CALLED AND CHALLENGED: EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN CLERGY IN BRAZOS COUNTY AND HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

SARAH RUTHERFORD

Submitted to the LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research office at
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the designation as an

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

Approved by
Faculty Research Advisor: Dr. Robin Veldman

May 2021

Major: University Studies – Religious Thought, Practices, and Cultures Concentration

RESEARCH COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATION

Research activities involving the use of human subjects, vertebrate animals, and/or biohazards must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate Texas A&M University regulatory research committee (i.e., IRB, IACUC, IBC) before the activity can commence. This requirement applies to activities conducted at Texas A&M and to activities conducted at non-Texas A&M facilities or institutions. In both cases, students are responsible for working with the relevant Texas A&M research compliance program to ensure and document that all Texas A&M compliance obligations are met before the study begins.

I, Sarah Rutherford, certify that all research compliance requirements related to this Undergraduate Research Scholars thesis have been addressed with my Research Faculty Advisor prior to the collection of any data used in this final thesis submission.

This project required approval from the Texas A&M University Research Compliance & Biosafety office.

TAMU IRB #: IRB2020-1147M Approval Date: 10/21/2020 Expiration Date: 10/21/2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT

Called and Challenged: Examining the Experiences of Women Clergy in Brazos County and Harris County, Texas

Sarah Rutherford
Department of Interdisciplinary Critical Studies
Texas A&M University

Research Faculty Advisor: Dr. Robin Veldman
Department of Interdisciplinary Critical Studies
Texas A&M University

Although women clergy have been ordained in many American Christian denominations since the mid-twentieth century, women clergy still make up a minority of clergy within their respective denominations despite making up half of qualified seminary graduates. Women therefore appear to decline to pursue ordination or to leave pastoral ministry at a higher rate than men. Existing literature suggests that reasons for women leaving ministry include challenges with hiring discrimination, the pay gap, family needs, and other factors which contribute to burnout. This study uses qualitative methods to explore the reasons which may lead clergywomen to leave ministry in Brazos County and Harris County, Texas, through semi-structured interviews with clergywomen and women who formerly served as clergy. By focusing on clergy within a specific regional context, this study examines the influence of regional bodies and local cultural norms on the experiences of clergywomen. I find that all of the above factors influence clergywomen's choice to stay in or leave ministry and that many women's decisions to leave ministry are based on a combination of these reasons. Building on the existing literature

exploring the many obstacles that female clergy encounter, I suggest that women clergy are subject to “gender tests” which serve to maintain the patriarchal character of clergy even while a woman is occupying a certain clergy position. These tests take the form of microaggressions about clergywomen’s physical “femaleness” and aim to counteract any potential change in the culturally normative gender of clergy. The resulting continuation of the idea of inherently male clergy exacerbates existing hiring discrimination and congregational bias against women clergy.

DEDICATION

To all of the clergywomen who shared their stories with me.

It truly is a privilege.

Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contributors

I would like to thank my faculty advisor, Dr. Robin Veldman, for her guidance, revisions, and support throughout the course of this research.

Thanks also go to the faculty and staff in the Religious Studies program and the Sociology department who have made my time at Texas A&M so incredible. I am particularly grateful to Andrew McNeely for introducing me to qualitative research. This project would never have happened without my experience on your team.

I would also like to thank the women clergy in my life who have listened to me, encouraged me, and inspired me to study this topic: Amy K, Cara, Caressa, Emily, Laura, Tracey, and others. I cannot begin to convey how much I value your mentorship.

Thanks to my family for their constant, unwavering support of both my research and my calling. I am incredibly grateful for your love in every area of my life.

Finally, thanks to my roommates for listening to me talk about women clergy so frequently. I hope you enjoy all of the "Sarah Fun Facts" in this paper.

Funding Sources

This research project did not receive any funding.

INTRODUCTION

"You can do that?"

The first time I told a college-aged peer that I intended to pursue pastoral ministry, this was her response. I believe that she was not trying to be rude; she simply did not know that a woman could be a pastor or priest.[1] Her surprise is not uncommon. Only 6% of American churchgoers currently attend a church at which a woman serves as the senior or solo pastor, and the majority of Americans report never having had a female religious leader at all (Chaves & Eagle, 2015; Knoll & Bolin, 2018).[2]

So why, exactly, are there so few women clergy? Of course, many churches hold theological stances which prevent the full ordination of women, especially those in Evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. Even within churches and denominations that do ordain women, however, the number of women clergy is still low. Women's ordination was officially recognized by most mainline denominations in the 1950s-1970s (Zikmund et al., 1998). Following these changes in denominational polity, the number of women clergy rose steeply to make up around 30% of ordained clergy within these denominations and around 50% of seminary students in pastoral tracks in 1998. Twenty years later, however, these numbers do not appear to have changed significantly. While women still comprise approximately half of Master of Divinity students, the percentage of pastors within denominations who ordain women

[1] While various denominations and churches use different terms to refer to their principal religious leaders, for the purposes of this study, the terms "clergy," "pastor," "priest," "minister," and "pastoral ministry" will be used interchangeably to refer to clergy and their work.

[2] Knoll and Bolin (2018) point out the importance of noting the distinction between sex and gender when discussing topics relating to women clergy; however, in keeping with their example, this paper will use the terms "women clergy" and "female clergy" interchangeably for the purpose of variety

has not increased by a meaningful margin (American Association of Theological Schools, 2018; Knoll & Bolin, 2018; Zikmund et al., 1998).

The persistent gap between the proportion of women qualified for ordination in denominations which permit it and the proportion of women currently serving in ministry begs the question: where do these qualified women end up? Presumably, some women either decline to pursue ordination after seminary, leave pastoral ministry at some point in their careers, or pursue non-congregational ministry positions that may not be recorded in all studies (e.g. chaplaincy, teaching, etc.). This study focuses on reasons why women may decide to leave pastoral ministry at a higher rate than men appear to do. Such work is needed for two key reasons. First, the last major study to focus on the additional challenges faced by clergywomen compared to clergymen was conducted in 1998 by Zikmund et al. While there have been other studies published since then that have focused on other aspects of clergywomen's experience, such as who supports women's ordination (Knoll & Bolin, 2018), clergywomen's political actions (Olson et. al, 2005), and pay inequalities amidst clergy (Schleifer & Miller, 2018), there has not been a comprehensive attempt to study the obstacles that may dissuade women from pursuing or staying in ordained ministry in the last two decades. This dearth of recent literature on the topic is especially notable in the light of the lack of significant increase in the proportion of women clergy since Zikmund et. al's 1998 publication.

Second, most existing literature relies heavily on data from national-scale surveys, including Zikmund et. al (1998). While the conclusions drawn from this data are important in gaining a picture of the state of clergy across the country, the method is unable to fully probe the often complicated and overlapping factors which lie behind women's decisions to stay in or leave pastoral ministry.

This study uses several strategies to address these gaps. In order to gain in-depth information on clergywomen's perceptions of obstacles to remaining in ministry, I conducted semi-structured interviews with clergywomen about their experiences. Unlike most existing literature, this study also includes women who previously worked as clergy, but have since left pastoral ministry, to better understand the reasons that compel women to leave clergy work. By focusing on clergywomen in only two counties in Texas - Brazos County and Harris County - I was also able to examine the influence of regional denominational leadership and experiences amongst clergy in similar contexts.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing research that suggests that while the factors which influence women clergy's decision to stay in or leave pastoral ministry are varied and complex, hiring discrimination, the pay gap, and burnout are major challenges. Reviewing each of these by turn will set the stage for the current study.

1.1 Hiring Discrimination

One reason women do not obtain clergy positions at equal rates to men is that they are discriminated against at the hiring process. After ordination, women clergy are likely to face challenges both in finding ministerial positions and advancing in their careers. These challenges vary depending on the method of obtaining pastoral positions used by denominations and independent churches. Amongst the denominations from which clergy are interviewed in this study, two main systems of hiring are used: call systems and appointment systems.

In call systems, such as that used by most Presbyterians, Baptists, and nondenominational churches, a pastor is "called," or hired, by an individual church. Some denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PC(USA)), have a centralized database of pastors and congregations which is used by lay congregational committees to find, interview, and hire pastors. The decision to hire a leader is made by members of the congregation, not by denominational authorities, and the pastor in question may choose whether or not to accept the position. In this model of pastoral hiring, congregations may choose not to hire a clergywoman based on the personal preferences of their leadership with few or no repercussions (Zikmund et al. 1998).

By contrast, in appointment hiring systems, which are used by denominations such as the United Methodist Church (UMC), The Episcopal Church (TEC), and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion), hiring decisions rest partially or entirely in the hands of regional denominational leaders. In the UMC and AME Zion, for example, the bishop decides where to place clergy every year, retaining almost total control over hiring decisions. In TEC, the bishop and their advisors present candidates to congregations from which they may choose. Zikmund et al. (1998) found that appointment systems can be attractive to clergywomen due to the guaranteed employment associated with some denominations, including the UMC. While they did not find any difference in the pay gap between male and female clergy in appointment system-based denominations at the time of their study, their qualitative data suggests that this practice may reduce the risk of gender-based hiring discrimination and may prevent women from being stuck in positions from which they are unable to advance. Since pastoral placement decisions rest in the hands of a few individuals, however, gender bias amongst these leaders may have a large negative impact on job opportunities for clergywomen within their denominational region.

A second hiring-related reason women may not remain in clergy positions at equal rates to men may have to do with the type of church they are hired into (rural or urban) and the level of position they are offered (senior pastor versus a lower level position). Regardless of hiring method, all women clergy are more likely than men to hold lower level positions (e.g., associate or assistant pastor). Among those who do hold the positions of solo/senior pastors, they are likely to be in smaller churches, often in rural areas, a pattern of "sorting" aptly referred to as the "stained-glass ceiling" (Schleifer & Miller, 2017). This limitation on women clergy's ability to

achieve prominent positions within their denomination over the course of their career may contribute to women experiencing burnout in "dead end" jobs within pastoral ministry.

Unlike other sectors of the economy, clergy are exempt from federal law prohibiting discrimination based on sex under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through the "ministerial exception." Courts have established this interpretation that holds that regulating the employment of "employees who perform essentially religious functions" would violate the First Amendment by infringing on the freedom of religion ("Questions and Answers," 2008). Therefore, hiring discrimination complaints from all clergy are subject only to whatever protection may be afforded by their denomination or church.

1.2 Pay Gap

Women clergy receive less compensation than their male counterparts for their work in pastoral ministry. Recent estimates hold that women clergy make $0.76 for each $1.00 made by men clergy, which is substantially less than the national average of $0.86. This suggests that while a pay gap is present in most, if not all, occupations, it is larger than average amidst clergy in the United States. This gap is especially prominent when compared to similar secular positions such as social work and counseling, in which women make approximately 95% of the salary of their male equivalents (Grant, 2016).

Some of the pay gap between the salaries of male and female clergy reflects the tendency of clergywomen to occupy associate pastor positions or to hold pastoral positions at smaller and less financially stable churches. Zikmund et al. (1998) found, however, that even after controlling for type of job, denomination, church size, age, experience, and education, women were paid 9% less than their male counterparts for the same work. This suggests that women are underpaid regardless of their level of career attainment.

An important backdrop to clergywomen's unequal pay is that many denominations which ordain women are experiencing shrinking membership. This most notably applies to mainline denominations, including the PC(USA), TEC, and the UMC (Lipka, 2018). This decrease in membership has resulted in there being fewer available full-time clergy positions and/or positions which provide adequate financial compensation. To make ends meet, clergy may therefore decide to leave pastoral ministry altogether or to seek bivocational work, which is generally defined as working one or more jobs as well as pastoral ministry. The additional job(s) may include other ministry positions (for example, a pastor working part-time at two smaller churches) or secular occupations. Perry and Schleifer (2019) found that the proportion of women clergy who report being bivocational has increased at a significantly higher rate than their male counterparts and that this effect appears to be especially pronounced amidst women clergy who are also unmarried.

The strain of bivocational ministry and/or general financial hardship in clergy positions may lead women to consider leaving pastoral ministry for secular jobs which could provide more financial compensation. As mainline congregations continue to decrease in size and/or financial viability, increasing job scarcity combined with the existing pay discrepancy may drive more women out of the clergy workforce or into bivocational positions.

1.3 Burnout

"Burnout" is an intentionally broad term that I use here to refer to reasons and situations which cause women clergy to leave pastoral ministry due to frustration, disillusionment, or strain. Burnout may be caused by physical demands, emotional exhaustion, or damaging experiences in particular jobs.

Clergywomen are subject to many of the same constraints which lead women to leave the workforce in general, including family needs. Zikmund et al. (1998) found that clergywomen were three times as likely as men clergy to report that they had difficulty balancing childcare and full-time ministry, probably due to the inequitable distribution of household duties between spouses of different genders. The pressure of raising children or taking care of other family members may lead women to seek out part-time positions or to leave the clergy workforce entirely in order to spend more time on family responsibilities. Besides demands on their time, clergywomen's marital and family status may also impact their employment compensation; evidence suggests that male clergy receive a noteworthy boost in their careers when they marry and have children, in part due to the traditional expectation for a "pastor's wife" who is expected to provide additional support for the church, while female clergy do not receive a salary benefit from marriage, and the existence of children may negatively impact their career path. However, the difference in job achievement between women clergy with children and those without children is significantly less than the difference between male and female clergy across the board, leading to the conclusion that gender is the most influential barrier to women clergy's professional advancement (Nesbitt, 1995). If a woman clergy is married to a spouse who makes more money either as a minister or in a secular occupation, it may increase the chance that the woman pastor will quit her job or reduce her hours in response to family demands. Given the pay gap amongst male and female clergy and general tendency of pastoral ministry to pay less than secular careers with similar educational requirements (Schleifer & Chaves, 2016), it is likely that a clergywoman will not be the primary breadwinner in a relationship and will therefore be more likely to leave her paid work to take care of young children due to the financial needs of her family.

