

**An Age Cohort Analysis of Femininity Among Catholic Women in the United States**

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Word Count=17,790

**ABSTRACT**

The research conducted examined the intersectionality of religion and femininity among Catholic women in the United States. A cohort analysis examining age was utilized in order to examine how a woman's age and her following of Catholicism intersect and divert from each other. 19 interviews were conducted with Catholic women falling into one of two categories, 18-30 years old and 31 years and older. The research primarily focused on the lived experiences and beliefs of Catholic women. When referring to Catholicism I am primarily referring to their practices and beliefs. I argue that the way in which Catholic women practice their religion and identify with being a woman is primarily impacted by the generation they were born and subsequently raised in. I found that Catholic women share similar experiences growing up and in adulthood, however, how they interpret these experiences in relation to their femininity and role as women differed by age cohort. Catholic women under the age of 30 are more critical of Church practices, such as the views and practices related to birth control and have more progressive beliefs and practices compared to Catholic women over the age of 30. Catholic women 31 years old and older described stricter religious practices and greater alignment with traditional beliefs and values that the Church holds. Both age cohorts shared a fear that if the Catholic Church does not modernize, specifically regarding gendered roles in the Church, practicing will become obsolete. The gendered roles commonly identified included that of the priest, a man's role, and subservient roles such as parish administrators and cleaners of the Church, mostly taken on by women. Despite calls for change and criticisms, all of the women interviewed emphasized pride in their Catholicism and gratefulness for the values instilled in them through the practice of their faith.

## INTRODUCTION

Being a Catholic woman in 2021 does not mean the same or even look the same among women. While times change, many traditions and beliefs within the Catholic Church do not. However, the ways in which women embrace these traditions and beliefs differ according to their socialization through family, Church, and society. I was not raised Catholic and have only general cultural knowledge derived from the entertainment such as television and the stories my father told me about growing up Catholic. From that, I formed assumptions about Catholicism and what it means to be a Catholic woman. These assumptions ranged from women hating the Church and wanting a way out, to women giving in to sexist traditions because they think they have to do so. Background research and the interviews I conducted demonstrates the opposite. Many Catholic-identifying women feel empowered by their religion and much of that has to do with the way they practice and the beliefs they were raised to have about God, people, and the world. Religion, regardless of sect, is made up of personal experiences. Being raised in the Catholic Church and having a Catholic family provides a religious foundation of personal experience that gives more insight into expressions of faith than going to mass or even the Bible is able to provide. Literature on past studies conducted on religious women identified and utilized the personal experiences of women to better understand their role and feelings about being Catholic. Dorothy Smith, a sociologist who studies feminist theory introduced the concept of standpoint theory. One can best understand roles in society and their impacts on people, specifically the oppressed role of women throughout time, by learning about the individual, through shared personal experiences. I asked Catholic women what their role is in Church and the role of the Church in their personal life. I asked what they think younger or older generations think about their role as Catholic women, and what this means for the future of their religion. What does it mean to be a Catholic woman today, across all ages? The women I interviewed say it means a lot.

## APPLICABLE LITERATURE

### *'Doing Gender' & 'Doing Religion' as a Religious Woman*

In this article I will argue that women are empowered by their religion. Past research, not solely on Catholic women, but women from other conservative religions as well, have described this empowerment. Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) wrote that “gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort” (p.129). Gender is created and perpetuated through social interactions, and some of the most notable social interactions are those related to religion. The Catholic Church creates a social situation where gender is performed by those who participate. Priests are male and lead the mass: The Pope is male, and he leads the Catholic Church. Women within religious organizations also have roles, some of which are strictly enforced by gender and others that are traditionally held by women and continue to be held by women. One such role that is restricted to women is the role of nuns and mothers. Roles that are not restricted to women but are traditionally held by women are Confraternity of Christian Doctrine teachers, henceforth referred to as CCD, and community organizers. The many roles that women take on in the Catholic Church can be viewed through multiple lenses. A sociological lens may view these roles as hierarchically gendered, specifically the roles that women take are seen as subservient to men. The lens of a young catholic female

regarding these roles can be both similar and different to the lens older Catholic women use in analyzing these roles.

Before diving into notions of both empowerment and oppression, a perspective on both femininity and masculinity within religiously conservative communities is helpful. Melanie Heath (2019) researched ‘gender negotiation’ among religiously conservative families, specifically Mormons in the United States. Gender negotiation describes the relational nature of femininity and masculinity in the context of religion, and how this relationship reproduces gender hegemony within the religion and family (Heath 2019). In terms of the Catholic Church, understanding the roles of Catholic women and their feelings of the degree of obligation towards these roles provides insight into the gender negotiations in modern Catholicism (post Vatican 2). Femininity and masculinity, in the context of religion, shape each other (Heath 2019). Heath (2019) describes the ways in which both femininity and masculinity set norms for their performances. Heath (2019) also recognizes that these performances of gender change over time, as definitions of and negotiations between feminine and masculine change over time. As a society, we are moving towards more ‘gender egalitarian’ values, and religions are as well (Heath 2019). Heath (2019) interviewed Mormon women in plural marriages and discovered that they “perform a homosocial femininity that complements and shapes the conciliatory masculinity...that their husbands do” (p. 901). While men and women have different roles and responsibilities, they feel as though they are equal, and some of these roles are even shared among men and women (Heath 2019). Society’s overarching move towards more egalitarian values is restructuring how people do both gender and religion. Many of the Catholic women I interviewed in the older cohort (31 and older) felt fulfilled by their roles and overall place in the Church and in their family. Karen, a 50-year-old mother and medical doctor, has taken on the majority of the parenting role with her children. When discussing leadership roles in the Church she told me that “we [women] are leaders for all the kids and offspring we have.” However, as a frontline worker when the coronavirus hit the United States, she took a more active role in medicine and her husband took on a more active role rearing their children. A shift towards more egalitarian values among Catholic women is new, even for professional and working mothers.

The roles taken on by women in religion can be both viewed as ‘doing gender’ and ‘doing religion.’ The structure of religion has made it so ‘doing gender’ and ‘doing religion’ are intertwined. You cannot do one without the other within religious institutions. Avishai (2008) outlines three levels of agency women have in conservative religions. The first level is called ‘comply, but...’ and it refers to how women may find religion to be restricting but they ultimately comply to the traditional roles and practices and express feeling empowered (Avishai 2008). The next level is ‘noncompliance,’ which recognizes the fact that religious women understand that there are traditional roles and practices for them; but, they decide to either ignore and/or change those roles and practices to better accommodate their own lives and the environment/time they are living in (Avishai 2008). The third level of agency described by Avishai is ‘doormats,’ which refers to women who use religion to their advantage in order to gain economic, domestic, and social power (2008). Many women in the older generation I interviewed closely identified with the ‘comply, but...’ level. Those women followed the traditional expectations of being a Catholic woman that they experienced during their childhood and learned in the Church, and they took pride in doing so. By studying age cohorts, I was able to find ‘noncompliance’ in different aspects of their practice, and an overall differentiation in ‘noncompliance’ by age cohort with the older and younger generations of women adjusting their

beliefs and practices to best fit their respective social situations. The women interviewed also revealed that many of the roles they take on, while traditional in nature and sometimes viewed negatively in the eyes of non-Catholics, are actually roles of power. The majority of Catholic religious teachings for children are done by women, demonstrating how women are taking on the burden of passing down religion. The Catholic Church recognizes the female influence on religious continuity, which is clear when one understands and sees how much importance is placed on the role of the mother. One is able to see how these levels of agency are not mutually exclusive. It is difficult to assign one level of agency based on the experiences of Catholic women, for many women move between all three levels at different times in their lives and just based on their own decisions and beliefs.

The roles women take on in religion have many implications on their status. Darwin (2018) argues that “people redo gendered religion and thereby contribute toward egalitarian social change” (p.349). Darwin (2018) writes that West and Zimmerman are flawed in their claim that people cannot escape ‘doing gender.’ This is a flaw because West and Zimmerman did not take into account the progressive nature of society, specifically a move towards a more egalitarian society (Darwin 2018). Darwin (2018) adapts West and Zimmerman’s concept of ‘doing gender’ to ‘redoing gender’ by focusing her framework on the “experiences of parishioners who advance egalitarian social change, instead of those who preserve the status quo” (p.353). Darwin (2018) surveyed 600 Jewish women who wear the kippot, a traditionally male practice, and found that those women felt empowered by their religion to do so. These women conceptualized their practice by feminizing it. The women in Darwin’s study are attempting to rewrite the traditional practices of Judaism by making a statement with the kippot. Darwin (2018) notes several issues that arise with such practices, especially the policing of both gender and religion in regard to women’s feminism. Darwin (2018) found that policing these women resulted in two different outcomes. Jewish women could either respond by following the tradition of solely men wearing the kippot in order to maintain patriarchal practices or by wearing the kippot and transforming what it means to be a practicing Jewish woman (Darwin 2018). This type of policing is not exclusive to Judaism; the Church has policed women throughout its history in religions of the book. As for research on Catholic women, the Church has traditionally assigned roles to women, whether it be from a ruling text such as the Bible, or an unofficially assigned role that continues to be held by women. An example of a traditional role is the religious education of children. A role that women have more recently taken on is that of a Eucharistic Minister, a lay person who assists the priest with administering the sacrament and readings during mass; a role that assumes more leadership responsibilities. While Catholic women do not take on this role for the purpose of making an explicit gendered statement, it does in itself make an implicit statement about the changing roles of women and overall changes within the Catholic Church.

