

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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White women's experiences with major institutions, the church included, often are generalized to other women's experiences, much like how the experience of men is often represented as the experience of all humankind. In 2001 Elaine Howard Ecklund studied white lay women in the Catholic Church and explored two questions: What causes dissatisfied Catholic women to remain loyal to their congregations? What makes a congregation open to women's leadership? (Howard Ecklund, 2001) In this study I aim to replicate, as much as possible, Howard Ecklund's research with Latinas. I found four major themes in the interviews with local Latina leaders: (1) the women tend to underestimate their involvement in the parish; (2) the women have mixed reviews on feminism; (3) their perceptions on the priest and the roles of women in the church prevent them from criticizing church structures; and (4) there is a need to balance the efforts of ministry to women and men in local parishes.

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Leadership and Loyalty Revisited:
Catholic Latinas and Leadership

by

Melissa Morales-Warming

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Melissa Morales-Warming, Author

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INTRODUCTION

Researching the Role of Lay Catholic Latina Women

When academics and church people talk about women in the Catholic Church, they almost always assume that those women are white women. White women's experiences with major institutions, the church included, often are generalized to other women's experiences, much as the experience of men is often represented as the experience of all humankind. In 2001 Elaine Howard Ecklund studied white lay women in the Catholic Church and explored two questions: What causes dissatisfied Catholic women to remain loyal to their congregations? What makes a congregation open to women's leadership? (Howard Ecklund, 2001)

As a bilingual, bicultural feminist, I am very interested in the experiences of Latina women within various United States institutions. After reading Howard Ecklund's study, I was curious to know how Latina women would have responded to Howard Ecklund's questions. This study aims to replicate, as much as possible, the research of Howard Ecklund. My sample size is smaller, and I only work with one parish; this study cannot generalize the experience of all Latinas and acknowledges places needed for further study.

First, I discuss the existing literature as it relates to feminist theology and Latinas, culturally important religious beliefs such as the Virgin of Guadalupe and its feminist critique, and Chicana leadership. Second, I present the methodological perspective I used in completing this study; this study is based in grounded theory, and I approach this work from a feminist perspective.

Third, I show four major findings of this study: (1) Latinas often use self-effacing language to describe their leadership roles, (2) the women in this study had broad views of feminism, (3) perceptions of the priest and women's roles in the church are linked to being content with women's current status in the church, and (4) women and men both need the energy of the parish and institution of the Catholic Church. Finally, I conclude this paper with a summary and suggestions for further research. This paper is a part of the larger conversation about Latina women, and their leadership and contributions to institutions such as the Catholic Church.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women are increasingly more involved in church leadership than ever before. Catholic women remain loyal to their local churches, despite disagreeing with church doctrine, when women's leadership is supported (Howard Ecklund, 2001). The research done by sociologist Elaine Howard Ecklund regarding women's loyalty to the Catholic Church closed gaps in research that at the time did not include the experience of lay women. Her research examined the importance of organizational cultures in supporting women's roles in church leadership. Not only do church structures dictate women's leadership, but church structures also "influence the meaning that women's leadership has for a particular congregation" (Howard Ecklund, 2001, p. 42). Howard Ecklund chose women in the study that were in an established pastoral role as well as women who volunteered extensively with church ministry, regardless of how they identified as leaders (pp. 14-16).

While Howard Ecklund's research begins to document Catholic laywomen, her research only includes white women participants. The Catholic Church is a large institution with a diverse population. Research about women's loyalty to the Catholic Church is an incomplete story when the only participants are white women. In general, there is a need for more research concerning women of color. Hispanics are the largest growing minority population in the United States; yet, much research does not focus exclusively on their experiences. Hispanics are also the largest growing minority

population within the U.S. Catholic Church (D'Antonio et al, 1996, p. 145).

There is a need for more research to be done regarding this population.

The term Hispanic originated in the United States during the Nixon and Reagan administrations. At the time, the government attempted to classify the influx of people immigrating from the southern American continents. Given that most of these immigrants spoke Spanish and had historic ties with Spain, the term "Hispanic" was born. Since the generation of the word "Hispanic," many have found the term to be problematic. First, Hispanic was not a name chosen by the people it represents. Second, it only refers to the European ancestry of people from Central and South America and the Caribbean. The people from these regions have a mixed heritage of indigenous, African, and European roots. For these reasons, some have adopted the term "Latino" because it is a name reminiscent of the sounds of Spanish, and it is a name chosen by the people it represents.

In this thesis, I will use the term Latino to refer to Spanish-speaking people from Mexico, Central and South American and the Caribbean living in the United States. When necessary, I will distinguish countries of origin. The word "Hispanic" is only used when I cite another researcher's words.

This thesis will continue the research of Elaine Howard Ecklund. Using her research methods, I will investigate the experiences and perspectives of Catholic Latinas' in terms of leadership roles. I view leadership in a broad way. Traditionally, leadership is perceived as hierarchical and at times tyrannical; this is not the model of leadership I wish to portray, nor do I see this as the model

embraced by the women in this study. I define leadership in terms of initiative, creativity, the ability to coordinate activities and inspire peers; I think of leadership in the “power-with” as opposed to the “power-over” model (French, 1985; Starhawk, 1988).

Through stereotypes and media representation, Latinas are often portrayed as submissive, subservient and docile. These qualities do not communicate a potential for leadership. So, it may appear that Latinas do not lead or do not have the support to do so. Yet, history tells us that Latinas have been soldiers, activists, union organizers, politicians, writers and poets (Garcia, 1997). Hypothetically, Latinas could/may draw upon past and present Latinas as strong role models.

Yet, what is the current atmosphere for Latinas in Catholic Church leadership? Are women encouraged to participate in ministry? Are Latinas supported in lead roles at Church functions or are they relegated to making tamales and setting up rooms for meetings? Preliminary research shows that Latinas are the ones responsible for passing down religion in their families (Christian, 2005, p. 183); yet does that role give Latinas in the Latino community credibility in parish-wide ministerial roles?

Before examining Latinas’ social location within the Catholic Church, I will explore Latinas’ social location within the Latino community. (It should be noted that each country within Latin America has its own distinct culture. Many of the references within this section will be of Mexican culture; the

majority of the women interviewed in my study are Mexicans or Mexican-Americans).

The Virgin of Guadalupe

The main icon of femininity within Mexican culture is the Virgin of Guadalupe, sometimes referred to as Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Virgin of Guadalupe is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who appeared to the peasant Juan Diego in 1531. On December 19th of 1531, as legend/myth goes, Juan Diego was walking along a hillside and the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to him. She told Juan Diego to go to the bishop and ask him to build a temple for her.

Juan Diego complied, but the bishop did not believe the peasant. Days later, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego again. She asked him if he went to the bishop. He told the Virgin of Guadalupe that he had visited the bishop but that the bishop did not believe Juan Diego saw her. The Virgin of Guadalupe handed Juan Diego a bunch of roses and told him to bring them to the bishop. Then she instructed him to wrap the roses in his *tilma* (heavy cloak).

When Juan Diego saw the bishop again, he insisted that the bishop build a temple to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Next, Juan Diego unfolded his *tilma*, and the image of Our Lady appeared on the inside of his *tilma* as the roses fell out. After that, the bishop believed Juan Diego and the bishop ordered the construction for the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Shortly after the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, many indigenous people converted to Catholicism. This is because the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe has much in common with the Aztec goddess Tonantzin. First of all, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared on Mount Tepeyac, where Tonantzin was known to reside. Second, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared with a dark complexion; she looked like the indigenous people. This was a stark difference from the European images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and other holy figures (Christian, 2005, p. 184).