Clergywomen also report more feelings of isolation compared to clergymen, which may lead them to be more likely to suffer from emotional burnout in the absence of a support system. Part of this isolation may stem from the fact that women make up a minority of clergy in nearly all denominations which ordain women, suggesting that they may not have contact with female coworkers who may serve as a support system (Kolll & Bolin, 2018). Furthermore, women clergy are more likely to serve in rural areas in which there may not be many other clergy of any gender with whom to interact, or indeed, similarly situated peers in general (Zikmund et. al 1998).

The isolation that is reported by many women clergy may be especially severe for those who find themselves single. This is especially significant as Zikmund et al. (1998) found that women clergy are significantly more likely to be single than men clergy, with proportions of 38% and 8%, respectively. The proportion of men clergy who are married is so high (greater than 90%) that it is not uncommon for studies to use marital status as a way of demarcating Catholic clergy (unmarried) from Protestant male clergy (married) in the absence of definite data about denominational affiliation (for example, see Perry & Schleifer, 2019; Schleifer & Chaves, 2016). This trend, however, is not true for women. Existing qualitative research suggests that women clergy believe this gap is because they find many men are intimidated by their clergy position, and, to a lesser extent, because they struggle to make time to cultivate romantic relationships amidst the often-long hours of pastoral ministry (Zikmund et. al, 1998). The difficulty of finding a partner may increase the feelings of isolation that women clergy experience and may speed emotional burnout.

While all clergy may have negative or unhealthy situations in their place of work, clergywomen are significantly more likely to be sexually harassed by staff or members of the

congregations that they serve. This can negatively impact their job satisfaction and lead them to consider leaving pastoral ministry. Sexual harassment has been found to be particularly damaging to the job satisfaction of women clergy who work at churches without strong organizational control structures such as grievance committees. Amongst clergywomen, pastors who are younger, unmarried, and serving conservative congregations are the most vulnerable to sexual harassment in the workplace (McDuff, 2008).

All clergy may experience burnout due to the taxing demands of their positions, such as long hours and emotional exhaustion. Clergywomen, however, are distinctly more at risk for these factors due to uneven household duties, isolation from peers, difficulty in romantic relationships, and increased vulnerability to sexual harassment. These reasons may cause clergywomen to be more likely to burnout and end their careers in pastoral ministry before reaching retirement age.

2. METHODS

2.1 Location Rationale

Brazos and Harris County were chosen as the location for this study in order to recruit women clergy who worked in a variety of churches and situations. Brazos County consists mainly of the adjacent cities of Bryan and College Station and has a population of about 229, 211 people (US Census, 2019). Harris County, by contrast, contains part of the city of Houston with an estimated population of 4.7 million (US Census, 2019). By focusing on two areas with very different population densities, this study intends to better explore the experiences of women clergy in a small town versus a metropolitan area. Since the two counties are relatively near to each other (approximately 1-2 hour drive), women clergy in the two areas are subject to similar regional religious bodies and are able to provide perspective regarding the influence of regional denominational leadership.

2.2 Recruitment

To recruit participants for this study, I reviewed the websites of churches in Brazos and Harris County for staff listings and contact information. I included the websites of all churches that I could identify who listed one or more female clergy on their website, regardless of denomination. In total, I contacted 32 women from 7 different denominations and 3 nondenominational churches, 17 of whom agreed to be interviewed (See Table 2.1). While I sought a diversity of respondents by requesting interviews from women from a variety of different denominations, since this was intended to be a small pilot study, I conducted interviews with the first 17 respondents who agreed to participate. They are not representative of the denominations that ordain women in the study area, but they do begin to paint a more detailed

picture of the experiences of women clergy in the region. The participants who agreed to be interviewed came from the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. I had the greatest responses from the Presbyterian Church (USA), probably due to my personal ties with that community. Included in this number are two clergywomen who were working in non-congregational pastoral ministry at the time of this study (e.g. chaplaincy, campus ministry, etc.). Due to the difficulty of finding such contact information on publicly available platforms, their information was obtained from personal acquaintances. Additionally, I relied on snowball sampling in interviews with clergywomen to identify women who had left pastoral ministry. These women made up four of the women contacted and three of the interviews conducted.

In terms of their positions, most of the women clergy were associate pastors, which supports the general trend of women holding lower positions in the job hierarchy of churches. Of the twelve clergy who were currently working in a church setting at the time of their interviews, only one was a senior pastor, (meaning that she was the head pastor and in charge of the church staff), while three women were solo pastors (the only pastor at a church). One pastor held the position of co-pastor. In a co-pastorate, authority is equally shared between two pastors at a church. In this instance, the pastor in question was part of a clergy couple (two clergy married to each other) who were co-pastors together at a church. The other seven clergy who were interviewed were currently working as associate pastors.

Due to the fluctuations in church attendance caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulty of collecting data on online attendees, I was not able to obtain precise estimates of church attendance in the past year, but participants gave me estimates of the average attendance at their church before the pandemic started. These estimates of attendance ranged from 25 to

2,300 people per Sunday, with most clergy reporting that their congregational attendance fell somewhere in between. The ages of participants ranged from 30 to 73, with the median age being 41.

Table 2.1: Denominations of Participants

Denomination	Number Contacted	Number Interviewed
African Methodist Episcopal (AME)	2	0
African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion)	1	1
Episcopal (TEC)	4	1
Lutheran (ELCA)	3	0
Methodist (UMC)	4*	4*
Nondenominational	3	0
Presbyterian (ECO)	2	0
Presbyterian (PC(USA))	12*	9*
Total	32	17

**Note: These categories include some number of participants who had previously worked as clergy, but had since left pastoral ministry.*

2.3 Interviews

If potential participants indicated their willingness to be interviewed, I sent them the Study Information Sheet at least two days in advance of the scheduled interview, which contained information about the criteria for participation, their rights as participants, and contact information for the study personnel and IRB officials. All interviews were conducted via Zoom video conference software due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic At the beginning of each interview, participants were given the chance to ask questions regarding the study and the

consent process and were asked for their verbal consent. They were also given the choice of being audio-video recorded or audio-only recorded.

All participants chose to complete the interview and not to withdraw from the study. In total, approximately 16 hours of audio recording were collected, from which 212 pages of transcriptions were created. To analyze the data, I listened to all of the interviews twice each and qualitatively coded all of the transcriptions based on the methods described by Smith et al. (2011). To protect my informants' confidentiality, all names given below are pseudonyms.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews revealed that the reasons which lead women clergy to leave pastoral ministry are varied and often overlapping. Women clergy are influenced by all of the factors examined earlier in the literature review. Additionally, they encounter what I call "gender tests" from people at their place of work, which reinforce congregational bias for men clergy. Ultimately, these comments create what many societal observers would call a hostile work environment. But I prefer to think about it not as hostile, but as draining, since it continually requires women clergy to defend their positions and their bodies.

In this section, I will examine how my qualitative data reflects and adds depth to the trends noted on a national scale by existing research. I will then explain the role of gender tests in working to maintain patriarchal domination in church environments.

3.1 Challenges to Women Clergy: Church-Related Barriers

In my analysis, I find that women clergy face hiring discrimination that is rooted in congregational preference for men clergy who fit common cultural expectations of pastors. Outside of the hiring process, they are also challenged by people both within and outside their place of work who do not believe in women's right to ordination. Defending their legitimacy as pastors discourages and exhausts women clergy and can accelerate burnout.

3.1.1 "We Don't Want a Woman Pastor": The Male Ideal

To begin with, my research confirmed what other studies have shown regarding hiring practices: congregations do not want women clergy. Or, at the very least, many congregations prefer men clergy over their women counterparts. Clergywomen often spoke of congregations

who wanted a certain "type" of pastor, generally described as a man who was married and had kids. Kate, a 47-year-old Presbyterian pastor, said:

> And stereotypically what people think of when they think of a pastor is someone who is a man, and if they are in a denomination that is predominantly white, they think of a white man, and what they tend to imagine after that is a white man who is married with 2.5 kids and the wife, in a perfect world, doesn't work, so that she can do all the pastor's wife things that some churches think the pastor's wife needs to do.

This idea of a man clergy with exactly "2.5 kids" was specifically mentioned by four participants, and several others mentioned similar phrases (e.g. "two kids," "two or three kids") in their interviews, suggesting that women clergy are very aware of the culturally accepted stereotype of a clergyperson from which they are inherently excluded. Furthermore, they emphasize that many congregations explicitly express a desire to have that sort of pastor, and that women are therefore less likely to be considered in hiring processes which involve congregational input.

Although I only spoke with two women of color in the course of my interviews, it appears that women clergy with other marginalized identities are likely to experience increased discrimination. Jeanne, an 46-year-old African-American pastor serving in the United Methodist Church, a majority-white denomination, discussed the difficulty in finding "calls," or jobs, for women of color. Speaking of church hiring bodies, she said, "They might call a woman but they aren't going to call a black woman. And there are other places, they might call a black man, but they're not calling a black woman." This reflects the difficulty of finding a congregation who is supportive of a pastor who is both female and from a minority racial group in a denomination whose clergy are mostly both white and male. The confluence of racism and sexism for women

such as this participant puts women of color at a significant disadvantage compared to other clergywomen. While this study does not provide enough data to fully illuminate the extent of race-based discrimination in clergy hiring, it is certain that such discrimination exacerbates the existing obstacles for clergywomen looking for positions. More research is needed to better understand the effect of race on the clergy hiring process.

3.1.2 Hiring Discrimination in Appointment Systems

Regarding the effects of hiring practices, my research confirmed the findings of previous studies in finding that regardless of how hiring decisions are made, clergy hiring processes tend to discriminate against women. In the appointment system, practiced in the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, and the AME Zion Church, the decision to hire a pastor is made partially or entirely by denominational authorities. For interviewees in denominations which used this system, I found that the extent of gender discrimination generally depended on the bias present in the leaders who chose where to place pastors. In other words, denominational hiring authorities could ensure gender equality in hiring, but they could also just as easily obstruct it. Additionally, several of my participants indicated that despite the supposed authority of denominational leadership in the appointment system, congregational preferences for men clergy can still impact women clergy's placements. Tracey, a 34-year-old Methodist pastor, described the impact of congregational preference by saying, "They place us in certain places where we will be most effective, and so if a congregation does not think that a woman should come in there, they're not going to put me there, you know, right or wrong." Tracey suggests that while the regional denominational leaders hold a significant level of control over women clergy's career advancement, they do not necessarily use this authority to expand opportunities for women clergy in pastoral ministry. On the other hand, however, denominational leaders can also

use their power to help women clergy get positions that were not previously available to them. Several of my Methodist participants specifically referenced a former woman bishop of the region who had intentionally worked to increase congregations' acceptance of women clergy. Claire, a 36-year-old Methodist pastor, said,

> Our last Bishop in Texas was a woman [...] and she really had an interest in raising up young female clergy. And so there was always a sense at the table of her pushing to put people in places that even sometimes, like the church might be like "We're not ready for a woman clergy," and she'd be like "You're ready for this one," and she'd put them there and it would go great.

The remarks made by Claire and several other participants indicate that in the appointment system of hiring, denominational leadership matters. If the bishop or an equivalent leader of a region is committed to promoting women clergy, women clergy can experience notable, effective improvements in their prospects for career advancement. On the other hand, if one leader is opposed to the idea of women clergy or simply makes sexist decisions, women clergy are likely to be severely disadvantaged compared to their male peers.

It is also worth noting that in some appointment systems, including the United Methodist Church, fully-ordained clergy receive a near-guarantee of full-time employment for their entire pastoral career. This means that while women clergy in this situation can, and do, encounter limitations in progressing to highly-ranked positions, they generally do not have to cope with long periods of unemployment or difficulty in finding a paying job of any sort (such as women clergy working in call systems do).

3.1.3 Hiring Discrimination in Call Systems

While the appointment system could be used either to push for gender equality or to limit women clergy's opportunities, I found that the call system of hiring did not offer such options; my interviewees' experiences suggested that this process almost exclusively favors men. Here, my findings echo what other studies have found with regards to the role of discrimination in different hiring processes across denominations. It is worth noting, however, that while discrimination may appear to be more prominent in the call system of hiring, Zikmund et. al (1998) did not find any difference in the pay gap between women clergy in call systems versus appointment systems, suggesting that discrimination still has measurable effects on women clergy in both systems.

In the call system, most personnel decisions are made by lay congregation members serving on committees. Amongst the denominations included in this study, the call system is mainly used by the Presbyterian Church (USA). The interviewees who had worked in this denomination believed that the call system allowed for congregation members' biases to disadvantage women clergy who were searching for positions. Patricia, a 30-year-old Presbyterian clergywoman, reported being present at a search committee meeting during which a church member said, "'Well, we want a white man who's over the age of fifty who's had children from North Carolina because we like the accent.'" That the statement mentioned above was voiced in the presence of the female associate pastor reflects the extent to which explicit gender bias was not only not avoided, but was considered socially acceptable in the clergy search process (along with other biases). It is worth noting that the congregation in question did end up hiring a woman pastor eventually, who, in any case, was also not from North Carolina; the congregation member's request was unfulfilled. But while the explicit sexism in this particular

instance did not lead to the congregation member's desired outcome, the existence of these strong opinions that favor men clergy serve as constant reminders to women that they are not preferred and may be actively opposed in pastoral positions.

