THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN CANADA

By KATHLEEN STEEVES, B.A., M.A.

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AUTHOR: Kathleen Steeves, B.A. (Crandall University), M.A. (McMaster University)

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Lay Abstract:

This thesis investigates what it is like to be a female pastor in the Christian church in Canada, as women have only recently been able to be fully ordained in most Protestant denominations. Three themes are explored: (1) how women decide to enter into Christian ministry, (2) how they navigate dilemmas around clothing in the pastoral role, and (3) how they feel they do pastoral ministry differently than their male counterparts. On a more theoretical level, this thesis also helps us understand the experiences of women entering traditionally male occupations, illuminating how they – and perhaps anyone who undergoes a career transition – navigate changes in work roles and identities, how clothing can help them achieve legitimacy in a role, and how women may be changing the professions they enter into in large numbers by doing their work differently.

Abstract:

The entrance of women into ordained ministry positions is a relatively new phenomenon in the North American Christian church, and has yet to be given adequate scholarly attention. This thesis probes the experiences of several pioneering women, presenting both the substantial and theoretical contributions emerging from a qualitative study of female pastors ministering in Protestant congregations across Canada. Data collection and analysis were approached through the lens of symbolic interactionism and grounded theory. The main findings emerging from 44 qualitative, in-depth interviews have been organized into three distinct papers to constitute a sandwich dissertation. The first paper outlines how some women experience a "call" to ministry and how this change in trajectory impacts their identity and constructions of the past, while the second two papers address different facets of performing the pastoral role once within it. Paper 2 explores the dilemmas women encounter in the area of clothing and appearances, a concern many of the women identified as influencing their performance of the pastoral role. Paper 3 explores in greater depth the ways women feel they perform the pastoral role differently than their male counterparts, and raises questions about the impact this may have on changing the role in the future. Taken together, the three papers contribute to a broad range of debates in the theoretical literature about key facets of the human experience, including: changing career trajectories, role making and performance of self, and microlevel influences on institutional change. The dissertation also encourages a new direction for sociological research – human interactions with the divine.

There are a few other particularly special friends and mentors I would like to acknowledge as well. Margaret Dickin and Sonja McEwan – thank you for the countless hugs, meals, prayers and encouragements throughout this process; I have been incredibly blessed to have two such strong women in my life. Shelley Cooke – I am so thankful I found you in the second year of my PhD, and for the countless hours of support and mentorship you have invested in me; thank you for cheering me on, always! And to my dear friend and roommate Ashley Feddes – you have always believed I could do this, and you don't know how much that means to me. I could not have asked for a better friend to walk closely beside me through this journey. Thank you for selflessly listening to parts of my dissertation, for pushing me, praying for me, cleaning for me, and caring for me!

It means a lot to me that the experiences and interpretations of two of the pastors I most look up to – my mother, Carolyn Steeves, and my dear friend, Karra Overholt – can be found within these pages. Their leadership and stories inspire me, and first motivated me to want to hear and make known the voices of other female pastors.

Karra – thank you for serving with an unmatchable passion! Thank you for the countless number of dissertation-related conversations you engaged in with me, including hearing me read several of my papers. And thanks, especially, for taking care of my heart along the way.

Mom – as a pastor's daughter, this project has allowed me to bond with you and, I hope, to understand and validate some of your experiences on a different level. I have such a greater respect now for what you do on a daily basis, and am proud of you for

pushing boundaries and helping to pave the way for other women to lead in churches in Atlantic Canada. You are truly a force to be reckoned with!

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Declaration of Academic Achievement:

I, Kathleen Steeves, am responsible for this program of research and thesis in its entirety.

I designed the interview guide, recruited interviewees and conducted interviews. I wrote

all portions of this thesis. However, my thesis supervisor, Dr. Dorothy Pawluch, and my

committee members, Drs. William Shaffir and Ellen Badone have supported my analysis

and writing processes through offering guidance on earlier versions of this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

"The worst result of the nineteenth century separation of art and science is… the continuing belief in many classrooms and laboratories that the objectives as well as thought processes are different. At its worst, this view tells us that science alone is concerned with reality; that art's function is simply to titillate the senses in a kind of aimless quest for the decorative and eye-pleasing. Nothing could be farther from the truth" (Nisbet 1962:68)

I was first introduced to Robert Nisbet's argument that sociology can be an "art-form" early in my graduate school career, and since then, no other single article has as significantly influenced how I research, write and teach. Nisbet asserts that we lose the ability, as a discipline, to make new discoveries and advances in theory when creativity and imagination are stifled by the strict and unyielding empirical rules of the "scientific method." Quantifiable, replicable and impartial is not always "better" science, nor does it make for the most generalizably accessible presentations of reality. On the contrary, people resonate more readily with the representations of the human condition they read in a novel, see in a gallery, or watch acted out in front of them on the stage. Nisbet's argument has always seemed to me to possess a strong affinity with the tradition of symbolic interactionism and the methods of qualitative research I have used to do the research presented in this dissertation. In this tradition, I wish here to introduce a thesis that will present the culmination of the creative work I have engaged in, together with my participants, to arrive at an in-depth understanding of their stories and experiences. My participants in this case are female pastors within the Christian church.

Women have always played a significant role within the life and maintenance of the Christian church. For example, in the past and still today, in the Catholic Church and

certain Protestant denominations (eg. Anglican and Lutheran) devoutly religious women have the option of serving as nuns (Reed 2004), while in both in the Catholic and Protestant tradition women have long fulfilled the duties of more 'back stage,' supportive leadership roles through their contributions in women's leagues, lay involvement in children, youth and music ministries, presence on parish councils or as pastor's wives. However, as Adams (2007) notes, "for most of Christian history, official church policies excluded women from holding clergy positions" (80).

In recent decades, the exclusion of women from positions of leadership has been challenged. In the North American context, the Congregationalist church was the first denomination to ordain a woman, in 1853, when a particular congregation within the denomination did so in the absence of a denominational rule against it (Chaves 1997). Other denominations, like the Advent Christian Church and the Salvation Army, incorporated women's ordination into the fabric of their organization from their conception (in 1860 and 1870 respectively). However, mainline Protestant denominations, like the Baptist and Presbyterian Chuches, did not begin fully ordaining women until well into the 1900's (Chaves 1997). Even then, as the official barriers to women's leadership began to dissolve, their entrance into seminaries and ministry positions was slow to follow.

Chaves (1997) reports that women did not start entering into pastoral positions in significant numbers until the mid 1970's, precipitated possibly by the women's rights movement with its messages of encouragement for women to pursue non-traditional

career paths (Chang 1997). Since that time, women's entrance into pastoral training and positions has risen continuously. In 1970, 3% of all American pastors were women (Chaves, 1997). More recent figures suggest that that percentage has grown to 18.6% in 2014 ("Non-traditional," 2014). Canadian numbers are more difficult to locate, as Statistics Canada reports only on the broader category of women working in the "social sciences and religion." Here again, however, women's involvement has increased from 61.4% in 1987 to 72.5% in 2009 (Table 12 2015). McDuff (2001) reports an increase in the number of women entering seminaries (and a simultaneous decline in men's entrance) to the point that most North American Protestant seminaries are now over 50% female (5).

This thesis presents a qualitative study of the lived experiences of female pastors within Christian denominations in Canada, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which women experience entering into the pastoral role, as well as how they navigate dilemmas of self-presentation and approach doing the work differently in light of their gender. Female pastors form an interesting sub-group to study, as their official inclusion into church leadership is still novel and sometimes even contested. This makes them particularly conscious of how they are playing their roles and the reactions they receive from others. Also, the ways these women are navigating different roles and situations are particularly exciting to investigate as there are few pre-existing social "scripts" for them to follow as leaders in this institution.

It is important to note at the outset that this is a "sandwich" thesis. In other words, the thesis is made up of three distinct papers, each of which has been written to stand alone. At the end of this introduction I provide a brief overview of each of the papers. Each paper provides a context-setting discussion as well as a review of the most relevant theoretical and substantive literature and a description of my methods. However, since those discussions are necessarily brief, I am taking advantage of the latitude that this introductory chapter offers to provide a more detailed treatment of these components of my dissertation.

In this introduction, I will set the stage by outlining trends around women's involvement and ordination into pastoral leadership and reviewing the scholarly literature that analyzes these trends. I will then discuss symbolic interactionism, the theoretical framework that has informed the questions I am raising in this dissertation, the methodological approach I have used to answer them and my analysis of the data. Subsequently, I will provide a more in-depth discussion of how I proceeded methodologically, concluding with an explanation of how the thesis is structured and a brief overview of the three papers.

BACKGROUND

While each subsequent paper of this thesis incorporates a literature germane to its focus, this section will provide a more general overview of the scholarly literature around women's interactions with the institution of the Christian church. Some of this literature addresses women's historical exclusion from pastoral ministry and debates the factors

that have led to change in some denominations. Another active body of literature probes lay congregation members' attitudes towards female clergy, and how they influence women's job opportunities and acceptance. Perhaps the largest body of literature in this area focuses on modern-day female pastors' experiences of exclusion in the "secondary labour market" of religion (Chang 1997) and the barriers women continue to face.

Historical Trends & Changing Norms

Although formal barriers to women's entrance into ministry were beginning to dissolve in several denominations in the early to mid 1900's, scholars note that a greater influx of women began entering North American seminaries only after the 1970's (Chaves 1997). Some literature takes an historical approach in reporting (statistically and/or from a narrative point of view) the changing norms and regulations around women's leadership involvement in specific denominations and traditions (ie: Brackenridge 1980; Huyck 1981 Stancil 1988). For example, Huyck (1981) traces the history of women's involvement in ordination in the Episcopal Church, while Stancil (1988) examines the history of women's involvement in the Southern Baptist Church since 1945, and Brackenridge (1980) discusses equity for women in the Presbyterian denomination from 1926-30. Several other studies follow in this vein, reporting the historical trajectories of attitudes, ordination policy, and women's involvement in leadership that are denomination specific (Brat 1992; Ferrell 1984; Memming 1995; Mulder 1989; Zikmund 1990).

Others studies look at this historical shift and question why, more broadly speaking, women began to enter into ministry in greater numbers in several denominations specifically in the 1970's – why did the turning point and influx of women into ministry training occur at this particular time? Several studies link denominational changes in women's ordination practices to the larger societal trend of second wave feminism (Chang 1997; Chaves & Cavendish 1997; Chaves 1996). Chaves (1996), for example, highlights the pressure churches faced from progressive institutions to abandon conservative practices like the exclusion of women from leadership. He demonstrates that, in the wake of larger societal trends towards equity embodied by feminism and the women's rights movements, many denominations began to change. Chang (1997) also suggests that it was the progressive social environment of the 1970's that encouraged women to enter seminaries at a greater rate as women were also entering into several other occupations at this time.

Finally, a group of related studies discuss the impact of this post-1970 change on the church as an institution and the role of "pastor" itself. Chaves and Cavendish (1997), for example, outline how the conflicts within denominations around women's ordination have changed over time, beginning in 1920 and moving forward. They see this change (in frequency, location and the nature of conflicts) as a product of changing cultural norms and women's increased entrance into seminaries in the 1970's. Several others address concerns around the "feminization" of the clergy role and how its status and script might change with women's increasing entrance (Finlay 1996; Klein 1994; Logan 2009; Nason-

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Clark 1987; Nesbitt 1997; Simon & Nadell 1995; Sweeney 2014; Weidman 1985). The changing nature of the clergy role, given the influx of women, is a topic which is given further consideration in the third and final paper of my dissertation.

Congregational Attitudes

Because the power of hiring and dismissing pastors still lies largely with individual church congregations, several studies have been conducted which examine lay peoples' attitudes and responses towards women in ministry (Adams 2007; Carroll, Hargrove & Lummis 1983; Dudley 1996; Lehman 1981 &1987; Stewart-Thomas 2010). These studies increase our understanding of the complexities of discrimination and provide a different angle from which to view women's experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Lehman's (1987) study on the attitudes of lay-people, for example, discovered that a majority would not be personally opposed to a female pastor, but these same individuals perceive others in their congregations might be and would oppose hiring a woman. This means that minority preference for hiring a male pastor may win out in the name of preserving church unity and avoiding conflict. Others have discovered that being exposed to a female pastor often leads to an increase in positive opinions among laypeople (Carroll et al. 1983; Dudley 1996; Lehman 1981), although some suggest that these attitudes may be 'pastor-specific' – having a positive attitude about one female pastor does not accurately predict one's amenability towards all other women in ministry (Carroll et al 1983; Lehman 1987).

Stewart-Thomas (2010) suggests that women are more likely to be accepted in the pastoral role if they perform this role in a stereotypically "female" way. She contends that, even in congregations where women take the lead, they cannot help but run up against more conservative expectations: "...congregations are gendered organizations and as such they are gendered in their expectations of clergywomen to carry out their ministries differently from men, with women's ministries often expected to be more service- and other-oriented" (407). She observes that female clergy members find acceptance when they adhere to the appropriate gender stereotypes of nurturing and caring, and therefore they do so, because for one woman to lose face could incur a loss of power for many others. Stewart-Thomas (2010) perceives this situation to actually be a disadvantage for women in church leadership.

Present-day Barriers & Experiences

The largest body of literature on women in ministry probes the experiences of being a female pastor with a focus on the inequalities and barriers women face in their pastoral roles, or, at times, when looking for a position. Two important seminal studies have influenced more recent work in this area. Carroll, Hargrove and Lummis' (1983) pioneering study of nine mainline denominations entitled *Women of the Cloth* drew on survey and interview data from 1,435 clergy members. The study detailed the progress women were making through positive assessments (by other clergy and congregation members) of their work, but also their struggle to get hired, legitimate their calling, and bridge the gendered pay gap. *Women of the Cloth* provided a benchmark for all future

research seeking to assess the progress made by female clergy (Chang 1997). A follow-up to the seminal work of Carroll et al. (1983), the Lilly study (Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998), expanded the scope of pastoral participants and offers wider confirmation of the findings reported more than a decade earlier, including reporting a 9% pay-gap between male and female clergy and the concentration of women in more precarious clergy positions.

A large body of literature takes a labour market approach (Adams 2007; Carroll et al. 1983; Chang 1996, 1997; Lehman 1980, 1985; McDuff 2001; Mills 1996; Nesbitt 1993). Lehman (1980, 1985), for example, suggests that, after their first placement, female Baptist seminarians are less likely to find jobs that offer them the same levels of prestige, earnings and other opportunities as their male counterparts. Nesbitt (1994) found similar outcomes for female clergy in the Episcopal Church and the Unitarian Universalist Association. Adams' (2007) work on the "stained-glass ceiling" is a seminal example. Adams uses the notion of a "stained-glass" ceiling to describe the experiences of women attempting to reach the upper echelons of Christian church or denominational governance. As McDuff (2001) reports, in most Protestant denominations male clergy experience much more upward mobility than their female colleagues, who tend to become stuck in more entry level positions.

McDuff (2001) addresses what she labels to be another disadvantage – the existence of a "gender paradox." Women report high job satisfaction although placed in "menial" and oppressive clergy positions. The "gender paradox" plays itself out as female

pastors often have lower pay and benefits and inferior working conditions when compared with their male counterparts, and yet they are still more likely to report higher satisfaction with their work. For a variety of reasons, female clergy are described as being accepting of the inequality inscribed in their circumstances – as are so many women in other male-dominated workplace settings. As Chang (1997) notes, the issue of gender equality in job placement among clergy members is complex, as there are both "push" and "pull" factors. Rewards of a different variety may "pull" women towards less materially rewarding or upwardly mobile pastoral positions, but it is also possible that they are being "pushed" into such positions by factors like discrimination and their disproportionate charge of family responsibilities. The higher levels of social support female pastors receive in less stable work environments may also provide personal compensation for the lack of material rewards (McDuff & Mueller 1999), but overall this situation simply perpetuates the gendering of non-standard work and does not allow the larger goal of gender equality to be advanced (McDuff 2001). Chang (1997) and others (ie: Carroll et al. 1983; Lehman 1980; Nesbitt 1993; Mills 1996; Chang 1996) thus conclude that women in ministry occupy a "secondary labour market," and are thus at a disadvantage.

Research Questions

While the literature discussed above certainly addresses important facets of the female clergy experience, it is hardly exhaustive. The tendency to focus on themes of inequality and discrimination has meant that other dimensions of the female clergy

experience have received less attention. These are the gaps that this thesis aims to fill – giving greater voice to the lived experience of female pastors in all its richness and diversity.

In this vein, women's entry into ministry positions in increasingly greater numbers raises several questions around their lived experiences as pastors that have yet to be adequately probed: as pioneers for their gender in this profession, why are some women drawn to enter into pastoral ministry and how do they experience this transition and change in life trajectory? Are there uniquely "female" challenges when it comes to performing the pastoral role? How do women present themselves, and how are their presentations of self received in this traditionally "male" role? How might women be changing the pastoral role by their increasing presence, and do they feel that they pastor differently than their male counterparts?

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Questions around lived experiences, life trajectories, presentation of self and micro level change are integral concerns of a theoretical perspective in sociology known as symbolic interactionism. Since symbolic interactionism is the lens I brought to bear on my analysis of the experiences of women in Christian ministry, I provide here an overview of the perspective as well as some of its central concepts, including those that I have used in my analysis.

Roots of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective rooted in the tradition of American pragmatism and thinkers such as William James and John Dewey, who posited that humans act in the world, and meaning stems from this behaviour (Meltzer, Petras & Reynolds 1975; Prus 1996; Reynolds 2003).

Bringing together key elements of American pragmatism, George Herbert Mead (1934) provided the foundations of symbolic interactionism, laying the groundwork upon which his students would later build. His work in *Mind, Self, and Society* is sensitive to the intersubjective nature of human group life and takes into account the symbolic, active and reflexive nature of human interactions (Prus 1996). Mead (1934) references the actor's physiological preconditions for language development, and affirms that language is essential for developing a self. Humans are minded agents, with the capacity to reflect and interpret positions of other people, and become objects unto themselves. Society is also a necessary precondition for the development of the self, as society offers the vantage point through which people come to understand who they are in relation to other people. Mead suggests three stages of childhood socialization, or development of the self, which culminate in the child's internalization of the generalized other – or "the attitude of the whole community" (Mead 1934: 154). For Mead, a fully socialized individual has come to understand society, the various roles people play and their place in this order. The actor is able to reflect upon, and internalizes (or, at times, reject or modify), the intersubjective norms and values of their community. Interactionists draw from Mead the importance of symbols, like language, for allowing community life – individuals

interacting with each other and creating shared realms of experience and meaning – to be possible.

Mead (1929) also developed a theory about the temporality of human experience which some sociologists (Maines, Sugrue & Katovich 1983) have argued has yet to be fully exploited in empirical studies. Mead's theory of time centers on his concept of the "specious present" – the idea that lived experience occurs only in the present. Past and future do not have an objective existence as independent entities; rather, they exist only through how they are experienced in the present. Using their current vantage point, social actors understand both past and future through the lens the present offers. This means, of course, that these understandings are continuously changing as individuals move through the trajectory of their lives (Mead, 1929). Moreover, for Mead, these understandings are fundamentally social in nature – they are intersubjectively (Prus, 1997) created and expressed. Mead (1929:236) also draws attention to the notion of "continuity" and "dislocation" (discontinuity), pointing out that the interjection of discontinuity into one's present position, created by unexpected experiences allows the "past" to be distinguishable from the "present."

Maines et al. (1983) clarify a number of elements in Mead's theory, including the idea of the "symbolically reconstructed past" (163) Mead (1929) argued that "the past is overflow of the present." As Maines et al. (1983) interpret this insight, Mead was suggesting that "the symbolic reconstruction of the past… involves redefining the meaning of past events in such a way that they have meaning and utility for the present"

(163). The concept of a "symbolically reconstructed past" and how such pasts are constructed are of particular concern in this thesis and are explored in the first of my three papers.

While Mead's work has led sociologists in many different and related directions, the best known of its formulations is symbolic interactionism as it was developed at the University of Chicago under the influence of Herbert Blumer. While Mead created the foundations for symbolic interactionism, it was Herbert Blumer who rendered Mead's theories more accessible and who addressed the methodological question of how social interaction ought to be studied (Muslof 2003). While Blumer recognized the partially limiting or constraining nature of reified social environments – which he terms "obdurate reality" (22) – he was a strong advocate for the social nature of meaning attribution and joint action, and the agency of individuals to create and shape meanings. Blumer (1969) sets out three premises which have been widely adopted as guiding principles within Chicago school symbolic interactionism:

> *(1)* "Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them."
>
> *(2)* "The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows"
>
> *(3)* "These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters" (2)
>
> In line with these three premises, Blumer was among the first to lay out a clear

methodological approach for studying how social actors achieve intersubjectivity, taking on the role (or meanings) of the other through an active process of interpretation and

reflection. Blumer (1928) advocated for an inductive approach to studying human group life, promoting the application of Cooley's (1922) idea that the researcher aspire to arrive at a "sympathetic understanding" with their participants – a deep shared knowledge of their experiences and meanings. Blumer challenged the validity of using deductive, positivistic methods to study human meanings and interactions, and instead promoted the adoption of a qualitative approach. The inductive methodological approach has been adopted, and further developed by Chicago school symbolic interactionists (ie: Glaser and Strauss 1967; Prus 1996; Charmaz 2014)

The preceding discussion has lain out in a general way the genesis and evolution of the main concerns of symbolic interactionists. Out of these general concerns have emerged two more specific themes that are particularly salient in this dissertation, the notions of careers and trajectories of involvement, and presentation of self and identity work.

Careers, Transitions & Trajectories

The concept of "career," as initially developed by Chicago school interactionist Everett Hughes (1937) and his students, refers to the trajectory of participation a person moves through within a group, status, relationship or role (Barley 1989; Becker 1953; Glaser and Strauss 1965; Prus 1996; 1997). One's position and identity in relation to a group of people or a setting is not fixed, but rather is fluid and changing. Symbolic interactionists seek to understand how, upon entering into a group, role, status or relationship, people go through a variety of stages of involvement, moving from one to

the next in light of "career contingencies" encountered (Prus 1996; 1997). One's involvement may eventually result in role-exit, and the stages and experience of exiting a role can also be explored (Rose 1988). The concept of "careers" is versatile in that it can be (and has been) applied to different groups and trajectories – from marijuana users (Becker 1953) to mental patients (Goffman 1961) to those facing death and dying (Glaser and Strauss 1965), among others.

Questions around how changes *between* careers and disrupted life trajectories are experienced have also been explored by interactionists. Strauss (1959) suggests that distinctive moments, or "turning points" are an unavoidable part of adult life. Events happen that lead individuals to realize that they have changed; they are no longer who they once were. Turning points are usually accompanied by feelings of surprise, anxiety and tension as a new role and a new self is tested out and explored. Although transitions may occur gradually, when a life changing event (like a call to ministry) occurs, this comes to be seen as a milestone, and such "recognition then necessitates new stances, new alignments" (93).

Strauss' idea of adult mid-life transitions has been taken up by others, who have elaborated on how these transitions occur in relation to particular roles. Rose (1988) analyzes the steps that individuals go through in becoming an "ex" in relation to a variety of different professions and identities – ex-nuns, ex-spouses, ex-military, ex-teachers etc. van den Hoonaard (2001) draws attention to the moment widows realize their identities have changed. She suggests that there comes a time when each widow experiences an

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"identifying moment" (38) – an instance when something happens and it becomes real to them, solidified, that they are now a widow instead of a "wife" or married person; their identity has changed.

Presentation of Self

The centrality of self as a concept in Mead's work has generated considerable theorizing among interactionists about self and identity. Within this broader literature is a thread that looks specifically at appearances and self-presentation. Cooley (1922) writes about self-assessment using the metaphor of a "looking-glass" or mirror. Like Mead's theory of the generalized other, Cooley's theory suggests that people come to form opinions of themselves based on others' imagined responses to them. In moments of interaction, actors may receive feedback from one another about themselves that they interpret as being either positive or negative. They may then come to internalize this imagined judgement – deciding to either accept or reject what is reflected back to them about themselves.

While sometimes clear sanctions or expressions make the "real judgements" of the other quite unmistakably known, what is interesting about Cooley's theory is that it acknowledges that people also form self-assessments based on *imaginations*. Sometimes, the people one seeks to impress are not present in the moment, but the "social" often invades even the "private" realm as the actor can still *imagine* what "they" might think of his or her behaviour or response before or after carrying it out. Cooley's theory suggests

that there is a certain amount of guesswork, stipulation, creativity and self-reflexivity in taking on the "generalized other."

Goffman's (1958) treatise on the presentation of self is perhaps the best-known work on the "self" in the interpretive tradition. For Goffman, actors in everyday life are like actors on the stage of a theatrical performance, hence the term "dramaturgy" for the perspective that Goffman developed. Focusing on the significant parallels between the two worlds, Goffman points out that everyday life contains both its "front stage" and "back stage" moments; situations where actors feel pressure to keep up particular appearances in accordance with roles can be distinguished from those in which they feel free to let their guard down and be more relaxed. "Front stage" arenas include many elements, from other actors to physical props which can be manipulated by the actor to aid in his or her presentation of a role.

Somers (1994) talks about identities being socially constructed through the narratives we tell about ourselves. She is interested in identity formation as narrative accomplishment, as opposed to a direct reflection of the various statuses one holds (i.e. gender, age, race, religion). "Social life is itself storied," she posits, "and that narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*" (613-614). Somers identifies four 'dimensions of narrativity' (618) – ontological, public, conceptual and metanarratives – but it is the ontological dimension that addresses the questions most relevant to this dissertation. Ontological narratives are intersubjectively constructed stories that "are used to define who we are; this in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to do" (618).

Ontologically speaking, identities are formed through the stories people tell to themselves and others. One's position within these narratives can shape how one behaves. Stories are told to create meanings for the actions of others, to explain one's own actions, and in an attempt to predict actions in advance. Somers (1994) argues that humans seek to maintain and act out stories of stability and coherence, plotting their biographies together in a coherent manner for the benefit of both themselves and others. Somers' work raises questions about how people achieve narrative coherence in the stories they tell, particularly when they undergo significant transitions in their lives.

Hughes' (1958) writing on the social psychological aspects of people's involvement in the workforce includes a commentary on the impact of work on identity formation. Hughes (1958) states that "a [person's] work is as good a clue as any to the course of his [or her] life and to his [or her] social being and identity" (7). He goes on to discuss work and transition points in the life course, office and role, and the interaction between work and self or identity. Hughes observes that the language people use to discuss what they do is directly connected to presentation of self. No matter how "menial" the occupation, people keep the self and other in mind when talking about their work, and tend to do so in such a way as to infuse value and meaning into their job – for both themselves and other people. Work also brings people together in terms of particular categories or roles – such as teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, priest-parishioner. Hughes' own 'work' is significant in it has influenced the evolution of symbolic interactionist thought and provides a useful tool for thinking about things like pastoral identity, dirty work and total roles in the ministry workplace.

