



## God, Man, Then ... Wait, How Does That Go? Emerging Gender Identities in 20-something Evangelicals

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*In this article, I analyze the gender identities of Evangelical Christians involved in a non-denominational, Evangelical ministry called Lamphouse, which is designed for 20-something adults. This analysis explores the rhetorical fluidity of gender and the structural concreteness of patriarchy within this space. In addition, this analysis proposes a typology of gender identity. Rather than creating a duality of egalitarianism and patriarchy, I propose a spectrum of gendered subject positions taken up by my respondents.*

In the past 20 years, gender scholars have produced a significant literature detailing the gendered identities of Evangelical Christians. According to John Bartkowski (2007), Evangelicals have been a hot topic of study in the past two decades because they are perceived to be “the arbiters of patriarchy” (p. 154). In particular, this scholarship has been most concerned with the notion of “headship,” a term used in many Evangelical circles to describe the relationship between God, men, women and children. In short, “headship” typically assumes a patriarchal chain of being in which children should be submissive to their parents, wives submissive to their husbands (and to God), and husbands submissive to God (the Father).

A good portion of this scholarship has analyzed Promise Keepers (Messner, 1997; Bartkowski, 2007, 2004; Claussen, 1999, 2000), its female counterparts, Women of Faith, Chosen Women and Women’s Aglow Fellowship (Erzen, 2000; Griffith, 1997), and Christian media products, like *Wild at Heart*<sup>1</sup> (Gallagher & Wood, 2005). Much of this literature has focused on official texts and rhetoric, but a growing body of literature also analyzes “men and women in the pews” who identify with these movements and texts, yet negotiate them into everyday life in a variety of ways (Bartkowski, 2004, 2001; Gallagher & Wood, 2005; Griffith, 1997).

Some of this literature highlights the fundamental gender conservatism embedded in movements like Promise Keepers and books like *Wild at Heart*, paying particular attention to essentialized, patriarchal discourses about gender and normative discourse about the heterosexual family. Michael Messner (1997), for example, wrote: “Promise Keepers can be viewed...as organized and highly politicized antifeminist and antigay backlash” (p. 35). Tanya Erzen (2000) argued that Women of Faith and Chosen Women furthered “an agenda advocating divine and worldly submission” (p. 252). Michael S. Kimmel (1999) suggested that the sensitivity rhetoric of Promise Keepers did little more than produce “a kindler, gentler

patriarchy ... [with] male domination as obligation, surrender and service” (pp. 114–5). Finally, Julie Ingersoll (2003) suggested that despite whatever negotiations of power occurred within Evangelicalism, the dominance of patriarchy still does symbolic and material violence, particularly to women and homosexuals.

That said, a growing number of scholarship has also focused on the negotiation of varied gender symbols into more fluid gender identities (Bartkowski, 2004; Gallagher & Wood, 2005; Gallagher & Smith, 1999). This scholarship has argued a) that official rhetoric is diverse, b) that the spaces created by Promise Keepers and other groups are empowering to constructive masculinities, and c) that Evangelical men and women negotiate patriarchal rhetoric in a variety of ways.

Bartkowski (2004), for example, argued that Promise Keepers offered a “diverse array of godly masculinities” (p. 45). This diverse array, he suggested, existed within a spectrum anchored on one end by “rational patriarchs” and on the other, “expressive egalitarians” (p. 20). Gallagher and Wood (2005) supported this idea, arguing for a more nuanced view of official Evangelical rhetoric. They note, for example, the divergent ideas of masculinity that exist within Promise Keepers and the book, *Wild at Heart* (Eldredge, 2006).

Longwood (1999) argued that rather than thinking of Promise Keepers as repressive, scholars should think of broader American culture as repressive to men and Promise Keepers as a positive space “for personal healing and self-growth” (p. 13). Further, according to Stoltenberg (1999), this space offers men a “redemptive theology,” as well as groups of compassion that help men transform their everyday ethics, particularly in relation to the objectification of women through pornography (p. 94). Finally, Don Deardorff (2000) suggested that masculine space like Promise Keepers offers men a space for “ritualized resistance” to broader cultural norms, “a refuge where [men] can cope with alienation that they feel on several fronts” (p. 77).