Since the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexicans have devoted themselves to her. On the day of December 12th, early in the morning thousands flock to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe to serenade her. With modern telecasting, even people far from Mexico can watch this event that is televised every year on the channel Univision. For many years, Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans have been celebrating the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the United States. One of the ways they show devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe is through processions. Processions are public, devotional acts in which people walk behind an image, often a statue, of the holy person they are celebrating. In 1927, East Los Angeles began holding an annual procession for the Virgin of Guadalupe, which at times had as many as 5,000 marchers and 30,000 spectators (Dolan and Hinojosa, 1994, p. 182). Historian Mike Davis describes the procession as rivaling Cinco de Mayo in community importance (1990, p. 331).

Today, one aspect of the Virgin of Guadalupe is especially important to Latinas. The black sash on her waistline signifies pregnancy; this icon of Mary represents and supports fertility (Christian, 2005, p. 184). This Mary, like many Latinas, watches as her adult son is tortured and murdered by the Romans. Because she suffered as a woman and mother, many Latinas identify with the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Traditionally, images of Mary, including the Virgin of Guadalupe, are praised for meekness, humility and subservience to God. These qualities are then transformed into expectations for women to achieve. Living up to Marian images is impossible for women because Mary retained her virginity while conceiving a son. Mary is seen as holy because she does not engage in sexual activity and is still able to appropriate a traditional feminine role of mothering.

The late Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa describes the importance the Virgin of Guadalupe had in her household even though it was not a typical Roman Catholic home (Anzaldua, 1987). Within Chicano culture, she argues, the Virgin of Guadalupe is the cultural medium representing their indigenous background. Unfortunately, nearly since the beginning of Guadalupe's iconic role for Mexicans, the Catholic Church has sought to desex her. Anzaldúa explains that the Virgin of Guadalupe is the Christian manifestation of the Nahuatl goddess *Tonantsi*. Guadalupe's apparition took place where the goddess *Tonantsi* was worshipped by the indigenous people of Mexico. Now, the Virgin of Guadalupe is, "...the single most potent religious, political and cultural image of the Chicano/mexicano" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 30).

The widespread importance of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, as well as many other Catholic Latinos now living in the United States, is an example of popular religiosity. Popular religiosity is the expressions and actions that the general public makes in response to living out their faith. It is a markedly different expression of faith than “official” Catholicism and has been denounced by church officials as an uneducated way of practicing Catholicism. The difference between the “official” way of celebrating faith and the expression of the public creates a rich diversity to people’s interpretation and definitions of Catholicism.

Theologian Jeanette Rodriguez researched Mexican-American women’s perceptions of Our Lady of Guadalupe and found themes from the participants’ responses. Fifty percent of the time participants thought of her a mother figure, 30 percent of the time she was seen as someone to whom to pray, 25 percent of the time she was seen as bringing comfort and peace, and 20 percent of the time she was seen as a figure of strength or who gives strength (Rodriguez, 1994, p. 107).

The strong regard for the Virgin Mary in Mexican culture correlates with social pressure for women to conform to socially acceptable roles. Since colonial rule, there have been three socially acceptable roles for women: virgin, wife, and mother (NietoGomez, 2002, p. 49). It is not an accident that these roles are the same roles that Mary occupied in her lifetime. The over emphasis on women’s socially acceptable roles women is called marianismo. “Marianismo portrayed the woman as semi-divine, morally superior and

spiritually stronger than her master because of her ability to endure pain and sorrow. This pedestal of thorns also justified ‘men’s wickedness’ (passed on today as the double standard” (NietoGomez, p. 49). While marianismo may seem to valorize women, it actually keeps them dependent on men (NietoGomez, 1997) and does not allow for individual expression beyond sanctioned, acceptable roles.

La Malinche

Within Mexican culture, there is another icon of feminine behavior. She is the antithesis of the Virgin of Guadalupe; she is La Malinche or Malintzin. La Malinche is known in history as Doña Marina. A daughter of Aztec royalty, and sent away after the birth of her younger brother, as a child, Doña Marina lived as a slave. Eventually, she translated for the Spaniards. She acted as a translator for Hernán Cortes. In Mexican culture, Doña Marina is known as being a traitor to her people because she enabled the Spaniards in conquering Mexico. Yet, it was really her people who betrayed her. Chicana feminists and historians have reexamined Doña Marina’s life and created new ways of visioning this important person in Mexican history (Candelaria, 2002). These feminists and historians see Doña Marina as a woman able to take care of herself, a person able to act on her desires, and as a person who wanted the best interactions to take place in regards to two different cultures coming together.

These two female icons, the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Malinche, reinforce what feminists call the *virgen/puta* (virgin/whore) dichotomy. The

dichotomy exists within society and defines women in only two categories: virgin or whore. This dualism separates women into categories of good and bad. Good women behave, or are expected to behave like Mary, the mother of God. The rest of the women, bad women, are known as sexually active or traitorous like La Malinche or Eve.

Chicana Leadership

There is an extreme lack of literature surrounding Mexican-American women's leadership (Méndez-Negrete, 2002). Most studies about leadership and Mexican-Americans focus on men and only from an individualistic stance. When Mexican-American women lead, they use a relational leadership strategy in order to benefit the most people. In fact, Mexican-American women do not lead for personal gain (Méndez-Negrete, 2002); to be more specific, they are not primarily concerned with the self. This may be attributed to the cultural role of *marianismo* within Latino culture for women and the cultural belief that women should be *abnegada* or put the priorities of others before themselves.

In their book on Mexican Americans and the U.S. Catholic Church between the years 1900 and 1965, Dolan and Hinojosa (1994) briefly mention the Catholic Church as a place where Mexican-American women accepted leadership roles. Though they mention several anecdotes of women taking leadership roles within their parishes, they fail to use the term again with women. In one reference, Dolan and Hinojosa could have elaborated on the

leadership roles of the women who organized efforts to eliminate the debt the church accrued when establishing its building. They write:

The most important day in the Santo Angel faith community, according to the pastor, was when the parishioners paid off the \$46,000 loan for their church building on May 19, 1946. Their effort had begun in earnest during Lent eleven years earlier. After a parish mission for women, the ladies pledged to donate ten cents a week from the family budget to retire the debt. A decade later families were contributing ten dollars a month for this special project. The effort demonstrates the roles of women in the home, that is, as managers of the household budget, and in the Church as the financial supporters of the parish. (p. 108).

Not only does this show women's ability to maintain a budget in the home and allocate spending to what they see fit, but it also shows how Latina women have strategized collectively in order to achieve something for the good of the entire community. Even in the mid-twentieth century, Mexican-American women were reportedly more involved than men in their local churches (Dolan & Hinojosa, p. 101). Not only were women active in their local churches, but they also were involved in *mutualistas*, aid societies, that benefited the local community (Dolan & Hinojosa, p. 146-7). Looking back in history and becoming aware of women's church leadership in years past is even more of an incentive to document their participation.

Feminist and Womanist Theologies

Feminist theologians have established the framework for support of women's leadership within the Catholic Church. Traditionally, theology had been an exclusively male area of study, as is true for many fields, and in the 20th century women started to break into this field. Many of the women breaking

ground in theology at this time were informed by feminist theory (Daly, 1975; Daly, 1973; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983, Radford Ruether, 1983); they integrated a feminist epistemology with theology.

The feminist theologians at this time were mostly white women. They wrote a theology intended to speak for all women. These theologians were concerned with developing hermeneutics informed by their feminism. At this time, feminist theologians wanted to reexamine what was known about women in Church history because men had overlooked the role of women in the Church. For example, feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983) utilizes a hermeneutics of reinterpretation in her writing. She uncovers where women would have been at the time of the early Christian Church. Her work has influenced many feminist Catholics to go back to history and familiarize themselves with women's history. Many feminist theologians reflect on history to support their cause and argue for women's increased role in Catholic ministry.