In light of this discussion of Chicago School interactionism, this thesis can be described as a study in the processes of outward symbolic presentation of self interactively taking place among a particular population – female pastors in the Christian church – with the goal of illuminating how trajectories of involvement and presentation of self and identity work are experienced among this population.

METHODS AND DATA

A Grounded Theory Approach

As Blumer (1969) suggests, the empirical world in which people actually live and interact and make meanings must remain the center of attention for researchers as they attempt to discover how human group life unfolds. No amount of general, abstract theorizing can replace a close proximity to the life world of participants. Prus (1996) likewise suggests that the interpretive nature of human beings necessitates the use of ethnographic, interpretive approaches to the study of human group life. All positivistic (quantitative) methods and measures fall short, as they do not provide the researcher with opportunities for achieving an intimate familiarity – or intersubjectivity – with participants.

The methodological approach that Blumer first promoted for symbolic interactionists has since been developed into a more fully elaborated and nuanced approach to doing research and generating theory. The *grounded theory approach*, as it described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2014), is a method of conducting

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research whereby theory is developed by starting with the data and working with it in an iterative way throughout – building theory from the "ground" up. This method employs inductive reasoning – meaning that more abstract theoretical patterns are developed out of concrete empirical examples, as opposed to the other way around.[1] The grounded theory approach encourages researchers to hold pre-conceived theories and concepts loosely at first, performing the creative work of moulding theory around the data instead of attempting to fit data into a pre-existing theoretical mould (Charmaz 2014). Strauss and Corbin (1998), in this tradition, outline a series of rigorous steps researchers should take while in the field and while coding data, and define their approach as a method which allows researchers to do good science. Charmaz (2014) provides a highly instructive treatise on grounded theory. She outlines the method of intensive interviewing, through which a researcher can conduct a guided conversation about the participants' experiences and expertise. Intensive interviews, as Charmaz envisions them, are designed to be pointed and structured, but also open-ended and dynamic. As she suggests, "the flexibility of intensive interviewing permits interviewers to discover discourses and pursue ideas and issues immediately that emerge during the interview" (Charmaz 2014: 85). This sort of interviewing works especially well in conjunction with fieldwork and ethnographic research to develop an intimate familiarity with participants' worlds.

Charmaz also lays out the steps researchers might take in analyzing the data through coding and making memos. Analysis, in a grounded theory study, emerges as the

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[1] Deductive reasoning, on the other hand, begins with an abstract theory and imposes it on specific instances.

research progresses, as themes that are discovered in one interview may be talked about with subsequent participants for confirmation or dismissal. Beginning with general, open-ended inquiry and a loose grip on potential sensitizing concepts, researchers transcribe and code for themes while still participating in the field, gradually coming to a more nuanced understanding of what is going on – what topics or themes arise most frequently, and how to direct further inquiry. As recurring themes emerge, they are incorporated into future lines of questioning, tested and confirmed before being incorporated as more solid analytical concepts.

Genesis of a Research Project

This thesis started as a project completed for a graduate-level qualitative methods class which covered many of the ideas presented in my previous section. Persuaded that the best way to learn was by doing, our instructor told us on the first day of class to "go talk to people." Each of us chose a group to interview or a setting to observe. I opted to talk to female pastors. My reasons were mostly pragmatic at that point. Since my mother is a female pastor, I felt confident that through her connections and mine, it would be possible to find a critical mass of interviewees in the short amount of time I had to conduct the necessary interviews and complete a paper for the course. For the rest of the semester, the class met on a weekly basis for lively discussions about our experiences in the field and interpreting data – our triumphs and awkward missteps as novice researchers. It was in this fertile environment that the seeds for the project – and my love of qualitative research – were planted and began to germinate.

I interviewed seven women that semester. The more I heard, the more absorbed in their stories I became. I was surprised by how quickly and naturally I was invited into their lives. They were open and honest about their biographies, but also about their innermost thoughts, feelings, doubts, convictions and faith. Towards the end of my introduction, I reflect on some of the factors that may have contributed to their openness. There is no question but that this first glimpse into their experiences piqued my curiosity and gave me a sense for what it would be like to extend my study into a larger project.

In the second year of my doctoral studies, while finishing exams and still determining what direction to take with my dissertation, I took a religious studies course which pushed me further down the path of studying female pastors. The course – in gender and religion – attracted a relatively small group of about six students from religiously diverse backgrounds. Our faith professions ranged from Judaism to Christianity, Islam to atheism. The course was pivotal in several respects. It was in this class that I first experienced an academic environment where discussion of personal belief systems was not only allowed, but welcomed and integrated into our discussions. For the first time in three years of graduate work, I did not need to compartmentalize my own faith (Christianity) in the classroom. There was space to wrestle with it and to consider theory and methods through its lens. This, in itself, was academically life-changing for me.

Moreover, it was in this class that I was exposed to theoretically and descriptively rich ethnographies of women in religious communities whose participation in these

communities was viewed through their subjective experience of them rather than as a sign of their "submission" to patriarchal religious and cultural forces (ie: Mahmood 2005; Fader 2009; Selby 2012). The most significant of these, for challenging my own taken-for-granted assumptions, was Mahmood's (2005) ethnography on the Muslim women's piety movement. Theoretically and analytically rich in her analysis, Mahmood (2005) argued that applying the liberal, secular, feminist mindset to analyze the lives of her participants would do violence to their true interpretations and life experiences. While the women she studied had some freedom to teach and lead in the mosque, Mahmood was quick to point out that women's leadership in Islam is still overall afforded only a relatively circumscribed role, meaning that women are still in a position of submission under men. However, Mahmood (perhaps controversially) suggests that they are not actively trying to undermine this authority through the piety movement. If a woman resists her husbands' authority to pursue her own studies at the mosque, this is done in pursuit of religious ends, not under the banner of "equality for all!" Mahmood beautifully asserts that the subversive actions of women cannot be assumed to be, at all times, in pursuit of gender equality or against submission. Perhaps, she suggests, a different type of agency exists in the practice of submission.

The journey of anthropological research away from assuming women's submission in "patriarchal" institutions to be intrinsically "oppressive" intrigued me, and the frank discussions that we had in that class liberated me of the assumption that studying female pastors in the Christian church necessarily meant framing the women as

"oppressed" and locating their experiences in the context of a tyrannical institution resistant to change. In the conclusion of my dissertation, I return to the theme of what there is to gain sociologically from the effort to grasp women's understanding of their realities in their own terms.

By my third year I had made the decision to focus my thesis on women in positions of leadership in the Christian church. I continued my interviews, adding 37 to the seven I already had. Over the year, I often did two to three interviews per week (once actually conducting three interviews in one day), transcribing and making notes and memos on days I was not interviewing. I went back and forth between Hamilton, Toronto and Mississauga several times that year to meet with women and attend services with them. On each trip to Atlantic Canada to visit my family, I squeezed in an interview or two in various maritime cities. To reach other areas of Canada, like the west coast and Quebec, I spoke to several women over Skype. I describe below the salient characteristics of the group who provided the data for this study.

Study Participants

The thesis is based on intensive qualitative interviews with 44 female ministers across Canada. To reach this number I relied heavily on "snow-ball sampling." That is, I began by interviewing a female pastor in my personal network, who passed on information about the study to her network, generating additional participants, each of whom did the same thing. In addition to word-of-mouth, I relied on other connections I

made through attending denominational gatherings and events with some of the participants.

The pastors in this study ranged in age from 19 to 78. Their family situations ran the gamut from heterosexual marriages to single, divorced and never married; some participants had parented (or were parenting) children either on their own or with a heterosexual partner, while others were childless. [2] I interviewed pastors from eight different denominations, including Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, Free Methodist, United Church, Congregational Christian Church, Mennonite, and a few who identified as interdenominational.[3] The majority of participants (31 out of 44) identified with one of the Presbyterian, Anglican, or Baptist traditions. For confidentiality reasons, the names of the churches and the denominational affiliations of the participants have been omitted and all participants have been given pseudonyms. The types of pastoral positions occupied by participants also varied. Most pastors were the senior (lead) or only pastor in their congregations. Others worked on a team, as the pastor responsible for a specific element of ministry (for example children's pastors or associate pastors). A few were chaplains in a university setting or a long-term care home. Some pastored small, rural churches, while others led sizable congregations in some of Canada's largest cities.

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[2] None of the women I interviewed openly identified as being homosexual or having any other sexual identity, although one denomination in my sample (the United Church) does openly ordain gay and lesbian pastors.

[3] One women was an assistant pastor in the Catholic church, which was a fairly unique case. As this denomination does not yet formally ordain women into pastoral ministry, she was not ordained; however, as we talked, I learned that she does all the work an ordained minister would do, but is denied the privileges of offering formal rites, like communion or baptism.

The vast majority of women had come to pastoral ministry as a second career, having previously worked in several different occupations, including: teaching, retail, management, theatre, and counselling. Most stated that, when initially choosing a career path as a younger woman, pastoral ministry had not appeared to be a viable option for them as their denominations either did not ordain women at that time, or they did not see any women doing this job in their churches.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews with participants ranged in length from about 30 minutes to just over two hours. Each interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed. The majority of the interviews took place face-to-face, in either the participant's church office or home, or my own. Some interviews were conducted over Skype, and two were conducted over the phone. Each conversation began with a discussion of the demographic characteristics of the participants and their current church communities. Participants were then simply asked to explain what led them to become pastors, and what the experience has been like for them. This often led to the telling of rich stories. I would occasionally interject, asking for clarifications or probing in response to references they made or experiences they described. The interviews had a conversational tone. For the most part, the women spoke easily and freely. It was not unusual for them to become emotional as they spoke. I frequently heard the statement "nobody ever asks me about this." The women appeared to appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and share those experiences with someone else.

An example of how the grounded theory approach played out in my own research is in the discovery of the second major area of analysis presented in this thesis– female pastors' concerns around clothing and presentation of self. This was not initially an area I set out to probe; rather, it was a theme that emerged iteratively – one of the several fruits of my data collection process. I will always remember the interview in which I asked Cindy, one of my initial research participants, about feeling self-conscious in ministry. After pausing to think for a moment, she gave this surprising response: "I do try to be fairly conscious about what I wear and how I appear to others." This was not the answer I was necessarily expecting, but I let her continue to lead the conversation, and we spent a lengthy amount of time talking about the complexities of this topic for women in particular. The topic stood out to me as novel beyond my conception or assumptions about what it was like to do ministry as a woman in the conversation itself, and again after the fact when reviewing the tape of our conversation during transcription. In my next interview, I tested the waters by asking a question about clothing, and again was greeted with a lively recounting of stories and opinions around this topic. It was then that I decided to incorporate questions around clothing into my subsequent conversations with female pastors, continuing to refine this new line of inquiry through hearing additional stories and perspectives. Interestingly enough, the topic of clothing and appearance has turned out to be the one several women have felt most at ease and eager to talk about, with some saying "nobody ever wants to talk to me about this!" – although they desperately want to talk about it. When I presented this portion of the research to a group of seminarians (in September 2016), the room lit up with engagement upon the

introduction of this topic and several female professors and young women preparing to enter ministry alike approached me after to share their own stories of wardrobe concerns.

This one example highlights how important and fruitful the iterative process of working back and forth between theory formation and data collection can be. This method was employed throughout this project. Transcribed data was coded by hand for recurring themes as the research progressed, three of which developed into the subsequent three papers in this dissertation. In reporting on the data, I have used the word "few" to represent less than 10 percent of participants, "some" to refer to more than 10 percent but less than 25 percent, "many" to refer to more than 25 percent but less than 50 percent, and "most," "several," or "the majority" to refer to more than 50 percent of participants (following the conventions laid out by Combs 1978 and Shaffir & Kleinknecht 2005).

Insider/Outsider: Telling the Story from Without and Within

Given the importance in qualitative research of capturing the perspective of social actors, it is not surprising that symbolic interactionists have spilled considerable ink discussing ways of gaining access to particular social groups and establishing rapport (Burgess 1990; Shaffir 1990; Sherif 2001; Vallely 2002). As part of this discussion, there have been debates about the advantages and drawbacks of being an insider versus an outsider in relation to the group that is being studied in terms of positionality, access, and objectivity (Adler & Adler 1987; Chavez 2008; Sherif 2001). [4] However, as Chavez

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[4] An insider, simply put, being someone who is part of the group being studied, whereas an outsider is a researcher who does not have group affiliation or insider status (Chavez 2008).

(2008) notes, this is not a clear dichotomy and researchers will face similar methodological challenges from either side of the fence.

A discovery I made as I conducted this research is that my position was rarely clearly defined as completely "in" or "out," and a more useful conceptualization of this "land between" may be Miller's (2015) discussion of the concept of resonance. Miller argues that sociologists have a tendency to focus on polarizing realities – individual versus society and insider versus outsider. In creating these binaries, however, we miss much of the ground in between. Miller (2015) highlights the intersubjective nature of creating shared meaning, or "resonance," in here and now contexts. This concept of "resonance" is useful for describing what the interviewer/interviewee relationship is often like – characterized by moments of fleeting and unstable resonance, sameness or common understanding between researcher and participants, and other moments of dissonance, difference or disjuncture. The whole balancing act of constructing shared meanings in an interview setting is thus intersubjective, precarious and fluid.

The most surprising and humbling part of this research experience for me, by far, was the extent to which female pastors let me into their lives, hardly ever seeming to hold back from talking about sensitive difficult and even deeply spiritual experiences they probably could not be absolutely certain I would understand. I am persuaded that the decision I made early on to be open during the interviews about my status as a person of faith (and thus a partial "insider") made a critical difference in the quality of data I was able to collect. My own profession of faith often built a bridge of "resonance," making it

easier for conversations to go deeper and incorporate reference to participants' spiritual experiences. That God is a being with whom one can communicate and who interacts in the lives of believers was a taken for granted assumption between us in the interviews. I played up the similarities between our beliefs and minimized dissonance. On occasion this strategy came close to getting me into trouble. For example, participants would often ask me which denomination within Christianity I identified with. At times, when I said 'Baptist,' I was immediately asked, by pastors in more progressive denominations (like the United Church), what my beliefs were around homosexuality, as the Baptist denomination has historically stood against this orientation. In these cases, I had to distance myself from the traditions of the denomination I grew up in and emphasize my sociological understanding of sexualities, or honestly say that "I do not put limitations around who God can call" – if the question focussed on lesbian women participating in pastoral ministry. This stance allowed me to continue to be perceived as someone trustworthy to talk with and to smooth out the thorny stereotypical associations that had momentarily threatened to break the resonance, or mutual understanding, between us. My aim was always to reduce social distance and create an environment in which the women felt entirely comfortable to share their experiences in their own terms.

My background in Christianity allowed me to cultivate resonance, giving me a vocabulary that allowed me to formulate my questions in ways that demonstrated our common base of understanding. For example, I knew to ask pastors about their "*call*" to ministry, and not simply how they "entered" ministry. I could also demonstrate a basic

understanding of religious rites and ceremonies like communion and baptism – although sometimes the nuances and denominational differences in traditions did have to be explained to me.[5] On some occasions, I even drew on my mother's experiences in ministry, telling small bits of her story as a way of prompting participants to compare and contrast their experiences with hers.

Thus, in many interviews, I felt like a partial insider. Several women I spoke with I could relate to on a personal and faith-based level. I was touched when I felt the pastors were trying to minister to me, especially when they invited me into their homes or offices, served me snacks and coffee, and offered to pray for me. In these moments, I felt like I occupied a "liminal space," somewhere between being a researcher and Christian, or even just another human being to whom they were offering their time and hospitality and with whom they were thoughtfully engaging and supporting. Just as I never fully abandoned the role of "Christian" in putting on my "researcher" hat, my participants did not seem capable of abandoning their "pastoral" tendencies to care, offer counsel, and discuss spiritual matters, even though we were in an "interviewing" context. Accordingly, I tell the story of this research as a partial insider in light of my faith, gender and experiences within the Christian church – they are lenses through which I see, and they have certainly informed the themes produced and the types of connections I draw in this research.

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[5] In one interview, for example, I spent a whole half hour being walked through the different styles, colours and designs of priestly robes; on another day, a pastor brought down several different makes and styles of priest's collars to show me, as it was my first time seeing one up close.

However, I tell the story of women in pastoral leadership from an outsider's perspective as well – and one of dissonance. I am not a pastor myself, and I come from one particular denominational tradition not shared by all participants. Even more significantly, I approached this project with sociological interests in mind as well, which I sometimes minimized or downplayed in front of participants. There were moments when I felt keenly aware of my "outsider" status and lack of shared understanding. Attending my first Anglican service (led by one of the study participants), for example, I felt extremely out of place – not knowing when to stand or sit or exactly when to participate. As I did not possess the insider knowledge to pick up the book with the liturgy (service plan) in it at the door as I came in, I ended up slinking to the back of the church, mid-service, to grab one. And then, at the invitation to "come to the front to receive communion," I panicked for the brief moment in which I had to decide, before appearing even more out of sync than I likely already did, whether or not I should join the line of adults kneeling at the rail to partake of the wafers and wine. I joined the line, in the end, after a split-second calculation that the chances that it would be disrespectful for me to take communion in an Anglican church as a Baptist were hopefully slim. Feeling this sense of dissonance within a Christian church was a novel experience for me, but one that opened the door to asking several questions and broadening my understanding of what it means to be a pastor and what that role encompasses in different traditions

I have used my mother and one of my closest friends, a youth pastor in the Hamilton church I attend, as informants in this research. While my relationship to them

kept me from conducting a formal interview with either of them, nearly every theme I cover in my thesis I ran past one or both of them as I analyzed and processed, to ensure I had gotten the story right. They gave me feedback on how closely the experiences of the study participants came to their own and those of other women in their networks.

Continuing in the reflexive mode encouraged of interpretive and qualitative researchers, I end this section with some thoughts about the impact that the study has had on me. As a sociologist, as well as a Christian and a pastor's daughter, the experience of doing this research could not help but impact me personally. As a sociologist, I have honed my skills and grown as an observer and analyst of the social world. I hold even more strongly to the tenets of symbolic interactionism now that I have had the opportunity to systematically study how social processes unfold, how social actors define situations and themselves and how experiences are rendered meaningful. I see more than ever the usefulness of symbolic interactionism as a framework for understanding the complexities of the human experience in the areas of turning points, careers and trajectories, identity work, and even institutional change.

As a Christian, I have developed a stronger respect for the sometimes quiet, but powerful leadership of women in the Christian church. I have also learned how to reconcile my studies with my faith. Trained as an undergraduate at a Christian college, I heard strong messages about integrating spiritual beliefs with one's scholarly work. But as I continued my training, I discovered that my discipline (sociology) does not leave much space for conversations of this nature, though there certainly has been a trend

towards openly declaring and even celebrating other kinds of political and ideological commitments in one's scholarship. Public sociology (Burawoy 2005) and standpoint theory (Smith 1987) are just two examples of developments in sociology that reflect the acceptability of propounding certain points of view through one's research. The research presented in this thesis has allowed me to work out how the two prominent circles of my life, "faith" and "sociology" (particularly interactionism and social constructionism), can indeed co-exist quite harmoniously, as happy duplex-residing neighbours, even if one is not always fully certain they agree with everything the other is saying on the opposite side of their shared wall. This has been quite satisfying to me. Indeed, as I take the next steps in my professional development as a sociologist, I feel emboldened to challenge interactionists to acknowledge that the agency of God and other supernatural agents with whom individuals believe themselves to have a relationship figures in social interactions and the meaning-making activities of social actors. Theorizing an interactional understanding of God would be a promising and worthy line of inquiry. This approach has parallels in anthropology in the "ontological turn" or "perspectivism" associated with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, a theoretical orientation in which researchers seek to take spirits of the dead, other types of spirits or animals seriously as social actors. An example of this line of theorizing exists in Jean Langford's (2013) ethnography *Consoling Ghosts: Stories of Medicine and Mourning from Southeast Asians in Exile*.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

The empirical portion of this thesis is presented in three separate papers, each elaborating on a different point of women's trajectories in pastoral ministry. Because each paper draws from the same set of data and employs the same methodology, there are some overlaps between papers in the data and methods, as well as the literature and theory sections. The first paper presents a qualitative analysis of why some women become pastors, and how they experience entering this role as a second career – a mid-life transition and turning point. In this paper, I look at women's stories of "call to ministry" through the lens of interpretive theory to analyze how women create meanings around this life-altering event, and how they construct past experiences in light of these decisions. I employ George Herbert Mead's theory of time to analyze how women afford prior secular work experiences sacred meaning in light of their subsequent "pastoral call" experience. This paper attempts to arrive at a better understanding of women's experience of entering pastoral ministry as well as their past and future life trajectories.

The second paper looks at one facet of women's experiences in their ministries - their concerns around clothing and appearance in the pastoral role. This paper presents a qualitative analysis of women's presentations of self as pastors, discussing the unique challenges and triumphs women face in dressing to fulfil the various facets of the pastoral role. I develop the concept of "walking the tightrope" to encapsulate the anxiety and balancing act required to "appear" in a role for which no prior conventions or scripts exist, and the artful manner in which pioneering female pastors rise to the occasion. Operating in a traditionally male dominated domain, female pastors occupy a liminal

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space and must discover how to overcome the carnal associations inherent in their female bodies in order to appear fully legitimate in their spiritual roles. The tightrope they walk is a balancing act between seeking to be seen while at the same time desiring to minimize their own visibility so that God might work through them. Through their daily decisions and strategies, women create a script where none has existed before, and redefine what a pastor can look like.

Finally, the third paper takes up the question of "feminization," and the extent to which the way women do ministry may be changing the face of what it looks like to be a Christian pastor. The "feminization of the professions," or women's entrance into several formerly male dominated occupations, is a phenomenon that is increasingly garnering scholarly attention. Several studies have investigated if and how women might perform their work differently than men, most revealing inconclusive or unsatisfactorily cursory results. The entrance of women into pastoral leadership positions within several mainline Christian Protestant denominations raises questions around if and how women perform the role of "church pastor" differently than their male counterparts. This paper reports five fundamental ways in which female pastors perceive they perform the pastoral role differently. I argue that the increasing numbers of women in pastoral leadership roles may significantly change how ministry is done. This, in turn, has the potential to facilitate more fundamental changes in the Christian church, changing its relationship to other societal institutions. This is a trend to pay attention to in the future of the Christian church.

The conclusion provides a summary of the dissertation's main points and addresses its contributions to the sociological literature. The key themes and findings of each paper are reviewed, and the implications for various debates in the discipline are considered. Areas for future research on careers and trajectories, as well as female pastors and other religious leaders are then suggested.

PAPER 1: EXPERIENCING A CALL TO MINISTRY: CHANGING TRAJECTORIES, RE-STRUCTURING LIFE STORIES

The first paper in this thesis is in press, pending publication in the journal

Qualitative Sociology Review. It is printed here with the permission of the journal. From a

temporal standpoint, this paper provides an excellent starting point for the substantive

portion of this thesis, as it details female pastors' experiences of starting out in the

direction of pastoral ministry. This paper tells the story of how the journey begins; how

women experience the turning point of hearing the "call" of God on their lives, and how

they negotiate their understandings of their past roles and experiences in light of this

moment.

The paper identifies and discusses three variations of the "call" experience

women may encounter ("sudden revelation," "mounting dissatisfaction" and "anomie").

In doing so, the paper sets the stage for the rest of the dissertation as it introduces the

participants and elaborates on how they first decided to enter into ministry. The paper

sheds light on the depth of the women's devotion to the role of "pastor." They experience

a life-changing call to do this work and are highly invested in doing it well. Appreciating

the meaning that the women attribute to the experience of call, and grasping how it has

impacted their life and identity trajectories, provides the necessary context for considering

the issues around *performing the pastoral role* that I cover in Papers 2 and 3.

At a theoretical level, the paper presents an empirical application of George

Herbert Mead's theory of time – a portion of his writings that has, as of yet, been

underexplored in empirical studies. Confirming Mead's assertion that the past and future

exist only in relation to the present, I discovered that women talk about their previous careers through the lens of their present pastoral positions – imbuing them with meaning they otherwise would not have. In this way, the participants are able to create coherent narratives which seamlessly bridge otherwise disjointed past and present life trajectories. The paper also has implications for the advancement of symbolic interactionist theory, more specifically in the areas of trajectories and turning points, as well as further illuminating both the temporal and narrative features of identity work.

Paper 1 sets the stage nicely for the subsequent papers of this thesis as it introduces the participants and elaborates on how they decided to enter into ministry. This paper lays the groundwork needed to fully understand the devotion women have to the role of "pastor" – it is not just a 9-5 job for them; they experienced a life-changing call to do this work, and so they are very invested in doing it well. Understanding the meaning women attribute to the experience of call, and how it has impacted their life and identity trajectories, can help us make sense of why the issues around *performing the pastoral role* addressed in papers 2 and 3 carry such a high-stakes importance for women.

PAPER 1: EXPERIENCING A CALL TO MINISTRY: CHANGING TRAJECTORIES, RE-STRUCTURING LIFE STORIES

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a qualitative analysis of women's experiences of *call* to Christian pastoral ministry as a second career – a mid-life turning point. Drawing on 44 semi-structured interviews with pastors of different denominations, I look at women's stories of call through the lens of interpretive theory to analyze how women create meanings around this life-altering event, and how they construct past experiences in light of these decisions. I employ George Herbert Mead's theory of time to analyze how women afford prior secular work experiences sacred meaning in light of their subsequent "pastoral call" experience. This paper attempts to arrive at a better understanding of women's experience of entering pastoral ministry as well as their past and future life trajectories.

Keywords: Identity, Narrative Work, Turning Points, Christian Ministry, Gender

INTRODUCTION

"So… what brought you to the place where you wanted to do ministry, even at the very beginning?" It is a warm August morning and I am sitting with Rev. Shirley in a pair of rocking chairs next to the window in her open concept living room. A small table between us holds a tray with coffee and banana muffins she had made for me, and I gratefully nibble and sip as we talk. It is early in our conversation when I ask Shirley the question about where her desire to become a pastor came from, and her answer takes us

back in time several years to her college days of majoring in English and tracking towards a career in journalism. One day before class, a colleague's remark that she would "never make it" in that world changed everything, setting her off on a journey of self-exploration and seeking (as she describes it) after "God's will" for her life in the direction of ministry leadership.

