

**Biblical Women in the Digital Age: Exploring Ideas of  
Motherhood and Femininity within Far-Right Evangelical  
Communities on Instagram**

Bachelor's Thesis

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## Abstract

Since the 1970's a new movement has been emerging within white conservative American evangelicalism, the Biblical Patriarchy movement. This movement is centered upon strict and fixed gender roles that are divinely commanded by the Bible. Key tenets of this movement are submission of wives to husbands, that women opt-out of participating in paid labor, and that the only acceptable family structure is a heterosexual nuclear family with a male head. Followers of Biblical patriarchy aim to practice biblical manhood and womanhood, the divinely sanctioned roles for men and women. On Instagram I found a community of women organized around promoting biblical womanhood and providing resources and information about what being a biblical woman means. This paper looks to explore ideas of femininity and motherhood and their respective responsibilities amongst these women. It aims to elucidate what these women have to say about what their domestic responsibilities are and what it means to be a biblical woman and mother.

*Key words: Evangelicalism, Gender, Biblical Patriarchy, Quiverfull, Biblical Womanhood, Femininity, Motherhood, White Christian Nationalism*

## Chapter I: Introduction

May 26, 2022:

*The next post I see is from Lori, it is a quote from Peter Marshall, who served as US Senate Chaplain between 1947 and 1948. It says that the most important thing needed for the country is women to returning to “old-fashioned morality, to old-fashioned decency, to old-fashioned purity and sweetness; for the sake of the next generation, if for no other reason. The modern challenge to motherhood is the eternal challenge - that of being godly women.” This is in line with the broad message of Lori’s page, that Christians need to return to “traditional” ways of life. Women must embrace their role as Godly women and be models and protectors of purity and morality, for and of their children and families. Next I see a screenshot of a tweet of Lori’s that says “Sex education when I was a child consisted of separating boys and girls. We were taught about having a period. That’s it. The details don’t need to be taught, especially to children. It’s to be learned in the marriage bed after the wedding between a husband and wife.” The post has 1500 likes and 199 comments, 3 women I follow have liked the post. I notice there are significantly more comments on this post than Lori’s normally receives. Most of her posts get between 15 and 100 comments, the number of likes though is in line with most of her other posts. I went to read the comments under the post and was somewhat surprised to see that most of them were in disagreement with it. Most of the women commenting follow Lori and also run accounts dedicated to biblical womanhood, being stay-at-home-moms (SAHMs), or homemaking, I follow a couple of them. Many of them take issue with the idea that kids should be taught nothing about sex before marriage. They provide a number of reasons for this, but the points that come up most frequently are that if kids do not have trusted godly adults they can ask questions they may: turn to the internet and pornography to answer questions, be left vulnerable to unplanned pregnancies or STDs from lack of*

information (I assume about why sex is only acceptable within marriage), and they may then listen to secular and/or immoral sources of information like public school curriculums or other kids. Other comments also point out that not talking to kids about sex makes it seem shameful, and might make them more vulnerable to abuse because they will not be comfortable talking to adults about sex and therefore will be hesitant to report. @Biblicalfemininitybootcamp says “Around 7-9 our kids know the mechanics of how babies are made. Because they are children, they think it’s gross! Fine by me. We drop it at that. The deeper details of what the true intimate relationship of marriage is like is mostly learned after marriage. You just don’t know what you don’t know til you get there. But to not explain it \*at all\* is a great disservice. I personally think other godly couples (asking the spouse of your gender) (and like 1-2 couples, not talking about it with everyone you know at church), not your own parents, are the ones to ask detail questions to when you are in that phase of life to carry it out. I’m sure this post is borne of the modern agenda to teach consent and tons of sexual (normal AND perverted things) to children as grooming, mostly on tv and in school. That truly is terrible!” While it is not explicitly stated what is meant by “perverted things” or “grooming”, they almost certainly are references to public schools adding education about gay sex to school curriculums. Over the past few months I have noticed a rise in the volume of posts dedicated to this topic, and the term “Grooming” seems to have become a new dog-whistle, signaling a belief that queer people preying upon, indoctrinating and abusing children. ... The next post I see is from Ané. The first slide is a screenshot of one of her tweets that says “What the Bible doesn’t say: “Make sure everyone does their fair share. What the Bible does say: “Outdo one another in showing honor ” (Romans 12:10b) This is the difference between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of the Kingdom.” The second slide then asks “How can you go above and beyond in showing honor to your husband today?”. The post has 7400 likes and 86 comments, 5 other accounts I follow have liked it. The post is a reminder to wives to not waste time dwelling upon, or complaining about shortcomings you may see in your



*husband, and to instead show him gratitude and appreciation for all he does do. This idea is prominent amongst women who practice submission. It is a better use of your time and energy to focus on your husband's positive traits and praise him for them so you do not grow resentful of him, and he does not see you as a nag who he will then resent in turn. In the comments section Ané has pinned a comment from a woman I do not follow asking for "good ways to show honor" to your husband. Some of the suggestions include "to listen and care about what state each other is in.", "make him his coffee OR snack before he asks", "random sexual "favours" when he's not expecting it", and "ask him, "what is the most important thing to you that I have done when when you come home from work?". All these responses come from other women and the woman who asked for suggestions has responded each to of them thanking them for the suggestion. To show honor or appreciation then is a mix of both material acts of service you can do, making him food, cleaning up as he requests, initiating sex, and providing emotional support, checking in to see how he is doing and what he needs from you. It is also mentioned by at least one woman that this emotional support should be mutual, despite the original post noting that you should be engaging in acts that show honor without expectation of reciprocity.*

What draws women into far-right ideology? What motivates women to advocate against feminism, the equal rights amendment, equal pay, or affirmative action? What makes some women desire husbands to whom they are totally submissive? These are the questions that prompted me to try and build a better understanding of women on the far-right. Far-right politics and the increasing sway the extreme right has on mainstream politics has garnered plenty of coverage over the past few years, particularly in the wake of the Trump presidency and Johnson administration. Absent from much of this coverage though has been in-depth analysis of the women of the right. Going beyond just elected politics and the specific issues that motivate women in the voting booth, understanding the day to day lives and beliefs of conservative women is something that has failed to garner much attention over the past few years.

Considering the centrality of “family values” in modern American conservatism it seems essential as well to try and unpack what exactly “family values” means. The use of the term as a political buzz-word connotes clearly the importance of the family and the domestic sphere in conservative politics.

In the digital era it increasingly seems that “conservative” has been adopted as an identity category, to be a conservative is something that impacts every aspect of your life and identity. This is evident in the frequent moral panics about conservatives being banned, shadow-banned, or censored on social media platforms, efforts that have been repeatedly shown not to be happening and that are often described as “discrimination against conservatives”. To be a then conservative is not only to possess particular political or economic ideas, but to embody and certain values and behaviors in your domestic life.

Furthermore, the modern American right-wing cannot be separated from contemporary white Evangelicalism, which in turn has become deeply politicized. Both white evangelicals and the Republican Party (GOP) have seen significant shifts towards extreme social conservatism over the past few decades, particularly in the decades since the Carter presidency. Parallel to the second-wave feminist, civil rights, and gay liberation movements, gender politics have become increasingly central to both conservative political ideology and evangelical doctrine. Ideas about gender and family are at the core of and are the intersection between conservative politics, conservative evangelicalism, and white supremacy.

Additionally, considering how relatively recent the alliance of white evangelicals and the GOP was, existing significantly only since the creation of the Moral Majority in the late 1970s, and how successful conservative evangelicals have been at segregating themselves from secular society, there seems to be little broad understanding of who exactly evangelicals are and what they believe.

The politics of women on the far-right is a massive topic, but to begin to construct an understanding of these women I believe it is essential to first try to gain a sense of how they define and identify themselves. The aim of this paper is to explore how of femininity and motherhood are presented and performed by conservative evangelical women primarily on Instagram. The women I studied belong to the “biblical patriarchy” movement and aim to

practice “biblical womanhood”. I looked at how they are using digital communities to monitor, critique, and display their own and one another’s performances of femininity, as wives, and as mothers. I aim to construct an understanding both of what they say femininity and wife/motherhood should be and how they reinforce or challenge these ideas through their own digital performances of these identities. Considering the influences of stated political ideology, religion, and race I aim to see how these women present their performances as wives, mothers, and women and build digital communities around them.

To study the ways in which conservative evangelical women today approach ideas of gender, femininity, womanhood, and motherhood I found a community of far-right Evangelical women on Instagram. These women aspire to conform to what they call “Biblical Womanhood” advocating not just for traditional “family values” and gender roles, but women being entirely submissive to their husbands and fathers.

#### Key Terms and Definitions:

Evangelical, conservative Evangelical, and white evangelical: Evangelical is a broad term used by many protestants to describe themselves and the theology they follow. There is no one evangelical denomination or doctrine, many would likely have a difficult time identifying one another as being members of a shared faith community. Broadly evangelicals are united by four core beliefs: the Bible is the literal word of God, Jesus Christ died and was resurrected allowing for the possible forgiveness of humanity from sin, you must consciously choose to be a follower of Jesus Christ, experiencing what is often described as being “born-again” in the truth of Bible, and that evangelizing, or spreading the truth of the gospel, is of the utmost importance to save as many souls as possible. The generality of the term Evangelical and the diversity of the people it is applied to is important to keep in mind. One of the main lines dividing evangelicals is race. White and Black evangelicals differ significantly in their politics. While they may share similar theological positions it is important to note that white evangelicalism in the past several decades has come increasingly to revolve around secular politics rather than specific religious ideas.

Jerry Falwell Jr., the son of influential megachurch pastor and founder of the Moral Majority Jerry Falwell, stated in an interview with the New York Times in 2018

*I think Jesus made it clear that you use your common sense and your God-given brain to decide who will be the best political leader. I don't look to the teachings of Jesus for what my political beliefs should be, I don't think he wanted us to. We need somebody tough, we need somebody who has the right position on the issues. [Donald Trump has] not only done everything he said he was going to do, but he's more. I think he's going to end up being our greatest president since George Washington(Haberman, 2018).*

In the same article Moral Majority co-founder Cal Thomas expressed his reasons for becoming a critic of the organization in later years stating “evangelicals are missing a greater point. If you’re not careful the political activism overwhelms the primary message, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the only thing that is able to truly change a life and by extension change a nation, and no politician can fill that role” (Haberman, 2018). These two quotes encapsulate the modern dilemma of conservative white evangelicalism, balancing secular political action with theology. White evangelicals are the most conservative demographic in the country and the most reliable voters for the Republican Party (GOP). Black protestants, including Black evangelicals, on the other hand are consistent democratic supports and are significantly more liberal than their white counterparts. Conservative evangelicalism has become a specific ideological and theological description for individuals as well as churches and evangelical organizations. When I attended a baptist church service and asked how the church leaders would describe their church they described it as a “conservative evangelical church”. Conservatism within evangelicalism is centered on strict adherence to gender roles, opposition to same-sex marriage and transgender people, and biblical literalism. Politically the only way to vote in line with your beliefs as a conservative evangelical is to vote for right-wing politicians. Additionally important to conservative evangelicals are issues such as prayer in schools, protection of religious liberty (specifically christian religious liberty), and the limited government oversight and interference in religious or church based organizations or activities. The evangelicals I am looking at in this paper are conservative evangelicals who represent only a sub-group within evangelicals. They

are not representatives of the whole of the faith, and they do have ideology that is in conflict with other protestants that identify themselves using the evangelical moniker.

#### Biblical literalism:

Biblical literalism is the belief that the Bible is the literal word of God and is irrefutable and cannot be modified or adapted for cultural context or changing attitudes over time. The belief in “old-fashioned” or “traditional” values is linked to the stance that the Bible and its message should be changeable over time, what it said was right and wrong when it written remains true despite shifts in public opinion or attitude. The bible was not written by men, but was divinely inspired through by the holy Spirit speaking through the writers.

#### Biblical patriarchy:

Biblical patriarchy is the belief that society should be structured to reflect the structure of the church. In the church God is above the church who is above the family. Within the family this structure is replicated with the husband/father adopting the same position as God, above wives/mothers who occupy the position of the church, and with children below both. Under biblical patriarchy individual women should not be seen subservient or submissive to all men, but must be to their husbands or fathers.