The predominantly white feminist theologians began to be criticized by women of color for not including the experiences and spirituality of women of color. Diana Hayes, a Black Catholic womanist theologian, adopted the term womanist from Black feminists, and she combined womanism with theology and created womanist theology. Ada-María Isasi-Díaz, a Cuban-American theologian, also noticed how white women's theology did not represent the experiences of Latinas. Similarly to other feminist of color, Isasi-Díaz states white feminism does not include racial/ethnic and class analysis of oppression

(Isasi-Díaz, 2004, p. 23). Isasi-Díaz appropriated the term “womanist,” translated it into Spanish, and coined *mujerista* theology.

According to Ada-María Isasi-Díaz, a *mujerista* is concerned about the liberation of the Latino community. Latina feminists are in a difficult situation because they face marginalization from white people and from the Latino community. They experience “invisible invisibility,” the fact that people are unaware that they do not know the experience of Latinas (Isasi-Díaz, 1985, p. 51). In order for *mujeristas* to work for the liberation of the Latino community, a *mujerista* “... builds bridges among Hispanics instead of falling into sectarianism ...” (Isasi-Díaz, 2004, p. 23).

The language Ada-María Isasi-Díaz uses to signify the process of achieving liberation is *proyecto histórico*. This term refers to the liberation of Latinos and “the historical specifics needed to attain it” (Isasi-Díaz, 2004, p. 52). “The articulations of Latinas’ *proyecto histórico* here is not only an explanation but also a strategy: it aims to help share Latinas’ understandings in our day-to-day struggle to survive ...” (p. 52). Here lies the main difference between *mujerista* theology and (white) feminist theology: many feminist theologians look to the past in order to uncover women and women’s role in the historical Church while *mujeristas* examine the present day lives of Latinas and actively seek out their liberation.

Isasi-Díaz is not the only Latina to have a feminist perspective in reading theology. Maria Pilar Aquino (2002) does not adopt the language Isasi-Díaz uses, instead Aquino prefers Latina feminist theology because Latinas do

not choose to identify as *mujeristas*. In fact, *mujerismo*, in Latin America, is an essentialist perspective that valorizes supposed innate qualities of women without acknowledging the differences among women. Aquino's theological perspective requires an understanding of the oppressed position Latinas have within the world due to globalization and the increased poverty of Latinas and the fact that Latinas are less educated than other races in the U.S. The Latino population is rising in the U.S. While they are a sizable population within faith communities, rarely is a Latina perspective integrated into theological organizations.

Latina feminist theology has four aspects. The first is divine revelation that leads to salvation, defined as liberation from every oppression. The second aspect is an integration of popular religion because it is an authentic faith experience of the men and women to which this theology pertains. Third, there is a clear feminist option for the poor. Finally, liberation, "...deliberately focuses on our daily activities aimed at transformation toward greater justice" (Aquino, 2002, p. 152). Aquino articulates Latina feminist theology in a way that is sensitive to the social location of Latinas, yet she also recognizes there are Latinas who are uncomfortable with claiming a feminist perspective for themselves.

Women in the Catholic Church

A recent pastoral letter from the United States Catholic Bishops creates a framework for Hispanic ministry. The letter describes the faith of Hispanics as

encompassing "... a profound faith in God, a strong sense of solidarity, an authentic Marian devotion, and a rich popular religiosity" (USCCB, 2002, sec. 15). According to the letter, the Hispanic church operates in a way that is relevant to the most neglected and vulnerable in society, including women and children. Social justice is an important aspect of Catholic ministry, specifically Hispanic ministry. Also, the use of Spanish is important in maintaining cultural relevancy when ministering to Hispanics. The letter seeks to include women's perspectives in a leadership model for Hispanic ministry, but it does not specifically outline the inclusion of Hispanic women as leaders. The model for ministry is to include the needs of women and children, but it does not actively and specifically endorse women as leaders of the church.

It is important to consider official church documents in research on Catholics because Church hierarchy is so revered within the organization. Overall, Catholics aim to unite with each other; they unity as a source of pride and religious commitment. The way Catholics achieve unity is through following the official teachings of the Church, which come from clergy, such as the U.S. Catholic Bishops. It is important to recognize that the official Catholic Church is aware that they must adequately minister to the Latino population. This letter shows an appreciation of the ways Latinos embrace and live out Catholicism as well as an appreciation for Latinos' contributions to the U.S. Catholic Church.

Within the conference of the United States Catholic Bishops, there is a Committee on Women in Society and in the Church. In their Committee report,

From Words to Deeds, the Bishops state that the appointment of women to church leadership positions is one of the three main goals. It is encouraging for Catholic women to have the increased support of the official Catholic Church.

Not only is there indication among clergy for the support of women's leadership, there is evidence that women are filling positions available due to the priest shortage. Across the United States, many parishes no longer have a resident priest, and non-priests administer these churches. Of churches without priests, 74 percent are run by women (Wallace, 2002, p. 15). This has been facilitated by Vatican II and subsequent changes to Canon Law (Wallace, 2002).

From 1962 to 1965, Catholic bishops convened four times to assess how the Catholic Church could become more contemporary. There were several immediate changes resulting from the council: the mass was no longer spoken in Latin but in the language the community spoke, women no longer had to cover their heads upon entering the church, and the priest turned to face the congregation. After the council, a new code of Canon Law allowed people other than a priest to be in charge of a parish.

Sociologist Ruth Wallace researched the Catholic women leading priestless parishes. One of the main distinguishing traits between women and men pastors is that women lead more collaboratively (Wallace 2002, Wallace 1992). Wallace defines a collaborative relationship as, "...based on equality rather than hierarchy, all of the persons in an organization work together to achieve a common end. The leader guides, rather than commands, drawing on the talents of others" (2002, p. 21). The women pastors actively involve parishioners in

the activities of the parish. Parishioners are pleased with the new parish leaders, most of these churches report an increase in weekly donations (Wallace, 1992), an important indicator of the lay people's commitment to their parish.

Besides women leading churches, there are many women in other parish-level leadership roles. Catholic nun Jeanine Gramick states:

On the parish level, women's leadership is found in pastoral ministry and religious education, in teaching and administration in schools, in ministry to the elderly and justice activities. Liturgically, women serve as Eucharistic ministers and lectors, though they are still barred from presiding at the Eucharistic liturgy. Priestly ordination notwithstanding, 85% of non-ordained ministerial positions in Catholic parishes in the United States are now held by women. (Gramick, 2001, p.45).

Like the women pastors in Wallace's study, these women lead collaboratively. Gramick cites the Second Wave feminist movement¹ as a major influence to Catholic women's collaborative leadership styles (2001).

This research on Catholic women taking on leadership roles on the parish level never discusses the implications of race and ethnicity. Wallace mentions that three of the 20 pastors she interviews are Mexican-American, but she does not provide a discussion about the different challenges these women face nor does she mention the cultural differences among the Mexican-American women and white women. The fact that race and ethnicity do not come up in the literature around Catholic women in leadership signifies theological and feminist scholarship renders women of color invisible. It does

¹ The Second Wave feminist movement refers to the popularly known Woman's Movement in the United States. Feminist scholars refer to this as the Second Wave because there was a major feminist movement, known as the First Wave, starting in 1948 and culminating in 1920 with women's suffrage. The following major feminist movement in the United States is referred to as Second Wave feminism for this reason.

not seem to occur to the majority of white scholars that there is importance in documenting the experiences of women of color and the effects of the intersections of culture and gender.