If such diversity exists within official discourses and the social spaces in which they form, it should not be surprising that “men and women in the pews” express various ideas about gender. Thus, following Gallagher and Wood (2005), researchers need “to attend to multiple meanings as well as messages” (p. 56). Wilcox (1989), for example, suggested “a good deal of variation among evangelical women in their attitudes toward women’s issues” (p. 149). Gallagher (2003) argued that only 50 percent of Evangelical respondents believed that headship was rooted in some Great Chain of Being. Further, while 84 percent believed that the husband was the spiritual leader of the household, 98 percent offered what Gallagher called “qualified” responses, softening headship language with the language of mutual submission and partnership. Finally, 78 percent of her respondents believed in both headship and equal partnership.

Griffith (1997) and Brasher (1998) both highlighted the ways in which Evangelical women have been able to negotiate power under ideas of headship. One strategy of negotiation employed by Evangelical women is to understand terms like “submission” and “headship” as mutual servanthood and respect (Jaffe, 1999). In this negotiation, marriage, for example, is seen as a triangle, with God at the apex and man and woman at either point of the base. Similarly, Gallagher (2003) highlighted a rhetorical strategy of power negotiation whereby women felt it their duty to “submit” their ideas to their husbands in a way that helps him make decisions.

It is not simply women who have negotiated gender ideals, however. Bartkowski (2007) has suggested that Evangelical men have begun to focus more on partnership and less on chain of command. Further, leadership, for these men, involves humility and servanthood more than power. Gallagher (2003) argued that both men and women engaged in “practical reciprocity” where “wives acknowledge their husbands are accountable; and husbands willingly delegate decisions to their wives” (p. 102). Bartkowski (2004) argued that men employed a rhetorical strategy of “discursive tacking” in their negotiation of gender (p. 53). Tacking is a sailing term that describes how boats reach shore during an offshore wind. Tacking involves turning starboard and port repeatedly until the destination is reached. Bartkowski extended this term to a discursive strategy of Evangelical identity. He argued that men oscillate between rational patriarchy and expressive egalitarianism in the construction of masculine identity. This tacking leads predominantly to what W. Bradford Wilcox (2004) called “soft patriarchs,” i.e., men who believe leadership involves kindness, affectivity, humility, and servanthood.

Even with such variance, however, only five percent of Evangelical Christians, according to Gallagher and Smith (1999), espouse fully egalitarian views. Further, according to Gallagher’s research above, 84 percent of her respondents still believed that the husband was the head of the household. These numbers lead scholars like Kimmel (1999) to suggest that any “tacking” really only leads to softer forms of patriarchy. Gallagher (2003) argued that tacking toward egalitarianism was not simply a spoonful of sugar that helps male domination go down. Rather, it should be considered a negotiation and reinvention of gender identity.

Further, Gallagher and Smith (1999) argued that the patriarchy in Evangelicalism today is merely symbolic. Thus, while most Evangelical men and women might espouse “symbolic traditionalism,” their everyday lives revealed practices of “pragmatic egalitarianism.” Gallagher (2003) argued that regardless of ideals “nearly all Evangelicals end up in the same place in practice: a pragmatic egalitarianism in which decisions are made according to who has the most knowledge or expertise in a particular area” (p. 95). Bartkowski (2007), in fact, argued that “traditional gender ideologies in evangelical homes often give rise to progressive practices” (p. 163).

Clearly, there is a lively debate among scholars surrounding the negotiation of headship by Evangelicals. Current trends in scholarship seem to point to a nuanced understanding of official discourses and negotiations. In this paper, I intend to engage this debate in two ways.

First, by offering a case study of a 20-something Evangelical ministry, Lamphouse, I will highlight the variance and negotiation of gender within official discourses, for example teachings, in this social space. At the same time, I will highlight structural and rhetorical limitations to gender negotiations within this space. Following Julie Ingersoll (2003), I will highlight some “little things” that reinforce and reproduce patriarchy, in spite of egalitarian negotiations (p. 110). Thus, it may be that “tacking” in this setting involves the reworking of gender identity, as Gallagher (2003) argued, but these “little things” define and constrain the parameters of this space, thereby placing limitations on what gender negotiations are legitimate.

