LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF FEMALE MASTER OF DIVINITY GRADUATES'

EXPERIENCES AND ROLE INCONGRUITY AT

TEXAS BAPTIST SEMINARIES

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Michele Lee Taylor

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

Women pursue Christian education, obeying God's call to prepare for ministry leadership. This qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological research study aimed to examine the perspectives of women graduates from Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Baptist Seminaries in Texas and to discover if their treatment could be linked to traditionally held beliefs about gender. The lived experiences of the study participants were defined as their first-hand accounts and perceptions of interactions with their male classmates and professors. The theory that guided this study was the Role-Congruity Theory, defined by Eagly and Diekman (2005) as aligning a group's characteristics with their typical social roles. Through interviews and focus group sessions with 14 female Master of Divinity graduates, this researcher discovered the thoughts of the study participants on the continued existence of stereotypes about women and the roles they can fill in the body of Christ from their male peers and professors. Interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed and coded to find common themes encouraging women to follow God's calling.

Keywords: Role congruity theory, gender roles, stained-glass ceiling, image of God, hermeneutical phenomenology

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated firstly to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who insisted on me pursuing higher education; thank You, Lord, for placing this dream in my heart. A big "Thank You" must go to my family: my parents, Ronnie and Carolyn Vaughan; my sister, Nicole Vaughan; my son, Joey Taylor, his wife, Yuko Taylor, and their daughter, Athena, for all their love and support. An extra "Thank You" for my husband, Tracy Taylor, who accepted all the times I had to say "no" to participating in events. I love you and appreciate your devotion! Also, I am genuinely thankful for the encouragement my closest friends and sisters in Christ bestowed on me, Melissa, Leslie, Molly, and Sarah. Lastly, I dedicate this manuscript to my son, Richard R. Hughes II, my biggest supporter! I miss our conversations about God, the Bible, and Christian music. I am thankful for God's revelation and comfort, as shown in Isaiah 57:1-2: "Good people pass away; the godly often die before their time. But no one seems to care or wonder why. No one seems to understand that God is protecting them from the evil to come. For those who follow godly paths will rest in peace when they die" (NLT). I love you; I miss you and will one day be reunited with you in Heaven!

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List of Abbreviations

Association of Theological Schools (ATS)

Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT)

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Liberty University (LU)

Master of Divinity (MDiv)

New International Version (NIV)

New Living Translation (NLT)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS)

United Methodist Church (UMC)

United States (U.S.)

Woman's Missionary Union Training School (WMUTS)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Societal equality between men and women has been an ongoing contention in American history. Even though inroads have been made to provide women with many of the same opportunities as men to fill high-level positions within businesses, the United States (U.S.) Armed Forces and other government agencies, there appears to be a dilemma within the Christian Church.

Typically, those seeking leadership positions must have attained education and training according to their career choice. Ministry leadership education is available at seminaries through Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree programs. Traditionally, ministry leadership positions have been filled by men. However, some religious denominations have changed their policies to allow women to become ministry leaders. This has led to women also enrolling in MDiv degree programs where they attend the required courses, along with men, in preparation for ministry leadership.

Some people maintain the traditional ideology that women should not be allowed to pursue leadership positions within the ministry construct, where there is the possibility that they will be in positions of authority over men. This study focused specifically on the perspectives of female MDiv graduates from Texas Baptist Seminaries. The first chapter has identified the historical, theological, sociological, and theoretical aspects of women seeking education and ministry leadership.

Background to the Problem

A debate has continued concerning women preparing for and stepping into ministry leadership positions within religious organizations. Despite the removal of barriers for women

reaching executive-level leadership in governmental agencies, business corporations, and social contexts, some barriers remain that prevent them from being successful in their pursuit of attaining or maintaining leadership in religious organizations (Silvoso, 2010; Wood & Eagly, 2002; Ferguson, 2018). Nesbitt (1997) asserts that the current practices that place obstacles in the paths of women seeking ministry leadership must be mitigated to have full access to opportunities to attain ministry leadership positions.

Historical

Patriarchal hierarchy has been associated with the Hebrew Bible and within the Hebrew societal structure. According to Meyers (2019), the social science concept of patriarchy was used by anthropologists in the nineteenth century after the discovery of legal texts from ancient Greece and Rome, which "asserted that the father in classical societies was all-powerful." Biblical scholars applied this to ancient Israel (para. 1). This mindset has been carried into more modern societies.

Contemporary American society has historically followed this premise; however, the establishment of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, where women were granted equal voting rights, was a step toward women being recognized as human beings with entitlement to the same rights as men (U.S. Department of National Archives, n.d.). More recently, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was instituted, which "prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin" (U.S. Dept. of Labor, n.d.).

Along with the progressive changes supporting equal rights for women through legal channels, perspectives toward women defending the nation were also shifting. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, women were admitted into military positions that were once "off

limits" to them due to the "Risk Rule" of 1988. This policy was rescinded in 1994, which "allowed women to serve in all positions except direct ground combat roles" (Moore, 2020).

Women hold positions of power in business corporations and fill high-level positions within the nation's government. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center (2018) revealed that there were 24 women senators and 118 women in the House of Representatives in the U.S. Congress. The election of a female vice president of the United States was a groundbreaking event for women in American history, and Kamala Harris was appointed to this role (Blue, 2021). Additionally, 37 female chief executive officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies were last reported by the Pew Research Center (2018). American society made inroads in the recognition and advancement of the equality and value of women.

Sociological

Men held more power in the ancient world, which was evident in Roman society. Gupta (2023) explains the first-century Roman societal system as patriarchal, which refers to the "male ruler as the 'father' of the state." This was the operating principle for all levels of society, from the household to the ruler of the Roman Empire, Caesar Augustus (p. 31).

However, within the early Christian community, the apostle Paul had many female coworkers, one of whom was Priscilla. Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, taught about Jesus. When they heard Apollo's teaching about the ways of the Lord, they gave him more thorough and accurate instruction on the Scriptures (Acts 18:1-25). Priscilla had to learn and understand the Scripture before she could teach others, even though the Bible does not provide the details. Payne (2023) notes that Paul insisted on women learning (1 Tim 2:11) even though no formal learning practices were established for them as there were for men (pp. 142-3).

Social change happens slowly and over a long period. According to Featherman (1986), social change occurs through the influence of one generation upon another and is called 'period effects' (Nesbitt, 1997, p. 171). The effects of generational influence can be selective, challenging, critical, or advocating changes in previous eras, which are then modified to fit contemporary society or ignored (Nesbitt, 1997).

In colonial America, private and public institutions made educational opportunities available for children. Additionally, dame schools were established because girls were typically not allowed in town schools (Anthony & Benson, 2003). Advanced education through colleges was focused exclusively on men's occupations, such as clergy and law, which resulted in women's exclusion from attaining higher education in early American history (Berg, 2020).

Women's education evolved as American society progressed. Before the Civil War, it was acceptable for women to be trained as teachers and writers. However, after the Civil War, women were more accepted to attend seminaries because it was more likely, statistically, that they would remain single (Berg, 2020, p. 3). Anthony and Benson (2003) surmise that the men and women attending seminary sought training as lay workers instead of formal ministerial preparation (p. 321).

More recently, laws have been enacted to grant women equal access to higher education and careers, such as The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.; Malkiel, 2016). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2022) reported that 61 percent of all postbaccalaureate enrollment students were women in the fall of 2020. American society has changed considerably in its acceptance of women seeking higher education. However, women who have attended seminary in preparation for ministerial leadership have continued to face challenges in serving the body of Christ in an

official capacity, as evidenced by the disparity between women enrolled in seminaries (50%) and women clergy (approximately 30%) (Norton, 2022).

Theological

More leadership opportunities have been provided for women to be considered for positions that were once only open to men as women have become more accepted in the workplace. The place that advocates for the inclusivity of all people groups is the Christian Church, and it should be the organization that models this concept for society. Kilner (2015) indicated that "the church is to lead the way in responding to this challenge, within its walls and in its public engagement" (p. 322).

The apostle Paul commanded the Roman Christians not to think or act like the society they lived in but to transform themselves by adopting the ways of Jesus Christ (Rom 12:2-3). Moo (2018) asserted that Paul directed the Christians to adjust their thinking from their previous lives to their new life in the Holy Spirit. He further clarified that Paul emphasized that the purpose of Christians being transformed was to discern and act upon the will of God. By following His moral direction, the relationships among all Christians will testify to the unity of the people, both women and men, within the faith community (pp. 774-8).

While some denominations have allowed women to fill senior leadership positions, others have not. According to Masci (2014), "Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists, Mormons (Latter-day-Saints), and the Orthodox Church in America do not ordain women or allow them to lead congregations" (para. 2). Good Faith Media (2018) reports that in 2016, "20.7 percent of all clergy in the U.S." was female; however, this did not include Roman Catholics or Southern Baptists because their doctrinal position does not allow women in leadership positions (para. 2).

A closer look at God's intentions is warranted since modern church organizations are touted as following His declarations recorded in the Bible. In the Scripture, Genesis 1:26-27, humankind, consisting of both males and females, was created in God's image and likeness. Scholars Payne (2023) and Gupta (2023) elucidate that God created man and woman to be equal in status and partners to share the work of caring for God's creation. They also declared that God in no way implies female submission or male headship, just because the male was created first, in Genesis 1 or 2. Gupta (2023) further clarified that a man is not to lead or guide a woman because he was instead to be united with his wife, as seen in Genesis 2:24 (p. 25).

In Galatians 3:28, the apostle Paul taught that there are no divisions between people groups. Payne (2023) asserted that Paul's point was that gender, race, and social rank no longer matter in the body of Christ. The opportunities for service in the church should be the same for Gentiles and Jews, enslaved people and free persons, and women, just as they are for men (p. 105).

One of the more well-known passages used in defending the position of excluding women from ministry leadership positions is 1 Timothy 2:11-12, in which Paul says a woman should be quiet and not teach men. Payne (2009) explained that Paul "did not give 1 Tim 2:12's restrictions on women in the Ephesian church any universalizing qualifier. Nor did he claim that those restrictions on women were from the Lord or that they should apply in all the churches" (p. 322). Scholars have recently deduced that the issue was with women spreading false teachings in ignorance, and they must first learn and submit to sound teaching before teaching in the church (Payne, 2023; Gupta, 2023; McKnight et al., 2023).

Theoretical

A person's ideology tends to be influenced by their personal experiences with the people they have close relationships with, such as family and friends, or those with whom they casually interact through school, work, church, or other community endeavors. Many theories exist about women and their proper place in society, whether in the home, at school, in the workplace, or even in the Christian Church.

Gender roles are first learned within the family context. Children are observant and quickly determine which parent holds a position of power and which parent is more of a caregiver for the family (Daniels & Leaper, 2011). Observations made concerning a people group filling specific roles more than another people group tend to become the typical behaviors associated with that group (Eagly et al., 2020). Men and women are then expected to possess the required characteristics to carry out tasks associated with their gender. Women have traditionally been seen as the group that cares for the home and family, whereas the expectations of men have been for them to work outside the home (Wood & Eagly, 2002).

As American society has made more allowances for women to become involved in attaining higher education and employment outside the home, some have disagreed with this ideology, resulting in obstacles being placed in their way. The area where contentious debate has continued concerning women and employment is in the Christian Church, particularly in ministerial leadership. Men are traditionally seen in leadership positions within the Christian Church. Women who seek to obtain or hold the title of clergy may have negative experiences because their gender does not align with the traditional image of that role (Ferguson, 2018). The women who pursue this career choice do so because they have a "feeling" they are called to this line of work or they are "following God's will;" the basis of their choice is spiritual (Hoegeman,

2017, p. 4).

Scholarly research on women in church leadership is prevalent. However, little research has been conducted addressing women's participation in Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree programs in any denomination. Research material containing lived experiences of women in MDiv degree programs at Baptist seminaries regarding their treatment by peers and faculty has also been lacking. Researchers have mentioned that more studies are needed to understand women's experiences while attending seminary in preparation for church leadership. This research study attempted to provide women seminarians with a platform to share their experiences while attending MDiv degree programs about how they were treated, whether positively or negatively, by their male classmates and faculty members and any relationship to the Role-Congruity Theory.

Researcher's Relationship to The Problem

This researcher is a woman who encountered people with both positive and negative attitudes toward women being in a position traditionally held by men in both the military and in attending seminary. All the personal experiences affected and shaped this researcher's theology on women and their pursuit of higher education to fulfill God's calling upon their lives. This researcher allowed other women to share their experiences while attending seminary in preparation for ministerial leadership. This researcher understood that any personal bias must be acknowledged and addressed to ensure minimal effects on the study outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

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Statement of the Problem

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Ministerial leadership positions in religious organizations within American society continue to be primarily filled by men. Recently, Duke University reported that the presence of female

leaders varied among the different religious groups (Allen, 2015). In 2017, the Barna Group studied women serving as senior pastors. The results showed that only nine percent of Protestant senior pastors were women (Kumar, 2017). Scholars have disagreed about whether women should be ministry leaders and present compelling arguments supporting and against women leaders in ministry. The two main viewpoints are commonly referred to as egalitarian and complementarian (Lee-Barnewall, 2016).

Women who pursue higher education in preparation for ministerial leadership may experience historical and theological patterns that persist concerning personal beliefs, authority structures, and gender roles (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). A significant gap in scholarly literature addressing women's experiences in a traditionally male-focused degree program in preparation for church ministry was identified as related to role-congruity theory. Women who prepare to serve in ministry leadership may or may not receive some adverse treatment because they do not fit the traditional image of a minister, which is role incongruity (Eagly & Diekman, 2005; Ferguson, 2018). This qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study provides future female seminary students with an understanding of what their predecessors experienced during their participation in theological studies.

Purpose Statement

This hermeneutical phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experiences of female graduates of the Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Texas Baptist Seminaries. These noteworthy events were generally defined as first-hand accounts and perceptions of women students who graduated from MDiv programs. The theory that guided this study was the Role-Congruity Theory. This researcher gained insight into the participants' experiences with their

male classmates and professors while pursuing theological education in preparation for ministry leadership.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do female experiences in MDiv programs differ from those of male classmates?

RQ2. How do the female graduates describe their relationships with classmates and faculty?

RQ3. What view did the female graduates develop on filling ministerial roles due to their experiences in their MDiv programs?

Assumptions and Delimitations

Establishing assumptions and delimitations for the study provided the reader with this researcher's belief on the subject that requires research. Roberts (2010) argued that "assumptions are what you take for granted in a study" (p. 139). Assumptions and delimitations established this researcher's desire to conduct the research without bias and personal opinion. Bredfeldt (2021) expressed the importance of establishing a framework for a phenomenological approach where the researcher avoids any possible outliers that do not pertain to the information being studied and avoids any distraction from the purpose of the study. Assumptions can create a passion for the subject of the study while adding to the knowledge base of the phenomena being researched, and they also assist in discovering an information gap. Delimitations "clarify the boundaries of the study" (Roberts, 2010, p. 138). The researcher clarified the boundaries and determined what was required and what could be excluded from the research.

Research Assumptions

When beginning a research project, the researcher typically starts with general assumptions that reflect their beliefs or position on a topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Bloomberg, 2023). Two assumptions were identified for this study. The first was that the female graduates of

MDiv programs intended to pursue ministerial roles in their local churches. The second assumption was that the faculty and male classmates' attitudes and behaviors toward the female graduates aligned with biblical teachings, especially regarding both men and women being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28).

Delimitations of the Research Design

The delimitations identified for this study are worth noting to help define the research parameters. This study focused on the lived experiences, relative to the role-congruity theory, of female graduates from Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Baptist Seminaries in Texas. The study only focused on their experiences while attending seminary, not after graduation or upon beginning their careers. The study did not include any perceptions or experiences of male classmates or faculty of the MDiv programs.

Definition of Terms

1. *Agency:* Attributes of "assertive, controlling, and confident tendency" associated with men (Schock et al., 2019, p. 190).

2. *Biblical equality:* A denial of created or God-ordained hierarchy due to gender (Pierce et al., 2005, p. 13).

3. *Communion:* The attributes of "cooperation and the welfare of others" associated with women (Schock et al., 2019, p. 190).

4. *Complementarian:* The belief in a biblical gender hierarchy where women are subordinate to men (Barr, 2020, p. 32).

5. *Egalitarian:* The belief in gender equality and that any office, ministry, or job opportunity cannot be denied based on gender (Pierce et al., 2005, p. 13).

6. *Glass ceiling:* A term described as "a barrier of prejudice and discrimination that excludes women from higher level leadership positions" in secular organizations (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 573).

7. *Hermeneutical phenomenology:* The "focus is on understanding the meaning of experience by searching for themes, engaging with the data interpretively, with less

emphasis on the essences that are important to descriptive phenomenology" (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, pp.1295-96).

8. *Hierarchy:* Role subordination. Due to the created order, men are superior; women were created second and inferior (Giles, 2002, p. 162).

9. *Image of God:* Men and women created in God's image is "God's expressed *intention* that people evidence the special connection they have with God through a meaningful reflection of God" (Kilner, 2015, p. 79).

10. *Imago Dei:* The Latin term for the image of God. Both men and women were created by God in His image, as stated in Genesis 1:26-28 (Gupta, 2023; Payne, 2023).

11. *Leadership:* "A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2013, p. 5).

12. *Master of Divinity (MDiv):* This is the primary degree for religious leadership recognized by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the national accrediting agency for seminaries in the United States and Canada (The Association of Theological Schools, 2012).

13. *Patriarchy:* The promotion of male authority and female submission (Barr, 2020, p. 13).

14. *Phenomenology:* A careful description of an everyday experience, as one experiences it, and an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

15. *Role-congruity:* How a group's characteristics align with their typical social roles (Eagly & Diekman, 2005).

16. *Secular:* To be without God, the opposite of religion (Knight, 2006).

17. *Social role:* A role based on gender stereotypes developed from differences in expected behavior related to family and work contexts (Ridgeway, 2001; Dulin, 2007; Eagly, 1987; Daniels & Leaper, 2011).

18. *Stained-glass ceiling:* Obstacles placed before women who seek leadership positions in religious organizations are due to religious ideology (Adams, 2007).

19. *Traditionalist:* The same as complementarian (Gundry & Beck, 2005, p. 92).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for Baptist Seminaries in Texas that offer a Master of Divinity

(MDiv) program to prepare men and women for ministry leadership. The lived experiences, both

positive and negative, of recent women graduates were analyzed and shared. The findings from this study may potentially contribute to assisting seminaries with reevaluating the effectiveness of traditional MDiv programs in preparing women for Christian leadership. Theological education aims to equip each student to work for the Lord, who correctly handles the word of truth, just as the apostle Paul directed Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15 (Estep et al., 2008).

A plethora of scholarly literature exists concerning the debate on whether women are biblically authorized to lead churches and the lived experiences of women who have attained ministerial leadership and executive-level leadership in Christian institutions of higher learning, as seen in the studies conducted by Davis (2019), Perkins (2019), Reyes (2011), Webb (2022), and Winchell (2020). This research study contributed to the knowledge base concerning the lived experiences of women who graduated from MDiv programs regarding their treatment by classmates and faculty as related to the Role-Congruity Theory.

Summary of the Design

A hermeneutical phenomenological study was conducted. It sought to capture the lived experiences of female graduates of MDiv programs at Baptist Seminaries in Texas in preparation for ministry leadership. This researcher encountered challenges with attaining the desired research population through random purposeful sampling, as recommended by Creswell & Poth (2018). This researcher worked with the gatekeepers of the Baptist Seminaries to reach prospective participants. An agreement was reached where the schools emailed the study information to their female MDiv alum and allowed whoever wished to participate to contact the researcher. The intended sample population of 12-15 participants was achieved by implementing this alternative recruiting method.

The interview appointments were scheduled once the researcher acquired participation consent through receipt of completed demographic surveys. This researcher conducted the face-to-face interviews individually and in groups via Zoom's electronic platform. This method was used because the participants were very comfortable with it. Another benefit of using the virtual software was that it saved time due to the physical distance between the interviewer and the study contributors. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to provide much-needed details of the phenomenon under study in their responses.

Data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process to scrutinize the categories and themes more closely as they developed. Focus group interviews were used to explore further and clarify the categories and themes identified during data analysis. Learning from the lived experiences of these female graduates aimed to uncover essential data to help seminary leaders and future female theological students understand the experiences of women who have completed their educational journeys in preparation for Christian leadership.

Chapter Summary

For this phenomenological study, the researcher utilized individual and focus group interviews as the primary research tools to gain insight into the experiences of female MDiv graduates and whether gender-related issues were present during their education journey. This researcher conducted 14 individual interviews and four focus group sessions.

The next chapter describes the context for this research study by summarizing the literature on theological concepts concerning women in ministry leadership and theoretical concepts that have affected women's progression in ministry leadership. Equal rights for women in theological education, the historical development of Christian education, and a historical account of women pursuing Christian education are also presented.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

God values women and men equally. However, as humanity has evolved, those in leadership positions, mainly men, have created an atmosphere of inequality and undervaluation between genders. Many women believe they are called by God to pursue Christian education and to seek ministry leadership in the Christian community. This study sought to understand women's experiences preparing for ministry leadership through their journeys in MDiv degree programs at four Baptist Seminaries in Texas.