While there are women acting as pastors in churches throughout the nation, though the Church still does not ordain women as priests. The Catholic Church states that women cannot be priests because the priest is a representative of Jesus Christ, and he was a man; therefore a woman cannot fulfill that role. There are women today who challenge this doctrine, including the Women's Ordination Conference that works towards ordaining women in the Catholic Church and the international Roman Catholic Womenpriests that seeks to support men and women in ministerial roles.

Because of the absence of literature surrounding Latinas in Catholic Church leadership, I will research what a small group of these women experience on a daily basis as leaders in the Catholic Church. It is important for me to create scholarship pertinent to Latinas because they are so often marginalized. I hope that this research will inspire further research related to Latinas within the Catholic Church as well as other under-represented groups of women.

METHODOLOGY

My study is a continuation of a study of Catholic women who remained loyal to their local congregation while disagreeing with larger Church doctrines (Howard Ecklund). Conducted in 2000, the previous study examined a population of white Catholic women in upstate New York. Utilizing Elaine Howard Ecklund's study as a starting place, I carried out similar interviews with 10 Latinas in a small town in the Pacific Northwest to see how Latinas' responses would compare to the original Caucasian participants' answers. I conducted ten semi-structured interviews and several participant observations over the course of four months.

From the beginning, I did not have any presuppositions about where the research would lead. Instead, I wanted to find emerging themes and patterns in what the women would tell me. This is at the heart of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is a methodology that creates theory directly from the source of who or what is being studied.

Although I did not enter into my research with preconceived theories about the experiences of Latinas leadership within the Catholic Church, I do bring a feminist theoretical framework and approach to my research and my interactions with the participants. Radical feminism informs my personal understanding of feminism. I believe societal structures must be recreated to end oppression for women and all oppressed groups. Equally important to my ways of knowing and thinking, my epistemology, are critical race theory, multicultural and global feminism, and feminist theology.

Critical race theory attests that we live in a racist, white-supremacist society (hooks, 2000), and it attempts dialogue within contemporary understandings of the social construction of race. Similarly, multicultural and global feminism acknowledge that race and class, as well as gender, shape women's lives. Certain feminists, especially radical feminists, have ranked gender oppression as the worst form of oppression, thereby ignoring the experiences of women of color who experience multiple oppressions simultaneously. I am in agreement with other feminists of color (that oppression cannot be ranked) because I recognize the interlocking nature of oppression, and I do not believe that gender had a greater influence on identity than other forms of difference such as sexuality, race, class, and ability.

I see this study as giving a voice to other Latinas who are not typically represented in mainline scholarship or even within their local parishes. As the data will suggest, Latinas' presence is crucial within the Catholic Church; it is imperative that they be heard.

Researcher Epistemology

My background as a Catholic Latina allows me to have a relational connection with the women in my study. I am an insider, a practicing and confirmed² Catholic. Speaking Spanish and knowing the community create a rapport with these women that may not have developed with a European, monolingual researcher. During the interviews, I felt a bond with these women,

² I received the Catholic sacrament of confirmation; that is the final ritual in being accepted into the Church.

many of whom I had no prior relationship. We discussed their personal experiences with leading in their congregation and beliefs about women's roles within the Catholic Church, and all spoke candidly with me.

Still, I recognize I must not let my insider membership status cloud the findings of my research. I cannot let my own feelings on topics such as the male-only priesthood and the official Church's stance on birth control and abortion prevent me from accurately representing the statements of these women. As a feminist, I found it difficult to hear women describe definitions of feminism to me that included "rejecting family" or "being above men." So, even though we have much in common, at times I felt like an outsider because I philosophically disagree with many of their beliefs. It has been extremely important that I be self-reflexive in all stages of the research process because of my background.

Participants

I asked five women to participate in my study; of those five four participated in interviews. From those initial four women, I contacted seven more, and six of those women participated in interviews. One woman did not show up for an interview, and the others never responded to my phone calls or were unable to be reached. I interviewed a total of 10 women.

The criteria for selecting the women were defined in the previous study with the exception being that I exclusively interviewed Latinas. The women needed to participate in Church-related activities outside of mass and regularly

attend church. While mass attendance is a reasonable selection criterion for targeting Catholic-identified participants, other literature notes that Latinos do not define themselves as Catholic in proportional amount to mass attendance. Therefore, other studies that encompass more broad participants may have different results. Yet, it made the most sense to include women in the study who had a consistent working knowledge of the running of their local parish, and much of this is centered around mass.

The ages of the women ranged from 23 to 58 years old. Four women were in their twenties, two were in their 30s, two were in their 40s, one woman was in her fifties, and one woman did not disclose her age. Seven women had attended college; of those only 2 did not receive degrees. One woman trained as a dentist in her home country, another was a licensed massage therapist, two had doctorates, two women went to secretarial school in Mexico, and one woman has gone on to pursue a master's degree in public policy. Six women were Mexican immigrants, one woman was Mexican-American, and there were women from Chile and Puerto Rican descent. Six of the women were married with at least one child; the rest were single.

The role of feminist methodology

From the beginning of planning my research this has been a feminist endeavor. One of the marks of feminist research is its collaborative nature (Fonow & Cook, 1991); the willingness of Elaine Howard Ecklund to let another researcher follow-up on her work is a testament to feminists supporting

each other in academia. Another emblem of feminist research is the “attention to the affective components” (Fonow & Cook). I thought carefully about my non-verbal communication as well as the wording of questions when discussing a sensitive topic. For example, I sensed one woman would not be comfortable in telling me her age, and so I phrased my question in such a way that she would not feel obligated to tell me a specific number. With another woman, I knew she did not have a very high level of education, and so I anticipated presenting myself in a non-judgmental way. Because of the reciprocal nature of feminist research (Fonow & Cook), I feel I learned something from the dignified way she responded to my question as she told me middle school was the highest level of education she had received.

My reasons for doing this research are based in an ethic of caring (Collins, 1989). I acknowledged the lack of literature on Latinas, and, because I am committed to eliminating inequality, I chose this research project. Yet, the ethic of caring continued throughout the research project. In my interviews with the women, I found that I truly cared about these women and their life stories. And as I wrote my findings and represented these women as a researcher, I tried my best to accurately describe their reality. All of this is rooted in an ethic of caring.

Data Collection

I interviewed 10 women between the winter and summer of 2006. I recorded 9 of 10 semi-structured interviews. One woman was not comfortable

with being tape-recorded but was open to having a conversation while I took notes.

In doing feminist research, it makes sense to conduct a semi-structured interview. Women are socialized to talk with each other, to share intimate thoughts with one another. Using open-ended interview questions allows the natural variations of women's experiences to become evident in data collection (Reinharz, 1992, pp. 18-19). Yet, the addition of a recording device can alter the participant's comfort level when sharing information. As I mentioned above, one woman was not comfortable being tape-recorded. I feel that there are multiple reasons for her reaction: a deep sense of privacy, a feeling of doing church-work for service only and not personal recognition, and some mistrust with what would happen to the results. Denise Segura tells about the reluctance Chicana women have towards unknown researchers (1989). Yet, this woman's reaction is not a reflection of the rest of the women. The majority of the women talked openly with me, and many of the interviews exceeded my estimated time of an hour and a half to two hours. Like Eve Ensler says of her interviews with women for "The Vagina Monologues," these women wanted to tell as much as possible about their experiences with the Catholic Church.