Second, I intend to expand the notion of “discursive tacking” by developing a typology of discursive strategies regarding gender. This typology will offer more

detail about how particular Evangelicals negotiate their gender identities. This, to use the tacking metaphor again, will give more detail about where certain Evangelicals come ashore, as it were, in their gender identities. In addition, this typology will show that it is not simply a matter of choosing headship or egalitarian symbols in this navigation. Rather, other discourses, particularly regarding theology and cultural relevance, enter into this negotiation of gender in a variety of ways.

### *Method*

This study involved four weeks of structured participant observation after two months of informal participant observation with Lamphouse in 2004, during which time I served as a barista in their café. In addition, I conducted a focus group and six semi-structured interviews. More a “method of instances” than a sample<sup>2</sup>, my research group included seven men, four of whom participated in the focus group, and three women<sup>3</sup>, leaders and non-leaders, new members and members who had been involved with Lamphouse for more than a year.

### *Setting the Stage: Lamphouse Structure and Official Rhetoric*

On Tuesday nights, 50 or more, mostly white, 20-something men and women gather at Lamphouse, a ministry of a large, Evangelical, non-denominational congregation located in a suburb of a metropolitan city. Meetings were held in the café area of the church.

Lamphouse was designed for intimacy. Though the room was large enough to comfortably hold 200 people or more, the seating arrangement was broken into tables that would seat no more than eight. A small candle adorned each table, symbolizing the group’s name and offering a small amount of ambient light in the dimly lit room. The tables formed a semi-circle around a stage, which typically hosted a band offering up contemporary Christian worship lyrics to acoustic or alt-rock music. Two television sets—anchored from the ceiling above the band—and one large screen to the side of the band projected lyrics, then teaching notes, and, often, popular movie clips. In case this techno-café atmosphere was not enough to draw in the 20-something crowd, Lamphouse also provided free food from a variety of fast food chains in the area.

Despite the use of cutting-edge technology or trendy music in a café setting, the gendered structure of Lamphouse was traditional. Men led each facet of Lamphouse. Upon entering the building, each person was greeted by the male “welcome coordinator” and his complement of female “greeters.” Men controlled the audio-visual presentations. Men led worship (with the occasional female back-up vocalist), and men always taught.

Compounding this structure, every media message during my fieldwork presented a hierarchical structure of male power. Of course, all of the worship songs exalted a male God, and despite concerted efforts to make scriptural teachings gender neutral, illustrations either offered a male perspective or an essentialist perspective about gender. Also, reinforcing this male perspective, every movie clip used focused on men—whether Al Pacino in *Scent of a Woman* (1992) defending Chris O’Donnell’s honor, Tom Cruise exhibiting courage in *Last Samurai* (2003), or Jack Black showing Lamphouse members how not to pursue or think about members of the opposite sex in *Shallow Hal* (2001).

While this patriarchal structure and practice was in play at Lamphouse, leadership employed rhetorical strategies that made this traditionalism less overt, if not ambiguous. Lamphouse leadership attempted to make teachings gender-neutral. In fact, one of the pastors apologized to the women at Lamphouse for the male-centric references in particular biblical passages. While this may seem like a small, pragmatic concession to keep women interested, it should be viewed as a challenge (if only a tacit one) to one of the core beliefs of Evangelical Christianity—the inerrancy of Holy Scripture—in an effort to be culturally relevant.

Apart from this rhetorical strategy, women were encouraged to take leadership positions in Lamphouse. At the end of each session, the leadership team joined near the stage to counsel and pray for any who had “come forward.” Half of the team was female.

This structural and rhetorical “wiggle room,” as it were, is well established in current scholarship about the negotiation of power in Evangelicalism (e.g. Gallagher, 2003; Griffith, 1997; Brasher, 1998; Bartkowski, 2004), and it is reflected in the following comments from two leaders, Ken and Ned.

Interviewer: How would you feel about a woman teaching?

Ken: I think it would give the women more of a comfort as far as knowing that they can step up and actually become a leader. I think the majority of the leadership team is men, and I kind of feel that women are just hesitant in taking that next step because it doesn't look right for some reason.

...

Ned: I think women do have a lot to offer because they are not stupid. They can read the Bible and interpret it and teach that to other people.