#### Biblical womanhood:

Biblical womanhood is defined as the ideal comportment and behavior of women to be aligned with the ideal woman described in the Bible who conforms most closely to God’s design for women. The textual basis for the values and behavior of Biblical women is rooted in all the women of the Bible, one must avoid acting as the women portrayed negatively such as Jezebel or Salome, and emulate the positively portrayed figures such as Ruth or the Virgin Mary. Two other specific passages that form the basis for what this woman looks and acts like are Titus 2 and Proverbs 31 which describe virtuous wives.

### Quiverfull:

The quiverfull movement is an off-shoot of the biblical patriarchy movement. It is not a denomination, but is defined by couple's goals to have as many children as possible in order to build up God's army on Earth. Quiverfull ideology opposes all forms of birth control or family planning, asserts the necessity of women acting as gatekeepers to sex by practicing modesty and unmarried couples "courting" as opposed to dating. Courting involves couples only going on supervised dates with parents or church elders and refraining from any sexual or intimate acts, including kissing, before marriage.

### Complementarianism:

The belief that men and women were created by God to fill different, but complementary roles in both marriage and society and women were divinely created to be helpers while men were created to be leaders (Barr, 2021).

### Influencer:

The women I followed ran a variety of types of accounts. Generally there are three categories I would divide the accounts I followed into. First, are small pages, with between 200 and 2000 followers, focused mostly on sharing personal information and stories as a way to engage with other women practicing biblical womanhood, not focused on amassing significant followings themselves. Second, are accounts that aim to provide educational resources or advice to women about submission, biblical womanhood and biblical patriarchy. These accounts have anywhere from a few hundred to over 100,000 followers. Lastly, the remainder of the accounts I followed are what I consider to be influencer accounts. These accounts share a combination of personal content and educational or resource based content. These accounts aim to amass large followings and to be influential on the issues they discuss on a broader scale than a tight-knit circle of other accounts they interact with online. All the accounts I followed in this category have between 9,000 and 100,000+ followers.

### Key Theories:

The theoretical basis for this paper is rooted in analyses of gender, family, and religion in relation to one another and American politics. Firstly, I will be drawing on Sophie Bjork-James' theory of "white sexual politics". Through her ethnographic research of the American religious right and white nationalists Bjork-James' found that "racial politics are deeply entwined with sex and gender, particularly in the defense of white racial privilege", and that "white sexuality is often expressed not in explicitly racial terms but through norms about the family, romantic heterosexual love, and innocent children" (Bjork-James, 2020). While an in-depth analysis of white nationalism and supremacy within this community is not within the scope of this paper, I am researching women who I have observed to make explicitly racist, anti-semitic, and white supremacist statements. It must be acknowledged that these statements do not exist in a vacuum, and are tied closely to the ideas these women share about family and gender, as is shown through Bjork-James' work (Bjork-James, 2020). The rigorous monitoring of heterosexuality and strict gender roles are a core aspects of defining and performing biblical womanhood and patriarchy, it must be considered as well that there is a heavily racialized element to this as well to conduct a proper analysis.

I will further be drawing from the work of Margaret Power to assess the ways in which ideas of femininity and masculinity are politicized and used to draw women into right-wing politics. Power's work found that weaponizing women's fears for their children and families coupled with the valorization of the mother figure was an effective tool to promote anti-communism and encourage women to disavow liberalism and leftism (Power, 2008). Power conducted her research in Chile in the 1960s, but I argue many of the same tactics used in the scare campaign at that time are present in the modern American right. Based on my own observations, the fears Power describes mobilizing Chilean women in the 1960's about communists stealing their children resemble closely the fears being raised today about queer people infiltrating public schools to "groom" and convert children (Power, 2020., Raz & Renfro, 2022). Additionally, fears of communism and socialism remain within this community, often connected by the women I followed to feminism, the Black Lives Matter movement, and abortion.

I will draw as well on Anne McClintock's work establishing the importance of the symbolic gendering of national symbols and structures (McClintock, 1993). McClintock describes nations as "contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimize peoples' access to the resources of the nation-state" she further finds that "gender difference between women and men serves to symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men. Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit" (McClintock, 1993). She identifies that women under patriarchal nationalist ideologies serve five key functions "as biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities, as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups (through restrictions on sexual or marital relations), as active transmitters and producers of the national culture, as symbolic signifiers of national difference, [and] as active participants in national struggles" (McClintock, 1993). The women I followed all identify strongly as "American" women, and American and Christian nationalism are frequently referenced topics. Additionally, it should be considered to what degree patriarchal nationalism has influenced the shaping of modern ideas of Biblical womanhood. I assert that the aims of Biblical womanhood all serve the five points McClintock identifies as the role of women under patriarchal nationalism. I will also be using McClintock's work related to the role of women as reproducers and the definition of citizens as male to develop my understanding of the reproductive labor of the women I am studying.

Regarding the specific role of male headship within evangelical households I refer to the work of Anneke Stasson who asserts that male headship serves multiple purposes (Stasson, 2014). Firstly, it is noted as a feature of evangelical families that distinguishes them from the broader culture they are surrounded by (Stasson, 2014). Its other purpose is as a tool wielded by fundamentalist religious leaders and political organizers to resist feminism, gay liberation, and civil rights advances throughout the 20th-century, beginning in the 1930's (Stasson, 2014). Stasson cites Betty DeBerg and Margaret Bendroth, establishing that around the 1930's the "christian home" as a term shifted in meaning to connote not simply a household occupied by practicing Christians, but one populated by a "white, middle-class, evangelical, nuclear family in which husband works and wife remains at home subject to the husband's authority" (Stasson,



2014). Stasson finds that this vision of the christian family was politicized in earnest in the late 1970's to be used as a tool by fundamentalist leaders to resist second-wave feminism, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and gay rights (Stasson, 2014). Conservative religious organizations such as Focus on the Family, the Moral Majority, and Concerned Women for America exploited Evangelicals fears about shifts in cultural attitudes related to the idea of the family (Stasson, 2014). This weaponization of fear was used to mobilize political action and “define evangelical political opinion” which in turn “strengthened evangelical commitment to male headship” (Stasson, 2014). Male headship then is not simply a theological value, but a political one, aiming to shape broader American culture and politics (Stasson, 2014).

When considering the fact that the community I am researching is a digital one I turn firstly to the work of Jannis Androutsopoulos on the potentials and limits of discourse based online ethnography. Androutsopoulos contends that online discourse is inherently different from in-person discourse and that language used online may shift in meaning and form of usage from that used in real life (Androutsopoulos, 2008). I recognize that the posts, comments, and videos I am analyzing have been written and edited to be ideal versions of the statement the poster would like to make, and I must assume this includes accounts of personal stories. This planning and editing is not possible in off-line discourse in nearly to nearly the same degree. This means that online statements and their application to the lives of the women behind the screen should not be seen as interchangeable. I acknowledge that this is an analysis of the digital community and identities of these women. There may be discrepancies between what is stated in posts online about the intentions and ideals of the members of this community and the actual actions and in-person statements of those I am studying.

Finally, I consider the work of John Parmlee and Nataliya Roman in the influence of selective avoidance and exposure to content on Instagram. Parmlee and Roman found that while across demographic barriers people favor exposure to content and ideas that affirm their previously held beliefs, they do not avoid counter messaging to the same degree they seek out affirming content with some exceptions (Parmlee & Roman, 2020). They found that on Instagram “women and those who identified as Republicans were less likely to follow such [opposing] political leaders than men and those who did not identify as Republican” (Parmlee &

Roman, 2020). I will factor this into my analysis of the ways in which the digital space is used to reinforce off-line politics and ideas. The ease of selective avoidance and exposure on Instagram enables people to shield themselves from exposure to challenging ideas or arguments thus further entrenching the prior beliefs (Parmlee & Roman, 2020).

Drawing these theories together I connect the work of Power and Stasson to in my analysis of the usage of gender, and the weaponization of femininity in particular to motivate political action and more deeply entrenched beliefs across in multiple contexts and show the inherent political dimension of the ideas expressed by the women in my study group (Power, 2008., Stasson, 2014). I further connect this to McClintock's analysis of patriarchal nationalism to demonstrate the ways in which women's identities as mothers, wives, and reproducers of culture as well as people are used to symbolically as well as materially support the stated necessity of patriarchy to maintain the proper functioning of the state and society. Gender is at the core of conservative politics and the religious right, it is the foundation upon which all other ideas must rest (McClintock, 1993., Power, 2008., Stasson, 2014). It is the defense of the heterosexual patriarchal family and rigid gender roles that maintain order within patriarchal societies (McClintock, 1993., Power, 2008., Stasson, 2014). Racial, ethnic, religious, and economic issues are all tied directly to the maintenance of the heteropatriarchal family and women staying in their role as subservient and unpaid reproductive laborers (McClintock, 1993., Power, 2008., Stasson, 2014).

Connecting this then to the function of this community as a digital one I posit that Instagram is a tool used by women on the right to build community and access educational resources, but also as a tool for women to exert political influence. The women in my research group believe women should limit themselves to the highest degree possible to the domestic sphere. Digital communities such as the one I am studying provide women a platform to find influence amongst like-minded people and serve to entrench these ideas more deeply within the minds of those who already believe them (Parmlee & Roman, 2020). Women in this community are able to engage in political discourse and exert their influence through their connection of broader issues to their families (Power, 2008).

The paradox of this community is that it is made up of women who profess a belief that women should not work, or engage in politics since paid labor and leadership are men's work, but many of these women also sell books, post brand sponsored content, offer paid counseling or advice sessions, or have blogs or YouTube pages from which they can collect ad-revenue and all of them have centered their online presences around the expansion and advocacy of inherently political beliefs (Barr, 2021., Stasson, 2008). Social media and other online platforms offer women in patriarchal households a way to engage in paid labor, and exert social, cultural, and political influence that appears passive as it is presented as a motherly labor in service of protecting of children and their way of life.

### **Methodology:**

Researching digital communities and culture necessitates a somewhat different approach than conducting in-person participant observation would. Additionally, the group that I am researching is rather extreme and considerations must be made with regarding personal safety and exposure, and the presentation of ideas and language used within this community. My main source of information and data is Instagram. To do a modified form of digital participant observation I created a new account on Instagram with no posts and no bio, and a picture of a flower from my garden for a profile picture. When collecting data I would log into the Instagram app and take fieldnotes on what I saw similarly to how I would take fieldnotes in person. I recorded what was said in posts, captions and comments, incorporating quotes into my fieldnotes and my own reactions and feelings to the content.

To establish the community of women I followed I began by following two women who interacted publicly with one another fairly regularly. The first woman I followed was Lori, @thetransformedwife, who I had been aware of before I began my research as a proponent of biblical patriarchy and biblical womanhood. The other account I followed was one she recommended and who identified Lori as a key figure in her own conversion to biblical womanhood. I did not focus on hashtags when expanding my research community, but instead followed women who were mentioned by women I followed, or were mutual followers with women I already followed. I also focused on women who identified themselves as practitioners

of biblical womanhood and biblical patriarchy, or as “Titus 2 women”, or “Proverbs 31 women”. Expanding the group of women I followed this way ensured that I was not simply following accounts that may have seemed connected to me as an outsider, but were actually run by women who interacted with and promoted one another’s ideas within a pre-existing digital community. I limited the total number of accounts I was following to about forty, beyond that I began to miss a lot of what was shared by some of the people I was following. The number of people I followed did not remain consistent throughout this process though since a number of accounts were deleted suddenly either by the women who ran them, or by Instagram for violating community guidelines.

To try and gain more context for the ideas being shared by these women, and how it fit into the broader landscape of conservative evangelical Instagram, I additionally followed non-personal accounts whose content was shared by the women I followed. These pages shared memes, general content related to evangelical culture, or ideas about christian masculinity

Almost all of the women I followed posted daily, some of them many times a day, on both their stories and their main feeds. While Instagram is a visual platform and is optimized for photo sharing, much of the content shared were screenshots of tweets, quotes, or longer text based posts in place of photos. With these posts long captions were often added underneath that elaborated further upon the poster’s ideas and opinions on the topic.