Also contained in this literature review are the biblical and theological viewpoints on women in the body of Christ, along with the historical development of American legislation providing women with equal opportunities for education and employment. This chapter also presented current scholarly literature about theoretical concepts affecting women's ministry leadership progression. This review revealed the gap in the literature concerning the experiences of women graduates from MDiv programs in the hope that the findings of this study would significantly contribute to assisting future women attendees in their pursuit of Christian education in preparation for ministry leadership.

Theological Framework for the Study

This section explored the different viewpoints concerning women preparing for church leadership through the pursuit of theological education. The foundational theological concept for every biblical viewpoint is Imago Dei, or the image of God. This was presented first, followed by two commonly presented perspectives: complementarian and egalitarian. The kingdom view is another perspective that was also discussed. Scholars utilized Biblical Scripture as support for each of these viewpoints.

Imago Dei – The Image of God

The phrase "Imago Dei" is translated as the "image of God" and is "the fulfillment of God's determination at creation that people would be 'in' God's image, living and growing in reference to God's standard for humanity" (Kilner, 2015, p. 53). The Bible reminds Christians of God's intentions about men and women, their identity, and how they are to serve one another. Scripture begins with this subject in Genesis 1:26-28 where God created man and woman in His image.

When the creation account is taught, the man is commonly referred to by a proper name, Adam. For American Christians, upon hearing this name, it is assumed that only the male person is being spoken about. However, Schlimm (2018) explained that the correct translation of the Hebrew term, *adam*, is "human," as agreed upon by many scholars (p. 3). This concept is further expanded by noting that in the Hebrew text, the term "humanity" or "humankind" is considered a "single entity, humanity as a whole, that is associated with God's image" instead of addressing individual human beings (Kilner, 2015, p. 86).

Continuing the thought that humanity is addressed in Genesis 1:26-28, Byrd (2020) contended that the focus was on unity and reciprocity without any distinction between male and female or the concepts of authority and submission (p. 116). Two distinguishable sets of instructions for both men and women were not created because God made both genders so they would work together to accurately reflect God's complete image. Both genders are biologically and psychologically unique, and "we each bring all of ourselves to all of the vocations God has for us as the human race" (Williams, 2022, p.68).

Nothing in the creation account declares that men are designated in positions of authority over women. Instead, it asserts that men and women are equally endowed with authority

(Langberg, 2020; Payne & Huffaker, 2021; Pierce et al., 2005; Pierce et al., 2021). Human beings were made to be in community together. God designed both genders to provide companionship to one another and also to work side by side in their endeavors (Imes, 2023). The identities of both the man and woman were expressly found in God's creation of them in His image.

The apostle Paul taught about reconciliation beginning in 2 Corinthians 5:11, and then a few verses later, he stated, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!" (Westfall, 2016, p. 153). According to Martin (2014), Paul relayed that the event of Jesus Christ had created a new age consisting of "reconciliation" and "righteousness of God" which had effectively changed all relationships to include both the divine-human and those between humans (pp. 318-19).

This message conveyed the importance of Christians treating one another with dignity and equality in their status as God's people. "All people have intrinsic worth for one basic reason: We are the creation of the living God. We have been made in his image" (Fitzpatrick & Schumacher, 2020, p. 17). This revelation informs the Christian worldview and understanding of the rest of the Bible while providing a theological foundation for Christian ethics (Closson, 2016, para. 3).

Additionally, in Galatians 3:28, the apostle Paul fought to include all people groups in the body of Christ. Rudd (2018) emphatically states that God eliminated all divisions created in a sin-filled world and replaced them with relationships and roles of total equality in the new creation. In Romans 8:29, Paul explained that all believers are made in the image of Christ due to God's intentions from the beginning and that all people were predestined to be in the image of

God. Kilner (2015) indicated that "the church is to lead the way" both within the organization and in the public square (p. 322). On the day of Pentecost, Peter reminded the people of God's word spoken by the prophet Joel that He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (emphasis added) and that both men and women would prophesy (Acts 2:16-18).

Imposing rules and restrictions upon people groups within the faith community is directly oppositional to the Word of God. It undermines their status as equal beings in the eyes of God. However, some would argue that certain people groups, while a part of the body of Christ, are not allowed to hold prominent leadership roles within the faith community. This viewpoint, referred to by many as the complementarian view, was evaluated next.

Complementarian View

Theological arguments that oppose women pursuing a career in church leadership utilize various biblical passages to support this viewpoint. Some biblical scholars have maintained that ministry roles are determined by gender, which is complementarianism (Gundry & Beck, 2005, p. 23). The term "complementarian" was coined in 1988, the year after the "Danvers Statement" was developed by John Piper, Wayne Grudem, S. Lewis Johnson, Susan Foh, Wayne House, and others. The Danvers Statement arose because this group believed a biblical response to feminism was needed (Burk, 2019).

He also reported that Piper and Grudem stated their word preference in their book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, and chose complementarian because it "suggests both equality and beneficial differences between men and women." They did not like the term "traditionalist" because they believed that Scripture was not used to challenge the "traditional patterns of behavior," and they rejected the term "hierarchicalist" because it focused on

"structured authority" without mention of equality or mutual interdependence (Burk, 2019, para. 16).

Scholarly research showed that the terms complementarian and traditionalist have been used and shared the exact definition; Gundry and Beck (2005) remarked that these terms have been used interchangeably (p. 92). Gundry and Beck (2005) presented two contrasting concepts: egalitarian and complementarian. The egalitarian view calls for equal opportunities for both genders in ministry and leadership, whereas the complementarian view maintains that ministry roles are determined by gender (p. 23). One of the contributors to the Gundry and Beck text, Linda L. Belleville, asserted that the fundamental difference between complementarians (traditionalists) and egalitarians is their "understanding of the created order of male and female" (p. 92). Because complementarians use the order of men being created first and women second, women cannot be leaders. Belleville explained this is due to "a belief that women are not to lead men-not in the family, not in the workplace, not in the community, and not in the church" (p. 92).

Additionally, Barr (2020) added that the complementarian perspective is the belief in a gender hierarchy where women are subordinate to men. Complementarians have claimed equality between genders but deny women opportunities in the pulpit or pastoral leadership; they emphasize the submission of wives to their husbands and even oppose women's leadership in societal endeavors (Williams, 2022). Groothuis (1997) maintained that complementarians had used Scripture, specifically 1 Timothy 2:12, to support their perspective (p. 41). This passage is used to declare that women are not to teach nor are they to have authority over men; they must instead be quiet.

While Larson (2000) presented egalitarian and complementarian viewpoints, his exegesis is more complementarian. He determined that Paul focused on orderly worship because the women were new to Christianity and did not understand the church environment. Larson emphasized that "Paul did not teach that women are inferior to men" but that this text does show the role differences between men and women (pp. 168-171). Longman and Garland (2006) contended that the need for women to be quiet "conveys submissiveness in contrast to rebelling against one's proper role" (p. 517).

Burk (2019) reported that "Complementarianism is first and foremost a theological position rooted in a long history of exegesis of biblical texts such as Genesis 1–3, 1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, etc." (para. 19). Additionally, Ephesians 5:21-33 has also been used by complementarians to prevent women from having authority or leadership in a church. Arnold's (2010) exegesis reflected the subordination of women to men in both the home and church. He concluded that Paul did tell women they must voluntarily submit to their husbands as they would to Christ (p. 380).

Grudem is a self-professed advocate of complementarianism. This was evident in Grudem's (2020) exegesis of Ephesians 5:21, where he maintained that the Greek word, *hypotassō*, used in this passage for the verb "submit," "always implies a relationship of one-directional submission to an authority" (p. 592). Grudem (2020) further noted that husbands were never called by the apostle Paul to submit to their wives (p. 593).

Other complementarian arguments from Scripture provided by Grudem (2018) appear from both the creation and the Pauline texts: the created order of men and then women (Gen. 2:7, 18-23; 1 Tim. 2:12-13), that Adam alone represented the human race (Gen. 3:6; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45-49); that Adam gave the woman a name (Gen. 2:20, 23); that God named humanity "man, not

woman" (Gen. 5:1-2); that God spoke to Adam and not Eve after they sinned (Gen. 3:9); that

Eve was made to be Adam's helper, not the reverse order (Gen. 2:18); that God cursed Eve and

through her all women (Gen. 3:16); that God restored the relationship between men and women

through Jesus (Col. 3:18-19); because Christ is the head of the church, men are in authority over

women (Eph. 5:23); and that due to the differences in each aspect of the Trinity, there are

different roles between men and women (pp. 394-407).

Egalitarian View

As with any debate, an opposing viewpoint is presented for evaluation concerning

women serving in church leadership. Egalitarianism is biblical equality between men and

women, and any "office, ministry, or opportunity" should not be denied based on one's gender.

The assertion is that "women and men are made equally in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27),

equally fallen (Rom 3:23), equally redeemable through Christ's life, death, and resurrection (Jn

3:16), equally participants in the new-covenant community (Gal 3:28), equally heirs of God in

Christ (1 Pet 3:7), and equally able to be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit for life and

ministry (Acts 2:17)" (Pierce et al., 2021, p. 2). Another scholar, Lee-Barnewall (2016),

maintained that women are free from the confines of the patriarchal church culture and have the

right to fulfill their potential in the church and marriage due to being in Christ, as are men.

One of the leading biblical passages that egalitarians have used to promote opportunities

for women to prepare for and serve in church leadership is "There is neither Jew nor Gentile,

neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*New*

International Version Study Bible, 1985/2011, Gal 3:28). The egalitarian perspective supports the

notion that women are to be afforded the same opportunity as men to serve in the church as

pastors, elders, deacons, or any other area of leadership. On the "Christians for Biblical Equality"

(CBE) website, the contention is that God equally calls both women and men to serve in the "home, church, and world" and that they equally share authority to accomplish this (CBE, 2022).

Scholars who support the egalitarian perspective also address the Pauline text, 1 Timothy 2:11-15, and the assertion that women must be silent and submissive. It is believed that there was a mistranslation of the Greek in 1 Timothy 2:2 and that the English word "quietness" should be used instead of "silence" (Lee, 2021; Mathews, 2017; Pierce et al., 2021; Barr, 2021). This instruction was due to disruptive behavior, and Paul was trying to impress upon the congregants that order was needed during the service (Fee, 1988).

Many biblical interpreters have specified that in this scenario only, Paul advised Timothy that women were to stop spreading the false teaching that had occurred in the church of Ephesus (Moo, 2021, p. 326). In this situation, false teachers infiltrated the congregation and negatively influenced the women. It is also noted that in the social context of that day, women were not educated nor qualified to teach. "Paul wanted the women to be educated, so he urged them to sit quietly in the assembly and to learn" (Polhill, 1999, p. 410). Recognizing the context of a biblical account is essential so that misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the original meaning are avoided.

Another Scripture that egalitarians have called attention to for support of women in leadership is Ephesians 5:21-33. The apostle Paul instructs husbands and wives to care for one another and to "submit to one another" as they do Jesus Christ. Many New Testament scholars agree that this passage is a countercultural attitude toward Roman patriarchy (Barr, 2020; Moo, 2021; Polhill, 1999). The traditional order in both Jewish and Greco-Roman households was one of patriarchy, where the husband was the leader and everyone else was to submit to his authority; however, the apostle Paul related mutual submission in the husband-and-wife relationship to

Jesus' relationship with the church (Polhill, 1999, p. 371). Newsom et al. (2012) claimed that honor was distributed between husband and wife within the family structure in this passage (pp. 578-9).

Biblical Women Leaders

Many women, both named and unnamed, were leaders during ancient societies in the Bible. Reverend Scott Shirley is one of the few men willing to speak out for equity, and he admits that "it's biblical-women have held ministerial positions in every era of the biblical narrative" (Wines, 2020, p. 221). A closer look at biblical women was required to determine their roles and dispel the myths that they were unnecessary.

Old Testament. Skidmore-Hess and Skidmore-Hess (2012) mentioned seven women prophets recognized by the Babylonian Talmud rabbinic sages: "Sarah, Miriam, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther." Only three of the seven were named in the Hebrew Bible: "Miriam, Huldah, and Deborah." (p. 9). Miriam was the first woman described as a prophet in the Old Testament (OT). Miriam was recognized as a prophet because she was established by God and her brothers, Moses and Aaron, as part of the small leadership team in leading the Hebrew people out of Egypt to the Promised Land (Pierce et al., 2021; Williams, 2022). Once they crossed the Red Sea, she directed the women to praise the Lord for their rescue from captivity (Exodus 15:20-21). Miriam's leadership was highly esteemed by the ancient Israelite community. This was evidenced by their refusal to move ahead until her place in leadership was restored after criticizing Moses for his marriage to a foreign woman (Num 12:15).

Deborah, another prominent OT woman, was a leader of Israel during the judges' time. She was married to Lappidoth; however, as noted in Scripture, she was a prophet first and then a wife (Williams, 2022). She was considered a "prophet (Judg 4:4, 6-7), judge (Judg 4:5), and

mother of Israel (Judg 5:7)" (Pierce et al., 2021, p. 71). Deborah was also a military leader (Judg 5:15), leading men into a battle. After the battle was won, a song was sung by both Deborah and Barak, which praised God for the victory. The song also honors Deborah and places her name before Barak's name (Judg 5:1), which associates more importance with her than with Barak (Pierce et al., 2021; Williams, 2022). Barak accepted Deborah's prophetic leadership and insisted she accompany him into battle, as in Judges 4:6.

Her leadership was rare for that society due to the traditional rabbinical law where women were prohibited from testifying in court, so there was no logical explanation for her serving as a judge (Skidmore-Hess & Skidmore-Hess, 2012). The appointment of Deborah to these leadership positions also went against the ancient Jewish society and the religious leaders who held fast to the traditional patriarchal hierarchy. God is not limited to cultural settings in a society. His selection and appointment of judges and deliverers have been based on "callings and gifts granted by the Spirit" (Williams, 2022, p. 207).

Huldah was the third woman in the OT to carry the title of prophet. She provided leadership, along with her male counterparts, Jeremiah (Jer 1:2), Zephaniah (Zeph 1:1), Nahum (Nah 3:8-10), and Habakkuk (Hab 1:6). Huldah was known to be a wise religious counselor. She was sought out by King Josiah, the king of Judah when the 'Book of the Law' was found in the Lord's temple (2 Kings 22:13). "Sweeping religious reforms resulted (2 Kings 22:8-20; 23:1-25)" from the message she relayed to King Josiah through his advisers (Pierce et al., 2021, p. 73). It was Huldah's record of providing expert counsel, not her gender, that impressed King Josiah and prompted him to seek her assistance.

God called these women to step out in faith to fulfill a problematic role among their people. They were assertive yet diplomatic when dealing with the people and their problems,

shifting the focus toward God instead of themselves. These women prophets impacted the people they served despite the minuscule coverage they received in the Bible. Even more biblical women answered God's call on their lives after Jesus was born, ministered, died, and was resurrected.

New Testament. The most well-known disciples of Jesus Christ were the original twelve apostles, as described in Luke 6:13, 17. Matthew also describes another group of disciples besides the original disciples (Matt. 8:21; 27:57; and 10:24-25). New Testament (NT) researchers declared that women were included in the larger group of disciples who followed Jesus on His travels (Bristow, 1988; Lee, 2021; Lee-Barnewall, 2016). Lee-Barnewall (2016) explicitly identifies "Mary Magdalene, Susanna, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza (Herod's steward) along with 'many others' who accompanied Jesus and the Twelve on a preaching tour of Galilee, contributing to their support" (pp. 93–94). All were being prepared to go out into the world to spread the gospel message, but the original twelve were never in a position of authority over the female disciples (Peppiatt, 2019, p. 33).

Jesus laid the foundation for elevating women in roles within the apostolic church and subsequent cultures due to having traveled (Mark 3:18, 15:40-41; Matt. 10:3, 27:55; Luke 8:2-3), taught (Luke 10:38-42), touched and healed (Luke 13:10-17; Matt. 9:18-26), and ministered to women (John 4:4-26) (Kilner, 2017, p. 175). The apostolic church was established after Jesus' death and resurrection, and women were prominently featured in leadership roles.

Those who witnessed Jesus' ministry and traveled with Him while He was alive were considered His disciples. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the disciples were referred to as apostles. Scripture defined an apostle as someone who had seen Jesus (1 Cor 9:1) or who accompanied the original twelve disciples once John the Baptist baptized Jesus until the time

Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:21-22). According to this definition, "Mary Magdalene, Joana; Mary mother of Jesus, Mary mother of James, wife of Alphaeus; and Salome the mother of James and John, wife of Zebedee" were called apostles because they traveled with Jesus. The angel commissioned them in Matthew 28:7 and Mark 16:7 (Spencer, 2010, p. 100).

This concept is further explained through a more detailed examination of the Gospel literature. Bauckham (2002) connected the presence of the women at the cross when Jesus died and then at the tomb when He was laid to rest to their witness of the empty tomb on Easter morning. He asserted that the women had a unique testimony. Upon leaving the empty tomb, Jesus instructed them to relay a message to the male disciples to go to Galilee and wait for Him there (Matthew 28:9-10). The eleven disciples believed what the women told them and went to Galilee as instructed. If they had disregarded the message, they would have missed meeting with Jesus where all the disciples, not just the original eleven, were commissioned by Him to share the gospel around the earth (Matthew 28:18-20).

Paul, Luke, Silas, and Timothy recognized Lydia as a church leader in the Philippian church after witnessing her role as head of her household and leading them in baptism (Acts 16:11-15). Sometime after Paul left Philippi, he wrote a letter to that church (Phil. 4:2-3) recognizing two women, Euodia and Syntyche, as his coworkers and women who also labored for the gospel (Spencer, 2010). He also encouraged them to end a dispute amongst themselves because it could affect the entire church. His naming them emphasized their importance within the congregation (Bristow, 1988, p. 56).

Lee (2021) reported that ten women are featured in Romans 16, and eight of them are named: "Phoebe, Prisca (Priscilla), Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Julia, Persis, the mother of Rufus, and the sister of Nereus" (p. 101). The fourth-century church leader, Chrysostom,

"wrote that Prisca was a teacher of Apollos, pastor of the church in Corinth after Paul left" (Bristow, 1988, pp. 56-7). Priscilla (Prisca) and her husband Aquila taught Apollos and provided him with more accurate instruction concerning the way of God, as recorded in Acts 18:26 by Luke (Spencer, 2010).

Lee (2021) further clarified that Priscilla was a coworker and companion of Paul and her husband, Aquila, and that they were leaders of the house church mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:19 (p. 103). Priscilla was mentioned first, which is notable because, in the Roman world, women were seen as inferior to men (Barr, 2021, p. 64). According to Westfall (2016), "Paul is countercultural because he commends women in the same way as men and for the same things for which he commends men" (p. 223).

The writers of the New Testament have provided numerous examples of women in significant authoritative positions in the first-century church. The prophets, teachers, apostles, overseers, and other ministry offices filled by women have paved the way for the modern church to appoint women into leadership positions. Both Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul were revolutionary in their recognition of women, and their teachings remind us that women were valuable emissaries of the gospel.

Kingdom View

Another perspective on the gender debate is that of a kingdom view. This perspective is focused on Jesus Christ as the foundation because He provided freedom for all humanity from sin, regardless of social status, gender, or ethnicity, through His redeeming work at the Cross. Galatians 3:28 states, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*New International Version Study Bible*, 2011/1985). Scholarly exegesis on the meaning of Paul's teaching is that "gender, just as

ethnicity and socioeconomic status, is irrelevant to status in Christ. The barriers that separate male and female in society do not exist in the new reality of their relations in Christ" (Payne, 2009, p. 92).

Every believer in Jesus Christ has membership in the church, with Jesus at the center of church operations. Because Christians follow Jesus, they are committed to one another in the faith community. A bond is developed, and the members love one another as Jesus loves the church. This includes demonstrating love to others of different backgrounds, gender, status, and ethnicities (Gal 3:26-28; Col 3:10-11). Members "are not free to reject one another," but must seek unity for the body's sake (Hiebert, 2008, p. 281). Each member (irrespective of gender) within the body of Christ has been given gifts, including "gifts of leadership and service" (Rom 12:4-8) from the Holy Spirit to be used for the benefit of all (Kroeger & Kroeger, 1992). A better way forward for religious organizations would be to adjust thoughts and actions to incorporate a godly response toward eliminating the gender disparity issue (Schultheiss, 2021).

The Scripture has declared that neither partiality nor favoritism can be demonstrated among people (Deuteronomy 1:17; Leviticus 19:15). Likewise, Kilner (2017) contended that "every individual is called, claimed, and welcomed" and that "Jesus embodied that inclusiveness throughout His ministry" (p. 175). Esqueda (2014) asserted that "Christ is the answer for all apparent dualisms related to faith and learning. Christ is the foundation, focus, and end of everything" (p. 96). With Jesus Christ being at the center of the Kingdom's view on the gender debate, then a closer look must be taken at His treatment of women.