These changes in the roles of women can be attributed to the feminization of the Catholic Church. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Blessed Virgin Mary was given more importance during worship making way for the feminization of the Catholic Church (Art 2012). During this period of worship for Mary the role of mother was elevated in importance by the patriarchal hierarchy itself (Art 2012). The importance of the female role in passing down religion was recognized. Art (2012) contends that “the Roman Catholic Church also holds to this conviction, and confronted with declining male involvement in Church matters, emphasizes the major role that has to be played by women, and certainly by mothers, in the religious education of their offspring” (p. 80). The Blessed Virgin Mary also acts as the mother figure to the clergy

members making decisions for the Church, thereby demonstrating the subliminal female power within the Church (Art 2012). Priests act out responsibilities associated with maternal functions through their giving of the Eucharist to “grow the bodies” (p. 82). The Blessed Virgin Mary has a clear influence on feminizing the Church. Her role sheds light on the feminine nature of many practices which aids in demonstrating the importance of females and their roles. Mary exemplifies the ‘doormat’ level of agency. Women’s roles in the Church, specifically the mother, are used to the advantage of women to elevate their status. The Church utilizes Mary as the ideal female figure to encourage women to conform to traditional practices. This maintains the Church’s power over the female role by circumscribing women’s power and keeping it within the Church. This is done by elevating the status of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

### *The Changing Expectations of Catholic Women*

With practices and roles becoming more egalitarian, the expectations placed on contemporary women are changing. Many of the women I interviewed did not feel as though either their families or the Church places expectations on them to fulfill certain roles and or abide by specific practices. When asked about marriage and the choice to have children all of the women made clear that the decision to do either was their own and not their family’s or the Church’s. However, the older generation expressed following a stricter set of guidelines when dating, such as not living with their partner before marriage. Ernest Abel and Michael Kruger (2011) used data from the wedding announcements section of the *New York Times* to conduct an analysis of women who either take or do not take their husband’s last name and used age, year of marriage, and religion as variables. They found that Catholic women, compared to other religious women and non-religious women, were most likely to take their husband’s last name (Abel & Kruger 2011). Abel and Kruger (2011) also found that from 1990-91, 17.6% of women kept their maiden name, and from 2007-08 47.2% of women kept their maiden name. Women married at 35-39 were 6.4 times more likely to keep their name than women married at 20-24 (Abel & Kruger 2011). Women married after 2008 were less likely to change their last name than women married before 2008, and women who married later in life were less likely to take their husband’s last name than women who married at a younger age, and all this data includes data collected from Catholic women. Abel and Kruger’s data demonstrates not only differences among age cohorts but also differences between Catholic and non-Catholic women. According to this study, Catholic women are indeed influenced by their religion and family. In the early 1990s and compared to today, women continue to be less likely to take their husband’s last name. The *New York Times* (2015) compiled data from the Social Security Administration in 2013 and found that 70.6% of women have changed their last name, either by taking their husband’s or hyphenating their two names, which indicates that 29.4% of women kept their maiden names.

### *Growing up Catholic as a Catholic Female*

When children are raised in a religious home, Church expectations are taught by those in their private sphere as a social fact through socialization (Durkheim 1895). As part of socialization, we are taught to give part of ourselves to a collective good we value, and for some that is religion (Dillon 2014). Children growing up in a Catholic household are taught about the norms, values, and structures within the Church. As stated earlier, women, specifically mothers, often take on the role of religious instructor. Anne Keary (2011) refers to this socialized role as

being the ‘good Catholic mother.’ A catholic mother relies on her relationships with her children to pass on religion and religious values (Keary 2011). An important aspect of being taught religion is being taught roles and one’s proper place within the religion. Keary (2011) explains in her research how the mother-daughter relationship is in part “choreographed” in order to reproduce Catholic values and practices. Motherhood and Catholicism are connected through maternal relationships (Keary 2011). Little girls are taught by their mothers how to be good Catholic wives and mothers (Keary 2011).

Being raised Catholic happens in both the private and public sphere; privately in the home and publicly in the Church (Keary 2011). Within the home girls are taught their gendered roles by watching their mother provide care and religious guidance: Mothers say the rosary and put their children to sleep afterwards resting peacefully in the knowledge that their child’s soul is in God’s care through his intermediaries, Christ, and the Blessed Virgin Mary (Keary 2011). As a little girl being raised Catholic, learning femininity and religiosity coincide with each other (Keary 2011). Watching mom meant watching what it means to be a woman, an adult, a mother, and a parishioner (Keary 2011). Going to mass as children is an act of socialization and a tool for religious education. Keary (2011) describes her mother’s makeup and dressing routine for mass on Sunday morning, something that happened privately in the home. She compares this with her brother’s Sunday morning routine as altar boys, when they arrived at Church early to get ready with the priest (Keary 2011). Women did not have any leadership roles, and the only times they were permitted to be in the sanctuary was to clean or organize, a role assigned to Keary’s mother as well as other women (2011). The private sphere/public sphere activities and strict division between them established a symbolic order, and children watched and took part in that order starting at a very young age (Keary 2011). A symbolic order is made up of symbolic positions: the mother and daughter roles and overall relationship is symbolic in Catholicism (Keary 2011). Art (2012) emphasizes the importance of the female role through the Blessed Virgin Mary as a mother. A mother’s role is that of religious instruction, and a daughter ensures the next generation of providing that instruction. The symbolic nature of the Church reaffirms the feminine identity through the use of those gendered roles (Keary 2011). Keary recalls the affirmation of her feminine identity as a daughter in the Church (Keary 2011). Through the matrilineal line religion is passed down, making the relationship between a mother and her daughter not only symbolic but sacred.

## **CRITICAL FEMINIST THEORIES**

To frame this research, I will use the following critical feminist theories.

### *Feminist Standpoint Theory*

Dorothy Smith’s feminist standpoint theory emphasizes the importance of gaining knowledge and an understanding through the “actualities of women’s experience” (Smith 1992: 361). In the 1970s, Smith contended that sociological frameworks utilize “abstract masculinity” and exclude female perspectives (Heckman 1997). Sociological frameworks relied on objectivity rather than lived experiences (Heckman 1997). Women as research subjects, and as sociologists were excluded from what society recognized as knowledge. Smith emphasized the importance of obtaining the lived experiences of women and not just applying abstract sociological frameworks, such as frameworks on gender social order, to women (Heckman 1997).

Historically, we have used ruling texts written by men, such as the Bible, to provide a woman's perspective, and this produces a discourse of femininity (Dillon 2014). Taking the standpoint of women provides insight to a woman's lived everyday experiences and obtains their point of views. In this research I interview Catholic women to obtain their standpoint as Catholic women. I asked about their everyday experiences and activities as it concerns being Catholic and a woman. Asking questions about their experiences growing up and their decisions to marry and become mothers provided insight into their roles as women, their opinions about feminism, and their beliefs about the place of women in the Church.

### *Doing Gender & Doing Religion*

West and Zimmerman (1987) explain how "gender is a socially scripted dramatization of the culture's idealization of feminine and masculine natures, played for an audience that is well schooled in the presentational idiom" (p. 330). West and Zimmerman's definition of gender is similar to Erving Goffman's notion that individuals present their selfhood by performing their roles (Goffman 1956). The role people perform becomes part of their identity and influences the relationships they have and how they interact within those relationships (Goffman 1956). The roles Catholic women have been assigned and taken on influence the relationships they have and how they are viewed within their communities. My research aims to gain an understanding about how the women I interviewed performed their roles, and how they felt about the expectations and/or pressures placed upon them to perform those roles. To do so I asked about the roles they have decided to take on as Catholic women, I asked about the roles performed by their mothers and older generations, and what they expected to see from their own children and future generations. The conversations that resulted from those questions then revealed their feelings about performing those roles.

### *Durkheim's Theories on Conformity Applied to Femininity*

Durkheim's social facts produce conformity in communities. Religion as a social fact functions as a tool of conformity and it does so through a society's social and physical structures, social norms, and collective expectations (Dillon 2014). The norms and rules established by the Catholic Church control gender representation using collective expectations. Social facts and the control they hold on a community may change over time. In the case of the Catholic Church and the power they hold over women, it has diminished sharply within the past two generations. Women have negotiated their roles and what is expected of them within the last century. Keary (2011), in her description of the 'good Catholic wife,' states that women have found spaces in their lives to escape the "Catholic Church's totalizing affect" (p. 695). As the Church loses both physical and social power, conformity begins to breakdown. Women take on responsibilities that go beyond the private sphere, such as jobs. Within the physical parameters of the Church the roles women are permitted to fill have changed. Women are given more leadership roles and religious power for example, changing what it means and looks like for women to conform to Church expectations. Women can also choose to disagree with beliefs held by the Church and/or choose to not follow a religious norm, such as not using birth control. I apply conformity to this research to demonstrate both what had changed and what has remained the same. By comparing age cohorts, I was able to see how what is expected of women has changed over time and how women practice and identify with their religion has subsequently changed.