To ensure that I saw as much of the content being shared as possible when opening Instagram I typically would first watch people’s stories. I took screenshots of many, but not all, of the posts made to people’s stories since they are deleted after 24 hours to maintain a record of these posts. I typically would screenshot any posts related to femininity, masculinity, marriage, family, or any that I had come into repeated contact with. I also saved samples from all the women of any non-ideological content they shared to ensure I was able to record the diversity of content shared by these accounts. After watching the stories I would then scroll through my main feed reading the posts shared by the women and the comments under some of them. I could not read all the comments under every post so I typically tried to read the comments under at least half of them.

To triangulate my data collected from Instagram I considered a number of other sources. I listened to podcasts focused on conservative evangelicalism or biblical manhood or womanhood including an interview with Lori on the “Hard Men” podcast and multiple episodes of the “Homefront” podcast. Additionally a number of the women I followed had blogs linked in their Instagram bios, I read many of these posts in conjunction with the posts made by the same women on Instagram. I also watched sermons on Youtube that were recommended by the women I followed. To gain a better understanding of the foundations of biblical womanhood I read “Created to be his Help Meet” by Debi Pearl a guide for wives that was recommended by many of the women I followed. I also interviewed a progressive pastor in my own community, to hear an opposing view from within Christianity, and get a sense of how significantly biblical interpretations may vary. Finally, I interviewed someone who grew up in a quiverfull homeschooling family about their experience being raised in the community and leaving it.

All the accounts I followed were public profiles, but the size of their audiences and reach as well as the purpose of the accounts varied. Some accounts clearly aimed to create large followings and to exert as much influence as possible, others though were more focused on sharing personal stories and engaging with content shared by these larger accounts. The ethics of digital research are complicated and are less consistent than many of the ethical standards applied to in-person research. Firstly, I did not disclose to my online research subjects that I was conducting this research. Regarding obtaining the informed consent of research subjects, it is generally necessary to obtain if you are in private or semi-private spaces, but unnecessary if you are accessing public data (Sugiura, Wiles, & Pope, 2017). I only followed public accounts that can be viewed by anyone. I did not have to request to follow anyone, try to be added to private group chats, or be added to “close friends” stories that can only be viewed by selected followers.

Regarding the anonymization of the women I researched I felt it was necessary to make judgments on an account by account basis to determine who needed to be anonymized. Simply because the accounts were all publicly accessible does not mean that it is ethical to reveal the identities of those you are researching (Sugiura, Wiles, & Pope, 2017). In my research group I determined that it would be unethical to name or provide identifying information for accounts that shared mostly personal content and were not aimed at amassing large followings. Accounts

that I will not be anonymizing are ones with significant followings, 9,000 or more. These accounts have reached such significant followings that it is important to factor in how their reach and influence may also affect the tone and nature of what they post. These accounts also may share personal anecdotes or pictures, but not with the same level of detail provided by small accounts. Considering as well that users can expect their content to have a relatively limited reach likely not being seen by many who are not in the posters intended audience, it is important to anonymize those who have not already made themselves into public figures (Parmlee & Roman, 2020., Sugiura, Wiles, & Pope, 2017).

Concerning the extreme nature of the beliefs expressed by this community certain considerations must be made with regards to both personal exposure and the presentation of this communities ideas. Regarding personal contact and exposure I kept my profile anonymous with only my first name attached to the account. I did not reach out to interview any of the women I followed because I felt like disclosure of what my project was and why I was following them could leave me open to harassment by these women, or people around them something I have witnessed happen to other critical of them. Additionally, sharing any sort of dissenting opinion under their posts could get me blocked, the women posted fairly frequently about blocking people who disagreed with them. Additionally, I felt like it would be unethical to share any sort of support for the ideas they were sharing, or actively boost their reach on social media. Some of the women I followed were very open about being white supremacists and shared very racist and anti-semitic content, as well as at times violent homophobia and transphobia. I expected to encounter open homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny, and for racism and white supremacist or nationalist ideas to be present, but did not start this project expecting to end up following people who were, or were adjacent to, neo-nazis. The aim of this paper is to provide objective depictions of the interactions of the women in this community, and begin developing a theoretical understanding of how and why these ideas are presented and connected. This is a community with extreme ideas and it is essential to provide an accurate account of what they actually are saying and their own explanations for these extreme positions.

### **Positionality:**

Gender:

I am a woman researching other women. I must consider the ways in which my gender affects how I view and relate to the women I am aim to comprehend. The ways in which I relate to women are inherently different from the ways in which I relate to people of other genders. I can relate to other women on a very general basis of shared life experiences and identity.

Additionally, this community is a patriarchal one that advocates for extreme misogyny. The relationship I have then to these topics is inherently different from those of people of other genders. This work has at times been challenging because it can be very emotional.

Ultimately, my own opinions about the topics this paper addresses are not its focus and do not serve to deepen my knowledge of what, how, and why the women I aim to study here say and believe what they do.

Age:

I am 22, most of the women around me are single and do not have children. I have a couple friends who are engaged or married, but no-one I am especially close with. No-one I know my age with children had planned pregnancies. I have had very little exposure to women who have been married very young. The women I am researching span a wide range of ages, from their late teens to their 60s. As practitioners of biblical womanhood they advocate for getting married and having children as young as possible. Getting married at 18 or 19, and having children by 20 or 21, is not just encouraged, but is touted as being ideal. In my own community most woman I know have gotten married closer to 30 and when they have had children is not strictly tied to whether or not, or for how long they have been married. In my life people who get married very young, in their late teens or early 20's have often been presented as people who are making a mistake and their judgment has been called into question. I must recognize that I hold some pre-existing bias towards very young married couples considering my limited exposure to them and the negative light in which they have generally been presented to me.

Class:

I come from an upper-middle class family. My parents both have university degrees. Recognizing that I come from a position of relative economic privilege is important because I must consider how it affects my perceptions of what is normal and average. With regards to the women I am studying I must factor this in when I consider how they talk about work and how many children you should have, as well as the relationships between class and conservative politics within the United States. I believe the main source of bias to consider with regards to class is ignorance about what the realities of the women I am researching is and what I can assume their household budgets are.

Being raised by a stay at home mother:

My mother was a stay-at-home-mother (SAHM) until I was ten. She has a master's degree and worked before I was born, and since I was ten, in a highly specialized field. My mother chose not to work for a time because she wanted to be home with her children, it was not the result of adherence to external principles. She chose to go back to work when my siblings and I were all in school because she wanted to go back to work. The other SAHMs I have known have all come from roughly the same position and circumstances. What I must keep in mind is that the women I am researching are not staying home just because they want and can afford to, but rather see it as an obligation even if their families cannot necessarily afford it. These women are making at times very significant financial sacrifices because they disagree on principal with the idea of women working. I must keep in mind that my own experiences with SAHMs and housewives are not necessarily representative of the women I am researching.

Marital Status and Being Childless:

I am unmarried and do not have children. Some of the women I am following are either married, but do not have children yet, or are unmarried and have no children, but most are married with children. All of them have made marriage and motherhood central in their online personas and the discourse they engage with. I must consider the ways in which I think about or criticize what they say about marriage and parenting as someone who has no experience with



either. I have opinions that I have gained through observing married couples and parents that I have known, but I ultimately only have observations, no first hand experience. I must keep in mind that my ideas about marriage and parenting are rooted in different experiences than the women I am researching and that I would potentially relate to them differently if I had first-hand experience with either.

#### Race:

I am a white woman who is researching mostly other white women, a couple of the women I am following are women of color, but a core aspect of the ideology they all follow is white supremacy. As a white woman I recognize that there is a long history of racism in America related specifically to ideas of protecting the virtue or purity of white women (Armstrong, 2021). The history of this ideology is one of lynchings, police brutality, and terror for many black people in the United States. The community I am researching is openly racist and I aim to be as careful as possible to depict accurately what their stated ideas are and can properly then work to discern the root is of these ideologies. I must also keep in mind that I still may have blind spots things I am ignorant to that I might overlook.

#### Sexuality:

I am a lesbian and the community I am researching is deeply homophobic. Within this community the existence of queer people is often dismissed or invalidated, or they are described as “groomers” or “predators”. For me personally I must recognize that I struggle to relate to many of the ideas the women I am researching because they revolve around having a husband, something I have never wanted and know I will never have. My personal opinions and ideas of what romantic relationships are and how they should function is inherently incompatible with the ideas professed by the women I am studying. The vision of marriage presented by this community is based on men and women having strict, static, complementary gender roles that make heterosexuality the only option. I personally have very different ideas about gender and sexuality because I cannot map their ideas onto any relationship I might be in a way that would

make sense. Ultimately, my sexuality makes biblical womanhood and patriarchy completely inaccessible to me, but it does not hinder my ability to uncover the deeper roots of these ideas and the cultural context they arise from.

### Nationality:

I am an American citizen, I was born in the United States (US) and lived there until I was nine. I then moved to Canada, I have also been a Canadian citizen since birth. I have not lived in the US since I was a child, but I still feel connected to being an American as part of my personal identity. I am eligible to vote in American elections as well as Canadian ones. I must consider though that while I am American, I have had a very different experience than the women I am studying since most of my life has been outside of the US. I may be American, but I also must consider that my own opinions and perspectives have been significantly influenced by the time I have spent in Canada and Europe.

### Religion:

I was not raised in a religious household and have identified as an atheist for most of my life. Understanding the intensity and weight faith and religion hold in the lives of the people I am studying is something I can only appreciate from the perspective of someone who has never experienced it, but has been impressed and awed by the commitments people make to their faiths. I am not anti-religion, it is simply not something that has been a big part of my life. I also recognize that much of my knowledge of theology and Christianity has come from doing this research which means I am approaching things from a different perspective than those who learn about these things in church or religious spaces likely would.

## Chapter II: A Brief Overview of Recent Evangelical History

To comprehend modern Evangelical culture it is essential to understand the ways in which modern American evangelicalism has become racialized and politicized in recent decades. White evangelicals have created over the past half century immensely powerful new denominations and movements within Christianity in tandem with becoming an increasingly powerful demographic in American politics. Evangelical identity, language, and theology have become inextricable from mainstream and traditionally secular facets of the political right-wing in America (Bjork-James, 2020). White evangelicals in 2022 are conservative both socially and economically. Issues that are now very divisive on the left-right political spectrum — abortion, racial equality, feminism — were in many cases not made political or partisan until the 1970s and 80s (O’Brian, 2019., Stasson, 2014). How though did conservative values become so inextricable from Evangelical beliefs and culture? For most of the 20th-century evangelicals were largely disengaged from politics seeing it as a futile waste of time (Wilcox, 2003). Between the 1930s and 1960s evangelicals did not widely engage in an organized way with politics (Wilcox, 2003). They instead focused on building and expanding political bible colleges and infrastructure that would prove very useful in later decades (Wilcox, 2003).

Essential to keep in mind is that much of the infrastructure used to launch new evangelical organizations and influential figures in the 1970s and 80s was established prior to desegregation, much of the development of theology and political ideology that happened in the 20th-century was done in exclusively white spaces (Wilcox, 2003). Additionally, Protestantism cannot be disconnected from organized and violent white supremacy in the US (Baker, 2017. Miller, 1957). Groups like the Ku Klux Klan aimed to create a white protestant America,

targeting Black and Indigenous people, immigrants, Catholics, and Jews (Baker, 2017). For American white supremacists historically Protestantism was an essential component of white identity (Baker, 2017). Protestants further were often found to either be involved in carrying out lynchings of Black people throughout the early 20th-century, or to have turned a blind cheek to them refraining condemning them or taking measures to prevent them (Miller, 1957). While evangelicals are a sub-group within Protestantism and are not solely responsible for these events or movements, they are part of the larger. The history of white supremacy in the US cannot be divorced from Protestantism which has in turn been influenced by white supremacy (Bjork-James, 2020). Part of the contemporary divide between white and Black evangelicals in the US is the long history of white supremacy within Protestantism. Modern “white evangelicalism” has its origins in a long history of open and organized white supremacy within the church.