Jesus Christ

During the first century, religious leaders considered women inferior and unworthy of teaching, but Jesus was the antithesis of their beliefs. His mission was to "oppose all that violated the will of God." He demonstrated this by speaking to women, teaching them, healing them, and affirming their personhood through encouragement (Mathews, 2017, pp.77-8). Giles (2002) believed that Jesus would have confirmed the issue of women's subordination if that was God's ideal (p. 199).

Kohm (2008) described Jesus's responses toward women as revolutionary because He "conferred equal dignity and personhood on women in a culture and time when they were not considered worthy of such treatment" (p. 353). Jesus showed respect toward the Samaritan woman in John 4:7-27 by speaking with her about her life even though it was Jewish custom for men to ignore women (MacArthur, 2006, p. 154).

From His life-altering discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well to His treatment of the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), Jesus ministered to these women even though the rules and traditions of society deemed them unworthy. Jesus also saw the injustice of persecuting the woman while no punishment was directed toward her male partner. His teaching about marriage equality (Matt 19:1-12) and sexuality, as relayed by the apostle Paul (1 Cor 7:3), and His desire to educate women personally (Lk 10:38-42) showed Jesus' remarkable view toward women. Mathews (2017) contended that Jesus knew the patriarchal cultural norms violated God's will, so He deliberately acted counter-culturally (p. 77).

Additionally, women's literacy was very low during the first-century Greco-Roman period. If women received any education, it was in the home (Westfall, 2016, p. 240). However, a small group of women was educated for the sole purpose of teaching children, and they were

either of a higher social status or in the positions of enslaved people or a lower social status (Lee,

2021, p. 6).

One familiar biblical example of a woman receiving an education is when Mary, the

sister to both Martha and Lazarus, sat at Jesus' feet to learn from Him in Luke 10:38-42. Martha

wanted Mary's assistance with preparations for serving Jesus and His disciples in their home, but

Jesus declared that the learning opportunity would not be taken away from Mary. By doing so,

Jesus liberated women from their traditional roles and placed them on equal footing with men

concerning discipleship (Lee, 2021, p. 53). Knight (1996) surmised that all of Scripture was

written for the instruction of *all* (emphasis added) God's people according to the apostle Paul's

messages in Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:5-11, and 2 Timothy 3:15-17 (p. 7). This has been

seen in scholarly commentaries using plural words to refer to people. Moo (2018) uses "we" and

"Christians" in his exegesis of Romans 15:4 (p. 885). '*All*' is used in the exegesis of 1

Corinthians 10:5-11 (Fee, 2014, p. 490; Moo, 2021, p. 137). The terms "we" and "us" were used

in exegetical commentary on 2 Timothy 3:15-17 (Larson, 2000, pp. 305-7).

Summary of the Theological Framework

Several theological arguments were developed regarding the gender debate in the church

context. The foundational theological concept of Imago Dei declared that both men and women

were created equally in the image of God. Every person in the body of Christ bears the image of

God, and because each person bears His image, every individual is worthy of dignity and respect.

The Cross's work erased any barrier established before Jesus' ministry. The apostle Paul taught

that nationality, gender, socio-economic status, and background were no longer reasons for

excluding anyone from being accepted in the body of Christ.

The complementarian view has contended that men are to be leaders in the home, the workplace, the community, and the church, whereas women are to be subordinate to men due to the creation order. Complementarians have also exegeted Scripture, namely 1 Timothy 2:12 and Ephesians 5:21-33, to support their view that leadership and authority are designated for men, not women.

Alternately, the egalitarian view is the opposite of the complementarian perspective, where biblical equality is supported, and women are to be afforded the same church leadership opportunities as men. Egalitarian scholarship explains that Paul's teachings in the epistles indicated a specific situation in one church where both men and women were disruptive, and order needed to be established. Egalitarians contend that the statement that women should be quiet was not a universal directive for churches, past or present.

Lastly, the Kingdom view is centered on the person of Jesus Christ and His treatment of women during His ministry. Jesus showed concern and respect to numerous women, which was counter-cultural to the Jewish tradition. Jesus loves the church, which is collectively made up of men and women. Due to His love for believers, they reciprocate by loving Him and one another. Because Jesus treated women with dignity, then the body of Christ is to do the same; there is no option to reject people based on physical characteristics.

In conclusion, the literature review concerning Imago Dei, the complementarian view, the egalitarian view, and the kingdom view has shown that more research is needed to determine the effects of these theological ideas on women preparing for church leadership. This leads into the next section, where the effects of the social role theory, role-congruity theory, and the stained-glass theory on women answering the call on their lives and preparing for church leadership were discussed.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

An individual does not encounter society in isolation from others. People are social beings and impact society while simultaneously being shaped by it because "both individual and collective activities are grounded in the past, the present, and the future" (Easterby-Smith et al., 1999, p. 82). Research showed three predominant theories that affect women and their experiences while pursuing theological education in preparation for serving God's people in church leadership: role congruity theory, stained glass theory, and social role theory. The details concerning each theory were evaluated, and some research findings showed that women have been affected by these theories and those who adhere to them.

Social Role Theory

The first theory that was evaluated and discussed, which was related to women seeking to become Christian leaders in religious organizations, was the social role theory. According to Dulin (2007), social role theory was developed as a "gender-related theory" by Alice H. Eagly in the 1980s (p. 104). Eagly (1987) explained that her research was focused on social and gender roles based on the differences in social behaviors between men and women in both work and family life (p. 9). Ridgeway (2001) additionally explained that social role theory is a concept where "widely shared gender stereotypes develop from the gender division of labor that characterizes a society" (pp. 14185-6). The basis of this theory seemed to be rooted in structural pressures originating from family, organizations, and community groups where people have a designated social role based on gender, which influences the behavior of both men and women (Dulin, 2007, p. 105).

Daniels and Leaper (2011) asserted that adolescents develop a sense of gender roles from what they learn within the family context. They tend to observe women as caregivers and

domestic engineers, whereas men are likelier to hold positions of power outside the home (p. 152). As adolescents transition into adulthood, their ideas on gender roles are influenced, in part, by what they have experienced in their homes. They can also learn about cultural norms concerning gender roles from peers, teachers, and the media (Daniels & Leaper, 2011, p. 152). When observations are made concerning a people group occupying specific roles more than another group, the behaviors associated with these roles become the typical behaviors of that group (Eagly et al., 2020, p. 302).

Wood and Eagly (2002) declared that within the sociology field, "social constructionist scholars emphasize societal role assignments and self-selection into social roles as the primary determinants of behavioral sex differences (e.g., Lorber, 1994)" (p. 700). The placement of men and women in society affects their exhibited behavioral patterns.

Additionally, Wood and Eagly (2002) determined that both men and women have been expected to possess the required characteristics to carry out the tasks typically associated with their gender. Compared to men, women have tended to be involved with domestic activities like cooking and providing emotional support. Accordingly, the skills, values, and motives connected with domestic activities become the stereotypes associated with women and the expectations of their gender roles (p. 701).

Gender roles have been presented as "truth" when gender is the basis of power within every aspect of society, including the family, the workplace, and the community. For women seeking leadership positions within religious organizations, whether a local church or institute of higher learning, obstacles have appeared at the center of the dilemma, including traditional Christian hierarchal beliefs and social roles.

The sphere of religious organizational leadership (clergy) is different from other professions due to the "eschatological element" (Nesbitt, 1997, p. 6). Individuals who pursue this choice of profession tend to say that they have a "feeling" they are called to this line of work or that they are "following God's will;" the basis of their choice is spiritual (Hoegeman, 2017, p. 4). The connections made between traditionally held beliefs about women and the roles they can fill have formed obstacles for them in following God's will for their lives.

Recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) showed that women clergy, with 16 years of experience and over, make up only "16.2% of the total employed clergy" personnel in the U.S. Many leaders have utilized the Bible to support their position whether in opposition to or in support of women as Christian leaders. Social and gender roles, especially concerning women, are closely associated with role-congruity theory, which will be evaluated next.

Role-Congruity Theory

The role congruity theory is modern terminology for an issue that can be traced throughout church history. Payne and Huffaker (2021) contended that "women were generally regarded as inferior, both in being and in role." Assertions by renowned historical church fathers, "Aquinas and Jerome to Calvin and Luther, and up to the American Puritans and into the 1800s," supported this perspective (p. 37). Aquinas built his theology of a female being a "defective, undeveloped male" from Aristotle's assertion that the souls and bodies of women were inferior to men. Therefore, they could not be fully in God's image (Kilner, 2015, p. 34). This ideology was carried forward into a contemporary society where the attributes and characteristics of an individual have been closely aligned with gender roles.

Eagly and Diekman (2005) explained role congruity theory as how a group's characteristics align with their typical social roles (p. 23). The potential exists for prejudice when a stereotype about a group is inconsistent with attributes required for particular social roles. Eagly and Karau (2002) asserted that prejudice has developed toward women leaders from incongruity between the perceived characteristics of women and the requirements of leadership roles (p. 574). As an example, religious leader roles (clergy) have been historically viewed as being male-only, and women who either seek to obtain or who currently hold the title of clergy "may experience prejudice because they do not align with the cultural image of pastor," which is role incongruity (Ferguson, 2018, p. 409).

Agency and Communion

Agency and communion are the two categories of expectations and beliefs attributed to either men or women (Schock et al., 2018; Manzi & Heilman, 2021). Agency comprises "assertive, controlling, and confident tendency" attributes associated with men. On the other hand, communion indicates the attributes of "cooperation and the welfare of others," which have been more strongly tied to women (Schock et al., 2019, p. 190). In secular society, women who aspire to leadership roles "should be masculine and tough, but as women, they should not be 'too manly.'" These opposing expectations for women have often resulted in the perception that "women are less qualified for elite leadership than men" (Northouse, 2019, p. 410).

However, Schock et al. (2019) recommended that women "carefully blend agency with communion and conform to both the leader role and the female gender role in order to avoid devaluation and to be recognized as leaders" (p. 190). Koenig et al. (2011) surmised that changes in the managerial practices within organizations have caused the manifestation of "democratic

relationships, participatory decision-making, delegation, and team-based leadership skills" to replace the hierarchal, "top-down" leadership style associated with men leaders (p. 618).

Studies on gender and leadership have primarily been focused on determining differences between men and women instead of the causes of these differences. One such cause, determined by Zikmund et al. (1998, pp. 62-63), was reported by Ferguson (2018) as stereotypes about men and women. "When a man is assertive, he is a strong leader;" nonetheless, an assertive woman has been viewed as "controlling, and power-hungry, a force to be managed and curtailed" (p. 412). Women have been regarded negatively when they approach leadership similarly to men.

Expectations for religious leaders have been for them to cooperate and put the welfare of others first, which have been reported as attributes of women. However, control of these organizations has been predominantly in the hands of men. Reported results from a study conducted by Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts in 2012 found there was "no difference in perceived competence between agentic women and agentic men, but instead attributed agency as a disadvantage to the mechanisms of lower likeability for women (Kim et al., 2020, p. 7). According to Ferguson (2018), "once females gain access into leadership, their congregants do not penalize them for being female, unless their leadership style is more agentic" (p. 420).

Schein (2001) asserted that stereotypes about women's abilities to fill managerial roles have diminished among women, but men's perceptions toward women in these positions have remained negative (p. 684). Research conducted by Johnston & Hewstone, 1992; Rothbart, 1981; Weber & Crocker, 1983; Bless et al., 2001; Critcher & Risen, 2014; Hewstone et al., 2000; Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004; found that observation of women in "high-profile, male-typed leadership positions" has weakened stereotypes about women's abilities to lead, decreased prejudice toward women, and generated counter-stereotypical beliefs (Manzi & Heilman, 2021,

p. 258). Dulin (2007) also noted that research conducted by Diekman, Goodfriend, and Goodwin (2004) concluded that the differences between men and women and their perceived social roles would change significantly over time, resulting in social roles becoming dynamic instead of rigid (p. 108). Next, a literature review was evaluated for connections between role-congruity and stained-glass theories.

Stained-Glass Theory

Whereas social role and role-congruity theories have been applied to women seeking leadership in both secular and religious organizations, the stained-glass theory has been uniquely applied to women in leadership within religious organizations, most commonly in the church context. To better understand the concept of the stained-glass theory, the term glass ceiling should first be explained. Eagly & Karau (2002) promoted the definition from the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, and Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987, for the term "glass ceiling," which is described as "a barrier of prejudice and discrimination that excludes women from higher level leadership positions" (p. 573). This term was "introduced into the American vernacular by two *Wall Street Journal* reporters in 1986 as documented by Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986" (Northouse, 2019, p. 404).

The Glass Ceiling Act of 1991 was proposed to the 102nd Congress (1991-1992), which established the Glass Ceiling Commission "to conduct a study and prepare recommendations concerning eliminating artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities; and increasing opportunities and developmental experiences of women and minorities to foster the advancement of women and minorities to management and decision-making positions in business" (Congress, n.d.).

Women lacking stereotypical leadership abilities is a part of this invisible barrier and has been a well-documented challenge facing women in their pursuit of reaching higher levels of leadership within organizations (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011; Schein, 2001; Cotter et al., 2001; Manzi & Heilman, 2021). Some specific examples where the glass ceiling has been used to either deny entry of women and minorities into or cause advancement issues within the areas of "manufacturing (Tabak, 1997), clerical and service jobs (Harlan & Berheide, 1994), the federal civil service (Naff & Thomas, 1994), and in the semiprofessions such as the clergy (Sullins, 2000), social work (Gibelman & Schervish, 1995), and journalism (Tan, 1990)" (Maume, 2004, pp. 252-3).

Obstacles placed before women who sought leadership positions in religious organizations were mainly due to religious ideology, and the term used for this barrier is the "stained glass ceiling" (Adams, 2007, p. 99). A review of the literature found that the focus has been on identifying obstacles for women in a religious setting of the church (Barr, 2020; Burk, 2019; Byrd, 2020; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ferguson, 2018; Groothuis, 1997; etc.). However, there also appears to be a "stained glass ceiling" for women faculty at religious institutions. Mock (2005) relayed her first-hand experience as a faculty member at a Christian university. She asserted that the negative comments made about her were steeped in Scripture and church tradition by her colleagues and students (para 3 and 7). Longman & Lafreniere (2012) have also reported that research conducted concerning faith-based institutions of higher education having membership with the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) confirmed an underrepresented population of women in senior leadership. Findings from Creegan & Pohl (2005) and LaCelle-Peterson (2008) discussed "connections between hierarchy and traditional

Christian beliefs" as the basis for women's underrepresentation in leadership positions at institutes of higher learning (p. 48).

Additionally, the separation between government and organized religion resulted in churches being exempt from complying with laws banning gender or racial discrimination, as reported by Zikmund, Chang, and Lummis 1998 (Schleifer & Miller, 2017, p. 405). Barrick (2020) reported that the U.S. Supreme Court "affirmed that a constitutional ministerial exception existed and was supported by the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses of the First Amendment" in two separate cases: one in 2012 and the other in 2020. In both rulings, the court sided with the religious employer (religious schools) over the "ministers" who brought discrimination claims against them (p. 465).

Morgan (2006) asserted that women who attempt to negotiate hurdles placed in their way to prevent them from attaining top leadership posts have opened themselves up to criticism about trying to fill roles traditionally held by men. Women have been perceived as "less legitimate" in powerful positions typically occupied by men (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 14187). Longman and Lafreniere (2012) concluded that in CCCU institutions, women have faced more obstacles than men when pursuing leadership positions.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

Generally speaking, "theories shape the landscape of facts by guiding thinking. They tell people what to expect, where to look, what to ignore, what actions are feasible, what values to hold" (Easterby-Smith et al., 1999, p. 25). Gender roles have been presented as "truth" when gender is the basis of power within every aspect of society, including the family, the workplace, and the community, for women who have sought leadership positions within religious Obstacles

have appeared in organizations, whether a local church or institute of higher learning, where traditional Christian hierarchal beliefs and social roles have been at the center of the dilemma.

As women have sought employment at religious organizations, the characteristics typically associated with their gender have been compared to the requirements of a leader. The outcome has been a juxtaposition because the typically held assumptions that women must be cooperative and put others before themselves do not align with the expected behaviors of assertiveness, confidence, and control usually exhibited by men. Role incongruity describes this phenomenon (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Research has found that social and gender roles and role congruity were factors in the stained-glass ceiling effect that prevented women from leadership in religious organizations. It is within this sphere that individuals have said that they have a "feeling" they are called to this line of work or that they are "following God's will" (Hoegeman, 2017, p. 4). Obstacles have been formed between traditionally held beliefs about women and the roles they can fill, which has prevented them from following God's will for their lives. However, as more women have entered paid employment, some people's perceptions of women's abilities in performing leadership duties have changed and slowly become more favorable toward women. More research is needed to determine how this has affected women pursuing theological education in preparation for leadership in religious organizations. This aspect of the research has been addressed in the next section on related literature.

Related Literature

According to Estep et al. (2008), "education is not an *option*; it is a necessity. In fact, it is a divine imperative, a command" in every aspect of the faith community as directed in Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Matthew 28:16-20; and Acts 1:8 (p. 49). This literature review section

critically reviews subtopics relevant to the research. This portion included an evaluation of the literature that addressed women being afforded the equal right to quality education and the theology of Christian education.

Equal Right to Quality Education

"The international community has been committed to achieving gender equality at least since the establishment of the United Nations…through promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion" (UNESCO, 2018, p. 39). Three global treaties relevant to gender equality in education have been enacted: "the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE), and Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)" (Berg, 2020, p. 33).

UNESCO (2018) reported that the United States of America is the only country that has not ratified these three treaties, and it has "not guaranteed the right to education in its constitution" (p. 42). United States (U.S.) citizens lack any legal recourse if there are perceived violations of their right to education. Underwood (2018) noted that even though the U.S. federal government does not have direct control over education, it can influence state and local schools that accept federal funding for their educational programs (para. 8).

However, in 1963, then-President John F. Kennedy encouraged Congress to create a civil rights bill. After Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon Johnson worked conjointly with Roy Wilkins and Clarence Mitchell to get the bill through Congress. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, and it "prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin." It also "forbade discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as race in hiring,

promoting, and firing" (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). Kilner (2017) stated that "human rights refer to what people ought to receive or be protected from by virtue of being human beings" (p. 155). As a result, women gained the right to equal access to higher education, better job positions, and more desirable careers (Kozan et al., 2020). Additionally, "Title IX, part of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in federally funded educational programs and activities, enlarging opportunities for women students in coeducational institutions" (Malkiel, 2016, p. 20).

Berg (2020) disclosed that public policies favoring women's education were implemented in Europe because of the American Civil Rights, Women's, and Antiwar movements (p. 25). Malkiel (2016) reported that in 1963, the Committee on Higher Education Report scrutinized the British university system and proposed that the universities expand their acceptance of all qualified students to include women. At that time, "less than 5 percent of British youth enrolled in universities, and of those, less than a quarter were women" (Malkiel, 2016, pp. 491-2).

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) (2019) reported that 55 percent of tertiary graduates (university level and beyond) were women in 39 of the 47 UNECE countries. In the United States, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2022) reported that 61 percent of total postbaccalaureate enrollment students were women in the fall of 2020. Legislative changes have encouraged women to attend and complete degree programs at institutes of higher learning.

Theology of Christian Education

Not only have women been interested in education beyond high school, but some have even pursued degrees in religious studies, sometimes called theological or Christian education.

To better understand the theology of Christian education, a closer look at education during the time of Jesus was warranted. In the first-century Greco-Roman period, women's literacy was very low. If they received education, it was in the home (Westfall, 2016, p. 240). However, a small group of women were educated for the distinct purpose of teaching children, and they were either of a higher social status or were in the positions of enslaved people or a lower social status (Lee, 2021, p. 6).

One familiar biblical example of a woman who received an education was when Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, sat at Jesus' feet to learn from Him in Luke 10:38-42. Martha wanted Mary's assistance with preparations for serving Jesus and His disciples in their home, but Jesus declared that the learning opportunity would not be taken away from Mary. By doing so, Jesus liberated women from their traditional roles and placed them on an equal plane with men concerning discipleship (Lee, 2021, p. 53). Knight (1996) surmised that all Scripture was written to instruct all God's people according to the apostle Paul's messages in Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:5-11, and 2 Timothy 3:15-17 (p. 7).

God is at the center of Scripture, the authoritative source of the Christian worldview. Knight (2006) stated, "Christian education must be built upon a Christian view of reality." The basis for Christian understanding and knowledge has been the Bible. Scripture must test any other source of knowledge because it is the source of God's truth, and every subject to be taught must be evaluated through their relationship with Him (p. 177). The Christian education curriculum has been grounded in the study of God, otherwise known as theology (Estep Jr. et al., 2008, p. 7). Esqueda (2014) stated that "Christ is the answer for all apparent dualisms related to faith and learning. Christ is the foundation, focus, and end of everything" (p. 96). Theological beliefs and convictions have made Christian education unique.

