able to provide deeper self-care for themselves while finding connections to others, both inside and outside of their religion.

While participants demonstrated the care they provide to others, they also recognized instances in which they need to receive care from others. Participants told stories about their network of other Orthodox women who have supported them and provided advice, counsel and candor in times of need. One participant noted:

> I know if a—if a big tragedy struck, there would be . . . this sounds kinda—there'd be another Greek woman there to step up and help me. And I know that because of my faith. 'Cause it's, it's like a—like you have a giant safety net around you. . . . And that circle of women is so important, you know, um, because they're the ones that, they gather around you, that listen, that uh—only give advice if you ask for advice, you know? Or they will step in if they know you're desperate for advice, you know what I mean? And uh, you'll never go hungry or, or not have a place to live until you get on your feet again.

The importance of community carried throughout all of the interviews. Participants frequently articulated the importance of other women who supported them in their most difficult moments.

As stated previously, many referred to spiritual guides as the most critical person to their religious and spiritual growth. One noted that they "could not have had that conversation with a man," and it was only through the care offered by a woman who had experienced the same situation that she found peace. From historical accounts (FitzGerald, 1998; Kollontai, 2000) to the stories from these women, the significance of the care of women cannot and should not be minimized (Assaad, 1999; Behr-Sigel, 1999).

Leadership. *Leadership* as it emerged in this study, is an activity and behavior rather than a framing for understanding power, privilege, and oppression. Many participants described leadership of women by characteristics attributed to servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Northouse, 2019), such as volunteerism, philanthropy, and a selfless giving of labor for the betterment of the greater good. The participants all vehemently argued that leadership in womanhood was about women's ability to get things done within the church community and in family life in general, and spoke to gendered-attributes of resilience, strength, and persistence.

Whether leading a team in the workplace, volunteering on a council or philanthropic board, all participants found it important to dedicate their time to various causes. Participants described being a woman in today's world as "a blessing and a curse;" "fighting for yourself. Knowing that men have always had the upper hand;" "Just as hard as it always was;" "a continuous fight;" and "always being on […] need to prove ourselves." All women are extremely proactive in their approach to leadership and womanhood. They did not make excuses for the situations in which they have found themselves but listed countless examples of times they have stepped in to "get the work done," despite whether or not they would receive credit. On several occasions, women were quick to note that while they saw differences between gender in terms of leadership and opportunity, they did not demand equality. One participant said, "For me, being a

woman is fighting for things, not necessarily making everything equal and one-for-one. But standing up for things, challenging the status quo, not being afraid to be wrong." As a result of finding opportunities for lay leadership, some women were able to separate the need for gender equality.

Several participants noted positive minor changes within the church at the level of women's leadership visibility, despite also understanding that the paradox within the patriarchal structure required a man to permit them access and standing. The participants were enthusiastic that the current Metropolitan has been open to better understanding the position of Greek Orthodox women in the Midwest. He represented someone who was willing to listen to the concerns of women, values the council of women, and appoints women to positions that are more than ceremonial (Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago, 2020). Participants put a high level of importance on their Metropolitan as a leader and someone who can not only talk about a more inclusive future, but be sure it comes to fruition.

The Evolution of Self and Development of Voice. The Greek Orthodox women of this study noted that Womanhood has been an introspective journey and that our dialogues have led them to new critical insights (Bakhtin, 1986; Dauite, 2014; Hall, 2001; Hauenstein, 2018; McAdams et al., 2006). They described the *Evolution of Self and the Development of Voice* by recalling their self-discovery over the years of their lives, the evolution of the definition of who they are, and the direction they see for their future (McAdams et al., 2006).

Participants discussed how they have evolved over time. Four participants shared that, from an early age, they were not taught proper Orthodox theology. They acknowledged a clear absence of religious literacy, even while repeating inaccurate teachings of the Church. The remaining participant, Maria, had the most extensive understanding of the tenets of Orthodox

theology. She explained that she has the wherewithal to seek out answers when something doesn't make sense. In addition to referring to the Bible, this means seeking out her spiritual guides for advice and support. The task of being faced with difficult and probing questions has led them all to a deeper understanding of Orthodox theology and whether or not that can be reconciled with their personal views. Some identified times when what they were taught to be religiously true did not match what they knew intellectually or square with their day-to-day interactions concerning women's rights, same-sex marriage, and divorce. For these participants, they were able to rationalize the Church's stance as that of a fallen world in which practice does not match theology. One participant shared that during the time she was separated from her husband, she knew the Church's stance that she should not receive communion until she had an ecclesiastical divorce. She told me that she did not believe in that rule. "I don't believe Jesus would say that. He reaches out to the least of them." She went so far as to tell her ex-husband that she was going to continue to receive communion each week, "Unless the priest stops me. And if he stops me, I'll go to another church, they won't know me."