I ask this same question – describe what led you to become a pastor – to Janice in her church office, and am transported into stories from her childhood and teenage years growing up participating in the church and helping to lead. Pauline takes me to her twenties and her aspirations to become a missionary; Heidi takes me to her childhood home and to memories of her atheist father singing in a church choir and reading to her from literary classics – poets and theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr and John Donne; Patty takes me to her room kneeling at her bed at the age of six on the Saturday night when, she explains, she first "gave her heart to Jesus." Asking a female pastor how she came to this profession is asking for the story of her life.[6]

Traditionally, pastors enter their roles through a lengthy schooling, internship and affirmation process involving the larger denomination they are affiliated with (ie: Baptist, United Church, etc.) and their own church congregation. These regulatory bodies test and, through pastoral ordination, confirm and legitimize a candidate's suitability for church leadership (Christopherson 1994; Oden 1987). Until recently, this affirmation process was

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[6]The label "pastor" will be used throughout this paper to describe ordained or "called" Christian church leaders. Different denominations use different titles, but the title of "pastor" will be used throughout to refer to all priests, ministers, etc.

available to men only; however, over the past 50 years, careers in Christian ministry have become a realistic possibility for *women* as well as men in several denominations (Adams 2007). In light of their relatively recent inclusion in the field of pastoral ministry, I set out in my research to discover how women get into this career. Many of my participants were among the first women ordained in their denominations, and I wanted to understand what had attracted them to this role. On the cusp of major institutional changes in the church, how did they choose to become pastors and how did this decision affect them?

Listening to their stories I discovered that, for most of the women, the desire to serve God started early in their lives, but that with limited opportunities and so few role models to follow, they typically pursued other careers. Thus, for most of them Christian ministry was a *second career*; before becoming pastors, they were full-time mothers, social workers, teachers, administrators, businesswomen, retail workers or any other manner of professional. I discovered as well that, while the paths that led them to Christian ministry were diverse, the decision typically involved great sacrifices – sacrifices they felt compelled to make in light of what they experienced as an irresistible "call" from God. In addition to the life changes that responding to these calls involved, the women also found themselves reassessing who they were, what their past experiences had been about and who they were meant to be. In other words, responding to a call involved re-storying their lives.

My aim in this paper is to explore more deeply how women who have made the decision to enter Christian ministry experience what they define as "the call" and the

routes their career transitions take. I am also interested in the identity-related implications

of their decisions and in the transitions that they experience in connection with how they

define themselves and come to understand their biographical trajectories. This paper

contributes to a relatively sparse sociological literature on the new roles that women are

assuming in Christian churches, particularly in relation to the lived experiences of these

women. Theoretically, the paper is informed by, and contributes to, symbolic

interactionist discussions of turning points in the lives of social actors and their impact on

definitions of self. I begin, therefore, by discussing the substantive literature in this area

as well as the more theoretical literature that I am using conceptually to frame the paper's

questions. This is followed by a discussion of the methods I used in conducting this

qualitative study of women in Christian ministry. The findings section of the paper is

divided into two parts. In the first I discuss the ways women describe and experience the

transition into Christian ministry. In the second, I discuss the way past life events and

careers acquire new meanings in light of this significant mid-life transition. The paper

concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings.

Women and the "Call" to Christian Ministry

The entrance of women into pastoral ministry has garnered significant scholarly

attention. Most of the literature in this area, however, examines the historical changes in

the church with respect to the inclusion of women (Adams 2007; Chang 1997; Chaves

1996; Lummis and Nesbitt 2000). For example, Chaves' (1996) survey of Christian

churches established that "in 1890, about 7% of US denominations gave full clergy rights

to women; today, approximately half of U.S. denominations do so" (842). That percentage has probably grown even more since the study was published.[7] Chaves concludes that the entrance of women into leadership and clergy positions is one of the most salient transformations in religion in the 20th century. He attributes this historical change largely to the external pressures that the church has faced from secular institutions to abandon conservative practices and become more inclusionary (Chaves 1996).

The literature also addresses the inequalities that women who seek positions of leadership in the church continue to face, arguing that gendered inequalities are still written into the fabric of most religious institutions. Stewart-Thomas (2010) contends that even as more denominations are accepting of female pastors, congregations themselves continue to be gendered organizations and place similarly gendered expectations on their pastors. Her study concludes that female pastors are often stereotyped in particularly gendered ways and expected to perform more emotional labour, like community service and care-giving.[8] This suggests that even in those churches that have opened their doors to female ministers, barriers to their full participation in ministry leadership still exist.

The concept of a "stained glass ceiling" has been used to describe the subtler barriers to career advancement for female clergy (Adams 2007; Sullins 2000). Sullins' (2000) study of female clergy in the Episcopal church concludes that there is a disparity

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[7] More recent data and Canadian numbers or representations of female clergy members do not appear to be published. Adams (2007) reports that the census bureau states that 85.7% of all American clergy were men in 1996 – suggesting it is still a gendered profession. Canadian numbers are not often reported in studies in this area.

[8] Data drawn from the 1998 National Congregations Study.

between the church's rhetoric of acceptance and the actual practices and opportunities afforded to female pastors.[9] He discovered that a higher percentage of female pastors still hold lower prestige positions than their male counterparts. While only 11% of ordained men held subordinate positions (like associate pastor, children's pastor, etc.), 32.5% of ordained women were in such positions. Sullins attributes this persistent, gendered inequality to unchanging cultural values operating within individual congregations, as opposed to denominational restrictions. Adams (2007) too uses the notion of a "stained glass ceiling" to describe his findings in a study on church practices of "symbolic conservativism."[10] He concludes that female pastors are blocked from participating at the highest levels of church leadership and, that within some congregations, the stained glass ceiling is intended to be visible. Women's exclusion thus becomes a symbol of the institution's conservativism and their differentiation from secular norms and institutions.

There has been relatively little research on the perspectives of women themselves or on how they experience their ministries. More specifically, little attention has been paid to how women transition into such pastoral positions in the first place or what draws them to this profession. While there have been numerous studies on the concept of "call" – the impulse to become a pastor - most of this literature is theological in nature (Bond 2012; Christopherson 1994; Duffy & Dik 2013; George 2005; Oden 1987). Pitt (2012), however, offers an insightful exception. Pitt conducted a sociological analysis of call experiences among black Pentecostal pastors. Interviewing 75 female and 38 male

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[9] Data drawn from the Episcopal Clerical Directory for 1999.
[10] Data drawn from the National Congregations Study and the 1998 General Social Survey.

pastors, he asked: "Would you tell me about your call?" (p.13). He suggests that the legitimacy of his participants' pastoral identity is greatly increased by their ability to relay a conventional call story – and that each participant could readily provide a description of their own experience of call. Pitt discovered that 'callees' (as he labelled his participants) experience both "vertical" (from God) and "horizontal" (from family members and friends) affirmations that they should enter pastoral ministry. In this way, he points to the call to ministry as a socially constructed phenomenon, and goes on to demonstrate how the actual *experience* of call can be broken down into two varieties: a "blitzkrieg" (47) call, experienced as a lightning-like, surprising supernatural intervention that interrupts one's normal life to redirect it, or a more "ordinary call" (46), that takes the form of a gradual realization and transition into a pastoral role.

Focusing specifically on women clergy, Zikmund et al. (1998) studied women in approximately 19 main-line denominations and include in their analysis a chapter on the pastoral call to ministry. These researchers conclude that many female pastors come to this profession later in life, as a second career. The significance of this is that women enter ministry with a different set of life experiences to offer than men, but the impact of this difference on their ministry has yet to be fully explored.

While Pitt (2012) and Zikmund et al (1998) pay close attention to women and men's experiences of being called into ministry, gaps in this literature remain. Pitt's sample draws from only one denomination; as it happens this denomination does not *fully* ordain women to all responsibilities of pastoral leadership. Women in Pitt's sample are

still barred from administering communion and marrying couples and have limited or otherwise labelled 'preaching' opportunities. Also, Pitt's pastors were all still involved in their secular vocations, not having fully abandoned their "day jobs" to pursue a career within the church. Zikmund et al. (1998) devote only a small portion of their study to women's call experiences and do not elaborate on how these might impact identity or life trajectories after the time of the call. My research broadens Pitt and Zikmund et al.'s contributions in two senses. First, I analyze the call stories of *fully* ordained women who *fully* transition out of their secular careers to become pastors. Second, I look beyond the call experiences themselves to analyze how being called leads women to look back on and reconstruct their lives and biographical trajectories.

Symbolic Interactionism and Adult Life Transitions

The questions I am raising in this paper are rooted in a symbolic interactionist perspective. Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective concerned with the ways in which social actors construct meanings. A fundamental premise of the perspective is that, through their interactions with each other, human beings engage in defining objects, situations and people, and that these definitions then become the context for their actions.

A central concern of symbolic interactionism is how social actors construct meanings about *themselves* as objects – thereby constructing a sense of self and identity (Cooley 1922; Doucet 2008; Dunn and Creek 2015; Goffman 1958; Mead 1934; Prus 1996 & 1997; Stone 1990). Many symbolic interactionists have written about identity –

how identities are acquired, managed, negotiated, changed and shed. Particularly germane to this discussion are those who have explored the connections between identity and narratives.

Somers (1994), for example, talks about identities being socially constructed through the narratives we tell about ourselves. She is interested in identity formation as narrative accomplishment, as opposed to a direct reflection of the various statuses one holds (i.e. gender, age, race, religion). "Social life is itself storied," she posits, "and that narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*" (613-614). Somers identifies four 'dimensions of narrativity' (p.618) – ontological, public, conceptual and metanarratives – but it is the ontological dimension that addresses the questions most relevant to this paper. Ontological narratives are intersubjectively constructed stories that "are used to define who we are; this in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to do" (p.618). Ontologically speaking, identities are formed through the stories people tell to themselves and others, and one's position within these narratives can shape how one behaves. Stories are told to create meanings for the actions of others, to explain one's own actions, and in an attempt to predict actions in advance. Somers (1994) argues that humans seek to maintain and act out stories of stability and coherence, plotting their biographies together in a coherent manner for the benefit of both themselves and others. Somers' work raises questions about how people achieve narrative coherence in the stories they tell, particularly when they undergo significant transitions in their lives.

Strauss (1959) suggests that distinctive moments, or "turning points" are an unavoidable part of adult life. Events happen that lead individuals to realize that they

have changed; they are no longer who they once were. Turning points are usually accompanied by feelings of surprise, anxiety and tension as a new role and a new self is tested out and explored. Although transitions may occur gradually, when a life changing event (like a call to ministry) occurs, this comes to be seen as a milestone, and such "recognition then necessitates new stances, new alignments" (93).

Strauss' idea of adult mid-life transitions has been taken up by others, who have elaborated on how these transitions occur in relation to particular roles. Rose (1988) analyzes the steps that individuals go through in becoming an "ex" in relation to a variety of different professions and identities – ex-nuns, ex-spouses, ex-military, ex-teachers etc. van den Hoonaard (2001) draws attention to the moment widows realize their identities have changed. She suggests there comes a time when each widow experiences an "identifying moment" (38) – an instance when something happens and it becomes real to them, solidified, that they are now a widow instead of a "wife" or married person; their identity has changed.

Another theme in symbolic interactionism that I draw on in my analysis has to do with how social actors make sense of time and biographic trajectories. This line of inquiry has its origins in the work of one of the perspective's founders, George Herbert Mead. Mead (1929) developed a theory about the temporality of human experience which some sociologists (Maines et al. 1983) have argued has yet to be fully exploited in empirical studies. Mead's theory of time centers on his concept of the "specious present" – the idea that lived experience occurs only in the present. Past and future do not have an objective existence as independent entities; rather, they exist only through how they are

experienced in the present. Using their current vantage point, social actors understand both past and future through the lens the present offers. This means, of course, that these understandings are continuously changing as individuals move through the trajectory of their lives (Mead 1929). Moreover, for Mead, these understandings are fundamentally social in nature – they are intersubjectively created and expressed. Mead (1929:236) also draws attention to the notion of "continuity" and "dislocation" (discontinuity), pointing out that the interjection of discontinuity into one's present position, created by unexpected experiences allows the "past" to be distinguishable from the "present."

Maines et al. (1983) clarify a number of elements in Mead's theory, including the idea of the "symbolically reconstructed past" (163) most relevant for the current analysis. Mead (1929) argued that "the past is overflow of the present." According to Maines et al. (1983), Mead was suggesting that "the symbolic reconstruction of the past… involves redefining the meaning of past events in such a way that they have meaning and utility for the present" (163). Again, we see in Mead's work, as in Somers (1994), the underlying premise that humans pragmatically orient themselves towards creating and maintaining coherence and meaning, but within some sort of temporal, tangible "present" framework and position. The question remains – how is this agential narrative work practically accomplished in everyday life?

These are the threads I draw on in symbolic interactionist theorizing to conceptualize the movement of women's biographical trajectories into Christian ministry as a series of continuities or discontinuities through their life-course. An identifiable

moment of change or discontinuity generates dilemmas about what course to take, as well as questions about who we are or want to become. Such moments can also prompt reflection on the meanings of experiences (Somers 1994), and as Mead (1929) suggests, a reinterpretation of the past. In the findings section of my paper, I show how these processes unfolded in the everyday life experiences of the women I interviewed for this study.

DATA & METHODS

I collected the data for this project by conducting a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews with 44 female ministers across Canada. Pastors ranged in age from 19 to 78. Their family situations ran the gamut from heterosexual marriages to single, divorced and never married; some participants had parented (or were parenting) children either on their own or with a heterosexual partner, while others were childless. I interviewed pastors from eight different denominations, including Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, Free Methodist, United Church, Congregational Christian Church, Mennonite, and a few who identified as interdenominational. The majority of participants (31 out of 44) identified with Presbyterian, Anglican, or Baptist traditions.

The interviews ranged in length from about 30 minutes to just over two hours. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The majority of the interviews took place face-to-face, in either the participant's church office or home, or my own. Some interviews were conducted over Skype, and two were conducted over the phone. Each conversation began with a discussion of the demographic characteristics of the

participants and their current church communities. Participants were then simply asked to explain what led them to become pastors, and what the experience has been like for them. For confidentiality reasons, the names of the churches and the denominational affiliations of the participants have been omitted and all participants have been given pseudonyms.

The interview data has been collected and analyzed using a grounded theory approach, as derived from symbolic interactionist premises about the nature of human group life and behaviour. I have relied on Charmaz's (2014) approach which emphasizes participants' perspectives, but also urges researchers to problematize their own taken for granted knowledge in the search for intersubjectivity with participants.

More specifically, I looked for themes in the data and coded while in the field interviewing, through a process of iteratively listening to, reading and re-reading the data, making note of recurring themes or points of discussion in responses that continued to emerge. This, in turn, shaped the questions I asked new participants as the interviews continued, until a point of saturation was reached. The theme of being "called" to ministry emerged early on, leading me to quickly catch on to the fact that asking about this experience at the outset of an interview led inevitably to lengthy, detailed and rich responses.

CALLS TO MINISTRY

Starting Points

In her analysis of how individuals shed old identities and take on the identity of an "ex," Rose (1988) observes that there can be a time before actually physically leaving a role when movement in that direction has already begun in one's mind. So it was for the participants in this study. The path into Christian ministry began for all of the women with an inciting incident or experience which prompted a mental re-assessment of their current trajectory and the consideration of alternatives. Each of the women could identify a memorable moment, day, or period of realization that marked the point that started their journey towards Christian ministry. They describe these turning points as *sacred* in the sense that they experienced them as God reaching out to them - directly, vividly, undeniably - to communicate a plan for their lives in his service. This description of the turning points, in essence, captures how the women understood what it means to "be called" or to experience "a call." For example, Selah recalled the moment when she made her decision to become a pastor in the finest detail and with great clarity, imbuing the day's otherwise mundane occurrences with a sacred significance:

> Sunday afternoon the boys were outdoors playing… I went home, my husband was in the living room – some things you always remember – Sunday afternoon, boys outside, went in, sat down on the chesterfield next to [my husband] and said, "I was down talking to Rev. C" – and he [the husband] said, "you're going to get ordained." We'd *never* had those words between us. And I said… "we can't afford it." And he said, "we'll sell the house if we have to," because we owned our own home. So that's where it started.

Selah's statement "some things you always remember" captures the women's experiences aptly. All of the participants had the common experience of feeling "called" and looking back on these pivotal moments with reverential nostalgia. At the same time, their stories

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of call took on different forms. The calls came to them in different ways, and while some acted on the impulse immediately, others took months or even years to make a move. In the next section of my paper, I describe three different forms of call stories: "sudden revelations," "mounting dissatisfaction" and "anomie" call stories.

"Sudden Revelations"

"You wanna make God smile, tell him your plans," said Dana. This was her way of introducing the story of her mid-life transition from teacher and department head to pastor and national leader in her denomination. For Dana, the call to ministry came as a complete surprise, as she had spent decades establishing herself as an educator. She and others talked about having their lives carefully charted only to find themselves at a crossroad, being pushed in a different direction by God. While the meanings they attach to these moments are redefined after they make the decision to enter Christian ministry, some of the women admit to being not only surprised, but unsettled and perhaps even annoyed at the time. In the moment they may experience these calls in terms of God "upsetting their plans." After all, to act on God's call means abandoning whatever career trajectory they had plotted out for themselves and dramatically changing course. These sorts of experiences are akin to what Pitt (2012) calls the "blitzkrieg" call, in which the message from God comes out of nowhere, producing a sense of shock and awe. Little wonder, then, that these sudden experiences of call are fraught with anxiety and angst as women wrestle with questions of whether they are suited for the pastoral role, especially

in those denominations where the role is still relatively new, and whether they are willing to make the changes required of them and their families.

Lucy's story provides an apt example of how dramatically call stories may be experienced. She, like many other participants, suggested her call story was atypical because she had already found her "dream career" before being called:

> I don't know that my story is terribly typical because I actually had my life charted out. I had done a master of applied science at McGill in speech and language pathology and so I, you know, pretty much had decided and in fact had worked in that field for 11 years, and I loved my work in that field so I really figured that I had my life stream pretty set.

Lucy experienced her call at the end of what she described as a "very typical Sunday [church] service." She was quick to point out that she is not someone who is "given to religious experiences" like hearing an audible message from God, so she was taken aback by what happened to her:

> There was nothing particularly special or interesting about the service that I remember. If anything I remember it being a little bit harried, uh, getting our three kids ready for church and there and um, it was... like this was a really weird thing for me, very much out of the ordinary. It was really an experience that I can only describe as having a sense that all of a sudden I was really actually in God's presence and He was saying to me 'here's what you're gonna do.'

Lucy was not unhappy with her current situation or thinking about making changes in her life which, according to Rose (1988), often characterizes the early stages of career or role transitions. Nor was she undergoing a period of soul-searching. From her perspective, her life was well on track when she found herself on the receiving end of an abrupt, direct and

unsolicited message from God, asking her to do something that did not seem to make any sense to her at first:

> I didn't really have any idea how this [becoming a pastor] would happen, it didn't seem probable to me. And my husband and I had pretty much got our lives – he was an audiologist so our two careers were very much in sync. We had just built our dream home, you know, we had a young family at that point so it was, it didn't look very likely and so I really didn't know what to think of this experience.

Reluctant to move and uproot her family, Lucy put her call experience "on the back burner" for two years. Then one day her husband handed her calendars for a theological college and suggested she apply. She describes no longer wanting to avoid what she had come to see as inevitable. She applied, doors opened, and "we just kind of decided to take the leap, and yea the rest is history," she says. For Lucy, God's call represented a surprising and unwelcomed invitation when it first came. But the experience planted a seed, a process of imagining what responding to the call would mean in both practical and spiritual terms, and eventually steps in the direction of turning call into action.

Shira shared a similar story. As a woman in a denomination where female leadership is still contested territory, she did not initially see pastoral ministry as a possibility. Shira went into social work, and was busy building her career and a life with her family when she experienced what she describes as a direct intervention from God while performing a mundane daily activity:

> One day I was walking my younger son back from having dropped my older son off to nursery school, and this is the word, like God like, the voice came – the only time in my life – and it said, "You will work for me."

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Shira had just accepted a promotion at the time and was one week away from starting her new position, but she decided instead to resign and take on a pastoral position immediately: "As opposed to a raise and a promotion I would come into this [pastoral] position and know that I would never move up in anything else. But I knew beyond... I knew that this was what I had to do. So here I am."

Lucy waited two years before acting on her call experience, while Shira acted immediately. These differing responses highlight the fact that while the women may not experience the call as something they initiated or have any control over, they do exercise agency in deciding how they will respond and in working out for themselves what these calls mean in terms of re-orienting their lives. In fact, from the women's perspective, there is an interaction that occurs between themselves and God, with God communicating – sometimes in a voice that they hear in a literal sense – his desire to see them working in his service, and waiting for their response.

The notion of God acquiring a real and active presence in individuals' lives in a way that allows interaction is consistent with other studies that have looked at the experiential aspects of spirituality. Pitt (2012), in his study of black Pentecostal pastors' calls to ministry, supports the assertion that religious people's interactions with a 'divine other' – whether it be imaginary or real – certainly do have *real* implications for their social behaviour. As a researcher, he operates within the premise that "God is a person with whom they [his participants] can, should and do interact" (p.14). In her study of an evangelical Christian church called the Vineyard, Luhrmann (2012) observed how the

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community of believers who make up the church explicitly cultivate the skill of

communicating with God (commonly called 'praying'), changing, in the process, their

neural pathways in just the same way as interactions with other individuals would. She,

like Pitt (2012), concludes that Christians' vertical relationship with their spiritual God

parallels their horizontal relationships with family and friends and is just as real for them.

The dimensions of this interaction are reflected in the ways Christians personify God in

terms that emphasize how He is to be experienced relationally – God can be, to name a

few: father, teacher, friend or provider. He is experienced in the daily lives of believers as

a being that exercises his own agency and with whom they can interact and have a

relationship (Luhrmann 2012). For most female pastors in this study, as for Pitt (2012)

and Luhrmann's (2012) participants, God speaks to individuals in audible, discernible

ways. There may be a time-lapse between "call" and "action," but there is the sense that

the decision is being made in response, and in some cases in obedience, to a higher

power.

"Mounting Dissatisfaction"

Pastors like Lucy and Shira described hearing God's call in a dramatic and sudden

fashion, but this is not the only way transition stories unfolded. Other pastors described

their "call" as more of a gradual realization – the product of a series of encouragements

and events over a longer period of time. This variation typically involved mounting

dissatisfaction with the meaning of one's life or one's current career. The experience of

these women seemed to better align with what Rose (1988) calls "first doubts" (41) – a

gradual and growing sense of unease with one's current role in light of organizational change, burn out or other events. As with many of Pitt's (2012) participants, many of mine described their call experience as being a more "ordinary," gradual transition. For example, Stella, a former math teacher, described feeling that all was not quite right, despite the fact that her career was on track and that in most respects she had the life she wanted: "I had all of these outward things going, but inside I was empty, and so that's when I sort of made the commitment to follow God not just for a couple of months or a couple of years but for the rest of my life."

For these participants, the call to enter Christian ministry came as less of a surprise than it did for those who were confident and happy in their present careers. In their growing unhappiness, these women had been mentally moving away from their current career path already, and so the call merely provides the catalyst needed to consummate the change.

Cindy's story provides an example of a "call" experienced in the context of existing dissatisfactions. A former retail worker, Cindy described feeling a mounting discontent with her work environment:

> I was very discouraged in that retail kind of world and, some of the things that I saw happening. I felt very ill at ease with, frankly, graft and fraud and things like that that I could see happening in the company that I worked for. So I was a bit disillusioned and I met someone who at the time said, "Have you thought about pastoral counselling?" So I entered seminary.

Although Cindy came from a background where there were no female role models to follow in her church, and where she had never imagined herself in the role of minister, her dissatisfaction with her former life and the reinforcement and affirmation she received as she started and then continued her seminary training encouraged her to keep moving in the direction of pastoral ministry. Cindy did not describe a surprising spiritual encounter with God. Instead, she experienced her call in what some participants describe as a "still small voice" - through the encouragement of friends and family, and a growing confidence that she had something to offer as a minister.

Pauline told a similar story about her mounting unhappiness as director of student services at an educational institution. Originally, the job was fulfilling and exciting, but new leadership brought changes she felt were detrimental to the organization:

> Quite a lot of people left. My self esteem went down so badly, um, and you know God's funny. At that time God spoke to me – I went up for prayer for my husband actually, for his career sort of choice, and had this little nudge that maybe I should be considering another career. Oh really? And a few weeks later while I'm having communion really sensed, wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to do this [serve communion] for people? And so that was sort of the start of my journey.

Pauline explained how she wrestled with problems at work, low self esteem, and doubt. However, over the course of the next year, through a women's prayer and study group, she began to feel a growing pull towards a life in God's service. She described the steps she took to get into Bible college and then to go through her church's ordination processes to be like putting a leaf in a stream: "I'm doing the first thing, and you're [God]

gonna have to carry that down all the [way]... And then one day waking up and seeing

that I have a collar on and going – I guess you [God] did it!"

The stories of call that involve mounting dissatisfaction exhibit a more gradual

change in direction and begin well before the call is experienced. In a sense the stage is

set in these cases with the women finding themselves unhappy, incomplete, uneasy or

feeling that something is missing in their lives. They are primed for change. However,

this makes the decision to respond to God's call no less fraught with sacrifices and

difficulties. These women too face challenges and choices as they reorient their lives.

However, they differed from other participants in that they perceived that there was *less*

to lose – and actually much to gain – in leaving an unfulfilling, as opposed to a rewarding

or promising, career.

"Anomie" Call Stories

Finally, some women experienced their "call" in the midst of a tumultuous life

event or a state of what I describe as *anomie.* Anomie is a term coined by sociologist

Emile Durkheim (1897) to describe the consequences of moments of great societal

change and upheaval. The concept was later elaborated upon by Robert Merton (1957).

At these moments, Durkheim and Merton argued, individuals and societies may

experience *anomie* or a sense of normlessness, where values and standards are shifting

and there is little certainty about how to respond or behave. The term is apt in this case

because some women go through precisely such an experience, finding themselves at a

point of chaos in their lives and in need of new norms, guidelines and direction.

Kierstie described one such moment: her daughter had married and moved away permanently. Kierstie's life had been so interconnected with her daughter's, and her identity so grounded in her role as mother, that she found herself at a loss:

> I was 45 years old and my entire adult life I was parenting, and suddenly my official job as parent had come to an end and... when she got married and moved an hour away suddenly I realized, about a month after that, I had a huge hole in my life because I wasn't actively participating in her life.