It is important to recognize that such comments are only possible because of the "ministerial exception" to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which otherwise prohibits gender-based discrimination in hiring. In most secular occupations, the incident described above would be a violation of federal civil rights laws. In the absence of governmental regulation of the clergy hiring process, however, women clergy have no legal recourse, and no option to "report" a complaint outside of their particular denomination or church. Denominations may adapt nondiscrimination policies which are binding to varying extents on their member congregations; however, the stories my participants indicate that these statements are ineffective at combating hiring discrimination against women clergy.

I conducted an internet search of the websites of the denominations from which clergy were interviewed in this study - PC(USA), UMC, TEC, and AME Zion - and found some form of statement about equal opportunity hiring practices on the websites of all of the denominations except AME Zion. The PC(USA) had the most direct statement on this issue in a file dating from their 1985 General Assembly [national ruling convention] saying "Each congregation is urged to implement its procedures of calling, recruiting, hiring, and promoting for all job classifications without regard to racial ethnic group, sex, age, or disability" (p. 202). In keeping with their congregational model of church governance, however, this declaration "urges" congregations to practice equal opportunity employment, but does not require it, and my participants' stories indicate that not all congregations choose to abide by this policy. Regional denominational leaders are given a more direct order to monitor and evaluate hiring practices (including

requiring congregations to submit a form listing the diversity of candidates considered for a pastoral position), although it is not clear if there are any consequences for churches which do not take the recommended steps. It is also notable that none of my Presbyterian participants made any mention of this form, despite many of them having participated in pastoral search processes. Further illustrating the gap in policy between the national denomination and individual congregations, the denomination also has a policy that requires "Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action" for employees of the denominational agencies - but not for all clergy ("Toward Inclusiveness in Employment," 2016).

Among the other denominations, while the United Methodist Church had a statement calling for "concrete efforts to nurture and promote the leadership of all people, regardless of gender," I was unable to find a clear policy about hiring discrimination ("Social Principles," 2020). The Episcopal Church's corporate body declares itself an equal opportunity employer, but I did not find a national policy which concerned the appointments of clergy in congregations ("Episcopal News Service Reporter," 2019). This assortment of policies of varying effects held by these denominations, none of which appeared to be particularly relevant to the hiring experiences of my participants, suggests that the national denominations fail to ensure that women clergy have equal access to jobs within pastoral ministry. This lack of effective policy may be attributable to denominations' preferences to maintain ties with as many member congregations as possible, their beliefs in limited governance over individual churches, or other factors within their leadership and history. Regardless, women clergy continue to experience explicit, limiting discrimination within clergy hiring systems.

3.1.4 Living Under the Stained-Glass Ceiling

While women clergy doubtless experience discrimination when applying for any ministerial job, my interviewees suggested that such discrimination is particularly strong among hiring processes for senior pastor positions of large churches. As mentioned above, seven of my participants were working as associate pastors at the time of this study; all of them served under male senior pastors. Several of them mentioned specifically that while their church currently had one or more female associates, they did not think their church would call a woman senior pastor in the near future. Julia, a 34-year-old pastor who worked at a large Methodist church, said,

> I will say this, it needs to be said because the large churches - we call them large steeple churches, that have like thousands of members - it is a sad thing to say, and I don't want to say it out loud. But [...] right now, we will not see a female be a lead pastor of one of those churches. And that is a tough pill to swallow.

Her explanation of the limits faced by women clergy, among multiple other participants' similar claims, support the existence of the "stained-glass ceiling" noted by Schleifer et. al (2017). Many of my participants indicated that this boundary is the most defined between associate pastor positions and senior pastor positions at large churches, but it can also work among differently-sized churches that only have one pastoral position. Athena, a 71-year-old Presbyterian pastor, commented frankly, "Where you find women in ministry are in the small churches that can't get a man." Her quote is evidence of the preference for men clergy that results in women clergy being seen as "substandard" replacements for the desired "type" of pastor. Since women clergy earn less money overall than their male equivalents, they are more likely to take positions which men clergy may refuse to accept due to low pay or difficult working conditions. The lack of advancement options open for women once they have entered the pastoral workforce serves to

maintain the pay gap and increases their chance of leaving pastoral ministry altogether due to the frustration of being unable to progress upwards in the hierarchy of clergy positions.

After a church has hired one woman pastor, increased bias may be present when looking to fill an additional pastoral position due the perception that women clergy are "atypical" and therefore require counterbalancing on a staff. While it is generally considered unremarkable when a church has multiple men pastors at the same time, three of my participants who belonged to denominations which used a call hiring system explicitly noted that hiring bodies sometimes operated under the assumption that having an all-female pastoral staff would be "too many women." Patricia told me, "At the last place I was serving, while they were looking for the new senior minister - they said 'Well, we can't hire a woman, that'd be too much estrogen.' That literally came out of their mouth." It appears that many churches operate under an unspoken "quota" for women pastors which makes them disinclined to settle for an all-female staff. This resistance to attending a church with all leadership positions filled by women suggests that men clergy are seen as neutral leaders of a church, while women clergy's gender makes them inherently exceptional.

Notably, several participants compared their experience with this achievement barrier to similar limitations for women in politics. The 2020 presidential election occurred during the period in which I was conducting interviews, and two different participants related the difficulty of overcoming obstacles for ministerial career advancement to the election of the first woman vice president, Kamala Harris. Jackie, a 43-year-old Presbyterian pastor, connected Harris' election to her hope of the role she could play in opening the field for future women leaders:

> I mean, I look at our new vice president. Holy cow, that just busted open the glass ceiling, right! Females can be vice president, they can be president, I mean, that's huge.

> So if I can have just a fraction of opening the doors, helping make that pathway for other young females, I would just be so honored. Not just to serve God, but to serve future generations, helping them to sense and answer their calling.

Jackie's connection between women political leaders and women ministers is indicative of how at least some clergywomen believe that their struggle for gender equality in pastoral ministry is deeply attached to the movement for gender equality in secular fields. This comparison seems apt when considering the shared issues faced by women in the workforce in general, including the unequal division of household tasks and sexism in hiring processes; however, in other ways, the theological justifications that lie behind others' critiques of their role create a unique situation for women clergy as they are forced to defend their religious legitimacy to other Christians.

3.1.5 Resistance from Strangers

Christians are, of course, divided on the theological question of women's ordination. This means that while clergywomen almost exclusively work for institutions which affirm their right to work in pastoral ministry, they are still subject to attacks on their legitimacy from people in their communities who disagree with the very existence of their ordination. Therefore, women clergy in denominations which ordain women often have to defend their right to pastoral ministry while men in the same denominations do not.

Most of my informants reported encountering people from the community outside their congregation who did not believe in women's right to be ordained clergy and sometimes challenged their authority with religious arguments. When asked if she had any negative encounters with those who did not support women clergy, Jael, a solo pastor at an AME Zion Church, said "I mean, just the other day, someone messaged me on our church website and basically said, you know, 'You're being disobedient by being a pastor in the church.' It's just, I

didn't even know the person." Encounters such as this reveal the difficulty of existing in a role which many people believe should not exist, even in denominations in which the official policy change occurred decades ago. Being the target of criticism and even hatred from people within your own religion due to your gender forces women clergy to continually process negative encounters or to justify themselves not only to acquaintances, but to strangers. Such encounters take up time and emotional energy, adding additional strain to women in positions which are already widely considered to be difficult and emotionally draining. This pressure only serves to hasten burnout.

I was curious whether some of this bias against women pastors might be related to the study location. The American south is dominated by religious bodies that believe only men should be clergy, most prominently in the form of evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics. In Brazos County, 41% of the population is identified as belonging to a religious congregation; out of this number, the two largest groups are evangelical Christian (19% of adherents) and Roman Catholic (11%) (Association of Religious Data Archives, 2010).[3] Similarly, 58% of Harris County's population is identified as belonging to a religious group, and 26% and 18% of these people are claimed to be evangelical Christian and Roman Catholic, respectively. By contrast, only around 6% of people in both counties identify as belonging to mainline Protestantism, which includes most of the denominations which support women's ordination (ibid). Hence, my interviewees all worked in a region where their denominations (and the accompanying belief in women's ordination) included only a small minority of the population. While my study did not include women clergy who were currently working in other regions of

[3] The Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA) bases their numbers off of the numbers reported by congregations. Therefore, people who identify as belonging to a religious tradition but are not affiliated with a particular congregation may be undercounted by this estimate.

the country (although many participants had worked in other states), it is possible that negative community encounters would be less frequent for clergywomen living in regions where mainline Protestantism or non-religiosity predominates. When I asked my participants about this possibility, however, most of them did not think this impacted their experience as clergywomen, either due to a lack of personal experience in other locations or a belief that location does not matter in general with regards to the amount of discrimination they face. Many women demurred, saying something along the lines of "Misogyny is everywhere." In general, however, since most women clergy had only worked in one city or, at most, a few cities, they appeared hesitant to make generalizations about regional trends. I suspect therefore that the religious composition of the surrounding area may indeed impact communities' receptiveness to clergywomen, even though my informants believed their experiences to be universal.

3.1.6 Sexism in Ecumenical Settings

Within the community outside of their own church, my interviewees also encountered discrimination amongst other clergy who worked in denominations which do not support women's ordination. In the interviews, women frequently brought up negative experiences with ecumenical groups or events, such as local ministerial alliances or interfaith activities. Traditionally, these groups include faith leaders from all Christian churches in the area or from all local faith-based organizations in general. Claire said, "We've done mission work with other churches, like in an ecumenical setting, and the male pastors kind of get together and make all the decisions, and then sort of tell the female pastors what is going to happen." Women clergy often complained of being excluded at ecumenical events where not all of the clergy members recognized or approved of their ordination. Since most of the women clergy in my study reported having sporadic encounters with lay people who do not believe in women's ordination, it is

perhaps unsurprising that they are negatively received by other clergy with similar beliefs who are also likely to have a more thorough theological understanding than lay people of why their denominations do not support women pastors.

While other clergy could be a source of frustration, my interviewees suggested that at times, they also served to protect and defend women clergy's right to be pastors. Two clergywomen in particular spoke highly of the other clergy in their local ministerial alliances with regards to how they treated ordained women. Amanda, a 34-year-old Presbyterian clergywoman who had since left pastoral work, described a situation that occurred while she was working in another state:

> The local ministerial association in my town in Michigan where I served for four or five years actually had several churches leave the ministerial association when I became the pastor of the Presbyterian church in town because [they thought] it was immoral for them to participate in a collegial group with women pastors. That we were, we were abhorrent. And thankfully, the other older white men in the group, like, stood up and were like "No, we're not going to kick Amanda out, like if you don't want to be here, you can leave." And they left.

Similarly, another participant mentioned a situation where her colleagues from a variety of denominations had defended the inclusion of women in a program the ministerial association was considering. These instances indicate that while ecumenical gatherings with clergy who do not support women's ordination can become hostile situations for women clergy, this is not always the case. Ecumenical groups can, in fact, be a source of support for women clergy. The key to such positive encounters seems to be the presence of men clergy who are supportive allies of their women colleagues regardless of their own theological beliefs on the matter. These stories

were the exception, however; most participants' stories about ecumenical groups suggest that many men clergy are unwilling to volunteer their support to women clergy in such situations.

3.1.7 The Congregational Catch-22

My informants indicated that they are also subject to delegitimizing comments and actions in the congregations whom they serve, which decrease job satisfaction and make certain congregations less attractive workplaces for women clergy. These negative responses appear to be more common amongst older congregations and congregations with few or no previous encounters with women clergy.

For example, the women clergy in my study who serve as associate pastors under men senior pastors often mentioned being treated as the pastor's assistant, rather than as an ordained religious leader. Patricia said: "I've had people actually come in and say, you know, they want to talk to the pastor and so, you know, my boss isn't here, they direct them to me. 'Oh, no, no, no, we want to wait for the real pastor.'" The apparently common perception that women are not "real" ministers is an example of the assumptions which cause women to have to defend their right to occupy their position, while men are automatically granted that respect.

Additionally, several of my interviewees suggested that the age of the congregation members in question can have a large impact on their reception. After reflecting on the varying treatments of women clergy in different congregations, Kate said:

> I think the older people are, the more likely it is that they're, it's just ingrained in them that a pastor is a man. And so I think that you know, the younger people are, the more open they are to it.

Her response suggests that the stereotype of clergy described earlier is the most influential for older people who are less likely to have grown up with women clergy in their congregations. In

the Presbyterian denomination of which Kate is a member, women only received the right to ordination in 1956, and they did not make up a significant proportion of clergy overall for decades afterwards (Chaves, 1997). This means that there are still many church members who remember a time when women clergy were not permitted to serve or were still relatively uncommon. Age may be particularly relevant to the experiences of my informants due to the proportion of older adults in their denominations. The average ages of members in the PC(USA), UMC, and TEC are 59, 57, and 56, respectively (Lipka, 2016). (No data on the average age of an AME Zion member could be found). Since these denominations are some of the largest denominations which ordain women clergy, it is likely that many women clergy find themselves in congregations which consist of mainly middle-aged or elderly adults.