The participants expressed the changes they wanted to see in the Church, and much had to do with lay leadership and an increase in female involvement in ministries. For most, their evolution of self and development of voice was paired with a relatively critical opinion of the Church. They felt frustration that what seems so obvious to them is oftentimes lost on Hierarchs of the Church.

The stories of the women in this study revealed their personal relationship with theology and spirituality as something different or adjacent to their relationship with the Church (Assaad, 1999). Several participants indicated that this study has led them to deeper critical reflection and intimacy within their culture, church, and community and their place within them all, which has

contributed to the development of their emotional and ethical voices – once quieted by their externally motivated reasoning.

Future Focused. Womanhood for the participants meant being *Future Focused* while recognizing and honoring the traditions of the past. Sustaining meaningful cultural and spiritual relationships for themselves in the future were critical to these women. Similarly, maintaining strong connections to the church and culture for their children and future generations was also important. The women also thoughtfully spoke of being intentional about the ways they wish to support the church and leave their own mark or legacy. For instance, many spoke to how they might support girls and women within their parish in ways they had (or wish they had) been supported.

In one way or another, all participants proved to be future-focused. All discussed the desire to see the church "full again," and some noted that they have hope in the current Metropolitan. Their view is that he is young, has foresight to see the need to focus on the youth—especially young women—and how to engage them. Participants talked about the need to look after the elderly and to create ministries that focus on networking. For others, they articulated a desire for better focus on the development of women and to award more opportunities to young girls to be involved as altar servers, as it is with the young boys their age. Participants discussed the Church being at a crossroad or "tipping point" where they will lose people if they do not think more intentionally about parishioners across all demographics.

Looking toward the future, the women were concerned about growth of the church, particularly given the social, political, and economic advancements of women in US society and around the world. They wonder how long the contradictions will be accepted as "just how it is" before women may choose to leave, taking their children and families with them. As a path

forward and with the future in mind, these women are committed to continuing to work on themselves and their own relationships with God.

Reflections on the Portraits: Womanhood. The participants in this study exemplified womanhood that centered the paradox of a religion whose values, practices, and policies keep women in subordinate positions, yet is filled with women who are faithful and have a passion for their church. The women in this study are industrious and have used their time, talent, and financial resources to work toward meaningful goals inside and outside the church. They responded flexibly when necessary and sought avenues to success that were not always easy and often required personal sacrifice. All of the women in this study prioritize their religious identity and personal growth in ways that I found admirable.

Conclusion

The overarching purpose of this study was to understand how the lived experiences of practicing Greek Orthodox women, as articulated through their own perspectives, influence gender and religious identity formations, with an aim toward illuminating the impact those identities have on the development of womanhood. These findings demonstrate the dynamic impact of ideology, power, privilege, and oppression on the development of women's identities. The findings also highlight the importance of religion, particularly within Orthodoxy, and the examination of gender and its relation to equity, faith, and womanhood. This study expanded on interdisciplinary literature examining the relationship between identity, namely gender, and religion. Another contribution of this study is that it adds a unique approach to examining the meaning-making of women within a patriarchal religion. A secondary purpose of this study was to examine my own experiences, as an insider, and my own urges to resist confronting the tensions between the authentic contradictions in my own agency, feminism, and religion. In the

final chapter of this study, I discuss the implications for research, women, Orthodoxy, clergy and

spiritual guides, as well as my educational practice. I also include a personal reflection.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In chapter 1, I discussed the scope, significance, and purpose of this research, including the focal questions that centered this study. Chapter 2 synthesized critical literature on Greek Orthodox history with a focus on women's roles, how individuals maintain cultural identity along with the education of Greek Americans, identity construction and the construction of the religious self. A review of social science literature on identity development and the social construction of identities, as well as feminist writings on the construction of privilege, oppression and power was also provided. Chapter 3 discussed the theoretical framework and methodology of this study. In Chapter 4, I presented the findings of this study through five Portraits and highlighted emergent themes for each. In Chapter 5, I detailed the study's emergent themes and synthesized the data as it relates to current scholarship. In the present chapter, I render my conclusion, providing implications for research, women, clergy and spiritual guides, as well as for my own educational practice. Lastly, I offer recommendations for further research and my final reflections on the implications for religious faith and practice in an increasingly secularized world.