Determined to fill the hole, Kierstie began considering her options. One day, she found and started looking at some of her daughter's literature on Bible colleges. This prompted a recollection from God that nudged her forward:

> I thought – well that's kind of interesting. And then God reminded me that I, I never considered myself a college dropout, but I had completed one year of college and then I did not return, I got married instead… And I remember when I had done that, I thought – I can always go back. And so after – what was that, 25 years? Gee. It was 26 years. After that I was reminded [by God], 'you said you could always go back.'

In spite of her insecurities about having been out of school for so long, this reminder from God about her own previous commitment to herself encouraged Kierstie to "take the plunge" and start taking classes. As she continued to work on her ministry degree part-time, she describes sensing God's 'call' and encouragement with every step she took forward.

Another example was offered by Dana. After teaching for 11 years and becoming department head, Dana reluctantly applied for a new position of leadership in her school overseeing the math, science and technology programs:

> I had a significant Holy Spirit moment because again, I was like I'm not gonna apply.[11] The night before the applications were due, it was such a significant prodding by the Spirit that I just, I have to. I have to apply. And so I did and I interviewed – and I didn't get the job.

Being passed over for the promotion was difficult for Dana, all the more so because she was certain that she had been guided by God to apply in the first place. The fact that she did not get the position left her restless, questioning what the point had been and what she wanted for her future. A few months later, Dana learned about an opening at her local church. She started to wonder whether that was where she was meant to be and whether the promotion falling through was God's way of bringing her to a point where she was open for the change He had in mind for her. She decided to leave teaching and take the position at her church, which ultimately culminated in pursuing a career in ministry.

Samantha, a mother and therapist, also experienced a time of inner turmoil leading up to her "call" experience. Samantha was in throes of a marriage breakdown and divorce:

> So as the marriage started to decline and I was getting more depressed and more like, ok what? You know, I'm not going to work some stupid job and have my kids raised by other people so that I can get you [her ex-husband] a bigger boat – like, it's that sort of thing. So it was in the midst of that, 1994, during lent that I woke up one morning and had this profound dream or vision that I had to be an ordained minister, and was hyperventilating

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[11] The Holy Spirit is also God in the Christian tradition. For Protestants, God is one being who expresses himself through three parts or persons – Father [God], Son [Jesus] and Holy Spirit. It is believed that God speaks and works in the lives of his followers most directly through the person of the Holy Spirit. However, sometimes my participants talked about hearing *God's* voice as well, so there are different names or ways of referring to this same deity. Dana here clearly assumed, perhaps in light of my own Christian background, that I understood what a "Holy Spirit moment" meant within the Christian framework – that she was hearing from and being directed by God.

> and you know, I phoned my sister and she said, "well we've all been waiting for you, you know, to be happy and figure it out."

As she recalibrated and started to consider what life after divorce would mean for her and her children, Samantha found herself reassessing her priorities. It was in the context of this period of upheaval and reassessment that she heard the call, waking up one morning to an experience she describes as profound – a vision that left her feeling certain that she was meant to be a minister. Encouraged by her sister's positive reaction, she began moving in the direction of ministry.

Whether they involve a job loss, a child moving away from home, a divorce, a time of illness or failing to receive a promotion, life-changing events can be the catalysts that leave women open to feeling called and propel them out of one career and into ministry. While anomie is generally connected in the sociological literature with negative outcomes for individuals, outcomes such as suicide, deviance and social disintegration (Cloward 1959; Durkheim 1897; Galtung 1996; Rosenbaum and Kuntze 2003), in the case of this study's participants, anomie provided fertile ground for more positive outcomes: the birthing of new possibilities, renewal and a re-evaluation of one's life purpose.

(RE)STORYING THE PAST

The paper has dealt thus far with how women are led to careers in Christian ministry. The data shows that women feel compelled or "called" to ministry, though their experiences of call come in different forms. Whatever form their call experiences took,

for all of the women the decision involved a sharp break with life as they had known it. This raises the question of what the disruption in their biographical trajectories meant for them in identity terms. As Somers (2009) observes, in defining themselves people seek continuity and engage in narrative work to achieve it, stringing together seemingly disjointed events in their lives to tell a coherent story about who they are. Abandoning established career paths – as a school principal, working in retail, working for the government or running one's own business – to pursue a career in Christian ministry qualifies as a significant disjuncture. Once women make the decision to enter formal ministry, how do they make sense of their prior life experiences? In this section of the paper I address how participants reconciled their past and present lives; namely, how they reinterpreted their pasts in ways that connected them directly with their current careers.

Prior Experience as Ministry Preparation

Many of the participants spoke about their prior careers not as missteps or what they did until they eventually found their true calling, but as an *essential* part of their journey to ministry. They came to understand the skills those lines of work gave them as assets in their current role as pastors. In this respect too, the notion of call figured prominently, in the sense that they understood God to be working according to a grand plan, one that might have included preparing them for the role He ultimately had in mind by giving them life experiences they would be able to draw on and use.

Cindy, for example, observed that her seven years in retail stood her in good stead in comparison to most of her colleagues, since most pastors find it challenging to acquire

the skills needed to manage the business aspects of running a church: "You have to be able to administer funds, you have to be able to supervise people. So I felt in some ways that that [my business experience] was a gift," Cindy said.

Patty came to ministry after pursuing acting and theatre in her studies and as a career. Again, she uses her call to ministry to ground her understanding of why she first felt called to pursue acting. She framed these prior experiences as giving her the tools she needed to be an effective preacher:

> So now I know what all that time in theatre was for – because boy did I learn so much! I learned about public speaking, how to speak well, you know, all the things that public speakers need to do to be good communicators. So I am very grateful for my background in film and television.

Stella similarly defined her prior work training as actually being ministry training in disguise. As a high school teacher, her early life ambitions were centered around entering education administration, so she completed various leadership and development training programs, including a Master in Education, before entering ordained ministry. She currently works in denominational leadership and describes her previous leadership training as being just what was needed for her present pastoral role:

> I thought I had it [my life direction] all figured out and it turns out I didn't, but having that educational and leadership development piece certainly helped for this role because that's a huge piece of what this role is. And so that was the piece – the two pieces really kind of fit together.

For Shira, it was her social work skills that helped her in her pastoral role; for several former teachers, it was the teaching skills they had acquired that they valued. In

each case, the women redefined former life experiences as necessary training ground for their present ministries.

Prior Experience as Ministry

Another way that the women made sense of their prior work experiences was to redefine their former career as ministry in and of itself. They asserted that they were really "doing ministry" all along, though they and others may not have recognized it as such at the time. In other words, they maintained the constancy of their identity as instruments of God, though at different points in their lives they may have enacted the role in and through different careers. They understood ministry as a devotion to God and a commitment to do his work in ways that need not necessarily involve formal ordination and the title of "minister."

Pauline, for example, blurred the distinction between what she does as pastor versus her previous work in administration in a graduate program:

> Even before I was ordained I really felt like I was in ministry. My previous position for 7 years... really had parts that, you know, were caring for people, so yea. And you know even when you're a lay person if you are open and willing God can call you into ministry you know, wherever doing whatever.

Pauline saw little fundamental difference in the work she has always done, though in one role she functioned as a lay person and in the other she is recognized as a minister. For Pauline, ministry is defined by the spirit in which one serves. To the extent that one allows oneself to be guided by God's call to serve others, one is engaged in ministry.

Selah, a teacher for 15 years, saw her teaching role in similar terms. She described her decision to become a teacher as just as much a "call" as her subsequent "call" to pastoral ministry. For her, teaching was so much more than simply an opportunity to educate. She defined it as a way to minister to the needs of the children one teaches and their families, though this work is carried out outside of the confines of church walls.

Patty too defined her former acting career as a form of ministry, a chance to reach out to colleagues and audiences alike, to "speak" to them or touch them in some meaningful way:

> I believe that the number of years that I did that [professional acting] the Lord opened up a million opportunities to be an example of a Christian in that environment which is very dark, a very dark world.

In all of these cases the women gave their secular work a meaning they might not have at the time – a meaning that established continuity in their minds between past and present. They saw themselves as always having been an instrument of God in the world, positioned where He wanted them to be, doing what He wanted them to be doing all along. Pitt's (2012) participants justified their *present* secular work in a very similar manner, suggesting that their call to minister to people reached far beyond the four walls of a church building.

"Now I understand why..."

A call to ministry may shape not only the way women see their prior careers, but also the way they attribute meaning to other significant, often painful, life events. There is

a sense of "now I understand why that had to happen to me" which comes after experiencing a call to ministry and living it out for a time.

One such case involved Dana, the 'teacher turned pastor' who did not get the department head position she had applied for. Though devastated at the time, Dana looked back on the experience differently during the interview:

> So, I'm in the middle of this thinking, what's all this for? And afterwards I could see, God had me go through this A) because it's his plan not mine, so there was an obedience check in there, but also this removed the 'if only,' the 'what if,' the 'coulda shoulda' – all those kinds of things because I did it, I did the process, right?

In hindsight, Dana interpreted the experience as one that taught her that when God closes one door, He opens another.

Another example involved Patty, the former actor, who was forthright about the pain she had experienced in her past. She was diagnosed with uterine cancer at the age of 24 and went through a long stretch of infertility before eventually giving birth to a daughter. The prospect of not being able to conceive was a source of great anguish for Patty and her memories of the experience still sting. However, looking back, Patty observed:

> I say it was, it was a determination on my part and I think a determination on the part of the Holy Spirit to keep me focused on Him and to keep me focused on ministry and I think if I'd had three kids when I was in my 20's, I may not have had that focus... I felt the Holy Spirit's call on me the whole time, throughout my life, with regards to professional calling.

From her vantage point as a minister, Patty looked back and attributed meaning to what, at the time, was a senseless experience of emptiness and sadness. She explained that she

now appreciated more fully why God had put her through that period of childlessness. It was his way of steering her down the path He wanted her to take. Patty also lost several family members as a young woman, including her parents. She had spent a number of years providing care for her ailing parents and also an aunt. This experience too, she looked back on as having served the purpose of preparing her for ministry. It taught her how to care for others and how to deal with death and dying, key aspects of her ministerial role. She saw purpose even in the story of resilience and perseverance that her life tells, offering others inspiration and hope as they dealt with their own trials:

> Through all that suffering, my faith has never once shaken. So I don't – I'm beginning to think that God uses people profoundly when they have suffered because they can't – you can sympathize and you can even practice empathy, but until you've really walked through the valley of the shadow of death and come through it, I don't know how really well you can serve.

These stories and the many others like them in the interviews demonstrate how the decision to move into Christian ministry was employed by the women to give meaning to events that occurred in the *past*, as well as *current* and *future* endeavours. They construct a narrative of call in line with the norms of other such narratives, but also weave their unique turning points into the story in a way that blends the past – sometimes surprisingly seamlessly - with the present.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

While there have been many studies that have looked at the history of, and barriers to, women's entrance into ministry positions in the Christian church, there is a

paucity of literature on the perspectives of women who actually enter ministry. This paper has started to fill the gap by presenting a qualitative analysis of the stories women tell of their call to pastoral ministry. On a substantive level, the paper sheds light on what leads women to take up these roles in their churches - many of them among the first in their denominations to do so. The data show that women, like their male counterparts, feel "called" to ministry. While they see themselves as exercising agency in how they respond to these calls, they understand the calls as originating with God, though sometimes mediated or affirmed through family and friends. The calls come in the form of dramatic and unexpected interruptions to the smooth and on-going flow of their normal lives (as with "sudden revelation" call stories) or more gradual promptings or pulls towards ministry through experiencing "mounting dissatisfaction" with their current lives. A third possibility, one that Pitt (2012) did not find among the ministers that he interviewed and that perhaps warrants greater attention in future research, are calls that I have described as "anomic." In these cases, calls blossom in the context of major upheavals in the women's lives brought on by such events as divorce, the death of individuals close to them or the loss of a job. The disruptions create a space for women to re-evaluate their priorities and goals, and from their perspective, to "hear" God's plan for them as they piece their lives back together in ministry positions.

The data also show that second-career pastors' decisions to go into ministry bring with them the dilemma of how to bring together the two disparate trajectories of their lives – secular and sacred – and how to organize their life stories as meaningful and

understandable narratives for both themselves and others. Here too, the experience of call figures prominently. The data suggests that it is the turning point itself – the experience of call – that allows women to accomplish the work of creating meaning and bridging the gap. The call to ministry becomes the fulcrum around which seemingly contradictory past and present experiences can balance and teeter to be reconciled without tipping. Women re-define their past careers in the secular world as ministry preparation or categorize them as ministry in and of themselves, with even painful past experiences being endowed with a meaning relevant to their role as ministers. In other words, their pasts are interpreted through the lens of the present and given a meaning that creates a smooth and coherent trajectory rather than a disjointed one. The women come to see their past experiences as necessary and inevitable steps leading them to where they were ultimately meant to be, though they may not have understood them in these terms at the time.

The need to re-story one's life, however, is a function of the fact that all of the women interviewed for this study were pursing ministry as a second career. Whether, and to what extent, this process occurs among those who commit to a career in ministry early in their lives is another question for future research to explore. Since it is more likely to be women rather than men who pursue ministry as a second career, this aspect of becoming a minister may be a key point of difference between female and male ministers.

There is a cautionary tale in attending closely to the perspectives of women in ministry and their own understandings of their life's journeys. Given the experience of women in relation to institutionalized religion, it would be easy to assume that their

stories would be stories of exclusion, inequality and marginalization. However, while the women in this study were quite prepared to point out the histories of exclusion and blocked opportunities that they themselves had experienced, there was little resentment or criticism of their churches. Instead of emphasizing exclusion, they focused on the advantages of having had the experiences they did prior to entering ministry. As one participant described it, her pre-ministry life was "a gift." To suggest that such framings are simply the women's way of rationalizing the sexism to which they were subjected or perhaps even of defending an institution they had finally succeeded in penetrating is to discount their lived experiences. To focus only on the "blocked opportunities" elements of their stories would have been to miss the broader and richer understandings they have of their trajectory of involvement with their churches. In any future work on women in ministry, there would be value in listening carefully and respecting women's stories, and in resisting the temptation to privilege alternative interpretations of the women's experiences over their own.

Also worthy of greater attention are the questions of how calls to ministry differ from impulses to make other types of career transitions, or any major mid-life transition for that matter, and how social actors who go through these transitions explain them to themselves and others. While there are certainly unique aspects to making the move into ministry – including the sense that one is not responsible for initiating the move, but simply responding to God's call – there are also probably more generic features of the process that characterize any significant transition. More comparative work involving

transitions of various kinds would allow a clearer identification of the unique versus generic features of transition experiences.

Similarly, the usefulness in this analysis of Mead's (1929) concept of "specious present," combined with Somers' (1992) notion of narratively constructed identities, invites reflection on other cases where these processes are at play. Mead's theory of time in particular, while debated theoretically, has generated few case studies that look in empirical terms at precisely how pasts are constructed and reconstructed in the present. What prompts such reconstructions and how do social actors understand what they are doing, especially in cases such as this one, where there is an awareness of the fact that the past is being reconstructed? Bringing Somers' insights into the picture, how much do constructions of the past have to do with concerns about self and the need to constitute coherent narratives about ourselves and our identities? Future research would do well to attend to the temporal aspects of identity work and the construction of self through narratives.

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PAPER 2: EMBODYING THE PASTORAL ROLE: GENDER, CLOTHING AND LEGITIMACY

Paper 2 of this dissertation will be submitted to a journal for publication shortly. Following the first paper, which emphasized how women *become* pastors, this paper shifts the focus to highlight an aspect of *being* a pastor which is particularly germane to women's experiences in the role: navigating ambiguities around clothing, appearance and presentation of self.

After taking on the role of pastor, women quite tangibly run up against the fact that this is a role which has been traditionally performed exclusively by men. This fact is exemplified in how the clergy shirts worn in some traditions are not tailored to fit the female body. Moreover, there are no clear scripts to follow when encountering situations like getting wet in a baptismal tank or offering communion while pregnant or breastfeeding. This paper highlights how the role of "female pastor" needs to be *made*, in various ways. I introduce the concept of "walking the tightrope" to encapsulate how women creatively work to balance the series of dilemmas they face in creating a role, in this case, navigating the need to be visible and yet invisible – to minimize the carnal associations inherent in their gendered bodies, yet fulfil the spiritual responsibilities inherent in their pastoral roles.

Beyond its substantial contributions in illuminating this important facet of the female pastor's experience, this paper engages theoretically with interactionist theories of role making, presentation of self, legitimacy and role conflict. The paper further elaborates on the themes of self and identity introduced in paper 1, and introduces a line

of thinking which becomes central to paper 3: that female pastors have unique concerns, and that women will experience and perform the pastoral role in ways that are different from their male counterparts.

PAPER 2: EMBODYING THE PASTORAL ROLE: GENDER, CLOTHING AND LEGITIMACY

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a qualitative analysis of women's presentations of self as pastors within the Christian church. Drawing on 44 semi-structured interviews with pastors from different denominations, I discuss the unique challenges and triumphs women face in dressing to fulfil the various facets of the pastoral role. I develop the concept "walking the tightrope" to encapsulate the anxiety and balancing act required to "appear" in a role where no prior conventions or scripts exist, and the artful manner in which pioneering female pastors rise to the occasion. Operating in a traditionally male dominated domain, female pastors occupy a liminal space and must discover how to overcome the carnal associations inherent in their female bodies in order to appear fully legitimate in this spiritual role. The tightrope they walk is a balancing act between seeking to be seen while at the same time desiring to minimize their own visibility so that God might work through them. Through their daily decisions and strategies, women create a script where none has existed before, and redefine what a pastor can look like.

Keywords: Identity, Clothing, Liminal, Carnal, Spiritual, Christian Ministry, Gender

FIGURE 1: THE WOMEN IN MINISTRY "CALENDAR PROJECT"

Rev. Trish, tilting her head too much

"Don't tilt your head to the side. You look like Jennifer Aniston. You have to look like a minister." This is the comment the photographer made to Rev. Trish when taking her photo for the church 'wall of ministerial fame.' It caused her to reflect on the "appropriate" look for a pastor and, when shared on Facebook, incited the telling of similar stories by other women in ministerial roles who had experienced questions or disapproval based on their physical appearance or activities. A group of these women ultimately came together to create a wall calendar filled with pictures of female pastors from across Canada "at work and at play." Flipping through the calendar, one sees female pastors at protest marches and pride parades, nursing babies and studying micro-organisms. One woman poses in the bush with a hunting rifle while another proudly displays her collection of high heeled shoes. The calendar is meant to be "part protest and provocation," they say. There

is a statement on the back of the calendar that indicates that its purpose is to cause people to question "what DOES a minister look like? Who decides what is appropriate for a woman in ministry to wear, who she should love and what she should and shouldn't do with her free time?" Sales for the 2015 calendar were so high, the group is considering the production of more calendars in the future.

INTRODUCTION

These are interesting days for women in positions of leadership in the Christian church. Until recently, ordination as a minister in the vast majority of Christian denominations was open only to men, with strict rules and restrictions around how and in what roles women could serve. The first denomination to ordain women into pastoral leadership was the Congregationalists, in 1853. Women have been ordained in the Salvation Army since 1870, with several other mainline denominations following suit gradually, through to the mid 1900's (Chaves 1997). Other denominations, like the Roman Catholic Church, have yet to grant women full ordination privileges, although women have served as nuns and in other circumscribed leadership positions as needed (i.e.: as 'pastors' when there is a shortage of priests) in this tradition for many years (Chaves 1997), and also more recently as lay assistants for masses.

Although some traditions were early adopters of the ordination of women, Sullins (2001) notes that women have really only started entering into ministry positions in significant numbers since 1970, making the past 45 years a significant time of change in the Christian church. Steadily increasing numbers of female pastors in several mainline Christian denominations (Stewart-Thomas, 2010; Sullins 2001) have led Nesbitt (1997) to suggest that the profession is being "feminized" (Nesbitt 1997:8), at least in terms of the ratio of women to men entering seminary since the beginning of the 21st century. In light of these developments, the study of the entrance and experiences of this increasingly

influential group of Christian leaders has much to reveal about institutional change, as well as the changing face of the clerical role itself.

In a previous paper (Steeves, 2017 Forthcoming), I addressed how women have made the decision to enter into pastoral roles over the past 40 years, despite the scarcity of female role-models and, in many cases, the dramatic changes they needed to make in their lives to do so. For most of these pioneering women, experiencing a "call to ministry" involved a journey fraught with confusion and uncertainty as they worked through whether a career in ministry could be a realistic possibility. Yet making the decision to enter ministry is only the first step in an even longer journey of *becoming* a pastor. For those who make it through their training and become ordained, the challenge becomes to work out what it means to be a *female* pastor. The relatively recent emergence of this role for women provokes several questions, including: what does a pastor look like? And what kind of face and identity work must *women* do to maintain their legitimacy in this role?

Drawing on 44 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with female ministers, this paper looks at the issue of choosing, on a daily basis, what to wear and how to appear as a pastor. While seemingly trivial, the question of what to wear captures many of the fundamental challenges female ministers find themselves confronting – expressed by the women themselves as "walking a tightrope." This metaphor, which runs through my analysis, reflects the complexities women experience in deciding what to wear and the fine balance they feel they need to achieve as they reconcile institutional clothing norms,

personal preferences, and competing social expectations. They want to look professional but also feminine; they want to be seen as legitimate but also to push the boundaries of what pastoral "legitimacy" looks like; they want to be visible – their very presence in the church in the positions they are now holding is a dramatic symbol of change in their churches – but not so visible that they become the center of attention and a distraction from their spiritual missions. How they balance these considerations and navigate these clothing dilemmas is the question at the heart of my analysis.

This paper will proceed by discussing the theoretical work in the area of presentation of self and identity, as well as dress, appearance and legitimacy. I then provide an overview of the data and methods used to conduct this study. Drawing on the metaphor of the "tightrope," my analysis section explores how women both experience and artfully navigate the series of dilemmas they face in the area of presentation of self. To conclude, I discuss the importance of these findings for understanding this group of leaders, but also for expanding theoretical understandings of the situational, interactional nature of self-presentation and identity work dilemmas.

THEORY

Identity & Identity Work

Actors fill a variety of roles in their everyday lives, from being a mother, brother or student to a manager, runner or Sunday school teacher. Scott (2015) defines identity as "a set of integrated ideas about the self, the roles we play and the qualities that make us unique" (2). Lindesmith et al. (1999) suggest two ways of thinking about the self,

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distinguishing the *linguistic self* – the self as represented through language and biographical stories – from the *material self*, or the body and other parts of the self that are visible. Along with being linguistic and material selves, many interpretive theories suggest that we are also *interactional selves*, meaning that the way we define ourselves is highly relational – developed in interaction with other significant people around us, and thus malleable throughout both the life course and across social situations (Goffman 1958; Mead 1934; Prus 1996; Scott 2015).

While all roles and positions come with a series of expectations, scripts and demands regarding how to execute a presentation of self, Scott (2015) argues that individuals do not simply passively conform to such constraints. For Scott, there is a difference between the role itself, and one's actual performance in it. While "ideal typical" (Weber) expectations develop around what roles like police officer, pastor, teacher or mother entail, there are also, theoretically, "an infinite number of possible ways of performing [these roles], depending on actors' different interpretations" (85). Actors thus have a great amount of freedom not only in choosing what roles to occupy, but also in choosing how to make or re-make these various roles they inhabit. Accomplishing this identity work is a real art form, especially in situations where normative scripts may be ambiguous or contradictory.

Goffman (1958) contributed in important ways to uncovering the strategies people use to artfully construct and perform their roles. His dramaturgical approach and its attention to the presentation of self is perhaps the most well-known work on the "self" in

the interpretive tradition. Drawing parallels between the world of theatre and that of everyday life, Goffman describes people as actors on a stage where social interactions play out and scripts, roles, props, settings and audiences assist and otherwise influence the part one plays. Goffman points out that everyday life contains both its "front stage" and "back stage" moments; situations where actors feel pressure to keep up particular appearances in accordance with roles can be distinguished from those in which they feel free to let down their guard. "Front stage" arenas include many elements, ranging from other actors to physical props, which can be manipulated by social actors as they present themselves and perform their roles. Clothing is one such prop.

Stone (1990) writes more specifically about the presentation of self as it pertains to clothing. He too recognizes that identities are socially situated, and thus involve actors making announcements about who they are, and others interpreting these announcements. One way of "announcing" an identity is through the clothing we wear. Stone (1990) states, "one's clothes impart value to the wearer, both in the wearer's own eyes and in the eyes of others" (142). Appraisals are made and communicated based on outward physical appearances, and the wearer comes to see themself through the perceived opinion of the other and internalizes positive or negative imagined judgments, an assessment which harkens back to classical theorist Cooley's (1922) concept of the "looking glass self". According to Stone (1990), there is an intersubjective, social nature to choosing clothes and getting dressed: "As the self is dressed, it is simultaneously addressed, for whenever we clothe ourselves, we dress 'toward' or address some audience whose validating

responses are essential to the establishment of our self" (148). While clothing comes to have meaning in connection with presentation of self, Stone (1990) recognizes that this meaning is not inherent in the clothing itself. Davis (1991) makes the same point in questioning the designation of erotic or chaste to particular fabrics or clothing styles. No piece of clothing is in and of itself either "modest" or "immodest;" rather, these are judgments that social actors bring to their reactions to certain clothing styles. In doing so, however, they consider codes of dress that communities establish. Aware of these codes, individuals make their decisions about what to wear keeping the "generalized other" in mind.

Davis (1991) further notes that actors espouse multiple, sometimes ambivalent roles, and may face more or less difficulty in attempting to dress towards multiple presentations of self in any given situation. More broadly, Gross and Stone (1964) discuss how sometimes the multiple roles actors embody can conflict with each other. Sometimes a subsidiary role can leak out, spoiling or complicating an actor's attempt to sustain a different, dominant role within a situation. These "subsidiary roles" could be identity alignments operating in the background, like one's political views or relationship status, a stigmatizing past identity, such as having been a prison inmate, or – most salient for this study – an adjunct role like one's gender. Mitigating such "dramaturgical dilemmas" (Scott 2015, p. 86) takes intentionality, care and the development of several interactional strategies for pulling off a seamless performance.

Building on Stone's foundational work, Hunt and Miller (1997) elaborate on how clothing rhetoric can contribute to individuals' identity work/talk. In analyzing how sorority women talk about their own appearances and those of others, these researchers identify three "taken-for-granted rules" (70) that guide their evaluations: moral precepts (some categories of dress are more or less morally acceptable than others), program neutralizations (justifications given for keeping or breaking certain appearance norms), and review neutralizations (neutralizations of those who keep or break appearance norms). Hunt and Miller (1997) ultimately conclude that appearance norms are both created and maintained interactionally through such discourse. It follows, then, that the discourse employed by the church around gender, appearance and the body will be significant in informing the clothing norms female pastors encounter.