Limitations

I have attempted to replicate Elaine Howard Ecklund's study to the best of my ability. However, there are some differences in the two studies. She interviewed 38 women from six congregations; I interviewed 10 women from

one congregation. One of the reasons for this is her research was conducted on the East Coast where there are many more Catholic congregations per region; there are far fewer Catholic Churches in the Pacific Northwest. Howard Ecklund conducted focus groups, and I chose not to use the questions from her focus groups because they were not recorded and because of time constraints. Interviews are a method that gives voice to traditionally “silenced women” (Letherby, 2003, p. 89), but their data are not always easily replicable as a survey or other quantitative method. Focus groups can inform the researcher about further topics for discussion in interviews, but the public setting may also hinder women from sharing topics in front of their peers. Had I integrated focus groups into my research methods, themes might have emerged earlier in the research. However, I feel that I gained a deep sense of trust from participants by doing in-depth, individual interviews.

FINDINGS

My research focused on Latina laywomen in the Catholic Church, and I found similarities and differences between previous findings of white lay Catholic women from a similar study. Through the interviews with 10 women from a parish in the Northwestern region of the United States, I have found that women are passionate and committed to their ministries, their leadership. They shared their thoughts and feelings on issues such as priests, feminism, and men's involvement with the church. I found four major themes within the interviews: (1) the women underemphasized their roles as leaders and referred to their leadership as "help"; (2) the women had diverse perspectives and definitions of feminism; (3) their positive perceptions of the priest coincided with being content on the role of women in the Catholic Church; (4) Balance is necessary in ministering to the needs of lay men and women.

I Like to Help: Language and Leadership

When asked to describe their role in their congregation, half of the women in the study refer to their work within the Church as "helping." Rosa³, the daughter of a previous Hispanic minister at St. Anne, said:

I mainly just helped my mom a lot. I helped a lot with the copies, bulletin and helping with coffee and donuts. Helping with the catechesis, especially with the middle school catechesis with [the youth minister] ... and the choir. The choir, is like, my big thing.

Kristina, a post-doctorate researcher, described her work with youth:

³ All of the women's names have been changed to a pseudonym.

I help out with the high school youth group which involves most, no, all of my entire Sunday evening from 4 to 8 pm. And sometimes there's some preparation that has to go on before that 4 to 8, so sometimes part of Sunday or Saturday that's involved.

Teresa, a middle aged woman who completed her doctorate before moving to the United States told about her involvement with Hispanic ministry:

Me gusta ayudar. Y a la vez me gusta tener proyectos, me gusta trabajar con la gente, he trabajado con la comunidad. Lo he hecho con mucho gusto. . .

I like to help. And at the same time I like to have projects [to work on], I like to work with the people, I have worked with the community. I have done it with a lot of pleasure . . . ⁴

Perhaps this choice of language can be accounted for by either cultural differences or a tendency of women to overlook the kind of work we do. At any rate, it is worth reflecting on this subject. These women sing in front of an entire mass; teach and lead youth of all ages about Catholic beliefs; coordinate large projects; have gone to the bishop to request a special mass time in Spanish; oversee behind the scenes work of a mass which includes putting out the religious vessels out and making sure volunteers are present and informed of their jobs; they find other women to pray and gather with and then lead these groups, and I'm sure there are other roles women take on in the church that I have not named.

A possible explanation why some of the women do not publicly claim to be leaders of the parish is the model of church they have, the theology with which they identify. The women could be acting out the theology of the faith

⁴ I have translated the Spanish interviews myself.

community as one body, with many parts. They do not need to take or announce a prominent role in leadership because they are part of a system that works well when people willingly provide their role to the benefit of the whole community.

While the language they choose to describe their involvement may seem passive, Latinas do believe they can do great work in the Catholic Church. As Elaine Howard Ecklund found in her previous study, it is important for women to feel that they have a role within their congregation, even if they feel they cannot change the larger church structure. When asked if she felt what she said made a difference in the Church, Yesenia says:

Como comunidad, yo pienso que si. Si estas envuelta de la iglesia, yo pienso que si. Para cambiar eventos, para cambiar la manera de ser de la iglesia, si. Pero como que la iglesia catolica nacional o lo que sea, no creo.

As a community, I think so. If you are involved in the church I think so. To change events, to change the way the church is, yes. But to change the church nationwide or whatever else, I don't think so.

She went on to explain why she would stay involved in her local congregation, even if she was unhappy with larger church structure:

Porque yo creo en Dios, creo en la comunidad pero mi fe se basa en Dios, en la Biblia. Y no en las ideas del sacerdote. Aunque, aunque no me gustaran las ideas del sacerdote, no veo una razon para dejar ir a la iglesia o dejarme confesar. El padre no representa mi fe o Dios.

Because I believe in God, I believe in the community but I base my faith in God, in the Bible. And not in the ideas of the priest. Even if, even if I did not like the priest's ideas, I don't see a

reason to stop going to church or stop going to confession. The priest doesn't represent my faith or God.

Whether or not Latinas feel that they are in disagreement with the Church hierarchy's doctrines, their concern lies with the local community. Amparo said:

Yo creo que para mi, me importa mucho lo que pasa con la comunidad. Y de verdad si conozco una persona que esta pasando un tiempo dificil o lo que sea, pero he dado tiempo y trato de estar alli con esa persona y darle apoyo. Yo trato de decirle yo no se que esta pasando pero aqui estoy. Si ya pasa a esa mujer por lo mismo a que yo pase puedo decirle, podemos sobrevivir, aqui estoy para darte apoyo.

I think that for me, it is very important to me what is happening in the community. And if I really know someone who is having a difficult time or what may be, I have given time and I try to be there with the person and give her support. I would try to say to her I don't know what's happening but I am here. And if what's happening to that woman is the same as what I went through, I can say to her, we can survive, and I am here to support you.

Amparo values the relationships that occur within a tight-knit community, much like how Carol Hardy-Fanta (1997) determines that “making connections – between their own lives and those of others...” is essential for Boston based Latina activists (p. 233). Amparo makes a connection between what she has experienced in her own life and how that can be of service to educate her daughters and women within her parish. Teresa also mentioned she enjoyed working with the community as a response to the question of whether or not she saw herself as a leader. Teresa and Amparo value the connections between themselves and the community that develop through the parish. Just as Boston based activists view “making connections” as a catalyst for leadership, women

in the study value making connections with the community. The ability to identify with others in the community and have that motivate their community involvement is an example of praxis; their beliefs in the community provide an initial motivation to act within the parish. This community-oriented leadership model is similar to the relational path of leadership described by feminist sociologist Jean Lipman-Blumen (1996) that regards identifying with others as a way to achieve success in a group (pp. 165-166).

Rosa and Kristina lend their talents to various ministries within the parish, surely a reflection of their commitment to community. All of the comments of the women reflect a deep, personal connection to the needs of the community. For them, the importance of their work is not reflected in their description of their contributions, rather it is shown through the relationships they have built.

The women's commitment to community is empowering for them and demonstrates that they value the time they spend cultivating their faith community. As a feminist researcher I desire that these women's perspectives be heard, yet I must also offer my commentary. The participants' commitment to community and their happiness with the status quo of the parish (as will be developed in further sections within the chapter) often prevents them from recognizing the limitations of women within their parish and the larger structure of the Catholic Church. As a feminist and a Catholic, I struggle with women's exclusion from the priesthood and secondary status in ministerial roles. Yet the

women in the study do not see the Catholic hierarchy as constraining them, nor do they identify a male-only priesthood as problematic.

Feminism

As a self-identified feminist, I, like bell hooks, understand feminism as the political movement to end oppression towards marginalized people (hooks, 2000) which includes women, the poor, LGBTQ community, people of color and the underdeveloped parts of the world. The women in my study were divided on the topic of feminism. Feminist theologian Maria Pilar Aquino (2007) discusses how feminists can work for justice with an intercultural perspective, and one way of achieving that is to possess the awareness of the political inequalities throughout the history of humankind that especially influence the relationships between women and men (p. 18). This perspective understands "...that all cultures come to be valuable resources..." for ways of being in the world yet, at the same time there is a need to eliminate the politics of inequalities (p. 19).