Chaves (1997) suggests that aside from the passage of time, there is a large amount of "decoupling" with regards to women's ordination, meaning that although some national-scale denominations officially condone women's ordination and gender equality in general, individual congregations may or may not adhere to these doctrines. As a result, while women clergy have technically been allowed in denominations such as PC(USA) for most of people's lifetimes, in many instances, Presbyterian churches have not necessarily hired or included women clergy in their church leadership positions. Such decoupling persists even today; two Presbyterian clergywomen in my study told me about a PC(USA) church in a nearby town which had explicitly refused to consider any women pastors when they were recently searching for a new solo pastor. Neither of the women who brought up this church in their interviews mentioned any sort of institutional repercussion to this congregation from a denominational body.

Although the clergy in my study talked about several factors which they believed contributed to congregations not wanting women clergy, many of them strongly emphasized that

most gender-based bias results from congregations not having previous exposure to clergywomen. Bethany, a 40-year-old Presbyterian pastor, explained it by saying:

> The longer you're open to women in leadership, the more comfortable you grow with it, I think. Because I think some people in the past who weren't comfortable, then had a good experience with a female pastor, and it changed their mind about it.

Her sentiment was echoed by many other interviewees in this study. This has far-reaching applications; I asked all of my participants if they believed that rural versus urban communities were more receptive to women clergy, and several of them referenced this phenomenon in their responses. They suggested that since rural communities may be less likely to have encountered a woman pastor before (due to a smaller number of local churches), they might be more likely to resist women clergy, but that it is due to a lack of exposure to women clergy, often combined with generally older congregation members, rather than political or cultural norms. In other words, it is not that rural congregations are inherently less receptive to women clergy; it is that rural congregations are more likely to have never had a woman pastor before, and therefore they may not view the idea favorably. My informants believed that this phenomenon can (and does) occur in any congregation, regardless of location.

The descriptions by my research subjects provide qualitative support for Lehman's (1985) study of the Social Contact Hypothesis amongst churches who had their first female pastor. This hypothesis holds that increased contact with a disliked or feared group will lead to decreased negative attitudes towards that group. After surveying congregations before and after receiving a woman pastor for the first time, Lehman found a significant increase in their positive opinion of women clergy overall. Similarly, several of the interviewees in my study, while perhaps unaware of Lehman's data, were strongly convinced that the best path to increasing

acceptance of women clergy in congregations was to increase people's exposure to women clergy in general. Kate, a Presbyterian pastor who worked in campus ministry, talked about how she hoped to increase positive reception to women clergy through doing pulpit supply (a form of fill-in preaching for local churches when needed):

> If I'm not tied to a particular church [...] that means that I have the opportunity to do more pulpit supply. And sometimes, inviting a woman to be in the pulpit once is a lot less scary than inviting a woman to be in the pulpit all of the time. But if you invite a woman to be in the pulpit once, and that congregation is treated with care and feels respected and is thanked and acknowledged for all of the ways that they were affirming of you being able to be there to share the Word, I think what that does is open the door for the possibility that, "Oh, it wasn't so bad that one time. So maybe we'll do it again. Maybe we'll do it again. Hey, you know what, we've liked all those women pastors, maybe we'll actually hire one." And that is a like that is a slow and steady wins the race approach, and I'm so afraid that that will take way longer than it should. But I think it's the one way that I can contribute.

Kate's belief in the power of increased exposure of clergywomen to increase congregational opinion of women pastors, and her faith in her own ability to contribute to this process, provides strong anecdotal evidence of the phenomenon described by Lehman at work in churches still today. If increasing receptivity to women clergy rests mainly on exposure, however, this puts many women clergy in a sort of catch-22: congregations will not hire a woman clergy because they have sexist opinions about women clergy, but their sexist opinions about women clergy likely will not be reduced until they hire one. This theory illustrates the enormous difficulty of "breaking in" to a church that has never had a woman pastor before in the call system of hiring.

Given this loop of exclusion from many pastoral positions, it is unsurprising that women clergy are consistently underemployed; many jobs are simply not open to them.

3.1.8 The Symbolic Power of Women Clergy

Besides the practical effects of having a woman pastor serving at a congregation, women clergy have a significant symbolic impact on both their congregations and communities. Chaves (1997) noted that a denomination's choice to ordain women serves as a form of "signaling" their stance on a variety of theological and social issues. While he spoke specifically of denominations, two of my interviewees spoke about this effect on the level of individual churches. When speaking of her former church, Amanda said:

> They were by far and away the most progressive church in this little town, right. And so actually having a woman pastor was one of their flags that they could wave to be like, "We're the progressive church in town because we have the lady pastor."

In this instance, Amanda's presence at the church was viewed as a mark of the church's general theological orientation. According to Chaves' conclusion, she served as a visible marker to the community that not only did the congregation support women's ordination, but that they held progressive views on other contested issues. This suggests that Chaves' (1997) claim can be applied not only to denominations, but perhaps also to individual churches in at least some situations.

3.1.9 Conclusion

In summary, my interviewees indicated that women clergy experience hiring discrimination in all hiring process, regardless of the denomination or type of hiring method used. This discrimination is particularly prominent in filling senior pastor positions at large churches, resulting in the continuation of the "stained-glass ceiling." Outside of hiring processes,

however, the women clergy in my study also find themselves on the receiving end of negative attention from strangers, other clergy, and members of their own congregation who believe that their ordination is illegitimate.

Previous research, such as Zikmund et. al (1998), showed similar patterns, but my research documents that discriminatory practices have persisted, while also capturing in rich detail the constant emotional labor of working under such conditions. Additionally, my interviewees revealed that not only do women clergy experience discrimination in the hiring process, but rather, they encounter backlash in interactions with people both inside and outside of their own congregations. This indicates that the women clergy in my study often exist in situations and communities which are intolerant or even openly hostile to them due to their status as ordained women. This nearly ever-present discrimination contributes to women clergy having difficulty in finding positions and advancing within pastoral ministry over the course of their careers. My participants suggest that the resulting discouragement, lack of employment, and draining process of defending their right to ordination all contribute to women clergy leaving ministry.

3.2 Challenges to Women Clergy: Society-Related Barriers

The position of clergyperson is commonly associated with long hours, working weekends, and intense emotional labor (e.g. hospital visitation, pastoral counseling, etc.). Given these associations, it is perhaps unsurprising that many clergy report experiencing burnout for reasons unrelated to their gender. But existing research suggests, and my data supports, that women clergy are subject to an additional set of difficulties which result from being a woman in pastoral ministry. These include isolation, juggling family needs alongside their pastoral commitments, and lack of support system.

3.2.1 Isolation From Others

Everyone, of course, may experience isolation from others who are sources of support; the clergy in my study, however, suggested that being a woman pastor can lead to additional isolation, as many women clergy do not work with other women clergy and may not have many opportunities to connect with peers who share similar experiences. Two of the women in my study served at the same church; aside from them, only one of the other women I interviewed currently worked on a church staff with one or more other women pastors. The other clergy either served as solo pastors or as members of church staffs with other men pastors. This lack of women clergy in a particular congregation may be magnified by the lack of women clergy in a region. Bemoaning the lack of other women clergy in her area, Patricia said:

> Ministry is a lonely profession. There's only a handful of us that live in each city, and I'm talking big cities, right [...] So in terms of having friends, in terms of having colleagues that are your own age, especially if you're a young minister, it's very, very lonely.

Patricia's comment reflects the struggle of occupying the position of a young, female pastor in an environment where that combination of traits is unusual. As mentioned above, the women clergy in my study indicated that they were not universally accepted by the other pastors in their area, suggesting that they may have difficulties in forming friendships with others in their career path. While women clergy, like all people, can receive support from people who are not their same profession, they may have fewer opportunities for such relationships than their male counterparts since even outside of the world of ministry, many people do not accept their position as legitimate. It seems natural that many, if not all, women clergy would prefer to have friends who view their career as valid - a level of acceptance that may be taken for granted in other career

paths - and may therefore struggle to find friends in areas in which many inhabitants adhere to conservative religious traditions.

While several of my participants indicated that they felt isolated from other women clergy, this sentiment was not universal. Several of my participants told me that they were members of clergy groups or networks which helped them to avoid this situation. While the composition (all female or mixed genders) and circumstances of these groups varied, my interviewees suggested that regular meetings with other clergy could be a source of considerable support. Jackie described her experience by saying:

> I had a set group of clergywomen that I met with once a month. [...] That was so life giving to be able to hear each other's stories, the struggles, to support each other, to just sit and and go “Man, that sucks,“ you know, “How can I pray for you? How can I sit with you on this?” [...] So, I mean, I have experienced the value of clergywomen coming together on a regular basis in a small group. I highly recommend it to any clergywoman.

Jackie’s story was one of several told to me about the beneficial effects of spending intentional time with other clergy. Notably, however, all of these groups were denominationally-based. While some of my participants belonged to ecumenical groups or alliances, they never brought up these associations as ways of finding support from other clergywomen, likely due to either a general lack of other women clergy or the presence of hostile clergy who did not believe in the legitimacy of their positions. None of my interviewees mentioned being a part of an ecumenical group of clergywomen; for example, there was no example from my data of a Methodist clergywoman being a member of a support group with Presbyterian and Episcopal clergywomen, even though several interviewees described clergywomen's groups within their own

denomination. This surprised me, because I had originally expected that women clergy would have more connections with other women clergy in their region across multiple denominations.

My interviewees also indicated that regional leadership can impact the isolation experienced by women clergy. Several of the Presbyterian clergywomen in Harris County specifically told me that they did not feel isolated or felt less isolated due to intentional gatherings and groups established by leaders at the Presbytery (regional) level. Bethany told me about a group established in this way:

> The General Presbyter [regional leader] invited me and some young clergy to a first call pastor's conference that the Synod [larger region] was hosting and got me connected with another female clergy in the presbytery. And we formed a colleague group, and that colleague group had anywhere from three to four women and then two regular men, so it was like we were already the majority, and those became very good friends.

While there are successful and fulfilling clergy support groups in many places, the numerous mentions of regional initiatives among Harris Country Presbyterians leads me to believe that regional denominational leaders - in this case, at the Presbytery level - can effectively institute support systems that can reduce isolation among women clergy. Even in this instance, however, the solution is not clear cut. Brazos County and Harris County are in the same Presbytery, but none of my Presbyterian participants from Brazos County mentioned having been connected with local clergy in their area; rather, such efforts appear to be centered on women clergy living near the Presbytery headquarters in Houston and in areas in which there are a significant number of women clergy, which are generally urban. My interviews do not provide adequate data to suggest that this is an universal trend by any means, but it is possible that even purposeful actions by denominational leadership to increase connections between clergywomen

disproportionately affect women in large cities, likely due to the convenience of initiating contact among clergy in a central area with many clergy.

Given this increased potential for isolation among women clergy who do not have the opportunity to frequently encounter others in similar situations, online groups may be important for providing support that is not regionally-based. One of my seventeen interviewees told me about an organization which seeks to remedy this isolation from other women clergy called Young Clergy Women International. Their website described them as a "network of the youngest ordained clergy women, defined as those under forty" and lists online publications, in-person conferences, and virtual support groups as some of their regular activities ("Who We Are," n.d.). Amanda said:

> I never felt isolated because I could just open my laptop and have hundreds of other young clergy women right at my fingertips, which, like, I think that's the reason I even stayed in to go to a second church was that, you know, when I experienced things that felt off to me, I could go talk to other clergywomen about it.

Her insistence on the power of this online organization speaks to the potential benefit of online groups for women clergy, even and perhaps especially in regards to staying in pastoral ministry amidst challenges. Notably, however, none of my other interviewees mentioned this group to me when I asked them about isolation from other clergywomen, even though six of my other participants were in the eligible age range. Several other participants did mention various groups of clergy on social media, but none of them explicitly described these groups as directly reducing their isolation. It seems probable, therefore, that while it is possible for women clergy to find support through online communities of women clergy, this is not a significant part of many women clergy's experiences at present.

3.2.2 Leaving Ministry for Family Needs

While some aspects of women clergy's position make their experience in the workforce distinctly different than that of women working in secular occupations, they are still subject to many, if not all, of the same factors that drive women out of employment in general. Chief among these is women clergy's decision to leave pastoral ministry either temporarily or permanently in order to meet family needs.

In the United States, women are more likely to do the majority of household work, including childcare, cleaning, and other tasks ("Raising Kids," 2015). They are also more likely not to work outside of the home in order to take care of children or other family members. In my study, while none of my participants had completely left pastoral ministry for family reasons, most participants told me about others they knew who had done so, and two of my participants had worked part-time in the past or were currently working part-time due to the demands of having young children. Athena told me about a young pastor she knew who had left pastoral ministry for children after being unable to make her family needs work with her church's expectations:

> She was a solo pastor at a small church. And after a couple of years, she had a child, and they gave her a hard time about bringing the baby to work and, you know, that kind of thing. And ultimately, she has taken some time off. She resigned, and she's not in ministry right now. I think she'll come back into it, but probably not until after she gets her children, she has all the children she wants and gets them to a stage where she feels like she can do ministry [and] be a parent both. And that's heartbreaking, because she's an excellent minister and the church needs people like her.