Gender & The Body

Women are arguably more readily assessed by their dress and appearance than men, and more discriminated against based on the form and physical functions of their bodies (Acker 1990; Lorber 1993; Ortner 1974; Phipps 1980). Feminist theorists note that across culture, time period, and belief system, women are frequently attributed inferior cultural status and value as compared to men (Ortner 1974). Ortner (1974) posits that this occurs because the reproductive functions of their bodies are perceived in many cultures to align them more closely with *nature*, while men, owing to the sort of creative, industrious work they have traditionally performed in the public sphere, are perceived as being symbolically aligned with *culture*. Because culture is evaluated as the superior,

more "human," structure through which order is imposed on the primal, chaotic forces of nature, men's bodies and roles in society are attributed a higher value than those of women (Ortner 1974). Although more recent feminist anthropologists have challenged the universality of the binary distinction between nature and culture, and the corresponding association with the opposition between female and male, Ortner's insight remains useful for understanding the complexity of the predicament that women pastors face when making decisions about self-presentation (For problematization of Ortner's model, see Yanagisako & Delaney 1995 and MacCormac & Strathern 1980).

Also specific to the Judaeo-Christian tradition is the well known creation story in which Eve – the woman God created and placed in the garden of Eden with Adam – is tempted and takes an apple from the forbidden tree, the "original sin" which resulted in humanity's banishment from paradise (Genesis 3). This story provides scriptural legitimization for the subordination of women in the Judeo-Christian tradition, when interpreted to mean that through the weakness of women sin entered the world.

Women's connection to nature and reproduction also causes their bodies to be more readily associated with sex and sexuality, which leads to their differential evaluation on several stages as compared to men. Lorber (1993), for example, highlights the case of women entering into the realm of professional sport (where they have traditionally been excluded in light of their stereotypically "weak and fragile" bodies). While male athletes are publicly celebrated for their strength, power – and sometimes even violence – in sport, media representations of female athletes tend to focus on more feminine qualities like

their beauty and grace. Lorber (1993) concludes that, "sports… construct men's bodies to be powerful [and] women's bodies to be sexual" (573).

Acker (1990) similarly sheds light on the gendered nature of the workplace – a setting where sexuality is not supposed to intrude. As women's bodies are associated with sex, reproduction, and emotionality, Acker (1990) argues that excluding women from higher positions of occupational leadership is, in part, an attempt to prevent sexuality and disorder from visibly overtaking "professional" organizations. However, a double standard exists: "while women's bodies are ruled out of order, or sexualized and objectified in work organizations, men's bodies are not" (Acker 1990:152). Like other "workplace bodies," the pastoral body, of course, is intended to be "a-sexual;" however, there is an even greater expectation, with this role, that its occupant be set apart from "carnal" things, as a pastor plays the role of representing the divine to humans, and acting as an intermediary for humans to have a connection to the divine – or spiritual world. Female pastors, in this way, stand in a holy place, and any associations of their bodies with sex and sexuality, or other elements of "carnal" nature, is especially problematic. There is a perceived need for women to minimize associations with the carnal/body when performing their spiritual roles, because God is spirit.

Douglas (1966) adds to this conversation through her discussion of the concepts of "purity" and "pollution." In her cross-cultural examination of these concepts, she observes that individual righteousness or purity (and on a larger level, societal structure and order) is maintained through the avoidance of things or persons deemed to be

"polluted" or contaminated in some way. For Douglas, pollution arises when culturally constructed systems of classification are violated: objects, people, and creatures are perceived as "impure" because they fall outside of or cross-cut the established pattern of conceptual categories that a society relies upon to understand and explain the world. Impure entities are thus "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966:35). From this perspective, the recent entrance of women in a hitherto male domain, the ministry, involves disruption of a previously taken-for-granted North American system of classification regarding gender. Women ministers represent a categorical contradiction and are therefore a potential source of danger and impurity. Furthermore, Douglas argues that because the human body is a complex system, "the functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structure" (Douglas 1966:115), namely society itself. In this way, Douglas (1966) argues that we can observe "the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body" (115).

A prime example of this notion is how the reproductive abilities associated with women's bodies (childbearing, menstruation, sexuality) have been used in the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition to justify women's exclusion from certain religious activities and the more sacred responsibilities of pastoral leadership (Phipps 1980). There is a strong taboo in this tradition which emphasizes the "uncleanliness" of the menstruating woman and treats her as a potential contamination to be avoided – instilling prohibitions around her right even to approach the altar to take communion (a sacred act). While many Christian traditions today do not take such an extreme stance, menstruation can still serve

as an unwelcome reminder of a woman's fertility and sexuality – topics which can still elicit a considerable amount of religious shame and silence (Phipps 1980). Here, we see a reflection of the religious values of purity, abstinence, and avoidance of the carnal or sexual contamination "reproduced in small" (Douglas 1966:115) on the female body. Menstruation is also matter out of place – since blood is supposed to stay in the body – hence its contaminating potential.

These observations set the stage for my analysis. The case of female ministers and their struggles over questions of how to dress in different situations offers an opportunity to explore more deeply what it is like to experience ambivalence and conflict in a role. These experiences are rooted in the fact that these women are in the unique position of defining (quite literally) what it looks like to be a woman in a pastoral role – and these two identities (*woman* – associated with the carnal and sexual, and *pastor* – associated with the divine and spiritual) do not always fit seamlessly together, which sometimes creates complicated situations. In focusing on precisely how they "walk the tightrope," this case study also offers an opportunity to explore how social actors respond in these situations and the strategies they adopt in an effort to manage the ambivalence and reconcile conflicting identities.

METHODS

I collected the data for this project through a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews with 44 Canadian female ministers.[12] The participants ranged in age from 19 to 78 (the majority were over 40 years old), and came from a variety of backgrounds and family situations. Some were single, while others were married (with a heterosexual partner). Some were mothers and others childless. As a group, they represented nine different denominations including Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, United, Mennonite, Congregational, Free Methodist and some who identified as interdenominational.

The interviews ranged in length from about 30 minutes to just over two hours. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The majority of the interviews took place face-to-face, in either the participants' church office or home, or my own home. Some interviews were conducted over Skype, and two were conducted over the phone. Each conversation began with a discussion of the demographic characteristics of the participants' current church communities. Participants were then simply asked to describe their call to ministry: what led them to become pastors, and what the experience has been like for them.

My initial aim in entering the field was to learn as much as possible about the lived experiences of female pastors. I did not initially ask about clothing and appearance because I did not anticipate that these would be issues of importance. However, much of the conversation in the first interview I conducted centered around how much time the

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[12] Since municipal or provincial differences are not salient for the purpose of the current study, the women's cities and provinces will not be disclosed in this analysis.

participant spent thinking about her clothing and appearance. When dress came up just as prominently in the next few interviews, it became clear that this was a theme worth pursuing. In subsequent interviews I began asking about clothing more directly, if the topic was not spontaneously broached by participants themselves, as often occurred. Time and time again, the question generated animated, lively and even passionate discussion. In the next section of the paper, I present my analysis of the content of those discussions.

FINDINGS

Female ministers bring a complex range of concerns to their decision-making around how to dress. These concerns run the gamut from more trivial practical apprehensions to the more serious spiritual implications of how they present themselves. Not unlike how most people decide what to wear and when, a basic strategy female pastors use is to compartmentalize. They consider the multiple aspects of their roles and distinguish between front stages (when they are "on" as pastors) and back stages (when they are on their own time). The difference is that, while most people would have little difficulty providing themselves with a fitting wardrobe for each "stage" on which they function, this is not so easy for the participants of my study. In the day-to-day life of the female pastor, there are no well-defined scripts to follow. Most women also feel that they lack a clear-cut division between "front" and "back" stage, in light of the visibility of their role and its all-encompassing nature. For these women, the practical, private decisions made in the reflection of a bedroom mirror quickly become the object of public, spiritual reflection in "front stage" community and church settings. They feel they walk a

high stakes tightrope in their daily lives, and devote a large amount of care and attention to achieving balance.

The tightrope female pastors walk can be succinctly expressed as the need to be visible (approachable, legitimate, noticeably pastoral and feminine), and yet invisible (not distracting, subservient to God's work through them, able to be heard). Here, I will illuminate both the dilemmas and strategies each side of this balancing act elicit. My analysis reflects that women are not all making the same decisions in this realm, and their strategies are highly fluid and in flux. However, I will attempt to outline some of the creative solutions they have negotiated to mitigate these dilemmas: the ways they are making choices in the absence of any set script or clearly expressed expectations or, as Scott (2015) put it: where the rules around how to present oneself appropriately in a role are ambiguous – in this case because the role of "female minister" is a relatively new one and cross-cuts previously established conceptual categories.

The Need to be Visible

Female pastors' concerns around *visibility* are linked to the larger, high-stakes, enterprise of presenting a legitimate feminine *and* pastoral self. It is an issue that is both ideologically and pragmatically complex, especially for female pastors breaking ground as the pioneers in this profession. In order to be legitimately heard, women understand that they first have to be legitimately *seen*, or to be seen as legitimate. Each day involves the minded work of considering collective expectations, norms and values around how both a Christian woman and a pastor should dress, and deciding what to do with them.

Because of the nature of their role and responsibilities, pastors carry out their lives and careers in a highly visible "front stage" world within the community of faith, and must decide what to do with this visibility. Some women viewed their position of influence in the church as an opportunity to exemplify Christian norms and values, chief among these being how to dress modestly and "conservatively" as a Christian woman. These pastors noted that there were impressionable women or girls in their congregations who would see them and follow their lead in this area. Nikki, for example, expressed this awareness; she said: "I'm setting an example for our other women and our other girls, my little girls, you know, like how do we dress conservatively?" Pastors like Nikki see their visibility as an opportunity to embody the modesty expected of good Christian women. Many expressed that this value goes without saying – they would not be acknowledged in any legitimate manner if they were seen as being immodest. Women equated "immodesty" with short skirts (too far above the knee), showing cleavage, and tight or form fitting clothing. Leigha described one daily routine she goes through to ensure she does not violate these clothing rules: "I mean, you can't dress sleezy, you can't have things that are low cut. I mean, I do a cleavage test everyday almost, [to check] oh, is this too low, is this too this is this too that, you know."

However, pastors like Leigha also want their congregants to be able to relate to them as *individuals*. As in every other sphere of life, we use clothing to communicate who we are, our individuality. Sometimes women's desire to be trendy, or embrace their own particular styles, conflicted with their desire to be good examples in the area of

modesty. Contemplating this dilemma, Leigha playfully suggested that we should write the popular television show "Project Runway" to set their participants the challenge of designing an outfit for "young women in ministry" that is trendy without being "sexy." Anna also referred to how trendy clothing styles often emphasize the sexual appeal of the woman's body in an undesirable way: "That's how [women's] clothes are made, right?" she said, "like, if I were to go to a store and buy something that was totally stylish and popular, then there would be people who would not think I should wear that." Anna felt there would be judgment from her congregation if she dressed in a noticeably trendy way that compromised her modesty; it is of utmost importance, in this position of visibility, to not to be seen as immodest or provocative. Here, we see women attempting to distance themselves from the dangerous "carnal" domain so often associated with the reproductive and sexual functions of the female body in both secular and Judeo-Christian worldviews (Douglas 1966; Ortner 1974; Phipps 1980). Most female pastors understand that, in order to be seen as a legitimate representative in their spiritual role, they need to work to minimize the subsidiary roles (Scott 2016) of sexuality or gender inherent in their bodies which threaten to spoil their pastoral performance. Dressing "modestly" and checking their outfits allows them to achieve this minimization of the "carnal self" and operate on the spiritual plain.

Leigha identified another potential pitfall for pastors who wish to visibly embrace their individuality through their clothes: having a wardrobe overflowing with stylish clothing could be perceived as an expensive and irresponsible way of spending their

salaries. Frivolous spending habits go against the Christian values of frugality, generosity and helping those in need so, as with dressing immodestly, women understand that dressing extravagantly could also detract from their legitimacy as pastors. Leigha, for example, told this story:

> I know a woman pastor whose church got annoyed with her because they thought that she dressed too trendy and were sort of like: 'you're wasting too much money on clothes,' because she was a real fashionista, and it was too much. But then like if you dress dowdy, people look down – like your clothes really express something about you.

Leigha makes a significant statement: "your clothes really express something about you." Achieving the balance between pulling off an appropriate, cost-effective and not too "dowdy" look – while still expressing at least a modicum of your own unique identity and style – takes a significant amount of intentionality and care. Shirley navigated this tightrope by having a few nice staple wardrobe pieces – a few higher end skirts, slacks and blazers – she could mix and match.

In traditions where women wear clergy shirts (as in many Anglican and Presbyterian churches), these pastors also come up with clever strategies to express their style through modifying this piece of their pastoral "uniform." [13] Pauline, for example, expressed her boredom with the traditional options available to her: "I have to say I'm bored with the clergy shirt – like with the fact that, [they are only] plain colours. I mean I mix it up, I've got a pink one, I've got a lilac one, so I wouldn't always wear black. In

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[13] Clergy shirts are specifically designed to allow a clergy collar (a rigid white strip of material) to fit in its proper place at the neck. They are usually button up dress shirts with the normal pointed flaps of the collar sewn down on each side to leave slots for the clergy collar to be inserted and made visible under the chin.

fact, I hardly ever wear black!" The limited options available in the colour and pattern of

the clergy shirt would seem to present women with few opportunities to express their

femininity and individuality; however, this does not stop them from finding a way. Selah,

for example, has developed a successful strategy. She too described herself as a lover of

"colour," and because of this (and the fact that clergy shirts were not very well tailored to

a woman's body 24 years ago when she was first ordained), she started doing her own

shopping:

> I went to the women's clothing stores and, for 24 years, I've been buying
> shirts that women buy that got, what I call, the ordinary man's collar. And
> then I took them to a seamstress and I got the points cut off of `em and I
> got `em stitched back here [pointing to her neck], the right size for my
> collar… So all my tops have always been coloured blouses, because I wear
> plain bottoms… And a lot of people, a number of women in our dioceses
> now, now go buy blouses.

Selah proudly bragged about how she now shares her "secret" with other pastors, and thus

has paved the way for many women (and some men) in her networks to express their style

through modifying regular shirts to fit the collar. As we see in these examples, although

restrictive norms and values around clergy women's clothing exist, women still discover

clever ways to be seen displaying their own style while maintaining their appearance as

legitimate Christian leaders.

Finally, visibility, for female pastors, is not just about the ability to set an example

for others or adequately express their unique styles. Many women expressed the desire to

be accessible – both to their own congregants, as well as to others in the community who

might find themselves in need of a pastor. This issue came up most saliently when talking

about when female pastors (in the appropriate traditions) choose to wear their clerical

collars. In the church setting, pastors described wearing their collars mostly when an

event was going on and visitors might need to be able to identify them as the leader. In

this way, they mostly choose to wear the signifier when it could be practically useful, as

opposed to just symbolically salient. Janice put it like this:

> If it was a social function, even where I would need to be centered out, you
> know I used to have to go and open the bazaar... at my last church, so in
> that case I was doing a designated public thing so I wore a collar so they
> would know that I was the minister. But other than that on a regular basis I
> don't wear them.

Other pastors choose to wear their collars even while commuting or on casual and

personal outings in the community. Aware that the collar serves as an indicator of who

and what they are, they sought to make themselves recognizable and available. Pauline,

for example, said: "I like to wear my clergy collar when I'm going for coffee or lunch or

something even when I'm in downtime because I'm never sure if there's somebody that

would see me that would want to chat with a priest." Selah talked about this visibility

strategy in more detail, stating that she wears her collar:

> Always, day to day. The reason we wear our collar is not about us,
> [rather,] we're out in the world and if anybody anywhere wants to talk to a
> priest… we often said, it's like the policeman's badge. Anybody that is
> anywhere and they're in trauma or somebody's sick or there's an
> emergency somewhere and they want a priest, they see me walking by
> with a collar, they can say, can you come? So it's our badge, kind of, lets
> people know [who we are].

Wearing the collar while out in the community, both Pauline and Selah make a conscious

decision to be visible and available to help or serve anyone who might need them, even

when they are not "officially" performing the pastoral role. Andy also talked about her choice to wear her collar while commuting around the city in order to challenge stereotypical attitudes of what a pastor should look like. She said this apparel starts "fascinating conversations" about her authority in the church as a woman, as opposed to a traditional "old white male." In being seen wearing her collar in public, Andy feels she can challenge traditional stereotypes because people see her and begin to ask questions about a woman in a collar. The wearing of the collar, in this context, becomes a political statement. Although these women still report, at times, being mistaken for a nun, in their clergy shirts, robes or collars, they believe that the more they wear these signifiers, the more normal the presence of female clergy will be. In this way, it is perhaps more important for women to wear the "badges" of their profession than for their male counterparts. Their presence in collar is literally creating a role – woman pastor – that may not have previously existed in the consciousness of some.

Visibility is an unavoidable part of the pastoral role that women must navigate in unique and creative ways in light of their gender identities and the way the female body may be perceived as out of place or sexualized in some contexts. Women acknowledge their position of authority and the responsibility incumbent in it to embody Christian values like modesty and frugality. They still work within the constraints placed on their attire, however, to incorporate elements of their own unique style and individuality, and sometimes actively wear the "badge" of their clergy collars in the community in order to be a pastoral presence.

The Need to be Invisible

While both their gender and the responsibilities of the position make women undeniably visible as pastors, at the same time, their understanding of the ministerial role requires a negation, or at least a down-playing, of self. Although they negotiate, and at times embrace being seen, being stylish and being themselves, the majority of women in my study expressed that their most significant obligation is actually to point attention away from themselves and towards the God they serve. In the midst of standing out and being seen, women also attempt to achieve a certain level of invisibility in both their day to day work weeks and, on a higher stakes level, on Sunday mornings.

On a day-to-day basis in their church communities, being available to serve God or have God work through you as a pastor means, quite practically, dressing in such a manner as to be able to do the work that needs to be done. Many of the women I talked to strive to be involved in every part of church ministry life – from helping do yard work to cleaning toilets to dropping in on events and meetings not under their direct leadership. This requires having clothing on hand that will not limit their full participation in any activity. Through several intentional strategies, women work to background their appearance and foreground the ministry or task at hand.

Pauline provides an apt example of the intentionality and behind the scenes work that goes into getting dressed for a day at the office as a female pastor. She described with great flourish and colour how, just a few days before we spoke, she had to negotiate three wardrobe changes in the span one day at work – all to seamlessly achieve invisibility, or

fitting in, on three different stages. She arrived at her church in the morning wearing a clergy shirt and "more casual pants," but decided she wanted to help some members who had come to shred tree limbs using a wood chipper that day (feeling it would be good for "these men to realize I'm not just a talking head"), so she changed into a casual t-shirt she happened to have on hand to be able to do the work. After wood chipping, Pauline headed out for lunch with the female warden of the church, so she changed into a dress she had brought in anticipation of later events. Getting back from lunch, she realized the craft group was meeting at the church building, and so she decided to change again before going down to see those women – after internally struggling with whether or not her dress might be a bit too short for them (which would cause her to be visibly out of place). "You need to think about what your appearance is, but it's a bit of a challenge sometimes," Pauline concluded. Her story reveals how mindful and situational such impression management work is – and how much effort and intentionality it takes to appear naturally dressed for a variety of settings and seamlessly blend in.

Several other pastors talked about strategically making daily wardrobe choices (or changes) by looking at their calendars to see what they had on for the day, and dressing for these occasions. Patty, for example, said: "I try to wear something that I think is appropriate to the situation so that people won't really have a lot of focus on what I'm wearing... something that I feel comfortable in and that I think is fitting for what I'm doing." Julie similarly described a mindful, practical consideration of the day's events and how to best blend in:

> So you know I try to define what – so I'll look at my calendar, what am I doing today?... And if it's a day where I'm just gonna be doing, filing paper work, I would much rather be in my blue jeans. If the food bank is unloading food, and can wear my jeans and my running shoes, then I know I can pitch in and help unload the cartons of food for a half an hour. Better than me saying, oh I can't help today, look at how I'm dressed!

For these pastors, dressing to be able to actively participate in every practical, but spiritual, part of their everyday lives is paramount. It is of primary importance that their clothing remains in the background – neither restricting nor distracting.

The desire to minimize the self and allow God to work is especially intensified, for female pastors, when walking onto the stage of Sunday morning services – what they called their "game day." From the women's perspective, as ministers on this stage they are mere instruments or vehicles for the transmission of God's message. To the extent that they draw attention to themselves, in dress or in any other way for that matter, they fear that they could be distracting others and drawing attention away from God. Patty, for example, very simply summed it up like this: "you don't want your congregation to be looking at you; you want them to be looking at Jesus."

Women are particularly conscious, and perhaps even self-conscious, about the strangeness of their female bodies in *this* space, where some congregations may not be used to seeing them. This, along with the aforementioned concerns around modesty, frugality and adhering to other church values and traditions (also intensified on "game day"), complicates their dress decisions. Women like Nikki spoke about the extra stress and pressure they experience when deciding what to wear to lead a Sunday morning service. She called this her "Saturday night crisis" – putting all the pieces together (often

with the help of friends or family) before appearing in front of her congregation. All this

effort is required so that she will not be distracting –not be *seen*.

Women also described a few strategies they employ to achieve this erasure of self.

In some denominations, it is the norm for pastors to wear a robe (a long, flowing garment

that covers most of their body and may change colour with the church calendar) while

officiating services. In traditions where this is an option for women, many of them do

choose to don the religious vestments – but not just as a nod to tradition. Some female

pastors intentionally choose to robe in an attempt to minimize any distractions their

physical presence might cause. For example, Joy said:

> I wear a robe Sunday morning and it has nothing to do with theology, it
> has nothing to do with that I want to have a set-apartness – nothing like
> that. It has everything to do with the fact that when I'm wearing the same
> robe week after week, they aren't concentrating on what I'm wearing, and
> [are instead] concentrating on the words.

Along the same lines, Cally matter-of-factly stated that "you can't have any boobs under

an alb"[14] – an unexpectedly bold statement that set us both off laughing for a few

moments before she could continue:

> So, you know, it just removes that. And I used to say that when I was
> leading worship I didn't want what I was wearing to influence... I'm not
> here to have my clothes admired. I'm here to lead you in worship.

Melanie also attested to the utility of robing on Sundays, when she might feel

especially self-conscious about how she appears. Although robing is not mandatory for

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[14] An alb is one of the liturgical vestments of some traditions – a white robe that comes down to the ankle
and may include wearing a belt around the waist.

her (pastors who robe are about "50/50" in her denomination), she says: "I wear a gown when I preach, and I love [it]. Like, I am not a highly liturgical kind of person, but I love my gown. I just love it because it's just so easy, you don't have to worry about what you're wearing." Melanie later lightheartedly joked that the robe "covers a multitude of sins" – a cheeky reference to a scripture verse that set us both to laughing for a few minutes.

Robing is one strategy some women employ to address the dilemmas their physical bodies might pose and as a way to ensure they are not distracted – they do not wish to be self-conscious or uncomfortable in their clothing and unable to fully focus on leading worship, giving the sermon or connecting with people. Female pastors robe in an attempt to minimize carnal associations or "distractions" inherent in their female bodies. Because of the perceived gendered divide between the natural and cultural (Ortner 1974), as well as the carnal and spiritual (with women being more closely associated to the carnal and its contaminations), it is especially important for women to minimize their physical presence and its connections to sexual or reproductive functions. It is the body, here, that carries "a multitude of sins," and the physical body that needs to be covered in order to allow female pastors to operate on the spiritual plain without contaminating it (Douglas 1966).

While robes certainly do help some women to "cover" themselves and diminish distractions, for others, wearing a robe is not an option in their particular denomination. And even among those who can wear a robe if they so choose, there may be a preference

to avoid them. Chloe, for example, presented an exception to the general preference

women seem to have towards robing on Sunday mornings. She described being called to

a congregation as their pastor only to shock them (after the fact) with the declaration that

she would not ever be wearing a robe. She suggests that this use of what she sees as a

"costume" presents a "barrier to feeling comfortable and accepted" for those she wants to

reach outside of the church:

> And we have more than enough barriers that I was not going to throw up
> another one... I am not any different than you or anyone else on the street.
> God calls all of us into ministry in different ways doing different things in
> what we do in our everyday life. He has just called me into this position.
> I'm not any different than you, why should I look any different than you,
> why should I act any different than you?

Chloe viewed robing as a choice that would actually cause her to stand out as opposed to

blending in and being available to her congregation members as an equal. Instead of

adhering to her church's norms, she tries to blend in through wearing "normal clothes" in

an attempt to reach out to people outside of the church community who would consider

her much less approachable in the costume of the high church.

Many other women lead in traditions where robes are not worn by clergy

members at all. These women must master the art of discerning and adhering to the less

overtly articulated expectations congregation members hold about what a pastor should

look like. Many women in this situation employ the strategy of dressing according to the

gender and modesty norms they perceive the most *conservative* members of their

congregation espouse. I call this strategy "dressing to the most conservative common

denominator". June provided an apt example of employing this strategy when describing

how she navigated the dilemma of speaking at three different services all held on the same Sunday. One service had a more conservative flavour, while the others were more casual and oriented to a younger crowd. When I asked if she changed outfits for each service, June expressed that, even though the younger crowd teases her, she dresses for the whole day with the conservative crowd in mind: "I just wear one [outfit] – the night service laughs at me, they're like, 'you were preaching at the 8:30 [the more conservative service] weren't you?'" It seems that, for June, it is better to be made fun of a bit by the younger crowd than to be accused of not dressing appropriately by more conservative church members.

Anna likewise noted that there was a large segment of older people in the church where she previously served, in Calgary. The expectations she sensed might be at play among this generation in particular influenced her choice of attire on Sunday mornings:

> [At] my church in Calgary I actually didn't wear pants to preach for a long time, and it wasn't because of anything anyone had told me, but I just wondered, like there were more elderly people in that church, and I just wondered if the elderly people would *more easily be able to hear me* if I sort of did the skirt and blouse kind of thing. (Emphasis mine)

Wearing a skirt and blouse, traditional female church attire, was the technique Anna used in order to practically navigate her ambition to be *heard* and not seen when preaching on Sunday mornings, keeping the most conservative members of her congregation in mind.

Even deciding when to get a haircut or change hairstyles is something some female pastors time intentionally with Sunday mornings, and their desire to minimize themselves, in mind. For example, June stated that, in light of prior experience, she now

refuses to change her hairstyle before a sermon: "because then everyone will comment on your haircut instead of your sermon. And, I'm like I worked hard on this sermon and I did no work at all for this haircut, oh my goodness!"