These ways of defining and applying feminism are not something with which many of the women in my study were familiar. Many of them had negative, stereotypical understandings of feminism, and because of that, they rejected feminism. Their understanding of feminism reflects what Gloria Anzaldua (1990) calls "whitewomen's feminism" (p. xvi), a feminism that does not acknowledge the experiences of women of color, and the women in the study do not draw upon the histories of feminist and activist women of Mexico

and Latin America. The participants often understand feminism as pitting women against men. Maria had this kind of understanding. She said:

Femenismo siento que es una persona, mujer, que quiere hacer todo por si misma y que no le gusta compartir mucho sobre todo con el sexo opuesto...

Feminism, I think is a person, a woman, that wants to do everything for herself and doesn't like to share much especially not with the opposite sex.

For Maria, feminism is negative because it means disregarding the things that she values in life such as her faith and family. She commented about a feminist she knows:

Tengo una amiga que es feminista, y ella rechaza a los hombres, ni novios ni nada. Ella esta en contra de los hombres y defiende los derechos de las mujeres y todo eso. Ella es muy radical. En ese aspecto ella es muy fuerte.

I have a friend that is a feminist, and she rejects men, no boyfriends, nothing. She is always against men, and she defends women's rights and all that. She is very radical. In that aspect she is very strong.

Even though Maria disagrees with the beliefs of her friend, she is still able to value her friend for being strong, and perhaps without admitting or articulating it, her friend's beliefs. Some Mexican-American women do not identify as feminists, but their actions and beliefs do reflect feminist ideology (Nabhan-Warren, 2007, p. 311). For example, all of the women in the study are leaders in the parish, and many of them mentioned how they support women as eucharistic ministers here in the parish. For the immigrant women, this is a

radical departure from who is allowed access to the real presence of God (in terms of Catholic theology) in their home countries.

Several of the women did not fully accept feminism, but either half-accepted feminism as something they identify with or they said they were in support of the rights of women but not feminism. Rosa was one of these women:

... I don't consider myself a feminist feminist but I feel in my life right now I don't need to get married to prove anything. I can still be a good Catholic without having to worry about marriage, and so I guess I'm kind of a feminist in that way. ... I guess my own feminism is, the way I define it is, that yeah it's okay to have guys around in our lives but we don't always have to depend on them for everything. Because I look at my mom you know and even though she always wanted to be a Suzy-homemaker, a housewife and have a bunch of kids that never happened for her. When she found God, she realized she didn't need another man in her life, and that was kind of her feminism and that's kind of my feminism too. With God I don't need any other man in my life.

Rosa attempts to define feminism in terms of her relationship with men, which many feminists would find problematic. From her lived experience, most women in socially acceptable roles are married or want to be. Those women do define themselves in relationship to men; yet Rosa is venturing outside of that realm. Through analyzing her mother's life and her own, it is possible for a woman to not have a man as the center of her life when God and religious life can act as a sort of substitute. Personally, I make a distinction between the role of a partner and God and spirituality in my life. I choose to have both, and I prefer not to interpret God as specifically male, so it would not make sense for me to see God as a substitution for a partner even if I were single. Yet, for Rosa

who has not spent years studying feminism or feminist theology, I believe in her situation affirming that she does not “need a man” is a radical statement for her to make.

Maria and Rosa reflect the majority of the women’s perspectives in this study. They do not see feminism as coinciding with Latino culture, in contrast to what Anna NietoGomez describes in her essay “La Femenista.” She claims, “... feminism is a very dynamic aspect of the Chicana’s heritage ...” (p. 89). NietoGomez sees Chicana feminism distinctly from white feminism because of the acknowledgement of racism and sexism in the lives of Chicanas. I do not have a concrete reason to explain why most of the women in the study do not see feminism in the ways that NietoGomez describes. I suggest a combination of factors: historically mainstream feminism has excluded the experiences and perspectives of women of color (Hurtado, 1996); academic feminism tends to stay close to the academic walls in which it is written; and the messages sent to Catholic Latinas from the Church hierarchy tend to reflect patriarchal ideals of womanhood such as the traditional depiction of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Anzaldua, 1987).

Amparo and Yesenia differ from the majority of the women in the study because they have positive understandings of feminism and do identify as feminists. Yesenia defined feminism in this way:

Yo creo que ser feminista es creer que la mujer vale mucho, que la mujer vale tanto como el hombre. Creer como ser humano. Para mi, sin importar de tu sexo. Yo soy tan importante para Dios y para la sociedad y para todo el mundo que un hombre, que mi hermano. Y Dios me quiere igual que a el, y soy tan capaz a llegar a tener una posición alta en un trabajo como el.

Y si yo quiero puedo ser ingeniera... yo puedo ser capaz de ser lo mismo que cualquier humano. Y luchar por eso, para mi, eso es feminismo. Creertelo y luchar para que se haga.

I believe that being a feminist is believing that women are worth a lot, that women are as valuable as men. To believe that she is a human being. For me, your sex doesn't matter. I am as important for God and for society and for the whole world as a man is, as my brother is. And God loves me the same as him, and I am as capable of having a high position as he is. And if I want I can be an engineer ... I am capable of the same things as any other person. And to fight for that, for me, that is feminism. Believe in yourself and fight that it be accomplished.

I asked her if she identified as a feminist before or after college. Yesenia

continues to explain why she identifies as a feminist and answers:

Igual que las [ideas] tengo toda mi vida porque crecí con una abuela muy liberal. ... Entonces mi abuela desde niña, me demostró con hechos y palabras de que una mujer puede salir sola en la vida. Y ella es fuerte, entonces yo nací con la idea podía hacer tantas cosas como los hombres. Pero yo no sabía en realidad lo que era ser feminista hasta mucho después. Si me hubieran dicho cuando yo tenía 15 años, "eres feminista?" yo hubiera dicho "no" porque no sabía que era. Y con la connotación mala, negativa que tenía yo hubiera dicho "no" por ignorancia y por no quererme ver mal ante mis amigos mexicanos. Ahora soy más madura, y no me importa tanto lo que digan los demás también. Ya puedo decir más obviamente que si soy feminista.

I have had the same ideas all of my life because I grew up with a very liberal grandmother. ... So my grandmother ever since I was a child, showed me with actions and words that a woman can come through life on her own. And she is strong, so I was born with the idea that I could do as many things like men can. But I didn't really know that it was feminism until much later. If they would have said to me when I was 15 years old, "Are you a feminist?" I would have said "no" because I didn't know what it was. And with the bad connotation, negative that it had, I would have said "no" because of ignorance and to not look bad in front of my Mexican friends. Now I am more mature, and I don't care what other say, also. Now I can obviously say that yes I am a feminist.

Like Yesenia's conviction in identifying feminism as a positive perspective for women, Amparo says this of feminism:

Yo creo que el feminismo es ... Cuando una mujer defiende los derechos de otra mujer. Cuando una mujer lucha por lo que cree.

I believe that feminism is ... When a woman defends the rights of another woman. When a woman fights for what she believes.

Amparo is a survivor of domestic violence, and explains why she identifies as a feminist:

Porque he creado tres mujeres que piensan aunque no quieren pensar como yo, a veces no quisieran hacer las cosas como he gustado pero yo creo que yo las eduque de una manera donde yo no quería que fueran mujeres débiles. Yo no querría que paso a ninguna circunstancia que tiene que pasar de lo que yo pase. Que sean mujeres fuertes ...

Because I have three daughters that think even if they don't want to think like me, at times they may not want to do things like I had liked but I think that I raised them in a way where I didn't want them to be weak women. I would not want any circumstance to happen to them like the one that happened to me. I want them to be strong women ...