During the Cold War, a series of events began that makes Evangelical political reengagement seem almost inevitable. After sitting out of politics for a few decades, focusing on strengthening their own institutions and communities Evangelicals entered the 70’s primed to engage in organized political action in a capacity they never had before (Wilcox, 2003).

In the 1950s, American politicians began speaking increasingly about the role of Christianity in shaping American culture and American capitalism. In 1954, under God was added to the Pledge of Allegiance and just one year later, “In God we Trust” was added to US currency by President Eisenhower (Du Mez, 2020). The rhetoric around Godless Communists and the threat that they posed to America, and America as a Christian nation, became more and more common throughout the postwar decades (Du Mez, 2020). Furthermore, the US underwent a series of significant changes in the 1950s-70s related to issues affecting the family. These changes expanded access to things like family planning, queer rights, civil rights, and interracial marriage. In 1960, the first contraceptive pill was granted FDA approval for use as a contraceptive (PBS, 2022). In 1962, Illinois became the first state to decriminalize sodomy effectively decriminalizing homosexuality (Brandimarte, 2020). In 1964, the Johnson administration signed the Civil Rights Act into law, and the United States entered the Vietnam War. In 1967 the supreme court overruled anti-miscegenation laws on the federal level, legalizing interracial marriage in all states (*Loving v. Virginia*, 1967). In 1970, California

became the first state to legalize no-fault divorce, and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) revoked tax-exempt status for Christian schools that maintained racially discriminatory policies (Kay, 1987., *Bob Jones University v. United States*, 1983). In 1972, the supreme court determined single women cannot be denied access to contraceptives, and Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) (*Eisenstadt v. Baird*, 1972). In 1973, abortion was legalized nationwide by *Roe v. Wade*. In 1974, women were able to obtain a solo credit card for the first time. In 1976, attempting to boost their appeal to traditionally Democratic Catholic voters, the Republican Party (GOP) adopted an antiabortion stance at the Republican National Convention (RNC) for the first time (O'Brian, 2020).

Access to contraception and safe, legal abortions allowed couples, and women specifically, to reliably control when and how many children they had for the first time. No-fault divorce and solo credit allowed women to access financial autonomy and make considerations for their futures in new ways. The decriminalization of sodomy/homosexuality presented a threat to hegemonic heterosexuality never before seen. The civil rights act, *Loving v. Virginia* and the revocation of tax-exempt status for religious schools increased the opportunities for interaction between white and Black Americans and a rise in mixed-race families.

Additionally, the GOP prior to the 1980s was a struggling party (Mason, 2011). After the Watergate scandal, the party was forced to confront how they would regain the trust of the American people and maintain their relevancy (Mason, 2011). In line with these considerations, the GOP adopted an antiabortion position in 1976, not as a result of a moral shift, but in an attempt to widen their voter base (Williams, 2011). Abortion was a traditionally Catholic issue, protestants and evangelicals had not adopted a firm or consistent position on the issue (Williams, 2011). Historian Daniel K. Williams found that:

*in spite of the Republican Party's pro-choice leadership, the GOP adopted a platform in 1976 that promised an antiabortion constitutional amendment. The party's leadership viewed the measure as a temporary political ploy that would increase the GOP's appeal among traditionally Democratic Catholics, but the platform statement instead became a rallying cry for social conservatives who used the plank to build a*

*religiously based coalition in the GOP and drive out many of the pro-choice Republicans who had initially adopted the platform (Williams, 2011).*

There was also protestant resistance to abortion, but it was far less consistent and mainstream than Catholic opposition (O’Brian, 2020). In a 1971 resolution, the Southern Baptist Convention affirmed its support for legal and accessible abortion services in at least some circumstances stating:

*we call upon Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother (Southern Baptist Convention, 1971).*

It was the GOP’s change of their stances on abortion that drew social conservatives to the party in numbers they had not previously seen and woke the party up the potential value of adopting an identity of social as well as fiscal conservatism (O’Brian, 2020., Williams, 2011).

Moreover, in the 1970s Democrats were still outperforming the GOP in the South. Having split during the civil war into Northern and Southern factions and then reunited, the Democratic Party of the 1970s still contained members who followed the traditions and ideology of pro-slavery Southern Democrats. While they were no longer advocating for slavery Southern Democrats were staunch defenders of Jim Crow laws and actively fought integration. The decline of the Democratic Party in the south can be traced back largely to the Carter administration. Carter lost a great deal of support amongst white Christians as a result of his refusal to drop a suit against private Christian schools that maintained policies of racial discrimination (Gardner, 2020).

In 1970, the IRS revoked tax-exempt status for racially discriminatory private schools. This was an issue for many white parents in the south who, following the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education supreme court ruling that determined segregated public schooling and the doctrine of “separate, but equal” were unconstitutional, had enrolled their children in private church schools to avoid sending their children to integrated public schools (Gardner, 2020).

In 1979 Jerry Falwell announced the creation of a new political organization, The Moral Majority (Fallwell, 1979). According to former Vice President, Cal Thomas, the goal of organizers was “...to accomplish the political organization of Evangelicals, fundamentalists, conservative Jews, and conservative Catholics into a large voting bloc that would elect like-minded people to public office, and restore a sense of patriotism and love for the country (New York Times, 2018).” The Moral Majority’s key issues were opposition to gay rights, protecting the nuclear family, and abortion (Fallwell, 1979). Ahead of the 1980 election the Moral Majority endorsed Ronald Reagan, a not particularly religious man, with a not particularly conservative voting record, over an Evangelical who spoke openly about his faith and centered it in all of his politics. Reagan, though promised that if elected he would ally himself with the Moral Majority and would implement whatever policies they liked (Marley, 2006). The Moral Majority was additionally not going to endorse Carter following his maintenance of a principled position against racial discrimination and acceptance of homosexuals (Stasson, 2013).

In 1980, Carter lost the presidential election to Reagan in a landslide ("Presidential Election of 1980 - 270toWin", 2022). Despite playing a large role in getting him elected though, Reagan failed to uphold many of his promises to the Moral Majority. He did not reinstate school prayer, or drop government suits against private Christian academies. Reagan was a letdown to the Moral Majority in many ways, but was also the best person they had at the time. Given his massive popularity with the American people, the Moral Majority stood by Reagan throughout his administration. They focused on entwining themselves ever more closely with the infrastructure of the GOP, hoping that someday they would find their perfect candidate who would not be afraid to implement all the policies they wanted.

As Evangelicals became more entrenched in formal American politics a number of movements within Evangelicalism were taking place. As previously discussed, women made consistent legal, social, and political gains throughout the first three decades after World War Two (WWII). These developments frightened Evangelical leaders and theologians for many of the same reasons they excited feminists.

In 1980 Adrienne Rich published her paper “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”. Rich’s paper focuses on the experience of lesbians and the ways that women are

forced into heterosexuality through coercive forces present throughout society, but she identifies that these forces affect heterosexual women as well (Rich, 1980). She posits that lesbianism is often erased or invalidated on the basis that living without men is made difficult by a multitude of forces across society (Rich, 1980). The concept of compulsory heterosexuality was an important development in the field of queer theory, but its implications extend beyond lesbians and other queer women. Rich shapes her theory around eight characteristics of male power previously identified by anthropologist Kathleen Gough:

men's ability to deny women sexuality or to force it upon them; to command or exploit their labor to control their produce; to control or rob them of their children; to confine them physically and prevent their movement; to use them as objects in male transactions; to cramp their creativeness; or to withhold from them large areas of the society's knowledge and cultural attainments (Rich, 1980).

These eight characteristics of power are what make homosexual relationships between women almost impossible, but also impact heterosexual women in ensuring that they are kept in a subservient position within society and their families to men. If women cannot control their labor, sexuality, or education, are objectified, and are taught to fear potential violence and threats to their own or their children's safety if they rebel, they inherently then are relegated to a status of second-class citizenry.

The modern biblical womanhood and biblical patriarchy movements reinforce these forms of male power over women. The ideas presented by these movements are not new, but rather represent a doubling-down on gender roles that existed historically both in and out of Evangelical communities. It must be kept in mind that women globally only began gaining voting rights about 100 years ago, the broad acceptance of women in politics, the workplace, and many social spaces is relatively new. The aim of these movements is broadly to revert back to a time before feminism (Stasson, 2014). Feminism is blamed broadly for the decline of women's happiness and the prosperity of American families (Stasson, 2014).

Prior to their abilities to obtain solo lines of credit and divorces women had to stay in marriages to access financial resources, social capital, and in many cases the safety of themselves and their children. The submission and subservience of women are long-held social values, but



the developments of the later half of the 20th-century presented new challenges to these concepts when the physical safety and livelihood of women were no longer dependent upon them. Concurrent with these material changes Evangelical preachers and authors developed new and increasingly extreme explanations for the necessity of women's subjugation within the home.

The first significant new development within White Evangelicalism pertaining to family structure and gender roles was made in the 1960s by R.J. Rushdoony. Rushdoony is not a particularly well-known figure, even amongst many conservative Evangelicals. His ideology though, Christian Reconstructionism, has come to form the backbone of many of the most popular and influential movements within white conservative Christianity since the 60s. The innovation of reconstructionism was the belief that all biblical teachings and commandments should be followed, even those commonly ignored by fundamentalists and biblical literalists (Worthen, 2008). Rushdoony believed that authority was divinely appointed, and patriarchy accordingly was divinely sanctioned, to pushback against it was heresy (Du Mez, 2020). Additionally, Rushdoony was an anti-statist, he believed in the application of Biblical laws, but he did not believe a state was necessary to oversee the application of them (Worthen, 2008). Rushdoony's advocacy for stoning homosexuals and adulterers never caught on within the mainstream of American Protestantism, but it did gain the attention and admiration of one of the most influential figures within conservative Evangelicalism since the 1970s, Bill Gothard (Du Mez, 2020).

Gothard, who never married and had no children, initially aimed to facilitate conflict resolution between parents and children through the application of Biblical principles (Du Mez, 2020). The key to avoiding and resolving conflict Gothard insisted was embracing biblically ordained authority ("What is an "umbrella of protection"?", 2021).

God-given authorities can be considered "umbrellas of protection." By honoring and submitting to authorities, you will receive the privileges of their protection, direction, and accountability. If you resist their instructions and move out from their jurisdictional care, you forfeit your place under their protection and face life's challenges and temptations on your own.

The jurisdictional authorities recognized by Gothard were: husbands and parents, government leaders, church leaders, elders, and other believers; and employers ("What is an "umbrella of

protection"?", 2021). Submitting to these figures and refraining from questioning them would lead you to a peaceful, happy life according to Gothard ("What is an "umbrella of protection"?", 2021). Gothard placed wives under their husband's "Umbrella of Protection" making submission to them necessary. Gothard further advocated for women to practice modesty, only wearing skirts that went to their ankles and shirts that covered their shoulders; for unmarried couples to practice courtship instead of dating; opposed homosexuality; and stressed that mothers should be willing to sacrifice their own individual goals and identities outside their homes so as to better serve and submit to their husbands. In an essay on Gothard's teachings, Senior Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary Ronald B. Allen stated "the husband as the hammer, the wife as the chisel and the children as the gems in the rough... The ghastly picture is that he beats on her and she chips on them to explain the umbrella of protection model and what he views as its flaws (Posner, 2011). Rushdoony's influence is clear in Gothard's insistence on respecting authority and hierarchies, and not questioning these systems.

To spread his teachings Gothard established his organization Campus Teams in 1961, later the Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP). In 1973, Gothard's seminars were attended by more than 200,000 people, up from just 2,000 only 5 years earlier. Gothard also published a popular homeschool curriculum through the IBLP (Du Mez, 2020). Gothard focused his organization on spreading homeschooling and correct family structure and never explicitly involved himself in politics, but others connected to and influenced by him did, including members of the Duggar family (Du Mez, 2020).

The Duggars rose to fame starring in the popular TLC reality show "19 Kids and Counting" which aired from 2008 to 2015. Jim-Bob Duggar, the family patriarch, was a former Arkansas state politician, serving in the Arkansas House of Representatives from 1999 to 2003, his wife Michelle was a homemaker. The family had close ties to Gothard as members of his ministry and followers of the Quiverfull movement. The family and their associated brand was one of the first evangelical properties to gain major popularity within secular as well as Christian media while being open about, and centering in their public personas, their evangelical faith.

The origins of Evangelical mass media can be traced arguably to 1950 and the establishment of the evangelical Christian Bookseller's Association (CBA) (Du Mez, 2020). The

CBA created infrastructure to both publish books and distribute them to churches and Christian bookstores on a scale that had never before existed (Du Mez, 2020). This created a new demand for Evangelical books that appealed to people across denominational lines, giving birth to a new genre of generic Evangelical books (Du Mez, 2020). In addition to new publishing opportunities, evangelical figures began growing their audiences on radio and television throughout the latter half of the 20th-century. In 1960 Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) was founded by Pat Robertson. The network's flagship program, "The 700 Club", was first hosted by Jim Bakker, who then went on to establish his own network with his wife Tammy Faye, the PTL Satellite Network, and the Christian theme park Heritage USA (PTL, 2022).

Televangelists and those featured on talk shows like "The 700 Club", or Tammy Faye Bakker's "Tammy's House Party", had far-reaching presences within Christian circles, but they were ultimately still largely segregated though from secular mass media appearing on Christian networks. If you were not an evangelical avoiding evangelical media remained fairly easy, conversely if you were an evangelical it was fairly easy to avoid secular media, with the major exception of news coverage.

In 1987 the Federal Communications Committee (FCC) repealed the Fairness Doctrine (Perry, 2017). Installed in 1949, the fairness doctrine mandated broadcasters dedicated some amount of time to coverage of controversial issues of public interest; and that these issues were presented with equal attention devoted to differing opinions on it (Perry, 2017). The rescinding of this policy opened the door to a new form of news media in the US, partisan news. Launched in 1996 Fox News officially claims to be non-partisan, but since its inception it has consistently worked to attract conservative viewers and keep them by reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs. (Sobel Fitts, 2014). Fox is also more explicitly Christian than other broadcasters. In 2005 Fox promoted a book about the "war on Christmas" and how it exemplified the kinds of attacks Christians in America were under from liberal antagonists (Sullivan, 2017). When searched on their website the phrase "war on Christians" returns 27,800 results (Fox, 2022). In contrast the same phrase returns 606 results on CNN's website (CNN, 2022). With the establishment of Fox, the CBA, the CBN, and the PTL Network evangelicals had more media that was consistently conservative and Christian than ever before. This allowed for evangelicals to insulate

themselves not necessarily from diverse evangelical sources of media and information, but to sequester them from secular media. These channels produced programming that reinforced the ideas of the pastors owners who controlled them through scripted programs, sermons, and interviews. It was the Duggar family and TLC, a secular network, though that represent a new kind of fame and interest in conservative Evangelicals outside of strictly Evangelical circles.

The Learning Channel (TLC), is not a religious network. Other popular shows on the channel have included “My Strange Addiction” in which people explain the strange things they are addicted to, “Cake Boss” which followed a family owned bakery in New Jersey, and “Toddlers and Tiaras” which followed child beauty pageant contestants and their parents. The Duggars fit into the network’s ethos with their focus on a family, and a culture that seemed somewhat bizarre to those unfamiliar with conservative evangelicalism. They seemed nice, if a bit strange, and they were immediately popular, an object of fascination for some and inspiration for others.

The family spoke about being Christian and were clear that their faith was why they had as many children as they did, but they also kept things vague about exactly what they believed and what movement they were part of (Blumberg, 2015). The quiverfull movement was never mentioned on air, but the family still became evangelists for it living by example. Quiverfull is a non-denominational movement that is centered on the principles of Biblical Patriarchy and the idea that families should have as many children as possible to expand God’s army on earth (Joyce, 2009). The name comes from Psalm 127, 3-5:

*Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.*

*As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.*

*Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.*

On the show the girls dressed modestly, they practiced chaperoned courtship instead of dating, and all the children were homeschooled. For many they exemplified what a strong, loving family could be when led by biblical patriarchy. One person I interviewed told me that their parents joined the Quiverfull movement specifically because of how inspired they were by the family, and that many in the community they were raised in also looked to the family for

inspiration. Their parents were born-again Christians before they learned about the family, but it was the Duggar's that inspired them to have as many children as possible and guided them in most of their ideas about family.

The image projected on television though of a loving and stable family began to crumble in 2014. Bill Gothard, who's homeschooling curriculum was used for the Duggar children, and who's events were promoted and attended by both Jim-Bob and Michelle Duggar, was forced to step down from the IBLP after being accused of sexual harassment and molestation by more than 30 women (Washington Post, 2016). While the accusers have been kept anonymous, many have been reported as having been involved with the IBLP, and some of whom were minors when the alleged incidents of abuse occurred (Washington Post, 2016). Things worsened for the family in 2015 when it was revealed that the Duggar's eldest child, Josh, had molested four of his sisters and one other girl in between 2002 and 2003 (Blake, 2021). Josh had confessed this to his father Jim Bob at the time who went to their church with the information (In Touch, 2015). Jim-Bob and the church remained silent for over a year before going to local authorities to report the incidences (In Touch, 2015). Josh Duggar escaped any charges at that time since the statute of limitations had already run out (In Touch, 2015). In April 2021, Josh Duggar was charged with receiving and possessing child pornography, in the summer of 2021 TLC cancelled the spin off show "Counting On" which followed the family minus Josh, and in May 2022, Josh Duggar was sentenced to 12 and a half years in prison (NPR, 2022).

The downfalls of Gothard and the Duggars are worth noting given the influence both have had over the past several decades in shaping modern white evangelical culture. That their loss of status is the result of allegations of abuse, assault, and attempts to cover up their behavior is not surprising though given the massive proliferation of abuse within evangelical churches. In late May 2022, a 300-page independent report was released on sexual abuse within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest protestant denomination in the US (Dias, Graham, 2022). Alongside this report a list of over 700 alleged and convicted abusers was made public detailing what each person was accused or convicted of, and what their relationship was with the SBC (Dias, Graham, 2022). Particularly in the wake of the recent proliferation of fear-mongering headlines and stories about LGBTQ+ people "grooming" and preying upon children it seems

significant to note that Evangelical churches are plagued by high levels of abuse (Dias, Graham, 2022., Raz, Renfro, 2022).

The rise of Evangelicals within media and politics, and the rightward shift within white evangelical culture and the GOP are inextricable from one another. The alliance of the GOP with white evangelicals has resulted in a very reliable voter base for the party, and social conservatism becoming core to evangelical identity. Increasingly evangelicals have come to advocate for politics as a way to enact God's desires for humanity on a large scale. What God's desires for humanity are though have become somewhat muddled as conservative politics and theology have become increasingly linked.

### Chapter 3: The Godly Wife

*“Someone asked me yesterday, “Who are you outside of being a wife and a mother?” I paused and thought about it and simply said, “I’m not sure.” Some people may look at that as a bad thing, but I don’t. In this season of my life I love that my family is the center of my identity, it’s not a bad thing. I feel fulfilled at home raising my daughter, keeping a calm environment for my husband, and making sure all of our needs [are] met as a family unit. I don’t need anything else in order to “find myself” because I already have. I’m a wife, I’m a mother, and I’m okay with being just that.”*

In this chapter, I will explore the concepts of the Godly or Biblical wife as she is described by the women I followed and under biblical patriarchy/womanhood. I will analyze the biblical origins and justifications that serve as the foundation of biblical womanhood. Additionally, I will explore the connection between the identities of wife and woman, and how these identity categories influence one another. I will also show the connections between the women I follow and depict what their accounts look like and how interactions play out between people on Instagram. Lastly, I will be using McClintock and Stasson’s theories on the function of women under patriarchal nationalisms, and the political value of male headship, to build a counter-narrative to the one presented by the women in my research group about the origins and value of Biblical patriarchy.

The italicized passage above was posted by a young woman I will call Miranda. She is in her early 20s and is a mother of 3. Miranda’s account is focused on sharing her life with her

daughters and husband, recipes, and advice for other young moms and wives on marriage, motherhood, and biblical womanhood. The above quote was posted as a caption to a post from August 2021 accompanying a picture of her holding her daughter who looks to be about 1-2 years old. There are a number of things within this caption that stand out to me as meriting deeper analysis. Firstly, while Miranda states very clearly that she feels fulfilled in her role as a wife and mother and does not feel she needs to look beyond those roles to find purpose, there is also a distinct feeling of self-defensiveness in the caption. She mentions that people may disapprove and that her feelings are “not a bad thing” twice in two sentences. The same message could have been conveyed with these statements removed to be more assertive:

*Someone asked me yesterday, "Who are you outside of being a wife and a mother?" I paused and thought about it and simply said, "I'm not sure." I feel fulfilled at home raising my daughter, keeping a calm environment for my husband, and making sure all of our needs [are] met as a family unit. I don't need anything else in order to "find myself" because I already have. I'm a wife, I'm a mother.*

It is interesting that the post is phrased to be almost a preemptive refutation to pushback. While it is not possible to know exactly what the origins of this defensiveness are, it is a quality that is found frequently in the content shared by the women I followed. Instead of making statements and letting opposition or criticism arise organically from others, these preemptive refutations are often baked into the original statement.

To further unpack the statement “I'm a wife, I'm a mother, and I'm okay with being just that” I will turn to the book “Created to be his Help Meet” by Debi Pearl. This book is one of the most popular books on the topic of Biblical Womanhood. The author and her husband, Michael Pearl, together run No Greater Joy Ministries, which focuses on providing resources on parenting, bible teaching, and Biblical manhood and womanhood (“No Greater Joy Ministries - Family and Marriage Resources from Michael and Debi Pearl”, 2022). The Pearls are very popular amongst the women I follow and their books have been recommended on many occasions. Their two most popular books are “Created to be his Help Meet” by Debi, and “To Train up a Child” which they co-authored. They are also controversial figures though, in part because of the controversial nature of Biblical Patriarchy, but what they are better known for is



their book “To Train up a Child” being linked to the deaths of at least 3 children killed by their parents who took disciplining the children too far (Lewis, 2013). Despite the controversy surrounding the couple both books mentioned above are still widely recommended by the women in this community. Figure 1 shows a post from a woman I followed from February 2022 showing what books she had read in the past year, both are included in the pile. At least 2 other women in my research group also identified the Pearls as the instigators of their conversion to biblical womanhood/patriarchy.

In the first chapter of “Created to be his Help Meet” Debi describes what the role of a wife is:

*If you are a wife, you were created to fill a need, and in that capacity you are a “good thing,” a helper suited to the needs of a man. This is how God created you and it is your purpose for existing. You are, by nature, equipped in every way to be your man’s helper. You are inferior to none as long as you function within your created nature, for no man can do your job, and no man is complete without his wife. You were created to make him complete, not to seek personal fulfillment parallel to him. A woman trying to function like a man is as ridiculous as a man trying to be like a woman. A unisex society is a senseless society—a society dangerously out of order.*

*When you are a help meet to your husband, you are a helper to Christ.*

The key points made here are firstly, that women are below men because men are designed to be leaders, women simply do not possess the skills or aptitude required to successfully lead. Secondly, taking on a submissive role is not degrading or demeaning because the work wives do

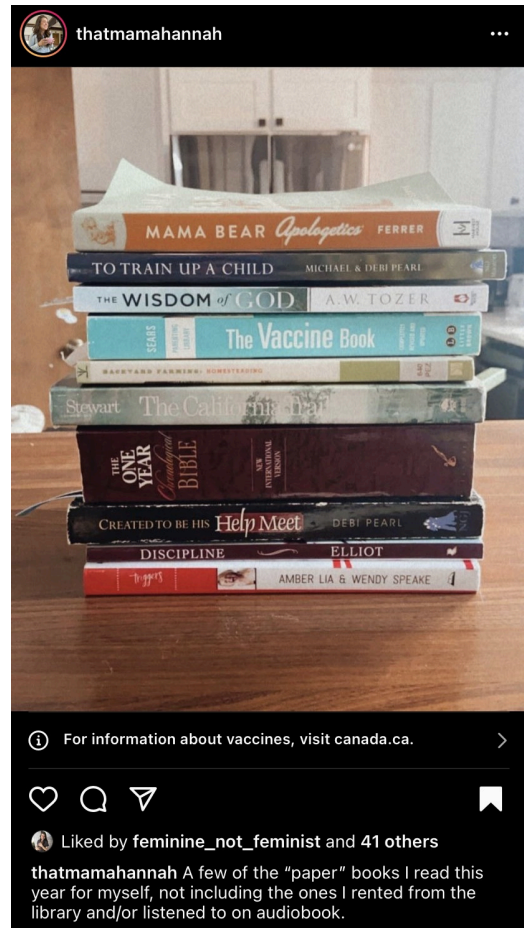


Figure 1: A post from a woman in my research group of books she read that includes both “To Train up a Child” and “Created to be his Help Meet” by Michael and Debi Pearl

as “helpers” is essential, men cannot do the work women were designed for and they cannot function without it. Thirdly, women are not created to seek out individual fulfillment the way their husbands may outside of the home. Women are created to make men complete, the entirety of a woman’s purpose on Earth is to help her husband, if they do this properly seeking out personal enrichment or fulfillment beyond your marriage or home should not be necessary or desired even. Finally, strict adherence to these gender roles is essential to the proper function of an orderly society. Men and women cannot take on one another’s roles successfully since that is not what they have been designed for. Submission is what allows for an orderly and peaceful society.

The assertion that an orderly society hinges on strict gender roles and a hierarchical organization is not exclusive though to evangelical theology. In patriarchal nationalism McClintock’s notes that:

*The significance of the family trope was twofold. First, the family offered an indispensable figure for sanctioning social hierarchy within putative organic unity of interests. Since the subordination of woman to man, and child to adult, was deemed a natural fact, other forms of social hierarchy could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature (McClintock, 1993).*

McClintock presents that the origins and purpose of the hierarchical patriarchal family is to naturalize and essentialize this structure and provide a model for other social systems to replicate (McClintock, 1993).

For Miranda the assertion that she feels complete and fulfilled as a wife and mother is important to display because it asserts that she is happy with what she *should* be happy with. To be happy as a wife and mother means that you are living according to God’s plan for you as a woman.

What is also important to note is the way that “woman” and “wife” are often used interchangeably. According to this ideology women are created for the express purpose of finding and helping husbands. Without husbands women are unable to do the work that they were designed for. This is significant because it is doing this work of helping your husband that allows you as a woman to properly display to God your commitment to his plans and display the

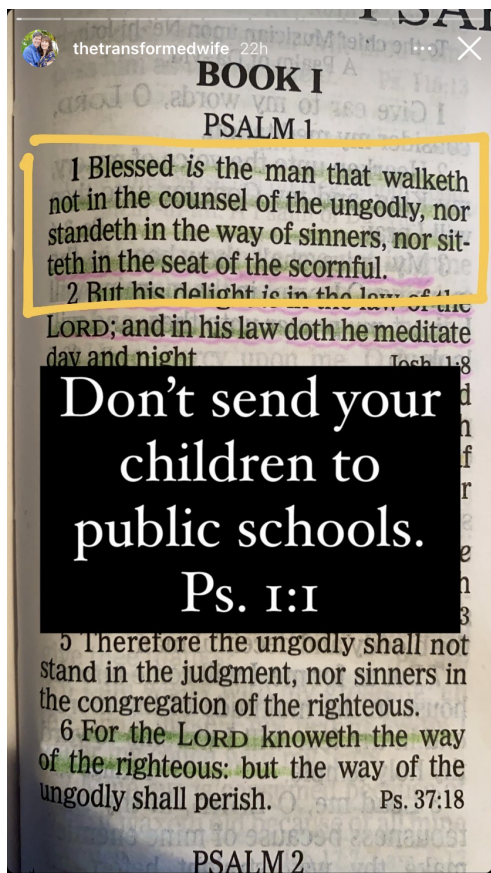


Figure 2: A post from Lori sharing her interpretation of a bible passage.

### What makes a Godly Wife?

The first woman I followed is named Lori Alexander, who online uses the moniker “The Transformed Wife”. Lori is a former teacher, as of June 2022 she has over 35,000 followers on Instagram, 130,000 Facebook followers, and 16,000 Twitter followers. She has written two books, a guide for wives and a guide to biblical womanhood, and has a blog on which she posts nearly every day (Alexander, 2022). I am unsure when I first became aware of Lori as it was before I began my research. Lori centers her personal brand on her story of being a “transformed wife”. In the about me section of her blog she says she “had 23 years of a difficult marriage but the years since then have only been getting better and better as I apply God’s principles to my life” (Alexander, 2022).

virtue that will guarantee your salvation and entrance into heaven (this idea will be elaborated upon further later). It also should be kept in mind that unlike Catholics evangelical denominations do not have nuns. While unmarried Catholic women may be able to affirm their godliness without a husband through a symbolic marriage to Christ, Evangelical women’s only options are being single or married.

She bases her ministry upon Titus 2:3-5 which reads:

*3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;*

*4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,*

*5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.*

In her words this passage “commands that older women teach younger women to be sober, love and obey their husbands, love their children, be chaste, discreet, good, and keepers at home.” Lori’s testimony on her own marriage states it was contentious, full of bickering and unpleasantness until she read “Created to be His Help Meet” and awoke to the truth that the Lord demands submissiveness from wives (Puterman, n.d.). Once she accepted this she says her marriage was completely transformed for the better (Puterman, n.d.). Lori is now in her 60s, she has four adult children and nine grandchildren, meaning that she has time to minister to other women on the duties of biblical womanhood (Alexander, 2022). That older women should be the teachers of young women is important to her, young women she believes are not unwise, but should be spending their time focused on their children and marriages, they should be putting their free time into learning as opposed to teaching which they can do later (Conn, 2021). She also believes that Bible teaching should come from men, women’s ministries should focus only on what behavior and comportment is in line with biblical doctrine (Conn, 2021). Despite this though she does make almost daily posts like the one in Figures 2 , in which she provides interpretations of scripture that appear to be her own as she does not credit them to anyone else.

To expand the community of women I followed, I began following accounts that Lori, and later other women, shared posts from or suggested were good for advice on Biblical womanhood or family. Many of these accounts had large followings in the tens-of-thousands to over 100,000, but others were fairly small ranging from 200-5000 followers.

Figures 3, 4, and 5 show the main feeds of three accounts that each have between 22,000 and 34,000 followers and are examples of what I would describe as “Influencer” accounts. The



Figure 3: Screenshot of the main feed for @nowthatwearefamily run by the Voetburgs

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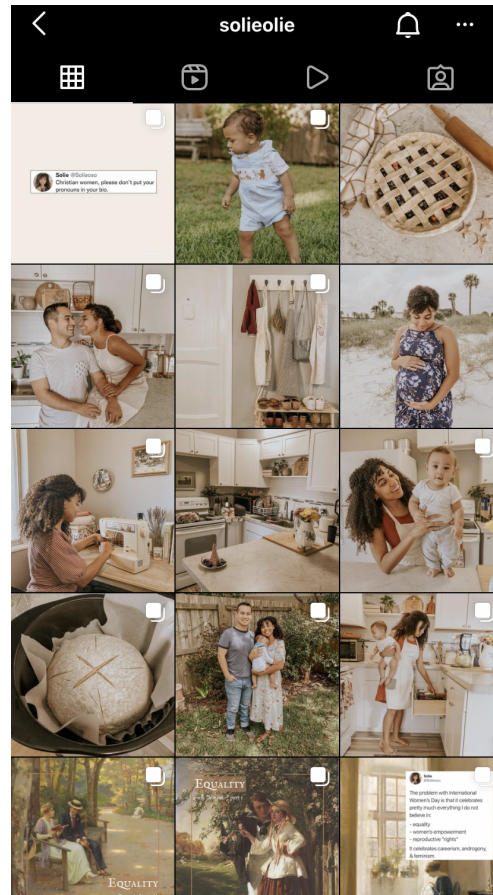


Figure 4: Screenshot of the main feed for @Solieolie run by the Solie

account  
Figure  
run by

husband and wife, the Voetburgs, who state in their bio their goal is “Equipping + Encouraging Christians to Embrace the Joys of Family”. The account in Figure 4 is run by Solie who describes herself as a “Wife and mom to 2 boys” and a “homemaker”. The account in Figure 5 is run by Christina who in her bio states “It’s all about Jesus” and describes herself as a wife and mother of five, the purpose of her page is to provide “Notes on womanhood to my sisters in Christ” and “The untold history of feminism”. Both Christina and Solie, follow the Voetburgs and one another, the Voetburgs follow Solie. The Voetburgs are followed by 9 accounts I follow, Solie is followed by 21, and Christina is followed by 17.

As can be seen in these screenshots, personal pictures typically show women with their husbands and/or children, their homes, examples of modest dress, or products of domestic labor



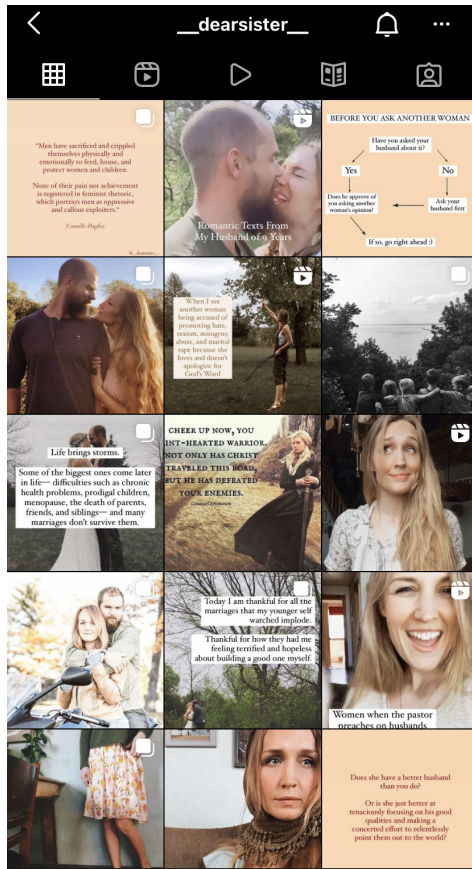


Figure 5: Screenshot of the main feed for @\_\_dearsister\_\_ run by Christina

such as baked goods. An example of what accounts focused mostly on educational or advisory content look like can be seen in Figures 6 and 7. The account in Figure 6, @biblicalfemininitybootcamp, run by a woman named Louise, has over 9,000 followers and is followed by 12 of the accounts I follow, including Solie and Christina. Figure 7 shows the main feed for Lori's account, Lori also shares personal pictures and videos, but they are typically reserved for her story posts. In her bio Louise states the focus of her page is, "Titus 2 Ministry", "Traditional gender roles, homemaking" and Proverbs 31. Louise does speak about her own marriage and life, but refrains from posting personal pictures, or providing a last name.

Regarding these larger accounts I will note as well that beyond simply engaging in online community the purpose of these pages is to provide guidance, inspiration, and advice and exert influence. They aim to

Titus 2 and Proverbs 31 are the two most frequently cited Bible passages informing the concept of Biblical womanhood amongst the women I followed. Proverbs 31 describes a "virtuous woman", who's "price is far above rubies." The proverb describes the duties and comportment of this woman saying:

*11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.*

*12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.*

*13 She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.*

*14 She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.*

*15 She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.*



Figure 6: Screenshot of the main feed for @biblicalfemininitybootcamp run by Louise



Figure 7: Screenshot of the main feed for @thetransformedwife run by Lori

16 She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

17 She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

18 She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.

19 She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

20 She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

*23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.*

*24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.*

*25 Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.*

*26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.*

*27 She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.*

*28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.*

*29 Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.*

*30 Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.*

*31 Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.*

This passage references a variety of duties for wives and details some of the specific ways wives should support their husbands spiritually and materially. While Proverbs 31 is mentioned by many who practice complementarianism and submission, the specific dictate of submission is cited as Titus 2:5, which commands wives “to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.” Proverbs 31 most frequently is used as a template for the virtuous behavior of wives. The qualities of the woman described are what women who practice biblical womanhood seek to emulate or embody. A biblical woman based on this passage works hard, is loyal to their family, and is devout in her faith and commitment to God (Proverbs 31:27, 31:11, 31:30).