Shirley sums up the delicate balancing act that the women are attempting to negotiate in their decisions about how to dress:

> The bottom line is not to draw attention to myself but I have to feel um, unselfconscious. I have to be at home in my own skin, to forget about myself and just let the Lord work through me, so I have to feel good and at ease in what I'm wearing and not be concerned that it's too much or not enough, you know what I'm saying?

Women mindedly work to achieve this erasure of self in their daily work lives by calendar checking and dressing (or bringing a change of clothes) to be able to "fly under the radar," and seamlessly appear in whatever ministry activity is expected of them each day. They pay especially minded attention to "game days" (Sunday mornings), dressing either in robes or to the most conservative common denominator in order to detract attention away from their appearance and towards their message and the work of God through them.

On the Uniquely "Female" Nature of the Tightrope

Female pastors inhabit a liminal space – existing "betwixt-and-between established states of political-jural structure" (Turner 1969:37). The fact that they will never be male or a-sexual means they cannot completely conform to traditional expectations of what a pastor should be. They exist outside of the established system of

classification, cross-cutting normal boundaries and configurations (Douglas 1966). This state makes them a potential threat or danger to purity and established order, as "it is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is him[her]self in danger and emanates danger to others" (Douglas 1966:96). Because they exist in a traditionally male domain, and in this liminal state, women must face issues that men do not have to face, and they readily acknowledged that this is the case in the area of clothing and appearance.

While the issue of dress figured prominently in women's thinking about how to present themselves as female ministers, so too did their awareness of the fact that there was a gendered nature to their dress dilemmas. They knew that their male counterparts do not face the same quandaries, were oblivious to their struggles and "have it easy." Male clergy don the robe and step into a long tradition of clearly defined expectations; in so many ways they already embody so much of what a pastor is or should be through the distinct advantage of being a man. Women, on the other hand, assert that they face a myriad of challenges. Cindy, for example, said: "I do try to think about what your outward appearance conveys for people, and unfortunately that's more of a concern for women than for men." Lucy similarly stated that "women put up with things that men don't have to put up with in ordained ministry." With further probing, she revealed that one of these things is the ongoing commentary from congregation members about what they wear and how they look.

One situation female pastors encounter that they suggest qualifies as a uniquely female concern is performing baptisms – a ritual, in traditions where adult baptisms are performed, that requires managing your body while getting wet (as both the pastor and the person being baptized stand together in a pool or tank). As Leigha candidly expressed: "it's tricky, right, like you have breasts!" After acknowledging her concerns about "flashing people" or having buttons undone, Leigha went on to talk about the difficulty of minimizing the visibility of her breasts when emerging wet from a baptismal tank. She told this story of what happened "back stage" after performing baptisms one Sunday:

> We do wear robes for baptisms, so I had a bra, white blouse, robe, so when I came out I took the robe off and just left it in a heap. And I was just walking to the bathroom and the woman who was helping with Sunday school, she came up to talk to me and she was like [whispering], 'you can see your nipples through your shirt' – and I was like, '[just a moment ago] I had a robe on.' But it's just interesting because it's a different problem [than men would encounter], and it's a different problem when you get wet, in a tank and you're wearing a wet t-shirt. It's a different situation; it's different.

Again, the distinction between the carnal and the spiritual is clear in this statement, as Leigha is confronted about her female "sexuality" coming through while performing a sacred spiritual task. This is just one of many situations when being a female pastoral presence can pose difficulties that simply do not exist if you have the more highly evaluated, normalized male pastoral body. Other uniquely female considerations include: anxiety around menstruation while preaching (around leaks and the appearance of blood on one's clothes), what to wear as a pregnant or nursing mother in the pulpit or while giving communion (again, one's sexuality and reproductive abilities appear in these moments with the threat to tarnish one's sacred position), what to wear to officiate at

weddings and funerals, working with ill-fitting clergy clothing tailored to the male body, and how to navigate the sheer variety of wardrobe options available to them as women. As Nikki said: "Yeah, men get off easy! They have to get up in the morning and go, 'am I gonna wear a white shirt? Am I gonna have a blue tie or a black tie today?' You know, and I'm like 'Ahh! What am I gonna wear?'" Leigha expressed how easy it is for a man to dress up or dress down an outfit by putting on a jacket or pulling out a tie from their pocket, while for a woman, moving from one "stage" to another often requires an entire wardrobe change.

The need to balance the many considerations discussed here, and get the balance right, was a source of frustration for several women. However, as if resigned to the irritating reality that they have to put so much time and thought into deciding what to wear, women often told their stories in a humorous tone, laughing or inserting cheeky references to scripture as they talked about their wardrobe issues (like how clergy robes could "cover a multitude of sins"). While the real-life stakes of badly mis-stepping in this area are high – legitimacy and reputations could be tarnished – humour is used, by some, to animatedly describe the daily muddle. I often witnessed the spunky personalities of these female pastors shining through, infusing a lighter tone into their expression of the inequalities they face.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Women began to enter into the pastoral ranks in significant numbers in the 1970's (Sullins 2001), and continue to do so, occupying an increasingly visible place in North

American seminaries and pulpits today. Upon entering into the clergy role, women face a particularly complex set of dilemmas around how to present themselves. For the pioneering women in my study, there have been few clear scripts to follow, and very blurry lines between front and backstage situations. In interaction with each other, male pastors and professors, and their own congregations, women try to figure out what works best – to be trendy but not sexy; to display variety in their wardrobe, but also frugality; to minimize themselves, allowing God to work through them, but also to assert their presence so as to be approachable to others – to be visible, and yet, invisible. No wonder navigating this issue feels so much like walking a tightrope – the considerations are complex.

Nonetheless, women mindfully and artfully work out strategies to walk that tightrope. They learn from their missteps and modify their behavior for the next interaction. A number of strategies have been identified here, all falling under the umbrella of "situational dressing" –dressing to suit the occasion and task at hand, whether that be accommodating a variety of meetings in a work day or preaching in the higher stakes realm of Sunday morning. As women develop strategies for themselves, it is important to remember that these are fluid; they change as they navigate their careers, grow in confidence, move from one church community to another, and experience reactions from other people.

Finally, women in ministry assert that there is a uniquely female quality to the dress and appearance issues – men do not have to deal with the myriad of challenges

women face in this area, as their bodies are not inherently dangerous or potentially polluting in Christian religious spaces. However, even though these challenges may at times be discriminatory, frustrating, embarrassing, or disparaging, most women talk about this issue with humour and equanimity. Rather than being resentful, hostile or angry, many pastors joked about the situations they confronted and even poked fun at themselves for some of their missteps. They seem to be resigned to the reality that this is a unique challenge they have to navigate, they want to do it well, but they can also laugh and make the best of it. Perhaps, in time, a script will develop that will offer guidance to the next generation of women in positions of leadership in the Christian church, but for now it is still a minefield and occupies a lot of the women's time and energy.

As Scott (2016) asserts, there is a difference between a role (a job description or less formal set of expectations surrounding a position) and the way such role is filled by the unique individual who occupies it. We have seen in this analysis one example of how role-making is accomplished. While there are modesty, frugality, and other clothing norms associated with the role of "pastor" – including wearing special vestments like a robe, clergy shirt and collar – women entering into this role adapt vestments, choose when to wear or not wear the collar and frequently robe on Sunday mornings for very non-traditional reasons. They work to decipher the norms and expectations around a variety of situations and come up with creative solutions for appearing pastoral, but also feminine.

But achieving the harmonious combination of a "pastoral" and "feminine" self is not without its challenges. As Davis (1991) and Gross and Stone (1964) state, certain situations can present actors with ambiguous, if not out-right conflicting, messages and expectations around how to appear. Such is sometimes the case of being simultaneously a woman and a pastor, and inhabiting a liminal (Turner 1969) space. One's physical, gendered body and appearance – the material self of Lindesmith et al. (1999) – at times threatens, as an adjunct subsidiary role (Gross and Stone 1964), to creep in and disrupt one's performance of the pastoral self. This is because of the dangerous associations prevalent in Euro-American culture and linked to the Judaeo-Christian tradition between the female body and the base carnal, sexual and "natural" elements of humanity (Acker 1990; Douglas 1966; Lorber 1992; Ortner 1974; Phipps 1980). The inescapable presence of the carnal in the female body and its functions always threatens to tarnish the spiritual nature of the pastoral role. Thus, female pastors live with the fear of having breasts that might appear in a wet baptismal tank, cleavage that might be showing, or more comments made on an attractive haircut than a well-researched sermon. Visible female gender markers become something that can discredit or threaten to disrupt the performance of the pastoral role and its higher order spiritual responsibilities.

And so women walk a tightrope – ever conscious of these potential pitfalls and wary of managing and downplaying themselves so as not to allow gender to get in the way of being a pastor. But the same can be said in reverse – many women would also prefer that the role of "pastor" not entirely limit them from displaying their gender. They

want to look stylish, feminine and be able to display themselves in their clothing and appearance as well. This combination of identities and roles demands a new script to be written, and every day, through their normal day-to-day choices and activities, female pastors are in the process of writing it – paving the way for others to follow in their footsteps. They are changing the norms of what a pastor looks like, and thus of what a pastor is.

More broadly, these women's stories provide an example of the enduring nature of human intersubjective (Prus 1996) meaning-making. In times where scripts are unclear, expectations are ambiguous or conflicting and stakes are high, we still search for meaning and discover it interactionally, in coordination with the audiences we play in front of. Audiences may influence the behaviour of actors in the front stage realms, as Goffman (1959) suggests, but actors maintain the agency to enact the roles they have been given in different ways. Through their enactment of gender in ministry, female pastors are gradually changing the expectations of their audiences so that church goers and other community members alike see that women can be pastors, and a pastor can look different – perhaps even feminine (in a variety of different ways). Slowly, one calendar, one pair of heels, and one colourfully patterned clergy shirt at a time, an institution changes.

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PAPER 3: "DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY": THE FEMINIZATION OF THE PASTORAL ROLE

The third and final paper of this dissertation has yet to be submitted for publication. While the previous paper focused on women's experiences of presenting themselves in the pastoral role, this paper probes women's experiences actually performing their pastoral work. The paper reveals that, as in the area of clothing and appearance, women feel they have unique ways of doing pastoral work; women reported doing some parts of the job differently than the male pastors they have observed.

This paper elaborates on five contributions women feel they make to pastoral ministry in light of their gendered socialization and experiences: (1) new perspectives and a willingness to change; (2) a more nurturing pastoral style; (3) a more collaborative leadership style; (4) different ways of reading and teaching scripture; and (5) increased community engagement. The overall substantive and theoretical implications of this paper relate, in part, to the growing literature in the area of "feminization of the professions," which seeks to understand how women's increased entrance into formerly male dominated occupations may change both the status and the performance of work in these arenas. While changes in secular occupations have yet to be reliably confirmed, in religious occupations it seems as though women's entrance may indeed be effecting change.

Paper 3, perhaps more subtly, also takes up the theme of identity so germane to the previous substantive papers of this thesis. Through not only *dressing*, but also

performing their roles in ways that take their femininity into account, women also engage in the work of "making" the pastoral role anew. Paper 3 appropriately wraps up the substantive portion of this thesis as it provides a window into how women are helping to change and re-shape the pastoral role, a line of inquiry ripe for further analysis. The doubts they express in the process of becoming a pastor (Paper 1), are assuaged by the positive experiences their feminine pastoral style elicits (Paper 3) as they simultaneously present themselves in ways which garner them increased legitimacy to do the work (Paper 2). The processes at play in papers 2 and 3 go hand in hand, both papers serving to display how women are carving out a niche for themselves in pastoral ministry.

PAPER 3: "DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY": THE FEMINIZATION OF THE PASTORAL ROLE

ABSTRACT

The "feminization of the professions," or women's entrance into several formerly male dominated occupations, is a phenomenon that is increasingly garnering scholarly attention. Several studies have investigated if and how women might perform their work differently than men, most revealing inconclusive or unsatisfactorily cursory results. The entrance of women into pastoral leadership positions within several mainline Christian Protestant denominations raises questions around if and how women perform the role of "church pastor" differently than their male counterparts. Drawing on a series of 44 semi-structured, in-depth interviews, this qualitative study reports five fundamental ways female pastors perceive they perform the pastoral role differently. I argue that increasing numbers of women in pastoral leadership roles may significantly change how ministry is done. This, in turn, has the potential to facilitate more fundamental changes in the Christian church, changing its relationship to other societal institutions. Given its potential impact on the future of the Christian church, this trend is worthy of scholarly attention.

Keywords: Feminization of Professions; Christian Pastors; Gender; Religion

INTRODUCTION

In 1990, the *Harvard Business Review* published an article which describes how female managers lead in a manner distinctly different than their male counterparts (Rosener 1990). A series of interviews conducted with female managers suggested that women had a more "interactive" (120) approach, encouraging the involvement of subordinates and the sharing of power and information. Women are person-centered, and want interactions with those they manage to be positive for all parties involved. Rosener (1990) challenges the assumption that this people-centric, power-sharing model of leadership comes "naturally" to women or stems solely from their socialization experiences, arguing instead that, because women have not always had access to formal authority and power, they have had to find other ways of leading and accomplishing their work. Even as women do gain formal positions of power and authority, they are hesitant to abandon their "feminine" leadership style, having developed an enduring confidence in its effectiveness. Thus, Rosener argues, women "have demonstrated that using the command-and-control style of managing others, a style generally associated with men in large, traditional organizations, is not the only way to succeed" (Rosener 1990:119).

Rosener's (1990) study raises a series of questions around the feminization of professions, or women's increasingly strong presence in formerly male-dominated professions. Several studies have posed the question of whether professions will change as more women enter, asking: do men and women do their work differently? To date, most of these studies suggest findings that are inconclusive (Adams 2010; Adams 2005;

Greed 2000; Nesbitt 1997; Sweeney 2014). For example, Greed's (2000) study on women entering managerial and professional levels of the construction industry concludes that the impact of their entrance is still uncertain. Women's entrance into construction work has led to the formation of several new interest groups (including "Women's Design Service" and "London Women and the Manual Trades") whose management is co-operative, inclusive, and less hierarchal (arguably "feminine") in style; however, Greed (2000) argues that these groups exist too far outside the mainstream culture of the construction world to exert larger level institutional change. Similarly, the findings of Adams' (2005) survey of female dentists in Ontario failed to shed much more light on the issue. The results emerging from the statement: "female dentists practice differently than male dentists" (coded strongly agree to strongly disagree) were inconclusive. One third of female specialists "strongly agreed" with this statement, and women were more likely overall to agree than their male counterparts; however, Adams still concludes that female dentists are not evidently changing the profession. "When joining professions," she muses, "many women may not seek change, but rather, the very characteristics that have drawn men into professions for decades: job status, security, knowledge and fulfilling work" (Adams 2005: 91).

Among the formerly male dominated occupations that women are now considering are leadership positions in religious institutions. The entrance of women into pastoral ministry within the Christian church has been described as one of the most significant changes within this institution in the 20st century (Chaves 1997). As church

doctrine opposing women's participation in ordained leadership in several main-line denominations has been revoked or relaxed sine the 1970s, increasing numbers of women are entering into seminary and taking up positions of leadership in North American congregations (Chaves 1997; Stewart-Thomas 2010; Sullins 2000). Between 1970 and 1990, for example, the percentage of clergy who were women in the United States went up from 3% to over 10% (Chaves 1997). The Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey reports that, in 2014, that statistic increased again to 18.6% ("Non-traditional Occupations" 2014). Statistics Canada reports much more vaguely only on women employed in professions within "social sciences and religion." Again, however, we can see that women's involvement has gone up in occupations within this overall category (which would include clergy positions) from 61.4% in 1987 to 72.5% in 2009 ("Table 12" 2015).

What is interesting about this development is that, contrary to studies that focus on secular occupations, studies focusing on the feminization of leadership roles within religious institutions frequently report much less ambiguous results around differences in the ways women work. Several studies find that female religious leaders do, in fact, report performing some aspects of their role differently than men. Simon and Nadell (1995), for example, conducted in-depth interviews with female rabbis (Jewish religious leaders), and discovered that these women report carrying out their mandate differently from men in a few notable ways. Female rabbis felt that they were less formal and

egotistical, and more approachable, "touchy-feely" and likely to give a personal touch to religious ceremonies than their male counterparts.

Sweeney's (2014) study of the history of women's involvement in the Episcopal priesthood suggests that "classic Roman patriarchy" (131) *is* being dismantled in the church with women's entrance into leadership. She posits that women, as priests, are "less authoritarian, less powerful, less wealthy, and less tied to traditional models" (137), clearly pointing to differences in how women do their work. Logan's (2009) survey of the women ordained and working in the Church of Scotland reveals perceived differences in how women may carry out some areas of ministry, especially in the area of "leadership." Approximately 68% of respondents stated that they have noticed differences between the genders in leadership style. Other areas, like "collaboration" were also marked as being gendered, while "preaching" and "vision building" were two categories in which most women reported no noticeable differences.

Stewart-Thomas (2010) offers a more critical approach to women performing gender-stereotypical work in church leadership. She contends that, even in congregations where women take the lead, they cannot help but run up against more conservative expectations: "congregations are gendered organizations and as such they are gendered in their expectations of clergywomen to carry out their ministries differently from men, with women's ministries often expected to be more service- and other-oriented" (407). She observes that female clergy members find acceptance when they adhere to the appropriate gender stereotypes of nurturing and caring, and so they do, because for one woman to

lose face could incur a loss of power for many others. Stewart-Thomas maintains that this tendency to conform to conservative gender expectations is actually a disadvantage for women in church leadership.

While several quantitative, survey-based studies have investigated women's perspectives on how they carry out their work in various religious institutions, few qualitative studies exist that probe for links between women's experiences and perspectives and the possibility of larger, institutional level change. Because the question of how women may work and lead differently is particularly complex and fraught with controversy and over-generalization, the subtleties and finer brush strokes are still missing from our picture of this phenomenon. This study aims to fill that gap.

While conducting interviews as part of a larger project focusing on the lived experiences of women in ministry, I discovered that women frequently talked about the unique traits, experiences and philosophies they bring to the pastoral role. My question then became: how? How exactly do women feel that they do ministry differently from their male counterparts? This question led me to carry out a qualitative analysis of how female pastors conceptualize their leadership within the Christian Church, and how they perceive they lead differently from their male counterparts. Several women talked about how institutions like the church are frustratingly slow to change, but they feel that it is important for them to "hang in" and challenge stubborn structures through their presence and in other subtler ways. My results, presented in this paper, suggest that the presence of women in the pastoral role is changing the way ministry happens both within the church

and in surrounding communities in ways beyond those formerly conceptualized in studies

of women in religious leadership. My research contributes to the work being done in this

field by offering a qualitative perspective, illuminating the subtleties and stories behind

the numbers and generalizations. I begin this paper by discussing the methods used to

accomplish this study, and subsequently move on to the analysis of the data, expanding

on each of the five ways women identify that they do ministry differently. To conclude, I

summarize my findings and offer suggestions for future research.

METHODS

My approach to the larger study from which the data for this paper were derived

was informed by symbolic interactionism, a theoretical tradition within sociology that

concerns itself with the meaning-making activities of social actor (Prus 1997). A central

tenet of symbolic interactionism is that social actors create meaning in conjunction and

coordination with each other 'intersubjectively,' and act in relation to the meanings they

possess (Blumer 1969; Prus 1997). Given its focus on the perspectives of social actors,

symbolic interactionism leads naturally to a methodological approach that aims to capture

as fully and accurately as possible the perspective of those being studied, such as in-depth

qualitative interviewing.

The data for this project were collected through a series of semi-structured

qualitative interviews with 44 Canadian female ministers.[15] The participants ranged in age

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[15] Since municipal or provincial differences are not salient for the purpose of the current study, the women's cities and provinces will not be disclosed in this analysis.

from 19 to 78 (the majority were over 40 years old), and came from a variety of backgrounds and family situations. Some were single, while others were married; some had children and some did not. Women who revealed their relationship status and sexuality all identified as being in a heterosexual relationship with a man. The group represented nine different denominations, including: Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, United, Mennonite, Congregational, Free Methodist and some who identified as interdenominational.

The interviews were semi-structured and ranged in length from about 30 minutes to just over two hours. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The majority of the interviews took place face-to-face, in either the participants' church office or home, or my own home. Some interviews were conducted over Skype, and two were conducted over the phone. Each conversation began with a discussion of the demographic characteristics of the participants' current church communities. After this, participants were then simply asked to describe their call to ministry: what led them to become pastors, and what the experience had been like for them.

My desire, when entering the field, was to gain a better understanding of the daily lived experiences of female pastors. I asked questions about how their experiences may have differed from those of their male counterparts, and if there was anything they felt that they brought to ministry, particularly as a woman. Depending on their initial responses, I would sometimes frame the question more broadly: "in your experience, is there anything that women might do differently in ministry than men?" In my first few

interviews, I actually (naively and biasedly) framed this question quite differently, saying: "are there any ways that women pastor better than men?" However, this value-laden question garnered so much protest from participants and defense of all gifts and genders as beneficial in church leadership that I decided I needed to find a better way to probe this area in subsequent discussions. At this point, I started asking about differences without implying any attribution of value and I received much more forthcoming responses, although some women continued to express their discomfort with or sense of inadequacy about speaking on behalf of their gender. In the next section of the paper, I present my analysis of the content of those discussions.

FINDINGS

Although most participants recognized that change in the institutional structure of the Christian church is slow and will often be resisted, they also confirmed the findings of previous studies which suggest that, as women enter into religious leadership positions, change is happening (Logan 2009; Simon & Nadell 1995; Sweeney 2014). The present study addresses the question of how women are changing the pastoral role in the Christian church by doing ministry differently. And yet, of course, some may consider this to be a problematic conclusion to reach. Do we fall into the trap of gender essentialism, reinforcing stereotypes or overgeneralizing when reporting such results? I was pleasantly surprised at how insightful several of my participants were in considering this very question, unsolicited. When I asked her about how women might do ministry differently, for example, Anna, said:

> Sometimes I think the challenge is to break out of some of those
> assumptions that men are like this and women are like this, so I mean…
> yes we need to name differences and things that we see, but how much do
> you let yourself fall into the trap of assuming things?

And Anna was certainly not the first to demonstrate an awareness of the pitfalls of

gender essentialism. Several other women demonstrated a dissatisfaction with their own

proclivities to assign homogenously gendered attributes to a large group of diverse

people; however, they nevertheless were able to speak to how gender could factor into

their own experiences and work habits as pastors. Because of this, I believe it is important

to discuss how women feel they do the work differently and are changing the pastoral

role, which will be the aim of this analysis.

My interviews revealed five characteristics that women feel they bring to this role

which are unique and that are transforming the image of ministry within the church.

These include: a new perspective and a willingness to change, a more nurturing pastoral

style, a more collaborative leadership style, new/different readings and styles of teaching

scripture, and increased (sometimes even extreme or intensive) engagement in their

neighbourhoods and communities.

A New Perspective

Similar to Sweeney's (2014) findings, women in my study feel that they bring a

willingness to change, and deviate from tradition to the ministry. However, beyond

simply being less tied to traditional models (as Sweeney 2014 notes), I would add that

these women also exert much creative agency in suggesting and developing viable

alternatives. Many of my participants feel that their involvement brings something unique and significant to ministry teams (when they work with other pastors in the same church) and denominational organizations. They conceptualize this contribution as a fresh way of thinking about problems that arise in church ministry. Nikki, for example, works with three male pastors on a leadership team. When describing what this is like, she said:

> I think totally differently than they [the three men] do, totally differently!
> … we definitely communicate differently. But also, I see things just from a
> different perspective sometimes than they do. They oftentimes wanna
> solve the problem, and sometimes I say, 'we're not supposed to solve the
> problem, we just have to walk alongside.'

Nikki feels that she brings a different perspective in light of her experiences as a woman. Likewise, Julie gave a concrete example of her own gendered perspective on church issues. Julie's church is situated at the top of a hill with few parking spaces in the vicinity. Church attendance was declining because of the parking problem, and Julie was the first pastor to "think outside the box," as she phrased it, and come up with a new idea to address the problem:

> You know people stopped coming to church because they couldn't get
> parked anywhere near it and they couldn't walk up the hill. Well, that's
> been a problem for 14 years. So, I said: "what if we had a golf cart to drive
> people up and down the hill?" And someone heard me say that and said,
> "here's the keys to a golf cart, I'd happily give you this." And immediately
> our congregation grew because people knew they could park down the
> street.

Julie's congregation calls their golf cart 'shuttle' the "magnificart" (a play on words of a portion of New Testament scripture called the "Magnificat" – Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55). As Julie mused over why it had taken someone so long to come up with a solution to

this problem, she linked her way of thinking back to being a woman: "We've gotten creative. But that was maybe part of a different style of being a priest – it's a feminine mindset." Julie believes that her new way of looking at this problem, and ability to creatively address it, were linked to the different perspective she brings to church leadership as a woman.

A Different Ministry Style

Along with a different set of eyes when examining ministry issues, several women feel they also bring a different pastoral style to the churches where they minister – one influenced by their special attention to nurture and care, and their proclivity towards building relationships and empowering others. This characteristic was the one most commonly referred to by women in discussions of how they might pastor differently than men, and is an area frequently addressed in the existing literature on women religious leaders (Logan 2009; Simon and Nadell 1995; Sweeney 2014). Betty said: "women tend to be more nurturing and that can open doors to people." And in Dana's words:

> We're [women] wired to be nurturers, right? And if we're not, society works really hard to train us to be nurturers! … but either way we get it, there can be just this natural place with people – and whether that's children, youth, adults, whatever – there is this natural place with people that women may have an edge on over men in terms of they just don't have to work so hard at it, right?

Women like Dana felt that this "natural place with people" was a distinct advantage in doing ministry, as so much of this work involves walking with people and being there for them through a variety of life events. Joan used the word "accompaniment" to describe

her philosophy of ministry: "My philosophy of leadership is you just see who God brings into your orbit, you walk alongside them, you call out what you see in them, you know, the gifts and… just walk alongside them over the long haul."

Several women went a step further to associate "walking alongside" and "nurturing" with "mothering" – asserting that whether women have children or not, they often become a mother figure in their congregations. Lynn, for example, said: "It seems to me that there are some real similarities, in some ways, between the mothering, nurturing role and that of the pastor, you know, a shepherd. It's really pretty similar in a lot of ways." The "mother love" she has for her congregation, Lynn says, reflects in small part the love God has for his children. Meghan similarly talked about the "motherly gift" women bring to their congregations, Chloe described herself as a "mama bear" when it comes to protecting those she pastors, and June expressed that she has always had a "nurturing, mothering heart," even before having children of her own. Taking this aspect of their identities even further, in some traditions where the pastor is traditionally addressed as "Father," some women officially choose to be referred to as "Mother" instead.