Another approach to education has been through philosophy, defined as "the love of wisdom" (Knight, 2006, p. 5). According to Scripture, the Lord God is the One who provides wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (Proverbs 2:6). Philosophy, as an academic exercise, has attempted to organize "all knowledge and addresses human concerns to discern the true, the good, the right, the real, and the valuable" (Pazmiño, 2008, p. 86). Knight stated it in another way, "people have not arrived at Christian truth through developing by themselves a system of thought that leads to a correct view of God, humanity, and the nature of sin and salvation" (Knight, 2006, p. 181). By itself, human reasoning has been found insufficient and deceiving, which has ultimately led to incorrect theology. Pearcey (2004) surmised that this has led to Christians' unconscious acceptance of secular concepts as truth instead of drawing from biblical truth (p. 44).

The way to ensure Christians are not deceived by secular teachings is to know what the Bible teaches about truth. Pearcey (2004) maintained that when biblical truth was taught in Christian education, students were wise about faulty thought patterns and false worldviews presented by secular scholars (p. 121). Wilhoit (1991) asserted that Christians were to learn about the Bible, and they "must learn to use the Bible, both in ordering their own lives and in ministering to others" (p. 170).

"The field of religious leadership has become professionalized; that is, the body of knowledge and the credentials one needs to become a religious leader have become more standardized" (Ferguson, 2015, pp. 342-3). The primary degree for religious leadership recognized by the national accrediting agency for seminaries in the United States and Canada, The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), is the Master of Divinity (The Association of Theological Schools, 2012). Learning how to utilize the Bible for service in the body of Christ

has been an essential aspect of theological education. Students have learned from their

instructors, peers, and mentors if their educational program has included additional support.

Mentoring and Counseling

Women MDiv students would benefit from having a Christian mentor while attending

seminary. Wilhoit (1991) declared that Christian education should be more of an apprenticeship

program than an academic classroom (p. 170). Murray (2001) presented a quote by Akio Morita,

the former chairman of the board of Sony, "We are making ourselves responsible for their

education and well-being. I consider it my job as a manager to do everything I can to nurture the

curiosity of people I work with" (p. 11).

According to Revulagadda (2020), female Indian international graduate students

experienced problems, especially in cultural conflicts where mentorship would have been

beneficial. Berry (1997) investigated the literature about migrants, including immigrants,

sojourners, and refugees, who moved to North America, Australia, and Europe (pp. 6-7). Many

societies, including the United States, have become cross-cultural or diverse due to immigration.

The predicament that many international students have encountered is acculturation

because they have chosen to live and attend school in a foreign country. The definition of

acculturation, according to Altschuler, Scott, & Careyva (2022), is "the process by which a

newcomer adopts the cultural behaviors common in the host country" (para. 1). Berry (1997)

identified four acculturation strategies that can be adopted. The first is assimilation, when

individuals no longer wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek relationships with people

from other cultures. The second is separation, where individuals want to retain their original

cultural identity while avoiding interaction with others. Integration is the third, where some

aspects of an individual's original culture are maintained while participating in a new social

network. Finally, there is marginalization, where there is little interest in relationships with others or maintaining their cultural identity (Berry, 1997, p. 9).

Not only have female international students encountered cultural clashes, but they have also dealt with gender conflict in the acculturation process. Revulagadda (2020) reported that it is likely for female international students to encounter gender conflict due to the probability of coming from cultures where there are specific gender roles for both males and females and coming into a culture that espouses gender equality (p. 29). Altshuler, Scott, & Careyva (2022) noted that conflict arises among immigrant families due to changes in family roles resulting from acculturation, especially with younger refugees because they adjust to the new culture much quicker than older family members (para. 5). Additional stress and anxiety have resulted from students getting accustomed to a society that is different from their original culture.

In a Christian education setting, having a mentor would provide much-needed support for the students adjusting to a new and possibly foreign environment. Drovdahl (1995) described a mentoring relationship as a "discipling/mentoring relationship" where a mentor provides support through listening, stability, being honest, having positive expectations, and setting tasks (p. 230). Livermore (2016) stated that insight has been gained into what drives the other person when seeing things differently. As one considers this, it will help create a good relationship because the other person will then feel as though they are understood (p. 67).

O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) emphasized that encouraging women through coaching and mentoring is necessary (p. 168). Longman and Lafreniere (2012) concluded that providing mentors to women would be beneficial in meeting current challenges, and they, in turn, could be role models for women coming after them (p. 58). A disciplining/mentoring approach would

help the student be successful in finding their place in a new environment because they have a support system instead of feeling alone.

Altshuler, Scott, & Careyva (2022) affirmed that acculturation impacts the mental health of those who immigrate and that there are concerns for long-lasting conditions such as "anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression" (para. 5). Revulagadda (2020) reported from the literary works that international students have been reluctant to utilize university support services, to include counseling (p.32). However, Hyun et al. (2007) stipulated that they have instead sought help from their primary care provider or peers (p. 110). Their research further indicated that 17% of international graduate students sought professional psychological help through counseling services compared to 36% of domestic graduate students who used counseling (p. 110).

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

This literature review provided insight into women's challenges in pursuing higher theological education in preparation for ministry, whether in a church leadership position or another area. The following section further developed the rationale for studying women's experiences in seminary and the gap in the scholarly writings.

Rationale for the Study

The Christian educational process seeks to build a Bible-oriented program. Christian educators are disciples of Jesus Christ and, simultaneously, disciple-makers who assist students in their spiritual development by teaching a Christian perspective on the subject matter. Wilhoit (1991) asserted that "educators must come to their task knowing what they must teach, how it should be taught, and who should teach it" (p. 108). Estep Jr. et al. (2008) affirmed that a "God-centered approach to education" is a distinct aspect of Christian education (p. 48).

Christian educators have recognized that male and female students participate in the established theological curriculum. In Colossians 1:28, the apostle Paul charged the Christian community with "admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ" (*New International Version Study Bible*, 1985/2011). Longman III & Garland (2006) explained that "Paul's ministry was for everyone because the gospel is for all people" (p. 303). In other words, using the term 'everyone' means that no gender distinction was established in Paul's audience; he included both men and women. This qualitative phenomenological study sought to gather information about women's lived experiences and treatment by their peers and faculty in the Master of Divinity education program.

Traditional Ministerial Education

Christians established early colonial higher education, and the most notable was "Harvard in 1636, Yale in 1701, Princeton in 1769, and Dartmouth in 1754," otherwise known as the Ivy League schools (Anthony & Benson, 2003, p. 303). Cremin (1970) reported that William and Mary College, established in 1693, was a seminary for gospel ministers. Yale was founded explicitly for learned and orthodox men of the Christian Protestant religion to spread the gospel (p. 321). May (1934) mentioned that these schools' curriculum was centered on divinity subjects (Green, 2002, p. 27). Anthony & Benson (2003) asserted that "for the first two hundred years of American higher education, people made a concerted effort to include biblical studies as part of the curricular offerings" (p. 304).

Eavey (1964) reported that shortly after the Great Awakening period, many denominations established seminaries to train church leaders (p. 335). Anthony & Benson (2003) described that period as a time of "spiritual malaise" where American culture entered moral decline (p. 306). Revival transpired due to preachers who traveled despite the acrimonious

changes in thought that had occurred. Chitwood (1961) declared that a direct result of revival in the colonies led to an increase in colleges, regardless of denominational association, such as "Princeton, Brown, Dartmouth, and Rutgers" (p. 447).

A second great awakening occurred between 1800 and 1830 in America as a response to the secularization of society. Out of this revival, a need for biblical knowledge and understanding developed, inspiring "Bible schools, colleges, and seminaries by the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Methodists" (Anthony & Benson, 2003, p. 318). One of the most notable Bible school founders, D. L. Moody, built Mount Hermon School for Boys (Northfield Seminary), along with the Moody Bible Institute. His vision was to develop "gap men," those who would be trained and stand in the gap between the ministers and the ordinary people (Anthony & Benson, 2003, p. 319). The traditional education and training focus was centered on men in church leadership positions and primarily on those who preached the Gospel. It was expected that upon graduation, the prospective pastor(s) would enter an apprenticeship with either a clergy member or the president of the respective college (Schorr, 1984, p. 266).

Gap in the Literature

A significant lack of information was discovered upon examination of the literature concerning women's experiences, as related to role-congruity theory, in a traditionally male-focused degree program in preparation for church ministry. One qualitative research study, conducted by Monique C. Norton and published in 2022, focused on "the perceptions of gender bias held by female Master of Divinity (MDiv) students and whether they perceive gender bias has an effect on their choice of a career as a ministerial leader" (Norton, 2022, Abstract).

Ferguson (2015) used the data reported by the ATS for the 2012-2013 academic school year to determine the factors influencing women's decisions to pursue careers as clergy. The

findings determined that the type of seminary an MDiv student attended, the gender of the MDiv student (female), and problems related to role congruity experienced by female seminarians all contributed to their likely decisions not to become religious leaders (pp. 356-8). However, for the 2018-19 academic school year, 32% of graduates with a Master of Divinity/Ministry degree were women (NCES, 2020). Additionally, a few years later, a large discrepancy between women enrolled in seminaries (50%) and women clergy (approximately 30%) was discovered (Norton, 2022, p. 26).

Women in Seminary

The historical purpose of the church has been comingled with developing a theological understanding of how Christians have responded to life through biblical strategies even though educational institutions, or seminaries, were not established until the nineteenth century (Marsden, 1994). The scholarly literature review revealed some historical information about women who attended seminary. A study conducted by Green (2002) evaluated the traditional curriculum in evangelical seminaries that prepared women for ministry, and she mentioned Tucker & Liefeld's (1987) report that in 1850, Antoinette Brown Blackwell was the first woman who completed theological studies but did not earn a degree due to her gender (p. 29). French & Poska (2007) likewise described women who sought education to fulfill their "call to spread the Gospel as Protestant missionaries" and that "by 1910, about two-thirds of the American mission force was composed of women, many of whom were single recent graduates of Protestant Bible schools" (p. 385).

Many American Bible schools were focused on both men and women being prepared for service as lay workers instead of formal ministry (Anthony & Benson, 2003). Even though women were accepted in the mission field and acquired formal education, they faced challenges

in the missionary community due to their gender. They were not allowed to vote in their respective organization and were limited by their denominational gender expectations (French & Poska, 2007, p. 385).

Longman and Lafreniere (2012) mentioned Thelin's (2004) discovery that American colleges and universities began allowing women to attend in 1855 (p. 46). However, Durso (2002) remarked that "women could not officially enroll in the one theological seminary sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention" before 1902 (p. 63). Additionally, women were active in mission activities; young women and the wives of ministry students attended classes at the seminary. However, they did not complete assignments or take exams, they did not earn degrees, nor could they speak in class (Littlejohn, 1958, p. 8).

In 1904, Southern Baptist Seminary instituted a curriculum for women that excluded Greek, Hebrew, homiletics, and the course on pastoral duties. Instead, women were required to take "music, domestic science, elocution, personal work, and practical skills" (Durso, 2002, p. 63). Three years later, the female students at Southern Baptist Seminary were transferred to the Woman's Missionary Union Training School (WMUTS). They were allowed to participate in all classes fully and earned a degree upon completion of academic work (Mueller, 1959, pp. 13-15).

In the 1970s, Protestant denominations changed from professional marginality to allowing women to be ordained in the United States (Carroll et al., 1983, pp. 1-2). Charlton (1997) performed a longitudinal study of clergywomen she referred to as the pioneer generation because they were among "the first groups of women-as opposed to individual women-entering Master of Divinity programs leading to ordination" (p. 600). Due to the changes within Protestant denominations concerning the visible role of women in the 1970s, mainly Lutheran and Methodist, Charlton (1997) interviewed 30 women enrolled in the Master of Divinity

programs who expected to be ordained upon graduation. From their responses, Charlton (1997) discovered that the women realized they were first in their choice of educational training and occupation because many had never seen a woman pastor. They described their journeys as "long and sober" because "the combination of woman and minister was new" (p. 603).

Charlton (1997) reinterviewed the same clergywomen 15 years later, except for three because one woman passed away and two women did not complete their degree programs. During the second round of interviews, the women revealed that they experienced many negative interactions with people in their ministerial roles. Sometimes, "they were told directly and indirectly that being a woman in the professional role was unusual or unwelcome, hearing once again the theological argument against women's ordination, jokes made at their expense, situations they defined as sexual harassment" (p. 603).

One other study related to women attending MDiv degree programs at Baptist seminaries strictly focused on one institution, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS), from 2005 to 2009 (Kimak, 2010). Kimak's (2010) evaluation aimed to look closely at the MDiv degree program and determine what changes should be made to bring the program up to date. He unequivocally stated his belief that only men could fill the position of pastor and elders in the church. His concession for women was that they could minister to the body of Christ in other areas such as "women's ministries, children and education ministry, student ministry, counseling ministries, and others" and receive ministerial training in MDiv programs at seminaries (Kimak, 2010, p. 28). Longman and Lafreniere (2012) mentioned that, particularly in theological higher education, historical and theological patterns persisted concerning personal beliefs, authority structures, and gender roles (p. 48). Gallagher (2004) asserted that hierarchal order had been

successful historically and continued to propagate the "gender story" throughout conservative Protestants today (pp. 218-219).

Kimak (2010) first concluded that the overall MDiv program at SEBTS from 2005 to 2009 prepared students for ministry according to the perceptions of the alums, faculty, and school administration (p. 303). The study found that the students were well prepared in Bible courses, Theology, and Biblical languages; however, they were deficient in the practical areas of ministry. The findings also supported the notion that women in the MDiv program needed extra theological preparation (Kimak, 2010, p. 305).

Another conclusion of this study was that it followed a "mentor-based model of field education" (Kimak, 2010, p. 309). The alums, faculty, and school administration perceived that the school adequately provided enough congregational field sites for the students to experience training in a church setting and have mentors during that time (Kimak, 2010).

Despite some deficiencies, Kimak (2010) reported positive assertions from the alums, faculty, and administration. Some of the recommendations included more Bible exposition courses and the implementation of a Master of Theology (ThM) to replace the MDiv and offer dual degree options (pp. 314-315). One suggestion was for more intentional descriptions and identification of the purposes of the degree programs so that the students could follow a more direct and correct track to fulfill their ministry goals (p. 315). An additional recommendation of interest focused on field education and gaining commitment from area pastors, their wives, and both men and women church staff members to assist in mentoring the students (p. 316). Kimak (2010) stated that "the training of people for ministry must be continually evaluated and changed in order to meet the present challenges of the day" (p. 319).

Profile of the Current Study

The ongoing hot topic of whether women should be allowed in church leadership has produced copious amounts of scholarly research. However, research on women's attendance in Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree programs in any denomination has yielded sporadic results. Finding studies containing lived experiences of women in MDiv degree programs at Baptist seminaries regarding their treatment by peers and faculty was also deficient. Researchers mentioned that further research is needed to understand women's experiences while attending seminary in preparation for church leadership. This research study was an attempt to provide a platform for women seminarians to share their experiences while attending MDiv degree programs. The hope was that others would better understand how women were treated by their male classmates and faculty members, positively or negatively, and whether any relationship to the Role-Congruity Theory existed.

The literature review concerning traditional ministerial education and women in higher education supported the need for research on the treatment of women while pursuing education in Baptist MDiv degree programs due to a need for more research material on the topic. The following chapter evaluated the rationale for the research methodology chosen for this study and various aspects of the study's design and methods, including how the research participants were selected, the data collection procedures used, and the data analysis methods applied to further the knowledge base.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presented the qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological research methodology, including the design synopsis, the research problem, and the purpose. The research questions that guided the study, along with the setting, participants, and the role of the researcher, were defined. The ethical considerations, data collection methods and instruments, and data analysis were also explained.

Research Design Synopsis

The selection of a research design is complex. It entails understanding the problem, purpose, theory base (including prior research), and the nature of the data (Roberts, 2010; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The researcher must decide on the best approach to use for the topic to be studied. There were three research approaches: "qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 3).

The qualitative research approach involves "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4). Within this construct, researchers tend to examine the nature of a phenomenon in an area they are interested in, where "the meanings people attach to the activities and events in their world and are open to whatever emerges" (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 143).

One typically used method of qualitative research is phenomenological research. Two subsections of this research framework are interpretive and hermeneutic phenomenology. The viewpoint of Sloan and Bowe (2014) focused on hermeneutic phenomenology: "understanding the meaning of experience by searching for themes, engaging with the data interpretively, with less emphasis on the essences that are important to descriptive phenomenology" (pp.1295-96). Van Manen (2017) stated that the original aim of phenomenology was to bring awareness of an

experience that was endured, so analytical reflection of the "living meaning of this lived experience" takes place (p. 813). The researcher then reports the findings in a way that describes not only what the participants experienced but also how they experienced the phenomena.

The research population for this study was purposefully selected from Baptist Seminaries in Texas. Scholars agree that purposeful sampling is essential to phenomenological studies because the participants help the researcher understand the problem or phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Random purposeful sampling was determined as the best strategy for this study. Utilizing this strategy added credibility to the sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This researcher contacted the gatekeepers at the seminaries for a list of female MDiv graduates. However, due to their privacy policies, the schools contacted potential participants on the researcher's behalf. The interested parties decided on whether to contribute to the study.

Typically, researchers of qualitative studies work both inductively and deductively. They build "patterns, categories, and themes" by organizing data from detailed to more abstract components. This was accomplished by alternating between themes and the database to develop a thorough set of themes. The researcher then evaluated the data to determine if additional information was needed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181). This researcher collected data through interviews conducted "face-to-face interviews with participants, telephone interviews, or engages in focus group interviews with six to eight interviewees in each group" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 187). Open-ended questions were used so the participants' responses could be thoroughly explored while they reconstructed their experiences, as recommended by Seidman (2019).

The Problem

Women who serve or prepare to serve in ministry leadership may or may not receive adverse treatment because they do not fit the traditional image of a pastor, which is considered role incongruity (Eagly & Diekman, 2005; Ferguson, 2018). Extensive research has been conducted concerning women and their experiences with those who continue to believe that women must adhere to their traditional gender role, especially in religious organizations (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2020; Dulin, 2007; Ridgeway, 2001; Daniels & Leaper, 2011). However, scholarly literature that focused on female graduates of MDiv programs and their experiences with their male peers and faculty due to role incongruity was deficient and unavailable.

Purpose Statement

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experiences of female graduates of the Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Texas Baptist Seminaries. The lived experiences were generally defined as first-hand accounts and perceptions of female students who graduated from an MDiv program. The theory guiding this study was the Role-Congruity Theory as it related to the participants' experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. How do female experiences in MDiv programs differ from those of male classmates?

RQ2. How do the female graduates describe their relationships with classmates and faculty?

RQ3. What view did the female graduates develop on filling ministerial roles because of their experiences in their MDiv program?

Research Design and Methodology

Several design choices for qualitative research were considered: narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological methodology was chosen because this study aimed to gather information from the female participants concerning their lived experiences while involved in their respective Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs.

Bloomberg (2023) explained that phenomenology is comprised of two elements: philosophy and methodology. This type of study is guided by investigating the meaning, or the essence, of the phenomena experienced by research participants. There were two distinct types of phenomenology research rooted in philosophy to select from: descriptive or interpretive, otherwise called hermeneutic.

Creswell and Poth (2018) recognized Husserl, a German mathematician, as the developer of descriptive phenomenology (p. 75). Heidegger, a student of Husserl, further developed phenomenology into a hermeneutic perspective (Bloomberg, 2023). Sloan and Bowe (2014) further elaborated on hermeneutic phenomenology as focusing on "understanding the meaning of experience by searching for themes, engaging with the data interpretively, with less emphasis on the essences that are important to descriptive phenomenology" (pp.1295-96). The researcher reported the findings in a way that described not only what the participants experienced but also how they experienced the phenomena.

The design choice for this author was a hermeneutical phenomenological study. The viewpoint of female Master of Divinity (MDiv) graduates concerning their experiences with their male peers and faculty was critical for this author to understand. "Phenomenologists are committed to understanding what our experiences in the world are like; experience (*verstehen*) is

to be examined as it occurs and on its own terms (Smith et al., 2009; Vagle, 2016; van Manen, 1990, 2016)" (Bloomberg, 2023, p. 88). Using other qualitative approaches would have been a disservice to the participants because their experiences while preparing for ministry could not have been accurately presented.

Setting

This research focused on the lived experiences of female participants during their involvement in a Master of Divinity (MDiv) program at Baptist Seminaries in Texas. The researcher needed participants who met the required parameters of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The seminary gatekeepers contacted possible participants and emailed all materials about this research study. Once those interested contacted this researcher, the interviews were scheduled.

Bloomberg (2023) asserted that the recent COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to dissertation students in conducting research, but it also offered opportunities to use "socially-distant methods and tools" (p. 133). She also mentioned that ethical issues remain the same whether online or face-to-face research methods are used (p. 133). Due to the time constraints, physical distance between the researcher and participants, and familiarity with Zoom, the interviews and focus group discussions occurred through this online platform. All additional communications transpired through email.

Participants

A large population is required for quantitative research. In contrast, qualitative phenomenology research is used to study a smaller sample because the emphasis is "placed on details of the setting and or situation, the participants, and rich descriptions of the participant's experiences" (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 148). The recommended sample size

for research studies varied among scholars. Bloomberg (2023) stated, "There is no specific number of participants that are needed for a qualitative study" (p. 268). Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend a sample size of three to ten participants for phenomenological research (p. 186). Leedy and Ormrod (2019) recommend a range of five to 25 participants who have all experienced the phenomenon under study (p. 233). This researcher intended to select 12 to 15 female graduates from Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Baptist seminaries in Texas. The final number of contributing participants totaled 14 women who agreed to be included in this study.

This researcher originally expected to select participants through purposeful sampling because scholars agree that purposeful sampling is essential to phenomenological studies. The participants help the researcher understand the problem or phenomenon under examination (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Seminary gatekeepers were contacted for a list of female graduates so this researcher could randomly choose the participants. However, because of their student privacy policy restrictions, the gatekeepers assumed responsibility for contacting potential participants on the researcher's behalf.

Only adult female graduates were asked to articulate their experiences clearly to understand the phenomenon under study. The minimum age was 18, and there was no maximum age. Participants were not limited to any specific ethnic group because the phenomenon under study focused on the experiences of female graduates with their peers and faculty members while attending courses for a Master of Divinity (MDiv) at Baptist seminaries in Texas. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, persons named in the data, and the Baptist seminaries to protect the data they provided during the research.

Role of the Researcher

As an instrument of the study, this researcher conducted individual and focus group interviews with the participants, recorded, interpreted, and then reported the data. The researcher established an informal dialogue that permitted the contributors to control their responses to the interview questions. The semi-structured questions were asked, allowing for further probing, follow-up purposes, or clarification when the thoughts or responses were unclear (Liamputtong, 2011; Bloomberg, 2023).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stressed the importance of the researcher identifying any "biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status (SES) that shape their interpretations formed during a study" (p. 183). Self-reflection assisted in recognizing whether assertions were skewed because of her own experiences. Re-analyzing the data helped the investigator remain objective throughout this study.

This researcher recognized her connection to one of the research sites because she previously attended and graduated from that theological seminary. While some relatable experiences to the study were recalled, the bracketing process diminished the researcher's perspective, so the participants' voices were heard. Additionally, assumptions were limited by collecting enough data through participant interviews to reach saturation of the categories, which means there was nothing new to be discovered about the phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

There are many ethical considerations to contemplate when conducting human subject research. Ethical issues are categorized into four areas: "protection from harm, voluntary and informed participation, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 111). The priority for qualitative studies is confidentiality. All participants

must feel free to reveal their honest thoughts, feelings, and experiences with the interviewer, whether in one-on-one discussions or focus groups. Therefore, this researcher required participants to review the information sheet (see Appendix F) before agreeing to contribute to the study. All participants verbally confirmed they read all documents provided by the interviewer before each session began. Participation was voluntary; if, at any time, the contributors wanted to withdraw from the study, the researcher would have destroyed the data from the individual interviews, but any contributions to the focus groups would have been maintained per IRB guidelines.

The researcher sought to safeguard participants by assigning and using pseudonyms to protect their identities. Additionally, descriptors were assigned to each seminary to shield them from being readily identifiable. The researcher also requested that all focus group participants not share identities or information outside the group. Finally, all data and transcripts were securely stored on two password-protected electronic devices in a locked safe inside the researcher's home to prevent unwanted access to personal data.

Before beginning this research study, the researcher was required to acquire approval from Liberty's IRB. The primary purpose of the IRB is to ensure ethical practices and protect the people participating in research studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This researcher complied with all requirements from the IRB at Liberty University, the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, for the online Christian Leadership Doctoral program.

This researcher submitted recruitment materials, the information sheet, individual interview questions, the focus group questions, and an application to Cayuse IRB. The researcher attached these required documents to the application per the IRB instructions. Every document submitted to the IRB will be kept for at least three years after the study's conclusion per IRB

regulations. If necessary, the researcher will shred all hard copies of documents, information sheets, and data to dispose of personal data securely.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Qualitative research requires thoroughness and many data collection methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher was as thorough as possible by conducting virtual individual interviews and focus group discussions through Zoom. Zoom is a web-based video communication software that provides accessibility for multiple people in various areas of the United States to communicate online while recording interactions. These collection methods allowed the participants a safe environment to share their experiences of being women in Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Baptist Seminaries in Texas.

Collection Methods

Data collection for this process consisted of several steps. The first step was to contact the seminary gatekeepers to identify possible candidates for the study. Each gatekeeper was unique and worked in a different area depending on the participating organization. There were four in all; one was the Director of Master's Degree Programs, another was the Director of a Satellite Campus, and the third was the Vice President of Student Experience. The fourth gatekeeper was the Executive Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness.

Gatekeepers are individuals who allow the researcher access to the site and can also help provide insight into potential participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The next step was to contact the identified female graduates and inform them about the study. Those interested in participating emailed the researcher a completed demographic survey (Appendix G).

The data was collected through face-to-face interviews using Zoom, a web-based platform. This virtual resource provided access to recording services and transcripts of the recordings at no cost to the user. The data collected from these interviews was stored on two password-protected electronic devices in a locked safe that only the researcher could access to ensure the security of the information provided by the participants. The security of this data is crucial in protecting the confidential nature of the material.

Instruments and Protocols

In a qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher is the primary instrument responsible for making decisions that inform the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Data collection methods included a demographic survey, 14 individual interviews, and four focus groups. In qualitative research, the interview is often the most appropriate method to explore the studied phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Merriam & Tsdell, 2016). The interview process, including the focus group sessions, helped this researcher understand the participants' experiences.

The interview technique used by the interviewer for both the individual and focus group discussion was semi-structured and informal. This protocol allowed the researcher to use a mixture of questions to inform the study while also providing the opportunity to follow unexpected responses made by the participants. This flexibility permitted the respondents to describe the phenomenon in their own words, which provided deeper meaning and descriptions of their experiences.

Before engaging in the interview process, the researcher consulted with an expert panel to ensure the questions were not leading or showed no bias, as recommended by Schuttler (2022). All questions were provided to an expert panel of seminary educators for review and were found

acceptable, so no adjustments were needed. The questions used for the individual interviews are in Appendix H, and the focus group questions are in Appendix I.

As the researcher prepared to facilitate conversations with the participants, the pre-session preparation included re-familiarizing oneself with the questions, confirming the equipment was operational, and mentally preparing for directing groups. Guiding group conversations was exciting and required the facilitator to remind everyone about confidentiality. This included using pseudonyms, the requirement that everything discussed in the group remain private, and safeguarding personal information unless the other participants permitted their data to be shared outside the group.

Procedures

This researcher submitted all necessary resources and data collection methods to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The IRB approval letter is provided in Appendix A. The required resources have also been included in the appendices, such as the permission request letter (Appendix B), the permission response form (Appendix C), the recruitment form (Appendix D), the recruitment follow-up (Appendix E), the information sheet (Appendix F), the demographic survey (Appendix G), the interview questions (Appendix H), and the focus group questions (Appendix I).

Confidentiality is paramount, and the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requires researchers to maintain it (Liberty University, 2023). Liberty University IRB states:

Investigators and personnel conducting research on human subjects must agree to maintain in strict confidence the names, characteristics, questionnaire scores, ratings, incidental comments, and/or other information on all subjects and/or subjects' data they encounter so as not to conflict with State and/or Federal laws and regulations. (Liberty-University, 2023)

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher assigned the participants a biblical pseudonym, and their seminary was also assigned a biblical descriptor once they consented to the study. Additional confidentiality measures include limited access to the data by ensuring that the information on the participants, seminaries, and data retrieved from the study is safeguarded on a computer and a separate external hard drive stored in this researcher's home safe. All documentation and digital data related to the study are stored per the IRB regulations. They will remain in this researcher's possession for at least three years afterward, when all materials will be destroyed and deleted from the electronic devices.

Data Recording Procedures

Upon IRB approval, the seminaries were contacted and provided background and rationale information about the study (Appendix F). Once the participation agreement was received, the schools sent the recruitment (Appendix D) and demographic survey forms (Appendix G) to the proposed participants. When this researcher received the completed demographic surveys from the interested parties, their participation was confirmed, and individual interviews were scheduled.

The one-on-one and focus group interviews were conducted using the vetted video conferencing software Zoom, which recorded the sessions through audio and video. All participants granted permission for the recordings to take place. As part of the interview protocol, the researcher informed the participants that they could end the discussion without being penalized. If they had decided not to participate fully, then all the data provided would have been destroyed.

This digital recording platform provided the researcher with audio-only files, audio and video files, and transcripts. The data files were compared to determine the accuracy of the

recordings. If any errors were discovered, they were quickly evaluated and corrected before official data analysis occurred.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

The data analysis process was integrated throughout the development of this research study because qualitative data analysis does not have a definitive beginning point (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher used the five-step data analysis process that Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended. It included organizing and preparing the data, reviewing it, coding it, developing descriptions and themes, and using data to represent all descriptions and themes.

Analysis Methods

The first step of data analysis involves organizing and preparing the data. This included "transcribing interviews, optically scanning material, typing up field notes, cataloging all of the visual material, and sorting and arranging the data" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 193). Transcripts were evaluated and compared to the video files for accuracy. When errors or inconsistencies were identified, the researcher could correct them through an extensive evaluation process.

The second phase of data analysis was to review the data, which gave this researcher an impression of what the participants said about the phenomenon and the depth of the description (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Examining the data and recording ideas and thoughts concerning the meaning and patterns from the review also happened simultaneously.

The third data analysis step consisted of coding the data into segments or categories with a word or phrase representing them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Saldaña (2021) explained that using a phrase to identify a data unit and its meaning is considered a theme. Similar themes were

evaluated to determine whether the data was similar enough to create groups or remain in separate categories.

During the fourth step of data analysis, categories or themes were generated for analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The description contained details about the events, the people involved, and the places where the events happened. These portrayals were supported by evidence and direct quotes provided by the participants.

The final step in data analysis, presented by Creswell and Creswell (2018), was the representation of themes and the description in the narrative explanation of the findings. This process brought order, structure, and meaning to the data collected and reported (Bloomberg, 2023). Researchers recommend using qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) because it is simpler to store, organize, code, and determine patterns in the data (Bloomberg, 2023; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). There were numerous qualitative data analysis software options, but MAXQDA was chosen and used because it was the most versatile in its abilities.

This researcher was able to import all interview and focus group transcripts into MAXQDA for evaluation and coding. Initial coding resulted in over 50 codes, most of which were expected. Some of the codes were surprising, with one code being unfamiliar to this researcher. As similar codes were grouped, six main themes emerged. The first was program changes; the second theme was mentorship; the third was a combination of gender roles and role incongruity; the fourth was theological and Baptist denominational challenges; the fifth was external hindrances; and the final theme was self-doubt and 'imposter syndrome.'

Upon completion of theme development, the researcher validated the data by reviewing the final themes and comparing them to the original research questions. Validation of qualitative research confirms the reliability of information and ensures that the data are consistent with the

study's parameters. The research findings were captured and summarized to provide an interpretation of the conclusions, potential implications, and applications of the research, along with the need for future research.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness often determines qualitative research's quality, credibility, and accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher used reliability and validity strategies such as self-reflective bracketing, using an expert panel to evaluate the interview questions, and checking transcripts for accuracy. Qualitative research can be subjective and requires meticulous work to ensure valid results (Easton et al., 2000).

This researcher reflected on their seminary experiences to minimize preconceived notions or biases during data collection and analysis. An awareness of personal bias was extensively monitored throughout the study to maintain objectivity and accountability. The need for accountability included an expert panel of seminary educators evaluating the proposed questions for the interviews and focus groups to ensure they were not crafted toward a desired outcome.

Furthermore, all individual and focus group transcripts were meticulously examined for accuracy by reviewing the recordings while reviewing the transcribed data. These electronic documents were then edited to accurately reflect the participant's responses to the interviewer's questions. Trusting research results is vitally important to the research community. This section outlines the steps to ensure trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

The credibility of the research is the display of confidence this researcher has in the truth of this study's findings. The results must be believable, applicable, and capable of being replicated in future research. The researcher added credibility by verifying all fourteen individual interview transcripts and four focus group transcripts. Another tool to add credibility was the self-reflection and bracketing procedures used by this researcher. The researcher also increased credibility by using triangulation of the data. This included reporting challenging data, researcher bias, and process details (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability

Bloomberg (2023) describes research dependability as stable and consistent data over time. This is accomplished by thoroughly describing the data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Each interview used the same questions to guide the discussions and was scheduled for 90 minutes. The exact process was followed for the focus group sessions, each allotted 90 minutes. However, a different set of questions was presented. They were designed to build upon the individual interview segments. This researcher clearly outlined the research methods, instruments, processes, and data analysis so others could easily duplicate the research process.

Confirmability

Confirmability within this study included the true feelings and perceptions of female MDiv graduates concerning their experiences with their male classmates and professors at Baptist Seminaries in Texas. This researcher ensured that an audit trail highlighting each step throughout the study process was recorded and safeguarded for review to establish confirmability. The checking and rechecking of the data throughout the collection and analysis of

the data ensures that the findings are repeatable by others (Bloomberg, 2023). All data will be

maintained for three years from the date of the study, per IRB guidelines, and available upon

request by any future researchers.

Transferability

Transferability results from finding that the details of the study can be applied to

other settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Transferability could

be problematic since the findings are based on the participants' experiences. However, the

researcher used rich, thick descriptions, as Creswell & Creswell (2018) recommended.

Using in-depth details gives others a realistic picture of the setting, activity, and context. It

also assists others in determining whether the processes used in this study are transferable to

another field of study.

Chapter Summary

This phenomenological study aimed to explore and understand the experiences of Master

of Divinity (MDiv) women graduates from Texas Baptist seminaries. Specifically, this chapter

provided information on the research process utilized in this study. The reader was introduced to

the research methodology, the study, the participants, ethical considerations, the data collection

methods, the instruments, and the protocols used for data collection. The strategies used

heightened the quality of the study through trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and

transferability, which were presented and outlined in the text. Careful consideration was given to

listening intently to the participants and accurately presenting their voices and experiences. This

researcher recorded the interview and focus group data and then painstakingly analyzed the data

electronically. Furthermore, the actions taken to safeguard the identities of the participants and

the seminaries were discussed. The goal of Chapter Three was to provide the necessary support

for the research design to ensure a quality research study was conducted.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experiences of female graduates of the Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Texas Baptist Seminaries. The theory guiding this study was the Role-Congruity Theory as it related to the participants' experiences. Chapter One explored the historical, sociological, theological, and theoretical nuances of traditional thought and beliefs concerning ministerial education and leadership. Chapter Two reviewed the current literature regarding the biblical and theological viewpoints on women in the body of Christ, along with the historical development of American legislation proving women equal opportunities for education and employment. Chapter Three outlined the phenomenological methodology, identified the study's sample population parameters, and acknowledged the data collection and analysis process. Now, Chapter Four will present the compilation protocols, demographic and sample data, and the results of the data analysis process.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

This study explored the experiences of women who attended and graduated from MDiv programs at Baptist Seminaries in Texas. Qualitative studies seek to "establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the participants' views" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 17). A significant gap was identified after researching the available literature about women pursuing theological education and ministry leadership. This study gained critical insight into the dilemma women continue to encounter, which can inform future decisions in the body of Christ.

The protocols and investigative measures outlined here below were implemented to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do female experiences in MDiv programs differ from those of male classmates?

RQ2. How do the female graduates describe their relationships with classmates and faculty?

RQ3. What view did the female graduates develop on filling ministerial roles because of their experiences in their MDiv program?

Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), this researcher solicited the participation of female alums through six Baptist Seminaries in Texas. Initial email correspondence included Appendix B (Permission Request Form), Appendix C (Permission Response Form), Appendix D (Recruitment Form), and Appendix F (Information Sheet) to inform the schools about the nature of the research study and to gain permission to contact the female MDiv alums.

Three negative replies citing institutional privacy policies were received immediately. Alternatively, three positive replies were received after a few weeks containing proposals that the gatekeepers would reach out to their alums on behalf of the researcher. The following information about the study was requested and then forwarded to the prospective study contributors through email: Appendix D (Recruitment Form), Appendix F (Information Sheet), Appendix G (Demographic Survey), and Appendix H (Interview Questions). All materials were reviewed and approved by seminary staff before being distributed. This study would have been difficult to complete without agreeing to this slightly altered method for reaching potential participants.

Even with the assistance of the gatekeepers, it was a struggle to reach the intended sample of 12 to 15 participants. Mount Sinai Seminary reported that the study information was sent to eight potential participants. Three of the eight female MDiv graduates (37.57%) completed the demographic surveys and stated their willingness to participate. Qumran Seminary

supplied the study information to four women, and one (25%) positive confirmation of participation was received. Seven women MDiv graduates from Mount Moriah Seminary were contacted, and all (100%) responded that they wanted to participate. Finally, Galilee Seminary provided three out of three (100%) affirmative replies for participation in the study.

The positive response times were varied. However, within a week, seven women expressed interest and asked to be involved in the study. The scheduling of the individual interviews began upon receipt of the demographic surveys while waiting to receive responses of positive interest from other potential participants.

The web-based platform Zoom was utilized to conduct all face-to-face interviews. Three driving factors for using this product were the participants' comfort, time constraints to complete the interviews, and physical distance between the interviewer and contributors. This electronic forum also provided audio and video recordings, along with transcripts of the interviews, that allowed the researcher to review and compare to ensure the accuracy of the data. Transcription is a valuable service used frequently to provide a written data record; it also saves valuable time and produces more accurate reports than notetaking (Clements, 2023).

Two gatekeepers inquired about the sample population and whether more participants were needed. Upon hearing that the desired sample size had not been reached, they initiated contact within a network of close associates to garner attention for this research study. Through this additional step, seven more female MDiv alumni from Texas Baptist seminaries agreed to provide data for this research study.

A change in IRB regulations eliminated the previous requirement for signed consent from participants. Instead, they could determine whether they wanted to participate by contacting the researcher after reading the Information Sheet (Appendix F) (D. S. Bass, personal

communication, August 28, 2023). The participants completed the demographic surveys, and once they were received, the one-on-one interviews were scheduled. The final number of individuals who contributed information about their seminary experiences totaled 14 from four institutions, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Female MDiv Graduates and Seminaries
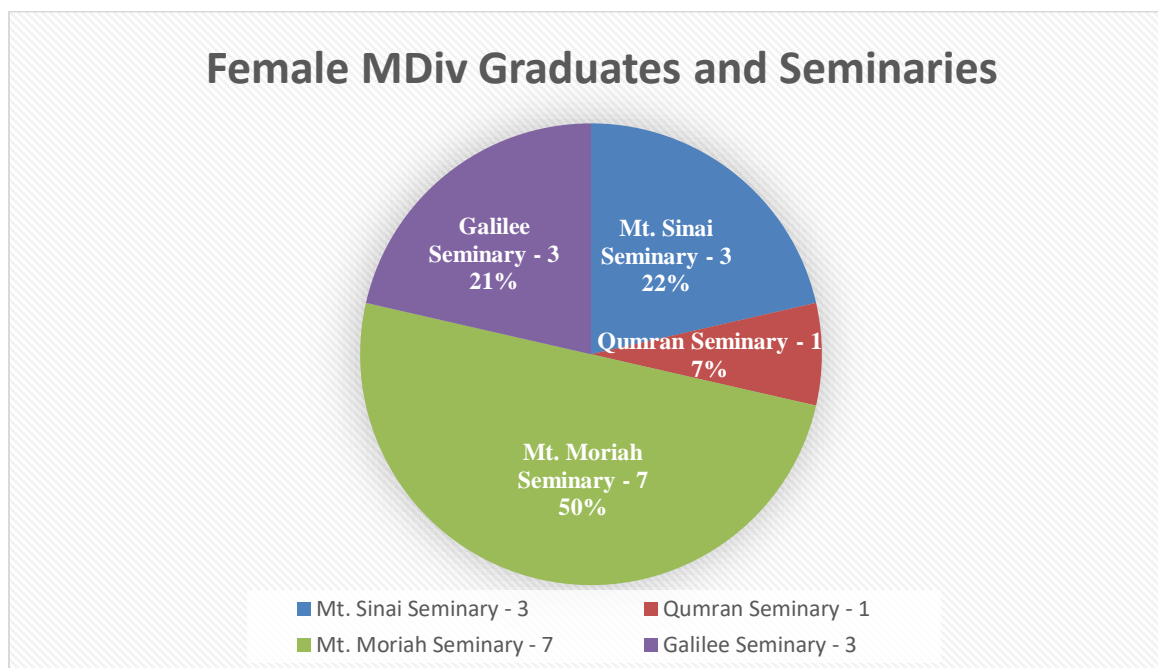
When the one-on-one interviews were almost completed, the proposed focus group interview dates were presented to all participants to accommodate their schedules best. Initially, three group interviews were scheduled. However, a fourth group was created due to unforeseen circumstances and scheduling conflicts. Participation was voluntary, and individuals were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. If any contributors had disengaged from the study, their input would not have been included as stated in the Information Sheet (Appendix F) electronically provided to each participant before the research study began.