## HYPOTHESES

With the application of these theories to my research questions I was able to form these hypotheses:

1. Women in the older age cohort are likely to fulfill the role of the ‘good Catholic mother,’ and if they fail to meet expectations of that role, they will likely express feelings of guilt.
2. Women in the younger age cohort are less likely to be affected by the traditional expectations of the Church. They are likely to express this in their opinions and decisions regarding:
  - a. The use of birth control.
  - b. Decisions to marry and have children.
  - c. How they practice Catholicism.
  - d. Criticisms about the role of women and the overall conservatism of the Church
3. Women are more likely to either take on or mention that women take on educational and administrative roles within the Church.
  - a. Teaching children in CCD school.
  - b. Fundraising for the Church.
  - c. Assisting the priest and other Church leaders with administrative tasks.
4. Both the older and the younger age cohorts will share similar experiences about the practices and positions of women in the Church; however, they will differ in their opinions on whether this is appropriate or not.
  - a. The older age cohort is more likely to feel comfortable with the traditional role of women whereas the younger generation is more likely to express a desire to modernize the Church through the progression of female status, such as being permitted to take on leadership roles.
5. Both age cohorts will be greatly influenced by how they were raised and the religious roles they saw their mothers, grandmothers, and other women in their life take on in both the private and public sphere.
6. Feminism will be applied more easily to the Church by the younger age cohort. The younger cohort will embrace more modern definitions and applications of feminism and what they would like to see change compared to the older cohort.
7. The onset of the Coronavirus pandemic will likely not have a huge impact on the roles of women in the Church or their practice beyond an inability to physically attend mass.
8. Both age cohorts will express features and functions of the Church that they feel are good and positive in nature and will overall express pride in being Catholic.

## METHODS

I would like to begin this section with a description of my original research plan. This research was to be conducted in Spring 2020 in Cork, Ireland. The proposed subjects in this research were Irish Catholic women. The data was to be comprised of the information collected from in-person interviews, focus groups, and participant observation during mass. I was able to attend mass three times during my time in Ireland at the Catholic Church that agreed to be part of the research. In March 2020 the research was paused due the Coronavirus pandemic. As a student studying abroad from the United States, I was required to return to the U.S. The research was pushed aside for a few months, and during that time I worked to adjust the proposal.



Changes included a relocation of the field site, a new group of subjects in the United States, and methodological changes. Interviews were held over the video chat software Zoom and over the phone. Focus groups and participant observation were now unrealistic and my data collection relied exclusively on in-depth interviews. Focus groups via Zoom were also not a realistic option due to limited participants and scheduling difficulties. My sampling strategy became an online effort, instead of person-to-person snowball sampling. Interview questions remained the same with the addition of questions asking if and how their practice and roles have changed due to the pandemic. Participant observation was no longer an option with churches holding mass over Zoom and in very limited numbers in-person. The focus groups were not conducted due to difficulty of finding subjects and because federal regulations prohibited gatherings of people who lived outside the same household.

In-depth interviews were utilized in order to gain the individual perspectives and knowledge that could only emerge through long conversation style communication (Bryman 2016). Open-ended and nonleading questions were utilized. In-depth interviews have a specific set of characteristics that were vital to this research. The first characteristic is an acutely focused topic, and in this case, it was Catholic women and their experiences (Bryman 2016). The second characteristic is the use of conversation style communication (Bryman 2016). During the interviews I often nodded and followed up the participants' responses with questions and affirmations to encourage the continuation of the conversations. The third characteristic is encouraging participants to speak on two levels, from experience and perception (Bryman 2016). And finally, the fourth characteristic is obtaining the opinions and knowledge from vulnerable and subjugated groups, such as women (Bryman 2016). The interview questions developed met the criteria of the characteristics in order to obtain rich and saturated data. The first three interview questions were demographic questions and the remaining fourteen were experience, opinion, and knowledge questions that invoked conversation.

The interviews for the study were conducted from Fall 2020 until Spring 2021. Participants for the interviews had to fit three requirements: They had to be at least 18 years old and identify as a female and a Catholic. The sample comprised of Catholic women who were then divided into two age cohorts, 30 years old and younger and 31 years old and older. I attempted to obtain an even number of interviews for each of the cohorts, approximately 10 per cohort. Interviews ranged from 45-90 minutes depending on how much information the participant was comfortable sharing. Prior to the interviews participants were given an informed consent form approved by the Roanoke College Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were required to read and sign the form prior to the interview. In compliance with the IRB, all data collected from interviews will be destroyed within two years. Every participant had obtained at least a bachelor's degree or were in the process of obtaining one. Race and ethnicity were not utilized as a variable in the research. I utilized snowball sampling as my primary sampling strategy. I contacted members of the Roanoke College Catholic Campus ministry and requested they provide a summary of this research and my contact information to ministry members. One subject emerged as a result of that request. I also used a posting on Facebook that summarized the research and requested Catholic women over the age of 18 to contact me if they were interested in being interviewed. From this posting the snowball effect began. Interview participants gave my information to their friends and family until enough viable participants emerged and my data became saturated. Participants were compensated for their time in the form of a gift card. Interviews were audio recorded with a tape-recording application on my smartphone and with the Zoom audio recording function. Detailed notes were also taken during

the interviews to supplement the recordings. Following the interviews, the transcriptions and notes taken during the interview were coded by myself, the primary researcher. From the notes I established prominent themes. These themes were topics that were discussed for a longer period and in great depth. The recordings were then listened to and prominent passages were transcribed for relevant quotes. Latent coding methods were utilized to identify the themes. Common responses emerged for several of the questions. These were coded using specific language and words employed by the respondents, words like “sexist,” “guilty,” “secondary,” and “mother” are example of key words that allowed me to interpret the themes.

## THEMES

Themes that emerged are listed below noted with the hypothesis(es) they address. The themes are separated into two tiers. Themes were placed in the first tier if they were more relevant in the interviews with the Catholic women. These topics were discussed in greater detail and were often referred back to later in the interview. These themes will warrant more discussion in the results and discussion sections. Themes placed in the second tier were brought up and discussed by the Catholic women, but not in the same degree as the first-tier themes. These themes are relevant to the research but did not warrant follow up questions or deep conversation.

### Tier 1:

- i. Women were taught to follow a high moral code and feel guilty if they did not follow it and pass it down to their children. (Hypotheses 1 & 5)
- ii. The pressure of expectations produced by religion in a woman’s personal decisions to marry and have children hold different weight for women depending on their age. Women in the older age cohort embraced the expectations while women in the younger age cohort expressed feeling a sense of independence in their decision to follow or oppose expectations. (Hypotheses 1 & 2)
- iii. Women take on subordinate roles in the Church, which was expressed through the experiences of both age cohorts. Some women viewed these roles as sexist while others were comfortable with gender-assigned roles and viewed them as necessary. These roles included CCD teachers, fundraising, administrative tasks, and cleaning and organizing the Church. However, women have countered past conservatism by taking on more leadership roles: such as Eucharistic minister, altar servers, and readers at mass. (Hypotheses 1, 3 & 4).
  - a. Women viewed being a mother as an important leadership role in the Church. (Hypothesis 1)
- iv. Women were influenced by other Catholic women growing up, such as mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. They view these kinship roles as important and powerful in the Catholic faith. Women also referred to female religious figures including the Blessed Virgin Mary, Eve, Mother Theresa, and Mary Magdalene demonstrating the importance of these female figures and their roles. (Hypothesis 5)
- v. The way women defined feminism was influenced by how they felt about the roles women are assigned and take on within the Church. Both cohorts utilized equality of genders as the base of their definitions. Opinions on whether feminism can be applied to

the Church in order to modernize differed by age. Younger women felt as though it should be applied whereas older women felt as though it could be but may not need to be. When asked if they would consider themselves to be feminists, the younger cohort readily identified themselves as feminists whereas many of the older women were hesitant to do so. (Hypothesis 6).

Tier 2:

- i. A sense of pride for being Catholic and fulfilling the roles that come with it. (Hypothesis 8)
- ii. A sense of solace in their religion and practice. (Hypothesis 8)
- iii. The coronavirus pandemic caused Church attendance to diminish, both in person and over zoom. It also allowed men (fathers) to take on more active roles in child-rearing and religious education. (Hypothesis 7).

## RESULTS

### Tier 1 Themes

#### *The Pressures of Passing Down Religion*

*Hypothesis 1:* Women in the older age cohort are likely to fulfill the role of the ‘good Catholic mother,’ and if they fail to meet expectations of that role, they will likely express feelings of guilt.

*Hypothesis 5:* Both age cohorts will be greatly influenced by how they were raised and the religious roles they saw their mothers, grandmothers, and other women in their life take on in both the private and public sphere.

The concept of the “good Catholic mother” was ever present when discussing family and the expectations that came with having children. Most of the women in the 31 and older age cohort described the roles they took on as a Catholic mother as it concerned their children and the pressures they felt from those roles. Consistent with Keary’s findings, a Catholic mother relies on her relationship with her children to pass down religion (2011). When the women felt as though they fell short in their role in passing down Catholicism, they expressed feelings of guilt. A 50-year-old mother of three girls spoke fondly of her Catholic education and the profound impact it had on her life. As a mother herself she wished her children could have had a similar religious education:

“We [her husband and her] always felt guilty because we sent our kids to public school, but we couldn’t afford Catholic school for our kids... they [her children] did religious education once a week through the Catholic Church and it ended once they received their confirmation.”

Feelings of worry and sadness were common among the older cohort of women. Women worried their children would not have a strong religious foundation and a spiritual deficiency

would affect their future decisions regarding religion and Church attendance. The prospect of their children lacking a foundation saddened many of them. A mother of two sons expressed regret that her sons were not very religious, and she hopes her sons marry Catholic women who attend church regularly, so they [her son's future wives] can "fix what I [the Catholic mother] did." This mother hoped other women, specifically wives, would be able to fulfill the female role of modeling religious engagement to family. This exemplifies the burden of responsibility women feel to pass down religion. Another mother expressed similar feelings that her children will not have the same support through their faith that she had while growing up and all through her life. Mothers prayed their children would follow their faith. A mother of three who was also a Eucharistic Minister told me it was hard knowing her children don't have the same sense of faith: "I pray every day that I am planting a seed [in passing down religion] ...somehow a seed was planted in me."