Many women also identified the perceived advantage they bring when interacting with and relating to other marginalized populations, in light of their own experiences of marginalization. Andy called this the "blessing of being an outcast" – by which she meant that through being the "second sex… discounted, by having their voices not heard as much" women can relate and minister to those experiencing marginalization and

disenfranchisement. One particular demographic women feel they are especially equipped to nurture and minister to is other women. Several pastors mentioned that ministry to other women is a task they do particularly well, and this application of women's care and attention to other women seems to be under-addressed in current literature on the topic. Some of the pastors I interviewed felt this ability to understand women and develop significant relationships with them makes women especially effective pastors because, as Donna put it: "women are the power in the church, they're the ones that keep it going [and] always have been."

Many of my participants asserted that female congregants (and sometimes even community members) would talk to them about things they would not talk to a male pastor about, specifically because of their gender. Having a female pastor they can confide in allows women to receive a deeper level of pastoral care and healing. For Anna, being a woman confers a "practical advantage" for a minister. My participants often discovered this advantage in surprising ways. Cindy, for example, talked about how, when she first took on the role of chaplain at a university, she unexpectedly had several young women disclose instances of sexual violence and abuse to her within her first few weeks on the job. When she talked to the man who had previously held her position, he told her that not once had a woman disclosed such incidents to him in his entire time as chaplain. Cindy mused about this difference, saying: "so I thought about the particularity of gender, in one sense that perhaps it is easier for women in particular to disclose [to another woman]." Julie shared a similar experience she had in 1990 while officiating a

wedding. She had been invited to the reception, and was seated at the family's table beside an "elderly grandmother" who had come over for the celebrations from England. At one point in the evening, everyone else at the table got up to dance, and it was then that the grandmother reached out to Julie in an unexpected way:

> She's sitting next to me, and once everyone leaves she grabs my hand and she says: "I want to tell you something." She said, "I've been waiting all my life to tell a priest, but I've only ever seen male priests, and I could never tell them because they would never understand." And she told me about being raped by her brother and not believed by her family and being kicked out of the house at the age of 13, and never having support from anyone … she just laid out her whole life story and then the family came back and she just said to me, thanks for listening. And all I could do is take her hand and say, "You know, God loves you." And she shed a little tear, but it was one of those like, she needed to confess in a way to a woman and had waited all her life to tell a woman her story.

This experience had a deep impact on Julie. She felt humbled and honoured to have been placed in the position to care for this woman through being the first one to receive a deeply painful part of her story. Julie reflected on this incident further, saying: "[it was] a profound thing for me as a woman… I remember at the time thinking, yea, this is why God called women… I'm doing what I'm supposed to do." This experience, near the beginning of her career, affirmed Julie's call to ministry and confirmed, for her, that women should be pastors, as they are uniquely able to minister to – and empower and hear – other women.

A Different Leadership Style

While several of my participants described women's approach to the pastoral role as more "nurturing" and "motherly," many others expressed the view that women bring a

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different style of leadership to the church, as Logan (2009) and Sweeney (2014) suggest

without delving into the details of what exactly this difference might mean. For the

women in my study, leading differently means seeking collaboration instead of asserting

their authority when leading meetings, congregations, and denominations towards making

decisions. They see traditional, hierarchal, top-down leadership norms in the church as

being "male," and assert that women are less egotistical and more open to receiving help

and networking with other leaders.

When asked what women bring to the pastoral role that is different than what a

man might bring, Summer was quick to respond: "I think I'm a much more of a

horizontal leader, so I don't think that I set up hierarchies a lot… I think I seek out

collaboration." Several other women talked about collaboration, using words like

"horizontal," "lateral" and "team building" to describe their preferred methods of leading

a group towards making a decision. Ellie, for example, described what this style of

leadership looks like in the church where she works. Every Sunday after church, the

entire congregation sits down to have lunch together, and then any decisions that need to

be made are discussed after they have eaten. Ellie feels that the way she has instituted

these "meetings" is quite unusual:

> I don't know that most ministers do that, because they have the authority
> to make decisions, right, and so they make decisions. But I think this way
> is really good because people feel like it's their church… so they're
> involved in all the decisions.

Although the congregation inevitably chooses to follow her lead and suggestions

probably "90% of the time," Ellie insists that "the point is that they're asked." Shirley

shared a similar story about her experience chairing denominational meetings as the

president of her regional denomination's organizing body. Another female pastor

approached her after a meeting one day and expressed her amazement over the way the

meeting was led:

> She said, 'No man would ever do it in the same way.' And you know, I kinda tried to analyze what she was saying, but I had this natural and intuitive desire to really explore what everybody was thinking, and to bring us to a place where we were all comfortable with the decision and so it was probably a much longer process than a man would take.

Shirley took her colleague's comments to heart, and they prompted her to consider her

unconventional contribution to the traditionally male dominated arena of the

denominational level organization. Melanie too talked about the gendered nature of

church politics and denominational meetings, labeling the system as "patriarchal…

confrontational… top down. I don't think it's empowering people." She used, as an

example, her own denomination's proposed response to declining attendance in some

churches. Several small churches in her denomination, she said, have declining

membership and can no longer afford to hire pastors for their own congregations, and so

the challenge is to decide how to resolve this problem. Melanie described how she would

want to move forward:

> To me it seems so clear that we need to make them [the declining churches] a part of the solution. Like, to me it just seems like common sense that we would contact those churches, invite them in and say 'Help us solve this problem.' But I've had this conversation with other clergy, and they would say, 'We are the bishop. We are the ones, the presbytery should make that decision… at the end of the day we are going to have to tell them what to do anyway, so we should just do that'… and I would

disagree with them because you know, my model would make them part of the solution, and then they're gonna be more comfortable with it.

Melanie suggested that a much more collaborative approach should be taken to remedy the 'declining churches' problem; however, she clearly felt her viewpoint was in the minority.

We see, in the stories of Ellie, Shirley and Melanie, how women intentionally strive to cultivate a different relationship with "power" and "authority" within their areas of influence in church leadership – striving to promote a model that is less authoritarian (as Sweeney 2014 also suggests). Many openly recognize that the power of the pastoral role has, at times in church history, been abused, and they do not want to perpetuate this situation; therefore, they avidly seek to share their authority and empower others. Catherine reflectively noted that it may still be true that women do not enter leadership with a lot of power, but what power they do have they tend to want to use to help promote equality. She feels that this is the proper Biblical role of a leader: "When you read the scriptures, leaders are servants and called to be servants, called to continually lay down your power. And so I think that [women's] use of power is different."

Andy articulated that the women she knows in ministry are much more willing to "build networks as opposed to compete." Along with encouraging collaboration in decision making within their churches, several women also felt that they lead from a less "egotistical" place, being more willing to reach out and ask for help or collaborate than their male counterparts might be. Steph, for example reflected that in her leadership, "ego is maybe not as involved… I don't have anything to prove for anybody… the male

pastors always feel like they have to brag, you know, [saying] '82 people came to Jesus last Sunday' – really? [said sarcastically]." Laura expressed that she does not feel the need to be the "lone wolf" in ministry who "has the answer for everything," and June suggested that, in her experience, women jump at opportunities to plan things in groups and work together with others. Milly felt that women's tendency to be "team oriented" and to "network with each other" should caution others to think twice before disturbing them:

> You should never upset a woman member of the clergy because you will upset every one of her network, from Trenton to Oakville [Ontario cities]! The men need to realize this. Because women bond together for mutual support, which is a very good thing"

Scripture & Teaching

Along with providing pastoral care and visionary leadership, interpretation and teaching of the Bible is a weekly part of the job for most pastors. Most preach from the front of their congregations (for half an hour or more) at one or more services per week, and several also teach children, youth, or adults attending weekly small groups and other programs. Funerals, weddings and other special occasions also provide opportunities for preaching, and the preparation work involved in this part of the pastoral role takes up a significant amount of time. Furthermore, congregations look to their pastors to bring them sound interpretation, since pastors have been endowed with the authority, through the ordination process, to speak on behalf of God through their teaching on Biblical passages and themes.

While Simon and Nadell (1995) found that female rabbis might be more likely to give a "personal touch" to religious ceremonies than their male counterparts, exactly what this might mean remains ambiguous in the description of their results. Furthermore, Logan's (2009) survey of pastors within the Church of Scotland discovered no significant differences between female and male pastors in the areas of preaching and vision building. Many of the participants in my study, however, reported significant differences in their preaching and teaching styles, as well as their interpretation of scripture in light of their gender. These differences are quite significant and important to consider.

The first way women suggest their treatment of scripture differs from men's is in their conscious attention to the use of "gender neutral language" when they read scripture, teach and give liturgies. As Andy noted, "our scriptures were written in a strongly patriarchal society," which means, among other things, that several translations have the tendency to refer to "all people" using only masculine pronouns. Women noted that several church liturgies, hymns, songs, and other texts share this same problematic characteristic; however, they have come up with creative solutions to ensure that women feel equally included in their services. Many women talked about modifying liturgies or blessings as they read them so that masculine pronouns are either omitted, or references to gender are alternated between male and female or are inclusive to both. This approach involves, for example, verbally substituting the word "people" when the text reads "men." Women intentionally monitor the songs and readings picked for their services to ensure that the lyrics are not all "male, men, male" and tend to preach from gender neutral

translations of the Bible (such as the post-2011 New International Version or the New

Living Translation). June, for example, talked about a reading on "spiritual gifts" she

wished to incorporate into her sermon, and how she modified it on the spot to be more

gender inclusive:

> It was a great reading, but in it, they had five examples and every one of them was male, which they didn't have to be because there was nothing particularly masculine about what they were doing. And so when I read it out I just, you know, alternated male/female, just to try to remind us that women could have these gifts too.

June eloquently articulated why she is so conscious of the language she uses when she

speaks, and why women more generally might bring a heightened awareness of this issue

to their preaching and teaching:

> It's really uncomfortable when people keep talking like I'm not part of the equation [as a woman], you know – it doesn't matter to you until you're the one who actually isn't allowed in this space, in this paragraph, in this way of thinking because you're saying "sons" and not including "sons and daughters" or you're saying "men" and you're not saying "men and women."

June, like many women, has experienced how language can be used to exclude a broad

range of human experiences, and is adamant about not perpetuating this inequality

herself. Pauline felt the same way and suggested that the son of God in the Christian

tradition would do likewise: "if Jesus was here today, I have no doubt He would call us

men and women, people – his children – He wouldn't be calling everyone of us male."

Beyond addressing their congregations with gender neutral language, a few

female pastors also talked about how they also do fancy footwork to avoid referring to the

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person of "God" in the masculine as they teach, with a particular sensitivity to other women in mind. Andy justified her approach, saying that she recognizes how "lots of women have significant reasons not to want to call God father," alluding to the fact that fathers can be abusive, absent or otherwise dysfunctional. She proudly proclaimed: "since I started preaching, I have managed, because I write my sermons, I have managed not to construct a sermon in which I refer to God as 'he.'" That many women have experienced abuse and abandonment at the hands of men makes some female pastors wary of using male imagery or roles to refer to God, as they feel this would colour how God is perceived, and the sorts of experiences God is associated with, or that by associating God with maleness, abusive male practices might be legitimated.

Betty also strives to refer to God without making any sort of gender designation at all, but simply because, as she puts it, "God isn't he, God isn't she – God isn't it, God is. You know? But we've anthropomorphized God to a ridiculous extent, um, made him in man's image." For Betty, God is not a being who can be contained within one gender descriptor, or in the same way that humans understand and categorize each other. Her image of the divine defies these categories.

Beyond the gender-neutral use of language, women also feel that they infuse something different in the style and content of their preaching. Many women talked about how they bring a different "lens" or interpretation of scripture to their audiences than a man might, in light of their different experiences as women. Janine, for example, said:

> We read scriptures through our own lens, so I know that I read scripture very differently from having lived overseas… but I also read scripture differently as a woman than a man does, so my husband and I can read the same passage and we'll come up with kind of two totally different insights… we have different vocabularies in our own world.

May similarly suggested that she approaches scripture "questioning through a woman's eyes" with a "hermeneutic of suspicion," which, to her, meant paying special attention to the places in scripture where women are left out of the formal, recorded story. She looks to bring light to:

> the things that inform women's experiences like menstruation, giving birth, their sexuality and the violence we experience in so many ways in our world. I look at certainly how Jesus is in relationship to women, how women are in relationship to him, [and] how He empowered them.

Leigha also gave a very practical example of employing her feminine "lens" and experience to the teaching of scripture. She talked about a sermon she preached on Romans 8, a chapter in the Bible that talks about how "creation waits as in birth pains" for God to return. It so happened that she was pregnant as she was preaching on this topic and, as such, was able to speak from a very personal place about the pain of pregnancy:

> I was talking about that, and I was like you know this passage means a lot to me because this, I get it, like you know my pregnancy. Sometimes people have perfect pregnancies, but then he [Paul – the writer of this passage] says sometimes people suffer all through their lives, and I think of this life as being like pregnancy. And some of you have lives like my pregnancies, and they're bad and they're painful but you know, at the end you have this whole life with this child, and labour does hurt and it's hard, and that's what, you know, Christ is doing.

Leigha reported that a couple in her congregation approached her after she gave this sermon to express how much they appreciated her unique interpretation of this passage.

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This was very affirming for her, and she concluded that: "that's just a passage that I could understand in a way a man can't" – in light of her actual experiences of being pregnant and having given birth.

Some women also asserted that they are generally more willing to preach from their own personal lives than their male colleagues, and to be vulnerable about their own emotions and experiences (as the story of Leigha's "birth pains" sermon demonstrates). Julie mused that women have a "slightly different preaching style" – not in the sense of being "more" pastoral, but in their "vulnerability and honesty." Both June and Steph felt that women are more "in tune with [their] own feelings and able to articulate these" (June) and "emotionally connected" (Steph), which means that, as they open up, they create spaces in their congregations where others can talk about all aspects of their lives too. Julie gave a practical example of this openness in her own preaching. She said:

> when I had a miscarriage, I preached on having a miscarriage. It freed up every woman in the church who's ever had a miscarriage to talk about it. When I suffered with postpartum depression, I preached about postpartum depression. It freed up the entire congregation to talk about depression… The male clergy that I work with wouldn't be quite as comfortable as I am to say, "well if I've experienced this, you can bet everyone else has."

Julie saw her vulnerability as having a positive effect within her congregation, and expressed that she brings a willingness to be vulnerable, as a woman, that a man might hesitate to express. Janice also expressed that women's "natural" proclivity towards storytelling – telling stories with their sermons that draw people in – make them "the better preachers that I've heard."

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Overall, women seek to remain theologically and Biblically accurate in their preaching, while also using inclusive language and sharing their lives – the experiences that resonate with them and make room for others to talk about important issues and experience growth and healing.

Community Engagement

While researchers like Stewart-Thomas (2010) report that female pastors are more likely than their male counterparts to be involved in social justice initiatives, probing into the details and extent of their involvement has yielded several significant (and at times surprising) results. Existing studies may underestimate the extent to which some pastors are involved in the greater communities in which they serve. Several of my participants told stories which revealed a passion for allowing their distinctive ministry objectives and styles to extend outside of the four walls of the church to transform and interact with the broader, "unchurched" community. Most female pastors I spoke with were actively involved in social justice initiatives within their communities. While I acknowledge that male pastors have historically been very active in community social justice initiatives as well, I suggest that, the increased presence of women pastors in this domain is unique as it can cause community members to re-think previously held stereotypes and assumptions about the role of women in the church. Their visibility in the community challenged secular peoples' stereotypes that women are not permitted to be pastors in the Christian church, as several were initially surprised to see them advocating in this role. Women's community involvement ranged from special initiatives spearheaded by the church to

entering, as ambassadors, into protests and other events taking place within the community.

Several pastors described social justice initiatives their churches have promoted, in an attempt to practically help those in need and also to bridge the gap between the church and the local community. Nikki, for example, described several local ministry opportunities taken up by the downtown church where she leads on a ministry team. Nikki is highly involved in these initiatives, and has real concern and passion for the marginalized street people in her community. She said:

> I have lots of relationships with prostitutes and drug dealers, I have coffee with them all the time, like they're just – I love it, and I love helping meet people's basic needs, all in the name of Jesus and saying, here we [the church] are... Every third Sunday of the month we meet and we feed them and then we have a church service, and sometimes we give out – yesterday, in the snowstorm, on Sunday, we gave out toilet paper and Kleenex and you know, and you just meet peoples' basic needs and give them an opportunity to worship at a time that's convenient.

Nikki described here her own personal relationship with the marginalized in her city and also how she, and those she leads with at her church, are attempting to integrate these marginalized people into the church community. She explained that her church is much more progressive than it once was, saying: "11 years ago we never would have had anybody get up and leave the service because they had to go get their methadone, and now we do and that just excites me, I love it!" Nikki described performing well-attended funerals for street people who had integrated into her church, and also helping bridge the gap between the police and the city's disenfranchised. Amy also talked about her emotional desire to "bridge [the gap] between the church and the world," and how this

informs her ministry work. She described work in areas like "refugee policy" and "the environment" to be part of her "Christian duty to care for the world." She observed that churches have often been involved in social justice issues:

> When you think about social change over the last five decades, churches have had a lot to do with that. From the civil rights movement through the end of apartheid, you know – churches get things done!

Many other pastors work beyond the official activities or mandates of their churches to truly immerse themselves in their communities in perhaps more unexpected or "unconventional" ways. Summer, for example, has abandoned traditional church buildings to hold church in a local café. She also works as the director of this café, which operates throughout the week with a mission to serve the community and those in need. Summer described her congregation as made up mainly by "marginalized people and sort of, some trendy hipster types." A street busker who is "transitionally housed" leads worship and singing and the whole 'church' experience at the café, as Summer described it, is "pretty informal." Also extending the definition of the location in which one can minister is Julie, a young pastor who held a part-time job as a bartender at a time when her pastoral position was also only part-time. She talked about the relationships she was able to develop in this capacity, and how regulars at the pub would sometimes come to her for advice or help in times of crisis, knowing she was also a pastor. Julie started a Bible study group that met in a local pub and called it "prayers and pints." She felt that the non-threatening pub environment allowed her to reach a demographic of people who might not otherwise regularly come to church or engage with religion and spirituality:

> We did Bible study or we just chatted and over beer, and we always changed locations so it was different drivers… Those people that attended the "prayers and pints" were loosely associated with the church; mostly they were children of the people that went to the church, and this was their only kind of faith discussion.

Julie engaged in this unconventional "pub ministry" in her community because she saw it as an opportunity to show God's love to others, even (and perhaps especially) beyond the four walls of a church building: "My agenda [as a pastor] is not to bring people into the church, my agenda is to show people the love of God, so if that happens outside the church, then that's probably best."

A few other female pastors described unexpectedly strong levels of commitment to community activism. Both Heidi and Andy participated in Toronto's downtown "Occupy" protests in 2011, demonstrating with their pastors' collars on proud display against poverty and the exploitation of the majority by large corporations and wealthy individuals. Andy described hanging out with protestors, building relationships, and how these became significant when she was called upon to use the trust she had built, along with her position of authority as a pastor, to mediate between protestors and the police on one occasion, when tensions were running high. She proudly described how she was able to "broker peace" and help deescalate what nearly became a violent situation. It was a significant moment for her, and for the direction of the protests would take more generally.

Heidi also attested to her involvement in "Occupy," and described a few other protests she has been part of, including one in which she voluntarily chained herself to a

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frontend loader. This highly publicized act attracted attention from the community, and even brought some new members into her church:

> One of the new members of the congregation, the first Sunday he came with a few friends, and said, "Yeah we came because we heard you chained yourself to a bulldozer and that intrigued us." I said, "well actually it was a frontend loader, but I hope you stay anyway."

Heidi also talked about being arrested at a protest in connection with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP). In this case, she actually remembered the preferential treatment she received as a pastor, and how this upset her:

> A couple of years ago I was arrested at an OCAP demo, um wearing my collar. And the police dragged me aside and said [whispering]: "We're not going to charge you." I said, "Really is there any way I can cause you to reconsider this decision?" But it's like they had this kind of superstitious fear of arresting a priest! That was really embarrassing because everybody else was charged, and I was like, "No, [but] I did my best [to get charged]!"

Heidi suggests that her congregation is accustomed to her involvement in protests and activism; they support her involvement in the community. She feels people, more generally, are looking for the church to "walk the walk" and not just "talk the talk" when it comes to standing up for social justice, and this is exactly what she attempts to do.

Joan is another pastor who "walks the walk" everyday, by intentionally choosing to live "in community" (with her husband and a few other adults) in a lower income neighbourhood in her city. She knows that, from the outside looking in, other middle class adults would think that she has "a pretty crazy lifestyle:"

> This street [where I live] you can measure by [police] squad cars, right? Around the corner one block is a brothel, at the end of this street here is a

crack house. You know, you don't have to watch TV, you can just sit on the front porch and watch it all go down. [But] you know, this is where we wanna be. It's where we wanna live.

Joan feels she can better minister to those in need in her community if she can relate to them, walk beside them, wave to them as she walks down the street and sees them on their porches. She referenced a passage in scripture that reads: "The word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), explaining to me that her favourite translation of this verse literally states that Jesus came and "moved into the neighbourhood." This is what she seeks to do as well, to move in to be a positive presence and representation of Jesus in a neighbourhood that she feels needs it most.

Women ministers' desire to be ambassadors in their communities is the common thread that runs through all of these stories – many of which are much more involved and "radical" than existing research on female pastors' social justice involvement would suggest (Stewart-Thomas 2010; Sweeney 2014). Participants in my study told stories of holding church at a café, bartending at a local pub, participating (and even being arrested) in local protests, or intentionally living in a dangerous, low-income neighbourhood to be a positive presence there. They feel that several of the unconventional elements they bring to church ministry as women (such as their ability to be relational, caring and power-sharing) translate into their community engagement, allowing the world to see a very different image of what a pastor can be. My conversations with female pastors revealed that, for them, involvement in their communities and the concept of "social justice" is not just a nice activity, or a religious requirement they preach about or raise money for. Many

are truly "walking the walk," everyday, through their own lifestyle choices, acting upon their personal convictions.

CONCLUSION

As women increasingly enter into several formerly male-dominated professions in greater numbers, questions of change and "feminization" will continue to be important to consider. While a broader consensus has not yet been achieved, at present, it appears that the literature on the feminization of religious leadership suggests a consistent trend towards change, although the nuances and details of this change have yet to be fully explored in qualitative studies. The present study has attempted to fill in some of the gap left by previous quantitative or denominationally selective studies, offering more detailed accounts and highlighting the voices of women from several Protestant denominations.

Like those in previous studies, my participants asserted that women bring a new perspective to ministry-related issues and decisions and show a willingness to deviate from traditional models. However, the present study reveals that women perceive they are not only less attached to tradition than male pastors, but also that women are actively, creatively suggesting alternatives to move things forward. The women I interviewed reported bringing a different style of doing ministry to the pastoral role – a more caring and nurturing persona. This finding is in line with those from previous studies. However, the present study adds to our understanding of how this "motherly" work plays out in relation to ministering to other women – a key demographic to which female pastors feel particularly well-suited to minister (for example, by hearing about trauma or other issues

a woman might feel more comfortable disclosing to another woman). The women in my study, like others before them, also reported adhering to a more collaborative leadership style as opposed to being the "lone wolf" who makes all the decisions. The current study also expands upon previous findings in this area by providing more nuance and analysing women's accounts of their experiences leading meetings and making decisions.

Beyond what has been previously reported in the area of women in religious leadership, my participants also expressed that they bring a different preaching style and interpretation of scripture to their work as pastors in light of their gender. Significantly, previous research has failed to find a gendered difference in terms of preaching style and scriptural interpretation. My participants talked about the care and intentionality they devote to word choice and using "gender neutral" or "inclusive" language when they speak so that women feel welcome and included. The women pastors I spoke with also felt quite strongly that women's experiences can allow them to interpret or speak to some passages of scripture in different and new ways, and that women are more willing than men to be vulnerable and share out of their own experiences openly when they preach. Because preaching is such an integral part of the pastoral role, these findings are significant. Women's intentionally different ways of communicating impact how scripture is heard and interpreted by their congregations, and the sorts of topics and experiences people feel open to talk about in the church setting. In addition, women's style of communication and scriptural interpretation could potentially shape the type of relationship their congregants envision themselves having with God.

My participants also reported a level of community involvement and social justice work that is unprecedented in other studies of this nature that focus on female pastors. While previous studies have observed that women tend to have more of a social justice thrust to their ministry than men might, the level of involvement reported by my participants was exceptional. These women pastors reported extensive involvement within their communities as part of the way they do ministry – taking church beyond the four walls of the traditional institution and into cafés, pubs, protests and low-income neighbourhoods to increase its visibility and promote inclusivity. My participants valued a church that "walks the walk," not only "talks the talk," and tried to embody this in their ministry approach. This finding is also significant, as it suggests women's greater involvement in church leadership may lead to increasing connections between churches and communities, and could impact larger societal norms about what church leadership and involvement can look like – including challenging secular stereotypes that women cannot be ordained as pastors in the Christian church.

My findings suggest that, through their presence and performance, women have the opportunity to change perceptions of the pastoral role, both within the church and outside the formal boundaries of the institution. This study suggests that women pastors are significantly pushing the boundaries for both church-goers and community members, not only of what a female pastor can look like, but what she can do. Since this study confirms that women do, in fact, feel that they are changing the pastoral profession by their greater involvement in it, questions around feminization and its impact on other

professions should continue to be explored in future research. In this particular vein, further probing into female pastors' perspectives on gender essentialism and gender roles on a more philosophical level would be a useful area for future research. Also, in light of the complexity and scope of this phenomenon, future research should consider adopting a methodology – like in-depth interviews or ethnography – that delves deep into participants' experiences and allows a detailed, fine-grained, holistic picture to continue to emerge.

Finally, while these results could be read as women simply exiting the private sphere and entering into the public to perform their new roles in the same traditionally "feminine" way (in which case, you might correctly wonder, what is so radical about that?), it is important to assert that my participants feel there is much more to the story. In fact, it is a story they are re-writing, seizing their moment in church history to advocate for the greater acceptance of women in ministry by standing their ground when it would sometimes be easier (in light of discrimination and unacceptance) to flee from their hard-won pastoral positions. Their presence in the pastoral role, day in and day out, doing things in their particular ways and being certain to do them particularly well, is creating radical change. What I mean by this is that female pastors are gradually changing resistant congregants' minds and guiding an institution towards greater unity of belief around the historically controversial and divisive issue of women's involvement in church leadership. Beyond this, several female pastors hope the inroads they are making will pave the way for the next generation of women, and several other traditionally

marginalized groups, to gain greater acceptance within Christian church leadership as well. Institutional level change is happening one female-led congregation at a time. And so the great ship is being turned slowly, gradually, by the quiet rudder – in heels.

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CONCLUSION

"The conclusion we draw is not that science and art are without differences… It is the simpler but more fundamental conclusion that in both art and science the same type of creative imagination works. And everything that impedes or frustrates this imagination strikes at the source of the discipline itself" (Nisbet 1962:72-73)

Beyond offering a systematic study of the social world as one group of social actors experience it, this thesis has involved the creative, imaginative, intersubjective work inherent in all meaningful acts of theory building. While there is much left to discover about the generic social processes underlying identity trajectories, impression management, meaning-making and relationships – as well as the experiences of women in positions of leadership in the Christian church – this thesis has attempted to broaden our constellation of knowledge in these arenas of human group life. As a symbolic interactionist, I set out to discover more about the lived experiences of female pastors. This is a group which qualitative research in the social sciences has yet to adequately probe, but whose expressions of the meanings around *being* a pastor are rich – aged, like a fine wine – by years of perseverance in taking ground in contested territory. My research involved questioning why some women decide to follow a call to ministry, and how they navigate the consequences of their decision. I questioned if there might be uniquely "female" challenges to presenting oneself in the pastoral role, and discovered that women see themselves adopting different models for doing ministry than those typically associated with their male counterparts. Peering through a symbolic interactionist lens, and using a grounded theory methodological approach, I was able to capture the meanings and experiences of 44 female participants, attending carefully to

their own voices, perspectives and understandings in the development of theoretical insights.

This conclusion affords me the opportunity to review the main findings of the creative work accomplished in this thesis and consider its implications, both for our understandings of women in ministry as well as the advancement of our disciplinary appreciation of the generic aspects of the human condition. To begin, I summarize the key findings of each empirical paper. I then discuss several overarching themes emerging from the thesis, offering directions for future research.

SUMMARY

The first paper of the dissertation applied Somers' (1994) narrative theory and Mead's (1929) theory of time to women's experiences of call to ministry. The paper analyzed the women's responses to this significant turning point in their lives. I emphasized how the "call to ministry" is a sacred and life-framing event for participants, several of whom describe direct and tangible encounters with God that led them to leave former careers behind and enter into full-time pastoral service. The paper makes two key contributions. First, the participants' narratives revealed three different types of call experience: sudden revelation, mounting dissatisfaction and anomie. However, while the form taken by this turning point varied among participants, the overarching content remained the same: each pastor understood her call as a directive from God that she felt compelled to follow. Acting on the call required sacrifices, such as leaving their former occupations and places of employment behind, going back to school, and sometimes

uprooting their families, but each participant ultimately came to terms with what "heeding the call" would entail and took the leap of faith.

The second point of interest in the paper was the impact that this turning point had on the women's sense of identity and self. I discovered that women engage in the work of "re-storying" their pasts in the wake of their call experience and subsequent entrance into ministry. This involves re-interpreting previous parts of their life stories, affording them new meanings in order to make sense of their present call and ministry positions. Bringing together Mead's theory of time and Somers' narrative theory allows us to see the participants' accounts as empirical examples of how "specious" story-telling (interpretation or attribution of meaning to the past from the point of view of the present) can bridge disjointed identity trajectories and create ontological narrative coherence.

The second paper in the dissertation followed women into the pastoral role itself to look at one of the key dilemmas they face in full-time ministry: "walking the tightrope" of clothing and appearances as *women* in this traditionally "male" domain. In light of the association of the female body with the spiritually contaminating carnal and sexual worlds in the Judeo-Christian tradition, women entering into ministry positions find themselves in an ambiguous position of inescapable role conflict. In navigating this conflict, my findings suggest that women go to great pains to dress situationally – in a manner that will allow them to accomplish the goal of being seen or not seen, as the situation requires.

I discovered that there are some situations in which women want to stand out and appear "visible" in their role as a pastor and a woman (as an example of modesty, to show off their style or to be available in the community), and others in which they seek to minimize themselves, and their femininity, so that they can achieve more *pastoral* goals (dressing for day-to-day office work or preaching on Sunday mornings). Murky or outright non-existent social expectations around dressing as a woman in this role complicate the female pastoral presentation of self, making it a venture that requires much intentionality and some guess-work, stumbles, rehearsals and re-calibrating. Finally, women assert that these are challenges and dilemmas that male pastors do not have to navigate, and may not ever consider, as traditional pastoral clothing and props are designed and tailored for male bodies to begin with. The paper explores the processes through which, in good spirits (and not without a little humour), women come up with creative clothing alternatives that enable them to successfully reconcile being both a "woman" and a "pastor" in most situations – sometimes emphasizing and other times minimizing their female bodies. In this way, this paper presents an empirical example of "role making" in an ambiguous situation – demonstrating how women carve out a place for themselves and are gradually changing both societal and religious norms around what it means to look like a pastor.

The third paper probes beyond the question of how women physically present themselves as pastors to look at how they understand their performance within the pastoral role, focusing specifically on the question of how women feel they pastor

differently in light of their gender. While keeping in conversation with the larger body of literature on the "feminization" of traditionally male professions, this topic was also addressed with a concerted effort to avoid the pitfalls of gender essentialism. Several participants in the study grappled themselves with the thorny issue of essentializing gender and making blanket statements that assigned particular characteristics to one sex or the other. However, at the end of the day, all of them were able to point to areas in which, in light of their gender or gendered experiences, they were in fact persuaded that they minister differently. These included their: ingenuity and willingness to change when faced with traditional problems, more nurturing pastoral styles, more collaborative leadership styles, different interpretations and methods of reading or teaching scripture and, finally, their intentional involvement in community initiatives outside of the four walls of the church. While women emphasized that both sexes are needed in pastoral positions and neither all women nor all men will pastor in the same ways, most participants also asserted that women do bring unique gifts, lenses and ways of pastoring in light of their gender socialization. They also emphasized how they are uniquely poised to minister well to a substantial population of the Christian church – other women. The paper concludes that the "feminization" of the pastoral role may, in fact, bring about changes in how this role is scripted and accomplished, as well as how churches in the 21st century interact with their communities and engage with social justice initiatives.

CONTRIBUTIONS

A good research project will raise questions, as well as provide answers. So it is that I conclude the dissertation by presenting the contributions of this research to both substantive and theoretical areas, as well as raising several new questions I believe my study suggests and areas for future research that could be pursued.

Substantive

This dissertation contributes to several scholarly conversations taking place around the entrance of women into religious leadership, including in the areas of sociology of religion, gender and the feminization of professions. Ample data exist that point to women's increasing involvement in Christian ministry leadership in the North American context (Brackenridge 1980; Chaves 1997; Huyck 1981; Stancil 1988), the nature of this change (Chaves & Cavendish 1997; Chaves 1996; Nisbitt 1997), congregational opinions (Carroll et al. 1983; Dudley 1996; Lehman 1981 & 1987; Royale 1982; Stewart-Thomas 2010) and the gendered occupational inequality that continues to exist (Adams 2007; Carroll et al 1983; Chang 1996 & 1997; Lehman 1980 & 1985; McDuff 2001; Nisbitt 1994; Zikmund et al 1998); however, there are few qualitative studies that illuminate the experiences of women entering into and performing the pastoral role, and fewer still that aim to capture that experience from their own perspectives. The present study is one of these few. What comes from working iteratively with women to understand their lives and give them voice are rich understandings of the experience of *being* a female pastor. There are two themes in particular, that weave through all three papers of the dissertation in one way or another that I would like to

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elaborate upon here, themes I have labelled the "Joseph principle" and the "secular as sacred."

First, all three papers confirm existing research showing that women feel they have unique concerns and experiences when entering into and participating in the pastoral role as compared to men – some of which include discrimination or exclusion. However, my findings also suggest that to stop there is to miss important dimensions of the women's experiences. While the existing literature documents the experiences of exclusion, it does not pay sufficient attention to the meanings that female pastors ascribe to these experiences. Their most pressing concerns and their differential treatment by the Christian church and those within it are often met by the female pastors with equanimity, patience and even humour rather than resentment, frustration, and anger. This response is rooted not in their conservatism, passivity, or commitment to traditional gender stereotypes. On the contrary, the women have a sense of themselves as trailblazers and challengers of the traditional order. Their response is rooted instead in their faith and cannot be fully understood without considering the tenets of that faith.

I use the term "the Joseph principle" to describe the frame their faith offers to make sense of the discrimination and exclusion they sometimes face. I derive this term from the Biblical character of Joseph who endured much hardship but imbued his experiences of suffering with spiritual meaning, saying: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20). This statement captures how female pastors interpret the

hardships they have faced in their own journeys; in the rear-view mirror, all can be seen as working ultimately towards the greater good and the fulfillment of God's plan.

Paper 1 confirms that most of my participants did not see pastoral ministry as an option for them when they were initially choosing a career in light of the official policies within their churches excluding women from pastoral roles, or the lack of female role-models in pastoral positions. Because of these factors, my participants often entered pastoral ministry as a second career later in life, and faced unique sacrifices which impacted their families and their own future career plans. Nevertheless, female pastors attribute *positive* meanings to their prior careers and experiences of exclusion, concluding that God's plan unfolded as it was meant to, equipping them through those experiences for the destiny He had in store for them.

Similarly, the unique dilemmas women face in the area of clothing and appearance in light of restrictive norms around gender and their physical bodies are borne with patience. To be sure, women report walking a complicated tightrope when dressing to perform the various parts of the pastoral role, but they do it with style. Far from viewing the modesty and clothing expectations others place upon them as being unreasonably sexist and hegemonic, women are sensitive to the norms and values of the congregations they serve, and find ways of exerting agency within the boundaries to make their clothing their own.

Finally, as Paper 3 details, women certainly espouse unique concerns in the ways they do ministry – including, as has not been previously reported on at length, in the areas

of speaking and teaching scripture as well as in their involvement in social justice initiatives. Women report performing some parts of the pastoral role differently than men, and this is sometimes resisted by others. Yet here again, women largely reflect on their experiences in this area with an overall positive outlook. They do not ignore or gloss over the difficulties they encounter as agents of change, but they are inclined to focus more on the progress they are making, albeit incrementally and slowly, than on the barriers and challenges they face. Recognizing the pivotal role they are playing at this transition point in the history of the Christian church, but also committed to the notion that "all things happen in God's perfect time," the women take a long-range view. While they might want to see change happening in the Church more quickly, there is the sense among them that a more paced and incremental approach will ultimately "win the game" for them.

These findings suggest that studies in the area of women's entrance and participation in religious leadership which report only historical patterns of exclusion, negative trends and present-day occupational barriers are incomplete. The meanings people are making of their "obdurate realities" (Blumer 1969) – the more or less "objective" situations they find themselves in – cannot be assumed and must become the object of inquiry. The Joseph principle allows the female pastors to actually attribute positive meanings to what might be perceived as negative circumstances or experiences. Thus, I believe that one of the most important contributions this interpretive, qualitative, and actor-centred analysis brings to the empirical study of women's religious leadership – is the discovery that there is a far richer and more complex story behind superficial

analyses of women's experiences, and that the impact of women in this field cannot be measured only in numerical terms.

A second overarching contribution of this dissertation is the demystification of the pastoral role that comes out of its focus on what is involved in doing this job on a day to day basis. Collectively, the three papers provide a window into what it is like to be a female pastor – not just on Sunday mornings or in the performing of obviously "sacred" pastoral duties, but in the more routine and quotidian aspects of the job. Classical studies on religious experiences, like Durkheim (1912), urge us to consider the sacred as something completely set apart and distanced from the secular (for him, "profane"); however, this study confirms that, for those who embody a symbolically sacred position in religious groups – religious leaders – this is empirically not always the case. My research shows that being a pastor involves numerous mundane "secular" or "profane" tasks and experiences, sometimes imbued with sacred meaning and sometimes not.

This mingling of the secular and the sacred begins, for several of the study participants, with their experience of a call to ministry. The "call" experience is often dramatized in the Christian tradition as a highly spiritual experience, a "voice from the heavens" or "a light coming down from the sky," In contrast, several participants described a much different kind of encounter. God chose to "speak" to them through ordinary events – while walking a child to school, or through a series of small decisions and confirmations from others.

Papers two and three also highlight how the day-to-day work of the pastor involves several practical, mundane tasks – agonizing over clothing choices, cleaning toilets, wood chipping, going to meetings and lunches, serving in the community, marching in protests. While these more mundane aspects of the pastoral role have received scant scholarly attention, they emerged in the data for this study as key aspects of the everyday lived experiences of female pastors.

On a related note, the study findings suggest that, when seeking to understand the spiritual experiences of religious people, it is important to pay attention to everything they do – not just the practices in their lives that seem overtly "spiritual." As the experiences of female pastors clearly demonstrate, the sacred and secular weave in and out of the daily lives of religious practitioners. An everyday moment can be imbued with sacred meaning, and likewise, a "sacred" ceremony may come to be seen as just part of the job. Paying attention to the sacred as it emerges from (or can be found in) the "secular" and mundane would be a fruitful line of inquiry for others who study religious experiences. Future studies might do well to avoid dualisms and pay attention to religious experiences that occur, not only in institutions or moments intentionally labelled "religious," but in the ordinary, day to day activity of life (as some, like Ammerman 2013, Bender 2010 and Luhrmann 2012 have begun to do).

From a substantive perspective, the dissertation offers a springboard for future inquiry into the experiences of women in ministry in the Christian church, with suggestions for other angles that remain to be explored. Continuing to probe women's

perspectives as time progresses and their acceptance into pastoral ministry becomes more complete will be important. Looking at women's experience by denomination may be a fruitful pursuit, as well as probing the experience of younger pastors entering ministry as a first career, perhaps as compared to those who, as in my research, entered pastoral ministry as a second career later in life. Another interesting comparison to take up would be between women and men in ministry – inquiring as to how their experiences in the areas of call, clothing, and doing the work of pastoral ministry are similar and different.

Future studies might further elaborate upon the themes within this thesis by choosing to use the interactionist framework to discover how women lead in other religious traditions outside of Christianity, and in other contexts outside of North America. The themes presented here offer a basis for more comparative work on women's roles in different religious institutions and/or geographical locations.

Theoretical

On a more theoretical level, I see this study as advancing scholarly debate both among symbolic interactionists and sociologists more generally. First, both individually and when taken together, the three papers further our understandings of how people engage in "role making" while developing and presenting a definition of self in changing or ambiguous situations. The interactionist theme of presentation of self is a key thread that weaves through this dissertation; attending to the case of women in ministry has generated insights that may be useful in exploring how other groups of social actors negotiate the challenges involved at moments of transition or in ambiguous circumstances

where standard social scripts are not readily available and improvisation and "role making" are required.

The processes outlined in the first paper, on women's call to ministry, can help interactionists think through more deeply how adults experience, not only the *process* of transition from one role to another, but also the impacts of transitions in trajectory on the *self* – how people make sense of turning point experiences in relation to their own past and present identities. As Somers (1994) points out, even in moments of transition and uncertainty, people cling staunchly to meaning-making processes and tell stories that allow their past selves to be reconciled with emerging present presentations. As interactionism would suggest, humans truly are meaning-making agents who engage in creative, restorative work even in the midst of change.

The processes outlined in papers two and three can also help interactionists to develop the theoretical concept of "role making" – the creative work that social actors engage in to create scripts where no clear directions for how to proceed exist. The analyses identified how women in Christian ministry are adapting to these circumstances, describing the specific strategies they employ, such as: considering the expectations and definitions of others, acting and then revising behaviour based on the responses of others, drawing on elements of a known role to help fill in gaps, and acting creatively to construct new norms and expectations. Paper 3 in particular demonstrates how blending two *known* identities (i.e.: engaging in "feminine" ways of doing "pastoral" ministry), if

this can be successfully accomplished, may be another strategy for reconciling such identity dilemmas in an acceptable way.

A second, subtler thread runs through each of the papers of the dissertation. It would be impossible to take the women's accounts of their lived experiences seriously without recognizing their relationships to, and interactions with the God they believe in and serve. Paper 1 outlines some of the ways in which the women see themselves as interacting with God, as well as the influence they see him as exerting in bringing them to reconsider their previous life trajectories. Papers two and three provide more glimpses into the women's understanding of who God is and how He works with them and through them. Whether it is in subordinating their own wills so that the will of God, as they understand it, can be fulfilled, or choosing to lead and preach in a way that minimizes their own presence so that the presence of God shines through, the women actively consider and consult God in their day to day lives and the decisions they make.

Symbolic interactionism has a long and rich tradition of theorizing around symbols, meaning-making, intersubjectivity and interactions in human relationships. More recently, attention has been given to the agency of material objects (Clarke & Fujimura 2014; Latour 2005). What this dissertation clearly demonstrates is that social actors also engage in meaningful relationships with *non-human beings* and that these relationships need to be taken seriously in our theory building endeavours (anthropologists would call these "other than human persons"). The interactionist study of human relationships and interactions with God and other deities is beginning to receive

attention. For example, Sumerau Nowakowski & Cragun (2016) have recently developed the concept of "deity work" to theorize how people construct and signify deities – heavily relying on the interactionist premises that meaning emerges out of joint action and is not inherent in the deity in and of itself. They state that "for deities to exist, people must first define them as an element of social life with recognizable qualities" (582), and go on to delineate a few ways in which this happens. Luhrmann (2012) contributes to this endeavour as well, stating that one of her key goals in publishing her ethnography on American Evangelicals was to bridge the gap between those who believe in God (and perhaps other spiritual beings) and those who cannot understand this leap of faith. Through demonstrating how relationships and interactions with God become real for her participants, Luhrmann also contributes to our growing understanding of human interactions with the divine and other unseen entities. While this is a good start, I would suggest that much more work in the development of theoretical frameworks for capturing these processes needs to be done.[16]

Symbolic interactionism is better positioned than other theoretical approaches in sociology to pay close attention to these kinds of human:non-human interactions in light of the particular focus of this perspective on individuals' collective understandings and symbolic meaning-making activity. Interactionists are less likely to dismissive of the ways in which social actors construct their realities, seeking primarily to understand the

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[16] It is also interesting to note that a parallel trend has been developing in other branches of the Social Sciences beyond Sociology – such as Anthropology. In this discipline, "the ontological turn" and "perspectivism" also emphasize the importance of taking spiritual beings seriously as social agents (see Langford 2013).

processes of construction rather than challenging or contesting the meanings that come out of them. The very nature of an interpretive inquiry (to achieve a sympathetic understanding with participants) forces a serious consideration of these kinds of relationships and assertions, respecting the meanings given to them by believers as we theorize and report on them.

I would suggest, then, that this qualitative inquiry into the experiences of female pastors allows us to draw some initial inferences as to the processes involved in human relationships with the divine (God or other supernatural beings). From the perspective of participants in this study, it is possible to have encounters with a living God who can "speak" to individuals, challenge, prod, guide, support and motivate in different ways. The fundamental starting point for any understanding of the women's experiences is the conceptualization of God as an *agent* with whom social actors can interact. Moreover, the women understand God to be an agent capable of communicating and exerting himself in the material world in and through *people*. Another feature of God as agent, at least from the perspective of the participants in this study, is that He defies gender, though they (and therefore I) use the traditional masculine descriptor. More generally, the divine can defy or transcend human categorizations and stereotypes. It must further be noted that the women describe their relationship with the divine as among the most important in their lives, giving all they say and do context and meaning. It is worth noting here that Luhrmann (2012) also found similar trends among her participants, adding the psychological observations that prayer lights up the same areas of the brain as having a

conversation with another person (and thus is experienced as a social relationship), and that mental experiences are changed as people practice everyday faith.

These, and so many more aspects of how social actors construct, relate to, and interact with, the divine call out for more systematic study. In the lives of female pastors, the divine takes the form of the Christian God. But there are many more instances where such relationships with intangible beings or forces exist. For example, consider psychics who mediate and foster communication between the living and the deceased in the spiritual world (and the clients of these mediums), oracle card reading and consulting forces that can help predict the future, as well as the sightings or interactions people believe they have with ghosts, extraterrestrials and other beings in the supernatural world. This is an area of research I hope to pursue in the future, as I feel that the development of theory in this direction can help us capture a broader range of the human experience (following in the tradition of those who have begun to study popular religion, un-churched religion and spirituality, like Stark 2004 and Wuthnow 1998).

I will end with a final lesson I believe can be mined from this dissertation which pertains more broadly to sociology as a whole. Despite the preoccupation in many sectors of the discipline with avoiding bias and somehow erasing our own fingerprints from accounts of the social worlds we enter into and aim to understand, there is still a tendency to retain control over the interpretive or authorial voice. In other words, even in cases where the object of the research is to capture and respect participants' experiences of the

world, those experiences are too often interpreted through the lens of the researcher's own

beliefs, beliefs that are privileged in analyses in a way that, in fact, challenge and I would

say disrespect the perspectives of participants.

To put the argument in more focused terms, much of the liberal, feminist literature

in the social sciences purports to give expression to women's experiences with the goal of

validating and legitimizing those experiences. That commitment, however, is sometimes

put to the test in treatments of the experiences of women in more conservative religious

institutions – as several of those immersed in studying women's religious worlds will

strongly contest (Ecklund 2003; Griffith 2000; Mack 2003; Mahmood 2005; Vallely

2012). Vallely (2012), for example, suggests that postmodernism's attempts to influence

feminism (in the 1990's in particular) – to legitimate and present a wide diversity of

women's experiences – have had a widely ambivalent reception in the feminist tradition

in general. This, she argues, is because "disavowing the possibility of generalizing about

women is counterproductive to the social and political goals of most feminists" (p.13).

Speaking to fellow academics, Mahmood (2005), provides an insightful criticism of the

"secular-left" tendencies to subjugate the understandings of religious women (she herself

studied women devoted to Islam):

> I have come to question our conviction, however well intentioned, that
> other forms of human flourishing and life worlds are necessarily inferior to
> the solutions we have devised under the banner of "secular-left" politics –
> as if there is a singularity of vision that unites us under this banner, or as if
> the politics we so proudly claim has not itself produced some spectacular
> human disasters… I have come to believe that a certain amount of self-
> scrutiny and skepticism is essential regarding the certainty of my own

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> political commitments, when trying to understand the lives of others who do not necessarily share these commitments (p. xxiii).

It would be remiss to not admit that this statement strongly influenced the way I approached my own study of female pastors – as I would have been initially tempted to read oppression, inequality and patriarchy into their experiences, approaching them through my own sociological lens. Likewise, I was influenced by the position Griffith (2000) took in her study of the evangelical women's "Aglow" prayer movement in the United States. She too discusses the necessity of rejecting traditional feminist understandings of power when it comes to looking at these women's positions of submission. Reality, she asserts, is much more "muddled, [as] women have always carved out spaces for themselves within the social, historical, cultural and religious structures that constrain them and have resisted those structures in subtle and unexpected ways" (p.14).

Of course, feminist frameworks have branched out and developed profusely over recent years, and I cannot presume to offer a knowledgeable critique of the proliferation of the feminisms. However, what I do wish to assert is that there may still be a tendency, in some branches of feminism, and in sociology more generally, to privilege a liberal, secular lens much too narrow to encompass the complexity of women's experiences in and relationships with more conservative religious institutions. One pertinent example of this is our use of the concept of "agency." Mack (2003) argues that there are some aspects of religious women's mindsets which may be difficult to comprehend within the framework of a secular, liberal model of agency (as evidenced in her feminist analysis of

Quaker women). She advocates for a new conceptualization of agency in which:

"autonomy is less important than self-transcendence and in which the energy to act in the

world is generated and sustained by a prior act of personal surrender" (Mack 2003,

p.156). That obedience, surrender and submission can also lead to agency and the ability

to act significantly in the world is also evidenced in my study of female pastors. As Mack

(2003) notes, when you look at historical social change initiatives, religious women have

often been at the forefront of action both in religious institutions and within their

communities, as continues to be the case today.[17] My participants are certainly examples

of this, taking up the torch in their own time and contexts.

   An interactionist study of this nature urges other sociologists to use theoretical

frameworks like "agency" and "feminism" as sensitizing concepts when first approaching

data or entering into the field – to listen to women's voices and then write the story that

emerges. This is, for example, is exactly how Ecklund (2003) approached her study of

Catholic women who also professed to be feminists – two seemingly contradictory

identities. She paid particular attention to how her participants reconciled these two

identities through the construction of their own definitions of both *feminism* and

Catholicism. Paying particular attention to definitions of the situation in this way is, of

course, a very interactionist priority. Like Ecklund (2003), I decided early on in my

research that I would not impose my own definitions of things like agency, oppression, or

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[17] Mack (2003) makes reference to the significant historical influence of queens, aristocratic women, Catholic nuns, mystics, puritan goodwives, as well as female sectarian prophets, religious tract and sermon writers, and social reformers (pp. 155-156).

anything else onto the lives of female pastors, and I would do the hard work of listening

for every nuance of the larger story they wanted to tell, giving their voices and

explanations primacy over my own. I believe that once my eyes were opened to be able to

see different representations of what it means to thrive as a woman, this opened up a

whole world of possibilities for acknowledging novel representations of what it means to

engage in other areas of social life as well. What do we miss, as sociologists, when we

impose stringent boundaries around how we define "agency" – or the act of being or

doing something?

A more concrete example of what is lost when ideological blinders get in the way

comes clear in the case of how women see themselves as doing pastoral ministry

differently than their predecessors. With the benefit of having the wider-lens

understanding of their stories, I would suggest that women in this context are actually

also doing social activism and advocacy in a way that has not yet been broadly

acknowledged or imagined in our discipline.

Over coffee or tea, in church offices around the kitchen table or in a noisy diner

environment, I was made privy to the stories of several women who face opposition to

their leadership, but patiently hold their ground. Quietly, slowly, and steadfastly –

through staying the course and doing their jobs exceptionally well, women exert agency

and gradually change the perspectives of those who would begrudge them their leadership

position in the church. Not through rebellion, protests or demonstrations, but rather

through doing the quiet work of showing up day in and day out, showing grace, having

tough conversations and doing their work well, peoples' opinions change. Norms and values change. An institution changes. Thus, one broader implication of this case study of female pastors pertains to the way we, as sociologists, conceptualize – and even identify – those who are engaging in agentival, meaningful forms of advocacy and social change. My findings lead me to urge sociologists to acknowledge and give voice to different methods of pursuing social justice beyond protests, social movements, social action, riots and other more visible and vocal disruptions. In drawing such narrow boundaries around what it means to advocate for and advance a cause, other forms and experiences of social change making are excluded. Sociology needs to develop theories around this process that allow room for both the vocal moments *and* the quiet, longitudinal commitments people make to instigating institutional change.

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