She is also responsible, as seen in Proverbs 31:17, for the protection of her virtue and taking on the role of preserving purity within society by acting as a gatekeeper to sex. This is another common theme between biblical womanhood and patriarchal nationalism since women under patriarchal nationalism “as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups (through restrictions on sexual or marital relations)” (McClintock, 1993). The virtuous wife is furthermore charitable and kind, extending aid to those in need (Proverbs 31:20).

The final line of the Proverb “Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates” is worth analyzing further because it connects to an issue raised



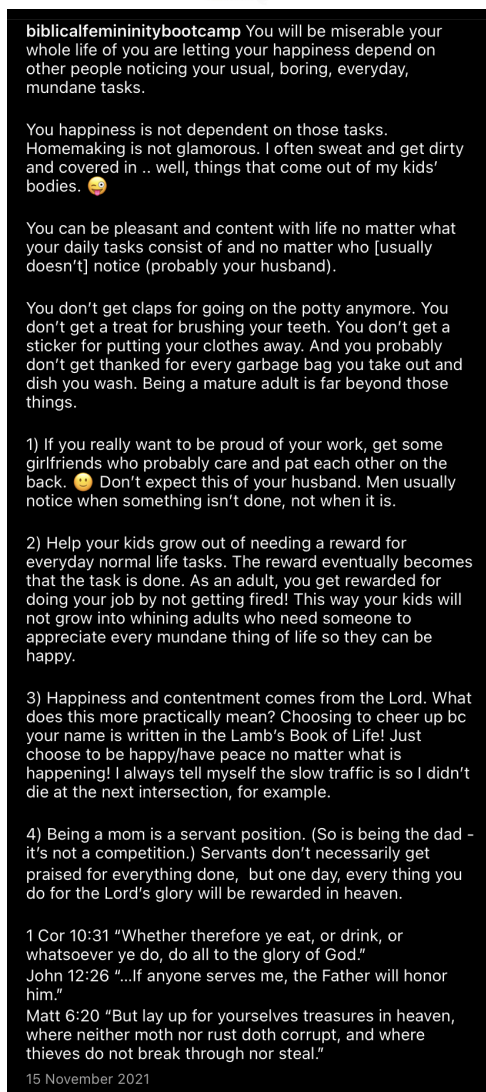
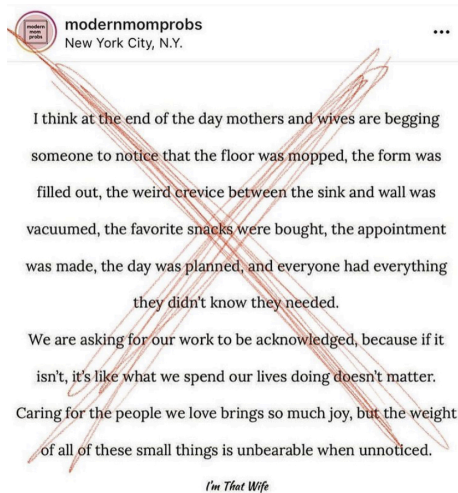


Figure 8: A post about showing appreciation to women for domestic work

frequently by the women in my study group; what praise or recognition should women feel entitled to in exchange for the labor they do?

Figure 8 shows a post that was circulated by a number of the women I followed last November. The original text in the photo part of the post is a call for the work of mothers, wives, and homemakers to be recognized and acknowledged as important and valuable. The caption though posted by Louise refutes this idea though explaining that it is not the job of husbands or society to recognize this work since it is what is commanded of women by God. If your husband does not notice all the work you do you should not let this make you bitter and resentful because “every thing you do for the Lord’s glory will be rewarded in heaven.” In the comments under the post many people state their agreement with the caption, but also note that having your work noticed and appreciated by your husband or children is very nice and that wanting those things is not necessarily wrong. One woman who I do not follow, but identifies herself in her bio as a christian “trad-wife” commented:

*While I agree our contentment needs to be found in the Lord. I do not find it unreasonable to desire one's husband to notice. It always feels nice to have appreciation expressed and if you as a wife feel loved when he does that, that's fine and you can absolutely let him know that. His job is to love you well and that's okay to help him out in knowing what would make you feel loved at times.*

*I love the acknowledging that contentment needs to come from giving as unto God though, I just thought I'd share that bit too ❤️*

In response Louise said “I understand what you mean. Well put 😊”. Further down in the comments there is one from a detractor. The account has no identifying information that is publicly available, no name or bio, and a meme profile picture. The exchange between the commenter and Louise reads:

*Commenter: and yet in this corner of the internet,, all that is babbled on is giving your husband a pat on the back for going potty. thanking him and showing him appreciation for things no matter how big and small, whether you think it's deserved or not. it's almost funny how sexism creeps back into circles where traditional thinking is upheld by fallible humans .. but it's honestly quite predictable and sad*

*Louise: Well, since marriage is a picture of the gospel, of a Christ and the church, yes, we should be thankful for every small thing. The Bible says to be thankful in ALL things. Sexism is when you hate the opposite sex. Loving your husband and respecting him (literally no one says tell him good job for going on the potty) is the opposite of sexism. And also not the point of this post. Besides, marriage isn't equal and opposite. It's not mutual. Husband and wife don't need or deserve the same things.*

*Commenter: this comment and your caption are very different. but maybe someone explained a different pov [point of view] to you before i did lol. treating one sex better than the other one is sexist. both husband and wife should be thanked for all they do. this isn't something the bible negates or says is only for one sex.... actually it commands all of us to have a spirit of gratitude and for wives to be praised and husbands to be respected.. so there's nothing else to be discussed. this take was a miss*

*Louise: gods tests the sexes differently. Is he sexist? By definition, thats not what sexism is. Sexism is \*hating\* or \*mistreating\* one sex just bc of their sex. Which neither the Bible nor God nor my post do.*

What is seen here is the assertion that men and women are inherently different as designed by God. For husbands and wives to have different wants, needs, and roles is natural and should be embraced. The belief that men and women are designed differently and for different purposes is central to the ideologies of complementarianism and submission.

Louise often uses the slogan “It’s not submission if you agree” to explain her approach to the practice. She points out that it is demanded of wives when they are in disagreement with their husbands in both small and large conflicts. That it is difficult and uncomfortable is to be embraced. Explaining her own journey to committing to embracing submission in the caption of a post from May 2020 she says:

*God poured out his grace one day and it hit me. It’s not submission if I agree. Like Jesus said - anyone will do something nice for a nice person. Who will do something nice for an enemy? THAT’S where the rubber meets the road. I was in a habit of trying to twist my husband’s arm to “compromise” whenever I STRONGLY disagreed. (Of course stuff I only minorly disagreed with but did anyway I held up as shining examples of what a great wife I was 😊) I wanted to invoke the “grace card” to make him feel bad for not going with my way. Ladies, this is not submission. Anyone can submit when they agree. Can you ACTUALLY submit when you disagree? That’s the only way.”*

That submission goes against your preferences and comfort is essential for it to be meaningful. Titus 2 commands women be “subject to their husbands”, therefore, arguing or pushing back against your husband’s judgment is in defiance of the Bible and God’s designs for wives. Submission also though must be voluntary. A husband cannot force his wife into submission, she must choose it, valuing it over her own discomfort. Submission also should not be seen as a devaluing of women. Women must submit to their husbands not because their opinions and ideas are worth less in the eyes of God, but because submission creates order. By

not feeding into strife within your home wives preserve peace and happiness for themselves, their husbands, and their children. In a blog post titled “Godly Women are Submissive and Home is their Priority” Lori states “Remember submission is for order, not value” (Alexander, 2022). Lori in the same post states “Men and women have different functions and roles”, a woman “must be submissive to the Lord and her father. Until she’s married, she is to be submissive to her father, or mother if her father is dead”, and reminds men that “if she’s not submissive to her father, she won’t be submissive to you ... It’s all about biblical headship. Marriage is modeling Christ and His Church. We must be submissive to the biblical picture in marriage” (Alexander, 2022). Lori ends the post with Proverbs 31:27-29. The comments on the blog post are closed, but it has 150 shares between Facebook and Twitter. Under the post on Louise’s page the first comment agrees stating “Husband is head of wife...its really simple”, the account this comment comes from has no bio or posts so it is not clear exactly who runs it, but they almost exclusively follow accounts dedicated to biblical womanhood and homemaking.

Under another post from June 2022 from a homemaking account, followed by Louise and nine other accounts I follow, on the topic of submission Louise further elaborates on her idea of submission. The original post scolds women who are “afraid of not being able to make rational decisions” further stating a woman who “can’t control herself is not a woman who is a helpmeet to her husband”, but may be “actually burdensome to him.” It is pointed out that the woman described in Proverbs 31 was trusted by her husband, therefore women “should depend on God” more than their husbands in improving in areas they are lacking to ensure they are assets to their husbands. Louise in a comment under the post said “women are more prone to emotions and making decisions on them”, but they should also be “raised up to be industrious and hard working” then going on to state:

*Modern women have the worst of everything: convenience, ease, self love, and way too much weight on emotions. Women that live within boundaries, usually authority from their male head. are more calm and rational and capable - but u wouldn't say that's \*why\* (at least not singularly) women need authority. We have it just bc it is the order God made. And also it helps us bc we are less solid. It's not an insult, it just*

*is (and of course has benefits like emotional intelligence and in raising children and serving other).*

It is to women's benefit that they embrace an attitude of submission with their husbands as it removes from them the burdens of difficult choices and arguments. She also points out here that "women are less solid" which is another point raised often to justify submission. Going back to Genesis it is pointed out it was Eve, not Adam, that was approached and tricked by Satan to bite the apple that cast them out of Eden. Women are more susceptible to the influence and corruption of the devil. Submission then adds an additional layer of protection to you and your family against sin. For mothers this is essential as the protection of one's children from harm, both material and spiritual, is a core duty.

This embrace of submission and complementarianism is explained then by the women I follow as divinely commanded and the best way to maintain order and happiness within homes and across society (Pearl, 2004). Stasson though provides an alternative narrative for the modern embrace of male headship that focuses instead on the political value of male headship. Stasson points out that as of the 1970s male headship "did not yet strongly distinguish evangelicals from the wider culture, which still largely endorsed a male breadwinner, female-housewife model of family.", but that evangelicals diverged from other groups in their approach to marriage in the 1970s as a result of it being "connected with their political opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and gay marriage" (Stasson, 2014). That the women I follow focus on the benefits to women, peace, contentment, happiness, and emphasize that they practice submission and biblical patriarchy voluntarily does not refute or contend with Stasson's theory of the origins of male headship in modern evangelical communities. A genuine belief that the Bible commands women adopt this role also does not refute Stasson's argument. There are so many different ways in which the Bible can and has been interpreted over the past several thousand years. It must be questioned why ministers and leaders of evangelical organizing efforts have chosen to elevate this theological interpretation and ideology when only decades ago it was seen as one possible interpretation (Stasson, 2014).

#### Chapter 4: Godly Mothers:

*Women's natural use of their body is to have sex with a man (her husband by God's design), then bear and nurse children. Wanting to fornicate with another woman and not wanting children is against the natural use of one's body. - From a blog post by Lori Alexander, 2020*

In this chapter I aim to explore the role of mothers in their households, communities, and families. I will look into the responsibilities of mothers in caring for their children, and the relationship is between motherhood and working outside the home. I will draw on the work of Bjork-James and Power to explore the weaponization of mother's fear as well to motivate them into more extreme or conservative ideologies out of a desire to protect their children.

The ideology of biblical patriarchy revolves not simply around marriage, but the family, complete with children. The women I followed all either have children or are currently trying to get pregnant with their first child. The importance of having children is discussed frequently.

Bernadine, has two accounts with over 60,000 followers between them. She is followed by more than 20 of the accounts I follow between both accounts. Bernadine describes herself in her bio as "Anti-degeneracy, pro traditional values" and focuses on "femininity, not feminism in dating and marriage". In a post sharing a series of her tweets in February 2022 that has amassed more than 3,000 likes and 125 comments, she states "Every Christian needs to get serious about marriage and parenthood. You are the future.", "How unfortunate to be g a y or feminist and willingly end your bloodline in your lifetime.", "Think multi-generational. Think long-term. Don't sacrifice your values or compromise your conscience for the temporal. Think eternal." This post illuminates one the motivations given for why it is important for Christians/evangelicals to prioritize having children, to build up the population of Christians on the earth. This idea is a cornerstone of the quiverfull movement, but is not necessarily exclusive to it. Generally what is expressed here is the belief that it is the obligation of christians to have children. More specifically though it is the obligation of christian women to have children unless they cannot for some reason, such as infertility. Motherhood then within this community is an obligation, it is natural and something you should want as is demonstrated in the quote at the

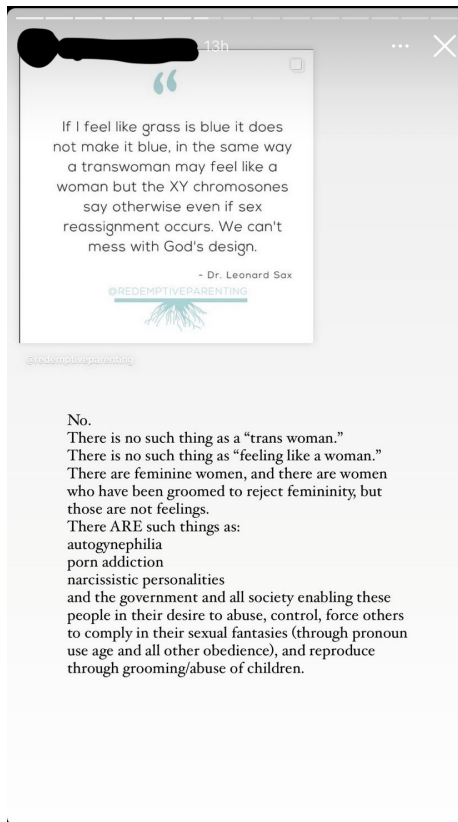


Figure 9: A story post about trans women

*both a career AND children.*

Suzanne is a young wife, she's in her early 20s and does not yet have any children of her own. She posts frequently though about her desire to be a mother in the future, at the moment though she is a stay at home wife and homemaker. She cites Lori Alexander and Michael Pearl as being instrumental in her acceptance of biblical patriarchy and submission. Mother should be home with their children then because it is difficult for their children not to have them at home. This idea was seen in another instance where Lori was asked her opinions on conservative news commentator Candace Owens, she responded "she is an intelligent and well-spoken young woman for the conservative movement, but her baby needs her more than the country does. No one can take her place in her child's life."

Mothers then must be at home to care and provide for their children, but also to homeschool them. Sending your children to public schools is risky for a number of reasons.

beginning of this chapter from Lori, but it also serves a higher purpose.

For mothers there are few responsibilities that are more important than the protection of one's children from harm. The community of women I followed see it as the obligation of women to be home with their children for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is damaging to children to be raised by people other than their parents. When reflecting on the announcement of a Christian YouTuber was leaving the platform to spend more time with her family a woman I will call Suzanne, said:

*THIS is why God tells women to be keepers at home who focus on their family! Herself and her children were suffering socially... It makes me so sad to see women doing that to their children, even if it's unintentional... It just hurts my heart for women like her who fall for the feminist mindset that you can have*



Firstly, they are secular and therefore may teach things that are counter to biblical truth. The biggest risks though associated with public schools these days are generally associated not with things like teaching evolution, but exposure of children to “liberal propaganda” or the LGBTQ+ community.

Over the past several months there has been a growing moral panic amongst American conservatives about LGBTQ+ people “grooming” children. Following the mainstreaming of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and policies like Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill, which bans education or discussion about gender or sexual orientation in public schools, and forces teachers to out queer students to their parents; and the proposed bill in Texas to ban drag performances in the presence of minors, increased attention has been placed on the idea that queer people are not just sinners, but mentally ill and a threat to children (Diaz, 2022.

Patton, 2022). As can be seen through bills like the one in Florida that target public schools, the fear is the LGBTQ+ people are targeting children and are therefore likely to be trying to infiltrate public schools to “groom” or convert children. This idea is not new, but has gained new traction over the past few months with the drafting and adoption of new legislation targeting queer people. Lori also touched on this issue in a 2020 blog post:

*Innocence is stolen from most children at early ages through TV, movies, music, the Internet, sexual abuse, school, and so on. Now, they’re being asked in elementary school if they want to be a boy or girl and before long, pedophilia will be accepted as*

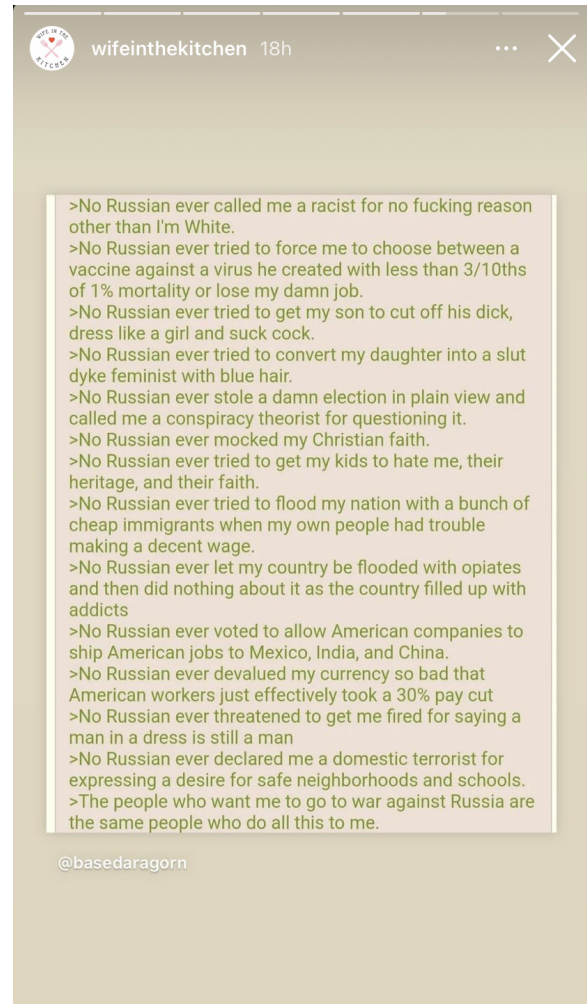


Figure 10: A post expressing white supremacist, homophobic, and transphobic rhetoric.



*normal. (You don't believe me? Just a few years ago, the state of California voted against same sex marriage!)* (Alexander, 2020).

A woman who I will call Amy shared the post seen in figure 9 in August of 2021 to her story. In the post she posits that trans identity is the result of “narcissistic personalities”, “porn addiction”, “autogynephilia”, or being “groomed to reject femininity”. She also states that complying with using people’s preferred pronouns would allow them to “control” and “abuse” the rest of society, which she claims is to in some way “comply in their sexual fantasies”. She finally says that trans identity is being passed onto children through “grooming/abuse”.

Amy is a new mother who’s account was deleted a few months ago. She was an open white-supremacist who used her feed to exclusively post pictures of the meals she cooked for her husband, but her story posts to regularly share white supremacist memes or ideas. The work of Bjork-James seems particularly relevant when considering her online persona, as Amy was one of the women I followed who most clearly fit into both the religious right and the white supremacist movement. An example of the kind of white supremacist content Amy shared can be seen in Figure 10. This post references white supremacy, opposition to immigration, vaccine misinformation, and is homophobic and transphobic, amongst other things. That this content is shared by a page with the username @wifeinthekitchen is notable largely because on the surface it seems so out of place and incongruous with the purpose of the stated purpose of the page, promoting biblical womanhood and homemaking. When considering though the work of Power it makes more sense as it speaks to the fear of this woman about perceived threats to the safety of not just her, but also her family (Power, 2008). Posts such as these and further calls to protect children from queer people are examples of how perceived threats to children are used to spur mothers into both political action and extremism (Power, 2008. Bjork-James, 2020). The accounts I followed focused more on providing advice to women on being good wives than on being good mothers, but a great deal of the content that is presented about motherhood and the duty of mothers is to protect your children.

With regards to protecting children there are also occasional threats of or references to violence against queer people, made not by the women, but typically by men in the comments under their posts. A woman I follow named Shekinah who is a young Black “conservative

activist” and conservative evangelical posted a video in October 2021 of a satirical song by men from the San Francisco Gay Men’s Choir. The song was called “We’ll Convert Your Children” and in it the singers state they are no longer interested in arguing with close-minded people from older generations and that these people will be proven wrong by their own children who are more-open minded than their parents and who may also grow up to be gay. It is clearly a joke and is poking fun at conservative fears of gay people “converting” straight children. Shekinah criticized the video and claimed in her caption that gay people are now bragging about grooming children, she treats the video and lyrics as if they are entirely serious. Comments under the post which was taken down either by Shekinah or was deleted by Instagram after being reported for violating community guidelines included: “Try it. I’ll shoot a new one in their heads.😂”, “Any Parent would grab a weapon if, they heard some say, “We’re coming for your children” let alone sing.”, “We cant keep being silent we have to stand up! We can do it lovingly but it is not loving (to God and our children) to keep letting this go on.”, “THIS IS NOT FUNNY IN NO WAY. THESE PEDOPHILES ARE IN PLAINSIGHT AND THEY WANT TI DESTROY OUR CHILDREN’S LIVES.” A few days later Shekinah promoted a song by her boyfriend called “Let’s Go Brandon” on her story. The lyrics to the song referred to democratic politicians as demons, claimed the covid-19 vaccine was the mark of the devil, and that the pandemic was planned, included the lines “Listen I don’t think you hear, man, let me make it clear, man/ Better keep yo’ hands unto yourself, that stuff is weird, man/ I wish I could take you in the back play, smear the queer, man”. What is clear in both this comment section and the lyrics to this song is that potentially resorting to extreme measures to protect your family and your children from exposure to gay people is considered by some to be a valid option.

Motherhood within this community is defined as both a necessity and a privilege. It is necessary to do all you can to have children in order to conform to God’s vision of women and their purpose, but it should also be the most natural desire you have as a woman and what should make you feel fulfilled and happiest. To be a biblical woman is to be a wife and a mother and to be content in those roles, not feeling that you are lacking validation, or purpose.

### Conclusion:

After conducting my ethnographic research I conclude that amongst the women in my research group who follow biblical patriarchy and practice biblical womanhood, a women's duty is to be focused primarily on the maintenance of the home and raising children. Women are also gatekeepers of sex, respectability, and family. The primary job of women is to care for their homes and children while respecting the headship of their husbands and working to be his "help meet". Women furthermore were created by God to be helpers to their husbands, the adoption of a submissive role in their homes is not an insult of slight, but rather an acknowledgement that God created men and women differently to fulfill different roles within the family.

The women I followed online cite the Bible as their motivation for adopting this ideology, but I contend that external forces have shaped the modern religious right and white evangelicalism and have incentivized the adoption of these ideologies for women within white evangelicalism. I suggest alternatively that a combination of fear for the safety of children amidst changing cultural attitudes that affect the composition of the family, the influences of secular patriarchal nationalism, and organized efforts to resist feminism, gay right's, and the civil right's movement have provided sufficient motivation to white evangelical women to adopt this ideology irregardless separate from theological justification in the interests if protecting their children and their known ways of life (Bjork-James, 2020., McClintock, 1993., Power, 2008., Stasson, 2014, Williams, 2020).

Improvements I believe could have been made through this research would have been having a somewhat more focused and narrow data collection method. When reviewing my fieldnotes and all the saved posts I had, I had to sift through an enormous number of topics and amount of information to find what I was looking for. Being more narrowed then in my research would have made my writing easier and likely somewhat more focused. I additionally also

would have kept better track of when certain accounts disappeared. There were a few accounts that were suddenly deleted and I am not sure exactly when that was because I did not notice until I realized I had not seen anything from them for a while and looked them up. In the future I would develop a better system for tracking this. I also would try to conduct more interviews to further triangulate my data.

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