Establishing a strong foundation, through religious education such as CCD school, was a pressure many of these women expressed feeling. However, the foundation of religion that the women were attempting to establish was not specific to being Catholic, but more so to establishing a sense of faith and community. Three mothers described their hope that they have established this foundation:

Mother 1: "I wanted to create a foundation for my kids to experience faith...I made sure my kids were involved with CCD and volunteering with the Church."

Mother 2: "I want my kids to have what I have...I want them [her children] to have that connection and space that they always feel they can go to...I think it helps."

Mother 3: "By my own example, hopefully they're [her children] going to realize at some point in their life that faith and community are huge."

While this was a burden that women took on, many of them told me how happy they were to do so. Women felt a sense of responsibility to teach their faith. A woman in her late 60s shared that her brother married a nonreligious woman, so she took her nieces and nephews to Church to "give them some sort of Catholic background." Another woman had two brothers who both married Jewish women, so herself, her mother, her aunts, and her grandmother ensured those children experienced the Catholic faith. Mothers primarily were the ones who taught CCD school. A 27-year-old woman told me how much she loved having their mother as her CCD teacher. The woman with the Jewish sister in-laws told me "I [herself] felt good about taking part in their [her own children's] religious education in a formal way." One mother put it bluntly when she said that "women are more involved in the teaching aspect of Church...mothers mostly volunteer to teach."

Hypotheses 1 and 5 are supported by these findings. Hypothesis 1 is supported by the fact that the mothers I interviewed only fell into the older age cohort, so they were the only ones who expressed feeling the need to pass down religion, and the pressures and guilt that came along with that responsibility. This burden to pass down religion is supported by Art's (2012) analysis on the Blessed Virgin Mary's influence over the Church. Women feel the need to emulate the ideal image of Mary, and part of that is through their relationships with and responsibilities to their children. These findings also support hypothesis 5. In these discussions on passing down religion, their own female influences were mentioned. The informants however, discussed those

influential women in greater detail when speaking about their experiences growing up. The women themselves as mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and women of the Church are providing examples for children to follow. The symbolic relationship between women and children was present in the stories the informants told about raising their children. The informants are the providers of religious guidance for their children, symbolizing the role of Mary and demonstrating the feminization of the Church (Art 2012; Keary 2011).

*Diminished Power of Moral Expectations: Changing Views on What is Right and Wrong*

*Hypothesis 1: Women in the older age cohort are likely to fulfill the role of the 'good Catholic mother,' and if they fail to meet expectations of that role, they will likely express feelings of guilt.*

*Hypothesis 2: Women in the younger age cohort are less likely to be affected by the traditional expectations of the Church. They are likely to express this in their opinions and decisions regarding:*

- a. The use of birth control.*
- b. Decisions to marry and have children.*
- c. How they practice Catholicism.*
- d. Criticisms about the role of women and the overall conservatism of the Church*

Expectations Regarding Marriage & Children

When asked about the moral expectations from the Catholic Church regarding marriage, having children, and the way they express themselves, through dress for example, most of the women contended that they did not feel too much pressure from the Church. When expectations, such as marrying a Catholic man, were present they explained that the decision was ultimately theirs and the Church's expectations did not affect them or their decisions. However, that said, it was clear that all the women kept the Catholic Church's moral expectations in mind, whether they agreed and followed the expectations or whether they disagreed and were more independent in their decision making. A 21-year-old woman who described herself as being "independent and free-minded," and willing to describe her decisions as her own, still anticipated following certain aspects of the expectations presented by the Church. When describing the path she sees for her future she told me:

"When I think about who I'm going to marry their religion doesn't really matter to me...the only thing that matters to me is that I get married in a Catholic Church...and I also want to raise my kids in the Catholic religion at least until they get to the age where they can choose what they want. But I think the Church expects you as a woman to raise your kids in the Catholic religion."

Another interaction I had with a 24-year-old woman eloquently summarized a strongly held opinion by most women in the younger age cohort regarding how they are expected to properly live as Catholic women. She described feeling annoyed by the moral expectations placed on women. She provided a very realistic perspective when discussing expectations. In terms of her future with marriage and children she explained:

“I would like my children to have a spiritual influence. I still want to keep my last name when I get married. I don’t feel like I have to get married in the Church, even though the Catholic Church won’t recognize your marriage unless you get married in a Catholic Church.”

This woman, like many other younger women I interviewed, described the Church as being outdated in their expectations. Examples she gives include how having a lot of children just is not affordable and how birth control is no longer used just to prevent pregnancy but for multiple other reasons as well. She told me “if it was up to the Catholic Church, I wouldn’t be on birth control right now.” Many of the moral expectations the Church places on women takes away their autonomy. The Church has strong opinions on abortion, birth control, when to have children and how many to have, and many younger women found this to be extremely problematic because it challenged their bodily autonomy and right to make their own reproductive decisions. Older women felt similarly with one woman explaining she only has two children instead of ten because of birth control. Contemporary women are opposed to the Church’s moral expectations because of how they experience changing individual rights and social acceptability of those rights. These are 21<sup>st</sup> century women; the world around them is changing and women’s rights are becoming more progressive. Women have the right to choose what is best for their body, then overall life, and they would like to see the Church respect those socially recognized norms.

When discussing the expectations parents, specifically mothers, had for their daughters many of the younger women referenced an expectation for them to dress conservatively. One 21-year-old female told me that her mother’s expectations for her are different than that of a typical Catholic family because her mother deviated from the norm. She married late and had children late in life because she began her career first. Her mother’s life experiences affected her own expectations for her daughter. She explained that her mother “supports me in whatever... get married young or get married late, have kids or don’t have kids, whatever it may be.” This is also an example of how women are changing their roles. Her mother still acted as the ‘good Catholic mother’ by raising her daughter Catholic but was more lenient in her expectations for her daughter as she grew up and began making her own life decisions.

#### Expectations Regarding Dating and Marriage

The older age cohort felt a stronger pressure to follow traditional expectations of marrying and having children compared to the younger age cohort. A common element regarding expectations was dating before marriage. Many women brought up dating before marriage when asked about what expectations they felt were placed on them as women. Informants viewed dating as a step on the path to marriage more than how dating is more commonly understood today, as a more casual relationship lacking long-term commitment. So, what was expected of women in the older cohort is stricter than what we see today. Two women described not showing affection such as hand holding or any physical touch for that matter, out of respect for the Church and their parents. One of those women was a 50-year-old Irish Catholic mother. She told me that expectations were “engrained in us by going to Catholic school and by our parents.” Another woman described a similar experience. She told me that she refused to move in with her fiancé before they married because that time spent apart is “precious.” She explained how she felt judgmental towards couples who lived together and then were married in the Catholic

Church. Values and family were important to her and living with a partner before marriage goes against those values. She expects both her teenage son and daughter to follow that tradition and will be disappointed if they do not. Despite feeling strongly about what she considers “living in sin,” she tells me that “you [Catholics] pick and choose what works for you when it comes to the Catholic religion.”

Marrying a Catholic man and marrying in a Catholic Church is an expectation that many women in the older age cohort followed. Multiple older women explained that they married a Catholic man, whether they sought one out or not. Women explained that it was useful marrying a Catholic man because their family values aligned with how they were going to raise their children spiritually. A 55-year-old woman explained to me the expectations her family held for her regarding marriage and children:

“I always knew I would have to get married in a Church...from my parents’ perspective they would have been devastated if I didn’t get married in a Church...I was going to get married first and then have children. I knew that having kids first and then getting married or having kids and not getting married would have been so devastating to my parents.”

That woman and her husband chose to raise their children Catholic. She explained “I was raised with a very traditional mold that I didn’t think about breaking.”

Hypothesis 2 is supported. Women in the younger age cohort feel less pressure to follow the traditional expectations presented by the Church and their family. These results add depth to Abel and Kruger’s (2011) research on women taking their husband’s last names. Younger Catholic women feel less pressure now than women in the older cohort felt when they were younger. Abel and Kruger (2011) found more younger women taking the last name of their husband compared to older women, but now the opposite is true. As one young woman made clear, she plans to keep her last name when she marries. Also demonstrated here is the diminishing power of conformity produced by the Church. Both age cohorts, especially the younger cohort, are adapting their faith to their needs by negotiating roles and expectations (Heath 2019). On the other side of the coin, women in the older age cohort did feel more pressure to conform and for the most part did conform. Women in the older age cohort are more malleable as to the expectations they followed when it comes to their own children, with the exception of one woman wanting her children to wait after marriage to live with their significant other.

The data relevant to this theme also supported hypothesis 1: The role of the mother is very important. Expectations placed on women often had to do with the path to becoming a mother, including dating, marriage, and bodily autonomy. Even when women discussed marriage and dating, it was brief compared to the conversations that emerged about the decision to have children and how to raise them. As the researcher, with a focus on the role of the ‘good Catholic mother,’ I asked more questions about the family unit, influential women, and plans for marriage and motherhood. All these questions lead to responses on mothers and motherhood. In Catholicism there is an expectation that marriage has a purpose, and that is to have children and raise them to be Catholic. Being a husband, a wife, or any kind of romantic partner did not hold nearly as much weight of importance than it did to being a mother. Similar to the last theme, the

importance placed on the mother and her role is connected to the feminization of the Church and the importance placed on the Blessed Virgin Mary (Art 2012; Keary 2011).