The web-based platform was again solely used to conduct three of the four focus group interviews, with the last group having been in a hybrid format with both virtual interviews and written submissions shared by the interviewer. Each group comprised a combination of participants from different seminaries due to their availability. The groupings were scheduled and are listed as follows: Focus Group A contained a mix of five participants (Lydia, Esther, Martha, Priscilla, and Naomi) from three schools (Mt. Sinai, Mt. Moriah, and Galilee), Focus Group B consisted of three women (Hannah, Miriam, and Abigail) from just two of the seminaries (Mt. Sinai and Mt. Moriah), Focus Group C ended up with only two attendees (Tabitha and Phoebe) who were in some of the same courses at Mt. Moriah, and within Focus Group D, special accommodations were made for four of the participants (Deborah, Sarah, Rachel, and Ruth) from all four seminaries (Mt. Sinai, Qumran, Mt. Moriah, and Galilee) through a hybrid format of both virtual interviews and written submissions due to medical emergencies and scheduling conflicts as seen in Table 1. The researcher shared written submissions during the focus group session to ensure everyone's input was included.

Table 1

Focus Group Assignments

PSEUDONYM	SEMINARY CODE	FOCUS GROUP
Lydia	Galilee	A
Esther	Mt. Sinai	A
Martha	Galilee	A
Priscilla	Mt. Moriah	A
Naomi	Mt. Moriah	A
Hannah	Mt. Moriah	B
Miriam	Mt. Moriah	B
Abigail	Mt. Sinai	B
Tabitha	Mt. Moriah	C
Phoebe	Mt. Moriah	C
Deborah	Qumran	D
Sarah	Mt. Sinai	D
Rachel	Mt. Moriah	D

Ruth	Galilee	D

The interviews followed an informal, semi-structured protocol to guide the discussions while allowing the participants to share their experiences freely. The questions were open-ended to allow the contributors to delve deeper into the meaning and descriptions of their seminary experiences, which was the focus of the study (Van Manen, 1997). This permitted the interviewer to pursue unexpected responses by asking follow-up questions. This method also allowed for clarification of any unclear data. A copy of the questions was available in case of interruptions or if data loss occurred while recording the interviews, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Expert Panel

Scholars recommend that researchers have all interview questions reviewed through either pilot testing or third-party experts, commonly called an expert panel (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schuttler, 2022). This researcher used an expert panel of seminary educators to review the questions for individual interviews and focus groups. The questions were acceptable to the expert panel, so no changes were made.

Self-Reflective Bracketing

Scholars lack agreement on 'bracketing' as a method of self-reflection while researching a phenomenon that the researcher can relate to and what that entails (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, a consensus has been reached about the researcher being honest about his or her previous experiences related to the phenomenon and any presuppositions, theories, biases, or assumptions that may be held related to the subject matter under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; and Tufford & Newman, 2010).

As the investigative instrument of a phenomenological research study, this researcher considered and reflected on their experiences as a seminary student to minimize bias or preconceived notions during data collection and analysis. Tufford and Newman (2010) present three standard techniques researchers can use to reflect on preconceptions and enhance their awareness of the topic under study. The approaches are memoing, conducting interviews with others outside the study, and journaling emotions during the research process (p. 87). The memoing option allowed the researcher to acknowledge her historical background and prior experience attending a ministry degree program at a Baptist seminary in Texas.

This researcher recalled and recorded two instances where a male professor disapproved of women in seminary and ministry. Firstly, the professor ignored the presence of the only female student in his course. When directly asked about the research paper, he disliked the topic. The less-than-professional comments were hand-written on the document, and the grade reflected his perspective.

The second event involved the same professor in the same course. In front of the class, he stated his beliefs that men were to lead and women were to submit to male authority. He referenced the biblical passage where Paul taught his protégé about the best course for dealing with disruptive women in the church, 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Women are to learn quietly; they cannot teach or be in an authoritative role over men; the woman was solely at fault for the entrance of sin into the world; God made Adam first and Eve second, and women can be saved by having children.

This researcher remembered that even though one professor did not appreciate the presence of women in either the classroom or ministry, the other professors exuded encouragement and support for the women in attendance. These encounters enabled this

researcher to empathize and maintain objectivity upon hearing about the research subjects'

ordeals. By memoing these remembrances, the researcher tracked impressions of data meaning

and recorded an internal dialogue (Bloomberg, 2023).

Data Coding

The researcher of this hermeneutical phenomenological study used inductive and

deductive techniques to develop themes within the data acquired through interviews and focus

group discussions. This process developed "patterns, categories, and themes" by continuously

alternating between themes and the database, establishing a comprehensive set of themes

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181).

As mentioned previously in Chapter Three, researchers recommend using qualitative data

analysis software (QDAS), and MAXQDA was the software utilized for this study. This software

program was economical, user-friendly, and versatile, and it documented and cataloged all data.

The researcher employed the five-step data analysis process that Creswell and Creswell (2018)

presented for data coding. The first step involved transcribing, scanning, and typing notes from

individual and focus group interviews to prepare the data for analysis. The second step included

a closer evaluation of the data by comparing the transcripts with the video recordings to ensure

the accuracy of the information provided. An intelligent transcript optimizes clarity and

maximizes readability (McMullin, 2021). Step three included importing all documents into

MAXQDA, organizing the text in data blocks, and labeling them. Themes were then shaped into

a general description for the fourth step. Finally, similar codes and themes were grouped, while

some were unique and could not be logically combined.

The researcher followed a traditional approach where the codes emerge during the data

analysis portion of a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By proceeding with this method, initial

coding yielded over 50 codes. However, after several reviews, the researcher noticed that while most codes were expected, some were surprising, and one was unusual and unexpected. The main themes identified were program changes, mentorship, gender roles, and role incongruity, theological/Baptist denominational challenges, external hindrances, self-doubt, and 'imposter syndrome.'

Demographic and Sample Data

As outlined by this study's information sheet (Appendix F), all participants were to be female graduates from Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Baptist Seminaries in Texas. Various recommendations on population sample size are provided by scholars, ranging from no specifications to anything between three and 25 participants (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; and Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The study aimed to reach a sample size of 12 to 15 women alums, so no restrictions were placed on ethnicity or a maximum age. It was assumed that the participants would be over 18 due to the requirement of graduating from a master's degree program, and a population of 14 was reached.

Scholars recommend assigning pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). All research subjects and their respective seminaries were assigned Biblical pseudonyms to protect their identities and the data provided during the research. These pseudonyms were used throughout the data collection process and maintained in a participant list, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Participants Descriptors

BIBLICAL PSEUDONYM	BIBLICAL SEMINARY CODE	YEAR GRADUATED	AGE RANGE	ETHNICITY	RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION
Sarah	Mt. Sinai Seminary	2023	30-39	Caucasian/White	Non-Denominational

Abigail	Mt. Sinai Seminary	2019	60+	African American/Black	Intra-Denominational
Esther	Mt. Sinai Seminary	2019	60+	African American/Black	Baptist
Deborah	Qumran Seminary	2017	60+	Caucasian/White	Baptist
Tabitha	Mt. Moriah Seminary	2019	40-49	Caucasian/White	Baptist
Phoebe	Mt. Moriah Seminary	2018	30-39	Caucasian/White	Baptist
Hannah	Mt. Moriah Seminary	2021	30-39	Hispanic	Baptist
Priscilla	Mt. Moriah Seminary	2011	30-39	Caucasian/White	Baptist
Naomi	Mt. Moriah Seminary	2010	60+	Caucasian/White	Baptist
Miriam	Mt. Moriah Seminary	2022	40-49	Asian-Eastern	Baptist
Rachel	Mt. Moriah Seminary	2020	20-29	Caucasian/White	Non-Denominational
Lydia	Galilee Seminary	2020	30-39	Caucasian/White	Baptist
Martha	Galilee Seminary	2016	30-39	Caucasian/White	Baptist
Ruth	Galilee Seminary	2018	30-39	African American/Black	Baptist

Note. Table 2 lists the demographic descriptions of the participants, including Biblical pseudonyms for each individual and seminary, the graduation dates, age ranges, ethnicity, and religious affiliation.

Data Analysis and Findings

This researcher considered the data analysis portion of the data collection process integral and demanding. It can be challenging to separate the aspects of data gathering from data analysis because they are interwoven throughout the qualitative research undertaking (Vagle, 2018). The interview and focus group questions explored the lived experiences of female alums from Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Texas Baptist Seminaries and role incongruity to answer the

three research questions for this study. The following section highlights the study's findings correlating to each research question.

Research Question One: Differences Between Female and Male Experiences

The first area of exploration with the participants consisted of understanding their perceptions about their classmates and faculty's treatment of them while pursuing an MDiv degree. Interviews were conducted individually and then in group settings to discover whether their experiences were positive or negative and if there were any underlying causes. Once each transcript was analyzed and coded, the researcher reduced the codes into themes by combining similar codes. The theme, gender roles/role incongruity, aligned with the first research question (RQ1): How do female experiences in MDiv programs differ from those of male classmates?

Every female MDiv alum stated that overall, their experiences at the seminary were positive, but they provided some general observations and shared some unexpected situations. In Focus Group A, Priscilla commented that her male classmates had mentors, whereas the women did not, leading to feelings of isolation. She believed this was due to the predominantly male population of both faculty and students. In Focus Group B, Tabitha mentioned that her male classmates held pastoral positions at local churches, which afforded them access to technological resources, like software and video equipment, to complete specific assignments that she and the other women students did not have. She admitted to frustration and stress because the lack of opportunity to use the equipment and acquire knowledge of these needed resources caused them extra work to accomplish the assignments.

During the initial interview with Tabitha, she relayed that a male professor announced that female students had higher GPAs than men. She felt uncomfortable with it because it seemed "over-positive" about women in seminary. She preferred the faculty to show their

acceptance of female students through equal treatment instead of an announcement referring to their intelligence. On the other hand, Abigail had a male professor give her a lower final grade than her male classmates even though she outperformed them on all assignments. When she approached him about it, he told her that maybe in the next class she took with him, she would get a better grade. This professor showed partiality toward the males when it came to grading. Abigail also revealed that this instructor made disparaging comments in the class about women in ministry and seeking Christian education. Complaints were made, but her grade was not changed, so she made sure she completed her degree without having any other courses with him.

During Phoebe's interview, she described an incident where the professor made some off-hand comments about women in the Baptist denomination, specifically that "it was unfair that women could not participate in Baptist life the same as men." She also stated that when it was her turn to preach, he said, "Oh no, you're not allowed to preach." She understood the limitations placed on women in the Baptist denomination and felt the professor was only teasing her, but she was caught off-guard and felt awkward.

Eight of the interviewees, Rachel, Naomi, Martha, Sarah, Ruth, Priscilla, Tabitha, and Hannah, provided instances of negative comments made by male classmates who expressed their beliefs that women were not allowed to be ministry leaders precisely because of their gender and biblical passages were referenced as supporting evidence, such as 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; and Ephesians 5:21-33. The researcher discovered the complementarian argument in these Scriptures, and others used to prevent women from serving in church leadership during her literature review, which is discussed in further detail in Chapter Two.

Some interviewees revealed they did not attempt to present their position, but others did. Ruth described an incident where one of her older male classmates continually interrupted her

during her presentation to the class and explained the material she was speaking on. After the third time, she responded to him and asked why he was doing it to her when he had not done so to the men, and she told him, "I've got this; I don't need you to do my part." Her reply set the tone with her classmates for the remainder of her time in school.

Naomi, Phoebe, Abigail, and Tabitha, from Focus Group C, commented that their male classmates sought their help with studying. Naomi and Tabitha remarked that they were viewed as older sisters or mother figures and not someone to compete with since they were about ten years older than their cohorts. Tabitha also added that the men discussed having their wives do their schoolwork so they could concentrate on their pastoral duties.

Hannah shared that she grew up in a family where most men were pastors. They initially supported her going to seminary until she contributed to their theological conversations, and then it became a problem. She stated that Hispanic culture teaches that the men are the leaders of the family while the women keep the home and raise the children. As she progressed in her degree program, her theological perspective changed and directly conflicted with the traditional social roles for women of her ethnicity.

Hannah also experienced adverse treatment from classmates and one of her male professors. When she shared her opinion in a group discussion that contrasted with theirs, they asked her what her husband thought, and one of her female classmates even commented on her being "a real woman now" since she was married. She was perplexed by their attitudes toward her. She felt that her opinion did not matter and that they believed her husband was to have control over her beliefs.

In her chapel course, the professor separated the males from the females. Hannah struggled with her group because they were not focused on the assignment, so she requested to

change groups. The professor refused to grant her request even after some of her male classmates also asked for the groups to be integrated so they could hear different perspectives. When she later approached him about it, he shut down the discussion, and his demeanor toward her after that was more indifferent without completely ignoring her.

In the Focus Group A discussion, Esther shared that a professor recommended her for an award sponsored by a local Baptist church upon graduation. She described how she fulfilled all the requirements to apply for it but received no feedback concerning the next steps. While in line to receive her diploma, she noticed the male graduate in front of her had two cards in his hand, but she only had one. She asked him about it, and he said he had received an award. He told her he had been interviewed after submitting all required documentation. It was the same one she had applied for but received no follow-up communications about. She expressed deep hurt by this because, upon further discovery, this church did not support women pursuing theological education for ministry purposes.

Research Question One Summary

Conducting individual interviews and focus group discussions allowed the researcher to learn about any issues the participants wanted to share while attending an MDiv degree program at a Texas Baptist seminary. The transcripts of these conversations revealed a pattern that developed into the theme of gender roles/role incongruity.

The researcher identified the following events as examples that aligned with the theme of gender roles/role incongruity by looking at them through scholarly definitions. Gender roles are when men and women are expected to possess specific characteristics, skills, values, and motives to perform tasks stereotypically associated with their gender (Wood & Eagly, 2002). Likewise, role congruity is when a group's characteristics align with their typical social role (Eagly &

Diekman, 2005). As the participants shared their experiences, they collectively painted a vivid picture that showed them masterfully performing outside of the expected gender roles, which some of their classmates and professors appeared to struggle with.

Research Question Two: Descriptions of Relationships with Classmates and Faculty

The second research question asked, How do the female graduates describe their relationships with classmates and faculty? The desired outcome of this question was understanding the nuances of the seminary classroom environment and the interactions between the students and professors. Out of 14 participants, 13 of them had predominantly positive responses about the relationships that developed during the time spent with classmates and professors, while one graduate provided a less-than-favorable observation. The corresponding theme that developed during data analysis was mentorship. Some participants experienced a mentoring relationship with faculty, whereas others did not.

Tabitha sensed a deeper connection with the female faculty because there were many parallels in their lives concerning children and serving in similar ministry areas at their churches. She also connected with some male classmates and maintained those relationships post-seminary. Ruth noticed that the women professors were more nurturing without being indulgent; she also stated they understood "real-life events" in their students' lives more. One of her male classmates was both a pastor and a friend. She stated that he assisted all the black seminarians equally with a church home, provided preaching opportunities, and spiritually invested in them. Lydia expressed that the professors at Galilee Seminary provided a great learning environment, especially for women, because of the controversy surrounding women and their involvement in ministry.

Abigail and Sarah shared that no female professors were in the Christian Studies Department at Mt. Sinai Seminary. They noted that their male professors were knowledgeable and provided a conducive learning environment for all students, whether online or in person. Esther attended the same school, but her experiences with the online instructors differed. She remarked that they were neither friendly nor supportive. She claimed she did not interact with her classmates outside of their online assignments, so there were no further contributions to the discussion.

Martha attended Galilee Seminary, Deborah's program was at Qumran Seminary, and Hannah and Miriam went to Mt. Moriah Seminary. All four ladies experienced traumatic personal events while attending their respective seminaries. Each one commented that their female professors were very supportive and encouraging while they dealt with these complex events. It was also noted that their male classmates were courteous, respectful, and supportive of their presence in a male-dominated program.

During all discussion sessions, the topic of mentorship was reviewed, and the consensus of the participants was that it would have been helpful if it had been officially provided as part of the MDiv programs at all seminaries. Three categories of mentorship were addressed: official, unofficial, and none provided. In Focus Group A, Esther experienced feelings of anonymity due to her online courses. She surmised that assigning mentors in that environment was probably more challenging. However, if she had someone communicate with her regularly through email or phone calls, she believed it would have been beneficial.

Tabitha and Phoebe shared an experience in their preaching class where the male professor coached the male students on their attire but did not share anything with the women. During their research, outside of class, they found preaching robes, but only for certain

denominations. They conferred with one another on their outfits before delivering their sermons because they did not have female role models at Mt. Moriah Seminary. They expressed their desire for guidance and mentorship, but it was not available in their program. Phoebe also relayed how mentorship was built into her undergraduate program and believes it would be especially "helpful for women in the MDiv program because women are not of the expected gender for ministry." Similarly, Deborah wondered why her school did not provide mentorship or another program to connect Qumran seminary students with a church or other ministry organization.

While attending the MDiv program, Priscilla worked on one of the Mt. Moriah Seminary satellite campuses. One of her female professors unofficially initiated a mentoring relationship, helping her realize and pursue her true calling in higher education leadership instead of missions. She agreed that official mentorship for female seminary students would be beneficial just as it was for her.

Ruth received mentoring from both official and unofficial sources at Galilee Seminary. Her professor of record for internship and fieldwork was likewise the sponsor of the school's Black Students Association, and he mentored her in the MDiv program. She also received mentorship through unofficial channels from local women pastors associated with the school through the alum group. They attended campus events to connect with the seminary students and provide them with mentoring opportunities in preparation for ministry positions upon graduation.

Research Question Two Summary

Regarding RQ2, how do the female graduates describe their relationships with classmates and faculty? All but one of the participants responded positively. One theme that emerged from the data analysis and coding process that aligns with answering this question is mentorship. The

female graduates described three types of mentoring relationships: official, unofficial, and none provided.

Research Question Three: Views Developed on Filling Ministry Roles after Seminary

The third research question asked, What view did the female graduates develop on filling ministerial roles due to their experiences in their MDiv programs? The data revealed four themes that contributed to the negative outlooks about serving in ministry after graduation: external hindrances, self-doubt and imposter syndrome, program changes, and theological and Baptist denomination challenges. However, three participants shared their positive views toward serving in ministerial roles once they completed their MDiv programs.

Abigail's favorable view toward filling a ministerial position upon completing her MDiv program developed because of the support she received from her church and the theological education and training she attained in school. Ruth's positive outlook on filling a church leadership position initially stemmed from the self-confidence instilled in her by her family. From an early age, she learned about the family history of pastors, both men and women. She shared that her father pastors a Baptist church, and he raised her with a Scriptural understanding that God calls men and women equally to serve in the body of Christ as pastors. Ruth exclaimed that her seminary training reinforced her belief, which she was excited to share with others.

Esther also exhibited a favorable outlook toward fulfilling her ministerial calling. Her husband is a Baptist pastor, and she struggled with her calling, knowing that in the Baptist tradition, women are not readily accepted in leadership roles. Her husband encouraged her to pursue an MDiv degree to complement her affinity for studying God's Word. She explained that on one of the visits to her sister's home church, the pastor told her, "Yeah, you have a call." The

event affirmed her calling to ministry and gave her the confidence to step out in faith and obey God's will for her life.

Additionally, some participants expressed doubts about being prepared for ministry upon completing their seminary education. The first of four themes that arose from the study's process of data analysis and coding portions was external hindrances. Two ladies expressed concern about completing their degree programs due to finances (Esther and Rachel). Deborah struggled with a severe medical condition, which impacted her lifelong dream of going to seminary. She stated that her female advisor and some of her professors encouraged her and helped her persevere. As soon as she finished her preaching courses, she was placed on a rotating schedule at a nursing home as a preacher. Her condition worsened after a few years, and she could no longer continue in that capacity.

Miriam's experience was different; her cultural background is Asian, and the women are quiet. The Baptist church, where she is on staff as an administrative assistant, does not support women in ministry leadership roles. She also had a spouse who supported her ministry goals and education in the beginning but then decided it was more than he wanted to deal with, so she divorced her. Similarly, Hannah went through a traumatic divorce because her spouse decided he was not going to support her in pursuing ministry. What happened to Phoebe was that her MDiv program was accelerated so she could accept a position that required her to have the degree before employment; otherwise, she would have forfeited the job opportunity.

Four participants commented that sometimes women put limitations on themselves and what they can accomplish. The second theme developed during coding that negatively affected the participants' outlook on pursuing ministry leadership is self-doubt and imposter syndrome, which was an unexpected finding for the researcher. Ruth demonstrated a passion for pastoring

and embraced the preaching courses offered, whereas some female classmates shied away from that area. She admitted that she prefers being the number two pastor because many responsibilities fall on the lead pastor, and she is uncomfortable in that role.

Priscilla discussed having an adjustment period going into her MDiv classes because she was the only female. She questioned her purpose for being there because there were no other women, so she developed negative feelings that were largely self-imposed. She used the term 'imposter syndrome' to describe her uncertainty about entering a degree program dominated by men. Priscilla then explained that she had changed her viewpoint and decided to accept the challenge before her so she could accomplish something she had never thought she could do.

Lydia opened up after Priscilla shared this in the focus group A session. She shared that she also experienced the 'imposter syndrome' feelings, which were primarily influenced by the Baptist denominational world. She referred to the dissonance of Baptist doctrine limiting women in ministry while attending a Baptist seminary that was very encouraging and supportive of women pursuing a pathway to ministry leadership. In focus group B, Hannah also felt intimidated while attending classes. She revealed she was the only female and much younger than her classmates. Almost all the men in her class were much older and lead pastors at their churches, but she did not have a ministry position while attending school. The lack of ministry experience left her feeling inferior compared to her classmates.