Of course, this negotiation of power, as expressed by both Ken and Ned, was couched in strong language of headship (discussed in more detail below). But their comments, mixed with the gender-neutral rhetoric of the teaching pastor and the material and symbolic practices of visible, female leaders, suggest that Lamphouse, in rhetoric and practice, if not in structure, employed a strategy of tacking toward egalitarian ideas, if only to remain relevant to 20-something Evangelical women. These discursive and material practices should not be dismissed simply because they occur within a structure of patriarchy. Yet, neither should the structure (and practices) of patriarchy be discounted. Instead, both help constitute the gendered space—fluid yet within concrete boundaries—of Lamphouse. Thus, both help constitute the gender identities of Lamphouse members.

### *Discursive Tacking: A Typology*

What follows is an attempt to locate the constituted gender identities of my respondents along a spectrum between traditionalism and egalitarianism<sup>4</sup>. Doing so will hopefully refine the concept of “discursive tacking” by identifying certain “identity” points between the two poles and by showing how certain individuals put together an array of symbols and practices into gendered notions of self.

The typology proposed here has five points. Either end of the spectrum includes “strong traditionalism” or “egalitarianism.” In between, and moving from

traditionalism to egalitarianism, are: interpretive traditionalism, cultural traditionalism, and apolitical egalitarianism. Each of my respondents fit in one of these categories: five in strong traditionalism, one each in interpretive traditionalism and cultural traditionalism, two in apolitical egalitarianism, and one in egalitarianism.

Before discussing these categories, it is important to note that gender is a “touchy issue,” as one respondent called it, in this group. There seemed to be dueling positions of social desirability in some of the respondents – a desire to be in line with the legitimated position of the church and a desire to be in touch with the culture at large. Most respondents believed the “church” and “culture” opposed one another, yet respondents desired to belong to both. This duel, of course, stems from a long history of non-fundamentalist, Evangelical belief that Christians must be “in the world, not of it.” In addition to the methodological implications of social desirability, this “touchiness” about gender is notable because of the ultimate significance gender plays as a pivotal axis between biblical truth and cultural relevance. In many ways, gender is a defining moment of belief and identity, a point on which to stake one’s identity as *inside* or *outside* legitimated, Evangelical beliefs about not only gender but also scriptural authority, biblical inerrancy and the nature of God and God’s plan for humanity. There is much at stake here in the negotiation of gender identity, the magnitude of which is felt by most of the respondents in each of these categories.

### *Strong traditionalism*

Five respondents fit in this group. Three will be excerpted below. Each respondent had been involved in Lamphouse for at least a year. One of the respondents, Kevin, was in a leadership position at Lamphouse. By the end of my fieldwork, he had moved up to the primary leadership position of the group. Another respondent, Rebecca, had also been involved in leadership, but she had since stepped down for personal reasons.

Respondents in this group take a definitive, essentialist position toward gender that is based on a literal understanding of the Bible. Men and women have clearly defined, and divinely-given, traits and roles that situate them in a Divine hierarchy of headship, where women are “covered” by the headship of men and where men are under the authority of God.

### Rebecca

Summary Analysis: Rebecca used traditional language in her discussion of gender and readily admitted that she was not a feminist. In addition, she indicated natural differences between men and women, namely that women are naturally more compassionate and nurturing and men naturally want to lead. She relied on biblical references for her position but also tradition.

I: Do you think it would be beneficial if a woman taught at Lamphouse?

R: Yeah, I think it would be great. Like, you know, one night a month or a couple of nights a month, just to bring a different flavor into the atmosphere because men view things differently than women and relate things differently than women. Like, you know, when the pastor teaches and when

a man teaches, it's from their heart and they are wanting to pastor you, to lead you, to guide you—like, this is what God's word says, it's really awesome. In a different way, a woman would be—there is more compassion there, and maybe God can use that in different ways.

I: Would you have a problem if [the leader's wife] took over [the leader's] role?

R: (Pause) You know, that's a touchy issue. Personally, my stand on that whole thing is that I think there should always be a man at the head and always in charge of a ministry because God made Adam first ...

I: How would you respond to someone who said your statement was sexist?

R: That's a tough question. ... I'm not a feminist obviously. ... I think I would say what I just told you about showing what God says in Scripture—this is the way [God] planned it to be. ... And like personally in my life, God sent Jesus, he didn't send Mary. It was his son, and not that men are better than women or women are better than men or anything like that. I just think from biblical past and history and the way the family is set up as a unit and how history has been, I think that's just the way it's supposed to be.