### *Differing Opinions on Female Roles*

*Hypothesis 1: Women in the older age cohort are likely to fulfill the role of the 'good Catholic mother,' and if they fail to meet expectations of that role, they will likely express feelings of guilt.*

*Hypothesis 3: Women are more likely to either take on or mention that women take on educational and administrative roles within the Church.*

- a. Teaching children in CCD school.*
- b. Fundraising for the Church.*
- c. Assisting the priest and other Church leaders with administrative tasks.*

*Hypothesis 4: Both the older and the younger age cohorts will share similar experiences about the practices and positions of women in the Church; however, they will differ in their opinions on whether this is appropriate or not.*

- a. The older age cohort is more likely to feel comfortable with the traditional role of women whereas the younger generation is more likely to express a desire to modernize the Church through the progression of female status, such as being permitted to take on leadership roles.*

Women's experiences, both first-hand as someone who fulfilled roles and second-hand as someone who watched them be carried out by other women, were similar. What differed was how women felt about these roles, and these differences aligned with age cohorts. Many women in both age cohorts identified female roles as subordinate to the male roles. This subordination was to the male leadership roles, such as priests and deacons. Subordinate roles included assistants to priests and deacons, religious teachers, cleaning and organizational volunteers, and fundraising volunteers. The younger age cohort and a majority of the older age cohort expressed frustration in regard to these subordinate roles. A small number of women in the older age cohort expressed acceptance and comfort with these roles. Being a mother was a role many women referred to as an important in the realm of the Church. Women also described improvements in the roles given to women in the Church, noticeably the acquisition of more power and influence through roles such as Eucharistic minister, altar servers, and readers at mass. Power for women came in the form of being a leader within the Church. Leaders did more than the regular parishioner and took on roles outside what was considered traditionally female roles. Experiences growing up also influenced the perception of subordinate roles. When women saw their female relatives take on subordinate roles, such as CCD teachers, Church cleaners, and assistants for example, they were quicker to identify these roles as background roles that often go unnoticed.

A 21-year-old woman I spoke with explained that "a lot [of women's work] is recognized but a lot is behind the scenes work." This behind-the-scenes work keeps the Church running, and she explains the work provides the Church with a "strong female influence." She told me of her own experience as a student CCD teacher of 10 middle school aged boys: "Me being young in combination with being a woman, and not being the older male role model, some of the kids in the class did not respect me as much." Another young woman told me of recent changes made by



the Pope in the roles women can have in the Church, and of her experiences regarding those changes:

“Recently the pope said women can now be official readers. I always thought women could be, I didn’t know it was a Church-by-Church exception. I was an altar girl when I was younger and I thought this was an across-the-board thing, and it wasn’t.”

This same 24-year-old woman explained that the Church gives roles to women in accordance with what they believe women are capable of, or not capable of as the case may often be. She provided an enlightening example: “They give women the roles that are subservient to the men...they give women the jobs like the teachers that dumb down the teachings of the Bible for children.”

A few of the women in the older age cohort did not feel the same way. While they listed similar roles that women take on in the Church, they were more comfortable with the ways the roles have been traditionally structured. Many women found the roles women took on to be just as important, if not more important than the roles assigned to men. While there is a clear cut in gender for the clergy members, only men, there is not one for the roles parishioners can have. Both men and women can be CCD teachers, fundraisers, parish administrators, etc. but made evident by my informants, these roles are mostly filled by women. Again, the roles women take on are described as being in the background but are overall foundational for the Church. These roles maintain the Church physically and financially. They also serve to ensure there is a next generation of Catholics, and without women making sure everything runs smoothly the solace and comfort the Church environment brings would be lacking or even nonexistent. A 50-year-old woman compared the Church to major corporations when it came to the role of women:

“We [the Catholic Church] don’t have women bishops and popes...but I do see the women have a very strong role in the Church, it’s just more in the background. It’s just like anything else, most major corporations are not run by women but it’s the women in the corporations that are actually running it.”

When asked how that makes her feel she told me “I’m okay with that because the Catholic Church is the Church.... it’s a place to go if I want to pray but I can pray wherever I am, my faith is my faith. It doesn’t bother me, but it [the Catholic Church] would probably be less messed up if women were there [in those leading roles].”

Many of the women in the older age cohort mentioned seeing progressive change within the Church as it concerns the role of women. A 53-year-old woman who spent her childhood in Ireland and now lives in the United States described the changes she has seen:

“I’ve definitely seen an evolution in the context of the roles women play in the Church in my lifetime. We started out with women cleaning the Church, women did the flowers, women sang in the choir, women were initially segregated, and then as the years have unfolded women now read at Church, we have altar girls, we have women taking up the collection at mass...women do all that the men do and in fact women probably do more.”

This change was also evident in a 50-year-old woman who was also a Eucharistic minister in her Church. She explained to me that the women in her Church lead important committees. One such committee was the committee of Eucharistic ministers. Eucharistic ministers are lay people who assist the priest and deacons during mass and work with parishioners on the home bound. The committee of Eucharistic ministers at her Church, led by women, scheduled faith sharing events and visits to the homes of families. While women have been invited to take on this role, other expectations for women, such as being a good wife and mother may interfere. The former Eucharistic minister described being worried about a conflict between motherhood and her service as Eucharistic minister. After having her first child she was concerned that she was not sitting with her husband and child during mass and even questioned if that separation of role symbolized by separation of space mattered. She confronted her deacon about it and was reassured that she was doing the right thing. After 10 years serving as a Eucharistic minister, she stopped because it became difficult to attend mass every Sunday with three children who all had a schedule of their own.

The role of the mother was a role many women felt compensated for the other subordinate roles they assumed. No matter the role within the Church, if they are a mother, they are leaders as they are the ones responsible for the next generation of Catholics. One mother explained that she could not imagine women taking on more leadership roles because wives and mothers are already the “leaders of their families and do not need any more on their plates.” She told me that “I still try to have those traditional roles of being the wife and the mother and then juggle the working.” The women who were mothers made it clear that being a wife and a mother was of upmost importance and the other roles that may seem subordinate are just not as important to women. A mother and medical doctor told me:

“The father child bond is definitely different than a mother child bond...that is just like nature. This being came out of you, so there is no denying there is always going to be a bond. So, you could make the argument we [mothers] are already leaders in Christ trying to continue to shephard our children to being Catholic, religious, and believing in God...that is a huge role.”

Another mother told me that the only female role within the Church that is put on a pedestal is the role of mother. Other than motherhood, women’s work within the Church is done in the background and not recognized to the extent of men’s work. Passing down religion to children is a large responsibility, and when asked who primarily takes on that responsibility many of the women stated it was the mother.

These findings support hypotheses 1, 3, and 4. The roles women mentioned as common for women in the Church included, CCD teachers, Church cleaners, choir singers, floral arrangers, fundraiser which required food preparation, committee members and leaders, and assistants to the deacons and priests. These roles take place within the public sphere, yet they reflect the duties women have within the private sphere. In the home women are primarily the ones to cook, clean, organize, and schedule their families, and as Catholic women these roles transcend to the Church. These roles exemplify how women are performing both gender and religion in the two spheres they move between (Darwin 2018; Goffman 1956; West & Zimmerman 1987). Even in spaces where women are gaining more leadership and power, domestic roots are still deep. Eucharistic Ministers are subordinate roles to male priests and deacons, supporting hypothesis 3. They serve parishioners at a more intimate level, in the

domestic sphere. Many women expressed wanting to see change in roles in the future. Multiple women mentioned wanting to see female priests, female deacons, and females in the Vatican. One woman in the older age cohort poignantly told me “as a woman you can see where our role is at Church is not exactly how it is in the world...it has been centuries in the making and not much has changed.” The world is evolving around us, but the Church seems to be evolving at a slower pace, which some women find problematic while other women are comfortable with the slow pace of change. The informants expressed wanting more opportunities that would result in the restructuring of gender within the Church, these opportunities would take the form of leadership roles, but also recognize the need for the Church itself to restructure (Darwin 2018). Clearly, the feminine role that holds the most power is that of the mother, and many women express feeling like a leader in the Church when they become mothers because they have the responsibility of passing down their faith.

### *Influential Role of Female Figures*

*Hypothesis 5: Both age cohorts will be greatly influenced by how they were raised and the religious roles they saw their mothers, grandmothers, and other women in their life take on in both the private and public sphere.*

When informants discussed how they were raised, both in the home and in the Church, and about the roles they saw women before them fulfill, they commented on the women they found influential in their lives. Influential female family members like mothers, aunts, and grandmothers were used as examples in stories about how the Church has changed over time. Women used older generations to describe the traditional roles against what the roles look like now. The Blessed Virgin Mary and Mother Theresa were also commonly referred to by both age cohorts in discussing the roles women found spiritually significant.

Mothers were the most common female figure that came up in informants’ discussions of growing up as Catholic women. Mothers, to both the younger and older age cohort, were described as more religious than the woman I was interviewing. Mothers provided a proscriptive foundation for religion that their children, specifically their daughters, were meant to follow. This religious foundation was also met with pressure to continue traditions with their children’s own families. A 53-year-old woman explained to me how her mother was the one who set the pace for the family when it came to practicing religion:

“My mother would have been more of a traditional Catholic...she was at the center of decision making...as a family there was definitely a moral code we were expected to adhere to and follow...my mother made it clear what the expectations were...mom set the pace.”