Amparo believes women ought to fight for what they believe in and that her daughters can benefit from the positive knowledge she has gained about women through surviving domestic violence.

Both Yesenia and Amparo use the word "luchar," to fight, multiple times in their definitions of feminism. As the first aspect of Latina feminist theology suggests, divine revelation reveals salvation; their revelations, strikingly similar, are united in the need for women to fight for their beliefs, self-worth and place in this world. Their understanding of feminism as directly linked to the value of women as human beings is a result of their lived

experience. This is much like Isasi-Diaz's theory of *proyecto historico*, the strategy of understanding our daily experience and what is needed for change in order to survive. For Amparo to survive and encourage the survival of her daughters, her *proyecto historico* needed to encompass an understanding of the role of women in the world as strong valuable women.

Even within this small sample of Catholic Latinas there is a wide array of perspectives on feminism. This shows that women, in any group be it Latina Catholics or another grouping of women, do not think in unison. Feminist researchers ought to document this breadth of perspectives in order to have complete, or as close to complete, data on women. The richness of viewpoints that come from women illustrates the complexity of women and their lived experiences.

Perceptions

The next section developed here is about the perceptions of the women in this study towards two people with power within the Catholic Church: priests and women. I name this section "Perceptions" because the word implies seeing reality from a person's own point of view. I want this section to show how the women perceive the roles of women and priests to be in the Church; I also want to show where I as a researcher disagree with some of their perspectives. At the same time, I do recognize that my own perspective is a perception of reality, and I hope that my analysis of the women's words acts as lens to view their experience.

The role of the priest

The priest has a large role in influencing the congregation of a parish. Howard Ecklund (2001) found that a priest with progressive views on leadership allows for a congregational culture that accepts women in more leadership roles (p. 27). Also his interpretation of women's involvement also influences the women in the congregation in positive and negative ways. As Howard Ecklund found in her study, the women in this study are affected by the priest's perceptions of their leadership involvement.

There is an overwhelming support for the Spanish-speaking priest at St. Anne's. The women in this study feel he supports laywomen and men equally, he listens to their concerns, and he is bringing more people to the congregation. Teresa said:

¡Padre Marcos nos encanta como es! Es un padre muy joven, otra cosa es, tiene bastante carisma espiritual. Siempre a las personas con mucho carino, y les hace sentir bien. Es un buen lider...

Father Marcos, we love how he is! He is a young priest, another thing is, he has a lot of spiritual carisma. He is always very caring with people, he makes them feel good. He is a good leader.

Lilia says of the same priest:

Para mi es un buen padre. Da muchos consejos buenos, es una persona sincera.

For me he is a good priest. He gives good advice, he is a sincere person.

When I asked her if the priest supports lay leadership, she responded:

Si. Aquí no hay discriminación.

Yes. There is no discrimination here.

Maria commented on his leadership:

Bueno creo que su liderazgo es muy bueno y el ha traído gente nueva también y ahora con lo que hace de los retiros siento que es una buena opción para que la gente se acerque mas a la iglesia y como le gusta andar de casa a casa buscando gente también anima muchas personas a ir.

Well, I think his leadership is very good and he has brought new people [to church] too, and now with what he is going with the retreats I think that it is a good option for people to get closer to the church and how he likes going from house to house looking for people, too, that inspires a lot of people to come.

The women are very happy with this priest, and they believe in the work he is doing to increase attendance for the Spanish masses. There is a correlation that with their feeling content with the role of the parish priest and his support of lay leadership, the women do not appear to desire an increased role within the church structure. I will discuss this further in the next section.

The role of women in the Church

Since the vast changes of Vatican II, the role of women in the Church has changed significantly. Within different generations, there are various perceptions of women's roles in the Church. For example a younger woman is more accustomed to women's participation in Church activities while an older woman has seen differing degrees of women's involvement over time. When asked directly about the limitations of women's roles in the Catholic Church,

half of the women did not report any even though there is quite an obvious limitation: the priesthood. These women were between the ages 30-50. It may be due to generational differences that these women seem to not notice women's exclusion from the priesthood. Pilar, the oldest woman in the study jokingly replied to my question that the only limitation was women cannot be priests. However, she followed up her joke by stating she would not like women to be priests and said, "It's nice they allow us to participate." When she says "they" I interpret that to mean priests, the clergy. Her comment reflects a hierarchical interpretation of Catholic Church hierarchy: clergy on top of the pyramid, laity on the bottom. If laity believe that the priests "allow" the laity to participate, then the laity are supporting the clergy as gatekeepers of who can and cannot be involved in ministry. This is a disempowering perspective of the laity, which also translates as disempowering for women in the Catholic Church because women are barred from the priesthood.

While most middle-aged women did not view women's exclusion from the priesthood as a limitation, three of the women in their 20's did acknowledge that women cannot be priests. Even though they mentioned this limitation, none of the three women was in support of women's ordination. Rosa discusses the idea of women in the priesthood:

They can't consecrate the body and blood, but that's pretty much it, because that's the role of the priest, and I respect that.
Because that's the way it is, and I respect that.

Yesenia discusses in more detail why she thinks women should not be priests:

No creo que las mujeres no sean capaces o no creo que no tengan la misma fe. Yo pienso que los hombres están mas preparados para ese papel.

I don't believe that women are not capable and I don't think that women do not have the same faith. I think that men are more prepared for this role.

It seems that due to generational differences, younger women are more inclined to notice when there is a difference between who is allowed to participate in certain roles within the Church, yet, even though they notice a difference in roles this does not mean that younger women will oppose these differences.

The women in this study are content with both the priest who presides at their mass time and the role of women in the church. These women do not take a progressive stance on increasing the role of women in the Catholic Church to include the priesthood, as do the women in Howard Ecklund's study. They feel their contribution to their parish, community and families can be made within socially acceptable roles, and using the words of Rosa, they "respect" the position of the all-male priesthood. There are a variety of factors that could explain why the women do not challenge the male-only priesthood: (1) they have known this model of church for their whole lives; (2) they have not personally seen women in the priesthood or female pastors and ministers; (3) the influence of male-centered theology on God and the role of early Christians; and (4) the women do not personally know women who feel called to the priesthood.

More research should be done before coming to the conclusion that the majority of Latinos also feel this way. However, if further research suggests

that most Latinos do not prefer to see women in the priesthood, this may complicate the mission of organizations such as Call to Action, a national group of Catholics who push for social change within the Church. Given that Latinos are going to outnumber other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. Catholic Church, their support may prove necessary to influence change on this issue.

Involvement of the laity: Men and women together?

The women in this study perform a multitude of roles for their parish.

They acknowledge that more women than men are involved in parish life.

Some offer a reason, Laura believes:

... women are more prone to come to church. They do have more devotion than men. I don't know why, maybe it's just because we find refuge more in our devotions ...

Maria suggests this reason as why men are less involved:

Bueno siento que es porque los hombres dedican mas tiempo a trabajar y a veces muchos de ellos trabajan los días domingos y a veces la señora, no,... Entonces es los hombres que trabajan mucho en los domingos. O se van a ver el fútbol.

Well I feel that it is because men dedicate more time to work and sometimes many of them work on Sundays and sometimes the woman doesn't... So its that men work a lot on Sundays. Or they go watch soccer.

According to Maria, most of the men are not coming to church or involved with church because of work, she slyly suggests at the end that maybe they are watching sports. Her comment slipped in at the end indicates that some men may be more interested in having fun on their own terms than coming to church. While I do believe there is some truth to Maria's comments, not all of the

women were able to come to the same conclusion for why men are not involved at the same level as women. Alma offers this reason:

Pienso yo que si vamos a ver quien trabaja mas en la iglesia de hombres y mujeres podria decir que si hay mas mujeres trabajando que los hombres. No se porque será, será porque son más tímidos.