Athena's story demonstrates the potential consequences of the clash between pastoral ministry and parenting for some women clergy. My participants suggested that one of the most prominent areas of conflict between clergy work and family life concerned the work schedule demanded by congregational ministry, as many church events occur on weekends or evenings - the same time in which children may be out of school or daycare and require parental attention. Claire, a pastor with a young child, said "One of the things about church work in general is that it happens on your congregants' schedule, not yours. So you don't really work a nine-to-five [...] And so it's just hard on families in general to be in ministry." All of the married clergy in active ministry I interviewed were part of households in which their spouses worked or went to school full-time, suggesting that they had to cope with the struggles of caring for children given two work schedules with varying degrees of overlap. The challenge of juggling these competing and often irreconcilable demands can negatively affect women clergy's mental and emotional states. Amanda, who had previously worked in ministry with young children, summarized the stress created by navigating the throes of household work and clergy work by saying,

> I think when you have a job that will take as much as you're willing to give, and you're also a woman in the US, meaning that you're probably putting in more hours on housework and childcare and sort of your second job at home, that it creates burnout real quickly.

This burnout, while likely experienced by women in many careers, remains a significant factor for many women clergy who struggle with the "typical" challenges faced by women in the workforce while also coping with the discrimination and backlash described earlier.

On the flipside, however, two never-married clergy I interviewed indicated they believed that the long and unusual hours negatively impacted them due to their lack of a spouse or children. Samantha, a 41-year-old Presbyterian pastor, described the occurrence by saying:

> In my first call, there was kind of the unspoken, and sometimes spoken [rule] "Well, you're single, you don't have a family, so you need to be here to do X, Y or Z, when we would never have asked the male senior pastor to do those things." And by mentioning that no family, no spouse, they also were saying it's because you are single that we're doing this.

Samantha's comment suggests that having a spouse and/or children can be viewed as an excuse for pastors to set and maintain boundaries with regard to the time they spend working, while some congregations may not recognize similar boundaries when they are set by single clergy. Although, given the challenges faced by women clergy with children, it appears that many congregations do not recognize boundaries set by women clergy, period. This phenomenon seems particularly relevant given many of my participants stressed the importance of establishing strong boundaries between their work and personal lives.

3.2.3 Establishing a Work-Life Balance as a Woman Clergy

Several of my interviewees emphasized that setting strict boundaries was crucial for clergy more so than in some other professions due to the demands of some congregations. Bethany explained to me "Churches will take as much as they can get from their pastor, which sounds more predatory [...] than I mean it to be." Her statement reflects the struggles of women clergy in my study to define the limits of what they are willing to do for their churches while trying to protect their own physical and emotional health. Athena said more bluntly, "Churches abuse their pastors, there's no question about that." Athena's comment suggests that

congregations can have unhealthy relationships with their pastors in which they constantly demand more from a pastor who has a limited amount of time. This trend undoubtedly increases clergy's isolation from others, as they are forced to juggle the sometimes unreasonable requirements of a church with their own needs for connection and rest. However, it became apparent in my interviews that not only was it possible to have a good work-life balance in pastoral ministry, but that several of my participants believed they had one. Tracey told me: "I have the flexibility to make my schedule based on my children, you know. [...] Even if we had to work from home or take the time off, you know, or if the kids get sick, I can take off." Her situation, among others, reveals that some pastors do find ways to balance the competing obligations of work and family responsibilities, but my interviewees suggested overall that such balance is not common amongst most women clergy.

Many of my participants spoke of feeling pressured to put in long hours, sometimes as many as 60-80 hours a week, and to be available for pastoral care needs at odd times. Several of them called attention to the norms upon which these standards rest - that is, the normative conception of the "ideal pastor" who has a stay-at-home wife to take care of family needs. Phoebe, a 38-year-old Methodist pastor who had left pastoral ministry, actively rejected this stereotype:

> I think we can set up boundaries and all that, but I think the expectation for so long has been that males left their spouse at home, and they were devoted 24/7. So if you've got someone who has multiple commitments, then it's, you know, it could be difficult to feel like you're being a good mom, a good spouse, or whatever, and a good pastor.

Phoebe's quote is evidence of the clash of the "ideal pastor" stereotype and the reality of life for many clergywomen. While actual male pastors with full-time housewives and children may be

becoming increasingly rare due to trends in the labor force, my participants indicate that congregations still expect their pastors to conform to the idea of this figure as much as possible. This stereotype can result in women clergy feeling pressured to do the work both of the pastor and the "pastor's wife," due to the coexistence of their femaleness and pastorhood.

My participants' experiences with congregational expectations demonstrate the extent to which the idea of the "ideal pastor" permeates the opinions of many congregants. According to this perspective, men clergy with children are considered optimal candidates to fill the role of pastor, while women clergy with children are disadvantaged by the assumption, and sometimes the reality, that they will have less time for church work. One of my participants, Amanda, explicitly encountered this bias when searching for a new position:

> I interviewed at one church right out of seminary, and their Personnel Committee told me that I was a lovely candidate, that they thought I was going to be a great pastor, they actually thought in all ways I was a perfect fit for their job, but they found out that I had a son, and they're just not sure you can be both a pastor and a parent. [...] That church hires single women or married women with no intention of having children, and they'll actually ask you that question in your interview, which is wildly inappropriate. Or they'll hire like any men, so long as their wife isn't also career driven, [...] and they work them to death.

Her experience points to yet another factor - children - which can explicitly impact women clergy's career advancement in the absence of legal limitations. Her story supports Nesbitt's (1995) conclusion regarding the effects of childbearing on clergy's career prospects: the author was able to identify a significant boost in men clergy's salaries when they married (thereby becoming the head in a "traditional" family structure), while women clergy experienced no such gain. My data enriches Nesbitt's study, which relied on quantitative survey data, by pinpointing a

possible reason for the difference that Nesbitt identified: the influence of the ideal pastor stereotype. My interviewees suggested that a man clergy better fits the ideal pastor stereotype when he becomes the father of a "traditional" family, while a woman clergy is viewed as becoming even less like the ideal pastor stereotype when she becomes a mother. It is likely that this normative emphasis on pastors as husbands and fathers is upheld at least in part by the longstanding theological concepts of God the Father and Jesus as the Church's husband. Although my study does not focus on the theology behind the many forms of discrimination experienced by women clergy in congregational settings, it is important to note that in many instances, theological ideas work alongside so-called "secular sexism" in creating draining environments for women clergy.

3.2.4 The Challenge of Creating a Support System at Home

Since previous research has indicated that women clergy are significantly less likely than their male counterparts to be married, I decided to ask my informants about it. In Nesbitt's (1995) study, women clergy were consistently around twice as likely to be single as their male counterparts, while Zikmund et. al (1998) found that 38% of the women clergy in their study were unmarried compared to 8% of men clergy. With marriage being a prominent part of many people's support systems, this gap puts women clergy at a disadvantage. While marriage is not desirable for all clergy, nor is it the only way of forming supportive relationships, many women clergy do seek to marry and may find their spouses to be significant sources of emotional support when coping with draining work environments. The marriage gap could contribute to women leaving pastoral ministry at unequal rates in several ways. A lack of a supportive spouse may therefore hasten emotional burnout and increase the likelihood of women clergy leaving ministry. Alternatively, due to the apparent difficulty in finding a spouse while working in

pastoral ministry, it is possible that some women clergy may choose to leave ministry in order to more easily find and pursue romantic relationships.

Given the potential importance of a spouse to at least some women clergy, then, I asked my participants why they believed this gap existed between the proportions of married men and women clergy. They suggested that it was mainly due to the struggle of dating as a woman pastor, the uncertainty associated with the role of "the pastor's husband," and the "fishbowl effect." These difficulties reduce the chance of women clergy finding partners and may accelerate their emotional burnout in an already draining work environment.

3.2.5 "Hard to Date"

The most frequently cited reason for the relatively low proportion of married women clergy was simply "It's hard to date as a woman pastor." Jeanne's description of this state was particularly memorable:

> "[My dad said] 'I think the two women who have the worst luck in love are the minister and the mortician.' And I said, 'That's not funny,' and he said 'I'm not making a joke, like, I'm just telling you what I think.'"

Several of my participants attributed this lack of "luck" in dating to men finding their status of holding positions of religious authority to be unattractive or, more generally, men responding negatively to women in positions of power in general. (None of my participants identified themselves to me as non-heterosexual, so as far as I know, my data only concerns heterosexual relationships). Maria, a 50-year-old Episcopal priest, referred to the priesthood as a "date killer," saying:

> If I tell them “Oh, I run a church, and a school, and I'm clergy,” [...] it either brings out the crazy Christian side of people, or they run away scared, you know, because then you're going to convert them or something.

Her comment suggests that the position of clergyperson may be perceived as unattractive by many men due to the traditional religious connotations of the role. Given the high proportion of men clergy who are married, however, the religious significance of pastoral ministry does not appear to be universally unattractive across genders. This disparity therefore indicates that religious leadership may be perceived negatively only when a woman holds the role of clergy, perhaps because a pastor is considered a traditionally un-feminine occupation. Men may therefore feel threatened by women who occupy a position that has overwhelmingly male associations with it. Several of my participants connected their challenges in finding romantic partners to that of women in other traditionally-male occupations based on this normative idea. Sierra, a 34-year-old Presbyterian pastor who had left pastoral ministry, told me:

> This is not just a clergywoman thing, I think. A lot of my good friends from undergrad are really wonderful, powerful women, doctors, lawyers, nonprofit directors. A lot of them are not married, or took a long time [...] I think it goes [with] educated women, it's hard to find a partner that who can be comfortable in - you would say if we're thinking heteronormative males - in their masculinity for that, honestly.

Her anecdotal evidence suggests that women in powerful positions outside of the religious field may also encounter frustration when looking for a partner due to the possibility of them being viewed as a “threat” to the partner’s masculinity. Thus it seems that women clergy not only have to confront misogyny within their traditions, but must also struggle with many of the same challenges that plague career-oriented women in secular culture.

As I mentioned above when speaking about friends, if women clergy are only willing to consider potential partners who recognize their ordination - which seems likely - then many, if not all, people who adhere to theologically conservative denominations are not potential partners. Simply put, if women clergy's dating pool is confined to those who are either from Christian traditions who ordain women or who are non-Christian (which may pose other challenges for pastors' spouses unrelated to gender, such as ideological conflicts or social repercussions) the pool of potential spouses shrinks considerably.

Among all-Christian groups, such as the student bodies at Christian seminaries, my informants suggested that the dating pool was even smaller. All of the women in my study had Master in Divinity degrees from seminaries, where several of them had met their spouses. While Julia met her spouse while attending a Wesleyan seminary, she indicated that she believes this can be a challenging environment in which to meet men due to others' theological beliefs about women's roles. She refers specifically to complementarianism, the belief that God created women as complements - not as equals - to men:

> I think that [women clergy] are single because I think that Christian men are not taught how to co-exist like with a strong woman. Not all Christian men. [...] There were a few other guys who would like a strong woman, but I'd say for the most part, the men who go to seminary and men who are strong Christians, [...] either they're complementarian and then you know what that means, or they're egalitarian and they still just have some complementarian residue in their minds. And they don't know what to do with a woman who, like, has a career, and who has a calling in and of herself.

Julia's discussion of "complementarian residue" reflects the larger trend underlying much of the discrimination faced by women clergy: while some people nominally support women's full

equality within Christianity, they still show preference for men in church leadership positions. Many of the people whom women clergy encounter would likely identify themselves as adhering to egalitarian theology, but their subtle forms of resistance to women clergy's power within the Church says otherwise. Given the confluence of "normal" sexism and theologically-reinforced religious sexism in women clergy's experiences, it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the two factors' impact, but it appears both affect women clergy to some degree.

On the other hand, two never-married participants in my study told me that they had encountered people who fetishized women clergy and their religious authority. One of these women told me:

> There are some people who feign an interest in you because they fetishize the role of the pastor. [...] That's a reality, there are some people who are willing to try to date you because of what they think it will be like to quote unquote be with the pastor.

This sexualization of the role of a woman pastor demonstrates another way in which women clergy's religious authority may be viewed as abnormal by potential partners. The other pastor summed up her experiences with dating in this way:

> It has been my experience that men are either intimidated by the fact that I'm a clergy person, or it's weird, like the level to which they have somehow fetishized [women clergy]. [...] This notion of how cool or quirky it might be to date a clergy person is really the reason they're dating you, and not so much about the emotional or personal connection that you might have.

This clergywoman's quote demonstrates the multiple challenges that women clergy can face while dating. In identifying the many extra hurdles and pitfalls that clergy women faced when it

came to finding love, my interviewees spoke powerfully to the personal cost of pastoral service. That such challenges made the job less appealing seems all but certain.

3.2.6 The Challenge for Partners: Breaking Gender Norms as the "Pastor's Husband"

According to the ideal pastor idea, a man pastor should have a wife who is an active member of the church. Nesbitt (1995) even speculated that the expectation of unpaid labor given by the pastor's wife contributes to the salary increase men pastors receive when they marry. This is certainly an example of how women clergy are inherently unable to meet the standards of the ideal pastor. But this norm also seems to impact clergy women in another way via its effects on potential partners' willingness to enter into a relationship with them. Bethany summarized the issue succinctly: "It takes a special kind of man to be able to say 'Yeah, I'm the pastor's husband,' because it's just not culturally normative for us." This sentiment highlights that it is not just women clergy who are breaking normative roles, but also their partners. While the husbands of women clergy may not experience discrimination in the way that women clergy do, they are still required to break with the prevailing cultural ideas surrounding the role of pastor.