Mothers to the women I interviewed also set high standards for their daughters. A mother told her daughter “if one generation stops [going to Church] and it’s all gone...all the tradition is gone.” That daughter, a 48-year-old mother, told me she “guesses” she stopped the tradition of attending mass every Sunday, and she feels guilty about her sporadic involvement. Another woman in the older age cohort described how involved her mother was in the Church and how she was commonly known in the community as the “church lady”: “She is the secretary to the

rectory...now she's 81 and has done that [secretary job] for at least a decade. She was always involved in some aspect of church and school." Women described the dedicated religious practices of their mothers. A few of the older women spoke about how their mother's attended mass daily, said the rosary every night, read devotional texts, took on stereotypical motherly roles such as cooking and cleaning, and taught CCD and other religious education.

Grandmothers were the second most common influential female figure mentioned. Grandmothers were also described as being more strictly religious and traditional, and in cases of the younger age cohort far more judgmental than the mothers of the informants. A woman in the older age cohort explained how the women in her family in the generations before her were very religious, and how she admired their religious dedication. She told me: "I do think the women in my life, in my family, were very religious and I followed in that." Specifically, she described a deep admiration for her grandmother on her mother's side of the family. The younger age cohort used their grandmothers to contrast their experiences and opinions about Catholicism. A 21-year-old woman explained how her grandmother had many children starting at the age of 15, and how losing some of those children brought her closer to her religious practice. A 24-year-old woman told me about how her grandmother on her mom's side encouraged her involvement in the Church by signing her up to be a reader when she was 16. Today, she still reads announcements and intentions at mass. However, traditions clashed when her grandmother expressed a dissatisfaction with her living alone.

A few women mentioned aunts and great-aunts. Aunts were mentioned three times as women who stepped in to model Catholicism when mothers were not Catholic. One woman strongly identified with the role of being an aunt, and she used that role to teach her nephews about religion because her own daughter, who was older at the time she was helping her nephews, had converted to Judaism for marriage. She told me:

"I think I was an influence on my nephews because their mother didn't practice religion of any kind, so my brother was the one who made sure they went to religious instruction and made communion and confirmation and I kind of pushed with them...I would take them to Church for different reasons like to get ashes on Ash Wednesday and try to give them some sort of Catholic background."

Another woman in the older age cohort described going to her aunts' homes after mass on Sunday because her mother was not very religious, and so her father took on the role of taking the children to mass. Similarly, a woman recalled a story her mother told her. Her mother explained that her nieces and nephews were baptized in the bathroom by her mother, grandmother, and aunts because her two brothers married Jewish women. This exemplifies the burden placed on women to ensure children are not just religious, but also have access to Heaven. Two women told me of their great-aunts who were nuns. One of these women told me stories about going to the convent in Connecticut to visit her great-aunt. She explained the strong presence the nuns had in her life because of her great-aunt. She saw the good things they did, such as taking care of the community and found inspiration in their service to humankind.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother Theresa, Eve, and Mary Magdalene were also influential female figures who were mentioned by women in both age cohorts. The Blessed Virgin Mary and Mother Theresa were presented as very high standards; what a perfect Catholic woman looks like. A 21-year-old woman told me:

“When I think about women in Catholicism, I think about Mary first...there is that expectation for women to live up to Mary or to see Mary as a female role model and the embodiment of femininity in the Church.”

In another 21-year-old woman's explanation of the importance of the role of mothers, she mentioned the Blessed Virgin Mary. She explained that mothers give life and religion to their children and self-sacrifice is valued in the Church as exemplified by the Blessed Virgin Mary. Other women briefly mentioned the Blessed Virgin Mary when discussing saying the rosary and their roles as mothers. In a discussion on the lack of recognition females receive for the work they do, a woman in the older age cohort told me the only woman who received public acknowledgment for the work she did for the Church was Mother Theresa. Eve was mentioned once by a 24-year-old female when making a point about the lack of autonomy women have over their bodies. She explained that she thinks women have a lack of autonomy because the roles men fulfill are viewed as more important than the roles women have, and this started with Adam and Eve: “Eve came from Adam so they [the Catholic Church] think we come from men and men are the original form.” The male body, perfected in God's image gives men power and control over women who, historically in teachings, represent the imperfect human form. Mary Magdalene was briefly mentioned by a 48-year-old woman. When asked if she found anything specific about the Catholic Church sexist, she told me that most of the gospels were sexist. Women are only mentioned as mothers or servers of Jesus, such as Mary Magdalene.

These findings support hypothesis 5. Women are clearly influenced by the women in their lives, especially the women who raised them, supporting Keary's (2011) findings on the symbolic role of women in their children's lives. This research however added to Keary's (2011) findings by demonstrating the overall symbolic role of women in children's lives beyond the role of mother. In addition to the primary childcare figures, informants noted other influential religious figures including nuns, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother Theresa, Eve, and Mary Magdalene as important female figures. These women served as models for the ideal and even perfect Catholic woman and mother (Art 2012). These influential women clearly added pressure to some of the women who attempted to be a better Catholic woman by emulating these exceptional women.

### *Definitions of Femininity*

*Hypothesis 6: Feminism will be applied more easily to the Church by the younger age cohort. The younger cohort will embrace more modern definitions and applications of feminism and what they would like to see change compared to the older cohort.*

When asking women how they defined feminism and if there was a space for their definition of feminism in the Church in terms of modernization, the answers differed. The age of women accounts for the most evident difference in definitions, whether they considered themselves a feminist, and the modernization they would like to see in the Church. Women in the older age cohort were more hesitant to give a definition and subsequently call themselves feminists compared to the younger age cohort. Women in the younger age cohort were more specific and realistic about the changes they wanted to see. Women in the younger age cohort

were also more optimistic that it was possible to see changes, whereas women in the older cohort either believed changes were not needed or not possible.

Two 21-year-old women made similar statements about how the Church could modernize. One woman used the example of the LGBTQ+ movement. The Catholic Church has become more accepting of homosexuality, so she believes they can be accepting of feminist movements and subsequently more accepting of females taking on enhanced leadership roles. The other 21-year-old woman explained that for the Church to modernize feminism needs to become an accepted idea. A 24-year-old woman told me that “I believe that we can close the gap, but I don’t believe women will ever be 100% equal in the Church.” When asked how she thinks the Church could close that gap she emphasized the need for modernization: “Modernization is the only thing that can save the Church.” A third 21-year-old woman told me that many fear the Church is going to die out, but obsolescence can be prevented by modernizing and with ensuring that equality between genders exists. She explained that modernizing how genders are viewed would require an entire mindset shift, not just action, and such a radical change in viewpoint would have to be huge. Every woman in the younger age cohort stated they considered themselves to be feminists. A 27-year-old woman differed slightly from her younger peers by describing herself as a ‘lukewarm feminist:’

“I’m a lukewarm feminist...we are there when we’re needed... we’re not getting the recognition we deserve but we’re fighting to get the right to do it [get that recognition].”

Women in the older age cohort often described feminism with examples of equal pay, equal rights, and overall equality between men and women. One of the women in this age cohort defined feminism as: “allow[ing] me as a woman to make individual choices that are right for me.” She went on to explain that feminism is not one size fits all, and that feminism can benefit all women by allowing them to make their own choices and taking their own paths. When asked if they would consider themselves to be a feminist many hesitated to answer. They would consider their definitions and identify with pieces of it, like being independent and deserving equal jobs and pay, and would for the most part eventually say “yes, I am a feminist.” Three women did not consider themselves to be a feminist, as they equated feminism with activism towards the pursuit of gender equality. One woman stated that she was not a feminist because while she supports equal rights, she does not do anything, like go to marches to fight for those rights. Another woman told me she has never faced any gender-based discrimination, so she did not feel like she needed to be a feminist.

When asked if there is space for modernization in the Church in terms of becoming more progressive and what specifically they would like to see happen, a majority of the women in the older age cohort did believe the Church could benefit from allowing women to fulfill more leadership roles but they did not think it would be possible or if women would even want to fulfill those roles. A 50-year-old woman poignantly explained: “Women already have so many things on their plate. They’re trying to raise their family, have a job, take care of the house. I just don’t think I see a lot of women stepping up for big roles.” Another woman similarly told me that she has never seen a female priest and does not think a woman would want to be a priest, citing similar reasons stated by the previous woman. One woman explained that she “didn’t think the Catholic Church would ever change their rules about women in leadership positions...it’s never happened before.” She then followed up that statement by saying it would be great if women were able to fulfill more leadership roles but whether they were able to or not would not

change her faith. The role of priest would inhibit their ability to be the ‘good Catholic wife’ and the good ‘Catholic mother,’ and the women made abundantly clear that those roles are the most important to them. Sacrificing their lives to the Church is not something the women thought they could personally do and were not sure if any woman would want to because they would not be able to meaningfully contribute to the Church while also fulfilling the needs of their own children and husbands. The Eucharistic Minister expressed a similar fear about being a good mother and wife when she explained her dilemma about sitting with her husband and children during mass. Despite a few of these women feeling this way, biblical references to women, like Mary Magdalene, have demonstrated that single women have taken on influential roles within the Church that have required a life of dedication to the Church. However, single women are also questioned in their decisions to prioritize the church over the domestic household, and stories may be misconstrued by presenting them as sexually deviant, such as the many stories told about Mary Magdalene and her special relationship with Christ (Ehrman 2006).