Summary

I never knew that asking my daughter *what do you want to be when you grow up?* would be the catalyst for this study, but the timing was fortuitous. I was in the beginning stages of my research and I set out to understand how Greek Orthodox women make meaning of their experiences through their own words and the stories they shared. The purpose of this research was never to find a solution to a *right* or *wrong* answer. Rather, I was wading into the messiness of *how* and *why* women remain faithful to systems that have marginalized them in one way or another, and how they use language to express their consent or dissent.

I ended this study with a challenge not only to begin a dialogue about the opportunities for women's lay leadership roles but to work within my own community to create additional spaces for women in the church. Intentionally including women in more lay leadership roles and increasing religious literacy was something all of the women in this study indicated was noticeably missing from current and past experiences and growth. Additionally, I challenge us to consider what it means for us as an Orthodox community to not learn from and actively seek out the voices and experiences of women. What does this say to women and our daughters? I invite the community to consider *why* it is so difficult to openly and honestly discuss the roles and responsibilities (and the exclusion of) of women in the church.

Implications

For research. A qualitative study allowed the space to not only fully understand the experiences of women but to identify common threads throughout each participant's interviews. It allowed me the opportunity to explore the structure, order, and broad patterns of thinking and behaviors found among my participants. Grounding this study was Narrative Identity Theory and Feminist Standpoint Theory coupled with the *Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity.* These were the appropriate lenses for (re)viewing the participants' thoughts about how they make meaning of their world as Orthodox women. In this inquiry, I engaged the methods of Portraiture, which is "distinctive in its blending of aesthetics and empiricism, capturing the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 5). By listening generously to my participants, this blended methodological approach highlighted the compromises and pluralistic ignorance(s) these women engaged in when confronting the tensions *of the practice* of two belief systems: Greek Orthodoxy and Feminism. I recommend this layered and adapted approach in studies seeking to

understand the frustration, pain, and challenges of power and authority structures, yet also for the purpose of creating space for participants to express joy, goodness, and fulfillment.

For women. This study confirms that women continue to do extraordinary work in the church. Typically centered around their role in Philoptochos, teaching Church School, or involvement in other initiatives, they continuously donate their time, talent and financial resources to the Orthodox Church. The participant interviews highlight the importance of women as support networks. As such, there should be initiatives to create more opportunities to build supportive networks of community. Instead of ignoring differences among gender roles as a cause of separation, we must view them as a force for change (Lorde, 1984) and continue to build community. Women must advocate for themselves to identify which areas of church life they find most meaningful. If there is a ministry that women want to create or if they have certain needs that are not being met through standard liturgies, they should advocate for themselves. Harding (1991) and Smith (1987, 1990) remind us that there are things that are only understood from certain knowledge positions and that as the position of the knower changes, so does the quality of knowledge. Women should also continue to educate themselves and question the tension they see between theology and practice. They must evaluate whether the status quo is working to support or oppose the tenants of Orthodoxy and their relationship with Christ and His Church.

For Spiritual Guides. It is clear that these women have deep abiding love for the Church and want to be active participants in various ministries, but there remains little opportunity for women to have careers within Orthodoxy outside of a youth worker. Women do not attend the seminary at the same rate as men because the same opportunities do not exist for them once they have graduated, and the positions that do exist are not plentiful or lucrative enough to support a

family. Women are typically the Church School teachers, yet they most often do not have formal training. If women find it easier to speak with other women about pressing issues, as indicated in the Portraits, we need to create opportunities for them to work within Orthodoxy.

This study highlights the fact that spiritual guides for women are most often women due to the fact that they have unique needs that are difficult to discuss with men (e.g., physical and emotional abuse, rape, suicide, abortion). Within the Orthodox community, we need more counselors who are women to provide counseling to other women. I acknowledge that many clergy have been trained in pastoral care, but needs that are unique to women should be addressed accordingly for those who seek counsel from the standpoint of a woman. Some women, otherwise, suffer in silence and "when one member suffers, all members suffer" (1 Corinthians 12:26). For this reason, the female diaconate should be reinstated as it provides an opportunity for women to show their love for the church in the same way as men. If Orthodoxy can make space for women to counsel women, in the ways that *only* women can, I posit that we will bring mothers, sisters, and daughters closer to Christ and His Church.