3.2.7 The Fishbowl Effect

Several of my participants indicated that pastoring a congregation can place women clergy in the position of "living in a fishbowl" - that is, their personal life is under the scrutiny of members of their congregation. In this respect, Kate compared the position to that of elected political leaders, saying that "People care so much about your personal life and what you're doing in it." While this difficulty in dating can also be experienced by men clergy, some of my participants alluded to an especially extreme purity culture being applied to women clergy. Phoebe told me "There's all this like weird sexuality purity, you know - you're a pastor, are you allowed to date?" Her quote echoes the issue of existing in the position of pastor, a position often

associated with strong morality, while also being a woman, whose sexuality is often judged by the purity culture that is more typically associated with evangelical Christian communities.[4] Amanda talked about some of the practical implications of this environment:

> And like the church, especially small churches, can be a real pressure cooker. [...] I have friends who, like, their boyfriends would like take Ubers so that the church didn't know what their car looked like, or they would always park multiple blocks away and like, you know, like try to like take different routes to walk to the pastor's house because church members had like eyes everywhere to see them. [It is] exhausting being the center of everyone's attention.

The practice of "hiding" a romantic relationship from a congregation that Amanda describes adds another layer to the already complicated process of dating while working in pastoral ministry. The necessity for potential partners to accept a woman who holds an untraditional role, to fill the undetermined position of "pastor's husband," and to live under the scrutiny of congregation members may make it more challenging for women clergy to date and find spouses if they would like to get married. These limitations together can all reduce the chance that a woman clergy will find a fulfilling romantic relationship, which can in turn make it more difficult (though not impossible) for them to establish a strong support system in their personal life.

3.2.8 A Marriage Solution: Clergy Couples

Given the barriers that can exist for women clergy who are seeking partners, it is perhaps unsurprising that many women clergy marry other clergy, generally from the same denomination

[4] While the definition of purity culture is contested, I use it here to refer to theological beliefs and practices which emphasize the importance of heterosexual marriage unions and of keeping oneself sexually "pure" outside of marriage.

(and therefore supportive of women's ordination), forming so-called "clergy couples." It is not certain exactly how common these unions are; Zikmund et. al (1998) found that 42% of married clergy women in their study were married to other clergy, and I could not find any more recent statistics. In my study, three of the nine clergywomen who were married at the time of my study were married to other clergy. While my study is of course not a representative sample, it seems likely that clergy continue to make up a significant proportion of clergy women's spouses.

The case of clergy couples demonstrates the friction between traditional pastoral hiring systems and the real lives of many modern clergy. Being a part of a clergy couple can pose challenges for clergy, chief among them being finding jobs near each other. Most clergy couples hope to find jobs for both partners within their respective denomination in the same area. In practice, of course, this can be quite difficult. Two of my interviewees told me about periods in which they and their spouses had served churches that were a considerable distance apart, resulting in long commutes. Regarding her and partner's placements within the Methodist appointment system, Phoebe told me, "The [Bishop's] Cabinet was really, really excited when they could appoint us within 40 miles of each other. And I mean like they felt like that was a home run." Her quote suggests that many clergy couples must adapt to long commutes amidst already-unusual (and overlapping) work schedules. Besides deviating from the ideal pastor stereotype, clergy couples defy even the general principle of most church hiring systems. In appointment systems, like in that of Phoebe's experience, the hiring decision is based on finding a job for one pastor in a family where the pastor is presumed to be the only breadwinner. This can pose problems in all families in which the pastor's spouse works outside of the home, but the challenge may be especially acute for couples in which both spouses are seeking equivalent pastoral jobs. Phoebe went on to say:

> [The problem] is modern times versus 50 years ago where you had one spouse, primarily a woman, who stayed home and was perfectly happy to just pick up and move and follow the, at the time, traditional male. So I think it's just the model that doesn't fit.

Her belief in the limitations of the appointment system underlines the reality that the institutional systems surrounding clergy remain rooted in an archaic ideal clergy stereotype and therefore do not accommodate the experiences of not only women clergy, but of many modern men clergy as well. In call systems, some clergy couples to struggle to find jobs near each other, period, leading one spouse to either take a secular job, work part-time, or work in a non-preferred pastoral position that may be more available (such as a pastor who wants to do congregational ministry working as a hospital chaplain). Hence, another reason women become or remain pastors at lower rates than men is that many of them marry men clergy, and there are major barriers to finding two positions in one denomination in the same location.

One solution to this challenge for clergy couples is to serve as co-pastors. In contrast to traditional church pastor hierarchies, in which there is generally some sort of head pastor and an associate pastor, co-pastors share responsibilities and prestige equally. While not exclusively held by clergy couples, co-pastorates provide a solution to the issue of finding two pastoral jobs. Only one of my interviewees was serving as a co-pastor at the time of this study. She shared a Presbyterian church with her husband, Bill. Prior to them serving as co-pastors, Bill had been the solo pastor at this church. She told me about the challenges that could come with initiating a co-pastorate:

> When we were talking with [this church] about the possibility of co-pastors, you know, the question that we got asked was, “Well, who's the pastor, like, who's in charge, you know, who's the one pastor that we go to?” you know, and there was some inkling that it

needed to be Bill because he was male. And fortunately, he quickly said "Oh no, you know, you can go to either one of us."

Jackie's story suggests that while a co-pastorate can be an ideal situation for women clergy, especially for those who live in areas with few pastoral positions, the idea of co-pastors can be viewed as foreign by congregations who are accustomed to having a single principle leader.

While difficult to obtain, co-pastorates can be a means of allowing a congregation to have its first woman pastor or for women pastors to surpass the glass ceiling. Jackie, the first woman pastor at her congregation, believed that her role as a co-pastor served to increase congregational exposure to women clergy:

> I think this church has made pretty good leaps and bounds by doing a clergy couple. And my hope is that, you know, by Bill and I making sure everything is equal, [...] my hope is that I'm paving the way that, if and when we did leave, that they would consider hiring a female head of staff.

Jackie's experience highlights the role that co-pastorates can play in increasing positive receptions to women clergy through the social contact method (as discussed earlier). This unorthodox system of church leadership may therefore be influential in increasing congregations' exposure to women clergy, as congregations may be more willing to hire a woman pastor when accompanied by a man pastor. Not all clergy couples desire to serve at the same church, but co-pastorates appear to be a solution for some clergy couples' job searches. Significantly, they appear to help women clergy break down the barriers of "getting in" to a church that has not previously hired women clergy. Clergy couples therefore occupy an unique place amidst the systems of pastoral hiring and gender discrimination: they directly challenge the

longstanding norm of single-pastor families while also potentially playing a role in gradually increasing congregations' acceptance of women clergy.

3.2.9 #PastorsToo: Sexual Harassment in the Pastoral Workplace

When thinking of sexual harassment in church environments, it is common to think of well-known incidents in which men pastors have harassed women staff or congregation members. This dominant narrative does not encompass the experiences of women clergy, however, who can be vulnerable to sexual harassment from other staff and congregation members. As expected, women clergy are more likely than their men counterparts to report being sexually harassed; McDuff (2008) found that 14.75% of women clergy and only 3.2% of men clergy agreed that sexual harassment was a problem for them in their work. While the higher rate of harassment of women clergy has been established by previous research, therefore, I was surprised by how little congregations did to protect women clergy or to punish harassers. Indeed, in the case I explore below, it was the victim who was arguably punished, while the perpetrator faced no consequences at all.

One of my participants, who will be referred to as Caroline in this section, told me about her personal experience with being sexually harassed by a male congregant. She had all of the characteristics identified by McDuff (2008) as increasing women clergy's chance of being sexually harassed - she was young, unmarried, and serving what she referred to as a relatively conservative congregation. While the sexual harassment of women in the workplace is not unique to women clergy, this pastor's description of the response of the interim senior pastor and her church's personnel committee demonstrates the extent to which the unique environment of the church may give women substantially less recourse. As Caroline recounted the story, after

she reported the harassment to the interim senior pastor and her personnel committee, they did not address the cause of her complaint:

> [The interim senior pastor] and the committee got together, and they asked me what I was wearing. They asked me to apologize for being in that place at that time with that person. They asked me what I did to make him want to touch me, what I said to make him want to touch me, and why I froze up when it happened instead of pushing him away and saying no. As you can imagine, these meetings went on week after week after week for about three months.

This Presbyterian pastor's experiences reveal how some churches' grievance processes for sexual harassment fail to adequately address the issue. She went on to describe how the situation became increasingly toxic, resulting in her leaving this job:

> The interim [senior pastor] started coming to my office regularly and threatening things that he technically could not do. "I'm going to fire you. I'm going to make sure that you get fired." Well, you can't do that to a minister who's installed and called. It needs to be a unanimous decision by the congregation and by the session [lay governing committee], and it needs to be a very public affair, there needs to be legit reasons why. I was already secretly looking for another job, which actually protected me from being fired. So I would tell him "You're wrong," and I have all of this recorded. And eventually I did tell him, I said "You know, I have you on recording. You can't be saying this stuff." And at that point he did stop threatening me with that. But while I was interviewing here [at my current church], he said, "If you don't take that job, I'm going to make your life a living hell."

In Caroline's experience, the response of the church leadership consisted of victim blaming and threatening that took place outside of any formal grievance process. She went on to describe how the regional denominational leadership received a report from her senior pastor and proceeded to agree that she was at fault in the incident and should publicly apologize. In the instance, the institutional system did not take action on her case, while outside of the "official" response, she was continually harassed by her boss. This is an example of how a sexual harassment incident can devolve into a toxic situation due to church leadership responses and can cause the woman clergy in question to leave either her job or pastoral ministry altogether. In this situation, the church committee's choice to blame Caroline, the victim, allowed the perpetrator to continue to harass her. This was the only instance of sexual harassment related to me by an interviewee, but it serves as a example of how sexual misconduct can be treated poorly in the relatively unregulated workplace environment of churches. McDuff (2008) suggests that workplace organizational controls, such as giving clergy high levels of autonomy and support, can help reduce the incidence of sexual harassment and can mitigate the decrease in job satisfaction if harassment does occur. Given the potential impact of the congregational workplace, then, more study is needed to determine if church governance can impact the frequency of and responses to the sexual harassment of women clergy. For instance, it is unknown if denominational leadership structure (e.g. such as in the call system versus the appointment system) can affect the way sexual harassment reports are addressed.

In the story of Caroline, the congregant who harassed her never received consequences from the church or denomination. She eventually chose to take a new pastoral position in another state. While they don't often come to light, it is likely that similar experiences lead some women clergy to leave pastoral ministry completely.

3.2.10 Pastors Who Leave Pastoral Ministry

Because little is known about women pastors after they leave ministry, I interviewed three women who had left pastoral positions, whom I will call Amanda, Sierra, and Phoebe. Their stories demonstrate that the choice to leave pastoral ministry is rarely, if ever, caused by a single incident or complaint. While I have isolated and discussed multiple elements which affect women clergy's decisions to stay in or leave ministry, it is important to emphasize that these factors do not occur in a vacuum; rather, former clergy likely choose to leave pastoral ministry based on the overlapping and often interrelated effects of several of these influences. Sierra, for instance, told me:

> I decided that I needed to quit for my mental health. So you could say that's why I'm not serving in the church. I was in therapy, [...] I was really good about taking vacations, not answering my email on my day off and doing all that. And I felt like ministry, no matter how good I was doing, and how I felt I was being faithful, I was getting chewed out for it. [...] I think that's a huge thing that a lot of women won't say, is dealing with the extra sort of stress of having to do your job and then feel like you have to prove it all the time. It's exhausting.

Her full explanation of the reasons she left included difficult situations in her congregations, a toxic work environment, and exhaustion from working in a field full of both implicit and explicit sexism. Sierra's emotional description of her time in ministry points to a crucial and often overlooked aspect of women clergy leaving pastoral ministry: while understanding general trends and patterns of women clergy is critical, I think we are missing a big piece of the puzzle of why women serve as pastors at lower rates than men if we do not attend to the intense emotional toll that pastoring takes on women. I have already used the term "emotionally exhausting," but

the term almost fails to capture the intensity with which ex-pastors described their experiences. For Sierra, the structural challenges she faced, such as struggling to find positions and grow in her pastoral career, combined with the personal obstacles of seeking a fulfilling career. Although I have explored many of these specific challenges separately, Sierra's experience emphasizes that it is the sum of these challenges that contributes to the broader pattern. Women clergy may experience many of these obstacles simultaneously, making pastoral ministry positions become untenable long-term.

All three of these clergy also mentioned feelings of disillusionment with the Church and its actions overall. While I do not have reason to believe that this disillusionment is more common among women clergy than men clergy, it is worth identifying this sense of disillusionment as a relevant factor that may contribute to women clergy (and perhaps men clergy as well) leaving pastoral ministry. Phoebe, for example, said:

> I felt like in the church I served - now, granted, it was a very wealthy congregation. But I felt like we talked really big about things we're going to do or whatever, but like, we didn't actually do it, you know. Like, we spent a lot of money, our payroll was huge, our budget was huge, [...] I guess it just felt too much like a 1950s model of country club church that was trying so hard to not be [one].

While the other two pastors who left ministry did not describe their disappointments with the church in the same ways, all three of them did tell me about feeling unsatisfied with the church and its role in society. It is possible that many of the clergy in my study held similar opinions about the church, but were less likely to talk about them openly since most of them currently worked in congregations. Regardless, it appears that disillusionment with churches may contribute to clergy seeking jobs outside of pastoral ministry.