Adam

Summary analysis: Adam was the most adamant in his expressions of patriarchy. He shared the same basis for his essentialism as Rebecca. He also introduced the notion that women should be allowed to teach 1) to bless women and 2) so men could learn something about women. The latter comment is an important one for understanding female teachers in this category. When men speak, as Rebecca noted, they are attempting to lead and guide ("they speak from the heart"). Because of this, male teachings, Adam argued, are applicable for both genders. Yet women, according to Adam, could teach men something *about* women, implying that they could not necessarily teach them about anything else. There was an undercurrent in his language that men can impart Truth or remove gender from their teaching, but women could not.

Interviewer: Would it make a difference to you if there were a female leader at Lamphouse?

Adam: Like preaching?

I: Yeah, preaching or actually in charge.

A: I think that would be awesome because right now we have teaching pastors and maybe a guest speaker, which normally turns out to be a guy... I think maybe getting his wife up there, just even a woman in general, would, number one, I think bless the women so much because now she'd be giving the woman's perspective, teaching to women specifically, but also she'd be

teaching us men something because now we're going to start learning some things about women that we may not even know, and it could help our walk as men, to even bless us...

...

A: I believe women should be in leadership, but I don't think they should be the head. I think the farthest a woman should go in leadership is as high as maybe assistant pastor, but I don't think a woman should be pastor-pastor because that is usurping the natural authority God laid out of God, man, then woman, because if a woman becomes the head pastor, where is that—that covering of a man to guide her and lead her?

Ken

Summary Analysis: Like others in this group, Ken expressed the view that women should be in leadership for other women, not for their abilities to impart Truth to both genders. Ken seemed less sure than Adam or Rebecca in his comments, and he tacked toward egalitarianism more than the others in this group. At the end of his segment, he mentions the idea of co-partnering in leadership (i.e., husband and wife), indicating a level of egalitarianism, but he still clung to an idea of headship.

I: How would you feel about a woman teaching?

K: I think it would give the women more of a comfort as far as knowing that they can step up and actually become a leader. I think the majority of the leadership team is men, and I kind of feel that women are just hesitant in taking that next step because it doesn't look right for some reason.

I: What is the extent, talking about women in leadership, how far can they go? Is it possible for a female to assume a position like [the leader's] position, or is there always a situation to where—like in the family you mentioned there is a spiritual headship—should there always be a man above?

K: I think it should be a man at the head. Now, if it is a man and a woman co-partnering it, sharing it, I'm fine with that, but I don't know, I just don't think a woman should be in headship.

As a final note to this category, the idea of partnership in leadership, as expressed by Ken, might seem to indicate an egalitarian position in marriage (and elsewhere), but it also serves to protect patriarchy and normative, heterosexual ideas about the family. On the one hand, partnership seems like a negotiation of feminist politics into traditional Christian views. On the other, partnership, as expressed in this category of strong traditionalism, presents a scenario in which a woman can only reach her highest position in leadership through marriage—under the headship of her husband. A single woman, it would seem, would not be able to attain a position of co-partnership with the senior leader. Only pastor's wives are afforded this position. Thus, any woman who might seek such a leadership position

should consider marriage as the rite of passage, not *only* seminary, a “calling” or any other routes to said positions taken by men. In short, the “wobble room” afforded women in this category is tied directly to normative ideas about heterosexual marriage.

### *Interpretive traditionalism*

Differences in this category from the above category are more a matter of degree than substantive change. The respondent in this category, Ned, the staff intern training for leadership, was simply less convinced. He repeatedly used phrases like “my personal opinion” or “my interpretation” when offering biblical explanations for his traditional view of gender. This could be related to the issue of social desirability mentioned in the beginning of this section. It could be that Ned was not as settled in his position as those in the category of strong traditionalism. Ned was almost apologetic in his position. He recognized that women have much to offer the Christian community, but he felt God simply does not allow women in primary leadership.