It was made clear that participants wanted to become more theologically literate because they were not taught or have not retained enough theology throughout their lives. Without understanding theology, it has proved difficult for women to apply it to their lives. Spiritual guides were extremely important for women who often noted that they learned more from spiritual guides than liturgies. As Audre Lorde (1984) notes, "For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power [is] rediscovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world. Only within a patriarchal structure is maternity the only social power open to women" (p. 110). These women clearly illustrated the power of female guidance and connection. Lorde goes on to

say that the "interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive be and the reactive being" (1984, p. 110). The leadership authority and power of the spiritual guide relationships was clearly active and creative because of the shared standpoints of becoming "woman."

For clergy. My intent was never to persuade those in ordained ministry *what* to think, but rather to invite them to consider this study with openness as a first step to improving and trying to understand the experiences of women. It is important to think broadly about clerical sermons and the ways they present theology to parishioners, and to consider whether they demonstrate inclusive language and applicability (i.e., to women). There is an inherent power that comes with ordained ministry and the impact of words is perceived differently by men and women. Clergy must encourage the involvement of women in lay leadership and ministries and invite them into decision-making roles. It's not enough to say women *can* be involved; they need to actively seek them out and invite them to be included in the conversation with shared authority. Most importantly, clergy need to consciously affirm the lived experiences of their female parishioners, which can only be accomplished through dialogue and an effort toward shared understanding.

Clergy are encouraged to reflect on the patriarchal structures that exist within the Church. One of my hopes for this study is that clergy will understand that, whether or not they believe they benefit from these structures, they are a part of a larger system that has not always considered the perspectives of Orthodox women. Women across Orthodoxy need men at all levels to "turn towards women and recognize, affirm, support and encourage them, acting out of grace and not brokenness, welcoming women as partners and vital members" (Reimann, 1999, p.

123) of the church. To continue toward theosis, we as a community need to work in collaboration with each other to advance the mission of the Church.

For my practice. I believe in servant leadership in my career and life, and I have been committed to remaining inquisitive, knowing that the process of seeking knowledge is often as powerful as finding the answers. This study has affirmed this. Professionally, I have worked in higher education for the last decade and see myself as someone whose calling it is to guide students to success by fostering an open and inclusive environment, which is important to me as a first-generation scholar-practitioner and higher education administrator and teacher. In higher education, I have personally felt the effects of exclusionary practices, and I have seen how even the smallest of inclusive efforts can make others feel they belong.

I am also actively involved in religious leadership in both my parish (e.g., Vice President of the Parish Council) and Metropolis (e.g., Secretary of the Metropolis Council). More than anything, this study highlights the fact that I have more work before me if I want to include women in ways that capitalize meaningfully on their desires and talents. I need to better understand my own complicity in these systems and unpack my own willingness to accept these contradictions for myself and my family. In addition to my daughter, I have two sons who are privileged in the current Greek Orthodox structures, and I find myself questioning whether these practices are supporting their relationship with God. As I continue to explore this further, I am engaging in critical conversations within my own mind, with my family, my community, and with my spiritual guides.

Recommendations for Research

I believe additional qualitative studies are needed to understand the fullness of the experiences of Orthodox women in the church. If we want Orthodox to remain actively engaged

throughout the entirety of their lives, church leadership needs to consider *how* to teach theology. Additionally, I believe religious literacy is worth exploring further. As an educator I am interested in the ways in which Orthodox theology is taught and its impact on the recipient, specifically the words we use and which lessons we teach. I have approached this study from a reflective space, and I believe Orthodox should be provided with the opportunity to wrestle with different faith topics. I believe talking through contradictions, critical thoughts, and concerns can strengthen every person's relationship with Christ and the Church.

Personal Portrait: Inward, Outward, Upward

I was led to this study by the contradictions I, as an insider, have faced in my life as an Orthodox Christian. My intention throughout this study was to amplify the voices of Orthodox women and understand how the religious experiences of Greek Orthodox women influence identity construction, particularly womanhood. Some of the participants said they lacked the aegis of their church community to ask difficult questions as it related to the roles and responsibilities of women in the church, while others shared outright fear of rejection.

When raised Orthodox from birth, questioning doesn't always happen naturally, as there is always a sense of authoritative knowing that is very difficult to confront. I contend that showing love and respect for the Church yet asking difficult questions regarding the roles and responsibilities of women in the church are not mutually exclusive and should not be viewed as polarizing. Despite knowing my own intentions throughout this study, there were frequently times when I was concerned that a reader might assume that I was taking a pejorative stance against Orthodoxy. I occasionally felt discomfort presenting criticisms of contemporary practices of the Church and had to resist the urge to justify any inconsistencies I observed. This highlights how conditioned *I still am* to not imagine otherwise which supports the ongoing patriarchal

structure of society and the Church. This is antithetical to my beliefs as a woman, mother, feminist, teacher, and scholar.