I think that if we are going to look at who works more in the church out of men and women, we could say that there are more women working than men. I don't know why this is, it could be because they are more timid.

Maria thinks men are working or watching football, Alma says men are timid and that is why they are not involved in the church. I do not fully subscribe to either of their reasons for why men are not as involved in church; it is more likely that it is a combination of factors.

Lay women are not the only ones who realize that there is an imbalance of the laity involved in the church. Four missionaries, male missionaries from South America, have come to St. Anne's to work with the various ministries of the parish. One of the kinds of outreach they are doing is targeted towards Latino male Catholics who are not coming to church or involved in parish life.

Laura describes the work of the missionaries:

... when the missionaries came, they have all these ideas and they started doing retreats for men. One of the retreats has happened already and there is a coming one which is for men, and so, there is a renewal for men in our parish. I find that a specific and, I find it as a sign of grace because there is a call for men to review their own ways and to make these ways, to make them for what Christ wants for families or men to be. At the same time that's going to create a change in family dynamics. But the experience of missionaries in other cases has been that when this happens the women get really jealous. Women get jealous because they see men get more involved in the church,

and they see changes and they lose control over everything. So what I suggested was that there is a need for women to also get this kind of renewal.

Laura's retelling of the missionaries' perception of women's reactions to increased lay male involvement in the church is telling. The women get "jealous" because they "lose control" over what happens in their parish. With the increased involvement of laywomen since Vatican II, women are actually sharing control with male clergy. Having more men, even if they are not clergy, involved with church puts women's leadership in jeopardy; this is how I imagine some women react to the focus on male ministry and the grooming of lay men for church leadership. Of course, church is a place for men and women to come together to worship, to organize events and participate as a community, which is why Laura hopefully suggests to the missionaries also to include women in this "renewal." Other women are not as hopeful as Laura. Amparo says this about the work of the missionaries:

... ahora, el ministerio de estos chicos que están trabajando en la parroquia, están haciendo un trabajo excelente, pero están tan enfocados en el ministerio de los hombres. Bien enfocado pero se olvidan de las mujeres...

... now, the ministry of those boys that are working for the parish, they are doing an excellent job, but they are so focused on men's ministry. Well focused but they forget the women...

Amparo acknowledges the good work the missionaries are doing for men, but she also recognizes the needs of women in the parish. As Laura suggests, women should also be included in the retreats and focus of the mission of the church. Laura and Amparo know there should be a balance in the efforts of

outreach to men and women in the church. I hope that there also be a balance in the decision-making and leadership roles across the church. I hope that when men start coming to the church in higher numbers that they are not given the path of the glass escalator to leadership roles and women are shown where the parish linens are for cleaning. I know that this will only happen if women remain diligent in examining the roles we have in the church.

In this chapter I discussed four major findings of my research. They describe this involvement, their leadership, with simple words; those words do not reflect the amplitude of their work. Second, the women had a range of perspectives on feminism. Some of the women had negative definitions of feminism and did not identify as feminists. Some women had a limited view of feminism, and mainstream feminists likely may not accept these women as “real” feminists, but these women’s actions and perspectives demonstrated a consciousness of gender roles different than what is socially acceptable in their communities. Two of the women in the study did identify as feminists yet none of the women, not even the women who self-identified as feminists, want to see women in the priesthood. Third, the positive perceptions of the priest coincided with their contentment with the status quo of women’s roles in the church. Their happiness with the current state of affairs prevents them from challenging the church structure, yet it may be difficult for them to challenge the hierarchy because this model of church is what they know. Finally, there is a need to balance the resources for men and women in the church. If the priests and ministers lose sight of the women who have so long contributed to church

leadership, they risk alienating a large group of their parishioners. Since the time of the interview, the parish has hired one of the women as the Hispanic minister. My hope is that these women will continue to develop as leaders and continue to reflect upon the role of Catholic women within the hierarchy. Perhaps with time, these women can examine how very valuable they are to an institution that fears women leading from the pulpit.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Research

I identify the experience of some lay Catholic Latinas who are leaders in their congregation. The qualitative findings I describe are distinct from the findings of Elaine Howard Ecklund's study of only white Catholic laywomen leaders. My study aims to give voice to women who might otherwise not have representation in academic literature; yet, more research should be done regarding the experiences of lay Catholic Latinas, which I will describe in the following section.

I was able to confirm that the parish culture does influence women's leadership involvement. An unexpected finding was the high perceptions of the priest's leadership role in the church; many of the women praised the priest highly and their positive perception of him correlates with their involvement in the church. One difference between the women in my study and Howard Ecklund's is that none of the women in my study reported disagreeing with church hierarchy or doctrines. While some of the women in the previous were remaining loyal to local institutions despite experiencing dissonance, none of the women in my study felt this conflict. Though the women in my study did not feel conflicted, they are involved in Church leadership for many of the same reasons that the women in the previous study do: to be heard in the congregation, a place to do meaningful work, and a place to live out Catholic identity (Howard Ecklund, 200?, p. 18).

Because I approach my research from a feminist perspective, I was curious to develop their interpretations on feminism. Many of the women had negative understandings of feminism, yet a few women did have positive understandings of feminism and self-identified as feminists. Their understandings of feminism are reflective of Latina feminist theorists such as Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz's *mujerista* theology. Even though there were some women that did identify as feminists, none of the women endorsed expanding women's roles in the church to the priesthood. While none of the women in this study want to see female priests, this is not necessarily reflective of all the Latinas in the United States. More research needs to be done with Latinas.

Recommendations for future research

There are four areas that need to be developed for research including Latinas. Research is needed about Latinas and leadership. There is a need to examine the language that resonates with Latinas around leadership and their ways of approaching leadership. How is Latina leadership distinct from other groups? What are their strengths in leading? How can Latina leadership be developed? I recommend that there be both qualitative and quantitative studies for this area.

Second, there is a lack of research on the experiences of Latina Catholic laywomen. It would be useful to interview more Latina Catholic laywomen in a study similar to the one outlined here. Due to the constraints of this study, it was not within the scope of the researcher to broadly research Latina laywomen

across the country. A study of that size could more accurately depict the experiences of Latina Catholic laywomen which could be utilized by women studies, Chicano/a studies and religious studies scholars as well as parishes. It would also be helpful to know what Latinas do when they do not like the parish priest: does this prevent them from leading; do they travel to find a parish with a priest they respect? Also, more in depth studies within groups of Latinas and Chicanas that lead in the Catholic Church would create a richer discussion and provide a more accurate representation on this topic.

Third, more research is needed to understand how the various subcultures that make up Latinos feel towards the priesthood. Many of the women in this study are Mexican or Mexican-American. Perhaps the results would be different with a diverse group of Latinas. Would Latinos from certain countries support women in the priesthood while others do not? Do Latinos in urban areas within the United States support changes in the priesthood more than Latinos in rural areas? Studies that gather substantial participants from a variety Latin American countries of origin now living in the United States can illuminate this subject.

Finally, it would be of interest to women and gender studies to have a better understanding of Latinas' understandings of feminism. Do Latinas have a positive or negative perception of feminism? Do they know about Chicanas' and Latinas' contributions to feminism? Having the answers to questions like these would give insight in how to reach out to and do consciousness raising with Chicanas and Latinas.

Final thoughts

In this study, I sought to give a voice to women who otherwise may not be included in academic literature. Regardless of being acknowledged, these women will continue to minister in their parishes because of their commitment to community and God. I feel blessed that they were generous with their time and willingness to share their stories, and it is my hope that academia will continue to pay attention to their contributions.

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