Two of the women in the older age cohort who did not identify themselves as feminists did mention wanting their daughters to fight for their rights and believe they could do anything males could do. One of the women told me “I’m going to encourage my girls to do anything they want. They can do anything a boy can do. They can be any profession they want to be.” The other woman said she believed “there is a little bit of feminism in all of us,” and that she has daughters who she wants to fight for their rights. The women in this older cohort identified the word feminism with radical feminism. Many brought up abortion and women’s marches in their definitions of feminism and conversations on why they would or would not consider themselves to be feminists. Despite my questions not mentioning abortion or birth control many shared their opinions on these subjects, nonetheless. There was an overall support for birth control, one woman stating she only has two children thanks to birth control. Women in the older cohort struggled with their feelings on a woman’s right to choose to carry a child to term. Women mostly supported women’s reproductive rights, but stated life does begin at conception and that they do still struggle with abortion.

These findings support hypothesis 6. Women in the younger cohort had more academic definitions for feminism, which was likely caused by these women either attending college now or within the last 5 years. These younger women also have not followed the religion or experienced the religion in as strict a manner compared to the women in the older age cohort, which may explain why they were more optimistic for change in the future. They have also grown up in a more accepting period of feminism. Social media personnel, celebrities, and politicians are among many who are outspoken feminists, inspiring the younger generation of women to feel more comfortable as feminists. Both cohorts used the language of “I wish” and “I hope” when asked if the Church could change. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the first feminization of the Church and now women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century want to see a more modern feminization through the roles of women (Art 2011). A more progressive form of feminism may be used to achieve that next wave of feminization.

## **Tier 2 Themes**

*Hypothesis 7: The onset of the Coronavirus pandemic will likely not have a huge impact on the roles of women in the Church or their practice beyond an inability to physically attend mass.*

*Hypothesis 8: Both age cohorts will express features and functions of the Church that they feel are good and positive in nature and will overall express pride in being Catholic.*

### *Proud to be Catholic*

Women in both age cohorts expressed an overall sense of pride in being Catholic. In asking about misconceptions about their religion, which often became their own opinions about problems they had with the Church, many women defended their faith against these misconceptions. A common misconception that arose was the Church's stance on gay marriage and the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. Many women made clear that no matter the Church's official position, which is clearly changing, their individual opinions were more powerful in that they supported the LGBTQ+ community. One woman in the older age cohort told me she did not agree with everything the Church believes, which was a common statement among most of the women. The same woman described being "hurt and embarrassed" by some of the opinions the Church holds and some of the past wrongs, such as the publicized events of priests assaulting children. Another woman explained that the Church is not as strict as often depicted in the media. Religion is an individual experience that one can tailor to suit their needs. Some women, specifically in the younger cohort, expressed anger at their religious faith. This anger stemmed from the Church's stance on many social issues. A 24-year-old woman explained to me that the Church claims they love everyone but that is just not true. After these hard conversations about misconceptions and real issues within the Church our conversations circled back to a question about what the women enjoy about their religion. One woman told me she loved the traditions and the feeling of familiarity and structure the Church brought to her life as a child and now as a mother. It was clear all my informants were proud to be Catholic women. A 24-year-old woman ended her interview with this statement: "I said all these bad things, but I am very proud to be a Catholic and I love my religion."

### *A Sense of Solace*

When asked what aspects of their lives were most affected by religion, the women all discussed hard times in their lives and the comfort that their faith brought to them. Durkheim's work on conformity supports these feelings of solace, for being part of a collective faith and practice gives people comfort in times of distress (Dillon 2014). Women in the older cohort had experienced more loss of family members compared to the women in the younger cohort. A 64-year-old woman told me stories about when she relied heavily on her faith. One of those stories was about her 3-week-old daughter developing spinal meningitis. The woman had her daughter baptized in the hospital and her daughter recovered and is alive and well today. This woman felt as though God was watching over her daughter in the hospital. This same woman also explained that she turns to her faith when she is making big decisions, and that by turning to her faith she has comfort in knowing that she has made the right decisions for herself. Women in the younger cohort told me that their faith is often recalled when they have sick relatives. One woman told me that the Sunday after her grandfather died, she was tasked with reading the announcements at church. She felt comfort in having that role on that day because she felt as though she should be the one to tell the members of the congregation about her and the congregation's loss of a loved one.



One woman described her religious experience as a cycle, referring to it as the cycle of faith, and she believes many religious people go through this cycle. As a child one is raised religious, then as they become a teen and a college student their faith and practice diminish, and then as an older adult their faith becomes strong again because they go through times where they rely on their faith, such as getting married, having children, and experiencing loss of family members. The age cohort analysis supports this claim. Many women in the older cohort described a similar cycle, while many women in the younger cohort seem to be in the phase where their practice has diminished, and they have more critical opinions of the Church. Either way, women lean on their faith for solace in times of emotional distress.

### *COVID-19's Impact on Catholic Women*

COVID-19 did have an impact on the informants regarding their practice and responsibilities as a mother. Women described limited to no Church attendance, whereas before they attended either weekly or a few times a month. None of the women shared that they were attending Church online, but some of the women told me they were able to attend in person. A woman who was able to attend in-person described an eerie scene; only older people were there and in such few numbers. She expressed concern that the pandemic will only cause Church attendance to further decrease, and this causes her to fear for the future of the Church. In addition to the women's comments on antiquated ideas being the result of diminished Church attendance, the pandemic has also clearly contributed. The pandemic could either be a beginning to the end for the Catholic Church, or it could provide the Church time to evaluate their stances on social matters, such as the role of women, and make changes.

Women also described a more personal practice as a result of the pandemic. One 21-year-old woman told me she continues to pray on her own, which allows for more personal reflection. Both parents have had to take on a more active role in the religious education of their children. Some of the women explained that because they are required to do more in terms of monitoring remote learning for their children, religious education has been lacking for their children, and they feel guilty about the lack of oversight. One woman, a mother and a medical doctor, opened up about how this pandemic has forced her to be less involved in her teenage children's lives. She explained that her husband has taken on more domestic roles, and she feels both good and bad about relinquishing some of the routine domestic responsibilities to her husband. She is happy he can be more involved and feels refreshed with her time apart, but she also feels guilty for not being there during such a scary time for her children. Studies on parent involvement during the pandemic have revealed that because both parents are working from home and children are schooling from home, fathers have been spending more time with their children (Cito, Micelli, Cocci, Polloni, Coccia, Carini, Minervini, & Natali 2020). This has slightly changed the role of 'good Catholic mother' and 'good Catholic wife.' Women are changing other roles they have, including their professional roles, and this is affecting their roles as Catholic women.

The findings of these second-tier themes disprove hypothesis 7 and provide support for hypothesis 8. The Coronavirus pandemic did have an impact on women in the roles they have as mothers and wives. Mothers and fathers became more involved in the religious education of their children, with fathers spending more time with their children overall. Religious practices were adapted to better suit these difficult times. Mass was attended over Zoom and personal religious reflection was more prominent than it was prior to the pandemic. The informants expressed both

pride and a sense of solace in their faith, which was only strengthened by the onset of the pandemic. Catholicism, like every religion, has elements that are antiquated and cause frustration to its parishioners, but it also has elements that make those who practice it proud and provide comfort when they are faced with the threats to well-being caused by the pandemic.

## DISCUSSION

Catholic women, no matter the age, have similar experiences growing up and in adulthood, supporting hypothesis 4. What differs among age cohorts, and even among women within the same cohort, is how they feel about those experiences and how they feel about being Catholic women. Consistent with the findings of previous literature, religion, specifically Catholicism, provides a space for the performances of both gender and faith. The women made evident that their performance of religion and gender occurs within the roles they take on, meaning these types of performances change over time (Heath 2019). Catholic women, as demonstrated by this research, are moving from the ‘comply...but’ level of agency to the ‘noncompliance’ level of agency (Avishai 2008). Women in the older age cohort, many having professions, all having a college degree, and all expressing independence, mostly fell into the ‘comply...but category.’ These women felt a heavier burden from the Church and their families to fulfill traditional female roles placed on them by the Church, such as the ‘good Catholic mother,’ supporting hypothesis 1. Women in the older cohort did share and express their feelings about elements of the Church they found problematic and restricting even. However, they also made clear that the symbolic roles of being a wife and a mother, make the burden worth it. Women in the younger age cohort fell more along the lines of the ‘noncompliance’ level, supporting hypothesis 2. These young women were quick to point out the elements of their religion they found to be problematic and in need of change. They feel less of a burden from the Church to follow traditional practices and expectations. All the women in the younger cohort spoke about getting married and having children, but not all applied religion to that decision. Who they marry and how they raise their children are decisions to be made using personal reflection rather than religious expectations. However, they still are fulfilling traditional roles by making the decision to be a wife and a mother, adding support to the first hypothesis.

The informants did not identify with the ‘doormat’ level of agency that Avishai (2008) refers to. Avishai’s research focused on Taiwanese women and their use of strict Christian denominations to strategically gain power in their patriarchal society (2008). The informants in the research of this article did not strategically use their roles, such as the role of mother, to gain power or prestige in the Church. The women did not have a need to be strategic, for they recognized the traditional elements of their roles and were already restructuring them to suit the needs of a modern lifestyle. Avishai’s use of the word ‘doormat’ is problematic in itself. It implies a lack of agency for women and objectifies their roles as easily overlooked and unimportant. This is clearly not the case for the women in this research.

Both cohorts made clear that they adjust their practice and interpretations to suit themselves, and modern times. None of the women followed every element and expectation produced by Catholic doctrines. While some followed the religious doctrines closer than others, the women made known that their decisions about their life and their practice were made for themselves and by themselves. This form of ‘noncompliance’ is just one of many in how women are redoing gender in the context of religion (Darwin 2018). The way women are restructuring their roles and beliefs about the Church are contributing to making Catholicism more egalitarian.