To be clear, I do not believe that Orthodoxy will ever allow a woman into ordained ministry, not in my lifetime, my daughter's or anyone's after us. I recognize the power of patriarchy. The participant's stories illustrated that for some, confronting tensions they have experienced meant suspending reflection and redirecting their thoughts. Others ignored perceived contradictions and focused on what was within their control, which usually included philanthropic efforts. Regardless of standpoint, the women put their love of Christ first and found beauty in a system that excludes them from fully belonging. For me, there is harrowing sadness in this, but I also see beauty and power in this resiliency.

Learning the stories of these five women reminded me of all that is good in Orthodoxy. All participants varied across demographics and psychographics, yet despite this, they all found meaning and goodness in the church. Participants recognized and accepted the patriarchal structures that exist. While they identified inconsistencies or what they view to be hypocrisy in the practice of the contemporary church, they still found goodness, which manifested in the building of community and their relationship with God. To an extent, they have been able to rise above throughout the course of their lives to recognize the need to separate the institution of the Church from Orthodox teachings. Some of this may be a coping mechanism, but I was nonetheless inspired by their commitment to the church and felt hopeful for future generations of Orthodox women.

While some view the Orthodox Church to be "changeless," Carrie Frederick Frost (2018) notes that, "Christian life today includes challenges and circumstances that are new to the Church, and which consequently require new responses grounded in the faith" (p. vii).

Institutional change is slow and is the result of complex nature of conciliarity in the Orthodox Church. I believe the next generation of Orthodox women is acutely aware of their gender, identity politics, feminism and the like. Women have challenges and circumstances that the Church needs to address if it wants to continue to thrive. Frost (2018) notes that the Church must remain responsive to its parishioners and the world we live in because

> An ideology of wholesale "changelessness'" leads to spiritual and institutional death. The more we know what is actually happening in our Church, good or bad, the more we may feel empowered to *become* that Church, personally and collectively, and grow into engagement with our Church and its Head, the changeless one, Jesus Christ. (p. 4)

As someone who works with young adults (e.g., in college settings, youth ministries, and the like), I caution that younger generations are far less tolerant of acts of oppression (however small they may seem to others) than previous generations. If the Church in general does not attempt to understand their perspectives, I fear we will lose future generations. The reality is that the gap between what is wanted of many of us in the workforce (our intellectual and innovative labor), paired with what is needed of us in the Church (our physical labor), is only going to widen. If we do not address this, we will lose women. Whether we want to admit it or not, young women of today would rather egress an institution (i.e., religion) than compromise their values (i.e., equity and inclusion). The silencing or erasure of these narratives is the easiest way to keep the dominant narratives intact.

Throughout the last two years, I have learned that to be both a feminist and Orthodox is not incompatible. I unapologetically lay claim to both. I recognize that for thousands of years it has been the voices and experiences of men that have dominated public and private spaces. Patriarchal societies were the norm and promoted maleness to the detriment of women. These

practices have historically limited the roles of women and the church is no exception. These same practices are lingering relics of today in some societies and in the Church. The integrity of the Church is not compromised because women have been silenced or excluded. Rather, women have found ways to contribute and find goodness in the Church regardless of their lack of authority or recognition.

Culture has influenced religion and it is through a patriarchal stained glass that many of us have experienced Orthodoxy, yet I choose to find the beauty in Christ's teachings—those of love, empathy, and forgiveness. These are the lessons that I will continue to teach my children by continuing to follow His teachings, which encourage all to keep asking, seeking, and knocking at the door to all of life's questions (Matthew 7:7-8). I faithfully look forward to a time when all Orthodox women and men alike are able to look inward, outward, and upward to serve Christ and His Church in meaningful ways.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Services
Institutional Review Board
1 East Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60604-2287
312-362-7593
Fax: 312-362-7574

Research Involving Human Subjects
NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

To: Anne Marie Adams, Graduate Student, College of Education

Date: November 27, 2019

Re: Research Protocol # AA101119EDU
"Agency, Feminism, and Religion: (Re)viewing the Roles of Greek Orthodox Women"

Please review the following important information about the review of your proposed research activity.

Review Details
This submission is an initial submission.

Your research project meets the criteria for Expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110 under the following categories:

"(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes."

"(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies."

Approval Details
Your research was originally reviewed on October 28, 2019 and revisions were requested. The revisions you submitted on November 18, 2019 were reviewed and approved on November 27, 2019.

Approval date: November 27, 2019
Please note: Under the revised regulations, protocols requiring expedited review no longer require annual continuing review. We have approved your protocol under the revised regulations. However, if any changes are made to your research, you still need to submit an amendment prior to initiating the amendment changes. [If we require continuing review: Please note: Under the revised regulations, protocols requiring expedited review no longer require annual continuing review, unless the IRB specifically requires it. We have approved your protocol under the revised regulations, but we are requiring continuing review because: list reasons. If any changes are made to your research, you still need to submit an amendment prior to initiating the amendment changes.

Approved Consent, Parent/Guardian Permission, or Assent Materials:
1) Adult Consent Form, version November 20, 2019 (attached)

Other approved study documents:
1) Recruitment Flyer, version November 19, 2019 (attached)
2) Recruitment Emails, Reminders, Phone Pre-Screen, and Member Checking, version November 20, 2019 (attached)

Number of approved participants: 14 Total
You should not exceed this total number of subjects without prospectively submitting an amendment to the IRB requesting an increase in subject number.

Funding Source: 1) None.

Approved Performance sites: 1) DePaul University; 2) Saints Peter & Paul Greek Orthodox Church.

Reminders
- Only the most recent IRB-approved versions of consent, parent/legal guardian permission, or assent forms may be used in association with this project.

- Any changes to the funding source or funding status must be sent to the IRB as an amendment.

- Prior to implementing revisions to project materials or procedures, you must submit an amendment application detailing the changes to the IRB for review and receive notification of approval.

- You must promptly report any problems that have occurred involving research participants to the IRB in writing.

- **Once the research is completed, you must send a final closure report for the research to the IRB.**

The Board would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation and wishes you the best of luck on your research. If you have any questions, please contact me by telephone at (312) 362-6168 or via email at jbloom8@depaul.edu.

For the Board,

Jessica Bloom

Jessica Bloom, MPH
Assistant Director of Research Compliance
Office of Research Services

Cc: Karen Monkman, PhD, Faculty, College of Education

DePaul University

Research Involving Human Subjects
NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

To: Anne Marie Adams, Graduate Student, College of Education

Date: January 24, 2020

Re: Research Protocol # AA101119EDU-R1
            "Agency, Feminism, and Religion: (Re)viewing the Roles of Greek Orthodox Women"

Please review the following important information about the review of your proposed research activity.

Review Details
This submission is an amendment. Amendment R1 involves: 1) expanding the inclusion criteria to a more general Greek Orthodox females in the Chicago area rather than a specific steward of a church.

Your research project meets the criteria for Expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110 under the following categories:

> *"(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes."*

> *"(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies."*

Approval Details
Your amendment submission was reviewed and approved on January 24, 2020.

Approval date: January 24, 2020
Please note: Under the revised regulations, protocols requiring expedited review no longer require annual continuing review. We have approved your protocol under the revised regulations. However, if any changes are made to your research, you still need to submit an amendment prior to initiating the amendment changes.

Approved Consent, Parent/Guardian Permission, or Assent Materials:
1) Adult Consent Form, version November 20, 2019 (unchanged)

Other approved study documents:
1) *Recruitment Flyer, version January 21, 2020 (attached)*
2) *Recruitment Emails, Reminders, Phone Pre-Screen, and Member Checking, version January 22, 2020 (attached)*

Number of approved participants: 14 Total
You should not exceed this total number of subjects without prospectively submitting an amendment to the IRB requesting an increase in subject number.

Funding Source: 1) None.

Approved Performance sites: 1) DePaul University; 2) Saints Peter & Paul Greek Orthodox Church.

<u>Reminders</u>
- Only the most recent IRB-approved versions of consent, parent/legal guardian permission, or assent forms may be used in association with this project.

- Any changes to the funding source or funding status must be sent to the IRB as an amendment.

- Prior to implementing revisions to project materials or procedures, you must submit an amendment application detailing the changes to the IRB for review and receive notification of approval.

- You must promptly report any problems that have occurred involving research participants to the IRB in writing.

- **Once the research is completed, you must send a final closure report for the research to the IRB.**

The Board would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation and wishes you the best of luck on your research. If you have any questions, please contact me by telephone at (312) 362-6168 or via email at jbloom8@depaul.edu.

For the Board,

Jessica Bloom, MPH
Assistant Director of Research Compliance
Office of Research Services

Cc: Karen Monkman, PhD, Faculty, College of Education

2) Recruitment Emails, Reminders, Phone Pre-Screen, and Member Checking, version January 22, 2020 (unchanged)

Number of approved participants: 14 Total
You should not exceed this total number of subjects without prospectively submitting an amendment to the IRB requesting an increase in subject number.

Funding Source: 1) None.

Approved Performance sites: 1) DePaul University; 2) Saints Peter & Paul Greek Orthodox Church.

Reminders
▪ Only the most recent IRB-approved versions of consent, parent/legal guardian permission, or assent forms may be used in association with this project.

▪ Any changes to the funding source or funding status must be sent to the IRB as an amendment.

▪ Prior to implementing revisions to project materials or procedures, you must submit an amendment application detailing the changes to the IRB for review and receive notification of approval.

▪ You must promptly report any problems that have occurred involving research participants to the IRB in writing.

▪ **Once the research is completed, you must send a final closure report for the research to the IRB.**

The Board would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation and wishes you the best of luck on your research. If you have any questions, please contact me by telephone at (312) 362-6168 or via email at jbloom8@depaul.edu.

For the Board,

[signature: Jessica Bloom]

Jessica Bloom, MPH
Assistant Director of Research Compliance
Office of Research Services

Cc: Karen Monkman, PhD, Faculty, College of Education

2

Appendix B: "Who Am I" Questionnaire and Exercise

Complete the statement, "I am a(n) ___, " 20 times in the spaces provided below rather quickly.
Do not think too long about your responses as no answers are right or wrong.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

I am a(n)_____.

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Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview One: Life Story and Womanhood

- I'm interested in learning more about your background. Tell me about yourself:
    - Where did you grow up and how would you describe the way you were raised?
    - Do you have siblings?
    - How would you describe yourself?
    - What do you value most about yourself?
    - What does it mean to be your most authentic self?
    - Tell me about what you do currently (work/school).

- Tell me about your parents:
    - What is your parents' background and education?
    - What values do you feel your parents instilled in you? Did they ever talk about what it means to be a "Greek girl/woman"?
    - Did you go to church a lot with your parents?
    - Do you feel the teachings of the church were important to your parents?

- Tell me about your experiences in your parish:
    - Describe the church where you grew up.
    - What types of activities (if any) were you involved in?
    - What is your earliest memory in the church?
    - Was going to church optional or mandatory?
    - Do you recall if going to church was important to you as a child? If so, what do you remember that made you feel this way?
    - Describe your current involvement in the church.
    - What do you value most about the church?
    - Do the teachings of the church represent what you value in life?
    - When was the first time that something that you were taught religiously was challenged or didn't align with what you experienced outside the church?

- Tell me about your feelings on womanhood:
    - How would you describe yourself as a woman?
    - What does it mean to be a woman in today's world?
    - Tell me about the woman who has been the biggest help in your life – family member or mentor.
    - What has been the hardest decision-making issue(s) that you have faced?
    - Tell about two defining moments in your life – one celebratory and one challenging.

Thank you for your time and for sharing your stories. The next time we meet I want to continue to talk about your life experiences within Orthodoxy and their impact on who you "are."

Here is the writing prompt we discussed (Appendix C). Take a second to look it over. Do you have any questions? I'll collect your diary before we begin our next conversation.

Interview Two: Life Experiences in Orthodoxy

- Let's pick back up on your experiences. In your *Who am I* questionnaire, you described yourself as a(n): (fill in the blank). Tell me about what it means to be a(n): (fill in the blank).
- In thinking of your life story and experiences, tell me about a situation in which you've relied on your religion to help you make a decision.
- Tell me your thoughts on the messages you receive about being an Orthodox woman. What does it mean to be an Orthodox woman?
- How do you know the church to describe women's roles and responsibilities?
- What critical roles do women play within the church? In what ways are women powerful within Orthodoxy?
- Do you think Orthodoxy theology/practices address your day-to-day reality? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How have you found spiritual and intellectual fulfillment within the church? When those conflict or have tension, how do you reconcile it?
- How has your understanding of Orthodoxy impacted notions of womanhood?
- Do you have anything you want to add that we have not talked about today?

Thank you for your time and for sharing your stories. The next time we meet I want
to reflect on the meaning of your life story and the overlap in experiences within Orthodoxy.

Here is the writing prompt we discussed (Appendix C). Take a second to look
it over. Do you have any questions? I'll collect your diary before we begin our next conversation.

Interview Three: Reflecting on Meaning of Life Story and Experiences in Orthodox Church

The last times we met, we talked about your life story, womanhood and experiences within Orthodoxy. Today I want to talk about the overlap of all three.