In the end, this category is necessary because it speaks to those who might use language like, “my interpretation” instead of “the interpretation.” The interpretation may be the same, but the degree of certainty does not appear to be. The difference here may be small, but it speaks to a growing fluidity of identity in late modern life, a fluidity that begins to question ultimate, universal sources (Taylor, 1989, 2004), even if only tacitly. Certainly, Ned would not question ultimate, universal Truth if asked directly about it, but as mentioned previously, gender is a terrain in which this late modern fluidity and tension between truth and relevance becomes most apparent, creating ambiguities and tensions that otherwise might not appear.

I: Could part of the problem be that only men teach?

N: Wow. Really, you know, and I don't want to be, you know, because I am a man, and I don't want to get all, to come across sexist or anything, but I think, and this is just my personal opinion, this is what I believe the Bible says, I don't think that ... I agree with men teaching. I think having, like when Rick and Anna were speaking, it was a man and a woman, it was a relationship, I thought that was really, really applicable. But, it seems to be an uncomfotability, and maybe it's just me, when there is a woman teaching everyone. Personally, something rises up in me because I feel like that God tells us differently—not to be sexist. I believe that I'm following God in believing that. It says it in 1 Timothy. If I'm misinterpreting that, then I hope to be proven wrong ... I'm very open to hearing what everyone has to say. I think women do have a lot to offer because they are not stupid; they can read the Bible and interpret it, and teach that to other people. But I just think that it is important that we are following the Bible and what God wants us to do, whatever that is....

### *Cultural Traditionalism*

Cultural Traditionalism represents respondents who believe gender roles are more cultural than natural. Jim is the respondent who fits *partly* in this category. I say partly because he believed that gender roles in church leadership are cultural, but male headship in the family is Biblical (thus natural, he would say). In either case, he would prefer things to be as they are, mentioning that he would be uncomfortable with a female pastor even though he is not opposed to it generally. There is much overlap between this category and “interpretive traditionalism.” The main difference is that “interpretive traditionalism” is grounded more in an understanding of canonical texts, whereas “cultural traditionalism” is grounded less in scripture and more in cultural tradition.

Interviewer: What would you think about a woman teaching regularly at Lamphouse?

Jim: It might turn me off a little bit personally. If they were an occasional speaker or a guest speaker, I wouldn't think twice about it. If they were *the* number one, regular main speaker, I personally would be turned off by it just because I've ... I was raised and grew up always listening to men. I just don't ... not that I'm against women at all ....

I: Men teaching: Is that the way it should be, or is it just a cultural thing? Is it designed by God? Is there a natural order, or is it something that we're just used to as a culture?

J: That's debatable. I've had a lot of people saying or quote Scripture where it seems to be in their opinion very clear that only men should be behind the pulpit, that it's really not a woman's place. However, I think a woman can be just as effective for Christ as a man can be. ...

I: Moving away from church leadership to relationships ... is there a hierarchy there? I mean traditionally, there is an idea of spiritual headship. Do you think, again, that is a natural order, or is that something that we're used to?

J: I believe that's the way God intended it to be in the Scripture. I believe that on that one it is very clear that the man is supposed to be the head of the household, especially spiritually, and, you know, I'm not going to go through it all, but I agree with the guidelines of the Bible as far as that's concerned.

I: But not necessarily the head of the church? You wouldn't have a problem with a woman being a senior pastor or...

J: I wouldn't have a problem with it. I may not attend that church because it's not something that I'm particularly used to, but I wouldn't be judgmental of it.

### *Apolitical egalitarianism*

There are also those who simply do not care about the political implications of gender. Two of the respondents, both women, fit in this category. Shari, who is excerpted below, recognized gender roles as historically created and even discriminating, but she did not have a major problem with them. For her, gender equality was not a battle worth fighting. Instead, she opted to use her gifts and her influence as a leader's wife. Incidentally, Shari was Ken's spouse, who became the new primary leader at Lamphouse after my fieldwork ended.

Shari: It would be nice to see more female leaders maybe teaching every now and then. Maybe showing that women who are leaders also have the knowledge and can teach and people can grow from that. But I think that is almost within the church in general. ... I think that's just the way—pastors are males and you've got pastors' wives, and that's just kind of the dynamics of how things are set up.

Interviewer: When men teach, there is an idea that it is universally applicable. If a woman were to teach, would that still be the case, or do you think that it would be more for women than for men?

S: The unfortunate thing is that I think women would think it would be for both, but I think men would think that it would be for women. I don't know, that's me making a statement, but I'm not a man, so it's hard for me to say that. I think that some—kind of the way society is—that [teaching] is maybe not the woman's place in this day and age that we are in ... that men are the leaders. So, I think that maybe it would be looked upon that way.

I: You also mentioned that the dynamic generally in this church and in a lot of churches is that men are pastors, leaders. Is that the way that it should be, or is that just the way that it is?

S: I think that is just the way that it is. I think that if it were different then it would take a long time for people to really accept that. ... I personally think that the reason you have leaders in the church that are so strong is because of their other half—because of women. I think they are kind of the ... under. And they may not be as visible, but I know that there is definitely ... the women are not just sitting back. They are definitely a part of it, and I think a crucial part of it, but I just don't think.... I don't necessarily think there is anything wrong with it [male headship]. I just think that is the way it is.

I: Would you think there would be a problem with it if it were reversed?

S: No.

Being unconcerned with patriarchy is not an uncommon position among Evangelical women. Messner (1997) claimed that women are able to tame "men with patriarchal bargains," meaning that they will subscribe to the notion of

headship if their husbands become the loving providers that groups like Promise Keepers advocate (p. 31). Also, Gallagher and Smith (1999) noted overwhelming support of headship, even in families that were egalitarian in practice. For these, headship was a non-issue because it was symbolic. The difference with Shari, it seems, is that many of the women discussed in both Messner and Gallagher and Smith claimed to subscribe to the ideal of headship as a natural order. Shari took her “patriarchal bargain” a step further. She seemed willing to abide by headship, even though she didn’t believe in it as a natural order. She believed in egalitarianism but saw no need to push this idea. For her, there were more important battles to fight, and she felt comfortable negotiating power under patriarchy as a spouse.

### *Egalitarianism*

Members in this category believe in mutual submission in all matters, discounting the notion of spiritual headship. Further, unlike the category above, people in this category would express moral outrage at the traditional gender types discussed previously. One respondent, Karl, fitted into this category. He not only subscribed to the idea of egalitarianism, but also he attempted to position egalitarianism on spiritual ground—as the “Christian thing to do.” Further, he commented that women had been put down in society and in the church for far too long.<sup>5</sup>

Karl: I just want to say for any possible future political career that I am all for women in leadership positions. I honestly mean this. I have no problem with women in leadership positions at all. I’ve worked with phenomenal leaders in different aspects that were females, and I think that they can lead just as well, and I don’t want to say better because it depends on the individual. I truly believe that. As far as religion is concerned ... here we just talked about how we should have more women presenters and then the next topic we talk about, well, they should only reach this height. ... I have no problem [with women leaders] at any level of society. They are still held down by society. Women are still held down in the workplace, in leadership positions—that’s just ridiculous. I think that society in general holds women down still ... so why should the church still? I mean, if you really want to walk the Christian walk, then open up your eyes to every aspect of things. Don’t just sit there and say women can have a partial leadership role ....

Interviewer: Okay, that’s a societal level. How about a relational level between man and woman, dating or marriage? Does it matter to you there?

K: No. ... I think you have a truly blessed relationship when you both look at each other on an equal playing field and it’s not this power struggle....

Adam: But what about leadership as in the spiritual leadership of the relationship? What about you just being the natural leader of it?

K: I’m not the leader in our relationship. I’m an equal partner, so that transcends all aspects of things. I don’t ever force my—I share my opinion and she shares hers ....

A: Well, you know what I mean, just the guiding force of the relationship as a spiritual...

K: I don't need to be a guiding force. I mean that's just how ... I haven't been brought up that way, but I don't believe that I need to force my will on anybody. I don't believe that I need to guide anybody. If I guide somebody, then I'm not getting out of it what she's getting out of it. And she is not getting out of it what I'm getting out of it. So, it's unequal. We are very much on an equal playing field.

### *Summary and Discussion*

This analysis supports the idea that Evangelicals negotiate gender in a variety of ways. My intent has been to add detail to this idea by showing how different individuals “tack,” leading them toward distinct gender positions. The resulting typology provides detail to some of the subject gender positions taken up by individuals. This typology is certainly not exhaustive. Rather, it is a tentative beginning to understanding subject positions taken up by 20-something Evangelicals between patriarchy and egalitarianism.

To date, much of the understanding of various Evangelical gender negotiations follows Wilcox's “soft patriarchy.” It is my hope that the typology provided here offers a more nuanced understanding of “soft patriarchy,” both in terms of the resources used to construct this gender position, for example canonical text or cultural tradition, and in terms of the degree of certainty applied to gender ideals, a certainty, or lack thereof, that expresses a profound tension between literal Biblical interpretation and cultural relevance. Both the array of resources and the tensions embedded therein are important in understanding the re-production of gendered identity.

Yet this typology did not only address variations of patriarchy. Also, it showed variations in egalitarianism. For respondents like Karl, egalitarian ideas are central to gendered identity; for others, like Shari, egalitarian ideas are secondary, or even trivial. Shari, in effect, neutered gender by marginalizing it as a locus of identity or as a structure of power. Because she did not believe that patriarchy held any power over her, she saw no need to challenge it. This suggests a reflexive understanding of patriarchy's presence, as structure, yet it is a presence perceived to be powerless and therefore meaningless. Perhaps Shari's narrative was simply the result of taming men “with patriarchal bargains,” as Messner (1997) indicated, allowing her to negotiate a position of power. Or, perhaps for Shari, feminist politics simply did not compare to more pressing matters in this community, particularly the most pressing matter to her—ensuring that people have a personal relationship with God through Jesus. Whatever the case, apolitical egalitarians are perhaps the most compelling people in this typology because their gender egalitarianism, since it is also apathetic, reproduces patriarchy.

In each category, gender positions were conditioned by the structural social space in which they were formed, a space defined by patriarchy. Certainly, there was room for fluidity within this space, but it was a fluidity with definite bounds. That is,

there was space for gender negotiation within Lamphouse, but each negotiation, whether strong traditionalist or egalitarian, was a negotiation with, and in most cases a reproduction of, "headship." Because patriarchy set the boundaries of legitimate gender identity in this space, it should not be surprising that seven of the ten respondents mentioned here embraced patriarchy and reproduced it in their narratives. Nor should it be a surprise that apolitical egalitarians felt comfortable under, and powerless to change, this patriarchal system. Finally, it should not be surprising that the vocal egalitarian became defensive as he staked out his minority, subversive position. Each of these negotiations of "headship" bespeaks patriarchy's normative power in this space.

In conclusion, the gendered space of Lamphouse provided an array of resources for the construction of gender identities, yet also provided a normative structure of patriarchy in which to construct a gendered self. The results in most cases were gender narratives that reinforced patriarchy, yet employed various expressions of equality. This should not suggest that the language of "equality" is simply an ideological weapon of patriarchy in this space. As Gallagher (2003) argued, the dynamic negotiation of equality and patriarchy, or perhaps better put, equality *through* patriarchy, must be read as a re-working of gender identity. However, optimism that such re-working is a reflective confrontation of patriarchy is largely unwarranted since it is clear that patriarchy still defines legitimacy in this space and is still the axis point on which gender identity turns.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Wild at Heart* (2006), written by John Eldredge, “invites men to recover their masculine heart, defined in the image of a passionate God. And he invites women to discover the secret of a man's soul and to delight in the strength and wildness men

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were created to offer” (<http://www.ransomedheart.com/store/detail.aspx?ID=96>, accessed August 7, 2008.) The book has been on the Evangelical Christian Publisher Association bestseller list since January 2006 (<http://www.ecpa.org/bestseller/bestseller0207.php>, accessed August 7, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Norman K. Denzin (2001) preferred the term, “method of instances,” as a way to move beyond the quantitative trappings of the term, “sample,” which is burdened with quantitative measures of reliability and generalizability (p. 63). This method captures complexity and nuance, not generalizability, and it seeks trustworthiness, not statistical reliability.

<sup>3</sup> Additional attempts were made to conduct a focus group with women, but these attempts were unsuccessful because of lack of interest and time.

<sup>4</sup> These categories draw on categories presented by Gallagher and Smith (1999), “strong traditionalism” and “pragmatic egalitarianism,” as well as by Bartkowski (2004), “rational patriarch” and “expressive egalitarian.”

<sup>5</sup> It is notable that much of the following exchange occurred between Karl and Adam, the most adamant strong traditionalist above.

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