Besides these “push” factors, the women clergy who left pastoral ministry also all talked about the “pull” factors that led them into new careers. One of them was currently attending business school, one was attending medical school, and one was working for a faith-based nonprofit at the time of their interviews. All of them, however, had retained their pastoral credentials, and they went out of their way to tell me that they still believed they were following their callings. Although they had left formal pastoral ministry, they viewed their current work as a form of ministry, too. Amanda, who was currently attending medical school, described it this way:

> I think some of my peers would tell you I've left ministry and that like I just burned out on the church, and I did burn out in some ways. But like, the healthier story, and the thing that I'm really leaning into personally, is the idea that this is not walking away from a calling, this is exploring my calling more deeply.

Amanda’s beliefs about her calling reflect the complexity of “leaving” pastoral ministry - while these three clergy no longer work in traditional pastoral roles, they all appeared to view their ordained pastoral position as something that was still a part of their identities and futures. This surprised me; despite having negative experiences with pastoral ministry in some way, none of them had decided to completely abandon their role as pastors. Rather, they viewed themselves as using their ministerial skills in a new way.

The women clergy in my study who were no longer working as pastors all suggested to me that women clergy’s decisions to leave ministry are frequently based on multiple factors related both to their experiences in pastoral ministry and their personal lives. In the end, my interviewees’ emphasized that the choice to change careers is difficult, but that they do not believe that their ministry as pastors ended when they left their jobs as clergy. While they have

left explicit pastoral ministry, they still maintain their clergy identities and view their work as a form of ministry.

3.2.11 Conclusion

While sexist discrimination within churches has serious consequences for women clergy, my research suggests that challenges coming from outside the church environment abound as well. As this section has revealed, my informants juggled isolation, work-life balance, relationships, and toxic workplace environments. Women pastors break the mold of what pastors' lives are "supposed" to be like, and they encounter many of the same challenges faced by their counterparts in secular workplaces on top of religiously-rooted sexist expectations. This combination of church-related challenges and society-related challenges illustrates that women clergy's decisions to leave pastoral ministry must be understood both in the context of the church and in the context of women in the workplace more generally. A corollary of this is that while a great many challenges they face can be addressed within the church context, their experiences are also shaped by broader societal patterns over which churches have little control.

3.3 Gender Tests

Given that women's ordination has been permitted for over fifty years by most mainline denominations, why have women not 'caught up' as a proportion of ordained clergy? There clearly must be barriers that go far beyond simple church policy. In an ethnographic study from 2017, sociologists Glenn Bracey and Leo Moore argued that predominantly white churches have remained racially homogeneous despite ostensibly embracing diversity by subjecting prospective members to uncomfortable, subtly racialized comments they call "race tests." Taking a cue from this analysis, I propose that a key way in which predominantly male-led churches have remained

predominantly male-led despite ostensibly embracing gender equity is a parallel phenomenon: ‘gender tests.’

In their study of majority-white evangelical churches in the United States, Bracey and Moore (2017) explore how white church members 'test' prospective members of color by subjecting them to off-putting and subtly racialized comments, a phenomenon they call 'race tests.' These tests are ones that members of color can only 'pass' in two ways: by declining to join the church or by ignoring the racial subtext, which is to say, by submitting to white racial dominance. Bracey reports encountering microaggressions which ranged from the seemingly innocuous (being ignored at the newcomers’ table) to the obviously racist and exclusionary (being shown Confederate memorabilia). The authors divide these experiences into “utility-based tests,” which serve to push people of color to accept white racial norms within the church space, and “exclusionary tests,” which seek to prevent non-white people from joining the church in question. Ultimately, they find that race tests serve to maintain the white norms of these institutional spaces.

In a parallel way, I use the term gender tests to refer to comments that people in churches and in broader society make toward women clergy that highlight their female bodies as unusual or remarkable. Example gender tests include the many comments described above that call attention (positive or negative) to the pastor’s female body or associated visible traits that are considered feminine (e.g. jewelry, makeup, shoes, etc.). Via such comments, congregation members amplify the pastor’s femininity as a continual reminder to both the pastor and the congregation that women pastors are atypical holders of men pastors’ positions. Like race tests, then, gender tests function to preserve the status quo by reminding listeners what kinds of bodies are welcome or acceptable in a particular space.

By subjecting women pastors to gender tests, congregation members are able to portray a woman pastor as an exception in a church and maintain the idea that "ideal pastors" (and therefore ideal candidates for churches to hire) are men. Women clergy are viewed as occupying an inherently masculine pastoral position regardless of how long they have been as pastor or how they act while in that position. While these microaggressions can turn into sexual harassment, they are distinct in that they are not necessarily sexualizing and they are frequently performed by both men and women congregants. I identify two specific types of gender tests that appear to be particularly potent: forced physical intimacy and comments about clergy's femininity.

Some of my participants reported incidents in which congregation members attempted to force physical intimacy against their wishes. When asked if she received negative comments about her position as a woman pastor, Claire told me:

> I get more of the comments that are just like, "What are you wearing under that robe?" things like that, just like the sexually inappropriate comments. I mean like men at the church will say things like "You remind me of my high school girlfriend." I mean, just wholly inappropriate [things] that they would never say to a male pastor on our staff. I've had to ask men at our church to stop kissing me, like, you know, because every time they greet me they go in for a big kiss and like they just feel this, like, I don't know, permission to do it. So I've literally had to say, like "Please stop kissing me."

Claire suggests that some congregation members appear to believe that they have a right to sexualize and touch her body since she is "their" pastor. These comments and physical touches can verge on sexual harassment, but not all gender tests appear outright hostile. Several of my interviewees were quick to point out that they experienced these microaggressions from people who were otherwise supportive of them, including Claire. She said:

> They're not saying you shouldn't be a pastor or we don't believe in women pastors, and I don't even think, especially the ones that told me I look like their high school girlfriend and other stuff like that, I don't even think they actually don't like me being their pastor, because like, these are the same people that write me really encouraging notes about sermons that I preach. But I think they just say more offensive stuff to women than they would say to men. And that's degrading. Like it's tiring.

Claire describes the contradiction inherent among people who nominally support women clergy but who also continually call them out as female and therefore abnormal. Ironically then, while people may support ordained clergy women in practice, they do not necessarily support them in theory, so to speak. That is, they are okay with having a woman pastor work at their church, but they do not want women clergy to change their conception of a pastor. These microaggressions serve to maintain the idea that women pastors are temporary replacements occupying a masculine position.

Gender tests most closely resemble Bracey and Moore's concept of utility-based tests - that is, they work to force women clergy to submit to male domination within churches. By calling attention to any outward indicators of traditional femininity, congregation members use gender tests to favor masculinity and therefore women clergy who best adhere to masculine standards. Julia told me about her experience with feminine jewelry:

> [The] congregation [is] always kind of sexualizing you and telling you how pretty you are and patting you on the head. You know, complimenting you on your earrings or complaining about your earrings because they're too distracting. I'm sorry, I preached a thirty minute sermon, and all you saw was my earrings? Get a life, dude.

Here, “distracting” is used to describe how women are considered to be abnormal in the role of pastor. A man preaching a sermon is “normal,” so his body is not distracting, but since a woman pastor is categorically atypical, her body and accoutrements are viewed as more noticeable to the congregation. In this instance, a congregant suggests that since Julia’s feminine jewelry supposedly decreases his or her ability to focus during the sermon, she should not wear jewelry in order to be a “better” pastor - where “better” means “more like a man.” Similarly, Maria told me about her experience with combining clergyhood and femininity:

> I've seen women clergy who literally cut their hair and wear pants and like give up being female or wearing even makeup. I mean, I wear makeup, right, because I love being a female, and I feel like that. So, that whole feminine side of it, you know, is like, is how can you embrace being both feminine and clergy and not feel like you are always being put up and compared to the guys.

Maria underlines that in an environment when femininity is noticed and emphasized, women clergy can feel pressured to counteract their femininity’s amplification by trying to appear less feminine - and therefore more masculine. This is an example of how women clergy “pass” gender tests only by submitting to the domination of masculinity. The felt need to change their physical appearance and possessions is another burden placed upon women clergy who are already disadvantaged in their church work environment.

The conceptual framework behind gender tests underlies the “too many women” motif present in some hiring situations (discussed earlier) - according to the gendered logic that underpins decisions related to pastoral hiring practices, if a woman pastor is currently holding the position of pastor at a church, the church must therefore have a man pastor serve as their other pastor (if they have multiple) or their next pastor in order to prevent their church’s pastoral

position from becoming de-gendered or even feminine. Gender tests serve to maintain male dominance in pastoral ministry by ensuring that while some pastors can be women, most pastors must continue to be men.

While previous research has amply demonstrated that women are being hired at unequal rates into pastoral positions, the idea of 'gender tests' provides a mechanism by which sexist biases are maintained outside of the hiring process, even in denominations that ostensibly embrace women pastors. Generally taking place after women clergy are hired at a congregation, gender tests continue to amplify how women clergy do not and cannot meet the inherently male standard of an "ideal pastor," and they prevent this "ideal pastor" standard from changing. Amanda told me:

> That comes from a really lovely place, right. Like people want to notice and tell me that my hair looks nice, and they, you know, love that I'm pregnant and are so excited for me. And also, even those positive things are still about the fact that I'm a woman in that space. And it is exhausting because it is a constant reminder that I have to be aware of my body and my voice and my hair and everything all the time.

Amanda's quote expresses a main effect of these gender tests: exhaustion. Gender tests create a draining environment for women clergy as pastors are forced to cope with unwanted comments, touches, and expectations about their gender expression. Gender tests reinforce the assumed male gender of clergy by continually reframing women clergy as deviants from the norm. Women clergy may therefore experience pressure to defend or minimize their femininity in the hopes of being seen as a more "neutral" pastor. These pressures add physical and emotional burdens for women clergy who are already serving in difficult jobs, eventually pushing them to seek other forms of employment.

Gender tests are not only unpleasant and draining for women clergy, but also serve a larger systemic function of perpetuating discriminatory hiring practices. Ultimately, gender tests serve as a means of maintaining sexist ideas of clergy, which have long-reaching consequences for both women clergy and the people they serve. I have discussed at length the extent of explicit and implicit sexism present in the clergy hiring process, even after more than fifty years of women's ordination in the denominations in this study, and I argue that this sexism is bolstered and supported by gender tests. Even though the number of women clergy has increased dramatically since women received the right to ordination in some denominations, congregations continue to use gender tests to maintain and reinforce their preference for men pastors. In the unregulated hiring environments of churches, this sexist stereotype can be enormously destructive to women clergy's career attainment.

Gender tests do not "cause" sexism in churches - rather, they are a manifestation of it - but they are a direct way in which congregants signal their preference for men to women clergy. Gender tests make sure that neither women clergy nor their congregants ever forget that women pastors can never be ideal pastors.

CONCLUSION

Women clergy encounter numerous hurdles while working in pastoral ministry on account of their gender. They are less likely to be hired; they are limited in their ability to achieve high-ranking positions; they are subject to delegitimizing comments from congregation members and strangers; they must face the challenges of balancing a family and clergy life; they can be vulnerable to sexual harassment and unjust responses to their complaints; and they encounter "gender tests" in which they are constantly reminded that they are not the "correct" gender for a pastor. These challenges paint a dismal picture of women clergy's experiences. Discrimination, it appears, is present at every level of clergyhood: at the systemic or denominational level, at the church level, and at the individual level. These layers of sexism - the macro level, meso level, and micro level - demonstrate the deep-rooted misogyny which is present in many Christian settings. These sites of discrimination work together to reinforce limitations on women clergy. What is particularly surprising about this situation is that the denominations in my study are generally viewed as being remarkably open to women leaders due to their acceptance of women's ordination. Many US Christian denominations do not do so at all. And yet my study suggests that there remains much work to be done in order to truly create equal opportunities for women pastors.

Much of the discrimination I have described relates to the prominence of the "ideal pastor" stereotype. My semi-structured interviews with seventeen women clergy allowed for me to perceive how influential this idea can be for clergy. Even fifty years after many mainline denominations began to ordain women, as long as the ideal pastor remains a married man with "2.5 children," clergy who do not fit this model are at a distinct disadvantage. Being a good

pastor, therefore, rests on far more than preaching or leadership. Rather, it is based on being a certain kind of person - and women clergy inherently "fail" to embody this ideal. While my study focuses on women clergy, it is clear that this stereotype affects all clergy who do not fit this stereotype, including pastors who identify as LGBTQIA+ or who otherwise break with the normative idea of clergy. More research is needed to fully explore the damaging impact of this idea.

Since much of the sexist discrimination experienced by women clergy rests on cultural norms that are deeply rooted in theological convictions held by individual congregation members, what can be done? There may be no way to completely end discrimination short of large-scale theological and cultural upheaval. However, I believe that there are actions which can be undertaken at the denominational level to significantly reduce the effects of discrimination on women clergy.

While the denominations in my study have chosen to support women's ordination, they have so far failed to follow through with the concrete measures that would be necessary to ensure that women clergy have equal opportunities for jobs, compensation, and advancement. If denominations truly wish to promote women's leadership within the church, they should commit to actively enforcing equal opportunity hiring practices beyond creating denominational statements which do not appear to actually affect women clergy's opportunities within clergy hiring systems.

Additionally, given the measurable pay gap between men and women clergy at all levels of career advancement, it is imperative that denominations commit to initiating equal pay policies among congregations. Due to the decentralization of hiring in call systems, this could perhaps be begun by requiring regional denominational approval of salary offers for pastors

based on a salary comparison with other pastors of all genders working in similar positions in the area. Additionally, since most of the hiring process in these denominations is conducted by lay members who often have little or no human resources experience, these denominations should establish mandatory training for search committee members concerning the topics of equal pay and implicit bias mitigation. While this would not eliminate bias amongst these committees, it has the potential to at least raise awareness of and reduce the extensive influence of sexism and other forms of discrimination on the filling of pastoral positions.