The following data point identified as affecting the development of the participants' view toward filling ministry positions was the need for course changes. Three interviewees expressed positive attitudes about their place in church leadership positions after graduation. However, they agreed with the 11 other research subjects that some aspects of the MDiv program need

adjusting. All commented that a more diverse selection of textbook authors and perspectives was needed because most of the material was written by white males, with the content focused on men and their experiences in church leadership. There was a unanimous consensus that more female professors were needed so that students could learn different perspectives about ministry.

Another area of contention they all agreed on was the lack of courses that presented some historical background on female theologians like Macrina, courses on Biblical women, electives in women in ministry, black theology, pastoral care, discernment, spiritual formation, and even emotional and multi-cultural intelligence. Tabitha also submitted the idea that courses about other ministry areas, like children's ministry, should be offered because the MDiv program is specifically geared toward learning about the role of the senior/lead pastor and their challenges. She asserted that many pastors do not understand the other areas of ministry, so when problems arise, the solutions implemented are not always appropriate.

Naomi said the MDiv program did not prepare her for a chaplaincy position. She loved the classes and professors at Mt. Moriah Seminary, but further education was needed to help her fulfill her calling. She had to accomplish hundreds of additional internship hours in a hospital and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) to gain certification as a chaplain.

The fourth data point that answers the third research question is theological and Baptist denomination challenges. Many scholars argue that men are the leaders in all areas of society and women are to be in support roles only. For this study, the researcher adopted the definition of complementarianism from Barr (2020), which is the belief in a gender hierarchy where women are subordinate to men. Women are denied opportunities in the pulpit and church leadership, the Submission of wives to their husbands is emphasized, and women's leadership in society is also

opposed (Williams, 2022). This perspective remains in the Baptist denomination and churches and has presented difficulties for the study participants.

Naomi grew up a Methodist and was unaware of the debate on whether women could be in ministry leadership until she entered the Baptist arena later in life. Similarly, Lydia was raised in the Assemblies of God church and had no idea that women in ministry were controversial until she attended seminary. Once there, she learned about Baptist history and the doctrinal views about women being excluded from leadership roles.

Miriam discussed being part of two different worlds because she is Asian and serves in the Korean Baptist community, where women are supported as pastors; they can preach, teach, and be ordained. She is also a member of a local Baptist church where the leadership does not support women being ordained. Miriam explained that she is mindful of what she says because of her role as an administrative assistant in the church where she is a member.

In focus group A, Lydia shared her belief that the MDiv program did not prepare her for ministry work because no discussions were had about what women experience in Baptist churches. She wanted to learn which churches affirm women while being part of the Baptist denomination to "smooth the learning curve when you exit seminary."

Sarah recently graduated from Mt. Sinai Seminary and shared a discussion with a male professor about why the school allows women to go through the MDiv program when they do not seem to have a place in Baptist church leadership. He referred to Title IV and equal rights legislation as the reason behind the school's acceptance of women. She responded that she was unprepared for what would happen to her as a woman seeking a ministry leadership position. She has struggled with getting hired in a Baptist church and has been told that she does not have

enough experience, yet she cannot gain the training needed due to being a woman. The professor told her she might want to consider attending a different denomination.

Rachel shared her thoughts on women's difficulty stepping into church leadership roles. She stated it "circles back to the viewpoint that only certain roles women can fill in ministry due to their gender." She disagrees with this perspective and will encourage other women to pursue their calling from God. In focus group C, Tabitha emphatically stated, "They did not prepare me for ministry within the Baptist church!" She shared that pastors have told her she cannot work in ministry leadership due to attending a Baptist seminary and acquiring a Baptist theological perspective. She has struggled with remaining in the Baptist denomination and does not believe there is a place for her in a Baptist church. She thinks there is a place for everyone in the body of Christ because God calls everyone into different areas that would support lead pastors in getting things accomplished. She wondered aloud, "Why would you want to exclude some and then carry the burden all by yourself?"

Hannah also shared that she does not feel called to be a lead pastor but would be obedient to God if she were. Her family's theological beliefs are complementarian in nature, and they are all members of a Baptist church with strong views on what jobs are acceptable for women. They did not support her going to seminary, and when she would attempt to share what she was learning, especially about the preaching class, her family would not listen to her.

Her in-laws support her work in children's ministry, but that is because she does not lead men. They do not believe that God calls women to be pastors in the same manner that men are called to be pastors. They are also critical of her marriage and do not approve of their son treating her as an equal partner. Furthermore, Hannah did not feel adequately prepared by the seminary for the realities of the work environment within a Baptist church.

Evaluation of the Research Design

This hermeneutical phenomenological qualitative study applied a lived experience design that focused on describing a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This research explored the lived experiences of female MDiv graduates from Texas Baptist Seminaries with role incongruity. The study design allowed the participants to share their perceptions of the treatment they received from their classmates and faculty. These discussions yielded deep, rich, and extensive data from events while attending seminary.

Bloomberg (2023) points out that studying several individuals through interviews and focus groups, who all experienced the same phenomenon, elicits interest among the group and increases the exchange of opinions and views on the shared events. The virtual focus group setting allowed for a group discussion on the challenges they faced while attending their MDiv programs. As one participant would present a story, several other participants verbally agreed or added their contributions or stories, enhancing the argument.

This researcher had trouble reaching the intended contributors through random purposeful sampling because of the student privacy policies for each school. The gatekeepers offered an alternative approach: They contacted the female MDiv alums, and then whoever wished to participate in the study could contact the researcher. Incorporating this nontraditional recruiting option allowed the targeted sample population of 12-15 participants to be achieved.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, 14 female MDiv alumni were individually interviewed and then participated in four focus groups. The researcher relied on Zoom's web-based platform to conduct all discussions, which produced audio and video recordings and session transcripts. The researcher thoroughly compared each transcript with the corresponding recordings to ensure the accuracy of the captured data. Throughout the data analysis process,

MAXQDA qualitative software was employed to compare the multiple codes between participants to determine which codes could be combined into a manageable group of themes that answered the study research questions.

The demographic survey described the research subjects from four Texas Baptist Seminaries. The researcher safeguarded all personal information of the participants and their schools by assigning pseudonyms to prevent them from being easily recognized. All digital documents and recordings containing participant information and corresponding school names have been stored on two electronic devices secured in a safe that only the researcher can access.

Chapter Summary

This study delved into the lived experiences of female MDiv graduates from Texas Baptist Seminaries and the perspectives they developed about their treatment by classmates and professors. This phenomenological research design allowed participants who experienced the same phenomenon to be studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Chapter Four introduced the data findings, including the participants' responses that answered the three research questions. This chapter also evaluated the data collection process utilizing individual interviews and focus group discussions where the participants were asked open-ended questions about their seminary experiences. The participants offered deep, rich discussions that yielded extensive data and included six themes aligned with the three research questions. The responses revealed one theme that aligned with research question one: gender roles and role incongruity. One theme aligned with the second research question, mentorship. The third and final research questions identified four themes: external hindrances, self-doubt and 'imposter syndrome,' program changes, and theological and Baptist denomination challenges.

This chapter presented the study results organized by the research questions. The next chapter discusses the findings and will cover the purpose, research questions, limitations, conclusions, implications, applications of the research study, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This study explored the perceptions of female MDiv graduates of Texas Baptist Seminaries and role incongruity through their lived experiences. To accomplish this task, 14 interviews and four focus group discussions were conducted. Following an in-depth analysis of the data, this chapter presents a review of the researcher's purpose and questions. These components served as notable guides for this research study. The researcher has also provided limitations, implications, applications, conclusions, and suggestions for further research.

Research Purpose

This hermeneutical phenomenological qualitative study aimed to understand the lived experiences of female graduates of the Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Texas Baptist Seminaries and role incongruity. For this research, lived experiences were defined as first-hand accounts and perceptions of women students who graduated from an MDiv program. The guiding theory for this study was the Role-Congruity Theory, as it directly related to the participants' experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to explore the experiences of the participants for this hermeneutical phenomenological research study:

RQ1. How do female experiences in MDiv programs differ from those of male classmates?

RQ2. How do the female graduates describe their relationships with classmates and faculty?

RQ3. What view did the female graduates develop on filling ministerial roles because of their experiences in their MDiv program?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

A hermeneutical phenomenological study design was used, with open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their experiences as female MDiv students attending a Texas Baptist Seminary. The virtual one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions revealed varying insights from the alumni about the phenomenon in their own words. Their responses to the semi-structured questions were analyzed and categorized by themes. Direct quotes from the participants were used to support the findings.

The recruiting was facilitated by institution faculty comprised of a Director of Master's Degree Programs, a Satellite Campus Director, a Student Experience Vice President, and an Executive Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. Invitations were sent through email correspondence. Fourteen prospective participants from four Texas-based seminaries expressed an interest in participating in the study, all of whom contributed. They completed a demographic survey and were involved in virtual one-on-one and focus group discussions.

The 14 virtual one-on-one interviews were initially planned to last 30 to 90 minutes; the average interview length was about 70 minutes. The four virtual focus group discussions were scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes; the average session lasted 85 minutes. The participant demographic results were mixed: nine Caucasian/White, three African American/Black, one Hispanic, and one Asian-Eastern. The targeted institutions for the research are in the State of Texas. All participants have remained in Texas since graduating.

Conclusions for Research Questions

Contributors provided explicit and thorough insight into their seminary experience and offered many interesting answers. The detailed responses included their perceptions of MDiv programs, their relationships with faculty and classmates, and their beliefs about preparedness

for ministry after graduation. The conclusions from the three research questions are presented in the subsequent section.

Conclusion to RQ 1.

How do female experiences in MDiv programs differ from those of male classmates?

Based on this researcher's observations from the answers the participants provided for research question one, the central theme of concern was gender roles/role incongruity. The literature review chartered in Chapter Two provided a clear understanding of definitions for gender roles and role incongruity. Eagly et al. (2020) explained gender roles as certain behaviors associated with specific gender groups through consistent observations over time. Men and women are expected to exhibit the required characteristics to perform tasks typically associated with their gender (Wood & Eagly, 2002).

Role Congruity Theory is the idea that a group's characteristics align with classic social roles (Eagly & Diekman, 2005). Historically, men have been viewed as ministry leaders, and women who attempt to prepare themselves for those roles do not fit the traditionally held image of a pastor, referred to as role incongruity (Ferguson, 2018). After careful consideration of the meaning of gender roles and role incongruity, this study found that the participants' experiences were vastly different than their male counterparts.

The participants shared explicit instances where their male classmates or professors expressed their traditional beliefs that women should not be educated in ministerial responsibilities or pursue ministry leadership opportunities. Two examples highlighted the continued belief that women are limited in how they can serve the body of Christ.

Ruth described an instance where she was signed up to preach at a Galilee Seminary preaching festival but was listed as providing teaching instead of preaching. She asked for

clarification so she could provide printouts to the audience and a slideshow if she presented

information as though in a classroom. Those hosting the event quickly adjusted the schedule to

showcase her as a preacher and not a teacher.

Additionally, Rachel provided insight into the perspectives of her male cohorts on

women in ministry. She explained that they respected the women in the class but made it clear

that they did not believe it was Biblical. She deduced that the basis of their argument was that

women could only fill specific roles in ministry due to their gender.

The study's participants sought acceptance and feelings of belongingness within the

confines of their degree program and in their church homes. There is a deep desire to be an

essential part of something. Belongingness shapes the meaning of one's life, having a sense of

inclusivity and purpose (New York University, 2023). They appreciate opportunities to connect

with others without feeling like they must be "on guard" to defend themselves and their calling.

Biblical Scripture asserts that *all* who receive Jesus and believe in Him become children

of God. There is no distinction between genders (John 1:12). Furthermore, in Galatians 3:28, the

apostle Paul teaches that "Belonging to Christ transcends all earthly distinctions that separate

humans" (Moo, 2021, p. 74). The Holy Spirit is the One who creates and sustains the unity of the

body of Christ. This body comprises many parts, with Spiritual gifts distributed to men and

women (1 Cor. 12:1-31). The church should express equal concern for every person within the

faith community. As seen in 1 Thessalonians 5:11-15, the apostle Paul charges the people with

encouraging, promoting, and holding one another in high esteem while living in peace.

Conclusion to RQ 2.

How do the female graduates describe their relationships with classmates and faculty?

This research question builds on the prior research question by examining relationships and the limited differences in their experiences. The study participants responded diversely to the second research question concerning relationships within their MDiv program. Deborah and Esther desired closer connections with their classmates and faculty, but due to the nature of their online programs, opportunities to develop friendships were limited to virtual interactions. As a result, they relayed feelings of disconnection and lack of a support system from their peers and professors.

The remaining 12 participants expressed a general sense of support from their classmates and instructors. Sarah described a connection made with one of her male classmates that was instantaneous and developed into a "sibling type" of relationship that has continued after graduating. Tabitha mentioned connecting with some of the female faculty because they were close in age and shared similar life circumstances due to being married and raising children. She has also maintained some friendships with a few male classmates post-graduation. Priscilla, Naomi, and Hannah also shared that they formed and kept some friendships while in seminary and have continued supporting one another.

All participants of this study indicated that relationships mattered to them. Mentorship was the dominating theme during the group conversations as a relationship they needed while in their MDiv programs. They observed formal mentorship between their male classmates and professors and wondered why they were not afforded the same opportunities. They desired official mentorship and believed they would have greatly benefitted from being partnered with a female professor at each of the four seminaries they attended. Ruth revealed that the women seminarians could connect with women pastors in the same vicinity as her school through the alum group, but this was informal and not part of the MDiv program. She also referred to the

professor of record for her internship and fieldwork as a "mentor" for her, but he was not assigned as someone who could encourage and affirm her as a female preparing for ministry service.

Priscilla shared that she was fortunate to have a female professor take an interest in her and her future. Due to her upbringing in a Southern Baptist church, Priscilla believed there were only two areas where she could serve in ministry: children and missions. The unofficial mentor helped Priscilla understand her true calling in an institute of higher learning and pursue that instead of missions. She expressed strong feelings about the importance of having formal mentors to guide women seminary students through school and into their calling. A study by Kimak (2010) found that mentorship in the MDiv program at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) better-prepared students for ministry, as reported by the alums, faculty, and administrative staff.

Scholars' technical definitions of mentoring relationships vary slightly, but they all agree that providing mentors for women is beneficial because it helps them address challenges that they will face (Drovdahl, 1995; Livermore, 2016; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). Having a support system in place, like a mentor, can provide encouragement and affirmation and bolster the courage of female seminary students to continue in the direction set before them. Also, in the literature, Lauve-Moon's (2017) study showed that the male seminarians understood they would be mentored and prepared for ministry leadership roles upon completing their education and training. They innately received affirmation, mentoring, and church leadership experience that the women were not privy to (pp. 93-94).

Conclusion to RQ3.

What view did the female graduates develop on filling ministerial roles because of their

experiences in their MDiv program?

This study revealed that only three of the 14 research participants developed positive

views toward pursuing ministry positions after attending seminary. Ruth's favorable outlook was

established by family tradition and her development of self-confidence because of her family's

support. The seminary training she received bolstered her belief in herself and reinforced the idea

that she was following God's call upon her life to pursue ministry leadership. Abigail's

optimistic outlook toward filling a ministry position developed through church support and the

theological training she received from her program. The third participant who expressed a

favorable view was Esther. She explained that her husband, a Baptist pastor, encouraged her in

her seminary education due to her love of studying the Word of God. She also received

affirmation from another pastor, which boosted her confidence in obeying the call on her life.

The other participants valued the education they received and believed it was vital to their

pursuit of advancement in ministry. However, they shared their doubts about being fully

prepared to fill ministry roles, which aligned under four themes: external hindrances, self-doubt

and 'imposter syndrome,' program changes, and theological and Baptist denomination

challenges.

External hindrances are the first area that showcases the negative outlooks of the

participants toward filling ministry roles. Two of the ladies, Esther and Rachel, experienced

financial struggles that had to be worked out so they could complete their programs. Their

determination to achieve their educational goals despite obstacles also helped them accomplish

their desire to attain ministry leadership positions. Deborah's severe medical condition caused

numerous delays in her education journey, but she persevered and completed her MDiv after 12 years. She was unsure about fulfilling her dreams of education and ministry involvement, but she was able to become a preacher for nursing home residents. Her condition worsened, which caused her to leave the ministry after a short time.

Miriam expressed three external hindrances to her education and ministry goals. Her former spouse withdrew his support and divorced her shortly after beginning her MDiv program. The Baptist church where she worked as an administrative assistant excluded women from leadership and decision-making positions, so she felt like she had to "walk on eggshells" around the staff. Lastly, due to her cultural background, Asian women are taught to be quiet, so her instinct is not to speak up. Hannah also experienced a spouse who refused to support her schooling and ministry pursuits. In Phoebe's case, her program was accelerated to accept a job because they required the applicant to complete an MDiv degree.

These participants' experiences were frustrating and stressful, but simultaneously, they were helpful. They discovered that by digging deep within themselves, they had wells of persistence that contained a dormant drive to finish what they had started. They completed their degree programs and obtained a sense of accomplishment despite facing challenges in other areas.

The second area of difficulty that presented itself and influenced the development of a negative outlook on filling ministry leadership roles was self-doubt and 'imposter syndrome.' During the interview with Ruth, this researcher observed that she exuded a sense of self-confidence while describing her upbringing and a negative encounter with a male classmate.

However, she admitted that she is uncomfortable with being a lead pastor because of the responsibilities. She prefers being the "number two pastor" so she can preach and teach without making difficult decisions.

In discussions with Priscilla, she shared that as the only woman in her MDiv courses, she developed self-imposed negative feelings, especially uncertainty about her purpose in a program historically filled by men only. She referred to this negative feeling as "imposter syndrome" and shared this in her focus group. After hearing this, Lydia shared the same sentiment, except that her self-doubt was shaped by the Baptist doctrine that limited women in ministry. Additionally, Hannah expressed feelings of inferiority because her male classmates were older and held pastor positions.

These participants had internalized an exclusion narrative they received throughout their lives. They spent time mentally, emotionally, and spiritually processing the devaluation of their calling and place in the Baptist world. They learned to replace the negative messages with those of affirmation and diligently pursued their calling instead of allowing disappointment to overtake them.

The third prominent theme that developed in answer to the participants' views of preparedness to fill ministerial positions was the need for program changes. Only three interviewees expressed a positive view about filling ministry leadership roles after attending seminary. However, all participants agreed that some aspects of the MDiv program need adjustment. They wanted to see a diverse selection of textbook authors. They believed incorporating various authors would provide different perspectives instead of a predominantly white male viewpoint with focused content on men's church leadership experiences. There was

also consensus that more female professors are needed so that the students can learn about the realities of women pursuing ministry leadership opportunities.

The participants also desired courses to showcase historical female theologians like Macrina, Biblical women, women in ministry, black theology, pastoral care, discernment, spiritual formation, and emotional and multicultural intelligence teachings. Tabitha added that courses about children's ministry should also be offered because anyone filling a senior or lead pastor position must understand other ministry areas. This would better prepare pastors and ministers to handle challenges they may encounter.

Naomi contributed to the conversation by sharing her disappointment with the MDiv program because it did not prepare her for the chaplaincy service. She "loved the classes and professors at Mt. Moriah Seminary," but additional education and training were needed. After graduating from seminary, she completed hundreds of hospital internship hours and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) to become a certified chaplain.

Theological and Baptist denomination challenges are the final themes identified to answer the third research question. Women continue to be denied opportunities to preach and occupy ministry leadership positions in the church. The existence of the complementarian perspective in the Baptist denomination has been challenging for the participants. This resistance women experience trying to pursue their calling results in an unequal and gendered division of labor.

Two participants expressed unawareness of the controversy surrounding the topic of women in ministry until they entered the Baptist world, leaving them unprepared for the realities of ministry in a Baptist church. Naomi grew up in the Methodist tradition and then aligned with Baptist theology as an older adult. Lydia's family attended Assemblies of God churches and was

not exposed to Baptist beliefs until she attended a Baptist seminary. Miriam found herself in the unique position of having membership in two communities. She is a part of the Korean Baptist group that supports women as pastors while also participating in a traditional Baptist church organization where women are excluded from leadership. Miriam was confused by the vast differences between the two Baptist organizations she relates to and felt unprepared for ministry after completing her MDiv program. Hannah, Rachel, Tabitha, Sarah, and Lydia also expressed negative feelings about being equipped for ministry leadership due to the challenges and obstacles in their way.

Another discovery from the discussions revealed that 11 of 14 participants remained attached to Baptist churches even though most do not endorse women in ministry leadership. At the same time, three attend church services unaligned with any specific denomination. Phoebe shared that although she disagrees with Southern Baptist doctrine, God called her to a Baptist church associated with the SBC. Hannah also remained in a Baptist church because God called her and her husband to serve there despite the resistance to women being in ministry. Ruth, Esther, and Lydia serve in Baptist churches that are not connected with the SBC but are autonomous and support women in ministry leadership.