- In your experience, do you feel there are clearly defined spaces and places for women within the Church and your parish?
- What are the most critical challenges you have faced in Orthodoxy as a woman?
- Have you created opportunities for yourself to have more space within the Church that you feel didn't exist?
    - If not you, can you identify any women who have created opportunities for other women in the Church?
- Do you feel there is gender inequality in Orthodoxy? If so, describe places within the church where you see this as most prevalent.
    - How has this inequality impacted you?
    - What drives you to tolerate it?
- Based on your experiences, what advice do you have for women growing up in Orthodoxy?
- Do you have anything you want to add that we have not talked about today or during our previous conversations?

Here is the writing prompt we discussed (Appendix C). Take a second to look
it over. Do you have any questions? You can email it to me at aadams54@mail.depaul.edu in the next two weeks.

Appendix D: Reflection Journal Prompts

Interview One Reflection Journal Prompt
I'm interested in learning more about your experiences in the Orthodox Church. Describe the most impactful event you experienced within your parish. This can be something during a liturgy, interaction with another person, or through a ministry. Reflect on when it has been easy to be a steward of the Church and when it has been difficult.

    Describe the experience.
    When did it happen?
    How old were you?
    Who was involved?
    What were you thinking and feeling?
    Why was this a significant event?
    Did you share this experience with anyone else?
    How do you feel about it now as an adult?

Interview Two Reflection Journal Prompt
I want you to continue to think about your life experiences. We sometimes experience *Shipwreck* – this is when someone or a new experience questions our perceptions and how they were presented or taught throughout life; it presents contradictions to what we know to be true. During *Shipwreck*, things you knew to be true fall apart. Think back to a time when something happened, and it made you question what you knew to be true – something that was a life-changing moment.

    Describe the experience.
    What did you think to be true previously and what was the new awareness or thought?
    When did it happen?
    How old were you?
    Who was involved?
    What were you thinking and feeling?
    Why was this a significant event?
    Did you share this experience with anyone else?
    How do you feel about it now as an adult?

Interview Three Reflection Journal Prompt
I want you to envision a future for the next generation of Greek Orthodox women. Ignoring the current practices and assuming the traditions of the Church weren't so ingrained, what would church practices and the possibilities look like for women in a utopic world and why? What would this mean for women?

Appendix E: Coding Matrix

Greek Orthodox Women's Identity Construction				
Authoring of Self	The interpersonal bonds formed before being able to assess the desirability of these life shaping influences.	Agency/Voice	How is it possible for women to live in male-dominated societies/institutions in ways that reflect their genuine needs and concerns?	Womanhood

1. Family
   a. Culture, custom, heritage
   b. Values, expectations, obedience
   c. Social values and hierarchies
		1. Tensions & Contradictions
		   a. Secular life
		   b. Gender inequality
		   c. Social issues (class, environment, LGBTQIA, etc.) + love thy neighbor
		   d. Belief and doubt
		   e. Modernity and traditional
				1. Care Ethics
				   a. Love, Selflessness, Caring, Empathy
				   b. Cognitive reframing
				   c. Preserve self-efficacy
				   d. Coping (cognitive, behavioral, avoidance)
				   e. Finding acts of solidarity

2. Church (Community)
   a. Experiences growing up
   b. Holidays and services
   c. Ministries
   d. Moral code
   e. Care
		2. Omnipresence of cultural norms
		   a. Accept subordinate decisions/role
		   b. Undervalue own entitlement
		   c. Norms against own interest
		   d. Inability to even imagine it differently
		   e. Double standards
		   f. Language concealing anything uncomfortable
				2. Leadership
				   a. Increased visibility of women (minor); HEM
				   b. Service to others; working
				   c. Volunteerism, advocacy
				   d. Contributing skills – resilience, strength, #GSD

3. Spiritual Guide (Guidance)
   g. Religious literacy
   h. Seeking answers
   i. Finding your "person"
   j. Study groups
		3. Disadvantages of non-conformity
		   a. Fear (confrontation, disobedience)
		   b. Developing a critique of sexist institutions
		   c. Radicalist v pragmatist
		   d. Instability and loss (of heritage)
				3. Evolution of Self & Voice: Discovery/Definition/ Direction
				   a. Theology/spirituality
				   b. Critical reflection
				   c. Culture, language, dance
				   d. Community/Connectedness
				   e. Structure

4. Secular World
   a. Education
   b. Work
   c. Marriage
   d. Children
		4. Shipwreck
		   a. Personal disequilibrium
		   b. Compartmentalize
		   c. Carry the burden alone; shame; fear; disappointment
				4. Future focused
				   a. Children/Future generations
				   b. Church
				   c. Personal legacy