In appointment systems of hiring, gender-based discrimination may be more easy to combat due to the relative centralization of hiring authority. In these instances, it is essential that denominations actively recruit regional leaders who are committed to ensuring equal access to clergy positions for all pastors. Requiring extensive training for these leaders about how to combat internalized and externalized sexism could also help increase the gender equality of pastoral placements.

Beyond congregational and denominational leadership, however, my data suggests that women clergy's experiences with hiring discrimination are impacted significantly by individual congregation members. The job of policing women clergy's opportunities is not exclusively carried out by sexist church leaders, but is rather reinforced by the power of the ideal pastor stereotype among congregants. My interviews lead me to believe that this idea is a pervasive, harmful force for women clergy and others.

Changing normative ideas of any role is difficult, but it is imperative that denominational and congregational leadership work to combat this limiting role in every form through teaching and preaching messages which include women and working to increase the representation of women religious leaders, even, and perhaps especially, in churches which do not currently have

any women clergy on their staff. Given the difficulty of "breaking into" churches who have never had any women clergy on staff, I am led to believe that efforts such as these, however small they may be, could improve women clergy's opportunities within the hiring process. My data shows that the issue of discrimination against women clergy cannot be solved by action among denominational leaders alone, but requires intentional, direct action among all church members to change the concept of the "ideal pastor" from a masculine attribute to an idea that can actually be applied to all effective pastors.

Truly accepting and supporting women clergy therefore requires a fundamental cultural shift among churchgoers. It is likely that the women clergy in my study, for example, will continue to encounter the challenges I have described for the rest of their careers. Some of them who are currently serving in ministry may choose to leave pastoral ministry at some point in the future due to the difficulty of existing as a woman pastor, while others may continue to serve as ministers despite the systemic and personal challenges inherent in their position. Yet despite this somewhat dismal portrait of clergyhood for women, many of my interviewees expressed feelings of hope about the present and future of women clergy. Esther, a 73-year-old Presbyterian pastor, told me, "I guess what it all boils down to is the blessings outweigh the trials and tribulations for me, they do. And I guess if they didn't, then I wouldn't want to do it, you know, but they do." Her perspective was shared by several other clergywomen who told me about negative encounters they had in ministry, but also emphasized that they believed their ministry was worth the struggles. Athena, who had served as an ordained pastor for the longest time of anyone in my study, said:

> We've talked about all the issues of ministry and how hard it is, and it is. It's also, though, gratifying. And I don't know, it's just so worth it, everything about ministry. I would not

> do anything else for all for all the love or money in the world. [...] If you have a call on your life, there's just nothing better to be doing. If you love people, and you love God, and you want to share that love and that compassion and that peace and all of that with others, man, this is the place to be. And I, for all of the hell that ministry has put me through [...] I wouldn't do anything different. I love what I do.

These clergywomen's adamant beliefs in the value of their ministry served as a powerful message of hope about the future of women pastors even in the face of challenges. Some of them specifically connected their role as women pastors to furthering women's opportunities in the Church. Jackie described her belief in this role this way:

> What is most important is that I can help open up people's beliefs, and open up their lives, their eyes, and their ears, and our hearts to receive someone that God has called that may not be their typical, you know, vision of what a pastor should look like or should be like. And, hopefully, [I am] helping them realize that God can speak through a lot of different people and that God's work can be done through the young and the old, and, you know, the white and the black, and the female and the male, and it doesn't matter because God is so diverse. And it's an honor to be in this role and have younger females be able to watch you, and to, you know, sometimes look up to you and go "Wow, so she's doing that. Maybe I could do that, too."

Many of the stories from my interviewees were discouraging. But my interviewees themselves told me about their hopes for their own ministry and for the ministries of women in the future. While it is hard to be a woman pastor in a Christian community which favors masculinity, some of my participants indicated that they see their work as an honor - the honor of paving the way for more women leaders to challenge the church. As someone who wants to follow the trail they

have blazed for women in the church, my interviews filled me with a deep hope for a future created by these women and the many others who work to change the prevailing conception of clergy.

REFERENCES

Association of Religion Data Archives. (2010). County membership report Brazos County, Texas. Retrieved from https://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/rcms2010.asp?U=48041&T=county&Y=2010&S=Name

Association of Religion Data Archives. (2010). County membership report Harris County, Texas. Retrieved from https://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/rcms2010A.asp?U=48201&T=county&Y=2010&S=Name

Association of Theological Schools. Retrieved from https://www.ats.edu/data-visualization-tool

Bracey, G. E., & Moore, W. L. (2017). "Race Tests": Racial Boundary Maintenance in White Evangelical Churches. Sociological Inquiry, 87(2), 282-302. https://10.1111/soin.12174

Chaves, M. (1997). Ordaining women: Culture and conflict in religious organizations. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Chaves, M., & Eagle, A. (2015). Religious congregations in 21st century america. (). Retrieved from http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII_report_final.pdf

Churchwide equal employment opportunity and affirmative action plan. (1985). Paper presented at the 197th General Assembly, 197-204.

Episcopal news service reporter/assistant editor. (2019). The Office of Public Affairs. https://www.episcopalchurch.org/publicaffairs/episcopal-news-service-reporter-assistant-editor/

Knoll, B. R., & Bolin, C. J. (2018). She preached the word: Women's ordination in modern america. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Lehman, E. C. (1985). Women clergy: Breaking through gender barriers. Transaction Publishers.

Lipka, M. (2016). Which U.S. religious groups are oldest and youngest? Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/11/which-u-s-religious-groups-are-oldest-and-youngest/

Lipka, M. (2018). Mainline Protestants make up shrinking number of U.S. adults. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/

McDuff, E. (2008). Organizational Context and the Sexual Harassment of Clergy. Sociology of Religion, 69(3), 297-316. https://10.1093/socrel/69.3.297

Nesbitt, P. D. (1997). Clergy feminization: Controlled labor or transformative change? Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 36(4), 585-598.

Perry, S. L., & Schleifer, C. (2019). Are Bivocational Clergy Becoming the New Normal? An Analysis of the Current Population Survey, 1996–2017. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 58(2), 513-525. https://10.1111/jssr.12593

Questions and Answers: Religious Discrimination in the Workplace. (2008). U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/questions-and-answers-religious-discrimination-workplace#:~:text=However%2C%20it%20only%20allows%20religious,sex%2C%20age%2C%20or%20disability.

Quick Facts Brazos County, Texas. (2019). US Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/brazoscountytexas

Quick Facts Harris County, Texas. (2019). US Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/harriscountytexas

Raising kids and running a household: How working parents share the load. (2015). Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/11/04/raising-kids-and-running-a-household-how-working-parents-share-the-load/

Schleifer, C., & Chaves, M. (2016). The Price of the Calling: Exploring Clergy Compensation Using Current Population Survey Data. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 55(1), 130-152. https://10.1111/jssr.12254

Schleifer, C., & Miller, A. D. (2018). Occupational gender inequality among american clergy, 1976–2016: Revisiting the stained-glass ceiling. Sociology of Religion, 78(4), 387-410. doi:10.1093/socrel/srx032

Smith, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Social principles 2020: United methodist revised social principles, Gender Equality and Diversity, (2020). https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124

Tobin, G. (2016). Gender pay gap among clergy worse than national average – A first look at the new national data. Religion News Service. https://religionnews.com/2016/01/12/gender-pay-gap-among-clergy-worse-than-national-average-a-first-look-at-the-new-national-data/

Toward inclusiveness in employment: The presbyterian church (u.s.a.) churchwide policy for equal employment opportunity and affirmative action for general assembly agencies, (2016).

Who we are. Young Clergy Women International. https://youngclergywomen.org/about/who-we-are/

Zikmund, B. B., & Lummis, Adair T. Chang Patricia Mei Yin. (1998). Clergy women: An uphill calling (1st ed.). Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Before we begin, I want to make sure you understand the consent process. As mentioned in the form, you can withdraw at any time, and there will be no repercussions to you. There are no more than minimal risks to participating in this study. Your information will be stored securely under a pseudonym and will only be accessed by myself and my adviser who is overseeing this project. Does that all sound okay? [Wait for confirmation]

Do you have any questions about your rights as a participant before we begin?

As I mentioned, I would like to record the interview so that I can be sure to have an accurate record of our conversation. Is it okay if I begin [audio or video] recording now? [If okay, turn on recording device] Okay, I have begun recording.

Thanks. To start, I'm going to ask a few questions about your background and training, then we'll move on to discussing situations and challenges that may be experienced by women clergy.

Section I: Background

1. Let me start by asking about your training. Are you ordained as a clergy person?
2. How long have you been ordained?
3. Are you currently associated with a religious denomination, convention, or similar association? If so, which?
4. Did you have a religious upbringing?
    a. YES Probe: In what religious background, denomination, or affiliation were you raised?

i. Probe: If it is different than the one you were raised in, when did you change? Why?

5. Can you tell me how you decided to become a pastor?
6. What is your current position?
7. Is your current position at a church?
    a. YES Probe: Approximately how many people attend services on an average Sunday morning?
    b. NO Probe: Where do you currently work? Is your position affiliated with a denomination, convention, or similar kind of organization?
8. Do you have any other jobs besides being in ministry?
    a. YES Probe: What is/are your other employment position(s)?
9. How long have you been in your current position as a clergy member?

Section II: Women Clergy

You might know that researchers have found that a lot more women get divinity degrees than become clergy. I'm trying to figure out why that is the case.

OPEN-ENDED

10. Why do you think so many women train to be ministers or pastors but ultimately choose other paths?
    a. Probe: Can you tell me more about that? (repeat as needed to fully explore interviewee's ideas)
11. And is this situation true in your personal experience? That is, do you know if many of the women you trained with ended up in ministry positions, or not?

CONGREGATIONAL PREFERENCE

12. Some people think that it has something to do with congregations not wanting women pastors. Have you ever run into that?
    a. Probe: How do you think people in your congregation feel about women pastors? What about at your previous congregation(s)? (if applicable)
13. Has congregational preference ever affected you in obtaining a position?
14. Have you ever had an encounter with someone from your community or congregation/place of work who did not believe in or support women pastors?
    a. YES Probe: What is/are specific instance(s)? Do these encounters affect your decision to stay in your current congregation/place of work?

SOCIAL CONSERVATISM

One thing I'm curious about is whether some communities might be more open to the idea of women clergy than others.

15. Have you ever worked as a clergy person in another city or town? If so, which?
    a. YES Probe: When you were there, did you ever have an encounter with someone who did not believe in or support women's ordination?
        i. YES Probe: How would you compare those experiences--do you think it was more common to have these negative encounters in your previous city/town than in your current city/town? Why?
16. Based on your experience or that of other women pastors you know, do you think certain communities are more receptive to the idea than others?
    a. YES Probe: Why do you think certain communities are more receptive, while others are less so? What factors are involved?

b. Probe: What about urban versus rural difference? Do you think that congregations located in cities might be more open-minded about women clergy than those located in rural areas?

LACK OF OPPORTUNITY TO INTERACT WITH OTHER WOMEN PASTORS

Another reason people have given for there being fewer women clergy is that in most denominations that ordain women, women still make up a minority of clergy overall. Women clergy may therefore have fewer opportunities to interact with other female clergy.

17. Have you ever felt isolated due to the lack of other women clergy in your community or denomination?
    a. Probe: What was the situation? Do you think this plays a role in discouraging women from becoming ministers or from staying in the ministry?
    b. Probe: How often do you interact with other women clergy?
    c. Probe: Are there any other women clergy at your place of work?
18. Would you like to interact more often with other women clergy?

PASTORAL HIRING PRACTICES

19. In your church or denomination, how are ministerial positions filled?
20. Do you think this hiring practice affects whether women become pastors and/or which positions they take?

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

21. How would you describe your balance between your work and your personal life?
    a. Probe: Do you think your career offers or enables a healthy work-life balance? Why or why not?

22. Do you think that the issue of finding a work-life balance in pastoral ministry affects whether women choose to stay in or leave ministry work?
23. Research shows that women clergy are less likely to be married than male clergy. Why do you think this is?
    a. Probe: Do you think being a clergywoman impacts your romantic relationships?

Section III: Demographics

Thank you for your answers so far. In closing, I am going to ask you a few background questions.

24. In what year were you born?
25. What race do you consider yourself?
26. How would you describe your political ideology: very liberal, moderately liberal, centrist, moderately conservative or very conservative?
27. Which political party do you most often support, Democratic, Republican, or something else?
28. What is your highest level of education?
29. Are you married?
    a. YES Probe: are you married to another clergy person?

Section IV: Wrap Up

30. As part of my research I am also hoping to talk to women who trained to be ministers or pastors but pursued other paths. Do you know anyone like that who might be willing to talk to me?

31. Thank you so much for taking the time to answer my questions! Before saying goodbye, I wanted to give you one last chance to tell me anything I might be missing about why many women who train to be ministers or pastors ultimately choose other paths.
32. As I mentioned, this interview is for my undergraduate honors thesis. This is just a small pilot study, but I would be happy to share my results. Would you like a copy of my thesis when I am finished?

Thank you again, for participating in this interview. Your answers were very helpful. If you happen to think of anything else later, or have questions, feel free to email me using the address on the Study Information Sheet.