The resultant impact of these negative encounters left two participants wondering if they should consider leaving the Baptist denomination to pursue church and ministry leadership opportunities in a different Christian setting. One of Sarah's male professors suggested this to her on a school mission trip to Africa. Similarly, Tabitha intimated that she may join another Protestant denomination due to encountering obstacles with developing theological educational materials for non-Baptist organizations. She was told that she must change her religious

affiliation to be ordained and accepted as a Biblical scholar because of the "Baptist stink" she obtained from attending a Baptist seminary.

The women hoped their seminary experiences would be free from gender-based theology, policies, and expectations. They instead discovered that some classmates and professors were unconvinced that women could and should pursue theological education and callings toward ministry leadership. These participants proved resilient in accomplishing their education goals despite objections from those who believe men are the only ones authorized to hold prominent ministry leadership positions. Some women have persisted in their pursuit of service to the body of Christ and found religious organizations that were open and accepting of them in leadership roles.

<div align="center">**Research Implications**</div>

Christian seminaries may use the results of this study to advance more inclusive practices and culture. The findings may assist seminaries with reevaluating the MDiv programs that traditionally prepare women for ministry leadership and their effectiveness. Christian (theological) education aims to equip all students for service to the Lord and the body of Christ.

Some study participants expressed misgivings about not being prepared for ministry leadership in the Baptist community. Their concerns extend to the traditionally held beliefs that women cannot be leaders in Baptist churches except in children's ministry, women's ministry, or education. Those institutions within the Baptist denomination may find the data from this research helpful since the participants graduated from Baptist seminaries. While only three female MDiv graduates are aligned with non- or intra-denominational churches, most continue participating in Baptist churches.

Theoretical Implications

This hermeneutic phenomenological research study sought to understand the lived experiences of female MDiv graduates. This researcher desired to learn if there was any correlation between their interactions with their classmates and the professors and the role congruity theory. This theory was built around the historical idea that women were considered inferior (Payne & Huffaker, 2021). The early church fathers adopted this concept, which has been carried forward into contemporary church ideology and policies, with men being in positions of authority and women being delegated to secondary roles.

A second theory evaluated in this study was the social role theory. The root of this theory originates from social and gender roles based on behaviors typically associated with a specific gender (Eagly, 1987). A division of labor was established for each gender type, male and female, and these became the normal expected behaviors to be exhibited in all areas of their lives. Gender roles are first observed in the family setting and carry over into other areas outside of the home. There are also cultural norms about gender roles that can be imposed on the members of some ethnic groups (Daniels & Leaper, 2011).

The gender of an individual, whether male or female, has typically informed society on the types of roles they can fill. Men have been expected to possess the characteristics and skills associated with leadership. Typically, men have been observed in religious leadership roles. As more women have chosen to pursue theological education in preparation for ministry leadership, they are more likely to experience adverse treatment because they do not fit the traditional idea of a pastor, also known as role incongruity (Ferguson, 2018).

The experiences presented by the participants of this research study revealed that correlations could be made between the social role theory and the role congruity theory and the

treatment they received while attending their MDiv programs at Baptist Seminaries in Texas. The findings of this study are invaluable for Christian leaders as they endeavor to comprehend the gender theories that continue to create obstacles that women face while pursuing God's call on their lives as leaders in the Christian community.

Theological Implications

Traditional theological education and training have primarily been focused on preparing men for church leadership, especially those who would stand behind the pulpit and preach the Gospel message. Once trained, these men were expected to apprentice with an established pastor or a college president (Schorr, 1984). A scholarly literature review revealed that most material available for examination focuses on male-dominant education opportunities in preparation for church ministry.

God, the Creator, laid the foundational framework for humanity in Genesis 1-2. God made humans, both male and female, in His image. He also designed humans to need relationships, first with Himself and secondly with one another. Biblical imagery showed that man and woman lived harmoniously with one another and with God before sin. However, sin quickly changed these relationships, causing tension between one another and between them and God.

The gospel provides the good news that God loved humanity so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for all sins and restore their relationship with Him (2 Cor. 5:18-20). In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus told the Pharisees that the greatest commandment was to love God, and the second was to love others as yourself. God values all humans regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, but human beings will disappoint one another because of the damage sin has wrought. Every person is worthy of love and respect because God loves them

unconditionally. A deeper relationship with God will bolster a sense of acceptance and love toward all God's people.

The apostle Paul instructs the church to encourage and build up one another (1 Thess. 5:11). The understanding is that everyone must not only love one another and create unity within the body of Christ, but they are to invest in others for spiritual growth. This admonishes us to view "all persons as those for whom Christ died" (Larson, 2000, p. 71). In Romans 15:7, Paul also directs Christians to accept one another because Jesus Christ has accepted them. "Believers have no right to reject from their fellowship those whom God in Christ has accepted" (Moo, 2021, p. 241).

Numerous biblical passages discuss growth in knowledge and spiritual maturity. Jesus taught and modeled growth, and the Holy Spirit empowers believers in their journey to learn more about Him. Scripture reveals that those who pursue training in righteousness will be blessed (Phil. 1:6; Matt. 5:6; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:5-8; Heb. 5:12-14). Jesus commissioned Christians to make disciples in Matthew 28. Christian leaders must live out this command by guiding, teaching, and empowering Christian women as they obey God's call.

Empirical Implications

Empirical research is knowledge gained from experience through observations and measurements of the phenomena instead of relying on a theory or belief (LaSalle University, 2022). This researcher sought to elevate the life experiences of female MDiv graduates while attending institutes of higher learning instead of quantitative statistics. The qualitative approach provides a deeper understanding of the perspectives female seminarians developed through their interactions with classmates and professors who were and were not supportive of their presence.

A significant aspect of this study was the participants' enthusiasm for sharing their tumultuous experiences while in seminary. They shared their growth and tenacity to remain focused on God's call on their lives. Their attitudes about their ordeals when they felt confused, disappointed, hurt, and sometimes lost directed them to intentionally turn toward God for the strength needed to complete their educational journey, as stated in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (*NIV*, 1984/2011).

During the interview, the participants remembered the times they sought God's presence and guidance about His purpose and chose to trust and accept the outcome, regardless of what happened. Some of the experiences shared by the participants were dramatic, while others were funny. They all demonstrated persistence in their obedience to God and completed their degree programs. This study revealed that God does not stop working with or in His children, even when they begin to question themselves or their assignments. Throughout the Bible, God told His people not to be afraid and that He would be with them always (Deut.31:6; Ps. 23; Ps. 121:5-8; Ps. 139:7; Jer. 29:11; 1 Chr. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6).

Practical Implications

In addition to theoretical, theological, and empirical implications, this study provides practical implications. By examining the results of this study, Christians gain insights into how female MDiv graduates were treated while attending theological institutions. The women in this study who pursued theological education and leadership roles in ministry settings experienced poor treatment or judgment because of negative stereotypes associated with being female (Hoyt & Simon, 2017). When these things happened to some participants, they developed feelings that undermined their self-confidence and desire to continue pushing forward with their goals. As these instances were presented, the women categorized these feelings as ones of self-doubt and

imposter syndrome. The women discussed how having mentors and role models would have been a valuable source of support, consistent with the research literature (Drovdahl, 1995; Livermore, 2016; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005; Revulagadda, 2020).

The participants believed they were on their own when deciding how to respond to the gender dynamics in seminary. They shared examples of determination as they worked through these social conditions. The women emphasized the need and added value of having access to female mentors because only other women understand women's unique circumstances and stress in a learning environment, a workplace, and a family setting (Noe et al., 2002).

It should be noted that although the participants shared experiences and frustrations with the poor treatment they received from some of their classmates, they assisted those same individuals when it was time to study for course examinations. This counters some research that alleged women would not support others after receiving opposition to their presence (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Theological institutions could benefit from noting that female MDiv graduates have provided great insight into their experiences. They also recommended improving women's learning portion of the education journey. They submitted that courses focused on women and their experiences in church leadership would help them understand what to expect in ministry leadership. There was also a consensus on the need for a more significant presence of female professors, specifically in the MDiv program. All the participants agreed that a more diverse selection of textbooks, authors, and theological perspectives was needed. White men wrote most of the material provided, and the information was centered on men and their perspectives on ministry leadership.

In summary, the women successfully navigated their path through theological education to pursue ministry leadership. They used the challenging experiences to refine their outlook on their place in the body of Christ, particularly in the Baptist community, because they graduated from Baptist seminaries. Most participants have found ministry positions that align with God's will for their lives. However, a select few are considering joining religious organizations that support women in ministry leadership.

Research Limitations

Research limitations represent "weaknesses within the study that may influence outcomes and conclusions of the research" (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019, p. 261). An ethical element of scientific study includes presenting these limitations, which also contributes to the validity of the findings. The female participants were limited to the individual experiences and resultant stories they could recall during the recorded sessions with the researcher based on the questions about the phenomenon.

The potential exists for other responses relevant to the study topic if the research parameters were not so narrowly set by the researcher. Alternately, the researcher's decisions to structure the data collection and adhere to "systematic precautions strengthen the integrity of the final product" (Hudson, 2020, p. 96). By limiting the research parameters, the integrity of the study was safeguarded.

It is essential to recognize that the researcher has limitations besides the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, the researcher's limitations must also be acknowledged due to personal experience, bias, and knowledge of the study topic. Because this study was voluntary, there was also a potential for self-selection bias, meaning only the women who desired to share their experiences contributed to it.

Creswell and Miller (2000) advised that selecting individuals from a population sample shows that those selected are typical of the studied population. The population consisted of only female graduates from MDiv programs at Texas Baptist schools. The perceptions and experiences of male classmates or faculty of the MDiv programs were not explored, which could have added to the context of the occurrences at Texas Baptist Seminaries. The study was also limited to Texas, so the findings may not fully reflect the MDiv experience of females in Baptist Seminaries throughout the United States.

Another limitation was physical distance, which did not allow for a personal connection with the candidates. This researcher relied on email and telephone communications, which can easily lead to misunderstandings due to the lack of observable clues that assist in determining comprehension of the study. Using web-based video conferencing helped to relay information accurately between the researcher and participants by observing nonverbal movements and listening to voice pitch and tone.

Further Research

This study yielded valuable data to establish a baseline of understanding about the experiences of female MDiv alums with role incongruity from Texas Baptist Seminaries. Future research could provide additional insights related to the sample area and sample size, including male MDiv alums and faculty, an in-depth assessment of the MDiv curriculum, and schools associated with other denominations.

It may be beneficial to conduct comparative studies concerning the participants' experiences in online, in-person, and hybrid MDiv programs. In contrast, this research study had limited ability to assess this area in greater detail. Another area that could be studied is the differences between the life stages of the participants because lifestyle choices and decision-

making processes appear to differ according to age, marital status, and family responsibilities due to having children.

Summary

This hermeneutical phenomenological study aimed to help fill the gap in scholarly literature concerning the perceptions of female MDiv graduates about their experiences while attending Texas Baptist Seminaries. This researcher listened to and documented the voices of 14 research subjects who believed they had information relevant to the topic of this study. This investigation contributes to the existing research literature of Charlton (1997), Green (2002), Kimak (2010), and Norton (2022). However, further studies are needed to garner a bigger picture of what is happening with female seminary students and gender barriers.

The key finding of this study was that participants experienced adverse treatment from some of their male classmates and professors. The negativity shown toward the women by their male peers and program leaders varied. The behavior ranged from apathetic comments and jokes about how women cannot fully participate in a religious organization to outright dismissal of their presence in the MDiv program and cruel remarks.

Humanity, male and female alike, was created in the image of God. The maltreatment of women, in any form, is an insult against God because He is the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is contained therein, as written in the first chapter of Genesis. Women are entitled to proper treatment, dignity, and respect and should be afforded the same rights as men.

The example Jesus Christ set for others to follow included His behavior toward women. His responses toward women were controversial because they directly opposed first-century culture and customs. Jesus understood that these traditions and cultural norms against women

were in direct violation of God's will, so He deliberately extended courtesy, healing, grace, respect, and education to them (Jn 4:7-27; Lk 10:38-42; Jn 8:1-11).

Those who claim to be Christ-followers must seriously consider how Jesus valued women and provided opportunities for them to participate in all ministry areas, including leadership. Scholars have noted that Jesus included women in the disciples who traveled with Him (Bristow, 1988; Lee, 2021; Lee-Barnewall, 2016; Peppiatt, 2019). Additionally, women were appointed to leadership roles in the apostolic church after the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:1-47; Acts 13:50; Acts 16:15, 40; Acts 17:4; Acts 18:18-28; Rom 16:1-3; Phil 1:3-5; Phil 4:2-3). The prominent women in the New Testament, such as Lydia, Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia, Mary, Euodia, and Syntyche, have established a pattern for women to serve in leadership positions. The body of Christ ought to value leadership abilities in women and cultivate their God-given callings through advanced theological education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB APPLICATION/APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 28, 2023

Michele Taylor
Derwin Lewis

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-106 A Phenomenological Study of Female Master of Divinity Graduates' Experiences and Role Incongruity at Texas Baptist Seminaries

Dear Michele Taylor, Derwin Lewis,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2. (ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Permission Request Form

Month Day, 20XX

Recipient
Title
Institution Name
Address
Address
Address

Dear Recipient,

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is A Phenomenological Study of Female Master of Divinity Graduates' Experiences and Role Incongruity at Texas Baptist Seminaries, and the purpose of my research is to understand the lived experiences of female graduates of the Master of Divinity (MDiv) programs at Texas Baptist Seminaries.

I am writing to request your permission to access and utilize a list of female graduates of the Master of Divinity program to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete a demographic survey, participate in an audio- and video-recorded interview, and audio- and video-recorded focus group, as well as review all transcripts. Participants will be presented with an information sheet prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to participate, please respond by email to ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Michele Lee Taylor
Liberty University Graduate Student

Appendix C

Permission Response Form

Please provide this document on official letterhead or copy and paste into an email. Permission response letters/emails should be returned to Michele Taylor at ███████████████.

Date
Recipient
Title
Company
Address 1
Address 2
Address 3

Dear Michele Lee Taylor:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled A Phenomenological Study of Female Master of Divinity Graduates' Experiences and Role Incongruity at Texas Baptist Seminaries, [I/we] have decided to grant you permission to access our Master of Divinity graduate list and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☐ [I/We] will provide our membership list to Michele Lee Taylor, and Michele Lee Taylor may use the list to contact our members to invite them to participate in her research study.

☐ [I/We] grant permission for Michele Lee Taylor to contact the women graduates from the Master of Divinity program to invite them to participate in her research study.

☐ [I/We] will not provide potential participant information to Michele Lee Taylor, but we agree to [send/provide] her study information to the women graduates from the Master of Divinity program on her behalf.

☐ [I/We] [am/are] requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

Official's Name
Official's Title
Official's Company/Organization

Appendix D

Recruitment Form

Month Day, 20XX

Dear Ms./Miss/Mrs. Female Graduate,

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the lived experiences of female Master of Divinity graduates from Texas Baptist Seminaries, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be women who graduated from Master of Divinity programs at Texas Baptist Seminaries. Participants will be asked to complete a demographic survey, take part in a one-on-one, video-recorded interview, take part in a video-recorded focus group interview, and review interview transcripts for accuracy. It should take approximately 3 hours and 45 minutes to complete all the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

An information sheet is attached to this email. The information sheet contains additional information about my research. Please read and review the entire information sheet before deciding to participate in my study.

To participate, please complete the attached demographic survey and return it by email. Contact me at ███████████████. I will work with you to schedule a time for an interview.

Sincerely,

Michele Lee Taylor
Liberty University Graduate Student
████████████████

Appendix E

Recruitment Follow Up

Dear Potential Participant,

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. Last week an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the demographic survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is _____.

Participants must be female, 18 years of age or older, and have graduated from a Master of Divinity (MDiv) program at a Texas Baptist Seminary. Participants will be asked to complete a demographic survey, take part in a one-on-one, video-recorded interview, take part in a focus group video-recorded interview, and review their interview transcripts and any developed themes to check for accuracy or confirm agreement. It should take approximately 3 hours and 45 minutes total time to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

An information sheet is attached to this email. The information sheet contains additional information about my research. Please read and review the entire information sheet before deciding to participate in my study.

To participate, please complete the attached demographic survey and return it by email. Contact me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ to schedule an interview.

Sincerely,

Michele Lee Taylor
Liberty University Graduate Student

Appendix F

Information Sheet

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Female Master of Divinity Graduates'
Experiences and Role Incongruity at Texas Baptist Seminaries
Principal Investigator: Michele Lee Taylor, Doctoral Candidate, School of Divinity at Liberty
University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a female graduate
of a Master of Divinity program at a Texas Baptist Seminary. Taking part in this research project
is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in
this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of female graduates of Master of
Divinity programs at Texas Baptist Seminaries.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Complete a demographic survey that should take no more than 15 minutes.
2. Participate in a one-on-one, audio- and video-recorded interview that will take no more
   than approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes.
3. Participate in an audio- and video-recorded focus group, that will take no more than
   approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes.
4. Review their interview transcripts and any developed themes to check for accuracy or
   confirm agreement, which will take no more than 30 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.
However, participation could contribute to the scholarly research material relating to
understanding the experiences of women preparing for ministry.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to
the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be securely stored, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

One-on-one interviews will be conducted electronically and in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

Focus group interviews will be conducted electronically. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.

Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and external hard drive in a locked safe in an area that only the researcher has access to. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.

Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer and external hard drive in a locked safe for three years and then erased. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Michele Lee Taylor. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at ██████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Derwin E. Lewis, at ████████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Appendix G

Demographic Survey

Demographics Survey: A Phenomenological Study of Female Master of Divinity Graduates' Experiences and Role Incongruity at Texas Baptist Seminaries

Questions:

1. What category includes your age?

18-20   21-29   30-39   40-49   50-59   60+

Prefer not to answer

2. What is your ethnic background? Please choose all that apply.

African American/Black   Asian-Eastern   Asian-Indian   Caucasian/White

Hispanic   Native American   Other

Prefer not to answer

3. What is your marital status?

Single   Married   Divorced   Widowed   Prefer not to answer

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Doctoral Degree   Master's Degree   Prefer not to answer

5. How many children do you have?

0   1   2   3+   Prefer not to answer

6. What Seminary did you attend?

7. What is your religious affiliation?

Protestant (i.e., Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed, Church of Christ, etc.)

Roman Catholic   Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or LDS)

Orthodox (i.e., Greek, Russian, or other Orthodox church)   Jewish   Muslim

Eastern (i.e., Buddhist, Hindu, etc.)   Atheist   Agnostic   Other

Prefer not to answer

8. Was your Master of Divinity program:

Online   In-Residence   Hybrid   Prefer not to answer

9. What ministry are you called to serve in?

Senior Pastor   Associate Pastor   Education   Women's Ministry

Children's Ministry   Prayer Ministry   Other   Prefer not to answer

10. Did you serve in a ministerial position while attending Seminary? If so, what area?

Senior Pastor   Associate Pastor   Education   Women's Ministry

Children's Ministry   Prayer Ministry   Other   Prefer not to answer

11. Were you employed while attending Seminary?

Full-Time   Part-Time   Not Employed   Prefer not to answer

Appendix H

Interview Questions

Interview: A Phenomenological Study of Female Master of Divinity Graduates' Experiences and Role Incongruity at Texas Baptist Seminaries

Date: _____
Time: _____
Interviewer: _____
Interviewee: _____

Questions:

1. How did the idea of getting a Master of Divinity come about?

2. How did your family or friends react?

3. Why did you choose your university and program of study?

4. What was your prior knowledge about your university and master's program?

5. How did you feel about your learning environment?

6. How were you treated by your male classmates?

7. How were you treated by the faculty?

8. Was there a difference in how male faculty interacted with you versus female faculty?

9. Can you describe a time when you considered dropping out?

10. How would you describe your social support network as a female Master of Divinity student?

11. How would you describe your academic support as a female Master of Divinity student?

12. How would you describe your pastor's reaction to your pursuit of a Master of Divinity degree?

13. Does your church support women in ministry? If so, in what areas?

Redirection Questions for Generalized Explanations:

1. Can you provide an example of this experience?

2. What was this experience like?

3. What did this experience make you feel?

Appendix I

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group: A Phenomenological Study of Female Master of Divinity Graduates' Experiences and Role Incongruity at Texas Baptist Seminaries

Date: _____
Time: _____
Interviewer: _____
Interviewee: _____

Guidelines:

1. There are no right or wrong answers, just different perspectives.

2. Actively listen.

3. Use first names.

4. One person speaks at a time.

5. This interview will be recorded.

6. My role is to guide the conversation.

Topics:

- What is it like to be a female graduate of a Master of Divinity program at a Texas Baptist Seminary?

- How can this experience be improved for future female students in this program at your school?

Questions:

1. Describe your experiences that hindered your success.

2. What were your positive experiences?

3. Describe your interactions with the professors and other students.

4. If you could change any aspect of your program experience, what would you change, and why?

Redirection Questions for Generalized Explanations:

1. Can you provide an example of this experience?

2. What was this experience like?

3. What did this experience make you feel?