Women in the older cohort are challenging and questioning traditions; they were all open to the idea of women becoming priests for example. Some questioned if women would even want to assume clerical duties, but said that if women did want to, they should be able to do so. One woman stated that she would love to see women in the Vatican. The older cohort was also supportive of overall change and a feminism that they all described as equality within the Church. While many could not describe exactly what they wanted to see change, they knew change was needed. Women in the younger cohort are changing how they view the roles they have now and the roles they may take on later in life. They feel less pressure to conform to the Church's religious expectations, yet they still identify with some doctrinal norms, such as wanting to have children and raising them Catholic until they decide their own faith. They too described equality when defining feminism, but in addition to that they all considered themselves to be feminists, supporting hypothesis 6. These younger women have hope for change, and they are within the generation that can begin implementing that change.

Having an open dialogue about the experiences of Catholic women is important and beneficial to religious communities. Women, particularly women in strict religions, often do not have a chance to share their experiences and provide their standpoints. Religion is a cornerstone of patriarchal society, and its practices aid in the maintenance of patriarchal hegemony. The lived experiences of Catholic women, and their points of view regarding these experiences need to be collected by researchers to apply them to abstract sociological theory. Understanding the roles of women in the Catholic Church allows sociologists to apply these standpoints to sociological theory, such as Durkheim's theories on conformity or West and Zimmerman's theories on 'doing gender.' By asking about the Catholic women's experiences being Catholic I was not only able to learn about the roles they fill as women, but how they feel about those roles and changes they would like to see regarding those roles. Scholars have studied religion as a social fact from a limited perspective. Durkheim tells us that social facts produce conformity, but what happens when the social fact changes because additional perspectives have been added? What one does to conform also changes, and Catholic women are great examples of how the structure of Catholic Church has begun to change as a result of their perspectives being added. Women are redoing both gender and religion, in both the private and public spheres of their lives. As parishioners of a Church, they are taking on more power and questioning the power they do not yet hold. As private individuals, they are making their own decisions about their futures, which directly affects the future of the Church. Many women expressed fear that if the Church does not adapt, and if it does not become more relatable, it will die. However, these women were also proactive and identified many of the changes necessary to modernize and feminize the Church: They now need to be carried out.

Despite efforts to interview closer to 30 women only 19 women were interviewed. One of the major limitations of this research was reaching an audience that would be receptive to this research. While in Cork, Ireland I established a connection with a local Catholic Church to create connections with parishioners. I was able to attend mass and meet both younger and older women at the Church and through the university I attended. However, those connections were cut at the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic. Upon arriving back to the United States, I attempted to make connections with Roanoke College Catholic ministries, but they did not have an interest in the project. I was able to use Facebook and word of mouth among groups of people I know to begin a snowball sample. The women interviewed lived in Maryland, Virginia, New York, and Connecticut, and a few of the women were either distant relatives and/or friends of each other. The informants were helpful in giving my name and contact information to women

they thought may be interested in the research. To compensate for the limited number of interviews I suspected I was going to have upon recognizing the slow pace of recruiting participants I conducted all in-depth interviews rather than semi-structured. All interviews were conducted using all 18 questions. This provided rich data accumulation from every interview. The participants were thoughtful and forthcoming in their answers to questions. Additional literature on past studies and a more in-depth presentation of results and analyses was also utilized to compensate for the limited number of interviews.

Technology also proved to be a limitation of this research. Participant observation was an intended element of the data collection. However, with mass being paused and then held online for multiple months during this data collection period, I was not able to observe women and their interactions with other parishioners. To compensate for that absence of participant observation I asked more questions about the women's experiences in the Church and about their practice prior to COVID-19. These changes as a result of COVID-19 did end up having an effect on the female role, so asking questions about before and during the pandemic proved helpful to this research. Technology also proved to be difficult at times when conducting the interviews. I used the Zoom application in order to record the audio of participants. At times women were more comfortable speaking over the phone due to a lack of experience using video software. The overall majority of the women were able to use Zoom, which allowed for a more in-person feeling interview. Seeing the face of the person on the other end of the screen made the interview feel more like a conversation, which I believe made the participant more comfortable in the interview and with myself.

Being the sole researcher may have allowed more room for implicit biases in the data collection and coding. I am not Catholic; therefore, I lack a deep understanding and connection to the Catholic faith. Consequently, I may at times not recognized the immediate significance of some comments. Preconceived notions I have about the Catholic Church were held at bay, however, they still existed at the time of data collection and may have had an impact on my analyses. As the sole researcher I did not have other researchers collecting and analyzing data. With additional researchers more data could have been collected and more insights on analyses beyond my own could have provided additional depth to the research.

Future research on the topic should delve deeper into the symbolism of religious figures such as the Blessed Virgin Mary, Eve, and Mary Magdalene in connection to Catholic women. While none of the questions asked invoked deep responses about these women, they were still mentioned quite a few times indicating their importance in the minds of Catholic women. A comparison among the roles and perceptions of those roles among Catholic males and females should be conducted. By researching only one gender in the faith, an entire side of the story was left out. The female informants provided their insights on the roles men have in the Church, yet male insight was not collected. Collecting the female standpoint encourages the collection of multiple different standpoints, and this includes that of men. Collecting data on the present-day experiences of male and female Catholics would provide a dimension to the data that has yet to be collected. The male standpoint is most likely changing, similar to the females.' Understanding both of these changes and their likely impacts on the Church may aid in preventing the Church from becoming obsolete in the near future.

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## APPENDIX

### *Appendix A: Relevant Definitions*

Modern: Post Vatican II (1962)

Catholic: One who is raised, practices, or identifies with the Catholic faith

Femininity: The quality or nature of the female sex: the quality, state, or degree of being feminine or womanly (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Feminist: A person who supports or engages in feminism

Feminism: belief in and advocacy of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes expressed especially through organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

*Appendix B: Interview Questions*

1. How old are you?
2. How would you describe your educational background?
3. What religion do you practice?
4. How would you describe your religion?
5. Tell me about your experiences either growing up in the church or joining the church later in life.
6. Tell me about your family-how has religion affected your family?
7. As a female practicing Catholicism do you feel like there are certain expectations that you are supposed to follow? Please specify.
  - a. Your plans for the future with kids? Marriage?
  - b. The way you dress?
8. What aspect of your life do you feel is most affected by your religion?
9. What do you think are some of the major misconceptions of your religion?
10. What is the role of women in your religion?
  - a. Are there any scriptures that refer directly to women?
11. How is your religion portrayed in today's society? How does this affect you?
12. How does your age affect the way to identify with your religion? Do you believe your generation thinks one way and other generations of women think another way?
13. How do you define feminism?
  - a. Do you consider yourself feminist? Why or why not?
14. Do you believe there is space for feminism in the Catholic Church?
15. What practices if any both support and enhance the role of women and what practices if any seem sexist in nature?
16. Is there room for change or modernization in the Catholic Church when it comes to women?
  - a. If you could change anything about the Church, what would it be?
17. Are there any experiences you would like to share that you believe would relate to the intersectionality of feminism/women and your Catholic identity?

## COVID-19 related questions:

1. In what ways has the pandemic affected your religious practice and/or your sense of spirituality?
2. How has the pandemic affected the way you express your femininity? Both in and outside of the church.
3. Has the pandemic affected the functionality of your family, specifically the women in your family, such as your mother? If so, please explain.



*Appendix C: Informed Consent*

Roanoke College  
Study Information Sheet  
IRB Study 20040  
A Cohort Analysis of Femininity among Catholic Women

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the intersectionality of femininity and Catholicism. Areas of examination include, but are not limited to, personal experiences and opinions relating to family, religion, and media representations. The purpose of the study is to analyze and understand the experiences of women in relation to their spiritual identity.

**Information:** Participants will be interviewed by the researcher in a one-on-one setting or as a member of a focus group of 10 individuals. Interviews will last approximately 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Approximately 50 participants will be in the study. With your permission, the researcher will audio record the interviews in order to accurately capture what is said. The recordings will be transcribed, but your name will not be included in the transcriptions. The recording and transcription will be kept on a password-protected computer. All interviews will be transcribed as soon as possible but certainly no later than within one year and audio recordings will be destroyed soon after transcription but certainly no later than within one year. Interview transcriptions will be cross-checked with informants for accuracy. Transcriptions will be kept for a minimum of one year after the close of the study. Reports of study findings will not include any identifying information.

**Risks:** Some of the questions may cause social discomfort, particularly questions that elicit a response that oppose either a religious or gender identity's expectations, rules, or norms.

**Benefits:** Your participation will help the researcher understand the experiences of Irish Catholic women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which will contribute to a better understanding of women and Catholicism by society and the Catholic Church.

**Confidentiality:** All information collected in this study will be kept completely confidential. Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. The data you give researchers in the interview will be used as the basis for articles or presentations in the future. Your name or any information that would identify you will not be used any publications or presentations. Your responses will be kept confidential.

**Compensation:** There is a \$15.00-\$20.00 gift card to compensate interviewees for participating in this study.

**Contact:** If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the principal investigator Haley Gray ([hegray@mail.roanoke.edu](mailto:hegray@mail.roanoke.edu)). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, you may contact the office for Institutional Review Board, Roanoke College, Admin 204A, 221 College Lane, Salem, Virginia 24153, 540-375-5249, by email at [irb@roanoke.edu](mailto:irb@roanoke.edu).

**Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also skip any question during the

interview. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information and have received answers to all my questions. I am at least 18 years old and voluntarily consent to take part in this research study and to have this interview audio recorded.

Participant's Name (Printed):

Participant's Signature:

Date: