

Empowered for Action:
The Coalition Project of the Evangelical Women's Caucus

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Abstract

Empowered for Action: The Coalition Project of the Evangelical Women's Caucus

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The Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC) established an unprecedented relationship between evangelicals and feminists in the United States, the impacts of which persist today. In the 1960s and 1970s, many Americans viewed the emerging second-wave feminist movement as ideologically incompatible with evangelicalism. Pioneering biblical feminists, however, believed the Bible confirmed that God created women and men equally in his image. In 1974, biblical feminists came together and built the EWC to advocate gender equality, bringing the "secular" feminist fight against sexism and sex-based discrimination into evangelical communities and churches. This dissertation examines how, despite representing ideologies often in tension, pathfinding biblical feminists built and sustained a coalition (the EWC), which grew into a movement (biblical feminism) that has transformed feminism, evangelicalism, and the broader American landscape. Drawing on extensive archival research, this dissertation traces the trajectory of the EWC from its inception to its current iteration as the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus – Christian Feminism Today (EEWC-CFT). By examining the EWC's construction, maintenance, successes, schisms, and failures, this dissertation highlights the ongoing and reciprocal relationships between biblical feminists, evangelicals, and feminists throughout this history. The EWC exposed intersections, overlaps, and conflicts between the feminist and evangelical movements and incited new discourses around broader cultural questions about appropriate gender roles, reproductive rights, homosexuality, and race. Bridging evangelicalism and feminism, biblical feminists created a new identity that challenged existing ideological, political, and social binaries. Through the lens of the EWC's coalition-building project, this dissertation reinterprets the history of biblical feminism, emphasizing its fluid, reciprocal, and interactive characteristics. This relational focus better reflects the complexities and nuances of biblical feminists' lived realities. Although this dissertation examines biblical feminist history, the discourses, challenges, conflicts, and repercussions that biblical feminists instigated, navigated, and, ultimately, have survived remain part of the contemporary narrative of polarization in American culture. Revisiting this past through a new lens can help scholars and activists understand and navigate the present.

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Introduction

We're On Our Way, Lord!

When biblical feminists formed the Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC) in 1974, they established an unprecedented relationship between evangelicals and feminists in the United States. Many Americans considered evangelicalism and feminism to be ideologically incompatible, but early biblical feminists disagreed.¹ Believing that God created women and men equally in his image, evangelical feminists understood the secular feminist movement to be promoting an essentially Christian principle: the innate equality of the sexes.² Biblical feminists built the EWC to bring the secular feminist fight against sexism and sex-based discrimination into their communities and churches. In so doing, biblical feminists transformed feminism, evangelicalism, and the broader American landscape. The EWC's coalition project, from its inception to its current iteration as the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus – Christian Feminism Today (EEWC-CFT), disrupts historical, political, and ideological boundaries between evangelicals and feminists, and within evangelicalism itself. This dissertation highlights the complexities of coalition-building and identity construction and maintenance. By examining the EWC's coalitional trajectory, I present a relational history of biblical feminism, deeply intertwined with evangelicalism and feminism.

The evangelical feminist movement began almost by accident. Historians and evangelical feminists credit Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty with launching the biblical feminist movement through their book *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation*. Published in 1974, this seminal text gave voice to nascent biblical feminist ideologies, and its unexpectedly eager reception revealed a community of like-minded Christians ready to mobilize.³ However, in the introduction to *All We're Meant to Be*, Scanzoni and Hardesty explained:

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I use "biblical feminist" and "evangelical feminist" interchangeably to discuss EWC members and members of the broader biblical feminist movement. The EWC has undergone three name changes since its inception to reflect its changing membership: the EWC became the Evangelical Women's Caucus International (EWCI) in 1980; the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus (EEWC) in 1990; and the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus - Christian Feminism Today (EEWC-CFT) in 2009. In this dissertation, I use the coalition name that corresponds with the era being discussed whenever possible. I use footnotes to signal name changes.

² See chapter one for a discussion about the EWC's Statement of Faith, which outlines how early biblical feminists understood God-given gender equality. Throughout this dissertation I use the term "secular" when discussing the liberal, mainstream women's movement to differentiate this movement from the biblical feminist movement. This is not to suggest that religion was not important to the mainstream feminist movement, but simply to designate between both feminist movements. Historian Ann Braude has argued that religion has played an integral role in the mainstream feminist movement in "A Religious Feminist—Who Can Find Her? Historiographical Challenges from the National Organization for Women." *The Journal of Religion* 84, no. 4 (2004).

³ Early Christian feminists were publishing articles about gender equality in evangelical magazines and periodicals, authoring books, and leading workshops at conferences beginning in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. For example, Letha Scanzoni's 1966 article "Woman's Place: Silence or Service?" published in *Eternity* magazine is often cited as a seminal moment where feminist ideas were integrated with evangelicalism. Ruth A. Schmidt published an article in 1971 titled "Second-Class Citizenship in the Kingdom of God" in *Christianity Today* and a similarly themed article by Nancy Hardesty in *Eternity* magazine followed also in 1971, titled "Women: Second Class Citizens." However, there was no consolidated, official, national movement until the formation of the EWC in 1974.

In speaking of liberation for the Christian woman, we are not thinking of an organization or movement, but rather a state of mind in which a woman comes to view herself as Jesus Christ sees her—as a person created in God’s image whom he wants to make free to be whole, to grow, to learn, to utilize fully the talents and gifts God has given her as a unique individual.⁴

The authors did not intend to instigate a movement with their book, nor did they suggest any direct actions toward Christian women’s liberation. Scanzoni and Hardesty wrote *All We’re Meant to Be* to transform Christian women’s self-perceptions; they focused on changing the hearts and minds of Christians as a necessary first step toward social change, a familiar convention among evangelicals during this period.⁵ However, Scanzoni and Hardesty’s book did spark a movement, and in 1978, at the Evangelical Women’s Caucus’ second national conference, it was clear that a biblical feminist movement was not only underway, but flourishing. This conference, held in Pasadena, CA and titled “Women and the Ministries of Christ,” was wildly successful; over 1000 participants attended from thirty-five states, including members from multiple Christian denominations and secular feminist organizations, including the National Organization for Women (NOW).⁶ Letha Scanzoni gave the conference’s keynote address and reflected on the perspective she had when co-writing *All We’re Meant to Be*. Scanzoni explained that for Christian women’s liberation, “[t]he state of mind, the basic attitude, comes first. But as more and more persons share that basic state of mind, a movement gets underway.”⁷ A focus on individual, internal change made sense to early biblical feminists, but “Christian women’s liberation needed both; liberation required a change of mind and an organization that brought together a sisterhood of changed minds.”⁸

⁴ Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women’s Liberation* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1974), 11. Emphasis in original.

⁵ In the preface to this edition, Hardesty wrote, “We hope that our thoughts will stretch your mind, inspire your spirit, and deepen the love in your heart for all of your sisters” (9). It has been a popular belief among evangelicals from the nineteenth century to the present that individual conversion will lead to a transformation of social structures, as converts, one at a time, apply Christian ideals to their social worlds. This idea is explored in more detail in chapter one. See also Darryl G. Hart for an examination of this ideology in nineteenth century evangelicalism: *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 89. Problems arising from this way of thinking, relative to later anti-racist ideals, are explored in chapter four. See also Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶ The EWC’s 1978 conference in Pasadena, California was co-sponsored by Fuller Theological Seminary. Approximately 1000 women and fifty men attended the event. According to EWC member and archivist Sue Horner, some of the Christian denominations represented included “Presbyterian, Lutheran, Church of the Covenant, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Church of God, and Assemblies of God” (Sandra Sue Geeting Horner, “Becoming All We’re Meant to Be: A Social History of the Contemporary Evangelical Feminist Movement, a Case Study of the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2000), 188-193). See also Isaac B. Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals: A Story of Liberal, Black, Progressive, Feminist, and Gay Christians – and the Movement That Pushed Them Out* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2023), 190-1. Scanzoni noted that “[p]robably no portion of [the book] has been reprinted and quoted more frequently” than this passage (“Marching On!” in *Women and the Ministries of Christ*, eds. Roberta Hestenes and Lois Curley (Pasadena, California: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979), 126).

⁷ Scanzoni, “Marching,” 129. Emphasis in original.

⁸ Horner, “Becoming,” 198.

The genesis of the biblical feminist movement can be unofficially traced to the fast friendship between Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni. Before meeting in 1968, Hardesty and Scanzoni had each felt isolated in their evangelical communities. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, most evangelicals were socially, politically, and theologically conservative.⁹ Due, in part, to national polling challenges and discrepancies regarding how “evangelical” was defined, the number of American evangelicals during this period is not known.¹⁰ However, according to historian George Marsden, evangelicalism in the 1950s and 1960s included “anyone who like[d] Billy Graham.”¹¹ A White, southern-born, and conservative Baptist preacher, Graham was both a leader within the movement and the “prototypical” evangelical.¹² Graham’s charisma garnered him national and international success, and he rapidly became the face of twentieth-century evangelicalism, promoting the broader principles of the movement: evangelism, personal conversion (being “born-again”), and an individual relationship with Christ.¹³ Moreover, with his “strong connections with...evangelists and church leaders around the country,” Graham served as an “important bridge between northern and southern evangelicals,” helping to unify the movement.¹⁴ Within this broader evangelical landscape, Scanzoni and Hardesty had each felt alone in the belief that God created the genders to be equal and that women should have leadership roles in the home, church, and society. When the two women discovered that they shared this unconventional perspective, which rejected traditional evangelical gender norms, they found strength in this comradery.

Nancy Hardesty was born in Ohio in 1941 and raised as a fundamentalist in the Christian Missionary Alliance Church. A holiness denomination, the Christian Missionary Alliance recognizes that the Holy Spirit can speak through any worshipper. Thus, during her upbringing Hardesty witnessed “an array of capable women serving as missionaries and evangelists” (though not as

⁹ For example, sociologist James Davison Hunter notes that most evangelicals rallied behind Republican Barry Goldwater in his 1964 presidential campaign, supported the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam war, fought “to reinstitute prayer and Bible reading in public schools,” and either ignored or condemned the civil rights movement (*American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 45-6); See also, Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 82. For a more in-depth discussion of evangelicals’ understandings of race and racism, and their views of the civil rights movement, see chapter four.

¹⁰ Statistics regarding American evangelicals during this period are unreliable or non-existent due, in part, to polling discrepancies and a multiplicity of definitions of evangelicalism. Estimates of American evangelicals in the late 1960s range from two million to twenty-five million (Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 1-2). See also Robert Wuthnow, *Inventing American Religion: Polls, Surveys, and the Tenuous Quest for a Nation’s Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 95-6. For more on the problems of polling during this period, see Wuthnow, *Inventing American Religion*. Scholars suggest that, while exact numbers are not known, the movement was clearly growing through the 1950s and 1960s because evangelical organizations were expanding (Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 181, 186). For more information on the problems of defining “evangelical,” see chapter one.

¹¹ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 6. Although partly tongue-in-cheek, scholars often agree that Marsden’s is the most effective definition of evangelicalism for this period. For example, see Daniel Silliman, “An Evangelical Is Anyone Who Likes Billy Graham: Defining Evangelicalism with Carl Henry and Networks of Trust,” *Church History* 90, no. 3 (2021): 621–43; and Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, xvi-xvii. See also Wuthnow, *Inventing American Religion*, 96.

¹² Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, xvi.

¹³ *Ibid.*; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 2; 64

¹⁴ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 176.

ordained pastors).¹⁵ Hardesty graduated from Wheaton College, a well-known evangelical institution in Illinois, in 1963. Hardesty then earned a master's in journalism from Northwestern University in 1964 and joined the editorial team at *Christian Century*, a mainline Protestant magazine based in Chicago, IL. In this role, working with the "demanding and acerbic news and copy editor" Margaret Frakes, Hardesty first developed a "feminist consciousness."¹⁶ From 1966 to 1969, Hardesty worked as an editorial assistant at *Eternity*, a conservative evangelical magazine, where her path would fatefully intersect with Letha Scanzoni.¹⁷

Letha Scanzoni (née Dawson) was born in Pittsburgh, PA, in 1935. As a child, Scanzoni held beliefs that she would later label "feminist."¹⁸ In an interview in 2019, Scanzoni explained, "I can't remember not being a feminist. I think I was one from the very beginning. I didn't know the word, but as a little kid I always said, 'Girls can do anything boys can do!'"¹⁹ Scanzoni's parents fostered these values, but when she began participating in evangelical and fundamentalist communities in her late teenage years, Scanzoni encountered resistance.²⁰ Leaders in these communities pointed to Scripture to restrict women's roles, "saying that's what God wanted," but Scanzoni rejected this perspective and thought to herself: "That's not the God I know."²¹ In 1954, like Hardesty, Scanzoni attended college at a well-known evangelical institution, Moody Bible Institute, in Chicago, IL. In 1956, Scanzoni got married and left her studies before graduating to look after her young family.²² During this period, she began writing, and in 1966 Scanzoni published a controversial article titled "Woman's Place: Silence or Service?" in *Eternity*. In this article, Scanzoni advocated for women's free expression of their spiritual gifts, challenging a conservative interpretation of Scripture that prohibited women from teaching audiences that included men.²³ "Woman's Place" drew "vehement" backlash from some *Eternity* readers, including a letter to the editors that proclaimed: "Mrs. Scanzoni's article is a perfect example of why a woman is admonished to be silent in the church."²⁴ Nonetheless, in 1967 *Eternity's* executive editor, William Petersen, asked Scanzoni to

¹⁵ Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, "In Memorandum: Nancy A. Hardesty," *American Academy of Religion*, http://rsnonline.org/indexab74.html?option=com_content. The Christian Missionary Alliance only allowed women to be ordained and claim the title of "pastor" in 2023.

¹⁶ Horner, "Becoming," 323. Frakes became a staff member at *Christian Century* in 1944 and became associate editor in 1951.

¹⁷ Hardesty later went on to complete a PhD in American Christian history at the University of Chicago, under the supervision of prominent religious historian, Martin E. Marty.

¹⁸ Janene Cates Putman, "An Interview with Letha Dawson Scanzoni," *Christian Feminism Today*, 2019, <https://eewc.com/an-interview-with-letha-dawson-scanzoni/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Scanzoni later returned to school and graduated with a bachelor's degree in religious studies from Indiana University in 1972. Letha and her husband John divorced in 1983 (Penelope Green, "Letha Dawson Scanzoni, Pioneer of Evangelical Feminism, Dies at 88," *New York Times*, 30 January, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/30/us/letha-dawson-scanzoni-dead.html>).

²³ Scanzoni, "Christian Marriage: Patriarchy or Partnership? (Published as 'Elevate Marriage to Partnership')," *Letha's Calling: A Christian Feminist Voice*, <https://lethadawsonscanzoni.com/blog/>. See also, Scanzoni, "Woman's Place: Silence or Service?" *Eternity*, February 1966.

²⁴ Scanzoni, "Backstory: Woman's Place—Silence or Service?" *Letha's Calling: A Christian Feminist Voice*, <https://lethadawsonscanzoni.com/2010/03/backstory-womans-placesilence-or-service/>

write another article about “women in the home.”²⁵ She accepted the request with trepidation and submitted a draft titled, “Christian Marriage: Patriarchy or Partnership.”²⁶

Petersen responded to Scanzoni, asking her to make some edits to specifically “expand on headship” in marriage.²⁷ Petersen wanted Scanzoni to discuss the “divine order presented repeatedly in Scripture, ‘not only in the Ephesians 5 and 6 passages, but also in a passage like Romans 13:1’” which outlined the husband’s role as the head of the family.²⁸ Scanzoni had intentionally avoided analyzing headship in her first draft because she knew how important this concept was to evangelicals, and she also knew that she disagreed with the dominant evangelical view. Scanzoni recalled,

[E]very time I had ever read an article on Ephesians 5 or heard a sermon on the passage, the main emphasis had always been on the ‘wife’s duty to submit’ and hammering home the idea that she must be subordinate and obedient to her husband. The penchant for a predetermined and unambiguous social order was – and continues to be — strong in much of the evangelical world and in other religious groups as well.²⁹

Scanzoni’s personal reading of Scripture supported an “equalitarian marriage” structure, which conflicted with the dominant interpretations that supported wifely subordination to the husband’s headship. Scanzoni felt underqualified to present her interpretation of this biblical ideal and was understandably apprehensive considering the backlash from her earlier article.³⁰ At Petersen’s request, Scanzoni cautiously amended her article. The revised draft included the following explanation of headship:

The role of the husband as ‘head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church’ calls for a Christian husband to love his wife as himself, to care for her as he does his very own body (Eph. 5:28, 29), to cherish her (Eph. 5:25), to look after her welfare, to recognize that he is a unity with her (Eph. 5:31). The stress is always on responsibility, not rank.³¹

After resubmitting her carefully revised article, Scanzoni did not hear back from *Eternity* magazine for seven months.

When Scanzoni finally received a response in 1968, it was from *Eternity*’s assistant editor, Nancy Hardesty.³² Hardesty introduced herself to Scanzoni and explained that she had “just

²⁵ Scanzoni, “Backstory: ‘Elevate Marriage to Partnership’ (1968 *Eternity* article)” *Letha’s Calling: A Christian Feminist Voice*, <https://lethadawsonscanzoni.com/2010/04/backstory-elevate-marriage-to-partnership1968-eternity-article/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Scanzoni felt apprehensive because she “was not a Greek scholar” and could not engage with an original translation of the New Testament (Ibid). Scanzoni noted in her blog that, at that time, biblical feminists were not engaging in biblical hermeneutics unless they were also biblical scholars, trained in biblical languages (Ibid).

³¹ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

³² Ibid.

finished editing [the] article.”³³ Hardesty exclaimed, “I’m really impressed by it – and I don’t think it’s radical or provocative at all. It’s just right and true and like it should be.” Hardesty wryly added, “But then I’m only a woman!”³⁴ Hardesty notified Scanzoni that the article would be published in the July issue and requested a photograph of Scanzoni with her husband to run with the article, “to show that he approves of your writing such ‘radical’ stuff.”³⁵ Scanzoni’s article, edited by Hardesty, appeared in *Eternity* in 1968 under the bold new title: “Elevate Marriage to Partnership.” Scanzoni had felt alienated and alone in her beliefs about women and gender equality in evangelical circles. However, when she encountered Nancy Hardesty for the first time in this exchange, she knew she had found a “sister Christian feminist!”³⁶ This first encounter sparked a lifelong friendship, which helped lay the groundwork for the biblical feminist movement.

Before the two women met in person, Scanzoni wrote Hardesty a letter inviting her to coauthor “a book on women.”³⁷ In Scanzoni’s proposal, she cautioned “that the project was a lonely and controversial one,” but suggested that both women shared similar perspectives on the subject and “might stimulate each other’s thinking.”³⁸ Hardesty agreed to the project. In 1969, the two women began writing *All We’re Meant to Be*, a book that advocated biblical gender equality and Christian women’s empowerment. As previously noted, the authors hoped their book would encourage reflection and personal liberation among their readers. The authors described liberation as the “realization that men and women alike may be freed from sex role stereotypes and traditions which hinder development into the true humanness that God intended when he created male and female in his own image to delight in fellowship with him and with one another.”³⁹ Because launching a biblical feminist movement was inconceivable when Scanzoni and Hardesty began their collaboration, it was not an early goal of the book. Scanzoni explained, “We felt very much alone...as we began the book project. Other than my husband John, I could not recall ever having met another evangelical who believed that God had created women and men to be fully equal partners in the home, the Church and the larger society.”⁴⁰ As if to confirm their feelings of alienation, Scanzoni and Hardesty were unable to find a publisher when they completed the book in 1971. The authors endured six rejections over the next three years because publishers “were hesitant and doubtful about an audience for such a viewpoint.”⁴¹ Scanzoni and Hardesty persisted despite these roadblocks and finally released *All We’re Meant to Be* with Word in 1974.

As soon as *All We’re Meant to Be* hit the shelves, letters for Scanzoni and Hardesty “began pouring in.”⁴² Contrary to what earlier publishers had predicted, the letters expressed appreciation and agreement with the authors’ views. Many readers reported feeling a new sense of community after reading the book, replacing previous feelings of loneliness and isolation. This unexpectedly fervent response revealed support for biblical gender equality within evangelical communities.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be*, 9.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁰ Scanzoni, “Marching,” 126.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The book was listed as one of *Christianity Today*’s “Significant Books of 1974” and awarded book of the year by *Eternity* magazine in 1975 (Scanzoni, Marching, 126-7).

Even more surprisingly, however, this reaction exposed a community ripe for coalescing around the ideals of biblical gender equality and women's empowerment among evangelicals. This realization was the impetus for forming the Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC). Scanzoni later reflected, "as people read the book they found they were not the only ones to feel that way. They had felt so alone in their thoughts and wanted to meet other like-minded people and expand on this idea of equality, as opposed to a hierarchy of the sexes. Hence, EWC was born."⁴³

Shortly after *All We're Meant to Be's* release, a small group of biblical feminists formed the Evangelical Women's Caucus to advocate biblical gender equality and support leadership opportunities for women in the church, home, and society.⁴⁴ While the second-wave feminist movement was well underway by 1974, the EWC's unique mission introduced feminism and evangelicalism as mutually reinforcing ideologies. Scanzoni emphasized the gap in the feminist movement that the emergent EWC sought to fill:

We believed that it was God who wanted us to be all we were meant to be...We attempted to follow the Bible's emphasis on loving one's neighbor as oneself, found in both the Old and New Testaments,...with a favorite scripture verse [Galatians 3:28]: "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."⁴⁵

For biblical feminists, evangelicalism and feminism were not just compatible ideologies, they were inseparable and inherently connected. Gender equality, the essential message of the second-wave feminist movement was, according to biblical feminists, also a fundamental Christian ideal. Scanzoni explained, "we became feminists because we were Christians, and we knew that women and men were alike created in God's image and given gifts by the Holy Spirit. Our Christianity preceded or coincided with our feminism, and our Christianity infused and inspired our feminism."⁴⁶ Early biblical feminists understood the EWC to be a logical representation of Christian faith, a means of enacting God's will and helping propagate the Christian message. They also saw God as guiding and supporting their mission. Scanzoni explained: "behind it all, we sensed that God was working... God is a God of action. God is a God of movement. And by faith, we believe we are part of that movement. 'God's truth is marching on,' declares the song. And we, too, are marching on."⁴⁷

In 1970s America, a coalition uniting evangelicals and feminists was a radical concept. From the emergence of the second-wave feminist movement in the 1960s, evangelicals had disputed feminist conceptions of gender and gender roles, which provoked and/or exacerbated later conflicts surrounding reproductive rights, gay rights, and discourses about race.⁴⁸ By the EWC's

⁴³ Letha Scanzoni, Email Interview with Author, 27 July 2022.

⁴⁴ Biblical feminists formed the EWC as a task force on women under the umbrella of the progressive evangelical group Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) in 1974. Men have continually participated in the coalition, however the EWC has always been led and sustained by women. The EWC hosted its first independent conference in 1975 (Scanzoni, "Marching," 128).

⁴⁵ Scanzoni, Email Interview.

⁴⁶ Scanzoni, "Marching," 130.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁸ I use the terminology "gay rights" throughout this dissertation to reflect the terminology used during this historical period by these historical actors. For readability, I also use the term "gay" as an umbrella term for gay,

emergence in the 1970s, evangelicals and secular mainstream feminists (as well as the wider American public) largely considered the values and objectives of these two movements to be in opposition. The EWC's earliest Statement of Purpose acknowledged this tension: "many feminists have understood the Bible to be anti-women, and many Christians have seen feminism as unchristian."⁴⁹ Yet, biblical feminists insisted that the Bible revealed "God's teaching on female-male equality," and, as such, they were committed to building a coalition to promote a Christian, feminist message.⁵⁰

This dissertation examines how, despite representing ideologies often in tension, pathfinding biblical feminists built and sustained a coalition (the EWC), which grew into a movement (biblical feminism). Biblical feminists created the EWC to embody the relationship between evangelicalism and feminism. As a bridge between these movements, the EWC exposed intersections, overlaps, and conflicts between feminist and evangelical ideologies, creating unprecedented spaces for discourse and the emergence of new identities within each movement. The effects of this historical bridge reverberate today, even as the EWC and the biblical feminist movement have evolved.⁵¹ To trace the historical and ongoing impacts of the EWC, my dissertation focuses on the EWC's bridging identity and presents the feminist and evangelical movements in relationship with one another. Existing scholarship, discussed in more detail below, portrays biblical feminism as a fraught movement that attempted to reconcile incompatible ideologies, but ultimately lost influence among evangelicals by the late 1980s. While this is certainly one version of the story, my dissertation complicates a dichotomous representation of feminism and evangelicalism as discrete and conflicting ideologies. The EWC was at the intersection of feminism and evangelicalism and in relationship with both movements; thus, my dissertation highlights the novel, dynamic, and reciprocal interactions between feminism and evangelicalism established by the EWC. By telling a relational history, my dissertation also illuminates the complexity and nuance within evangelicalism itself. Finally, this approach enables me to examine ongoing relationships between evangelical feminists and their broader matrix, including the feminist and evangelical movements.⁵²

Coalitions do not emerge in a vacuum; individuals or groups create coalitions in response to a perceived gap or problem with the status quo.⁵³ Early evangelical feminists created the EWC

lesbian, and queer individuals throughout this dissertation, unless otherwise stated. For more information on these emerging conflicts between evangelicals and feminists, see chapters one and two.

⁴⁹ AWTS: EEWC Archives, "Statement of Purpose (from By-Laws adopted June 17, 1978)," Series 1A, Box 1, Folder 3.

⁵⁰ "Executive Council Meeting 1978," Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 4.

⁵¹ The biblical feminist movement today is largely represented by Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), a coalition that separated from the EWC in the late 1980s (see chapter three). The EWC now identifies as an ecumenical Christian feminist organization, known as the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus-Christian Feminism Today (EEWC-CFT), often shortened to CFT (see chapter five for more details on the coalition's current iteration).

⁵² Throughout this dissertation, I use philosopher Ian Hacking's term "matrix" to discuss the broader climate or ecosystem within which the EWC is engaged. According to Hacking, a matrix represents institutions, human agents, legal decisions, and social and material components whereby "an idea, a concept or kind, is formed" (Hacking, "Madness: Biological or Constructed?" in *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 10). I draw on Hacking extensively in chapter five when I discuss the EWC's interactive relationships within its matrix.

⁵³ Some social movement theorists define coalitions as being comprised of multiple organizations, however I follow Suzanne Staggenborg's definition that contends a coalition can be made up of individuals. Staggenborg notes, "[i]n reality, many coalitions consist of individuals who are participating on their own" Staggenborg, "Building Coalitions

to extend feminist resistance to sexism into evangelical churches and communities. As biblical feminism evolved, biblical feminists engaged with discourses about gender, reproduction, sexuality, and race. Yet it was at these junctures that the coalition faced its most formidable challenges. For evangelicals, discussions about the body often involve larger theological conversations about creation, the structure of the universe, and Christian morality. How evangelicals understand gender is one example. According to American religious historian Seth Dowland,

[E]vangelicals believe that gender is a biological category — not a social construction, as feminists argued — and as such, gender provides identity and should stand at the center of social organization. Evangelicals rooted this belief in their reading of the biblical creation story in which God created humans “male and female.”⁵⁴

In their biblical interpretation of gender, evangelicals conflate sex and gender and understand the sex-gender category to be an organizing principle of the universe. Conversely, by the second-wave period, feminists discussed gender as a social construction, a concept created and shaped by social and cultural norms which was unfixed and separate from biological sex.⁵⁵ However, for evangelicals, gender was God-given, immutable, and “a fundamental marker of human identity,” and therefore “evangelicals focused much attention on how humans should embody their gendered roles.”⁵⁶ The social roles available to women and men had to reflect God’s prescribed gender order, which included male headship and female submission.⁵⁷ Evangelical ideologies about gender and gender roles influenced conservative evangelical resistance to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion rights, and the gay liberation movement, beginning in the 1960s.⁵⁸ As such, different understandings of gender were at the heart of the tensions between evangelicals

and Movements,” *Mobilizing Ideas*, 3 November 2015,

<https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/2015/11/03/building-coalitions-and-movements/>.

⁵⁴ Seth Dowland, *Family Values: and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 11. See also Sally K. Gallagher, “Twentieth Century Evangelical Ideals,” in *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 39-62.

⁵⁵ The division between sex and gender among feminist thinkers is most famously represented by French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, published in 1949 (first published in English in 1953). In this formative text, Beauvoir asserted: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 267). By suggesting that one *becomes* a woman, biological characteristics (sex) can be separated from socially constructed or learned cultural traits (gender). Second-wave feminist theorists explored and expanded this distinction between sex and gender to challenge systems of oppression based on women’s “nature” or biology. Second-wave theorists developing this distinction include Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Ballantine Books), 1970; Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210; Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1978).

⁵⁶ Dowland, *Family Values*, 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-12. Dowland is discussing gender in the context of conservative evangelical ideas about “family values,” which I discuss throughout this dissertation. Dowland also notes that the evangelical gender ideology of the 1960s and 1970s has roots in nineteenth-century Victorian ideals, rather than Scripture (11). I discuss these connections in chapter one.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

and feminists. This tension anchors this dissertation as I explore how biblical feminists navigated, challenged, and bridged such ideological conflicts.

Introducing the EWC and its Foremothers

A group of passionate, faith-driven feminists created the Evangelical Women's Caucus to fight for women's equality in the church, home, and society. By the mid-1960s and early 1970s, biblical feminist ideas were circulating among evangelicals. Early biblical feminist thinkers, including Letha Scanzoni, Nancy Hardesty, and Ruth Schmidt, published articles discussing women's "second-class" status and introducing biblical feminist ideas in popular evangelical magazines.⁵⁹ Biblical feminists soon found a home in the likewise embryonic progressive evangelical movement, sharing values and goals with the newly established Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA).⁶⁰ In 1973, the ESA hosted its first conference in Chicago, IL, and outlined its goals in its manifesto: the *Chicago Declaration of Social Concern*. In the *Declaration*, the ESA linked social activism with Christian ideals and objectives, identifying and condemning racism, economic injustice, militarism, and sexism in the United States. However, the ESA's all-male leadership had invited only a handful of women to attend the conference; the most generous estimate suggests that five or six women were invited out of approximately sixty attendees.⁶¹ Nancy Hardesty, then a PhD student at the University of Chicago Divinity School and known within the evangelical community for her position as editor of *Eternity* magazine, was among those included on the exclusive guest list. ESA leaders also invited Sharon Gallagher, a psychology student at the University of California, Berkeley. Gallagher was also an editor at *Right On*, an evangelical magazine that offered social and cultural commentary (renamed *Radix* in 1976).⁶² Gallagher was making a

⁵⁹ See footnote 3 for a discussion of early articles promoting biblical feminist ideals. Ruth Schmidt played an integral role in the development of the EWC, presiding over the committee to affirm the coalition's first bylaws and faith declaration in 1978. Schmidt was born in Minnesota in 1930 and grew up in the Christian Missionary Alliance. As an adult she joined a presbyterian church (Nancy Hardesty "Remembering Ruth Schmidt," *Christian Feminism Today*, 2010, <https://eewc.com/remembering-ruth-schmidt/>). Like many members of the EWC, Schmidt was well-educated and held a master's degree from the University of Missouri and a doctorate at the University of Illinois in Spanish (Ibid). Having authored one of the earliest critiques of evangelical gender roles: "Women, Second-Class Citizens in the Kingdom of God," published in *Christianity Today* in January 1971, Schmidt became a prominent voice supporting biblical feminism throughout the 1970s. Beyond her contribution to the EWC's organizational structure, Schmidt was also integral to the formation of the Albany, New York, and Greater Boston EWC chapters.

⁶⁰ The ESA was called Evangelicals for Social Concern in 1973, becoming Evangelicals for Social Action in 1974.

⁶¹ The most generous estimate from the women who were at the conference comes from Nancy Hardesty, who recalled that five or six women were invited. Sharon Gallagher, another one of the invited women, noted that only three women were invited. See, Hardesty, "Blessed are the Waters that Rise and Fall to Rise Again," *Christian Feminism Today*, 2004, <https://eewc.com/blessed-the-waters/>, and Gallagher, "Women in Transition: The First Evangelical Women's Caucus Conference (1975): Introduction," *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/the-first-evangelical-womens-caucus-conference/#7510Years>. Pamela Cochran estimates that about seven women were present at the event, because the wives of some male invitees attended (*Evangelical Feminism*, 12); See also Brantley W. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 47.

⁶² Sharon Gallagher was raised in the Plymouth Brethren church in California and attended the evangelical Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California before pursuing her degree at the University of California at Berkeley (Horner, "Becoming," 317-8).

name for herself through her work at *Right On* and was invited to the conference by her good friend Jim Wallis, a leading progressive evangelical who founded the progressive evangelical magazine *Sojourners* in 1971 (previously known as *The Post American*).⁶³

Acutely aware of “the inferior status of women in Church and society,” this tiny cadre of women attended the ESA conference ready to rally other progressively-minded evangelicals “to consider issues related to sexism from a Christian perspective.”⁶⁴ The women’s motivation and persistence paid off, and the ESA’s convening committee included a resolution advocating gender equality in its *Declaration*. Nancy Hardesty penned the resolution, which stated: “We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship.”⁶⁵ Fifty-three signatories within the evangelical community endorsed the ESA’s *Declaration*. However, Hardesty’s statement for “mutual submission” stood out as too radical for some: ESA founder Ron Sider disclosed to Hardesty later, that when the prominent evangelical leader Billy Graham viewed the statement, “he pointed to those sentences [Hardesty’s resolution] as the reason why he would not sign it.”⁶⁶

Encouraged by the inclusion of her resolution in the *Declaration*, Nancy Hardesty “graciously volunteered to be the token woman” on the committee organizing the following year’s ESA meeting.⁶⁷ Hardesty also volunteered to be the secretary for the 1974 conference, working tirelessly behind the scenes to shape the progressive movement. Hardesty knew that the secretary oversaw the invitations for the event. She also knew that ESA leaders would predominantly be inviting White, male, “socially progressive” evangelical leaders.⁶⁸ Knowing she had a “limited quota” to invite women and Black evangelicals, Hardesty recalled:

I had no intention of wasting a precious invitation on (1) a woman who could not or would not show up (Thanksgiving Weekend is not a time when most people want to go to a conference), and (2) a woman who did not think there was a problem with the status quo! So I started making my list and checking it twice, finding out who was naughty and who just wanted to make nice.⁶⁹

Almost all of Hardesty’s vetted invitees, approximately thirty women, attended the 1974 ESA Conference. Letha Scanzoni was an early and easy choice for Hardesty’s elite list. The two women had just released *All We’re Meant to Be* in August of that same year. Other well-known attendees

⁶³ Horner, “Becoming,” 318-9. EWC member and archivist Sue Horner also notes that Gallagher spent the summer of 1970 in Switzerland at L’Abri, the “evangelical studies center” led by Francis Schaefer (317). Schaefer, an evangelical intellectual, later became a central figure uniting the Christian Right against abortion. See chapter two of this dissertation.

⁶⁴ “Our Origin,” *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/about/>.

⁶⁵ Hardesty, “Blessed are the Waters that Rise and Fall to Rise Again,” *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/blessed-the-waters/>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hardesty recalled, “The secretary’s job included keeping the list and mailing the invitations. Those invited would have to qualify in some way as “evangelical leaders.” Among white guys, they wanted to invite those who were “socially progressive.” Among African Americans it was hard to find people who cared to be identified as ‘evangelical.’ As to women, I think the committee considered the fewer the better” (Ibid).

included Cheryl Forbes, then assistant editor at *Christianity Today*, and Evon Bachaus, a recognised Christian feminist from Minnesota who was an active member of Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) and the head of the National Organization for Women (NOW) Task Force on Religion in Minnesota.⁷⁰

A lesser-known invitee at the time, Anne Eggebroten (now, Linstatter) would become integral to the founding and growth of the EWC.⁷¹ Eggebroten was born in Colorado in 1948 and raised in Bakersfield, California. The daughter of a Southern Baptist father, Eggebroten grew up attending Presbyterian churches. In 1962, during her first year of high school, Eggebroten experienced a deep recommitment to her faith "giving her life to Jesus."⁷² Eggebroten graduated from Stanford University in 1970, where she had participated in both a Christian coalition (the Stanford Christian Fellowship) and a feminist activist group. However, for Eggebroten at that time, "these two interests were discrete."⁷³ During this period, Eggebroten also interned at *Christianity Today* under the editorship of Harold Lindsell, where she interacted with many future EWC members (including Reta Finger and Virginia Hearn, introduced later chapters).⁷⁴ It was not until Eggebroten read *All We're Meant to Be* in 1974 that she "pulled Christianity and feminism together."⁷⁵ Brought to tears by the book's message of gender equality, Eggebroten wrote to Hardesty and Scanzoni to express her gratitude.⁷⁶ Hardesty responded by inviting Eggebroten to attend the 1974 ESA conference.⁷⁷ At that time, Eggebroten was a graduate student of English Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, and, like Bachaus, an active member of NOW.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ "Women in Transition: The First Evangelical Women's Caucus Conference (1975)," *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/the-first-evangelical-womens-caucus-conference/#75press>. Bachaus was born in Minnesota in 1941. She was ordained as a minister at Knox Presbyterian Church in 1987 in Minneapolis, MN (EEWC Archives, "Clearinghouse," *Update*, vol. 12, no. 4 (Winter 1988-89), 16). Bachaus also served as EWC's first national coordinator from 1975-78.

⁷¹ Eggebroten later "changed her surname — going matrilineal instead of using her father's name (Eggebroten)," deciding to go by Linstatter. Linstatter means "'Evelyn's daughter' in the old Scandinavian system of naming" ("Anne Linstatter," <https://www.annelinstatter.com>). I use the surname "Eggebroten" throughout much of this thesis because that was the surname Anne used during this period, and it is how she is referenced throughout the EEWC archives.

⁷² Horner, "Becoming," 310.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 310. Reta Finger joined the EWC's executive council in 1981 while working as the editorial coordinator of *Daughters of Sarah*, a biblical feminist journal with deep connections to the EWC ("Reta Finger, Susie Stanley join Executive Council," *Update*, vol. 5, no. 3, (Sept-Nov 1981), 7. *Daughters of Sarah* (DOS) was the first magazine dedicated to biblical feminism, published from 1974 to 1996. The emergent EWC used *Daughters of Sarah* as a temporary clearinghouse in 1974, and all early correspondences went through their mailing address (AWTS: EEWC Archives, "Proposals from the Evangelical Women's Caucus," 29 November – 1 December 1974, 3, Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 1). In the late 1980s, EWC leaders approached the leaders of DOS with a request to merge their organizations, which DOS declined (AWTS: EEWC Archives, Letter from Florence Brown to Michelle Prentice, 22 April 1991, Series 1C, Box 7, Folder 12).

⁷⁵ Horner, "Becoming," 310.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; Letha Scanzoni, "It Just Keeps Rollin' Along: Christian Feminism, Equality, and Justice—Our Part in the Ongoing Story," *Christian Feminism Today*, 2014, <https://eewc.com/letha-dawson-scanzoni-50-years-biblical-feminism/>.

⁷⁷ Scanzoni, "It Just Keeps Rollin' Along."

⁷⁸ Eggebroten completed her PhD in 1979. EEWC Archives, "Proposals from the Women's Caucus: Second Thanksgiving Workshop, Evangelicals for Social Action," 29 Nov - 1 Dec 1974, Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 1.

In 1974, these feminist-minded evangelical women formed a task force under the umbrella of the ESA to address women's issues. They called themselves the Evangelical Women's Caucus.

As their first order of business, EWC participants proposed a list of actions to the ESA. The list included "equalization of job opportunities for all persons now being discriminated against by virtue of sex, race or age;" a declaration "to work toward giving women all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of membership in the Church of Jesus Christ" including women's ordination, and support for the ERA, among others.⁷⁹ Having found community with one another and realizing the magnitude of their goals, EWC members decided to branch out from the ESA and hosted their first independent conference in 1975. Held in Washington, D.C., EWC leaders titled the conference "Women in Transition: A Biblical Approach to Feminism."⁸⁰ Over 360 people attended this event, representing multiple Christian denominations from thirty-nine states and Canada.⁸¹ Biblical feminists were inspired and exhilarated by this conference; According to Scanzoni, "It was a very exciting time. The air was just charged."⁸² For founding members, the first conference's broad reach confirmed that a distinct coalition focused on women's issues and combating sexism was viable among evangelicals.

In early 1976, EWC founders selected a fifteen-person Temporary Steering Committee (TSC), which included Nancy Hardesty and Anne Eggebroten, to help develop grassroots chapters across the United States. The EWC also established its first national office in Minneapolis, MN, and hired Evon Bachaus, a full-time staff member, to organize the growing coalition.⁸³ The TSC's first objective was to develop regulations to standardize and govern the emerging coalition. The Steering Committee determined that to claim official EWC chapter status, local meetings would require a minimum of ten members, and chapters would need to meet at least twice per year.⁸⁴ If a locality could not meet these requirements, the group would be considered an "affiliate," rather than a chapter. By January of 1977, the EWC had almost ten "healthy" chapters across the country, including Albany, NY, Minneapolis, MN, Washington, D.C., and two in California: the Bay Area and Southwest.⁸⁵

Despite its early success, by 1978 the EWC struggled as "a loose network of autonomous chapters and individuals," lacking a cohesive national presence.⁸⁶ The TSC disbanded due to financial concerns. The coalition reduced the full-time staff position to a part-time administrative role, and the national headquarters relocated from Minneapolis, MN, to Los Angeles, CA, under

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Biblical feminists from Washington, D.C, including Cheryl Forbes, Judy Brown Hull, a member of the Broadway Presbyterian Church in New York City, and Karin Michaelson, associated with Wesley Theological Seminary, volunteered to organize this conference (Hardesty, "Blessed Are the Waters;" Scanzoni, "It Just Keeps Rollin' Along").

⁸¹ EEWCA Archives, "What is EWC Nationally and Locally? Our Roots – National," (Fall 1979), Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 6; Bonnie Greene, "We're on Our Way! The Evangelical Women's Caucus in Washington," *Vanguard* (January–February 1976), 18–19.

⁸² Scanzoni, "It Just Keeps Rollin' Along."

⁸³ "What is EWC Nationally?"

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.; Horner, "Becoming," 179.

⁸⁶ "What is EWC Nationally?"

the purview of the most successful EWC chapter, EWC-Southwest.⁸⁷ During this period, chapter leaders determined that a stronger national presence would help the coalition maintain unity and grow. Volunteers from multiple chapters collaborated to draft bylaws for the incorporation of EWC as a non-profit organization.⁸⁸ During the business meeting at the EWC's 1978 national conference in Pasadena, CA, approximately 100 members voted on the proposed bylaws, which were affirmed, along with the coalition's Statement of Faith, "after minimal editorial changes."⁸⁹

The EWC's early bylaws and faith declaration, discussed in more detail in chapter one, solidified biblical feminism's "essential niche" within the broader feminist and evangelical movements.⁹⁰ Biblical feminists asserted their goal to "bridge the gap between the secular feminist movement and those Christians who are fearful, misinformed, and afraid to take a new look at woman's role because they believe to do so is to go against Scripture."⁹¹ The EWC's primary objective was to advocate for the scriptural validity of biblical gender equality.⁹² Another early goal, identified at the Pasadena conference, was the creation of an inclusive coalition (discussed more in chapter four) to welcome and represent "all Christian women... regardless of age, race, social and educational background, denominational affiliation, or anything else..."⁹³ The Pasadena conference, which the EWC hosted in partnership with Fuller Theological Seminary, was the most successful event the EWC had ever hosted (or would ever host).⁹⁴ On the heels of this "history-making event," the EWC elected a national executive council to meet annually to oversee and "transact official business" for the coalition.⁹⁵ The executive council, which included Letha Scanzoni, consisted of one representative from each chapter and five from the general membership.⁹⁶

The EWC sustained its community and shared news among members through local chapter meetings, biennial national conferences, and newsletters. The EWC's newsletters included local chapter publications such as *Green Leaf*, distributed by the California Bay Area's chapter, and the quarterly national newsletter, *Update*, launched by the TSC in the summer of 1977.⁹⁷ At times, the EWC's chapters and affiliates extended across the nation. At a high-point of membership in 1983,

⁸⁷ "What is EWC Nationally?"; Horner notes that the EWC-Southwest chapter regularly had over 100 participants at its meetings, which she attributes partly to "the influence of Fuller Seminary instructor Roberta Hestenes," a reputable scholar, advocate of women's leadership in the church, and member of the EWC ("Becoming," 179). The head office remained in Southern California until 1987, when the office was moved to Hadley, New York to the home of then administrative coordinator and bookkeeper, Florence Brown (Horner, "Becoming," 256). By 2024, the national office was in Indianapolis, Indiana ("Contact the CFT Central Office," *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/contact-office/>).

⁸⁸ Horner, "Becoming," 180; "What is EWC Nationally?"

⁸⁹ Horner, "Becoming," 200.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹¹ Scanzoni, "Marching," 133. See also, Horner, "Becoming," 199; Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 191.

⁹² Scanzoni, "Marching," 133; Horner, "Becoming," 197-9.

⁹³ Scanzoni, "Marching," 133; See also, Scanzoni q't'd in Horner, "Becoming," 199.

⁹⁴ "What is EWC Nationally?" (This source, from the EWC-SW Newsletter, mistakenly notes that the conference was held in June of 1979. However, it was held in June of 1978); See also, Horner, "Becoming," 189; Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 190-1.

⁹⁵ "What is EWC Nationally?"

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ In 2005, the coalition changed the name of its newsletter from *Update* to *Christian Feminism Today* to correspond with its new web presence.

the EWC included eastern chapters (Albany, NY, New York City, NY, Boston, MA, New Jersey, and Baltimore-Washington, D.C), eastern affiliates (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and western New York), midwestern chapters (Minneapolis, MN, Michigan, and Indiana), western chapters (California: Southwest, Bay Area, and Fresno/Central California) and pacific northwest chapters in Seattle, WA, and Portland, OR.⁹⁸ There was also a chapter in Toronto, ON, Canada, by the late 1970s, which influenced the EWC's decision in 1980 to change its name to the Evangelical Women's Caucus, International (EWCI). By 1984, the EWC had a southeast chapter in Georgia, and by 1985, a southwest chapter in Texas.⁹⁹

Membership within the EWC has waxed and waned, and new chapters have emerged while others have dissolved (some into affiliate status, some disbanding). Throughout the coalition's fluctuations and despite the EWC's attempts to expand and diversify its membership, members have predominantly remained White, middle-class, well-educated women.¹⁰⁰ The EWC has also been consistently underrepresented in the American South.¹⁰¹ The EWC had very few chapters in the South, and in its first thirteen years of existence, the coalition hosted only one conference in a southern state.¹⁰² Southern EWC chapters and affiliates often emerged when biblical feminists from other parts of the country moved to the South and brought the coalition with them. For

⁹⁸ Horner, "Becoming," 208.

⁹⁹ Nancy Moller, "Reports from the EWC Network," *Update*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Summer 1985), 11; Barbara Allen, "Gone with the Wind: A Letter from Atlanta," *Update*, vol. 12, no. 2, (Summer 1988), 8c. Allen writes about the demise of the Atlanta, Georgia chapter after only four years, noting early excitement among members which eventually turned into a drop off in interest and membership. In her article, Allen explains her confusion regarding this shift, looking for answers from the EWC community.

¹⁰⁰ Many EWC members hold graduate degrees. The racial make-up of the EWC is discussed at length in chapter four.

¹⁰¹ I specify southern EWC participation to help mediate a potential "bi-coastal bias" in this thesis. Historians of American feminism have identified a "bi-coastal bias" in feminist histories that have "privileged the history of the Northeast and the left coast," erasing the influence and participation of southern feminists in the movement (Janet Allured, "Louisiana, the American South, and the Birth of Second-Wave Feminism," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 54, no. 4 (Fall 2013), 392). For Allured, the "bi-coastal bias" does not just ignore southern women's participation in the movement but ignores the historical roots of the feminist movement itself. Allured argues that the second-wave feminist movement "was the product of a long continuum of grassroots activism emanating from southerners, black, white, and—especially in Texas—Chicanas" (390). Other scholars have identified the discrete and discreet shape of feminism in the South. For example, Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman was the first to label southern feminists "stealth" feminists, noting that southern women navigated unique dangers in their activism. Wilkerson-Freeman found that women's activism in the South "remains clouded in obscurity in part because women deliberately hid and disguised their most subversive political activity in order to fool, disarm, and outmaneuver their opponents. In the southern woman's arsenal of political tactics, *stealth* was a critical feature" ("Stealth in the Political Arsenal of Southern Women: A Retrospective for the Millennium," in Melissa Walker, Jeanette R. Dunn, and Joe P. Dunn, ed., *Southern Women at the Millennium: A Historical Perspective*, (Columbia, Missouri, 2003), 44-45).

¹⁰² In 1992, the EWC held its national conference in Norfolk, Virginia. Sociologist Sally K. Gallagher demonstrates that these demographic trends aligned with broader trends in emergent American neo-evangelicalism in the 1940s and 1950s. Gallagher notes, "[m]ost of those who identified with neo-evangelical subculture were part of an expanding educated, white, and largely northern middle class" (*Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 127). For an analysis of historical evangelical migration, see Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W Norton, 2011). Dochuk explores the migration of American southern evangelicals to Southern California, beginning in the 1930s, which infused evangelicalism in California with southern ideologies by the 1960s.

example, Nancy Moller founded the Texas chapter when she relocated to the area from Indiana. Similarly, Nancy Hardesty became a contact person for potential EWC members in Georgia in 1979, after she moved from Chicago to Atlanta to teach at Emory University.¹⁰³ Some southern-born women joined the biblical feminist movement while living in northern states. Kaye Cook, the EWC's national co-coordinator in 1989, was raised as a Southern Baptist in Georgia. Cook completed her PhD in psychology at the University of North Carolina and moved to Massachusetts in 1978 to teach at Gordon College, an evangelical institution. Shortly thereafter, Cook read Hardesty and Scanzoni's *All We're Meant to Be* and attended the EWC's 1980 conference, "Women and the Ministry of Reconciliation," in Saratoga Springs, NY. Cook then joined the EWC's Greater Boston chapter.¹⁰⁴

Although non-southern transplants helped launch EWC initiatives in the South, the EWC archives also portray a local southern biblical feminist presence.¹⁰⁵ EWC members and well-wishers communicated with the broader coalition through *Update*, writing from Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, and Georgia. Notably, the authors of these letters frequently expressed isolation and loneliness regarding their Christian feminist beliefs. One EWC participant from Virginia wrote into *Update* because her Sunday school teacher insisted on teaching the dominant evangelical interpretation of Ephesians 5: "Jesus is the head of all and that the man is the head of the woman; that the woman is to be subservient to the husband and he is to Christ."¹⁰⁶ The author explained that she had shared "some literature" on this passage with her teacher, presumably supporting the EWC's perspective of egalitarian marriage, which the teacher rejected. The Virginia member ended her letter to the EWC community with a plea: "Please keep the good news coming; it is so bleak here."¹⁰⁷

By 1990, reduced membership across the country influenced the EWC leaders' decision to undergo a structural shift toward a more centralized organization (discussed in chapter five). While local chapters continued to function, new members paid dues directly to the national organization upon joining, rather than splitting the dues evenly between the local chapter and the national organization.¹⁰⁸ EWC participants have consistently reviewed and revised the coalition's bylaws and Statement of Faith to reflect changes in membership and the EWC's evolving goals. Membership consensus, determined through mail-in ballots or votes held at biennial conferences, inform important coalition decisions. The EWC's major coalitional transformations, including significant changes in membership, modified goals and faith declarations, internal conflicts, and name changes, are documented in this dissertation. The coalition's changing name reflects these shifts. The EWC became the Evangelical Women's Caucus International (EWCI) in 1980, the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus (EEWC) in 1990, and the Evangelical and Ecumenical

¹⁰³ Horner, "Becoming," 203.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 308-9.

¹⁰⁵ Historian Janet Allured has challenged a "northern transplant" narrative when discussing the second-wave feminist movement, recognizing that any exchange goes both ways. Allured surmises that many northern women likely encountered activist ideologies and strategies while visiting the South during the civil rights movement, and "they might have encountered southern women after they moved North. Ella Baker and Pauli Murray, two influential feminists of color native to the South, influenced many non-southern feminists with whom they worked while outside the South" (390 n.2).

¹⁰⁶ Rita Hoffman, "Sound Off!" *Update*, vol. 5, no. 5 (December 1981-February 1982), 2. Emphasis in original. See chapter one for more information on interpretations of Ephesians 5 among evangelicals and biblical feminists.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Susan Garrison, "Coordinators' Comment," *Update*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Fall 1990), 8-9.

Women's Caucus – Christian Feminism Today (EEWC-CFT) in 2009. In this dissertation, I use the era-appropriate title for the coalition whenever possible and identify name changes in the footnotes.

Biblical Feminist Coalitions and Conflict: Existing Scholarship

Scholarship discussing the Evangelical Women's Caucus, and the biblical feminist movement more broadly, often highlights tensions between evangelicals and feminists. By emphasizing ideological conflicts between the movements, this historical narrative suggests that evangelical feminists held a precarious position within both their evangelical and feminist matrices. In *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles* (2003), for example, religious studies scholar Julie Ingersoll presents an ethnographic study of women within American fundamentalist Protestantism. Ingersoll discusses how women in conservative Protestant contexts navigate the barriers imposed upon them through enforced "traditional" gender roles (including biblically-grounded ideals of female submission and male leadership), through both resistance and concession.¹⁰⁹ In examining the ways conservative Protestant gender ideals limit women's roles and opportunities, Ingersoll's book responds to existing scholarship that suggests women in conservative Protestant movements transform doctrines of submission into sources of empowerment.¹¹⁰ Seeking to complicate the 'empowerment in submission' narrative, Ingersoll argues that, while true for some women, this framing misrepresents the lived realities of most women within the fundamentalist movement. Ingersoll's study concludes that "many women in these traditions...often feel limited, discounted, and redirected, when they express the sense of calling for which men are encouraged and rewarded...women in these traditions struggle with frustration and depression as a result of their gendered worlds."¹¹¹

In analyzing the myriad ways women cope with conservative gender culture, Ingersoll views Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) as representative of the biblical feminist movement. CBE emerged from the EWC in the 1980s (introduced in chapter three of this dissertation) as a "more conservative" evangelical feminist organization. After conducting interviews with CBE participants, Ingersoll argues that biblical feminism created a support network for women seeking equality within evangelical traditions and constructed a resistance to "a key point in the dominant ideology of the fundamentalist movement:" female submission and male headship.¹¹² By examining evangelical women's personal and professional struggles for equality in conservative

¹⁰⁹ Ingersoll writes as an academic and outsider to the evangelical community (although she blurs these boundaries slightly by noting her personal past within evangelical institutions). For a contemporary and accessible insider perspective, see Beth A. Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020).

¹¹⁰ Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 3. Ingersoll specifically responds to R. Marie Griffith's study of the Women's Aglow Fellowship *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*, and *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power* by Brenda Brasher. For a more contemporary exploration of female influence, power, and celebrity in conservative Christian traditions, see Kate Bowler, *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019).

¹¹¹ Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*, 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 34.

Protestant traditions, Ingersoll determined that the gender dynamics integral to evangelical structural systems are harmful to women. For Ingersoll, scholars who leave these ideals unchallenged (or present them as paths to empowerment) erase “the conflict and complexity that characterizes gender norms, expectations, and ideology in these traditions,” which evangelicals are consistently navigating.¹¹³ This erasure further silences any “counterhegemonic voices” within these traditions and presents conservative gender ideals as normative. As such, this scholarship reinforces and reproduces a harmful status quo.¹¹⁴

Ingersoll identifies the roots of CBE in the EWC and recognizes the importance of ongoing ties and a shared community between the two coalitions. Ingersoll’s interviews reveal that many CBE members feel that the EWC stepped outside of evangelical boundaries by the late 1980s when the EWC declared its support for gay civil rights (discussed in chapter three).¹¹⁵ Ingersoll argues that, beyond advocating for biblical gender equality, CBE sought “to maintain the legitimacy of its place within the larger evangelical subculture so that it can effectively pursue [that] goal.”¹¹⁶ The CBE affirmed a position against homosexuality (and against the EWC’s position), thereby upholding the “behavioral codes and notions of purity that predominate in the larger evangelical world.”¹¹⁷

The first book-length history of evangelical feminism, Pamela Cochran’s *Evangelical Feminism: A History*, was published in 2005. Cochran, also a scholar of religious studies, presents a chronological history of the American evangelical feminist movement. Cochran compares the theological development of the Evangelical Women’s Caucus and Christians for Biblical Equality in relation to mainstream evangelical theology. Like Ingersoll, Cochran’s book centers challenges facing biblical feminists within the wider evangelical movement. Cochran argues that although the EWC began as an evangelical feminist organization, the coalition expanded beyond the purview of evangelicalism as it developed its feminist orientation. For Cochran, as the EWC affirmed “secular” feminist policies (including support for gay civil rights in 1986), the coalition came to represent a more socially and theologically “diverse and inclusive” alliance.¹¹⁸ This shift made “traditional evangelicals” feel uncomfortable and, ultimately prevented the EWC from continuing to “witness to conservative churches.”¹¹⁹

Cochran suggests that CBE’s more conservative ideologies usurped the EWC’s position in the evangelical feminist movement, sharing the view expressed by many CBE interviewees in Ingersoll’s book.¹²⁰ Focusing on theology and biblical authority, Cochran argues that CBE members uniquely supported biblical gender equality while embracing the supreme authority of Scripture and maintaining evangelical theological standards. Such a relationship is exemplified, for example, in CBE’s support of “celibate singleness, and heterosexual marriage as the patterns God designed for us.”¹²¹ Alternatively, according to Cochran, by the late 1980s the EWC refused to

¹¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 37-8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹¹⁸ Pamela Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 175.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 175-6.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 182; See also Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*, 36-8.

¹²¹ “The CBE’s Affirmations,” qt’d in Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 153.

recognize the social, hermeneutical or textual limits of the evangelical community. Although [the EWC] wanted to continue to be known as evangelical, it did not accept those aspects by which evangelicals defined their movement: the inerrancy of scripture, particular methods of biblical interpretation, and appropriate social conclusions that could be drawn.¹²²

Cochran positions the EWC and CBE as competing for evangelical status, and thus, authority and legitimacy within the biblical feminist movement. Cochran concludes that by the late 1980s, only CBE sustained an appropriately evangelical relationship with Scripture. Similarly to Ingersoll, Cochran rejects the EWC's influence among evangelicals in the 1990s. For Cochran, the coalition's "growing inclusivity [and] acceptance of homosexuality" and the EWC's changes to its Statement of Faith in 1990 signaled the EWC's rejection of evangelical standards of biblical authority.¹²³

Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances, published in 2008, builds on Cochran's work. This text presents biblical feminists as part of a broader study of "unlikely allies:" coalitions that blur boundaries between the religious, social, and political "Left" versus "Right."¹²⁴ Drawing on social movement theory, *Native Americans and the Christian Right* identifies a gap in scholarly and activist accounts regarding the significance of religion and politics in coalition-building.¹²⁵ It argues that "evangelical feminisms destabilize notions of evangelicalism as singularly conservative."¹²⁶ Like Cochran's study, *Native Americans and the Christian Right* considers only the CBE to be a biblical feminist coalition by the late 1980s, suggesting that the EWC lost evangelical status after affirming its support for gay rights.¹²⁷

¹²² Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 178-9. Cochran notes, "biblical inerrancy is concerned with the issue of scriptural authority. Those who subscribe to this doctrine believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, completely true and faithful in all matters on which it touches" (17). Cochran notes that the meaning of biblical inerrancy became a topic of discussion and controversy among evangelicals in the 1970s (64-9). Cochran notes that Harold Lindell, editor of *Christianity Today*, was the "most widely known supporter of inerrancy," a view that he advocated in his 1976 book *The Battle for the Bible* (67).

¹²³ Ibid. The EWC's Statement of Faith changes are discussed at length in chapter five.

¹²⁴ Andrea Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), x, 5. I have decided not to use the author's name in the main text of my dissertation. Smith identifies herself as an Indigenous evangelical feminist and writes at this intersection. However, Smith's Indigenous heritage has been discredited, and her decision to lay claim to this identity (and accept funding designated for Indigenous scholars) remains widely controversial (see, for example, Sarah Viren, "The Native Scholar Who Wasn't," *New York Times*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/25/magazine/cherokee-native-american-andrea-smith.html>). By relegating Smith's name to my footnotes, I hope to communicate my refusal to support the influence of this problematic scholar, while acknowledging the import of this text as part of evangelical feminist historiography.

¹²⁵ An exception to this lacuna, which Andrea Smith notes, is Christian Smith's *Disruptive Religion* (Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, xviii). In 1996, Christian Smith argued that much social movement scholarship ignored the transformative role of religion in social movements. Instead, scholars often framed religion as a "conservative" force, utilized to sustain the status quo. Alternatively, Christian Smith suggested that religion "can also...challenge and overturn social, political, and economic systems. Religion *can* help to keep everything in its place. But it can *also* turn the world upside-down" (*Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social-Movement Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1996). 1. Emphasis in original).

¹²⁶ Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 133; 116.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 142; 196-7.

According to *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, “in order to maintain its evangelical credentials,” the CBE began to define itself against “secular” feminist ideals, particularly regarding feminist advocacy of abortion and gay rights.¹²⁸ CBE members rejected much of a broader feminist agenda in order to sustain their influence and credibility within evangelical circles. For example, this study contends that the predominantly White evangelical feminist movement failed to resist gender-based violence within their own communities, distracted by a shifting discourse that located gender-based violence in “the Third World [sic],” as an evangelical project of “saving ‘brown women.’”¹²⁹ By aligning itself with racism and parochial politics existing within the broader evangelical community, “evangelical feminism seems to be...a site that reinscribes colonial relationships with indigenous women, Third World [sic] women, and women of color.”¹³⁰ This book seeks to problematize binary progressive/conservative categories to identify new possibilities of allyship and social mobilization, ultimately, “to develop mass-based movements for social change.”¹³¹ Because CBE rejected important feminist goals to sustain its evangelical status, this study concludes that meaningful alliances between White biblical feminists and women of colour, including Native American feminists, have not been possible.

The most recent study of biblical feminism is Isaac B. Sharp’s *The Other Evangelicals: A Story of Liberal, Black, Progressive, Feminist, and Gay Christians – and the Movement That Pushed Them Out* (2023). Sharp, a Christian ethicist, dedicates one chapter of his larger study to the biblical feminist movement, which includes the EWC and the CBE. Like Cochran and others, Sharp’s text prioritizes ideological conflicts between evangelicals and feminists, arguing that adherence to feminist ideals ultimately obstructed effective overlap and compatibility between evangelical feminists and mainstream evangelicals. Sharp contends that a variety of participants, including biblical feminists, have historically shaped mainstream evangelicalism. Yet, Sharp’s text articulates the EWC’s trajectory out of evangelicalism-proper, arguing that mainstream evangelicalism has pushed feminists (and Black, gay, liberal evangelicals, among others) out of its theological and cultural boundaries. Sharp suggests that conservative evangelical gatekeepers, or the movement’s “power brokers,” came to identify biblical feminists as “dissenters” to the movement by the late 1980s.¹³² According to Sharp, the mainstream evangelical community understood “supporting the

¹²⁸ Ibid., 196-7.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 162-3. Smith’s work, published in 2008, uses the now outdated term “Third World,” which was used to discuss Latin America, Africa and Asia, predominantly. This terminology is no longer considered appropriate because of its racist implications. First introduced by French demographer Alfred Sauvey in 1952, “Third World” was a label applied to countries that were not part of the economically developed capitalist “First World,” which included the United States and Western Europe. Neither were these countries part of the communist “Second World,” which included the Soviet Union and China. Among scholars, this classification system is now widely considered racist, implying “a backwardness” among “Third World” countries (Themrise Khan et al, “How We Classify Countries and People—and Why It Matters,” *BMJ Global Health* 7, no. 6 (2022), 2). The debate about how to categorize countries without such biases and without reinforcing existing power dynamics persists today. Furthermore, the term “Third World” is still sometimes used by American media outlets, most recently while reporting on the armed mob attack on the U.S. capitol on January 6, 2021 (See Marc Silver, “Memo to People of Earth: ‘Third World’ Is An Offensive Term!” *NPR*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/01/08/954820328/memo-to-people-of-earth-third-world-is-an-offensive-term>).

¹³⁰ Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 164.

¹³¹ Ibid., xix; 272.

¹³² Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 23; 196-7.

full equality of women in the home, church, and world [to be] tantamount to rejecting the clear teachings of the Bible.”¹³³ As such, Sharp’s boundary between feminism and evangelicalism is stricter than Ingersoll’s and Cochran’s, neither of whom challenge the CBE’s influence within the broader evangelical movement. According to Sharp, mainstream evangelicals rejected the validity of biblical feminism as a movement understanding “evangelical feminism and biblical egalitarianism...[to be] contradictions in terms.”¹³⁴ In Sharp’s framing, the CBE is as precarious among evangelicals as the EWC, despite the former’s declaration that homosexuality is a sin.

Histories of biblical feminism that concentrate on conflict and tension within the movement limit our historical understanding of the EWC and biblical feminism. Positioning evangelical feminist coalitions within a dialectical or competitive frame with one another or with the broader evangelical movement presents conflict and schism as undesirable. In this framing, conflicts negatively impact a coalition and its broader movements. Recent sociological studies, however, explore the ways that coalitional fractures positively influence both a coalition and its wider matrix.¹³⁵ Secondly, focusing on historical tensions highlights the biblical feminist movement’s loss of credibility and declining influence within its broader context, ultimately identifying evangelical feminists as outsiders within the wider evangelical and feminist movements. This focus erases ongoing reciprocal and complex relationships between biblical feminism and its matrix.

By focusing on the EWC’s coalition-building project and considering recent scholarship that highlights the benefits of coalitional conflicts, this dissertation presents a new avenue for examining the histories of evangelicalism and feminism. The EWC created connections between evangelical and feminist ideologies that blurred the boundaries between these movements, creating new ways of being both evangelical and feminist, as well as biblically feminist. By examining how the EWC sustained relationships between these movements, scholars can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the EWC’s ongoing impacts on evangelicalism and the historical variations and nuances present in each movement. The EWC’s coalition-building trajectory highlights the fluidity of historical categories, an aspect that scholars often overlook, particularly as distance from the lived experiences of the past increases.¹³⁶ Tracing the EWC’s coalition-building project, this dissertation first examines why and how early biblical feminists created a coalition. I then explore how biblical feminists maintained their coalition through various strategies, including an unconventional “non-position” tactic. Following a basic chronology, this dissertation then examines how biblical feminists navigated their first major coalitional fracture, resulting from the EWC’s support of gay civil rights in the 1980s. I also investigate what I consider to be the EWC’s major coalitional failure: its continued racial homogeneity despite members’ efforts to diversify membership. Finally, I examine the EWC’s continual evolution and regeneration

¹³³ Ibid., 196.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ This argument is introduced in chapter two, and draws on the work of sociologist Kelsy Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now: Diversity and Discord in the National Organization for Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

¹³⁶ Studying coalitions ensures a historical focus on individual people and boundary crossing. As coalition theorist Stephanie Gilmore notes, “Exploring how people come together in coalitions...requires significant attention to lived experiences of the people involved” (*Feminist Coalitions*, 2). Gilmore also contends that “what we know intuitively from our own experiences but rarely acknowledge in the lives we study historically – is how often people travel in many circles at the same time” (Ibid., 5). By studying a coalition that crosses the boundaries between evangelicalism and feminism, my dissertation highlights this historical complexity.

following its fractures and failures. Even after the EWC's supposed decline in influence among evangelicals in the 1980s, the new relationships, identities, and discourses fostered by the coalition throughout its history continue to have a resonance across American evangelicalism.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter of this dissertation uses coalition-building theory to trace the emergence, formation, and development of the Evangelical Women's Caucus. Chapter one demonstrates that the EWC was a revolutionary and radical coalition that bridged ideologies often considered to be in conflict. This chapter suggests that the creation of the EWC had a significant impact on the trajectory of evangelicalism and feminism in the United States by building and sustaining a bridge between these movements. Presenting the historical context for the EWC's formation, this chapter examines existing evangelical coalitions and feminist coalitions in the United States. Coalitions are formed in response to the dominant culture, to fill a perceived lack or to amend an observed problem with the status quo. Therefore, chapter one begins with the EWC's resistance to the dominant evangelical conception of gender, which stipulated that God established a hierarchy where women were submissive to men in the home, the church, and broader society. I then examine the gaps biblical feminists sought to fill within the feminist movement, including a paucity of Christian feminist coalitions and a rejection of the popular idea that feminism was a secular movement. This chapter introduces the cultural and religious context from which the EWC emerged.

Continuing to follow the EWC's coalition-building project, chapter two examines the EWC's strategies for sustaining internal unity and external credibility among evangelicals and feminists. As EWC leaders worked to maintain their coalition and strengthen a developing biblical feminist movement, they enforced a strategic "non-position" on the controversial subject of abortion. This chapter employs recent coalition-building theory by sociologist Kelsy Kretschmer to complicate conventional scholarship that suggests schisms and splits are inherently destructive to coalitions. Kretschmer suggests that splitting can benefit not only the emerging coalition, which is free to establish its own goals and purpose, but also the original ("parent") coalition, which can now refocus its attention on its goals rather than mediating internal conflicts. Schisms can also strengthen the broader movement surrounding the coalitions by creating new avenues of activism and participation for potential members. Chapter two presents the EWC's "non-position" on abortion rights as a tactical strategy to maintain unity within their coalition. However, because abortion became a litmus test for feminists in the 1970s and evangelicals in the 1980s, chapter two argues that the EWC's relationships with evangelicalism and feminism suffered because of the coalition's non-positionality, reducing its potential influence on both movements.

The third chapter examines the EWC's first major schism, which occurred in 1986 when the coalition declared its official support for gay rights. The EWC's gay rights resolution resulted in a massive exodus of approximately half of the coalition's members. This chapter analyzes internal discourses among EWC members, preserved in the archives, to present behind-the-scenes conversations between coalition members and leaders. This dialogue helps explain how and why the coalition decided to pass such a controversial resolution. Beginning in the early 1980s, EWC members debated expanding the coalition's goals from gender equality to other social justice

concerns, including gay rights. To contextualize the EWC's internal discussions, chapter three outlines broader American discourses regarding homosexuality and gay rights among the coalition's parent movements: evangelicalism and feminism. Chapter three discusses strategies identified by coalition theorists and activists to mediate internal diversity within coalitions. I suggest that the EWC did not employ adequate mechanisms to sustain unity while implementing a new and controversial purpose and collective identity for its members. Yet the 1986 schism did not destroy the EWC. Building on Kretschmer's scholarship on schisms introduced in chapter two, chapter three examines how the EWC evolved after this fracture, which ultimately proved productive and creative for both the coalition and the broader biblical feminist movement.

Chapter four examines a significant failure of the EWC as a coalition: its inability to attract and represent Black women and women of colour.¹³⁷ EWC members recognized the importance of creating a diverse and inclusive community to advocate for the coalition's goals, reach a broader demographic, and maintain coalitional credibility within the feminist movement. The EWC made efforts, outlined in this chapter, to diversify its membership. However, members have remained predominantly White into the present. Chapter four contextualizes the EWC's racial homogeneity by examining historical attempts (and failures) among evangelicals and feminists to create racially inclusive coalitions. This chapter employs a unique methodology that differs from the other chapters in the dissertation, as it addresses EWC's failure by interrupting the silences in the EWC archive. Because EWC members failed to build an interracial coalition, the voices of women of colour and Black women are missing from the EWC's archive. To speak against this silence, I supplement my primary archive with two archives from the secular feminist movement: the National Organization for Women archives and the Sophia Smith Collection. Using these archives, chapter four employs a case study at the intersection of race and gender: sterilization abuse in the United States from the 1950s to the 1970s. This case study examines discourses between women of colour, Black women, and White women regarding the construction of coalitions across racial lines. By drawing parallels between the secular feminist and biblical feminist movements, this chapter offers insights into why and how the EWC ultimately failed to attract and represent Black women and women of colour.

Chapter five examines the EWC as a coalition in relationship with feminism, evangelicalism, and the expanding biblical feminist movement. This chapter engages with a theoretical framework inspired by philosopher Ian Hacking to present the EWC in a continuous and reciprocal (looping) relationship with its ever-changing matrix. This chapter challenges the standard historical narrative of the "rise and fall" of biblical feminism, which assumes a dialectical relationship between evangelicalism and feminism. Chapter five suggests that relationships of exchange persist among EWC members and their broader matrix, with continued impacts on evangelicalism, feminism, and biblical feminism as "interactive kinds." Presenting internal discourses from the EWC archives, I show how EWC members navigated changing relationships, descriptions, and identities within their communities. These discourses also offer unique insights into the personal and religious

¹³⁷ I intentionally separate the categories "Black women" and "women of colour" in this dissertation, when readability allows this distinction. I do so because Black women have a specific and unique history in the United States that shapes their experiences in unique ways in American society. As sociologists Emerson and Smith explain, the division between Black and White Americans is "generally more vast and the history longer in comparison to [relationships between other races]" (*Divided by Faith*, 11). See also footnotes 54 and 55 in chapter four.

struggles faced by biblical feminists as evangelicalism and biblical feminism evolved. Finally, as biblical feminists interacted with and shaped their matrix, they disrupted ideological boundaries and defied binary identity constructions. Chapter five examines how the EWC's coalition-building project, identity construction and maintenance, and biblical feminists' lived experiences, reveal the permeability of historical "fixed" categories.

Methodology and Methodological Restrictions

To investigate the historical relationship between the EWC and its wider communities, my dissertation relies on extensive archival research. My primary archival source has been the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus – Christian Feminism Today Records (heretofore referred to as the EWC archives). I visited these archives from January to March of 2022, at the Burke Library at Columbia University in New York, NY. The EWC archives comprise personal and official correspondence, official memos, informational pamphlets on events and conferences, media coverage of the EWC, and past iterations of the coalition's website. Through the EWC archive, I surveyed the complete collection of the coalition's national newsletter, *Update*, published quarterly from 1977.¹³⁸ The EWC's newsletter contains information about the development and growth of the coalition, theological treatises, social commentaries, news of members' career changes, educational successes, acceptances into seminaries, and relocations, as well as letters from members, editorials, poetry, and book reviews. I was very fortunate to complement this archival research with an interview with EWC founding member Letha Scanzoni in July of 2022.

In June and July of 2022, I visited the National Organization for Women (NOW) Records at the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA, and the Sophia Smith Collection (SSC) of Women's History at Smith College in Northampton, MA. My dissertation draws on these archives to illustrate historical events within the mainstream "secular" feminist movement, as well as intersecting discourses between secular and religious feminists. These archives include information on the development of NOW's various task forces on religion, engagement with Catholics for Choice, and backlash from and resistance to various conservative religious groups and ideologies, discussed throughout this dissertation. Most significantly for my purposes, these archives provided discourses between White women, Black women, and women of colour within the secular feminist movement. These records enabled me to comprehend and represent not only the diversity within American feminism but also ongoing racial tensions and challenges within the movement, which also impacted the EWC. I discuss my decision to utilize these archives in detail in chapter four.

Finally, I utilized *Christianity Today's* digital archives to represent mainstream evangelicals in conversation with the EWC and biblical feminism more broadly. *Christianity Today* has roots in the neo-evangelical movement of the 1940s and it remains influential today. This magazine reported widely on social, political, and theological issues among mainstream evangelicals, including important topics for evangelical feminists such as biblical gender roles, abortion,

¹³⁸ The frequency of publications per year fluctuated with EWC membership, editor availability, and resources. However, *Update* editors attempted to sustain seasonal issues (summer, fall, spring, and winter). For my dissertation, I focused on *Update* issues from 1977 to 2006.

homosexuality, and race.¹³⁹ The *Christianity Today* archives also signal important events and discourses happening within the broader evangelical community, which impacted the EWC. Finally, the editors at *Christianity Today* published reports on the EWC's formation and coalitional development, as well as reactions to the EWC's significant events. This archive helps me identify shifts in the evangelical matrix and illuminate connections and relationships between evangelicals and biblical feminists.

Since what is now known as the “archival turn,” historians, archivists, anthropologists, and cultural theorists have identified the limitations of archival research. According to anthropologist and historian Ann Laura Stoler, the archival turn involved the “move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject.”¹⁴⁰ Or, in other words, this scholarly “turn” acknowledged archives as spaces of power that require critical analysis and engagement. Many scholars suggest that this shift toward questioning the authority, objectivity, and construction of archives as non-neutral spaces began in the 1990s. Alternatively, some scholars trace the roots of this “turn” to the 1970s with Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever*.¹⁴¹ Stoler contends that a critical engagement with archives began long before Derrida, who simply “compellingly captured that impulse by giving it theoretical stature.”¹⁴² Regardless of its exact beginnings, the archival turn describes an interrogation of how archives “wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies.”¹⁴³ Archival power is “the power of the present to control what is, and will be, known about the past, about the power of remembering over forgetting.”¹⁴⁴ This process of remembering occurs within existing socio-cultural frameworks, which help determine which records are stored to create a “societal memory” about the past.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Before 2003 when *Christianity Today* became a monthly publication, the editorial team published between fourteen to sixteen issues per year. To effectively engage with this immense source, I searched the digitized magazine using key terms, author names, and dates of events.

¹⁴⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44.

¹⁴¹ For scholars who articulate the archival turn as a phenomenon beginning in the 1990s, see May Chazan, Melissa Baldwin, and Laura Madokoro, “Aging, Activism, and the Archive: Feminist Perspectives for the 21st Century,” *Archivaria* 2015, no. 80 (2015), 61; see also Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 4-6, 162 n.6. It is also common for scholars to cite Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London, 1974) along with Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), as key cultural theorists establishing the archives as spaces of power. See, for example, Rodney Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence,” *Archivaria* 61: *Special Section on Archives, Space and Power*, (2006), 216; Joan M Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science: International Journal on Recorded Information - Incorporating “archives and Museum Informatics”* 2, no. 1–2 (2002), 4.

¹⁴² Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 44; As noted in chapter four of this dissertation, historian Vivian M. May has shown that Black feminist activist and scholar Anna Julia Cooper was interrogating archival silences and challenging archival power dynamics as early as her 1925 Sorbonne dissertation (Vivian M. May, “Anna Julia Cooper, Archival Absences, and Black Women’s ‘Muffled’ Knowledge,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 40, no. 2 (2021), 243).

¹⁴³ Schwartz and Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power,” 2. See also Carter, “Of Things Said,” 216.

¹⁴⁴ Schwartz and Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power,” 3. See also Carter, “Of Things Said,” 216.

¹⁴⁵ Carter “Of Things Said,” 217. See also Maurice Halbwachs, “Language and Memory” in *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, 1941, 1992), 43.

In contemporary archival scholarship, archivists and historians are encouraged to think critically about the parochial nature of what an archive communicates about the past, particularly because archives reveal more about the present and the future. As Derrida explains, “the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past...It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.”¹⁴⁶ Because archives represent spaces of power that reflect cultural decisions about what information is of value to preserve and remember, they always contain “distortions, omissions, erasures, and silences.”¹⁴⁷ These erasures can be exposed and mined for information about whose voices were excluded, which records were omitted, and why. While archivists and historians accept that “[n]ot every story is told” in an archive, scholars have determined that archives consistently neglect some groups, including women, marginalized communities, and working-class, colonial, and racialized subjects.¹⁴⁸

This scholarship provides a framework for my approach to archival research, reminding me that the information to which I have access has been intentionally documented, curated, and filtered. Moreover, the EWC archives reveal that EWC leaders were collecting, compiling, and recording the development of their coalition with the intention to construct an archive.¹⁴⁹ In 1991, for example, leading member Florence Brown prompted chapter leaders to send in all relevant records to the appointed EWC archivist, Sue Horner. Brown wrote to her council sisters: “It was rather fun to review so much of the past,” as she and Horner culled the existing archive.¹⁵⁰ Such intentionality has uniquely shaped the EWC archives because, while the purposeful documentation of this coalition seeks to ensure that these women’s voices are not erased from the historical record and social memory, this archive continues to be a space of absence. The power resides among EWC leaders as they seek to tell their own story about their coalition.

A notable gap I identified in the EWC archive, explored in-depth in chapter four, is the absence of voices and experiences from women of colour and Black women. This was not an intentional omission: women of colour and Black women predominantly did not join the EWC, and thus were not included in the EWC’s records. This absence in the archive limits my dissertation; I am unable to tell a story about evangelical feminist women of colour. However, without writing a

¹⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics* vol. 25, no. 2 (1995), 27. See also Jennifer L. Morgan, “Archives and Histories of Racial Capitalism: An Afterword,” *Social Text* vol. 33, no. 4 (2015), 154. Saidiya Hartman explains of her archive work: “For me, narrating counter-histories of slavery has always been inseparable from writing a history of present, by which I mean the incomplete project of freedom, and the precarious life of the ex-slave, a condition defined by the vulnerability to premature death and to gratuitous acts of violence” (“Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe*, No. 26 (2008), 4).

¹⁴⁷ Carter “Of Things Said,” 216.

¹⁴⁸ Carter, “Of Things Said,” 216-8. Morgan, “Archives and Histories,” 154; Schwartz and Cook note that “Gerda Lerner has convincingly traced, from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, the systemic exclusion of women from society’s memory tools and institutions, including archives” in “The Search for Women’s History” in *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York and Oxford, 1993) (“Archives, Records, and Power,” 7).

¹⁴⁹ In the 1980s, leadership was searching for an appropriate location for the EWC records. In 1985 leaders discussed housing their records at the Schlesinger Library, and in 1989 they announced in *Update* that they had “accepted Wheaton College’s bid to house [their] archives” (Margaret Arighi, “Council Notes: Archive,” *Update*, vol. 13, no. 2, (Fall 1989), 5). See also AWTs: EEWc Archives, “Minutes of the Council Meeting,” 28-30 June 1985, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 8.

¹⁵⁰ AWTs: EEWc Archive, “Dear Council Sisters,” (Oct. 5, 1991), Series 1A, Box 1, Folder 6

history that might “trespass[] the boundaries of the archive,” I do interrogate this absence and attempt to understand why it exists in chapter four.¹⁵¹ To do so, I bring the NOW and SSC archives into conversation with the EWC archives. The NOW and SSC archives include cross-racial discourses that address coalitional challenges between White and racialized secular feminists. These discourses offer insights into discussions that also impacted biblical feminists. Finally, by surveying the *Christianity Today* archives, my dissertation only comments on what has been published in the magazine (although I also have access to internal correspondences between *Christianity Today* editors and EWC members preserved in the EWC archives). Because I employ this magazine to represent a public response to the EWC within the evangelical community, this limitation is not a hindrance to my project.

When I mention that my dissertation is about biblical feminism, I am often met with raised eyebrows. Many people (both inside and outside of academia) are either unaware American evangelical feminism exists or consider an “evangelical feminist” to be an oxymoron. While this response reflects the current polarized American climate, it has its roots in socio-political, religious, and cultural changes that began after World War II.¹⁵² Leading up to the 1950s, “most Americans aligned with specific denominations, usually those in which they were reared, such as Catholic or Episcopalian, Methodist or Baptist.”¹⁵³ After the war, Americans underwent a “political and cultural realignment,” orienting themselves by “moral and political sensibilities,” as liberals or conservatives.¹⁵⁴ By the late 1970s, conservative, politically engaged Christians created the New Christian Right to address “morality” problems within the changing American landscape. Predominantly White, conservative evangelicals played a key role in the New Right and promoted “family values” to support America as a Christian nation.¹⁵⁵ The ideology of family values stipulates a “traditional” nuclear family, led by a breadwinning father and a stay-at-home mother who takes care of the children. This ideology had a lengthy history among conservative evangelicals with roots

¹⁵¹ Hartman notes that a historian’s obligation to observe the limits of what an archive tells us: “History pledges to be faithful to the limits of fact, evidence, and archive” (“Venus,” 9).

¹⁵² For more on information on the changing American landscape after WWII, see Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*; Spruill, *Divided We Stand*; Axel R. Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011); Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). For a focus on the American Sunbelt, see Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*.

¹⁵³ Anthony Petro, *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 59.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. Petro notes that this realignment occurred for many reasons, including increased access to higher education, women’s changing roles in society, and increased mobility among Americans (*After the Wrath of God*, 59). See also Wuthnow, “Decline of Denominationalism,” in *Restructuring*, 71-99.

¹⁵⁵ Todne Thomas, *Kincraft: The Making of Black Evangelical Sociality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 40. Thomas notes that “family-values discourse held and still holds antiblack implications...the morally deserving evangelical family was constructed in juxtaposition to a raced, gendered, and classed construct of the morally undeserving, black, female-headed household” (Ibid). Thomas examines ideas of kinship within two Black evangelical congregations, Dixon Bible Chapel (DBC) and Corinthian Bible Chapel (CBC) in the Atlanta metropolitan area in Georgia. Thomas found that ideas of family and kinship among Black evangelicals differed from White evangelicals: Black evangelicals formed a “spiritual family” as children of Christ that transcended blood and spousal relationships, which White evangelicals cherished. Thomas explains of Black evangelicals, “Family was not just something that congregants did away from church in their homes with spouses and children. Family was also a community praxis, a collective spirituality that privileged and made space for Christian connections” (3).

in the Cold War era.¹⁵⁶ However, family values became part of American mainstream discourse through the New Right in the 1970s as conservative evangelicals argued that the traditional family structure was “the crucial institution guarding against societal collapse” in the United States.¹⁵⁷ In 1979, Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, which combined leadership from the political right and the religious right, and Beverly LaHaye’s Concerned Women for America (CWA) emerged as two significant Christian Right coalitions supporting family values. These coalitions sought to combat the perceived imminent and insidious moral decline of America, represented by the women’s rights, abortion rights, and gay rights movements. Conservative evangelicals viewed these movements as threats to the traditional family, and therefore, as threats to the nation.¹⁵⁸ In the 1980s, the politically conservative cadre within evangelicalism that dominated the Christian Right “increasingly came to define the larger public image of American evangelicals.”¹⁵⁹ This perception persists today as evangelical histories curtail the complicated and diverse blend of identities and discourses that have always constituted American evangelicalism. And people continue to raise their eyebrows about biblical feminism.

I have titled my dissertation *Empowered for Action* after the EWC’s 1986 national conference in Fresno, California: “Free Indeed...Empowered for Action.” To me, this title connotes biblical feminists’ early enthusiasm and powerful endurance as they built a coalition that ignited a movement. It also points to the vital companionship among biblical feminists as they stood up and fought for their beliefs. As soon as Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni addressed “the woman question” among evangelicals, a deep yearning simmering below the surface erupted.¹⁶⁰ Previously isolated biblical feminists found community with one another. Supported by new friendships and mutual objectives, biblical feminists created the EWC to represent the inherent connections they saw between feminism and evangelicalism. The EWC pioneered a path through evangelical and feminist discourses on gender and gender roles, reproductive rights, homosexuality and gay rights,

¹⁵⁶ Religion scholar Sara Moslener traced discourses about religion, morality, family, sexual deviance, and American fears of national decline to the Cold War Era in *Virgin Nation: Sexual Purity and American Adolescence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). See chapter two specifically: “From Adolescence to Lost Innocence: Religious Revival and Sexual Deviance in the Cold War Era,” 48-76.

¹⁵⁷ Dowland, *Family Values*, 151.

¹⁵⁸ Historian Seth Dowland explains that, historically, “family values” has been a slippery concept: “Conservative politicians and ministers couched their criticism of almost everything they opposed – abortion, feminism, gay rights, nuclear disarmament, and high takes – in the language of family values” (*Family Values*, 10-11). Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 205. Race was also an important instigator of the New Christian Right. Historian Randal Balmer has argued that racism was at the center of the rise of the Right. Balmer suggests that conservative evangelicals became politicized not in response to abortion rights, as the standard narrative goes, but instead in response to the 1971 District Court for the District of Columbia ruling *Green v. Connally*. This ruling stipulated that racially segregated institutions could not claim to be charitable institutions, which meant that evangelical institutions would need to embrace racial integration to maintain their tax-exempt status. Balmer argues that the Christian Right arose in reaction to the pressure to racially integrate their institutions (see Balmer, *Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2021)).

¹⁵⁹ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 214; See also Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 59; Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 10-11.

¹⁶⁰ The “woman question” asks about women’s roles in society, church, and the home. In their individual prefaces to *All We’re Meant to Be*, both Scanzoni and Hardesty note that the intention of the book is to address “the woman question” (7, 9). According to Scanzoni, they wrote *All We’re Meant to Be* because “it seemed that Christians were sitting on the sidelines saying nothing about the ‘woman question,’” even as women’s roles were changing in the wider culture, provoked by the emergent second-wave feminist movement (7).

and race. At its first national conference in 1975, EWC leaders chose the theme song, “We’re on our way, Lord,” and, as promised, the coalition went on to transform the evangelical and feminist landscapes in the United States. The EWC’s influence continues today.

Chapter One: Creation

Building the Evangelical Women's Caucus

In 1987, “Anna” mailed a greeting card to “Diana,” her friend and fellow member of the Evangelical Women’s Caucus (EWC).¹ The card’s cover portrayed an idyllic scene of a young woman and man drifting down a tranquil, tree-lined river in a wooden sailboat.² Concealed behind this serene and romantic image, Anna’s scribbled note told a story of heartbreak, anguish, and, ultimately, friendship. Anna and Diana’s correspondence illustrates the profound challenges and powerful stakes facing the trailblazing women in the evangelical feminist movement.³

Anna opened her letter with EWC business, thanking Diana for sending financial reimbursement for an unidentified expense incurred on behalf of the organization. The tone of the card then abruptly shifted into a familiarity between friends, and Anna disclosed that she was grateful for the cheque because she has been struggling financially and “not doing well altogether!”⁴ The reason for Anna’s chagrin: her engagement and wedding was just called off by her now ex-fiancé, who ceased all contact with her because of her feminist beliefs.⁵ In Anna’s words:

Essentially what happened was I became a different person in order to fit into [my fiancé’s] “ideal.” When I realized and explained that I couldn’t be that person he decided he didn’t want me afterall [sic]. (this is simplified a bit but it really boils down to this) I feel quite certain he will find a woman who will in fact meet the requirements.⁶

The “requirements” to which Anna is referring would have been well-known to both women involved in this correspondence as members of the evangelical community: wifely submission and respect for the husband’s headship. This hierarchical marital relationship was part of a divinely ordained familial structure according to the dominant evangelical interpretation of Scripture. Evangelicals widely believed that God created a gendered universe whereby men were directly accountable to God, women were below them, answering to men, and children were at the bottom, subject to both parents but the primary responsibility of the mother.⁷ Identifying as

¹ The first names in this correspondence have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved. Since their last names were not recorded in this archival exchange, I can only speculate as to the specific members involved myself. Therefore, I cannot provide more background or details into either of their lives (age, denominational affiliation, etc.) beyond the context of what is recorded in this exchange.

² The image was of the painting “On the River,” by nineteenth-century artist Thomas James Lloyd.

³ Women founded the Evangelical Women’s Caucus and remained the dominant demographic throughout its existence. Some men joined the ranks of the coalition, and others supported from the sidelines as husbands and partners of female leaders. Men have remained a minority within the group throughout its existence. Moreover, the stakes presented in this chapter are gendered and the challenges Anna faces are unique to women in the movement.

⁴ AWTs: EEWC Archive, “Correspondence 1987,” Series 1C: National Office, Box 7, Folder 3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 62; Margaret L. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 109. See also Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Biblical Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021). This interpretation was based

evangelical feminists, Anna and Diana opposed a hierarchical marital structure. The biblical feminist movement contended that this purportedly “natural” gender hierarchy was not only a misreading of Scripture but a sinful rejection of God’s intended creation of human equality.⁸ Evangelical feminists thus created the EWC to advocate for egalitarian marriage and “mutual submission,” where men and women submit to each other as equals in a relationship under God’s authority. Such concepts were not only unprecedented within American evangelicalism in the 1970s and 1980s, but they were also anathema to the dominant evangelical understanding of God’s universal order, which perceived “mutual submission” as unbiblical.

Anna’s card to Diana recognized the pervading sentiment among evangelicals that feminist ideals were incompatible with evangelicalism. Amidst her grief over her romantic fiasco and aided by Diana’s support, Anna acknowledged that her feminist values were irreconcilable with the relationship her ex-fiancé wanted: “I...recognize that this marriage would not have worked. It scares the hell out of me to look back and see my desperation for a man!”⁹ Anna’s broken engagement thus underlines some of the difficulties facing feminists as they pioneered a message of biblical gender equality within evangelical circles. Anna’s card also alludes to the widespread endorsement of wifely submission among her evangelical community. She believed that her ex-fiancé would easily find a wife who aligned with his desires (Anna’s letter underlines the word “will” in “will find a woman” twice). Even some of Anna’s friends disapproved of her feminism, which put Anna in a painful and confusing situation. Anna explained to Diana, “Betty Jo scolds me for not standing up for my feminist values and another close friend scolds me for taking ‘the feminist thing’ to the extreme. I don’t know what to think.”¹⁰ Diana, as an evangelical feminist herself, empathized with Anna’s fraught position and responded with her own insight: “[T]here are many compromises required of those of us who want to marry. We are pathfinders, in the transition years, and men are still very fearful of any change, so we must be very diplomatic and not expect great things from them immediately.”¹¹

A close reading of the correspondence between Anna and Diana reveals that Anna’s relationship troubles were caused, in part, because she did not wish to take her fiancé’s surname in marriage.¹² This refusal would have indicated to her fiancé, who sought a specific kind of wife, that Anna would not fulfill his expectations. Anna’s desire to keep her surname signaled and reified her new-found feminist consciousness: predominant second-wave discourses in the United States at that time connected notions of a woman’s autonomy, independence, and personhood with

on prioritizing the second chapter of Genesis (one of the creation stories) when Adam was formed first, followed by Eve. See, for example, Sally K. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 51. And Timothy 2:13.

⁸ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 45.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “Correspondence 1987.” Beyond her fiancé leaving, Anna faced problems in her friendships as she tried to unite her new-found feminism with her conservative evangelical community. The painful confusion involved in occupying this position is palpable in Anna’s letter: “Betty Jo scolds me for not standing up for my feminist values and another close friend scolds me for taking ‘the feminist thing’ to the extreme. I don’t know what to think.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. This reason is made clear in Diana’s response to Anna when she replies, “I do not think you were asking too much by wanting to retain your own name” (“Correspondence 1987”).

keeping one's name (as part of one's *identity*) after marriage.¹³ The consequences that Anna faced in voicing this desire, including the dissolution of her engagement and the cessation of all communication with her fiancé, underscore the crucial significance of naming for second-wave feminists and the sacrifices women made to uphold this value. As mentioned, Anna knew that many other evangelical women would not make such requests of their future husbands. And yet, Anna and Diana were just two members of a growing community of evangelical feminists who rejected the so-called biblical foundation of gendered hierarchies in the home, their churches, and the wider society. These "pathfinders" fought to bring their message of equality to their evangelical networks. Anna and Diana's friendship, along with the implicit support of the broader EWC coalition conveyed through their correspondence, empowered both women in their unique and challenging circumstances. Anna ended her card to Diana by confessing, "You can't know how important it was that you called me...on the very night of that little crisis. You really helped me put things in perspective. I hope we'll remain friends in spite of everything!"¹⁴ By interlocking their faith with feminism, Anna, Diana, and an emergent coalition of biblical feminists ventured into uncharted territory for evangelicals, transforming both evangelicalism and feminism in the United States.

Coalition-Building in Early Evangelical Feminism

In the broadest sense, a coalition is an alliance formed between individuals or groups with a shared goal of social and/or political transformation (or other task).¹⁵ Coalitions can be short- or long-term, single- or multi-issue, and can be in pursuit of social progress or advocate "regressive" social or political aims.¹⁶ As the first biblical feminist coalition in the United States, the Evangelical Women's Caucus created a bridge between two ideologies often in conflict: evangelicalism and feminism. Although the EWC's current iteration, Christian Feminism Today (CFT), represents an ecumenical Christian feminist coalition, the Evangelical Women's Caucus emerged in the 1970s

¹³ The naming of *Ms.* magazine, the immensely popular liberal feminist magazine first published in 1972, illustrates this feminist ideology in action. For a discussion of this naming process see Wendy Atkins-Sayre, "Naming Women: the Emergence of 'Ms.' as a Liberatory Title," *Women and Language* 28, no. 1 (2005), 8. Atkins-Sayre's article on the naming of *Ms.* magazine includes a history of the importance of naming and this focus for feminists, from the first wave to the early twenty-first century.

¹⁴ Anna does not expand on the meaning of this almost cryptic conclusion. However, in context, I take this to mean that Anna hopes they remain friends despite the hardships involved in sustaining biblical feminist communities and upholding biblical feminist values (AWTS: EEWCA Archives, Series 1C: National Office, Box 7, Folder 3).

¹⁵ Following Jill Bystydziński, Steven Schacht, and Stephanie Gilmore, I employ the terms coalition and alliance interchangeably throughout this chapter, I also sometimes use group and organization for readability. Jill M. Bystydziński and Steven P. Schacht, "Introduction," in *Forging Radical Alliances Across Difference: Coalition Politics for the New Millennium* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 14, n.1. Stephanie Gilmore, "Thinking about Feminist Coalitions," in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 6. Staggenborg, "Building Coalitions and Movements."

¹⁶ Bystydziński and Schacht, "Introduction," 13; Gilmore, "Thinking about Feminist Coalitions," 6-7; Nancy Whittier, "Rethinking Coalitions: Anti-Pornography Feminists, Conservatives, and Relationships between Collaborative Adversarial Movements," *Social Problems* 61, no. 2 (2014), 176.

from within (and in response to) the evangelical movement.¹⁷ From its inception, the EWC positioned evangelical and feminist ideologies as inherently intertwined and mutually reinforcing. In an early press release that publicly introduced their coalition, EWC leaders declared: “feminism is not only consistent with the Bible, but a natural outgrowth of Scriptures rightly interpreted.”¹⁸ Moreover, founders create coalitions in response to a perceived absence or lack within the dominant culture, or to challenge a problematic value system perpetuated by the status quo. The EWC contested the popular perception that feminism and evangelicalism were incompatible, particularly regarding issues involving women and gender.¹⁹ Scholars and activists alike recognize coalitions as a vital tool for bringing people (and their networks) together to share and disseminate knowledge and resources, thereby increasing visibility for the coalition’s desired goals, often through media attention.²⁰ By entwining feminist and evangelical ideals, the EWC created a new space for discourse among and between members of the predominantly secular feminist movement and Christians across multiple denominations.

To be an effective vehicle for change, a coalition must be “workable and relatively lasting;” it must effectively unite group members toward a shared goal and last long enough to achieve its desired aims.²¹ Founders, therefore, construct coalitions around shared principles or an agreed collective identity that unites potentially diverse individuals.²² To facilitate an internal collective identity, coalition leaders and members often utilize processes of exclusion whereby the group defines themselves (“who we are”) by “marking off who we are not.”²³ Coalition leaders often use (or construct) external opponents or “outsiders” to delineate their own boundaries by emphasizing explicit ideologies and identities that the coalition rejects or prohibits. Beyond external threats however, coalitions also “always involve negotiations of difference” internally to maintain harmony

¹⁷ EWC changed its name to Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus-Christian Feminism Today (CFT for short) in 2009.

¹⁸ AWTS: EEWCA Archives, “For Immediate Release,” (Dec. 2, 1975), Series 1C, Box 1, Folder 7.

¹⁹ In an early press release in December of 1975, EWC leaders acknowledged that for “many people the terms ‘feminist’ and ‘Christian’ seem mutually exclusive” (AWTS: EEWCA Archives, “For Immediate Release,” (Dec. 2, 1975), Series 1C, Box 1, Folder 7).

²⁰ Michelle I. Gawerc, “Diverse Social Movement Coalitions: Prospects and Challenges,” *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 1 (2020), 1.

²¹ Bystydziński and Schacht, “Introduction,” 1. While much scholarship centers long-term collaborations as successful examples of coalition, Amanda Pullum examines the benefits of intentionally restricted partnerships that seek designated short-term relationships on specific issues (rejecting an all-encompassing shared ideology) in “Foul Weather Friends: Enabling Movement Alliance through an Intentionally Limited Coalition,” *Social Currents* 5, no. 3 (2018), 228–43. Stephanie Gilmore also uses this definition to specifically describe feminist coalitions in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 6–7. See also, Nancy Whittier, “Rethinking Coalitions: Anti-Pornography Feminists, Conservatives, and Relationships between Collaborative Adversarial Movements,” *Social Problems* 61, no. 2 (2014), 176.

²² Whittier notes that coalitions can also develop because of a perceived threat, however most coalitions develop out of shared ideologies as studies have shown that “even threat did not produce coalition across substantial ideological difference” (“Rethinking Coalitions,” 176).

²³ Joshua Gamson, “Messages of Exclusion: Gender, Movements, and Symbolic Boundaries,” *Gender and Society* 11, no. 2 (1997), 179, 181. See also Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier, “Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization,” *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon D. Morris, and Carol McClurg Mueller (Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 104–29; Kelsy Kretschmer, “Shifting Boundaries and Splintering Movements: Abortion Rights in the Feminist and New Right Movements,” *Sociological Forum* 29, no. 4 (2014), 894.

within the group.²⁴ Uniting a group of diverse individuals requires fostering feelings of solidarity among participants so that members “recognize others and [feel] recognized, as belonging to the same social unit.”²⁵ Coalitions achieve inclusivity and comradery more easily when members already share networks, as this promotes clear communication, facilitates the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and enables the merging of resources.²⁶ This chapter examines how early evangelical feminists cultivated a radical movement that advocated biblical gender equality and appealed to like-minded evangelical Christians across the United States. My analysis employs coalition-building theory to investigate how these pioneering biblical feminists established a collective identity with shared goals from which to launch their movement, and why early members fought to expand their coalition despite internal differences and external pressures.

According to activists and scholars, the key to building and fostering coalitions among diverse individuals is to acknowledge and attempt to bridge differences, rather than diminish or ignore them.²⁷ Recognizing differences among coalition members is necessary to develop an inclusive space where members can negotiate privilege and power inequalities that might otherwise threaten the group’s comradery.²⁸ Actively bridging internal differences promotes commitment to the group by cultivating mutual acceptance and understanding between members. Navigating differences also helps participants determine the “common ground” for the coalition: a purpose or commitment that transcends members’ “divisive identities” and is deemed more important than these differences.²⁹ Beyond recognizing and grappling with diversity, successful coalitions must foster trust among members. Trusting the coalition means that members believe the leadership will not exploit them, and that participation in the group will not cause them harm. Trust involves “the cognitive belief that those with whom one is interacting have one’s interests at heart and are competent to carry out the task at hand.”³⁰ A trusting atmosphere further encourages members to make any necessary sacrifices or overlook potentially threatening differences within the coalition in the name of group unity.³¹

Because activists create coalitions in response to a perceived problem with the status quo, alliances, like activism more broadly, are historically and culturally situated.³² To understand the coalition-building project of the Evangelical Women’s Caucus then, this chapter begins by providing the broader American context that inspired the formation of the EWC. As the parent coalitions for the EWC, the evangelical and feminist movements created the environment from which the evangelical feminist movement emerged. Biblical feminists identified a missing link in the

²⁴ Ibid.; Bystydzienski and Schacht, “Introduction,” 7.

²⁵ Michelle I. Gawerc, “Coalition-Building and the Forging of Solidarity Across Difference and Inequality,” *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 3 (2021), 2.

²⁶ Whittier, “Rethinking Coalitions,” 176.

²⁷ See Gawerc “Coalition-Building;” Elizabeth R. Cole and Zakiya T. Luna, “Making Coalitions Work: Solidarity Across Difference Within Us Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010), 71–98; For activist accounts of building coalitions across difference, see Bystydzienski and Schacht, *Forging Radical Alliances Across Difference: Coalition Politics for the New Millennium* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

²⁸ Gawerc, “Coalition-Building,” 3, 9. See also Cole and Luna, “Making Coalitions Work,” 76.

²⁹ Bystydzienski and Schacht, “Introduction,” 10.

³⁰ Q’t’d in Gawerc, “Coalition-Building,” 3; See also Bystydzienski and Schacht, “Introduction,” 10; Gilmore, “Thinking about Feminist Coalitions,” 2-3.

³¹ Gawerc, “Coalition-Building,” 8.

³² Pullum, “Foul Weather,” 228.

relationship between these movements and constructed their own innovative coalition at this intersection to fill this gap.

Evangelical Coalitions

The American evangelical movement can be understood as a cluster of coalitions. Due to its immense reach and internal variety, historians frequently note the difficulties involved in defining evangelicalism.³³ Scholars generally concur, however, that despite its diversity, evangelicalism constitutes a singular, unified movement based on a shared history, and “a conscious fellowship, coalition, community, family, or feudal system of friends and rivals who have some stronger sense of belonging together.”³⁴ British historian David Bebbington identified a set of collective principles that promote unity and provide a comprehensive framework for evangelical coalition membership. Bebbington’s “quadrilateral” continues to be a widely accepted definition of evangelicalism among scholars and evangelicals alike:

conversionism (an emphasis on the ‘new birth’ as a life-changing experience of God),
biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), activism (a concern for sharing the faith), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work on the cross, usually pictured as the only way of salvation).³⁵

³³ For example, George Marsden notes in the introduction to an edited volume on American evangelicalism: “The greatest conceptual challenge in a discussion of this sort is to say what evangelicalism is” (“The Evangelical Denomination,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, edited by George Marsden (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1984), viii). See also Matthew Sutton’s introduction to *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), xi-xii. Here Sutton compares George Marsden’s definition of evangelicalism with that of Ernest Sandeen to show which Christian beliefs are excluded in each scholar’s definitions. See also Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8. Evangelical historian Timothy L. Smith warned against a scholarly tendency to oversimplify or overrepresent the unity of evangelicalism. Smith suggested instead that evangelicals be viewed as a “mosaic” or “kaleidoscope.” These metaphors were not intended to emphasize disorganization and disconnection, but to depict the immense diversity within an overarching framework of solidarity among evangelicals (“The Evangelical Kaleidoscope and the Call to Christian Unity,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 15 (1986), 125-140). Building on Smith’s metaphors, historian Randall Balmer argued that a “patchwork quilt” might better represent evangelicalism because a quilt is a “quintessentially American” form of folk art (“rather than fine art”), which better illustrates “the absence of an overall pattern” (Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 313-4).

³⁴ Marsden, “Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination,” xvi. Evangelical historian Mark Noll argues that, despite diversity within evangelicalism, “when used with care...the term is a useful designation for a strand of twentieth-century American Protestants” distinct from and positioned between mainline moderates and fundamentalists (*The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 155). Axel Schäfer’s edited volume *American Evangelicals and the 1960s, Studies in American Thought and Culture* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013) also supports this understanding. In the introduction, Schäfer explains that “the chapters in this volume, while recognizing the significant differences between, for example, neo-evangelicals and Southern Baptists, in the main agree with Mark Noll that the term ‘evangelical’ retains its usefulness...” (7).

³⁵ This helpful breakdown of Bebbington’s quadrilateral is from Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 13. See also David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Britain: A*

This description accommodates many Christians across the theological, social, and political spectrum. Such an inclusive definition is necessary because the evangelical umbrella encompasses a wide range of Christians, including Southern Baptists, Mennonites, Presbyterians, Methodists, Christians in the Holiness movement, Pentecostal Christians, and “strict separatist fundamentalists...who condemn Pentecostals,” among others.³⁶

Recently, scholars have shifted from doctrinal definitions to an understanding of evangelicalism’s coalitional nature. Historian Kristin Kobes Du Mez, for example, defines evangelicals “as a series of networks and alliances.”³⁷ By highlighting the importance of coalition-building among evangelicals, defining evangelicalism as “a historical and cultural movement,” historians are better able to identify and interrogate ongoing “underlying affinities” within contemporary mainstream evangelicalism, including racial separation, gender hierarchies, and conservative political affiliations, which continue to shape White evangelicalism in the United States.³⁸ Both definitions provide a helpful framework for understanding evangelical feminists in relationship with the broader evangelical movement. Evangelical feminists articulated a theology that often aligned with mainstream evangelical theology and corresponded with Bebbington’s quadrilateral. However, in other important ways, including challenging a “natural” gender hierarchy, the EWC challenged mainstream doctrines.³⁹ Identifying evangelicalism as a collection of coalitions helps illustrate why evangelical feminists were able to launch a new coalition within the framework of evangelicalism in the 1970s. This framework also provides context for investigating the ongoing, shifting relationship between biblical feminists and mainstream evangelicals, as traced throughout this dissertation.

American evangelicalism, from which the EWC emerged in the 1970s, has roots in the “neo-evangelical” movement that began after World War II. “Neo” or “new” evangelicals created the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942 to launch their movement. By identifying as new evangelicals, the founders of the NAE linked their coalition and their collective identity to a very specific American Christian past: the First and Second Great Awakenings. The Great Awakenings were revivals that swept through the colonies and early nation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries promoting immediate conversion and a personal and emotional relationship with God.⁴⁰ Then a novel, rebellious form of Protestantism, revivalistic Christianity rewarded charismatic

History From the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-17. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) uses Bebbington’s definition as “a helpful summary...identifying four primary characteristics of evangelicalism” (National Association of Evangelicals, “What is an Evangelical?” <https://www.nae.org/what-is-an-evangelical/>). For more on the debate regarding definitions of evangelicalism, see Mark Noll, David Bebbington, and George Rawlyk, eds., “Introduction,” in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³⁶ Marsden, “Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination,” viii; Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 18.

³⁷ Kristin Kobes Du Mez, “Exclusion, Coercion, and MAGA Politics: The Story of White Evangelicals in America,” 18 Oct, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/jesus-and-john-wayne-white-evangelical-christians-1.7355223>. See also Heather D. Curtis *Holy Humanitarians: American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 9-10; and Hillary Kaell, “The Long History of Child Sponsorship, c. 1700–1950,” *Historical Research* 95, no. 267 (2022): 45–61, 47 n.16.

³⁸ Du Mez, “Exclusion, Coercion.”

³⁹ The EWC’s early statements of faith are outlined in the “Divinely Created Order” section.

⁴⁰ Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 2.

preachers who presented a simplified and accessible theology that appealed to the masses. Itinerant evangelists brought the Great Awakenings to the very edges of the frontier, both physically and metaphorically, and produced unprecedented conversions among colonists and early Americans.⁴¹ In the 1940s, when leaders of the NAE identified their coalition with the moniker “evangelical,” they were consciously reviving a then-anachronistic label to connect their new movement with this colonial Christian history. NAE leaders framed their coalition as an outgrowth of these historic and monumental revivals, an innovative shift in twentieth century Protestantism back to America’s Christian roots.⁴² The neo-evangelicals’ mission was to unite conservative Protestants and revitalize Christianity in the United States. They quickly dropped their prefix and became simply evangelicals.

The neo-evangelical movement grew out of early twentieth-century fundamentalism; many early leaders came from within fundamentalist circles.⁴³ Thus, as neo-evangelicalism developed, the movement retained some fundamentalist ideals, including the central and supreme authority of Scripture.⁴⁴ However, neo-evangelical leaders rejected the fundamentalist movement’s exclusivity and separatism. Neo-evangelicals framed fundamentalist exclusion as “lacking in ‘brotherliness’” (an important Christian ideal), and as unnecessarily restrictive for the potential influence of Christianity on the wider American public.⁴⁵ Leaders of the new evangelical movement sought to establish a path between the perceived isolationism of fundamentalism and the increasingly liberal Christianity of mainstream Protestantism. They created the NAE to be a “middle way” between existing Christian organizations, namely the liberal theology represented by the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) and the “strict separatism and doctrinal purity” of

⁴¹ Ibid. I speak of a “metaphorical” frontier to point to the frontier of civilization or citizenship because the Great Awakenings also converted women, enslaved populations, and Native Americans in unprecedented numbers. Such members of the population were not considered equal citizens in the colonies or early nation. See also Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). For Native American responses and engagement with the Great Awakenings, see Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴² Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 42.

⁴³ Early fundamentalist leaders in the neo-evangelical movement first imagined a coalition called the “Council of Fundamentalist Protestants” but, by 1942, decided on the National Association of Evangelicals. Historian Matthew Sutton explains: “Replacing the label ‘fundamentalist’ with the more historic ‘evangelical’ demonstrated the seriousness of their efforts to...craft a new public image free from the negative associations that had dogged” fundamentalists since the 1920s (*American Apocalypse*, 284-6).

⁴⁴ In an examination of evangelical theology, sociologist James Davison Hunter argued that “the most important element of Evangelical theology is its particular conception of the Bible as the literary vehicle for God’s revelation, both his own nature and of his intentions in human history. As the inspired testimony of a perfect and supreme deity, the Bible is itself perfect, inerrant (which is the say without error of any kind), and infallible with regard to all spiritual, ethical, and religious matters” (*American Evangelicalism*, 61). Hunter does not make a distinction between inerrancy and infallibility because he argues that such a distinction “is made by theological elites but not by the laity as a whole” (149, n.1). Hunter, drawing on religious historian Martin Marty, notes that integral components of evangelicalism (from its emergence as neo-evangelicalism in the 1940s) “remain as they were in the beginning of the century” including “the centrality of the Bible as the infallible and inerrant Word of God” (47). Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 173; See also George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 70; Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 42-3. For a discussion of how inerrancy was defined and emphasized among fundamentalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 37-41.

⁴⁵ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 173.

fundamentalist Christianity.⁴⁶ The emergent movement quickly developed into a “coalition of submovements,” which included a wide range of Protestants within its defined boundaries.⁴⁷

Baptists and Presbyterians dominated the early membership of the NAE. However, early on, NAE leaders sought to create an interactive and inclusive coalition that represented all conservative-minded Protestants. To unite Protestants across denominations, the NAE affirmed a wide-reaching statement of faith that prioritized “faith in the Bible and in Jesus Christ,” which was “never intended to speak to every doctrine or teaching but to establish the center that all evangelicals share.”⁴⁸ The NAE’s inclusive theological statements and powerful base of well-educated, reputable, and charismatic leaders appealed to many conservative White denominations. The NAE successfully established neo-evangelicalism as “a culturally savvy, professional movement.”⁴⁹ As early as 1947, the NAE included members across thirty different denominations.⁵⁰ Movement leaders disseminated their message through a well-financed periodical, *Christianity Today*, which they launched in 1956.⁵¹ Intended to “insert evangelicals into the national conversation,” this periodical strengthened the movement by providing a cohesive and unified voice for the group, which helped create and maintain clear boundaries between this emerging movement and its fundamentalist forebears.⁵² While neo-evangelicals drew upon the American revivals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for their collective ideology, they also represented “[a] new generation— along with important players from the previous generation [that] sanded down fundamentalism’s rough edges and...transformed fundamentalism from a dispersed, decentralized movement into one carefully directed by a powerful and culturally influential white male elite.”⁵³ The evangelicalism that emerged in America following the Second World War was both a “resurgence of conservative Protestantism” and a new movement with new actors, new goals, and new means to achieve such goals.⁵⁴

Although the NAE sought to reach beyond a fundamentalist audience, its fundamentalist roots shaped the coalition’s trajectory and ensured that the NAE would remain predominantly White (and male). From its inception, the fundamentalist movement explicitly excluded Black

⁴⁶ “Our History,” *National Association of Evangelicals*, <https://www.nae.org/history/>; Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 20.

⁴⁷ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 2. This movement was predominantly White, as is detailed in this section.

⁴⁸ Leith Anderson, “The Gold Standard: NAE Statement of Faith,” *National Association of Evangelicals* (2008), <https://www.nae.org/the-gold-standard/>.

⁴⁹ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 295.

⁵⁰ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 69-70. The NAE now claims that up to 40 denominations participate in the organization (NAE “About Us,” <https://www.nae.org/about-us/>). While the NAE expanded across denominations, membership was from its inception, and remained throughout this period, predominantly White and male. Sutton also points out that early NAE leaders included “the most powerful and influential white fundamentalist men in the nation” (*American Apocalypse*, 285).

⁵¹ David Swartz notes that *Christianity Today* “emerged immediately as the preeminent neo-evangelical journal and one of the most read religious journals in the nation” in *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 22. Part of the success of the periodical was due to the financial support of oil tycoon J. Howard Pew, president of Sun Oil Company (now Sunoco). See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 241.

⁵² Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 22; Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 25.

⁵³ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 295.

⁵⁴ Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 42.

Protestant leaders from participation. The distribution of *The Fundamentals*, the pamphlets that instigated the fundamentalist movement and sparked resistance against modernism in the early twentieth century, were promoted as having been mailed to “every minister in the United States.”⁵⁵ Contemporary historians note, however, that this mailing list did not include Black ministers, who, therefore, did not personally receive these documents alongside their White peers.⁵⁶ This is not to suggest that Black Protestants were unaware of the ideas that *The Fundamentals* discussed, but simply that the White leaders of this movement did not include them in the debate. Thus, despite fundamentalists’ claims of “doctrinal purity” as the foundation for Christian fellowship (which they shared with many Black Protestants in the United States), “the color line always trumped theology.”⁵⁷ The NAE, although responding to the isolation and strict membership policies of the fundamentalist movement, drew on membership from within this community and was shaped by its exclusionary history. Even as the NAE grew, it continued to lack Black Protestant representation, fostering an atmosphere that discouraged Black participation: “De facto racial segregation prevailed...The all-white organizers made little effort to recruit African Americans as they established a new evangelical front. The inclusion of vocal segregationists among the leadership and the courting of explicitly segregated denominations guaranteed that African Americans were not welcome.”⁵⁸

While White neo-evangelicalism emerged out of (and responded to) the fundamentalist movement, the same is not true for Black evangelicalism. As previously mentioned, leaders in the fundamentalist movement excluded Black evangelicals. Black evangelicals, like White evangelicals, trace their Christian roots to the Great Awakenings.⁵⁹ However, Black evangelicals built their first official coalition within the neo-evangelical movement in 1963: the National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA) (originally the National Negro Evangelical Association).⁶⁰ Black evangelicals launched the NBEA in Los Angeles, CA, as an umbrella organization for Black evangelicals who were “dissatisfied with the predominantly white National Association of Evangelicals.”⁶¹ Beyond an alignment with typical evangelical doctrines, including the authority of Scripture and the importance of personal conversion, the NBEA had two major objectives: to minister to liberal Black

⁵⁵ James Davison Hunter asserts that in the first decades of the twentieth century, the emerging fundamentalist movement saw themselves as defenders of true Christianity against an increasing threat of modernism. Fundamentalists saw modernism as “an adulterated [faith], one informed by new scientific discoveries and hypotheses (evolution in particular), new methodologies (higher criticism), and the new reductionist interpretations of religious reality (the psychology and sociology of religion)” (*American Evangelicalism*, 35).

⁵⁶ Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 42.

⁵⁷ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 109.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 286-7.

⁵⁹ See Albert Raboteau’s 1978 book *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* for a detailed outline of the history of Black Christianity in the United States. Raboteau examines the ways that revivalist Protestantism developed in relationship with Black Christianity and an African American worldview.

⁶⁰ In this chapter I am discussing Black Christians who identify as evangelicals. Many Black Protestants have not used this label to describe themselves: prominent Black evangelist William Bentley noted, “To blacks, at least the mainstream ones within the major black denominations, the word [evangelical] has little historical relevance. Instead, ‘Bible believing’ is the more widely used descriptive term” (qt’d in Milton G. Sernett “Black Religion and the Question of Evangelical Identity,” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, edited by Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, 135-147 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 137).

⁶¹ Sernett, “Black Religion,” 143-4.

Protestants with an evangelical belief system, and to create a space for Black evangelicals to find safe and supportive community with a focus on the diverse and unique needs of Black Christians in the United States.⁶² Like the NAE, the NBEA was (and is) an interdenominational organization designed to unite evangelicals across the United States. However, unlike the predominantly White NAE, the NBEA was run by Black leaders who centered discussions of race and represented the specific experiences of Black evangelicals as inseparable from their theology. William Bentley, a prominent leader in the movement, declared that a Black evangelical's "uniqueness is his black experience...If we cease to interpret from a black perspective, we might as well cease to exist organizationally."⁶³ A major focus of the NBEA was intertwining Christianity and race to fight racial oppression in the church and the wider American society.

The NBEA's integration of social justice with evangelicalism was a new concept for many White evangelicals in this period. In 1975, an article in *Christianity Today* noted that a key difference between White and Black evangelicals was that "the NBEA, like the black church generally, had never accepted a dichotomy between belief and social action."⁶⁴ For Black evangelicals, social activism was integral to Christianity, in part, because this movement grew out of historical Black Christianity in the United States. Many Black Christians historically had experienced Christianity as a means of resistance in the face of racism and as a liberatory force during the institution of slavery.⁶⁵ Aligned with this past, the NBEA continued to address problems of racism within American Christianity and the wider culture.⁶⁶ White evangelicals in the 1960s and 1970s, like their fundamentalist predecessors, did not actively protest racism or even engage in conversations about race. While adhering to the same essential doctrines and claiming to share a similar history, Black evangelicals developed their coalitions along a different path from White conservative evangelicals. As such, Black evangelicals set an important precedent for later groups, including the progressive coalition Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) and the EWC, both of which also connected Christianity with social justice and activism.

Predominantly White, progressive-minded evangelicals founded Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) in 1973 in response to a perceived lack of social activism in the wider White evangelical movement.⁶⁷ Leading progressive evangelicals challenged the dominant neo-evangelical movement for being overly inward-focused and prioritizing individual conversion over social problems. For progressive evangelicals, advocating for social justice was an essential component of America's evangelical heritage and thus integral to evangelical identity.⁶⁸ Conservative neo-

⁶² Ibid.; See also Soong-Chan Rah, "In Whose Image: The Emergence, Development, and Challenge of African-American Evangelicalism," *ThD diss.* (Divinity School of Duke University: North Carolina, 2016), 196.

⁶³ Q't'd in James S. Tinney, "Black Churches Today: Friendship is a Way of Life," *Christianity Today*, vol. 19, no. 15 (1975), 41.

⁶⁴ Tinney, "Black Churches," 41.

⁶⁵ Ibid.; See also Alfred Raboteau, *Slave Religion*; Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 3.

⁶⁶ Tinney, "Black Churches," 41.

⁶⁷ At this time, ESA was called Evangelicals for Social Concern. They became Evangelicals for Social Action in 1974. I use ESA throughout this chapter for consistency.

⁶⁸ Gasaway suggests that many nineteenth-century American evangelicals understood social activism to be part of God's plan for the United States: "Many Calvinistic evangelicals during this time believed themselves charged by God to exercise control over society, ensuring that it reflected Christian morality and mores" (*Progressive Evangelicals*, 7). This idea was linked to a common post-millennial theology during this era, which stipulated that Christ would return only after the millennium, a period of blessed peace and prosperity for the church, instigated

evangelicals, alternatively, asserted personal conversion as their primary goal, assuming conversion was a means of addressing social problems. For neo-evangelicals, as more individuals converted to Christianity and experienced internal transformations, social ills would naturally dissipate as citizens enacted their Christian values in their communities.⁶⁹ Progressive evangelicals, however, flagged this neo-evangelical individualism as disconnected from historical evangelicalism. ESA leaders noted that the evangelical mindset of the nineteenth century prioritized social reform as an expression of Christian faith: evangelicals actively participated in education programs, abolition, and prohibition, among other causes.⁷⁰ Jim Wallis, a prominent leader of the progressive movement, was known to frequently declare: “I am a nineteenth century evangelical born in the wrong century,” linking his belief in promoting social justice with the Christian goals of that era.⁷¹

The ESA delineated the importance of connecting faith and social justice in its manifesto, the *Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern*:

As evangelical Christians committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and the full authority of the Word of God, we affirm that God lays total claim upon the lives of his people. We cannot, therefore, separate our lives from the situation in which God has placed us in the United States and the world.

We confess that we have not acknowledged the complete claim of God on our lives.

We acknowledge that God requires love. But we have not demonstrated the love of God to those suffering social abuses.

We acknowledge that God requires justice. But we have proclaimed or demonstrated his justice to an unjust American society.⁷²

In the *Chicago Declaration*, progressive evangelical leaders cited examples of injustices and inequalities within American society and called on evangelicals to address these national concerns. The ESA, like the NBEA, identified racism in Christian churches and American society as a problem that evangelicals must address and resist. However, the ESA also identified many other social issues, including the “imbalance and injustice” involved in America’s global resource distribution, an anti-war and anti-violence agenda, and recognition of and opposition to women’s subordination in Christian churches and the wider society.⁷³ The ESA’s manifesto redefined the existing evangelical movement by drawing a boundary around an “insider” identity that required advocacy for social justice.

by Christians. Gasaway notes, “post-millennial expectations...produced optimism that religious revivals and public reforms would help to inaugurate the anticipated kingdom of God. Most evangelicals thus believed that a ‘Christian America’ required not only the redemption of individuals but also the reformation of society” (Ibid).

⁶⁹ Darryl G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 11, 19. An example of this mentality was Jerry Falwell’s 1965 sermon where he decried evangelical participation in 1960s social justice campaigns, stating: “Believing the Bible as I do, I would find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving Gospel of Jesus Christ and begin to do anything else,” including “participating in the civil rights reform” (qt’d in Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 31).

⁷⁰ Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 7.

⁷¹ Qt’d in Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 7.

⁷² *Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern*, Chicago, Illinois, 25 November 1973.

⁷³ Ibid.

Beyond a shared belief that faith and social justice were intertwined, the ESA brought progressive-minded evangelicals together in opposition to an external enemy: the perceived threat of a “new conservatism in evangelical ranks, reminiscent of an earlier, more militant fundamentalism.”⁷⁴ Broader evangelical reactions to the Vietnam War depicted this “new” conservative push, according to ESA leaders. Progressive evangelicals, including Jim Wallis, had protested American participation in the war at “Explo ’72,” a massive youth conference organized by Campus Crusade for Christ.⁷⁵ Their “small but noisy antiwar protest” was not well received at the event, and organizers asked Wallis’s group to cease their protests.⁷⁶ It was no accident that progressive evangelicals announced the inaugural ESA conference the following year. On the invitations to their conference, ESA founders proclaimed: “[a] conservative religious tide is sweeping the country. Will evangelicals meet the challenge...by proclaiming the biblical message concern for the whole man?”⁷⁷ Thus, progressive evangelicals created the ESA to fill gaps in the wider White evangelical community, which not only ignored connections between social activism and Christianity, but also appeared to be moving toward social and political conservatism.

At the first ESA conference, a small but committed cadre of approximately five evangelical feminists, including Nancy Hardesty and Sharon Gallagher, fought to include gender equality and evangelical women’s issues on ESA’s docket.⁷⁸ These early biblical feminists felt encouraged when the wider ESA membership passed a resolution composed by Hardesty: “We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship.”⁷⁹ As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the notion of mutual submission, which challenged the norm of male domination, was not widely accepted among the broader evangelical community. Therefore, acknowledging such powerful sentiments at this inaugural conference reassured many progressive evangelical feminists that the ESA shared their goals and commitment to fighting for gender equality.⁸⁰ At the ESA’s second annual conference in 1974, approximately thirty women formed the Evangelical Women’s Caucus as a task force to address women’s concerns. By 1975, however, for reasons discussed in the following sections, the EWC broke away from the ESA. Despite early enthusiasm for the ESA, EWC founders quickly determined that they needed to become an autonomous organization to prioritize a message of gender equality in the home, society, and the church. The EWC also emphasized egalitarian biblical interpretations regarding women and women’s roles and advocated for female leadership in evangelical churches.⁸¹ The founders of the Evangelical Women’s Caucus, many of whom were already active in the mainstream American feminist

⁷⁴ Pamela Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 17.

⁷⁵ This youth conference was originally called the “International Student Congress on Evangelism” but was dubbed “Explo ’72” for short.

⁷⁶ Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 96.

⁷⁷ Ron Sider qt’d in Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 17.

⁷⁸ For more details on the creation of the EWC, see “Introducing the EWC and its Foremothers” in the introduction.

⁷⁹ *Chicago Declaration*. Other resolutions, including one on abortion rights, were initially presented by the task force, but none were passed by the ESA (Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 13).

⁸⁰ See “Introducing the EWC and its Foremothers” for a discussion of the controversial nature of this clause.

⁸¹ In 1980, the EWC released a detailed list to clarify the coalition’s goals. In this article, the National Council specified that part of the EWC’s purpose was to “work effectively toward full participation of women in all aspects of worship and ministry,” meaning the EWC supported female pastors as well (AWTS: EEW Archives, “Statement of Purpose (from By-Laws adopted June 17, 1978),” (June 28, 1980), Series 1A, Box 1, Folder 3.

movement, identified the space and the need for a new coalition to promote their objectives. Within this early 1970s context of expanding evangelical identities, challenges to the status quo, and emergent alliances, the atmosphere was ripe for coalescing.

Feminist Coalitions

While coalitions can promote either socially progressive or conservative goals, feminist coalitions have a social justice orientation. Feminist organizations advocate for the eradication of “all forms of oppression,” including, but not limited to, discrimination based on class, race, sex, dis/ability, and sexual orientation.⁸² In contemporary scholarship and activism, even alliances between feminist and nonfeminist participants can be considered feminist coalitions if the goal is to fight systems of oppression.⁸³ In the 1970s, however, when the EWC entered the feminist landscape, second-wave feminist coalitions predominantly revolved around what we now call “identity politics.”⁸⁴ Feminist coalitions emerged among similar coalitions in the 1960s, which connected oppression to an acquired social identity (usually a singular marker, such as race, class, or gender).⁸⁵ An identity-based structure demanded:

recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is *qua* women, *qua* [racialization], *qua* lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect “in spite of” one’s differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself *as* different.⁸⁶

Within this context, early second-wave feminist coalitions, initially dominated by White middle- to upper-class women, responded to and sought to amend a “common oppression and discrimination *as women*.”⁸⁷ As such, feminist coalitions aligned with the preexisting activist climate. For example, the civil rights movement centered on the fight against racial oppression in its pursuit of legal, social, and political equality. Like other identity-based coalitions, second-wave feminists

⁸² Gilmore, “Thinking about Feminist Coalitions,” 7.

⁸³ Holly Jeanine Bux, “Towards a New Theory of Feminist Coalition: Accounting for the Heterogeneity of Gender, Race, Class, and Sexuality through an Exploration of Power and Responsibility,” *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, vol. 10, no. 10 (2016), 6.

⁸⁴ Problems affiliated with this structure of coalescing are discussed in the fourth chapter on race and the EWC.

⁸⁵ Cole and Luna, “Making Coalitions Work,” 75. Although historians often apply the framework of “identity politics” to the civil rights movement, American Indian Movement (AIM), gay and lesbian liberation, and second-wave feminist movement, the term was not used until the 1970s (Bystydzienski and Schacht, “Introduction,” 3).

⁸⁶ Sonia Kruks qt’d in Cressida J. Heyes, “Can There Be a Queer Politics of Recognition?” in *Recognition, Responsibility, and Rights: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*, eds. Robin N. Fiore and Hilde Lindemann Nelson (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 55.

⁸⁷ Gilmore, “Thinking about Feminist Coalitions,” 2. Benita Roth notes that, an often-overlooked reason that White middle-class women predominated the early second-wave movement was that White people predominated the culture: “It is important to note that most feminists in the 1960s and 1970s were white because most people in the United States were white” (*Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7). The problems with centralizing race and ignoring other social oppressions (such as gender) in the civil rights movement are discussed in the fourth chapter.

“focused on one dimension of power – sex/gender – as primary and structuring” in the development of their activism and theory.⁸⁸ Feminists therefore founded early second-wave coalitions on the assumption “that all women shared an experience of gender oppression,” a consequence of prioritizing sex discrimination above any other form of oppression.⁸⁹

Recently, feminist theorists have identified second-wave feminist attempts to acknowledge and bridge racial and class differences to build more inclusive and effective coalitions. This contemporary scholarship seeks to correct a prevailing historical narrative that suggests second-wave feminism was a movement created by and for White women.⁹⁰ These feminist historians argue that soon after feminists created early alliances in the growing feminist movement, “the coalition politics of feminists moved beyond simple identity politics based on being women” to recognize and address the importance of differences among women and the interconnected nature of oppressions dictated by differences.⁹¹ Feminists began to understand and address each woman’s experience as unique based on her relationship to different oppressive structures. For example, Black women encountered racism and sexism in American society, whereas poor White women faced sexism and classism, but not racism. Feminists began to develop activist strategies that supported disparate social positions. There is also evidence of attempts to bridge racial and class divides within the EWC archives, as discussed in chapter four of this dissertation.⁹² However, many predominantly White feminist coalitions, including the EWC, originally prioritized fighting sex-based discrimination as a primary goal. This early objective excluded participants with alternative priorities (such as fighting racism or classism) and created a framework that was (initially) unable to identify, and thus combat, intersecting oppressions.

Mainstream liberal feminists formed coalitions in the 1960s and 1970s, in which many EWC founders participated, to remedy sex-based inequality in the public sphere using institutional and political avenues.⁹³ Leading liberal feminists, including Betty Friedan, created the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, which quickly became the “face of liberal feminism,”

⁸⁸ This was also the foundation of emerging Women’s Studies classes, for example. Barbara A. Crow and Lise Gotell, “Who is the ‘Woman’ of Canadian Women’s Studies? Theoretical Interventions” in *Open Boundaries: A Canadian Women’s Studies Reader* (Toronto: Pearson, Prentice Hall, 2009), 11.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ See Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions*.

⁹¹ Gilmore, “Thinking about Feminist Coalitions,” 7. This understanding of intersection and multiple oppressions was prompted by women of colour both within and external to the feminist movement who showed the predominantly White and middle-class liberal feminist movement the problems of prioritizing one social identity (sex) over another (race). This exclusion of multiply oppressed women is a loss for the wider movement, as Cole and Luna argue, because women of colour “may be particularly attuned to the ways that organizations, social movements, and public policies based on social identities often frame their analysis to address primarily the concerns of individuals who, but for one marginalized status, are otherwise privileged” (“Making Connections Work,” 74-5).

⁹² While the EWC archives show multiple attempts to bring their message to women of colour and encourage new demographics of Christians to join their ranks, the coalition remained predominantly White and middle-class throughout its existence, as its purpose remained centered on fighting sex-based discrimination. I provide more detail on the racial makeup of the EWC in the fourth chapter.

⁹³ This focus contrasted with the emerging radical feminist movement which criticized liberal feminists for trying to include women in the public sphere, making them “honorary men,” rather than creating a coalition to deconstruct the entire oppressive system. For more on radical feminists see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) and Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women’s Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

advocating for equal rights, equality in the workforce, and equal opportunity for education for women.⁹⁴ NOW leaders prioritized the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) as an early goal of the coalition.⁹⁵ First introduced as an amendment during the 1920s by suffragist Alice Paul, the ERA stipulated that “equality of rights under the law shall not be abridged in the United States or by any State on account of sex.”⁹⁶ Second-wave feminists reintroduced the ERA into the American political climate in the early 1970s, building on the success of the 1964 Title VII Amendment to the Civil Rights Act, which barred employers from discriminating against employees based on race, sex, national origin, or religion. This amendment drew on the authority granted by the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, which guaranteed all citizens equal protection under the law.⁹⁷ In the first few years, the ERA was widely perceived as certain to pass into law. However, in 1972 “a number of antifeminist groups formed to stall its progress,” changing the trajectory of the amendment.⁹⁸ For the next decade up to 1982, “the struggle to ratify the ERA consumed the energy of the women’s movement” as liberal feminists fought for equality under the law, against a growing and powerful opposition, dominated by conservative Christian women.⁹⁹

The emerging “antifeminist” movement framed the women’s liberation movement as “a total assault on the role of the American woman as wife and mother, and on the family as the basic unit of society.”¹⁰⁰ The driving force behind the organization and success of this counter-movement was Phyllis Schlafly, a devout Catholic from Missouri and mother of six who “proudly personified the ideal traditional woman.”¹⁰¹ Schlafly was already a prominent American political figure by the 1970s. Schlafly had run for U.S. Congress twice (in the 1950s and 1970s), she was a radio personality in the 1960s, and she had self-published a book that sold millions, helping to propel conservative Barry Goldwater to the Republican Party's presidential candidacy in 1964.¹⁰² In 1972, Schlafly created a conservative advocacy group called Eagle Forum and began publishing the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* as a platform to articulate her opposition to the ERA. In an article titled “What’s Wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?”, which reached at least five thousand readers, Schlafly argued that God made women the backbone of the family to stay home and raise children. Conversely, God created men to provide for and protect their wives and families.¹⁰³ According to Schlafly, the ERA disrupted this divinely ordained familial order, and she argued that passing the bill would plunge the entire nation into chaos.

⁹⁴ Kelsy Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now: Diversity and Discord in the National Organization for Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 10; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 3-4.

⁹⁵ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 3-4. See also Kelsy Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now: Diversity and Discord in the National Organization for Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

⁹⁶ quoted in Mary Ziegler, “Women's Rights on the Right: The History and Stakes of Modern Pro-Life Feminism,” *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2013), 246.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ziegler, “Women's Rights,” 246-7.

⁹⁹ Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 385. As noted in the introduction, rank-and-file members of this movement were predominantly conservative, southern, evangelical women. This marked a unique realignment in American politics around gender, that crossed older religious and geographic divisions (Schlafly was a northern Catholic).

¹⁰⁰ Phyllis Schlafly qtd in Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 71.

¹⁰¹ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 76.

¹⁰² Ibid., 77-8.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 81.

By the mid-1970s, Schlafly had successfully gained control over the religious “pro-family” position against the ERA, discursively separating feminist ideals from “family values.” Schlafly’s STOP ERA campaign suggested that “God-fearing” Americans were fighting a battle to protect the traditional family against a feminist threat, embodied by the ERA.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Schlafly represented the feminist movement and the ERA as an attack on the unique privileges of wives and mothers.¹⁰⁵ In this context, southern conservative evangelical women joined forces with Phyllis Schlafly and quickly “became the backbone of the STOP ERA movement.”¹⁰⁶ Historian Seth Dowland demonstrates that evangelical support for Schlafly signaled significant religious and political realignments in the American South. For conservative southern evangelical women, this new comradery represented “an alliance with a northern Catholic that their mothers would have found abhorrent.”¹⁰⁷ Schlafly united conservative women across pre-existing religious and geographical divides by constructing a common enemy and imminent threat: the “women’s libber.”¹⁰⁸

Broader historic trends in the American South further explain southern conservative evangelicals’ participation in Schlafly’s anti-ERA campaign. Scholars have explored the “texture and complexity to southern conservatism in this era” to understand the South’s passionate opposition to the ERA in the 1970s.¹⁰⁹ Historian Robert O. Self examined racist and antifeminist discourses in the southern United States during this period, noting that “the South’s traditional hostility to federal power and the spirit of liberalism provided a ready-made framework for its decisive rejection of the women’s movement...So too did the white South’s long tradition of protecting white womanhood from threats both sexual and racial.”¹¹⁰ Self determined that discourses about gender and family values were deeply intertwined within this framework of southern conservatism. Many White southerners found stability in the “Christian values” that upheld

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁵ STOP ERA stands for Stop Taking Our Privileges; Self, *All in the Family*, 316-7. See also Dowland, *Family Values*, 150-1; Marjorie J. Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women’s Rights and Family Values that Polarized American Politics* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 304-5. For more information on Schlafly’s pro-family strategy to defeat the ERA, see Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁶ Dowland, *Family Values*, 150. Lisa McGirr discusses conservative evangelical women’s grassroots political organizing during this period in Southern California, which included their engagement with Schlafly’s writings, in *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). The anti-abortion movement, which evangelicals joined in the 1980s, also has roots in this pro-family movement, discussed in chapter two. The anti-abortion movement is another example when evangelicals aligned themselves politically with Catholics, crossing previously staunch boundaries.

¹⁰⁷ Dowland, *Family Values*, 150.

¹⁰⁸ Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 88. It should be noted here that Schlafly is widely credited with the ERA’s ultimate failure to pass.

¹⁰⁹ Self, *All in the Family*, 317. In 1974, Tennessee rescinded its earlier vote to ratify the ERA, and into the 1980s, “of the former Confederate states, only Texas ratified the amendment” (Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 317). See also Katarina Keane, “Second Wave Feminism in the American South, 1965-1980,” PhD diss. (University of Maryland, College Park, 2009).

¹¹⁰ Ibid. For more information on the role of gender and the idea of protecting White women as part of the “Southern Strategy” during this period, see Angie Maxwell and Todd G. Shields’ *The Long Southern Strategy: How Chasing White Voters in the South Changed American Politics*.

“God’s ordained family structure and appropriate sexual behavior.”¹¹¹ Thus, Schlafly’s emphasis on protecting the “traditional” family structure, women’s roles in the home, and opposing abortion rights (discussed in the second chapter of this thesis) as the key issues in the ERA battle, appealed to many conservative southern evangelical women.¹¹²

From its inception, the Evangelical Women’s Caucus promoted only one resolution: an endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment. The EWC’s consistent advocacy for the ERA sustained an important link between the EWC’s Christian and feminist ideologies.¹¹³ At the EWC’s first national conference in 1975, members reinforced this resolution as representative of the ongoing goals of their coalition: “We, as participants...re-affirm our support for the ERA. It is consistent with our Christian convictions and necessary as constitutional undergirding for the continued removal of legal discrimination based on sex.”¹¹⁴ The ERA “gripped most liberal feminists as no other issue had since the fight for suffrage,” for two main reasons: firstly, because feminists were enraged by the realization that “the only right women had under the Constitution was the right to vote,” and secondly because of the powerful “antifeminist” opposition fighting the bill’s passage.¹¹⁵ By supporting the ERA, EWC members established a clear boundary around their coalition, effectively communicating their goals, values, and membership to other evangelicals, feminists, and the broader American public. By the early 1970s the fight for the ERA’s ratification had primarily become a rhetorical battle between secular liberal feminists (including major players represented by NOW and *Ms.* magazine) against conservative Christian women. However, the EWC’s firm support for the ERA complicated the existing dialectical framing between conservative Christian women and feminists. Evangelical feminists established an unprecedented identity and created a new space for dialogue among Christians and feminists.

The Formation of the EWC: Filling in the Gaps

¹¹¹ Self, *All in the Family*, 317.

¹¹² Dowland, *Family Values*, 151. Schlafly’s activism was integral in linking the ERA with abortion advocacy, despite many ERA advocates denying this connection (Spruill, *Divided We Stand*, 104). Schlafly shaped the discussion around abortion rights that polarized feminists and Christians as two contradictory groups, as she argued that “it was politically impossible to oppose abortion while supporting the women’s movement” (Ziegler “Women’s,” 246). Schlafly wrote in her newsletter: “Women’s libbers are promoting free sex instead of the ‘slavery’ of marriage. They are promoting Federal “day-care centres” for babies instead of homes. *They are promoting abortions instead of families.* Qt’d in R.B. Siegel, “Abortion and the ‘Woman Question:’ Forty Years of Debate,” (*Indiana Law Journal* 89.4 (2014), 1372. Emphasis added.

¹¹³ AWTs: EEWCA Archives, “Executive Council Meeting 1983,” Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 1. Not all liberal feminists supported the ERA during this time. For example, Church Women United (CWU), the first Christian feminist organization in the United States (founded in the 1940s under the NCC becoming independent in 1971) opposed the ERA. CWU leaders believed its “passage would invalidate existing legal protections for women and result in discrimination against women” (Caryn E. Neumann, “Enabled by the Holy Spirit: Church Women United and the Development of Ecumenical Christian Feminism” in *Feminist Coalitions*, edited by Stephanie Gilmore (University of Illinois Press, 2008), 123). This fact further solidified the boundary around the EWC, marking the EWC as distinct from existing Christian women’s groups.

¹¹⁴ AWTs: EEWCA Archives, “Executive Council Meeting 1983,” Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 1.

¹¹⁵ Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 385.

The EWC officially separated from Evangelicals for Social Action following the success of its first conference, “Women in Transition: A Biblical Approach to Feminism,” in 1975.¹¹⁶ The EWC left Evangelicals for Social Action due to the ESA’s exclusion of female participants, the absence of available leadership roles for women, and the organization’s inability (or refusal) to address specific feminist concerns. As aforementioned, generous estimates of ESA’s first Chicago conference in 1973 suggest that only a handful of women were invited, compared to just over fifty men (the vast majority of whom were White).¹¹⁷ Beyond a lack of representation, the ESA’s first conference revealed deep discrepancies between feminist Christians and the wider progressive evangelical movement. Specifically, many male progressive evangelicals had oppositional views to biblical feminists regarding women’s roles, women’s rights, gender equality, and the prioritization of such concerns within the movement.¹¹⁸ One example will suffice to demonstrate this disparity. The ESA’s conference pamphlet listed Dr. Ruth Bentley, a professor at Trinity College and the University of Illinois Medical Center, as “Dr. Ruth Bentley” in the list of participants, but as “Mrs. William Bentley” when she was chairing a plenary session.¹¹⁹ The ESA conference organizers’ decision to name Dr. Bentley by her affiliation to her husband struck a nerve for many feminists in attendance. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, naming was a foundational issue within the second-wave feminist movement, linked to discussions about women’s labour, individual social autonomy, and legal and political privileges. Early in the movement, feminists “began to question why, on a very fundamental level, [women] were defined through their relations to men.”¹²⁰ This affiliation was especially conspicuous in how women were addressed: “Mrs.” for a married woman or “Miss” for an unmarried woman. Feminists challenged this titling system because it described women based on “whether or not they had a permanent relationship with a man.” Instead, feminists proposed the title “Ms.” as an alternative label to address women without asserting their marital status (the equivalent of using “Mr.” to address a man).¹²¹

The title “Ms.” was invented “to even the playing field by giving women the option of being known for their own identity, not that of their husbands.”¹²² This neologism reflected the wider goals of gender equality in the women’s movement by reifying women’s autonomy and individuality. The immensely popular liberal feminist magazine *Ms.*, first published in 1972, underscores the significance of this title and, by extension, the importance of naming more broadly for the second-wave movement.¹²³ With the help of *Ms.* magazine, which sold out of its inaugural three hundred thousand “test copies” nationwide in just eight days, such feminist discourses became part of a wider cultural conversation.¹²⁴ As such, EWC members feared that problems within the ESA reflected not only a lack of feminist understanding in the progressive movement, but also underlying and unaddressed sexism among participants. As mentioned previously,

¹¹⁶ As noted in the introduction, over 360 people attended this event, representing many different Christian denominations from thirty-nine states and Canada.

¹¹⁷ See the introduction, footnote 61. Generous estimates suggest that between five and seven women attended.

¹¹⁸ Horner, “Becoming,” 165.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Wendy Atkins-Sayre, “Naming Women: the Emergence of ‘Ms.’ as a Liberatory Title,” *Women and Language* 28, no. 1 (2005), 8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ “About Ms.” *Ms. Magazine*, <https://msmagazine.com/about/>.

coalitions require mechanisms to sustain unity by recognizing and bridging diversity, and encouraging participants to set aside potentially divisive concerns for the greater goals of the alliance.¹²⁵ When members feel ignored, undervalued, or as though the wider coalition does not reflect their goals, they leave.¹²⁶ Thus, although the ESA affirmed Nancy Hardesty's resolution against gender oppression in the *Chicago Declaration*, evangelical feminists decided that they needed an independent, female-led and women-centered coalition to advocate for their unique feminist goals, including biblical gender equality.

Biblical feminists also addressed an important gap in the broader culture: the perceived lack of space for evangelical beliefs within the feminist movement.¹²⁷ In 1976, the EWC's newly established Temporary Steering Committee (TSC) identified "[t]he recent emergence in our society's consciousness of the hitherto unrecognized and unacknowledged discrimination and undervaluing of women" as an unfortunately "secular phenomenon."¹²⁸ Recognizing sexism as a problem within evangelical institutions as well, the EWC sought to amend this dangerous oversight. Other Christian feminist organizations existed in America by this time, however none were evangelical. Church Women United (CWU), for example, developed under the umbrella of the National Council of Churches (NCC) in 1941, becoming an independent organization in 1971.¹²⁹ As an ecumenical and liberal coalition, the CWU did not speak to the specific issues facing the evangelical community from which the EWC emerged. Coalitions require a shared community or overlapping networks to effectively communicate between members, pool resources, and define common ground for shared goals. Thus, to build a successful coalition of and for evangelical feminists, the EWC needed to appeal to their own community. EWC founders recognized important contributions made by the secular women's movement toward gender equality, adding a new space for "[e]vangelical men and women to seek the whole counsel of God concerning the roles of Christian women" through their own, new, biblical feminism.¹³⁰

EWC founders were also building a coalition in response to emergent conservative Christian women's groups. Many such coalitions (including Schlafly's organization, Eagle Forum, and the wider movement opposing the ERA) endorsed the existence of a natural gender hierarchy where women were subordinate to men. For example, Women's Aglow Fellowship, a charismatic transdenominational Christian women's group founded in 1967, was often labeled "antifeminist" for its promotion of female submission.¹³¹ Aglow was created, in part, in response to the emerging

¹²⁵ Gawerc, "Coalition-Building;" Elizabeth R. Cole and Zakiya T. Luna, "Making Coalitions Work: Solidarity Across Difference Within Us Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010), 71–98.

¹²⁶ L. J. Wood, qt'd in Gawerc, "Coalition-Building," 7.

¹²⁷ Ann Braude provides a historiography of the study of Christianity in feminist history in "A Religious Feminist-Who Can Find Her? Historiographical Challenges from the National Organization for Women," *Journal of Religion* 84 (2004), 555–72. Braude notes that, often, the relationship between Christianity and feminism is explained in reference to Mary Daly's experience, "in which Christianity is rejected as irredeemably patriarchal" (556). Caryn E. Neumann asserts this claim as well noting that "histories of the women's movement rarely consider mainstream religion" ("Enabled by the Holy Spirit," 114).

¹²⁸ AWTs: EEWc Archives, "Local Chapter Development 1976-1977," Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 6.

¹²⁹ Caryn Neumann, "Enabled by the Holy Spirit," 115, 122.

¹³⁰ EEWc Archives, "Local Chapter Development."

¹³¹ R. Marie Griffith argues that Aglow women's understandings of female submission are not antifeminist. Griffith suggests that Aglow women were empowered through their submission to God's will. Although this submission "requires from women obedience to those believed to be his earthly representatives: husbands, ministers, and other male authorities," it does not mean that women were created inferior to men, nor that men can rule as

women's movement and feminists' advocacy for women's equal roles in the family and society. Many early Aglow members were Christian housewives who felt that the existing evangelical gender hierarchy reflected a properly ordered universe.¹³² As a coalition, Aglow advocated female submission and male authority based on an interpretation of Scripture that presented God as "male, omniscient, and omnipotent....creator and master of the universe," a figure who established "a divinely ordered hierarchy that extends down through men, then women, and finally children."¹³³ Outside of Aglow membership, many American women "who rejected the feminist label and fought for a return to the traditional home and family values...were conservative evangelical Christians."¹³⁴ Numerous Christian women's groups were created during the 1960s and 1970s as an alternative means of coalescing beyond the parameters of the feminist movement. These new coalitions often positioned feminist goals as antithetical to a conservative Christian worldview. Feminist mainstream Christian coalitions, such as CWU, and conservative Christian women who were either opposed to or apathetic toward the secular feminist agenda, including members of Aglow, contributed to the cultural milieu that both provoked the formation of the EWC and shaped its trajectory, connecting evangelicalism and feminism.

Collective Identity: Mutual Submission

The Evangelical Women's Caucus established a collective identity around the label "biblical feminist" to foster unity and attract other Christians to their coalition. A biblical feminist, as defined by the EWC's Temporary Steering Committee, included anyone "who is committed to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, believes in the Bible as the inspired and authoritative word of God, and calls for the mutual submission and active discipleship of Christian men and women in society, church and home."¹³⁵ The EWC's early alliance sought to recruit and represent Christians who saw themselves reflected in this relatively broad description. This ideology ultimately appealed to and drew Christians from various theological and geographical backgrounds. As noted in my dissertation's introduction, the EWC's first national conference

tyrants or dictators in the home (*God's Daughters*, 62). Complicating a dichotomy between male dominance and female oppression, Griffith draws on feminist historians, including Caroline Walker Bynum, to remind her readers that "the realities are far more muddled, that women have always carved out spaces for themselves within the social, historical, cultural, and religious structures that constrain them and have resisted those structures in subtle and unexpected ways" (14). Moreover, Griffith shows that the idea of submission changes over time within the group: by the mid 1980s Griffith's highlights more flexibility in the biblical interpretation of this role and by 1995 submission is widely represented as "mutual submission" among husbands and wives (45). Other scholars challenging existing feminist ideas of submission include Saba Mahmood, who illustrates that ideas of power and submission must be contextualized, and that applying such notions across divergent geographical, cultural, or religious groups is not only inaccurate, but harmful. Ideas of agency, Mahmood suggests, must be redefined and framed within their specific culture and historical moment to avoid designating women in various religious traditions around the world as "oppressed" or "ignorant" when such terms do not apply in those contexts. See Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001), 202–36.

¹³² Griffith, *God's Daughters*, 45.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹³⁵ AWTs: EWC Archives, "Local Chapter Development 1976-1977," Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 6.

attracted more than 360 participants from “39 states and Canada,” from predominantly Presbyterian, Baptist, and Mennonite denominations, but also brought Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Christian Reformed, Holiness traditions, Charismatic and Pentecostal members, United Church, and Quaker participants, among others.¹³⁶ As a collective ideology, biblical feminism established solidarity across much potential diversity by utilizing language and a belief system that was accessible and coherent for evangelical Christians across denominations.

The EWC emphasized the necessity of fostering a personal relationship with Christ and the supremacy and authority of Scripture, ideologies strongly supported by mainstream evangelicalism.¹³⁷ Advocating such specific and significant evangelical ideals helped keep the emerging EWC within the folds of this community, maintaining overlap with a wider Christian network. Coverage of the EWC’s early years in *Christianity Today*, a major periodical that reflects and shapes evangelical thought, demonstrates a mainstream evangelical interest in the EWC from its inception. For example, in 1975, journalist Carol McFadden reported on the EWC’s first national conference with curiosity and a general objectivity. McFadden identified key participants, including conference planner and *Christianity Today* assistant editor Cheryl Forbes, and described conference themes of gender equality without challenging the budding organization’s claims to evangelical identity. McFadden concluded that the EWC’s conference successfully navigated immense differences between participants by adhering to the biblical precedent of Galatians 3:28: “...you are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹³⁸

In 1976, Harold Lindsell, a leading evangelical thinker, also reported on the EWC in *Christianity Today*. Lindsell acknowledged that many Americans accepted the EWC’s general goals: “people inside and outside the churches generally agree that women should have the same rights as men: equal pay for the same jobs; equal opportunity for positions generally limited to men; the right and freedom to pursue any career...”¹³⁹ However, Lindsell took issue with one of the EWC’s primary assertions: that egalitarian marriage is the Christian ideal represented in Scripture. Evangelicals and biblical feminists shared the same Scripture, yet the feminist interpretation reached a contradicting conclusion from mainstream evangelicalism regarding a husband’s headship in marriage. Because both movements emphasized the importance of biblical authority, advocating an oppositional interpretation from the dominant evangelical perspective was more than transgressive; it was a threat to the collective identity of mainstream evangelicalism. Lindsell’s article in *Christianity Today* underscores the central importance of adhering to a hierarchical interpretation of Scripture for evangelicals:

¹³⁶ Bonnie Greene, “We’re on Our Way! The Evangelical Women’s Caucus in Washington,” *Vanguard* (January–February 1976), 18–19. See also Carol Prestor McFadden, “Christian Feminists: We’re On Our Way Lord!,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 20, no. 6 (1975), 36–7. In EWC’s own press release on the conference, leaders note that a “minority” of women in attendance were also members of “NOW and other secular feminist organizations.” (AWTS: EEWCA Archives, “For Immediate Release,” (Dec 2, 1975), Series 1C, Box 1, Folder 7).

¹³⁷ While many coalitions must create their own authoritative literature, including manifestos and rule books to outline group membership, biblical feminists and evangelicals could point to the most authoritative text possible for their wider communities: the Bible. However, interpretations of the text vary within each coalition and among individual members, which caused problems for coalitional unity. See chapter three’s discussion of evangelical interpretations of Scripture during the abolitionist movement.

¹³⁸ Carol Prestor McFadden, “Christian Feminists: We’re On Our Way Lord!,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 20, no. 6 (1975), 36–7.

¹³⁹ Harold Lindsell, “Egalitarianism and Scriptural Infallibility,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 20, no. 13 (1976), 45.

At stake here is not the matter of women's liberation. What is the issue for the evangelical is the fact that some of the most ardent advocates of egalitarianism in marriage over against hierarchy reach their conclusion by directly and deliberately denying that the Bible is the infallible rule of faith and practice. Once they do this, they have ceased to be evangelical: Scripture no longer is normative.¹⁴⁰

In this statement, Lindsell firmly separates evangelical feminists from evangelicalism-proper because of their interpretation of biblical marital equality. Lindsell recognizes that biblical feminists use Scripture to defend their position, including interpretations of Genesis 1 and Galatians 3:28.¹⁴¹ However, Lindsell argues that biblical feminists, including Scanzoni and Hardesty, have not yet successfully proven the doctrine of biblical egalitarianism using appropriate evangelical techniques, such as biblical infallibility.¹⁴² While Lindsell exclaims that "[a]nyone who wishes to make a case for egalitarianism in marriage is free to do so," he feels that existing biblical feminist interpretations "denigrate[] Scripture" by rejecting biblical infallibility.¹⁴³ According to Lindsell, the Bible clearly demonstrates that Paul asserts male headship and wifely obedience in marriage, and biblical feminists did not effectively prove otherwise. Despite his apprehension, however, Lindsell does not discredit the biblical feminist movement as inherently unevangelical. These examples demonstrate that, while linking evangelical views with a feminist identity may have been uncomfortable to some members of the evangelical community, the EWC's collective ideology was not *unintelligible* – an important first step for biblical feminists in sustaining their coalition.

Divinely Created Order

The EWC's Statement of Faith, confirmed in 1978 in the coalition's first by-laws, situated the coalition snugly within evangelicalism while asserting feminist values as integral to its ideology.¹⁴⁴ The statement acknowledged the final authority of Scripture and God's saving work documented therein: "We believe that the Bible which bears witness of Christ is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and is the infallible guide and final authority for Christian faith and life."¹⁴⁵ The EWC also confirmed that humans achieve eternal salvation only through a personal relationship with Christ: "We believe that God in love has made possible a new beginning through the incarnation, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ...We affirm a personal

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 46.

¹⁴¹ I discuss biblical feminist interpretations in more detail in the next section.

¹⁴² In his article, Lindsell criticizes Scanzoni and Hardesty's conclusions in *All We're Meant to Be* that Paul's instructions about wifely obedience reflected his cultural and historical period and were not intended to be universal rules. Lindsell also singles out Virginia Mollenkott, another influential evangelical feminist scholar (discussed at length in chapter three of this dissertation). Lindsell takes issue with Mollenkott's prioritization of Genesis 1 over Genesis 2 in her interpretations of Scripture ("Egalitarianism and Scriptural Infallibility," 45).

¹⁴³ Lindsell, "Egalitarianism and Scriptural Infallibility," 46.

¹⁴⁴ The initial Statement of Faith has been amended many times throughout the years as the demographics of EWC membership changed, outlined in chapter five.

¹⁴⁵ AWTG: EEWG Archives, "Executive Council Meeting 1978," Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 4.

relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.”¹⁴⁶ Finally, the statement acknowledged the importance of proselytizing and fellowship: “We believe the church is the community...who have been divinely called to fellowship with God and one another to seek and do God’s will...”¹⁴⁷ The TSC further reiterated the importance of evangelism, asserting that the purpose of the EWC was “to honor and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by engaging in religious, charitable, educational, and/or cultural activities.”¹⁴⁸ These aspects of the Statement of Faith reflected widely accepted beliefs among the evangelical community, as noted above in Bebbington’s quadrilateral. This language was a nod to evangelicals’ unique theology, shared history, and collective ideology. Adherence to these doctrines helped the EWC establish credibility and authority among their wider community, even as a radical new coalition. The Statement of Faith signalled to evangelicals that this coalition was still familiar, still within the community, in important and definitive ways: biblical feminists affirmed many of the agreed upon components of evangelicalism.

Within the Statement of Faith, however, the EWC also promoted a uniquely feminist perspective regarding gender equality that most evangelicals would not recognize as consistent with their beliefs. The statement asserted:

We believe that God created humankind, female and male, in the divine image, for fellowship with God and one another. We further believe that because of human sinful disobedience, the right relationship with God was shattered, with a consequent disruption of all other relationships.¹⁴⁹

This declaration rejected long-held evangelical ideas of a divine gender hierarchy. The dominant evangelical perspective regarding a God-given gender hierarchy drew on an interpretation of human creation from the second chapter of Genesis, where God created Adam first and then formed Eve from Adam’s body. The EWC, in their faith declaration, centered another creation narrative found in Genesis 1:27, which states, “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”¹⁵⁰ The EWC suggested that this passage proved that God created the sexes simultaneously. Early EWC members and leaders argued that any hierarchical interpretations of human creation were a consequence of sin, a mistake inherited from fundamentalism when neo-evangelicals emerged from that movement.¹⁵¹

The roots of this gendered theology, however, run deeper than the fundamentalist movement in the twentieth century. Scholars have traced the conservative evangelical notion that female subordination and male authority are part of “God’s original, perfect design” to at least the nineteenth century.¹⁵² During this period, dominant American ideologies included the cult of true

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ AWTs: EEWC Archives, “Local Chapter Development 1976-1977,” Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 6.

¹⁴⁹ “Executive Council Meeting 1978,” Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 4.

¹⁵⁰ This quote is from the New International Version.

¹⁵¹ For an examination of the fundamentalist understanding of biblical gender hierarchy following WWII, see Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*.

¹⁵² Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 36. See also Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 112. While my thesis examines historical representations of a biblical hierarchy of the sexed universe among American evangelicals, such ideas are not unique to evangelicalism (or Christianity). In *The Fantasy of Feminist History* Joan Wallach Scott

womanhood, which deemed White women to be naturally more pious, pure, domestic, and submissive than men.¹⁵³ Such widespread cultural ideas reinforced a conceptualization of women and men as opposite and complementary by their natures: “[w]omen were domestic; men were wage earners and breadwinners. Women were naturally pious; men were essentially unspiritual and worldly. Women were to be sexually pure; men were naturally lusty.”¹⁵⁴ This definition of femininity positioned women not only as “better human beings, but also as better Christians than men;” women were considered “more Christlike” in their nature.¹⁵⁵

In one sense, this ideology served to solidify (and naturalize) women’s position in the home and the separation of public life (as the male domain) from private life (the female domain). As morally superior beings, women were assigned the task of raising good Christian children into the faith. Men were considered morally flawed and reliant on their wives for spiritual guidance. Women were “the point of contact between God and an entire family,” thus making their role as wife and mother integral to their family’s religiosity: “every person needed to be a member of a traditional family, with a mother at home to provide moral and spiritual instruction and maintenance.”¹⁵⁶ In another sense, this ideology also afforded middle-class White women the unique space to advocate for social change in nineteenth-century America.¹⁵⁷ Acting from within their designated position as the moral pillars of society, White middle-class women could participate in (and even lead) many charitable, benevolent, and reform movements, including the abolition and temperance movements. Evangelical women specifically were among the leaders of the women’s suffrage movement, fighting for the expansion of women’s rights in the public sphere.¹⁵⁸ Evangelical women’s social and religious activism created discomfort for many male church leaders, who viewed women’s increasingly visible and public roles as threatening to the dominant social order and as a corruption of the divinely ordained division of the sexes, as outlined in Genesis 2. Male evangelical leaders argued that women, as exemplified by Eve, were created to “nurture children and act as their husbands’ helpmates.”¹⁵⁹ As such, women were expected to utilize their unique talents in their homes.

Into the 1970s, mainstream evangelicals continued to interpret the creation story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 as proof of the hierarchical creation of the sexes. They used this interpretation to justify gendered roles within society, church, and the family. Biblical feminists created the EWC in response to the prevalence of this ideology, which, as seen in Anna’s letter in the introduction

presents a history of secularism which depends on an understanding of the differences of sexes (designated by nature, rather than God): “The difference of sex was taken to be a legitimate ground for inequality” (99).

¹⁵³ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966), 152.

¹⁵⁴ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 31.

¹⁵⁵ Kathy Rudy, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1997), 20.

¹⁵⁶ Rudy, *Sex and the Church*, 20.

¹⁵⁷ As Kathy Rudy notes, this ideology applied to White middle-class women only, as “black women were conversely viewed as sexually insatiable” (*Sex and the Church*, 19).

¹⁵⁸ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 33. It must be noted here that such opportunities were more available to women in the American North than in the South. Leading moral reformers Sarah and Angelina Grimké, for example, came from a Southern conservative Christian background, but moved north to advocate their goals more effectively, where “public activism of respectable women was possible” (Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 86.)

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

to this chapter, provided a serious stumbling block for pioneering evangelical feminists. EWC members, like the wider evangelical community, understood Scripture to be God's revealed truth, and thus turned to the Bible for answers to this dilemma. In the seminal text *All We're Meant to Be*, Scanzoni and Hardesty examine the creation narrative of Adam and Eve, asking, "[I]s the order of creation of cosmic significance?"¹⁶⁰ The authors suggest that if this was the case, "then the animals are clearly our betters," having been created before humans.¹⁶¹ While this response is tongue-in-cheek, Scanzoni and Hardesty present a careful analysis of Genesis 1, where "male and female are said to be created simultaneously."¹⁶² The authors also examine New Testament passages, including Jesus's recounting of Genesis 1:27 in Matthew 19:4-5, and Galatians 3:28 which states, "there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." The authors deduced that prioritizing a perceived hierarchy in Genesis 2 to advocate women's subordination to men was not aligned with the wider liberatory message of Christianity or the inherent equality of the sexes present throughout the Bible.¹⁶³

As the EWC continued to grow into the late 1970s, biblical feminists defined their transformative agenda through their Statement of Purpose, establishing and promoting gender equality and mutual submission. By 1978, the EWC's declared purpose was to "[p]resent God's teaching on female-male equality to the whole body of Christ's church" and "[c]all both women and men to mutual submission and active discipleship."¹⁶⁴ This ideology further positioned the EWC in opposition to the dominant evangelical community. By this period, a growing number of conservative evangelicals were questioning the EWC's hermeneutical approaches, its coalition-building objectives, and the validity of its proposed alignment between feminist and evangelical principles. Conservative evangelicals began to see biblical feminists as outsiders. At the same time, the EWC continued to promote feminist interpretations of Scripture and objectives as part of its internal equality, thereby defining its community's insider status against the wider evangelical community.

Better a Wrong Decision by the Head of the Family than a Right Decision by a Wife

No conservative evangelical advocate of gender hierarchy bothered evangelical feminists as much as Marabel Morgan. In her immensely popular book, *Total Woman* (1973), Morgan argued that female submission was the foundation for a happy marriage, bringing conservative evangelical understandings of women's roles in the home into the wider American consciousness. *Total Woman* was on the *New York Times* best-seller list in 1974 (selling over ten million copies), and Morgan promoted the book in wildly successful "Total Woman Seminars" across the country. Morgan's "Total Woman" ideology flawlessly portrayed the dominant evangelical view of wifely

¹⁶⁰ Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be*, 27-28. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*; See also "It All Started with Eve," in *All We're Meant to Be*, 23-37. It is important to note here that some male theologians also advocated for egalitarian marriage as the most biblical path, including Paul King Jewett in *Man As Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). EWC leaders frequently encouraged members to read and study this book in their chapter meetings.

¹⁶⁴ "Executive Council Meeting 1978," Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 4.

submission and male authority. Morgan argued in her book that women could have successful and happy marriages if they submitted to the headship of their husbands: a “Total Woman” must adhere to four A’s regarding her husband: accept him, admire him, adapt to him, and appreciate him. For Morgan, the underlying theme of the marital relationship was female submission and subservience, based on Ephesians 5:22: “You wives must submit to your husbands’ leadership in the way you submit to the Lord.”¹⁶⁵ Importantly for Morgan, the “[t]otal woman is not a slave. She graciously chooses to adapt to her husband’s way, even though at times she desperately may not want to.”¹⁶⁶ This distinction reflected ideas in the wider evangelical community as well: evangelical leaders often suggested that the submissive wifely relationship was not to be conflated with servitude, nor was the husband to rule as a tyrant. James Dobson, a prominent conservative evangelical, best-selling author, and the founder of Focus on the Family, a Christian organization formed in 1977 in Southern California, clarified the husband’s role as the leader of the family. Dobson asked, “Am I recommending that men dominate their wives, ruling with an iron fist and robbing them of individualism? Certainly not.” Turning to Scripture, Dobson quoted Ephesians 5:28-33: “...a man must love his wife as part of himself; and the wife must see to it that she deeply respects her husband, obeying, praising, and honoring him.”¹⁶⁷ Dobson concluded that “masculine oppression” has no part in God’s formula for the family. Instead, a husband must rule over his wife and the home “with loving leadership.”¹⁶⁸

Morgan likened the husband-and-wife relationship in the home to a king and queen ruling over their dominion. According to Morgan, while the king is the leader, he may occasionally defer to his wife for advice. However, “if there is a difference of opinion, it is the king who makes the decision.”¹⁶⁹ And if that decision is incorrect? “Oh, that’s a hard one, especially when you *know* you’re right, and there are times when that is the case. The queen is still to follow him, forthwith. A queen shall not nag or buck her king’s decision after it is decreed.”¹⁷⁰ Morgan correlated gendered roles in the home with a sexed order of creation, believing that God gifted the first woman to the first man as a helper (albeit, “the best present any man could receive”).¹⁷¹ Morgan’s representation of wifely submission and male leadership and authority thus directly paralleled nineteenth-century evangelical ideas. In *Total Woman*, Morgan argued that submitting to this “natural” and biblical hierarchy was the key to a happy marriage and a happy life.

Early biblical feminists took it upon themselves to respond to Marabel Morgan’s ideology personally and directly. The EWC’s first organized demonstration, occurring even before their inaugural national conference, involved picketing, infiltrating, and disrupting a Total Woman Seminar at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley, California. On the ninth of November in 1975, fifteen members of the EWC, men and women, gathered in front of the entrance to the massive, stately

¹⁶⁵ Morgan, *The Total Woman* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), 80.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 82-3.

¹⁶⁷ James Dobson, *What Wives Wished their Husbands Knew About Women* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale, 1975), 69. Dobson cites The Living Bible for this passage.

¹⁶⁸ Dobson, *What Wives Wished*, 70. See also Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 54-5.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 83. Likening the marital relationship to that of “king and queen or president and executive vice president” was common among evangelical authors at this time, including Susan Foh’s 1979 *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, q’t’d in Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 51.

¹⁷⁰ Morgan, *Total Woman*, 83-4.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 129

hotel, waiting for the “75 would-be total women” to start arriving for the Total Woman Seminar.¹⁷² EWC members carried picket signs with slogans that read: “Total Woman Misuses the Bible,” “Jesus freed women,” “Love not lust,” and “Be a total person, not a sex object.”¹⁷³ The protesters also distributed leaflets and spoke with seminar participants as they approached the hotel to present the EWC’s interpretation of Scripture, which negated the concept of female submission. This strategy proved effective for at least one Total Woman participant, who opted not to attend the seminar.¹⁷⁴ Two EWC women even paid the fifteen-dollar entrance fee to attend the Total Woman Seminar “and object from within.” The EWC infiltrators went undercover and “[d]ressed in full feminine regalia” to blend in with the other participants at the seminar.¹⁷⁵ They “made sure that each woman entering the room received a green protest sheet,” which the EWC members tacitly presented as a seminar handout.¹⁷⁶ Throughout the six-hour seminar, the two EWC members openly challenged ideas about wifely submission and the Total Woman’s biblical analysis of gender and women’s roles. The evangelical feminists “pointed out that serious and careful analysis of all the biblical passages relating to women can lead to exactly the opposite position: that Jesus is a feminist, that the apostle Paul worked with women apostles as his equals, and that real Christianity liberates women from cultural stereotypes.”¹⁷⁷ Significantly, the EWC members noted that, to their credit, the leaders of the seminar “tolerated the presence of the feminists with more or less graciousness,” which helped establish “a climate in which communication was possible.” Overall, the EWC felt that the coalition’s efforts were successful because they “changed the tone of the event; other listeners also raised questions.”¹⁷⁸

After the seminar, the EWC infiltrators spoke with five of the participants, including the seminar host, for over an hour. During this conversation, EWC members challenged the leader’s assertions of a wife’s “blanket submission” taught during the gathering, and the host “admitted that when a husband makes a decision that is immoral or illegal, the wife should not submit to his decision.” This “admission” amended a previous proclamation made by the seminar leader: “Better a wrong decision by the head of the family than a right decision by a wife.”¹⁷⁹ As distasteful as that sentiment was for EWC members, they took issue with Morgan’s ideas of submission not simply because they were antifeminist, but because EWC members also saw these statements as anti-Christian, based on an incorrect interpretation of Scripture. Morgan was a dangerous figure for biblical feminists because she was an evangelical woman advocating that women’s submission was the true message of the Bible.¹⁸⁰ Biblical feminists made it part of their coalition’s mission to educate potential *Total Woman* readers and seminar participants (and the wider American public) about the inherently feminist ideas represented in Christian Scripture. In December 1975, the

¹⁷² Marabel Morgan was not present at this seminar. Morgan’s Total Woman Seminar program trained women all over the country to host Total Woman events in their localities. This event was led by trained host Adelaide Woodcock of Sacramento, California.

¹⁷³ AWTs: EEWC Archives, “For Immediate Release,” (Nov. 9, 1975), Series 1C, Box 1, Folder 7.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ AWTs: EEWC Archives, “1975-76 Press Releases,” Series 1C, Box 1, Folder 7.

¹⁸⁰ “For Immediate Release,” (Nov. 9, 1975), Series 1C, Box 1, Folder 7.

EWC's press release declared: "Providing organized opposition to Total Woman, Inc., is an immediate goal of the EWC."¹⁸¹

Conclusion

Emerging from within two distinct ideological climates often considered in conflict, an evangelical feminist coalition was a radical undertaking in 1970s America. At the same time, for biblical feminists, building a coalition that merged these worldviews was only logical because they believed that feminist ideas were intrinsic to Scripture and reflective of God's liberatory message. Evangelical feminists drew on evangelicalism's shared ideology, including the recognition of Scriptural authority, a personal relationship with Christ, and the goal of spreading the faith. EWC founders also shared a broader feminist belief in gender equality and feminist coalitional objectives to fight gender and sex-based oppression. At the intersection of these movements, the founders of the Evangelical Women's Caucus established an alliance that combined evangelical and feminist ideals by asserting that the Bible supported gender equality. However, the EWC's adherence to feminist values ensured the coalition's dissent from dominant evangelical ideals, including a divinely ordained gender hierarchy of female submission and male authority. The EWC argued that this hierarchy was the result of an incorrect interpretation of God's message in Scripture. This proclamation would eventually create distance between biblical feminists and the wider evangelical community. However, in its formative years, the EWC's blend of evangelical language and beliefs with its feminist ideology sparked evangelical interest in the biblical feminist movement. In its early years, the EWC's collective identity appealed to and attracted Christians from many different denominations, including Presbyterians, Baptists, and members of the Holiness movement, from across the United States.¹⁸²

As Anna and Diana's correspondence in the introduction illustrates, trailblazing the path for acceptance of mutual submission and egalitarian marriage among evangelicals was not easy work. Regardless, the coalition survived its early years: potential members found the message of biblical feminism appealing and joined from a variety of churches; new EWC chapters cropped up across the country; national conferences fostered long-distance friendships and support networks as biblical feminists resolved internal kinks in their ideological framework and solidified their coalition's aims. The EWC changed the American landscape by creating a credible and authoritative (if controversial) space for sharing feminist ideas and Christian community in the mid-1970s. This credibility, indeed, the coalition itself, would be challenged in the decades that followed. However, at its inception, the challenges and critical importance of the EWC was captured by Anna in her letter to Diana. Anna explained, "[T]his may sound funny: I almost resent ever having heard about biblical feminism. It's changed my life and I'll never be the same again. (even if I want to!)."¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ AWTs: EEWCA Archives, "Local Chapter Development 1976-1977," Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 2.

¹⁸² Greene, "We're On Our Way!," 18. In her coverage of the event, Greene identified conference participants as truly national, noting "no state or area dominat[ed]" in attendance (Ibid).

¹⁸³ "Correspondence 1987," Series 1C: National Office, Box 7, Folder 3.

Chapter Two: Maintenance

Silences, Sacrifices, and Stagnancy

By the Evangelical Women's Caucus' tenth year, members and leaders were focusing on sustaining and consolidating the coalition. In February of 1984, the EWC's administrative assistant issued a warning in the annual Office Report among the general updates for the executive council. This cautionary note was nothing new but served as an important reminder to EWC leadership:

...in this packet are two requests [to retract memberships] because of "pro-abortion" and not having a "strong anti-homosexual stand" [sic]. It is unusual to get two in one month – we usually only get one request like this per year. We need to be careful about what we write and say. If questions like this come up, be prepared to defend EWC's "non-position."¹

By acknowledging the EWC's history of requests for withdrawal because of disparate perspectives regarding homosexuality and abortion, the administrator underscored the controversy surrounding these "social issues" in the coalition.² Reminding EWC leaders of the coalition's diverse membership, the administrator advised leaders to remain mindful of the dangers involved in taking an official position on such controversial subjects. The potential risks facing the EWC included diminished membership (loss of numerical strength, membership dues, access to resources, and social networks), disunity and lack of cohesion toward shared goals, and loss of credibility and authority as an evangelical feminist coalition. These risks were front of mind for many EWC leaders because they threatened not only the EWC's viability, but its very existence. To neutralize this threat, EWC leaders assumed and enforced a strategic silence regarding abortion rights within the coalition; the EWC's official position on abortion was a "non-position."³ Although an unconventional coalition tactic, EWC leaders implemented non-positionality to avoid potential conflicts or schisms (or, worse, an exodus) among the coalition's diverse Christian membership. Moreover, EWC leaders enforced this official neutrality to sustain connections, intelligibility, and credibility among its parent communities: the feminist and evangelical movements.

The previous chapter examined the formation of the EWC as a coalition bridging the often tense and contested ideological space between evangelicalism and feminism. Evangelical feminists created the EWC to connect these worldviews, identifying the intrinsic inseparability of Christianity and feminism as evidenced by the divinely ordained biblical equality of the sexes. Continuing to trace the EWC's coalition-building project, this chapter examines the EWC's execution and navigation of strategic non-positionality to maintain internal cohesion and influence among its

¹ AWTs: EEWC Archives, Judith Steinmetz, "EWC Office Report," 1984, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 5. (1619).

² The subjects of gay rights, homosexuality, and abortion are often grouped together and labeled "social issues" in the EEWC archives. These subjects were also frequently connected among evangelical discourse during this period. Mainstream evangelicals, from the 1960s, have often conflated these topics as symbols of sexual permissiveness, which threaten traditional family values. How the EWC addressed queer sexuality and gay rights is the topic of the next chapter, which also unpacks the wider evangelical understanding of queer sexuality. For a more detailed discussion of evangelical ideology surrounding ideal family structures and "family values," see chapters one and three.

³ The next chapter examines EWC's position on queer sexuality and gay rights, which, unlike abortion rights, did not remain neutral.

parent communities. Non-position tactics have been understudied as a coalition-building strategy because, as outlined in chapter one, coalitions challenge the status quo by advocating for social and/or political change. As such, coalition scholarship has tended to focus on more “active” strategies by which coalitions identify and fight for their goals. However, as this chapter demonstrates, a non-position is still a position, and the EWC’s strategic silence on abortion influenced its growth, membership, and relationships with its parent communities.

The EWC’s non-positionality did promote internal unity as leadership hoped. However, by prioritizing unity among members on the controversial and salient subject of abortion rights, the EWC lost potency as a bridge between both mainstream feminists and evangelicals. Coalitions require more than internal cohesion to be successful; they are also vehicles of social and political transformation.⁴ By the 1970s, the mainstream feminist movement supported legalized and accessible abortion as part of a comprehensive approach to a woman’s right to reproductive healthcare and bodily autonomy. In the 1980s, evangelicals developed a religious opposition to abortion that rapidly became the standard ideology among their community. As first feminist and then evangelical positions about abortion hardened, developing along contrary and antagonistic lines, feminists and evangelicals expected members of their respective communities to vocalize support for or against abortion. In a climate that required expressed advocacy regarding abortion rights, the EWC’s sustained silence contributed to a stagnancy in its relationships with its broader communities. The EWC’s non-position tactic diminished the coalition’s ability to defend biblical equality and women’s rights among evangelicals and feminists. This chapter presents one approach to studying the unconventional coalition strategy of non-positionality, on which historians and coalition theorists might expand in future coalition-building research.

Unity versus Schism

Building a coalition involves establishing a collective identity to unite diverse members toward a shared objective.⁵ Feminist coalitions challenge the patriarchal status quo or otherwise advocate against oppression in the dominant culture. To achieve its goals, a coalition must protect itself against external threats. However, in the past two decades, scholars and activists have also emphasized the importance of mediating internal differences among coalition members.⁶ Mechanisms to identify and resolve potentially divisive issues within the group help ensure that the organization’s goals take priority over points of tension or conflict among members. This view of coalition-building idealizes an organization’s ability to sustain unity because preventing schism is framed as integral to a coalition’s success. Certainly, creating and maintaining unity, trust, and

⁴ This is not to say that the EWC bridge-building project was a failure between evangelicalism and feminism. This chapter argues that the EWC lost some influence in its wider communities by maintaining a non-position on abortion rights, particularly as this topic became a defining boundary for both feminists and evangelicals. As the following chapters show, the EWC remains in relationship with these communities today, despite this setback.

⁵ This component of coalition-building is outlined in chapter one.

⁶ See for example, Elizabeth R. Cole and Zakiya T. Luna, “Making Coalitions Work: Solidarity Across Difference Within Us Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010): 71–98; Michelle I. Gawerc, “Coalition-Building and the Forging of Solidarity Across Difference and Inequality,” *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 3 (2021): 1–14; Jill M. Bystydzienski and Steven P. Schacht, *Forging Radical Alliances Across Difference: Coalition Politics for the New Millennium* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

solidarity across differences increases membership cohesion (and fosters numerical power) toward a shared goal. Unity remains a powerful tool and objective for activists building alliances on the ground, presented as part of “the dream of a grand coalition,” where many different groups and individuals come together to work toward a shared goal.⁷ In this setting, members combine resources, expertise, and social and political networks to increase the probability of achieving a coalition’s goals. Success, within coalition-building theory, is typically determined by a coalition’s ability to “creat[e] something larger and more ambitious than could be done as one group or organization.”⁸ Schism, or the splitting of the original group, is thus viewed negatively. Schism is perceived “as proof of an organization’s inability to manage internal conflict,” which results in “the group’s dramatically reduced ability to achieve any of its goals.”⁹ Much existing scholarship on coalition-building echoes this understanding of fracture as undesirable and harmful for coalitions. Even scholars who predict possible positive outcomes of coalitional infighting tend to represent schism as “proof of organizational damage.”¹⁰ This approach views schism as a coalition’s failure, which either leads to its demise or signals that it was always already doomed to fail.¹¹

In recent coalition-building scholarship, sociologist Kelsy Kretschmer complicates the conventional view that schisms are inherently destructive or produce adverse outcomes for coalitions. Kretschmer examines conflicts, schisms, and breakaway groups that emerged within the National Organization for Women (NOW) from 1966 to 2009. Through this research, Kretschmer argues that splitting “can be a healthy outcome for individual groups and social movements.”¹² Kretschmer demonstrates that fractures within NOW have also been spaces of productivity that advanced the goals of the broader feminist movement. Schisms within the original group allowed a variety of identities and ideologies to develop among new coalitions, which shared a common general purpose with NOW, promoting gender equality and women’s rights.¹³ Kretschmer’s more expansive view of coalition splitting also challenges a misconception that infighting engenders bitter conflicts between members. By interviewing coalition participants who both left and stayed in NOW, Kretschmer determined that schisms are often “relatively conflict free” in lived experience.¹⁴ Rather than embattled disputes, most fractures are the result of certain members realizing their needs would be better met elsewhere, exiting the coalition without animosity, and maintaining friendships and some mutual goals or convictions with the parent coalition.

In this framing, schisms can benefit each group involved: the parent coalition, the emerging new coalitions, and the broader movement. Members who exit one coalition for another often

⁷ Brooker and Meyer qt’d in Michelle I. Gawerc, “Coalition-Building and the Forging of Solidarity Across Difference and Inequality,” *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 3 (2021), 2.

⁸ Gawerc, “Diverse Social Movement Coalitions: Prospects and Challenges,” *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 1 (2020), 1.

⁹ Kelsy Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now: Diversity and Discord in the National Organization for Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 127.

¹⁰ Ibid. For an example of the positives of infighting within coalitions, but which still understands schism as an ultimate failure, see Amin Ghaziani, *The Dividends of Consent: How Conflict and Culture Work in Lesbian and Gay Marches on Washington* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 20.

¹¹ For example, William Gamson in *The Strategy of Social Protest* (1990) views schism as a failure that can demonstrate that the coalition was “inherently moribund,” signalling “a deeper, fatal disease” of the organization (qt’d in Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 127).

¹² Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 7. I expand further on schism as productive and creative in chapter three.

¹³ Ibid., 131.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

recognize the continued importance of the original coalition, seeking to expand the movement through a new avenue for activism that reflects their distinct agendas.¹⁵ While Kretschmer recognizes that additional coalitions also generate more competition “for the same scarce resources, especially money, members, and media attention,” the author rejects a scarcity mentality for coalition-building.¹⁶ Kretschmer argues that “this dynamic does not automatically translate into fierce or uncooperative relationships between groups.”¹⁷ The same can be said about the EWC: EWC leaders frequently encouraged members to join multiple advocacy groups (including NOW) to better reflect members’ personal activist goals.¹⁸ As such, EWC leaders supported rather than disparaged members’ affiliations with other coalitions in the EWC’s broader matrix.¹⁹ Understanding schism as a creative and productive option in coalition-building deemphasizes the importance of unity. It provides a framework to examine how the EWC’s non-position on abortion was both unifying for the coalition’s membership and stultifying for the coalition’s influence on its wider feminist and evangelical communities.

The Abortion Debate in Context

Abortion was not just an important issue for feminists and evangelicals in the United States; by the late 1960s, abortion had become inextricably entwined in religious, political, legal, medical, and social discourses impacting the entire nation. Before the nineteenth century, abortion was not illegal in America.²⁰ Leading up to this period, most abortions were non-surgical and involved ingesting abortifacients to terminate pregnancies (with varying results). States began introducing laws to restrict such abortions in the 1820s and 1830s to protect women from an increase in unregulated, dangerous, and often poisonous abortifacients entering the market.²¹ By the late

¹⁵ Ibid., 123-8.

¹⁶ Ibid., 134.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ AWTs: EEWc Archives, “Guidelines for EWC/NOW Working Relationship,” 29 Oct. 1983, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 1. EWC’s relationships with other advocacy groups is discussed in the section “The EWC and Abortion.”

¹⁹ An interesting avenue for deeper research on this subject could be to examine of how Protestantism itself has evolved through productive schism, beginning as a fracture within Roman Catholicism. Because of Protestantism’s history of fracture and continual growth and adaptation through innovative splitting, evangelicals and evangelical feminists are perhaps uniquely suited for navigating schism and fracture within their communities.

²⁰ It is important to note that how “abortion” is defined, and what counts as abortion, changes across time and culture. Historian Leslie Reagan notes that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries “the term abortion referred only to the miscarriages of later pregnancies, after quickening [when a woman first feels the fetus move]. What we would now identify as an early induced abortion was not called an ‘abortion’ at all. If an early pregnancy ended, it had ‘slipp[ed] away,’ or the menses had been ‘restored” (Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 8. Throughout this chapter, I specify the definition of abortion (surgical, medicinal) when necessary.

²¹ Leslie Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 10. Reagan is drawing on James Mohr’s study here: *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). I use the term “women” to discuss pregnancy throughout this chapter because this is the language of the archives and of this historical period. While “pregnant person” is more inclusive and accurate, it is anachronistic terminology for this period. That being said, I underscore here that “women” excludes and/or erases anyone who does not identify with

1850s, the newly established American Medical Association (AMA) joined and expanded the parameters of the anti-abortion campaign. According to historian Leslie Reagan, “[t]he antiabortion campaign grew in part...out of regular physicians' desire to win professional power, control medical practice, and restrict their competitors, particularly Homeopaths and midwives.”²² Physicians endorsed new criminal abortion laws that were implemented across the country starting in the 1860s. By 1880, abortion was illegal in every state.²³ Even as new laws criminalized abortion, an exception for legal “therapeutic abortions,” if an abortion was necessary to save a woman’s life, was always included.²⁴

Criminalizing abortion did not stop abortions. It simply pushed abortion underground, which increased the risks and costs of obtaining an abortion.²⁵ Although “therapeutic abortions” remained a legal and safe option, gaining access to these legal medical procedures was prohibitively restrictive and out of reach for most women. By the 1950s, many hospitals established committees to review and approve requests for therapeutic abortions. These committees required pregnant women to meet with one or more physicians (at their own expense) to plead their cases for a medically necessary abortion. To meet the requirements, a physician had to prove that a pregnancy would physically harm or kill the pregnant woman. At this time, “life-threatening pregnancies” included mental health concerns as well as physical risks.²⁶ If a woman could prove to a psychiatrist that she was suicidal, for example, the psychiatrist could refer her to a therapeutic abortion committee. However, this avenue still did not guarantee an abortion.²⁷ This system ensured that only the most privileged women had access to therapeutic abortions through access to a psychiatrist and the ability to manage the costs and time involved in meeting with the therapeutic abortion committee. Moreover, White women were more likely to be granted “therapeutic abortions.” Reagan demonstrates that race and class stereotypes within the broader medical institution framed women of colour as more promiscuous and, therefore, less deserving of medical abortions.

this terminology but might still experience pregnancy. Such an erasure is not my intention; the reproductive history outlined in this dissertation reflects the experiences of all pregnancies in the United States.

²² Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 10.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 193. See also Johanna Schoen, “I Knew That It Was a Serious Crime: Negotiating Abortion before *Roe v. Wade*,” in *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (University of North Carolina Press: 2005), 139-196. Some hospitals even set arbitrary abortion quotas that they did not disclose publicly (Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 161; Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 57, 121); For more on the discrepancies in access for women of colour, see Reva B Siegel, “Abortion and the ‘Woman Question’: Forty Years of Debate.” *Indiana Law Journal* 89, no. 4 (2014), 1366.

²⁶ Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 201. Reagan notes that some psychiatrists encouraged women to claim that they were suicidal to obtain a legal abortion (201-2).

²⁷ Reagan highlights one example from a hospital in Baltimore, MD. Reagan explains that “a pregnant teenager...tried to kill herself after learning that her request for a therapeutic abortion had been rejected. The committee reconsidered her case and decided to hospitalize her through her pregnancy in order to save her life. Physicians were using the hospital to enforce childbearing. In the end, this teenager so disrupted the hospital with her multiple suicide attempts that the abortion committee reconsidered a second time and agreed to a therapeutic abortion. Her abortion was granted less because of her own mental health than because of the needs of the hospital and its staff” (202).

Such systemic biases created a “deeply discriminatory and deadly system, a system stamped at every level with the power dynamics of race, class, and gender.”²⁸ Although this system privileged White, middle-class women, Reagan emphasizes that “the availability of legal abortions to this group should not be overstated. Very few therapeutic abortions were performed. Most middle-class women who had abortions, like low-income and/or racialized women, had illegal abortions.”²⁹ We do not have accurate data recording the number of abortions performed during this period because of the necessary secrecy surrounding illegality. However, the Guttmacher Institute reports that “[o]ne stark indication of the prevalence of illegal abortion was the death toll. In 1930, abortion was listed as the official cause of death for almost 2,700 women—nearly one-fifth (18%) of maternal deaths recorded in that year.”³⁰

Between 1950 and 1960, estimates suggest that there were between two hundred thousand to 1.2 million abortions being performed every year in the United States.³¹ During this decade, the need for abortion “intensified” for many women as “women’s opportunities and responsibilities expanded...[and] their need to control their reproduction grew.”³² For example, as women entered colleges and the labour force at unprecedented rates, they sought to “postpone and control childbearing” for fear of being expelled from college or terminated from their jobs.³³ At this time, prevailing methods of reproductive control included birth control, abortion, and sterilization, however broader discourses and histories of reproductive rights and healthcare affected the legality, availability, and efficacy of each of these methods.³⁴ As Reagan notes, “[p]hysicians and birth control clinics refused to provide contraceptives to unmarried women” in the 1950s and 1960s, which increased “the danger of intercourse and the fears felt by single women.”³⁵ Restrictive birth control policies were predominantly applied to White, middle-class, unmarried women. During this same period, in the early 1960s, state and federal governments were exploring newly available oral contraceptives as a means to control reproduction among

²⁸ Ibid., 214, 200.

²⁹ Ibid., 207.

³⁰ Gold, Rachel Benson, “Lessons from Before Roe: Will Past be Prologue?”, *Guttmacher Policy Review*, vol 6, issue 1, 2003.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 194. Reagan is drawing on Rosalind Petchesky’s research here in *Abortion and Woman’s Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom*, rev. ed. (1984; Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 100-116).

³³ Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 194.

³⁴ See chapter four for a more detailed discussion of sterilization. Race and class have historically shaped all aspects of reproductive health and care in the United States as contributing factors that dictate women’s access to abortion, birth control, and sterilization. Contraception did not become an explosive issue for evangelicals in the same way as abortion. Amy Derogatis outlines widespread evangelical acceptance of birth control by the 1970s, as part of a discourse that sex (within a heterosexual marriage) was Godly and, therefore, good (see “Sex, Marriage, and Salvation,” *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42-71. For further discussion regarding the intersecting histories of race and class in contraceptive and abortion access and sterilization abuse see Joanne Schoen, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (University of North Carolina Press: 2005); Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997); Rickie Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America* (New York: New York University Press: 2005); Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

³⁵ Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 196.

Black women in America.³⁶ As part of a broader discussion about population control, “politicians, demographers,...and civic leaders...were convinced of the volatile, inexorable relationship between ‘overpopulation’ in the U.S. black community and social chaos.”³⁷ Historian Rickie Solinger explains that many supporters of this ideology “shared the vision that supplying contraceptives to unwed black women was a solution to ‘overpopulation.’”³⁸ As new reproductive technologies emerged, White unmarried women were denied access to birth control while Black unmarried women were encouraged to use it.³⁹ Neither group had control over their reproduction. The Supreme Court did not legalize birth control for unmarried women (of all races) until 1972. *Eisenstadt v. Baird* ruled that state laws banning the sale of contraceptives to unmarried couples infringed on a couple’s right to privacy. This ruling extended a 1965 ruling, *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which had legalized the sale of contraceptives to married couples, also under the right to privacy.

As physicians and scientists developed new reproductive and medical technologies, legal abortions became increasingly safe by the 1960s. Yet medical professionals working in American hospitals had a front-row seat to the ongoing horrors of illegal, unregulated, and botched abortions. Physicians knew better than anyone how preventable these tragedies were, as legal, sterile, “therapeutic abortions” had become safer than carrying a pregnancy to term by this time.⁴⁰ By the 1960s, the most effective abortions involved surgical intervention, which, when performed in a proper medical setting, involved antisepsis and antibiotics, greatly reducing the risk of infection and maternal death.⁴¹ Reagan’s poignant representation of this historical moment in American hospitals merits quoting at length:

Abortion was institutionalized in hospitals in two interrelated structures: the therapeutic abortion committee and the septic abortion ward. While a very small number of women

³⁶ Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 207. Oral contraceptives became available in the United States in May of 1960.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 208. The rhetoric of population control, discussed further in chapter four, frames Black reproduction as excessive and as illegitimate. Solinger illustrates how Black women were constructed as hypersexual in this rhetoric. These discourses are deeply intertwined with the eugenic and racist ideologies used to validate forced and coerced sterilizations of Black women, poor women, and women of colour, discussed in chapter four. As Solinger notes, “for black women the early history of the new contraceptive technology was controlled not by a value-free technological development, or by a discourse of women’s rights, but by public discussion that blamed black women for the problems of their community and demands that these women accept measures to halt ‘excess reproduction’” (*Wake Up Little Susie*, 211).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

³⁹ For a more thorough discussion of the racial history of pregnancy and birth control, see Solinger, “The Population Bomb and the Sexual Revolution,” in *Wake Up Little Susie*, 205-231.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 214. Reagan is drawing on the research of Russell S. Fisher, “Criminal Abortion,” *Abortion in America: Medical, Psychiatric, Legal, Anthropological, and Religious Considerations*, ed. Harold Rosen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 9, and Christopher Tietze, “Mortality with Contraception and Induced Abortion,” *Studies in Family Planning* (September 1969), 6.

⁴¹ Antiseptic technology was first introduced in the nineteenth century but was not widely accepted and utilized until the beginning of the twentieth century. Antibiotics were developed after the Second World War and generally made available to the American public by the 1950s (“Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113 (1973)” in *Controlling Reproduction: An American History*, ed. Andrea Tone (Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 1997), 192). For an account of how these technologies changed (and medicalized) childbirth, see Judith Leavitt, “‘Science’ Enters the Birthing Room: Obstetrics in America since the Eighteenth Century,” *The Journal of American History* 70, no. 2 (1983): 281–304.

came in through the hospital's front door for scheduled therapeutic abortions, many more abortion patients entered the hospital through the emergency room door. On the one hand, hospital abortion committees approved a few therapeutic abortions, which took place in sterile operating rooms for patients who recovered in private rooms; on the other, hospital abortion wards housed thousands of injured and infected women who had illegal abortions. Class and race defined these hospital spaces: private rooms belonged to a few privileged white women of the middle class; the wards were shared by low-income women of all races, together with some middle-class women who had illegal abortions.⁴²

Physicians had championed the criminalization of abortion in the nineteenth century. However, in the face of such immense and avoidable suffering, by the 1960s physicians were among the first to petition for less restrictive abortion laws; they could not ignore the repercussions of abortion criminalization.

Scholars contend that two other significant events brought abortion legality discourses into the public sphere: Sherri Finkbine's highly publicized abortion in 1962 and the rubella outbreak (also known as German measles) in the United States from 1963 to 1965.⁴³ Sherri Finkbine, host of the popular children's television show *Romper Room* and a married Catholic mother of four, had taken a drug for morning sickness while pregnant with her fifth child. Her husband had obtained the drug in Europe, which, unbeknownst to the couple, contained a substance not approved in the United States: thalidomide. Even small doses of thalidomide posed a threat of "severe structural abnormalities in a developing fetus."⁴⁴ Learning this information too late, "Finkbine followed existing protocols [for a legal, therapeutic abortion] and sought permission for an abortion from a hospital abortion committee on the permissible grounds of suspected fetal anomaly."⁴⁵ Finkbine's request was approved but before she received the abortion her story was published in a local newspaper. Finkbine was friends with the journalist who wrote the article and had hoped to remain anonymous while still warning other pregnant women about the dangerous side effects of thalidomide.⁴⁶ However, the journalist used Finkbine's name in the newspaper article and, because she was already in the public eye, "[t]he publicity that followed changed everything. Finkbine's scheduled abortion was canceled, as was her subsequent application for a visa to Japan, where abortion was legal."⁴⁷ Finkbine eventually procured an abortion in Sweden.⁴⁸ While making her decision public prohibited Finkbine from accessing an abortion in the United States, her unique

⁴² Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 214.

⁴³ Leslie Reagan, *Dangerous Pregnancies*, 57-63; Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement*, 14; Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 163; Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 80-2.

⁴⁴ Carol Sanger, *About Abortion: Terminating Pregnancy in Twenty-First-Century America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 224. It is important to note here, the reason thalidomide remained unapproved in the United States was because of the diligent persistence of Dr. Frances Kelsey at the Food and Drug Administration (Sanger, *About Abortion*, 102) See also Robert D. McFadden, "Frances Kelsey, 101, Dies; Exposed Dangerous Drug," *New York Times*, August 8, 2015, p. A1).

⁴⁵ Sanger, *About Abortion*, 224.

⁴⁶ Ibid; See also WNYC Studios, "Smashmortion" *On the Media Podcast*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/episodes/on-the-media-2018-01-05>.

⁴⁷ Sanger, *About Abortion*, 224.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

circumstances sparked a shift in the general tide. Reproductive rights scholar Carol Sanger identifies Sherri Finkbine as “the sincerest of pro-choice poster women imaginable” because Finkbine had wanted to be pregnant but had accidentally ingested a drug that impacted her fetus’s growth.⁴⁹ With much consideration and sadness, Finkbine sought a therapeutic abortion as her last resort. Finkbine, representing an earnest and sympathetic figure on a well-publicized quest for an abortion (in circumstances that were relatable to many), shifted public opinion on abortion laws. A Gallup poll following Finkbine’s abortion struggle found that over half of the Americans surveyed agreed with Sherri Finkbine’s decision to seek an abortion.⁵⁰

In the wake of Finkbine’s abortion, popular discourse began to normalize abortions for fetal abnormalities. In 1963 and 1964, abortion was once again a part of the national conversation with news reports on a rubella outbreak in the United States. Rubella was known to cause prenatal injuries to a fetus if contracted when a woman was pregnant.⁵¹ According to historian Leslie Reagan, “thalidomide taught Americans what German measles might mean,” and both physicians and the general public began to view therapeutic abortions with increasing acceptance.⁵² These incidents brought abortion and its consequences into the public sphere in the United States, which helped improve access to therapeutic abortion and fueled the fight for abortion legal reform.⁵³ This history set the stage for feminist, evangelical feminist, and evangelical engagement with the abortion debate in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mainstream Feminists Enter the Abortion Debate

In the late 1960s, second-wave feminists changed the abortion debate. Before feminists began advocating for abortion rights, men dominated the movement. Clergy, physicians, and advocates for population control fought for legal reforms to existing abortion laws.⁵⁴ The reform movement, prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s, involved “quiet” advocacy toward restructuring existing “therapeutic abortion” laws, focusing on changing legal and medical policies without alerting the media.⁵⁵ Radical feminists were the first to join the abortion conversation in the early 1960s. Instead of reform, they fought for the repeal of all abortion laws.⁵⁶ The pioneers of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 223.

⁵⁰ Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 82.

⁵¹ Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 163; Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 81.

⁵² Reagan, *Dangerous*, 62; Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 81.

⁵³ Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement*, 30.

⁵⁴ Self, *All in the Family*, 135; Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 192.

⁵⁵ Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement*, 14.

⁵⁶ Radical feminists were a branch within the wider feminist movement, with some participants coming out of the then-newly formed NOW (others from the civil rights movement, new left coalitions, and anti-Vietnam war movements). Members of this coalition identified as “radical” because of “their commitment to uncovering and eradicating the systemic or root causes of women’s oppression” (Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), 84). The classic historical narrative of radical feminists positions radical and liberal feminists almost exclusively in conflict (and often suggests that radical feminism disappeared by 1975). See for example, Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980). Recent scholarship challenges this

consciousness-raising groups, radical feminists centered the personal experiences of women as the basis of feminist politics. They focused their attention on issues of female sexuality and reproduction (including the antirape movement and abortion rights).⁵⁷

In the early 1960s, the liberal women's movement advocated for economic and legal equality for women. Organizations such as NOW coalesced to fight for equal opportunities for women in education and employment. They advocated for the establishment of necessary social structures to achieve these goals, including equalizing access to education, occupational training, maternity leaves, pregnancy benefits, and childcare centers.⁵⁸ As the movement grew, liberal feminists identified a connection between reproductive control and "increased social authority and the opportunity to become full participants in the economy."⁵⁹ Liberal feminists increasingly incorporated abortion rights into their political agenda, a priority which remains integral to contemporary mainstream feminism. By 1967, the National Organization for Women officially joined the campaign to repeal all existing abortion laws, making abortion a central plank for the organization.⁶⁰ Some NOW members found this resolution to be controversial, since "abortion had not yet been defined as a 'women's rights' issue," and its passage sparked immediate conflict and schism within the group.⁶¹ However, NOW president Betty Friedan connected abortion rights to women's equality and argued that reproductive control was integral to the feminist movement. In a now-famous speech presented at the First National Conference on Abortion Laws held in Chicago in 1969, Friedan declared: "[T]here is no freedom, no equality, no full human dignity and personhood possible for women until we assert and demand the control over our own bodies, over our own reproductive process."⁶² The mainstream feminist movement fought to increase and equalize access to abortion for all women and positioned abortion within a discursive framework of "freedom" and "choice," as part of reproductive healthcare for American women.⁶³ As NOW gained power and established its position as both "the public face of feminism," and "the movement's ideological center" by the early 1970s, and as radical activists became more involved

representation of the two feminist branches, showing instances of overlap and interactive borrowing between the two groups, both in resources and ideologies. For an example of intercoalition activism in the antirape movement, see Maria Bavacqua, "Coalition Politics in the Antirape Movement," in *Feminist Coalitions*, edited by Stephanie Gilmore (University of Illinois Press, 2008): 163-177.

⁵⁷ For more on the radical and liberal feminist collaboration in the antirape movement, see Bavacqua, "Coalition Politics." Bavacqua, "Coalition Politics," 165; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 3, 139; Jaggar *Feminist Politics*, 83.

⁵⁸ Jaggar, *Feminist Politics*, 35.

⁵⁹ Linda Greenhouse and Reva B Siegel, *Before Roe v. Wade: Voices That Shaped the Abortion Debate Before the Supreme Court's Ruling* (New York: Kaplan Pub, 2010), 35. For example, advocating for abortion rights remains a significant component of NOW's agenda into the present day, as well as for *Ms. Magazine*.

⁶⁰ "Highlights," *National Organization for Women*, <https://now.org/about/history/highlights/>. For a more detailed analysis of the liberal feminist decision to promote repeal vs reform regarding abortion laws, see Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement*.

⁶¹ Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement*, 20. For more on this schism within NOW, see Kretschmer's *Fighting for Now*, 37-57.

⁶² Betty Friedan, "Abortion: A Woman's Civil Right," in *Before Roe v. Wade*, ed. Greenhouse and Siegel (New York: Kaplan Pub, 2010), 39.

⁶³ For more information on the racial implications of discourses of "choice" in reproductive health and care, see chapter four. See also footnote 39 in this chapter.

with NOW, abortion repeal became a central demand of the broader mainstream feminist movement.⁶⁴

A groundbreaking “Speak Out” hosted by the Redstockings, a radical feminist coalition, also helped bring liberal feminists into the abortion rights campaign. On March 21, 1969, in the Washington Square Methodist Church in New York City, twelve women testified in front of a crowd of over 300 people regarding their personal experiences accessing and obtaining abortions. This “Speak Out” brought the private reality of abortion into public discourse while highlighting the need for accessible and legal abortion as women articulated their own horror stories of experiences of unregulated and nonsterile procedures, often conducted without anesthetic.⁶⁵ This event also made the public aware of massive discrepancies in access to abortion, as speakers explained the immense monetary sums required to obtain the procedure which made abortion inaccessible to poor women and, disproportionately, Black Women and women of colour.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Gloria Steinem, in her capacity then as a reporter for *New York Magazine* covered this speak out, later noting its importance on her own feminist activism:

There was something about seeing women tell the truth about their lives in public, and seeing women take seriously something that only happens to women. In my experience, things were only taken seriously if they also happened to men. It made some sense of my own experience – I had had an abortion and had never told anyone. It was one of those moments when you ask, “Why? Who said?”⁶⁷

As a founder of *Ms.* magazine in 1971, Steinem helped sustain abortion rights as a priority for liberal feminist activism. In 1972, *Ms.* launched a petition called “We Have Had Abortions.” This petition, published in their preview issue, was signed by 53 well-known American women, including folk singer Judy Collins, prominent author Susan Sontag, and Gloria Steinem. The signatories put themselves at risk by signing this petition because abortion was still illegal in most states. *The Washington Post* remarked on the significance of this campaign despite (or perhaps, because of) its potential legal ramifications, reporting that *Ms.* had embarked on “a powerful strategy in the U.S. abortion rights movement: ending the secrecy that had kept many women out of the fight.”⁶⁸

Liberal feminists advocated speaking about abortion as the most effective form of activism in the struggle for abortion rights. However, they also understood and respected individual silences

⁶⁴ Kretschmer, “Shifting Boundaries and Splintering Movements: Abortion Rights in the Feminist and New Right Movements,” *Sociological Forum* 29, no. 4 (2014), 897; Shulamith Firestone, a radical New York feminist, asserted that “many women who had joined [NOW] for lack of a better place to go soon shifted to radical feminism-and in doing so have forced NOW into an increasing radicalism, cf., where once the organization didn’t dare officially endorse even abortion law repeal for fear of alienating those who could go no further than reform, now abortion law repeal is one of its central demands (*The Dialectic of Sex*, 33). Many EWC leaders and members were participants in the liberal mainstream feminist movement and actively curated a relationship with this branch of the feminist movement, represented by such institutions as NOW and *Ms.* magazine.

⁶⁵ Susan Brownmiller, “Everywoman’s Abortions: ‘The Oppressor is Man,’” in *The Village Voice*, March 27, 1969.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*; See also Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 142; Self, *All in the Family*, 145.

⁶⁷ Gloria Steinem, “30th Anniversary Issue / Gloria Steinem: First Feminist,” by Susan Dominus, *New York Magazine*, April 6, 1998, <https://nymag.com/nymetro/news/people/features/2438/>

⁶⁸ Jodie Tillman, “We have had abortions’: 1972 petition changed abortion rights movement,” *Washington Post*, May 16, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2022/05/16/ms-magazine-abortion-petition>.

regarding abortion when it was necessary to keep a woman safe (or safer) “from the many harms of disclosure.”⁶⁹ Feminists understood that silence was sometimes necessary, but they did not view it as an *activist* strategy. By disclosing personal abortion experiences, second-wave feminists sustained public visibility about the need for accessible and legal abortion. They also highlighted the prevalence of abortion among women from all walks of life. Paired with discourses of women claiming authority over their own bodies and reproduction, feminist activism contributed to the American political climate leading to *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which legalized abortion federally on a trimester basis.⁷⁰ As historian Robert Self notes, paradoxically, the women’s rights movement “had to make abortion public and political in order to protect it as a woman’s private decision.”⁷¹

As the feminist movement evolved in the 1980s and 1990s, abortion rights remained vital to the movement. Recognizing the unique challenges facing Black women, women of colour, and poor women in the United States, feminists expanded their fight for abortion under the framework of “reproductive justice” to include the right to continue a pregnancy and the right to parent “with dignity and safety.”⁷² Feminists have continued to strategically encourage public discourses about abortion, even after its decriminalization in 1973. And abortion rights advocates implemented this activist strategy each time the Supreme Court threatened the legality and accessibility of abortion. For example, *Ms.* relaunched its abortion petition in 2006 when the Supreme Court was considering *Gonzalez v. Carhart*. This bill, which passed, upheld a federal ban on the so-called “partial-birth abortion” (this jargon refers to the medical procedure called intact dilation and extraction, a procedure most often used in late-term abortions to preserve the health or life of the woman). *Ms.* relaunched the petition in 2022, after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.⁷³

⁶⁹ Carol Sanger, *About Abortion: Terminating Pregnancy in Twenty-First-Century America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 22.

⁷⁰ The Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade* was framed by two previous decisions: *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) and *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972). In these rulings, respectively, the Court struck down state laws that banned the sale of contraceptives to married couples, and then extended to unmarried couples, under a couple’s constitutional right to privacy. *Roe v. Wade* “was an extension of *Griswold* and assumed that a woman could exercise her conscience, but she was expected to do so in consultation with her physician” and regulated by a trimester categorization, that allowed more freedom for the woman to decide, with her doctor, the earlier she was in the pregnancy (Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 8). Scholars and activists, such as Dorothy Roberts, have long challenged the positioning of abortion under the realm of “privacy,” arguing that such a framing favours White middle class women who have more opportunities and privileges needed to access privacy. For more details see Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997); See also, Johanna Schoen, *Abortion After Roe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 10.

⁷¹ Self, *All in the Family*, 136.

⁷² Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 10. Black feminists instigated this shift in the wider feminist movement toward a more inclusive understanding of intersectional oppressions. This discourse recognizes the history of forced sterilizations that disproportionately impacted Black women and women of colour. Reproductive justice also advocates for better social welfare policies to help parents raise children. Chapter four discusses sterilization abuse.

⁷³ In June of 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. The *Dobbs* ruling ended the federal right to abortion in the United States.

The EWC and Abortion

The EWC officially maintained a non-position on abortion rights to avoid ruffling feathers within its ranks. However, this curated external silence did not reflect a silence among biblical feminists, and the EWC archives depict a vibrant internal conversation about abortion from the coalition's inception. EWC participants held various views regarding the religious acceptability of abortion. Some members believed that abortion was biblically prohibited, while others felt that abortion was a difficult decision that was ultimately up to individual women. In 1976, founding member Evon Bachaus composed a letter to her fellow Temporary Steering Committee (TSC) members responding to questions the TSC had received about how the group ought to address issues of "lesbianism" and "abortion" in their communities.⁷⁴ Bachaus discouraged any position on these topics for the EWC, explaining, "We are just a 'baby' organization in the process of getting organized and at this point we are not ready as a group to develop a definitive position on anything."⁷⁵ Bachaus recognized that this silence might mean the emergent coalition "may lose some potential members to whom a certain position on those subjects means so much that they will not join with any group that is not on the 'right' side."⁷⁶ Bachaus and the TSC also feared backlash from the evangelical community. The TSC understood that the coalition's reputation within the evangelical community would impact their coalition's authority, credibility, and ability to recruit new members:

As an organizational thing, I would like to point out that the news stories covered in the Christian press often remind me of the National Inquirer. Any action on either lesbianism or abortion would be sure to find its way into the headlines of any news coverage no matter what else EWC did. So CHRISTIAN HERALD, MOODY MONTHLY & CHRISTIAN LIFE (whose news pages have ignored us up to now) would read "EWC Approves Lesbianism and Abortion" or "EWC condemns Lesbianism and Abortion" or "EWC Refuses to Take Stand on Lesbianism and Abortion" so we lose or we lose or else we lose.⁷⁷

The Steering Committee knew that abortion was already an important and controversial issue for early EWC members and the wider evangelical community as they were developing their coalition. EWC founders feared any position on abortion would be detrimental to the coalition's success because it could cause a schism or even an exodus of members. Also dreading retaliation in the evangelical press, the TSC decided to jettison any public position regarding abortion. Instead, they advocated a non-position on abortion that would shape the EWC's future.

Despite Bachaus' fear of the evangelical press' retaliation in the mid-1970s, the EWC's internal dialogue mirrored an ambiguity regarding abortion in the broader evangelical community. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, American evangelicals discussed diverse and discordant beliefs regarding the morality and acceptability of abortion.⁷⁸ EWC members grew up in an evangelical climate not yet decided on abortion. However, in the 1980s, evangelical opposition to abortion

⁷⁴ Evon Bachaus was EWC's first national coordinator from 1975-78.

⁷⁵ AWTs: EEWC Archives, Letter to TSC members, 11 May 1976, Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Capitalization in original.

⁷⁸ This history is expanded in the section "Evangelicals and Abortion."

became the standard, and the general evangelical narrative tended to ignore past theological discrepancies. Yet tensions regarding abortion persisted within the EWC. In 1980, the EWC's national coordinator Joyce Erickson wrote a guest editorial for *Update* acknowledging and attempting to assuage internal conflicts stemming from divergent Christian views about the acceptability of abortion:

EWC members hold different positions on abortion... homosexuality or any other social issue that might be named: but we believe that discussing these issues, always in the light of our understanding of what the Scriptures might have to say to affect our decisions, is responsible stewardship of our talents. We may disagree on these issues, but we do agree that, whatever position we take, we are responsible to the Lord of creation as revealed in the Scriptures.⁷⁹

Recognizing the plurality of biblical interpretations among Christian members, Erickson argued that allowing diverse views on these "social issues" was necessary for the EWC's success. For Erickson, contradictory opinions could co-exist amenable among members if the participants adhered to the EWC's governing principles, including respect for the final authority of Scripture.⁸⁰ If members developed and supported their opinions through their personal understanding of God's message in Scripture, Erickson believed the coalition's broader collective ideology would remain intact.⁸¹

Erickson's suggestions ultimately did not resolve internal tensions, which continued to threaten the coalition. In 1981, editors at *Ms.* magazine notified EWC leadership that *Ms.* would endorse the Evangelical Women's Caucus as one of three organizations to receive Christmas contributions. Upon receiving this news, the EWC executive council conferred among themselves: "The other two [organizations] are pro-choice organizations. If this goes in it will be the December issue...if it does appear, be prepared. We did nothing to solicit this."⁸² EWC leadership braced themselves for potential backlash from within their organization and from the wider evangelical community because of this peripheral affiliation with abortion advocacy groups. The EWC leaders' apprehension surrounding this honourable recognition by *Ms.* illuminates the potential volatility regarding the abortion debate simmering below the surface of the EWC's official non-position.

In 1984, EWC leaders surveyed coalition members to ask if the coalition "should delve into other social justice issues" beyond its ongoing support for the Equal Rights Amendment.⁸³ One hundred and thirty-four of 650 EWC members responded to the mail-in poll, with responses evenly split on whether the EWC should engage in more social justice activism.⁸⁴ Founding member Sharon Gallagher reflected on the survey results in 1985, noting, "[n]ot surprisingly, the two issues

⁷⁹ Joyce Erickson, "A Guest Editorial: Social Issues: How EWC Grapples," *Update*, vol. 4, no. 4 (December 1980), 2.

⁸⁰ See chapter one for a discussion on the EWC's views of Scripture, as outlined in the coalition's Statement of Faith. Chapter five addresses the EWC's changing view of Scripture by the late 1980s.

⁸¹ EWC members frequently used the encompassing term "social issues" to refer to abortion, gay rights, race, the Equal Rights Amendment, and/or nuclear power. These issues are sometimes differentiated from "political" issues. See footnote 2 in this chapter.

⁸² AWTG: EEWCA Archives, Letter from Florence Brown to the executive council, 21 October 1981, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 8.

⁸³ Letter to Members, 1986, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; See also, Spring, "Gay Rights Resolution Divides Members of Evangelical Women's Caucus," *Christianity Today*, vol. 30, no. 14 (1986), 40. For further discussion on this poll and its results, see chapter three.

cited most often as potentially divisive were abortion and homosexuality.”⁸⁵ Some members responded to the 1984 poll directly, expressing anti-abortion sentiments. For example, one EWC member emphatically wrote, “Not all Biblical feminists are liberals and those of us who are anti-abortion are very disgusted by the secular feminist movement’s insensitivity to our views.”⁸⁶ Others contended that abortion was an important social issue aligned with Jesus’ summons in the New Testament to fight for social justice. One member supported social justice activism for the EWC, including abortion rights, identifying “[a]s a Christian who is committed to social justice as part of the New Covenant-- ‘to love one another as I love you’ in practice...”⁸⁷ Notably, members were already aware of internal diversity before leaders published the poll results in *Update*. One participant wrote, “I’d drop out in a moment if EWC were to oppose abortion; some of my valued colleagues would drop out if EWC were to campaign for abortion mandated by Christian principles.”⁸⁸ This member suggested, “[s]uch issues are things we should discuss for information and insight but not take official positions about.”⁸⁹

Another unspoken factor in the EWC’s internal abortion discussion was that some EWC members were having abortions and others were impacted by the abortion experiences of women in their lives. In 1994, founding EWC member Anne Eggebroten published *Abortion: My Choice, God’s Grace: Christian Women Tell Their Stories*. Eggebroten’s book was an edited volume chronicling Christians’ experiences with abortion. Although many of the abortion stories were anonymous (recorded under pseudonyms), Eggebroten advertised her project in EWC’s *Update* and requested that EWC members share their experiences for her book. Eggebroten recognized contributions from the EWC network in the book’s acknowledgements.⁹⁰ Documenting the abortion experiences of women in the EWC, Eggebroten also included women who identified as members of “conservative” churches.⁹¹ According to Eggebroten, “thousands of women in conservative, born-again congregations find themselves in difficult situations where they choose abortion as the least painful or most responsible decision” each year.⁹² Conservative EWC members shared abortion stories only under the protection of anonymity, highlighting an ongoing and real threat of retribution or expulsion from their Christian communities. Members’ fears and silences contributed to and shaped the EWC’s coalitional silence. Significantly, these stories also demonstrate that EWC membership mirrored the wider American population regarding abortion: women across all religious affiliations, races, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds have abortions.⁹³ Women’s real experiences of abortion in the United States consistently cross the seemingly rigid battle lines of the abortion debate.

⁸⁵ Sharon Gallagher, “EWC Opinion Poll: What Does our Diversity Mean?”, *Update*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1985), 3.

⁸⁶ AWTs: EEWC Archives, “Results of EWCI Membership Poll,” 1984, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 3 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ AWTs: EEWC Archives, “Results of EWCI Membership Poll,” 1984, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 3.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “Reports from the EEWC Network,” *Update*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Fall 1990), 12; Eggebroten, *Abortion: My Choice, God’s Grace: Christian Women Tell Their Stories*, ed. Anne Eggebroten (California: New Paradigm Books, 1994), ix-x.

⁹¹ See for example, Bonnie Moser, “Trying Freedom, Finding Myself,” *Abortion: My Choice*, 101-107; and Claudia Davis, “A Pastor’s Wife Faces Truth,” *Abortion: My Choice*, 73-84.

⁹² Eggebroten, *Abortion: My Choice*, 5.

⁹³ The Guttmacher Institute’s recent survey of American women of reproductive age found that one in four women will have an abortion before the age of 45. Rachel Jones, a Guttmacher researcher, noted, “This statistic confirms

EWC leaders promoted the coalition's non-position on abortion because of the (very real) potential repercussions of taking a stand. EWC leaders also encouraged impartiality for members because abortion was considered peripheral to the coalition's goals. In the 1984 poll, many members voiced concerns that taking a stand on abortion would "dilute" the EWC's essential goal of promoting women's equality in the church, home, and society.⁹⁴ Maintaining a neutral position on specific topics must be part of any coalition's collective ideology if the subject is understood to be outside of the scope of the group's goals or agenda. Designating a peripheral or potentially distracting subject as "off-limits" for the group mediates conflict around divisive issues. To be successful among members with opposing perspectives, a coalition needs its members to feel more strongly about the group's stated purpose than about individual differences or conflicts. Establishing a neutral position on a controversial subject can appease tensions and allow diverse participants to maintain membership in the coalition without feeling excluded or ignored.⁹⁵ This tactic is only effective, however, if the issue is not a priority for the coalition. If a specific view of abortion had been a central component of the EWC's overall agenda (as abortion eventually became for both the feminist and evangelical movements), neutrality on the subject could diminish trust in the coalition's ability to achieve its goals. Such a position could lead members to lose faith in the coalition and the leadership's competency.⁹⁶ However, the TSC relegated abortion to the periphery of the EWC from its first meetings, defining the EWC as "Christians who see feminism as implicit in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ."⁹⁷ According to the TSC, the purpose of the coalition was to "provide a vehicle which can address a wide range of issues, such as recognition of the Biblical basis of feminism, the full utilization of women's talents in religious employment, the elimination of stereo-typing in religious education and the affirmation of the freedom of every woman to respond to God's particular calling for her life."⁹⁸ Abortion was not a principal pillar of the initial coalition.

Founding member Letha Scanzoni confirmed that abortion was not a priority for the early movement in an interview with me:

We for the most part held a pro-choice view, but it wasn't of particular significance as compared to other issues at that time that were of greater concern to evangelicals, especially a reinterpretation of Scripture on "women's roles." We saw our various views

what we already know: Abortion is a normal part of the reproductive lives of people with the capacity to become pregnant" ("One in Four US Women Expected to Have an Abortion in Their Lifetime," Guttmacher Institute, April 17, 2024). This statement is not meant to deny the fact that race, ethnicity, age, socio-economic background, and other factors contribute to the likelihood of a woman obtaining an abortion in her lifetime. However, women across all demographics have abortions.

⁹⁴ At least ten of the recorded 1984 poll responses mentioned the threat of "dilution" of the essential message or goal of biblical feminism: women's equality and leadership in the church, home, and society. Many members specifically feared that this "dilution" would impact the EWC's ability to bring this message to women in more "conservative churches" ("Results of EWCI Membership Poll").

⁹⁵ Bystydzienski and Schacht, "Introduction," 8-9.

⁹⁶ Gawerc, "Coalition-Building," 3.

⁹⁷ AWTs: EEWC Archives, "Press Release: Evangelical Women's Caucus National Office," 1975-6, Series 1C, Box 1, Folder 7.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

as a matter of Christian liberty and thus were open to one another's different opinions on abortion.⁹⁹

By identifying abortion "as a matter of Christian liberty," Scanzoni indicated that the acceptability of abortion was an individual decision that members made through careful consideration and interpretation of Scripture, with guidance from the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁰ As a coalition, the EWC's focus was on advocating for the inherent equality of the sexes in biblical creation narratives and promoting female leadership and authority in the broader society.¹⁰¹ However, Scanzoni's response also highlighted another element of the EWC's coalition-building project that shaped how the group navigated the abortion question. Scanzoni's quote suggests that early EWC leaders held "progressive" social values, accepting and encouraging conservative members to join, but not necessarily sharing (or supporting) conservative social and political views.¹⁰²

EWC leaders advanced progressive social views from the EWC's inception as a task force under Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA). At the inaugural meeting, founding member Nancy Hardesty proposed a resolution (which was not passed by the wider ESA) that affirmed "a woman's right to choose to terminate a pregnancy, especially in the case of rape, incest, or when it threatened the health of the mother."¹⁰³ Hardesty's proposal advocated support for abortion rights with the caveat that "the church should urge women to deliberate carefully before opting for abortion while offering objective counseling, support, and assistance to pregnant women and single mothers."¹⁰⁴ Thus, while Hardesty drew on mainstream feminist rhetoric, which by then utilized the language of a "woman's right to choose," she argued that Christian principles should mediate abortion decisions in conversation with a woman's church.

Hardesty and Scanzoni represented abortion similarly in their groundbreaking book *All We're Meant to Be* (1974). The authors addressed the acceptability of various methods of birth

⁹⁹ Scanzoni, Email Interview.

¹⁰⁰ Scanzoni discusses this understanding of Christian liberty in *All We're Meant to Be*, 17-18, 249. What Scanzoni terms "Christian liberty," or, that individual decisions guided by God and Scripture should be respected among EWC members was reflected among the 1984 poll responses. For example, one member argued that the EWC should "not take organizational positions on any issues other than ERA" noting: "we are a heterogenous group, at least insofar as our denominational affiliations, and...our membership both corporately and individually represents a spectrum of opinions on 'issues' such as those presented as 'resolutions' in 1984...we are corporately and individually able to support these varieties of expression from our biblical and theological convictions and our firmly-held personal opinions" ("Results of EWCI Membership Poll").

¹⁰¹ The previous chapter discussed the difficulties EWC founders faced in establishing a feminist evangelical coalition that questioned dominant evangelical interpretations of Scripture, including promoting biblically ordained gender equality. The EWC faced further challenges advocating for this equality to be reflected in women's opportunities in the home, church, and society. These priorities took precedent in the early movement, according to Scanzoni.

¹⁰² Here I am referring to "progressive" values which include support for gay civil rights and abortion. "Conservative" values, while supporting gendered equality in this example, do not support traditional progressive values such as gay rights or abortion rights. I acknowledge that using the term "conservative" to describe a person fighting for gender equality challenges our binary of the social and political values affiliated with this term. However, this term best describes these individuals' positions on other subjects, including abortion and gay rights.

¹⁰³ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 13. Despite this early resolution of the task force, EWC discussed and actively rejected taking an official position on abortion after the group stepped out from under the umbrella of the ESA in 1974. This position is examined in detail in the next section of this chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

control for Christians by drawing on the Bible, secular feminist ideas, the availability and effectiveness of contemporary reproductive technologies, and theological perspectives. Hardesty and Scanzoni assumed that, for Christians, the decision to have an abortion would be “agonizing” and, relative to questions about birth control, would be morally more complex: “the hardest decisions related to reproduction concern abortion.”¹⁰⁵ However, the authors suggest that women are moral agents in making such decisions, acknowledging “this great responsibility that God has placed in our hands.”¹⁰⁶ They argue, therefore, that questions about restricting fertility ought to be considered “with a sense of stewardship and accountability to God.”¹⁰⁷ Abortion, though presented as the most fraught decision a woman might make in her reproductive life, is not presented as morally reprehensible or prohibited for Christian women in all circumstances. The authors argue that there are divergent Christian opinions on this subject, perhaps deflecting some of the potential controversy of their perspective by noting there was not yet a consensus among Christians regarding abortion. The authors note that for some Christians, abortion is “nothing short of murder,” while for others, “it can be a humane, merciful act fully in accord with Christian principles.”¹⁰⁸ Scanzoni and Hardesty conclude that it is best to defer to the ruling of the Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) for a morally acceptable answer to the question of abortion rights. The authors consider this decision “wise not only with respect to a woman’s right to privacy and leaving the choice with her, but in interpreting the Constitution to refer to postnatal life only with regard to the rights of individuals.”¹⁰⁹

Scanzoni and Hardesty were certainly not the only EWC members who promoted abortion rights. Often openly supporting abortion rights in their activism outside of the EWC, many EWC leaders were concurrent and active participants in the National Organization for Women.¹¹⁰ Crossover between NOW and EWC membership has continued throughout the EWC’s existence and extended beyond advocacy for abortion rights. EWC leaders have incentivized this crossover by reimbursing EWC members for travel expenses incurred through collaborating with NOW.¹¹¹ EWC leadership also accepted invitations to advertise and recruit new members at local and national NOW conferences by hosting an information booth at these events (when the EWC could afford the financial expense for this space).¹¹² For EWC leaders, their coalition’s objectives were

¹⁰⁵ Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be*, 143.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ For example, founding member Anne Eggebroten was an advocate for abortion rights through NOW and in her broader activism. In 1994 she published a book reflecting this advocacy, titled *Abortion: My Choice, God’s Grace: Christian Women Tell Their Stories*. Susan Garrison (EWC national coordinator, 1990) participated in the March for Women’s Lives in Washington D.C. in April of 1989, carrying a sign that read “Christians for Choice!” She wrote about this experience in *Update* (“Members on the Move,” vol. 13 no. 12, (Fall 1989), 10). I focus on NOW at length here because many EWC members had a strong relationship with NOW; I do not mean to suggest that NOW speaks for or represents all liberal feminists during this period.

¹¹¹ “Guidelines for EWC/NOW Working Relationship,” 29 Oct. 1983, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 1.

¹¹² Letter to Carolyn and Florence from Letha, 11 Oct. 1979, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 6. Anne Eggebroten mailed packets of responses from EWC’s *Ms.* ads to other EWC leaders in May of 1987. The responses showed reader interest in conversing across religious and secular lines and general curiosity about Christian messages as compatible with feminist ideals. See for example, AWTS: EEW Archives, “Addendum to Ms. Report,” (1987), Series 1C, Box 7 Folder 4.

compatible with NOW's, and EWC leaders considered this relationship to be mutually beneficial. They also believed this relationship reflected historical evangelical ideals, as nineteenth-century evangelicals "held some very radical positions," including abolitionism and women's suffrage.¹¹³ The EWC did benefit from this relationship in many ways: new memberships and newsletter subscriptions flooded into the EWC from NOW events. The EWC also advertised in *Ms.*, receiving many positive responses from its ads until 1989, when the magazine's new leadership removed all advertisements from *Ms.*¹¹⁴

NOW, in turn, also benefitted from this relationship. The EWC's contributions to and influence within NOW are perhaps most visible during the final push for the ratification of the ERA in 1982. The EWC joined NOW's "Countdown Campaign" for the ERA "in an attempt to offset the negative effects of a small-but-vocal group of conservative Christians on this issue," specifically Schlafly's Eagle Forum and Falwell's Moral Majority.¹¹⁵ EWC members Florence Brown, Phyllis Bailey, and Britt Vanden Eykel traveled to Oklahoma (a state which had not ratified the ERA) in January 1982 to work with local EWC participants and National NOW members. EWC members worked tirelessly "following up contacts, lobbying legislators, and developing media opportunities" to advocate for the ratification of the ERA.¹¹⁶ While in Oklahoma, Brown and Vanden Eykel "participated in a press conference with National NOW President Eleanor Smeal...to announce evangelical support for the ERA."¹¹⁷ EWC members also worked diligently alongside NOW in Illinois, Florida, and North Carolina leading up to the deadline for ratification of the ERA on June 30, 1982.¹¹⁸ During this collaboration, NOW leaders hired Vanden Eykel and Bailey at NOW's Washington D.C. office to help the National Organization for Women develop "active evangelical support [for the ERA] in the unratified states."¹¹⁹

Though often not prioritized in histories of NOW, the National Organization for Women was concerned with the role of religion and religious institutions from its inception.¹²⁰ By the early 1970s, NOW identified religious institutions as an important "target for action" in the struggle for gender equality.¹²¹ According to Women's Studies scholar and activist Karen Bojar, "NOW leaders clearly understood that religion was a powerful institution in American life; to achieve gender equality and combat homophobia, major changes in religious attitudes toward gender roles and

¹¹³ Erickson, "A Guest Editorial," 2. See chapter one for more details on nineteenth century evangelical social activism.

¹¹⁴ Letter to Britt, 8 Dec. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 4; "Council Meeting July 1988: Administrator's Report," Series 1B, Box 5, Folder, 2. In a letter to the executive council in January 1988, the author notes that the EWC continues to get "a good response" from *Ms.* ads: "anywhere from 20-35/month with two of three memberships resulting" ("Letter to Council Sisters," 5 Jan. 1988, Series 1C, Box 7, Folder 6). For more information about the challenges *Ms.* Magazine faced with advertising, see Amy Erdman Farrell, "From a Tarantula on a Banana Boat to a Canary in a Mine: 'Ms. Magazine' as a Cautionary Tale in a Neoliberal Age," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 30, no. 2 (2011): 393-405.

¹¹⁵ Britt Vanden Eykel, "Providing a Strong Christian Presence," *Update*, vol. 6, no. 1 (March-May 1982), 1.

¹¹⁶ Florence Brown, "Opposition Takes Many Forms," *Update*, vol. 6, no. 1 (March-May 1982), 5.

¹¹⁷ Vanden Eykel, "Providing a Strong Christian Presence," 4.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Brown, "Opposition Takes Many Forms," 5.

¹²⁰ See footnote 127 in chapter one for a discussion of some scholars who do examine the history of religion within the women's movement.

¹²¹ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 76. Other early targets included "employment equality, educational opportunities, social equality, media portrayals of women, poverty, [and] equal rights" (*Ibid.*).

sexuality were essential.”¹²² To focus the necessary resources, planning, and expertise toward its targets for action, NOW leaders created individual task forces; the “Ecumenical Task Force on Women and Religion” was formed to address gender equality in religious spaces.¹²³ Many EWC members were influential within NOW’s task forces. Founding EWC member Evon Bachaus led NOW’s Minnesota Task Force on Religion in 1975; Britt Vanden Eykel, EWC’s national coordinator from 1986 to 1990, was a member of NOW’s ERA Advisory Committee on Religion and established a working relationship with the chair of NOW’s National Task Force on Women and Religion from 1976-1982, Georgia Fuller. Fuller joined the EWC in 1983, and Vanden Eykel sent a letter personally welcoming her to the coalition. In this letter, Vanden Eykel expressed the EWC’s continued “interest in supporting [Fuller’s] efforts in the Women and Religion Task Force” and acknowledged that Fuller’s “work with NOW has provided much needed understanding to the women’s movement about religion and the opportunities for cooperation.”¹²⁴

Although many EWC leaders encouraged these connections, not all members supported the EWC’s relationship with NOW.¹²⁵ In December of 1975, a Christian woman requested to join the EWC’s mailing list, praising the accomplishments of the first national conference, and seeking “to encourage” the coalition’s work. This letter called attention to potential problems involved in the EWC’s relationship with NOW, specifically related to abortion discourses. The inquisitive subscriber wrote: “I have been observing and studying the women’s rights movement since it began but have not joined any organization pertaining to it. Two elements have kept me from promoting NOW; namely, their approval of abortion and lesbianism.”¹²⁶ However, EWC leaders continued to encourage members to collaborate with secular feminist groups to promote mutual goals, including the ratification of the ERA. To help mediate any internal conflict, the EWC established a committee to create guidelines for the “EWC/NOW Working Relationship.”¹²⁷

By holding more progressive social views and supporting progressive activism, EWC leaders represented an almost insular group within the broader coalition. This cohesive dynamic is not uncommon within coalitions. Coalition leaders comprise an organization’s “core,” which consists of “national leaders or boards of directors, executive positions, and administrative committees.”¹²⁸ Core members have access to structural power through participation in formative and significant meetings, they often “have personal relationships with other national leaders” (both within their own coalition and other organizations in the wider movement), and they enjoy increased mobility within the organization as they move seamlessly between chapters or local groups and the national council.¹²⁹ As a group, the core is often ideologically consistent and least likely to fracture or split:

¹²² Bojar, *Feminist Organizing Across the Generations* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 50.

¹²³ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 76.

¹²⁴ AWTs: EEWc Archives, Letter from Britt Vanden Eykel to Georgia Fuller, 25 Feb. 1983, Series 1C, Box 4, Folder 7.

¹²⁵ This relationship was not always easy or amicable among EWC leaders either. For example, the archives show that one of the committee members of the EWC/NOW Working Relationship felt “that EWC should have no relationship with NOW” and did not wish to participate in creating guidelines to build this relationship (“Letter to Jeanne, Phyllis, Tammi and Britt,” 19 Sept. 1983, Series 1C, Box 9, Folder 6).

¹²⁶ AWTs: EEWc Archives, Letter to Evangelical Women’s Caucus, 23 Dec. 1975, Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 2.

¹²⁷ “Guidelines for EWC/NOW Working Relationship,” 29 Oct. 1983, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 1.

¹²⁸ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 27. Following Kretschmer, I use the language of open systems organizational theory (“core” and “periphery”). This language helps highlight the distinction between leaders and members in the EWC.

¹²⁹ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 124.

“[a]fter all, the organization’s written rules and procedures are shaped by these...self-selected members.”¹³⁰ The rank-and-file members, or those “with less structural power,” make up “the periphery” of a coalition.¹³¹ Among this subgroup, members are more likely to leave the group because they share less ideological alignment with one another and the core: “[t]he wider the gap between a peripheral group’s collective identity and the national organization’s core, the more pressure there will be to exit.”¹³²

The relationships between the EWC’s leaders and members influenced the way EWC leaders discussed and represented abortion. Understanding the subject to be divisive and peripheral to the movement’s larger goals, EWC leaders promoted a strategic official silence on abortion rights, while providing space for members to advocate their individual beliefs outside of the EWC’s parameters. In Bachaus’ 1976 TSC letter, previously cited, Bachaus noted: “in the interests of freedom of speech, we do allow people to give their individual views, as long as they are sure to mention that EWC does not have a position.”¹³³ Scanzoni likewise promoted free speech and expression of individual opinions in her understanding of “Christian liberty,” quoted above. Thus, while EWC leaders did not make abortion rights a priority for the early coalition, neither did they attempt to quash individual views or activism on the subject. In Bachaus’ letter, however, she emphasized a significant exception to the EWC’s non-position for activism and individual views: “our position on the authority of Scripture as stated in the press release” was a non-negotiable priority for EWC members.¹³⁴ The EWC’s support for Scriptural authority was fundamental to the coalition because, as evangelicals, this was of primary concern to many individual members, and this declaration was necessary to sustain participation and intelligibility within the wider evangelical movement.¹³⁵ The leaders’ support and encouragement of members’ individual views and activism outside the boundaries of the EWC were part of their strategy to maintain unity within the group by recognizing and accepting differences among their ranks. At the same time, EWC leaders gently reminded members of the EWC’s distinct priorities: biblically ordained gender equality and promotion of women’s leadership in the church, society, and the home.

As the EWC’s core continued to curate a relationship with NOW and Ms., the EWC’s strategic silence on abortion posed a potential problem for the coalition within the mainstream feminist movement. In the 1970s, vocal support for abortion rights had become a litmus test for valid membership in the feminist movement. Abortion rights advocacy became part of the “ideological congruence” required of participating coalitions, a defining boundary for feminist acceptance and legitimacy.¹³⁶ The National Organization for Women exemplified this boundary-policing in at least two feminist organizations: the Women’s Equity Action League (WEAL) and

¹³⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 31.

¹³³ Letter to TSC members, 11 May 1976, Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 2.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ See chapter one for a more detailed examination of EWC’s relationship with Scripture.

¹³⁶ Gawerc, “Coalition-Building,” 3; Kretschmer notes by the early 1970s, “support for abortion rights had become settled dogma in the feminist movement” (*Fighting for Now*, 53). For more on how abortion also became integral to the Democratic Party, see Daniel K. Williams. “The Partisan Trajectory of the American Pro-Life Movement: How a Liberal Catholic Campaign Became a Conservative Evangelical Cause.” *Religions* 6, no. 2 (2015): 451–75; and Spruill, *Divided We Stand*.

Feminists for Life (FFL). WEAL and FFL were both created by (then current or former) participants of NOW who disagreed with NOW's support of abortion rights and sought to provide an alternative space for feminist activism outside of abortion advocacy.¹³⁷ WEAL was established in 1968 in direct response to NOW's endorsement of abortion rights. WEAL's more moderate and conservative feminist founders identified the abortion debate as a distraction from the original goals of the women's liberation movement: the struggle for equal rights in education and employment.¹³⁸ However, just four years after its founding, WEAL changed its position to support abortion rights, joining "nearly all feminist organizations [which] were active in the fight to institutionalize and protect abortion access."¹³⁹ In a letter to its organization's members, WEAL leaders retracted the coalition's earlier neutral position on abortion rights and declared that taking "'no position' has aligned itself with those who say 'no abortion.'"¹⁴⁰ Therefore, the leaders declared their support for abortion rights in solidarity with the wider feminist movement's fight for repeal of abortion laws. This shift in WEAL ideology and advocacy was necessary for the group to remain "aligned with the narrowing feminist boundaries" as the requirement to support abortion rights hardened in the wider movement.¹⁴¹ This transformation in WEAL's ideology represents not only how widespread the abortion issue had become in the movement but also "how the feminist boundary had been reshaped by abortion rights;" WEAL could not maintain its feminist status or its coalition membership without conceding support for the repeal of abortion laws.¹⁴²

Feminists for Life's historical trajectory differs from that of WEAL because FFL never capitulated to pressure to support abortion rights. FFL's nonconformance ultimately led to the coalition's expulsion from the mainstream feminist community. The founders of FFL, Patricia Goltz and Cathy Callahan, were both members of NOW. However, they opposed NOW's support for abortion rights, believing "that women's capacity to bear children was an important trait to be valued, not undermined with reproductive rights rhetoric."¹⁴³ In 1972, Goltz and Callahan created FFL as a "space for conservative and moderate women" to engage with the feminist movement.¹⁴⁴ They maintained their memberships within NOW because they agreed with the coalition's larger itinerary.¹⁴⁵ However, in the early 1970s, Roman Catholic organizations dominated the anti-abortion movement, and an influx of Catholic women shaped FFL's trajectory. New and "devout" Catholic members provided essential resources and authority to the FFL in the anti-abortion campaign; however, "they were also less interested in maintaining a place in the feminist movement."¹⁴⁶

As incoming FFL members deprioritized the coalition's ties to other feminist coalitions, the anti-abortion movement was also changing. Evangelicals entered the movement in force in the

¹³⁷ Kretschmer, "Shifting Boundaries," 897.

¹³⁸ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 44-5.

¹³⁹ Kretschmer, "Shifting Boundaries," 894.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 905.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 904.

¹⁴³ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 52.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 51-2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

early 1980s, shifting the “pro-life” movement toward conservatism.¹⁴⁷ FFL founders initially attempted “to resist spilling over to the religious right movement” when they joined the anti-abortion conversation.¹⁴⁸ However, this proved futile because the “religious pro-life movement” provided support and resources that kept the FFL afloat.¹⁴⁹ Because FFL refused to support abortion rights and increasingly appealed to conservative religious participants, NOW rejected any partnership, affiliation, or alliance with Feminists for Life. In 1974, the Columbus chapter of NOW formally expelled one of the founders of FFL, resulting in the departure of both FFL founders and one other NOW/FFL participant from the organization.¹⁵⁰ As the leading voice in the mainstream feminist movement in the United States at this time, the National Organization for Women disproportionately influenced and sustained “correct” feminist ideology for coalition membership. NOW required other feminist coalitions to support legal abortion as part of the shared principles of the feminist movement, quashing collaborations between groups who refused to adhere to this ideology and denying the feminist status of such groups. NOW (r)jected Feminists for Life and other “pro-life” groups from participating in the wider feminist conversation by withholding NOW membership from those involved with such groups. NOW’s abortion advocacy also required groups that were previously neutral, such as WEAL, to vocalize support for abortion rights.

Considering the fates of WEAL and FFL, it is curious that liberal feminists did not exclude members of the Evangelical Women’s Caucus from the broader feminist community, despite the EWC’s non-position on abortion. As previously mentioned, the founders of the EWC personally supported abortion rights and participated in NOW’s abortion activism, which likely contributed to the continued relationship between NOW and the EWC. Additionally, EWC leaders actively cultivated and maintained a positive relationship with NOW by incentivizing individual EWC members’ participation in NOW events, specifically rallying members in support of the ERA. Any leniency granted to the EWC from NOW was also likely a result of the EWC’s identification as an “evangelical feminist” organization. Members of the secular feminist movement were aware that such a designation included restrictions, as evangelical beliefs were becoming increasingly conspicuous within the American political, religious, and social landscape.¹⁵¹ Moreover, other religious women’s groups, such as FFL and Concerned Women for America (CWA), discussed later in this chapter, presented abortion as immoral and unChristian. Despite continuing to enforce its non-position on abortion, the EWC did not state unequivocally that abortion was immoral from a

¹⁴⁷ As Daniel K. Williams demonstrates, the early pro-life movement in the 1970s was dominated by “Catholic liberal, Democrats” (“The Partisan Trajectory,” 453). Williams explains that after the Second World War, “human rights ideology became an increasingly prominent part of American liberalism,” and Roman Catholic anti-abortion advocates viewed their activism as part of this broader discourse (454). Williams notes, “Catholic clergy began framing their campaign against abortion in the language of international human rights by speaking of the ‘right to life’ for the unborn” (Ibid). The changing anti-abortion movement is discussed in this chapter in the section, “Evangelicals and Abortion.”

¹⁴⁸ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 52.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵¹ Scholars have found that the American public was largely unaware of what evangelicals believed (or even that they existed) prior to the mid-1970s. However, during the 1976 election of Jimmy Carter, America’s first self-proclaimed “born-again” president, the national media began “a harried search both for an explanation for what exactly an evangelical Christian was and for a better grasp of the likelihood that there might be a portion of the country’s citizenry that actually shared Carter’s faith” (Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 2). News about evangelicals spread quickly, and Gallup and *Time* magazine declared 1976 to be “The Year of the Evangelical.”

Christian standpoint. As noted, leading evangelical feminists conceptualized abortion within a Christian frame as a heart-breaking decision, but one that was morally acceptable in some circumstances.¹⁵² Although the EWC's official silence on abortion diminished its influence within the feminist community, the secular feminist movement afforded the EWC notable leniency because of the coalition's unique positionality.

Interpreting the EWC's Strategic Silence

French philosopher Michel Foucault examined the power and ambiguity of silence. According to Foucault, "[t]here is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses."¹⁵³ Among different kinds of silences, the EWC's non-position on abortion rights was a political strategic silence. Communication studies scholar Barry Brummett notes that political strategic silence "violates expectations...[and] seems intentional and directed at an audience."¹⁵⁴ Brummett also explains that "[s]trategic silence draws the attribution of fairly predictable meanings: mystery, uncertainty, passivity, and relinquishment."¹⁵⁵ These attributions bind strategic political silences because of the role of speech in sustaining "[s]ocial and political relationships."¹⁵⁶ Brummett notes that "[t]hrough verbal discourse we coordinate and mediate our activities, define who we are and get a fix on the characters of others, and make significant symbols, forms, and rituals that grease the social wheels and define roles and responsibilities."¹⁵⁷ In this context, silence disrupts or denies the relationship between the social and the political, creating mystery about the government among the public.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the act of political speech creates the "political persona," the character constructed, with the help of the media, to portray an appropriate image of the political party, leader, or government.¹⁵⁹ Conversely,

Strategic silence...creates a passive persona. The persona may be acting, but if the persona is not communicating an interpretation of those actions to the public, then the persona is rhetorically passive. A silent, passive persona has relinquished control over defining and shaping the world...Silence allows unchecked inference about one's motive and actions.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵² The circumstantial morality of abortion, as noted, was represented in *All We're Meant to Be* by Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty. In this text, legitimate reasons for abortion ranged from "an unmarried coed who was carried away in the emotion of a moment she later regrets" to genetic test results showing fetal disabilities that the couple did not feel prepared to handle (142-3).

¹⁵³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1978), 27.

¹⁵⁴ Barry Brummett, "Towards a Theory of Silence as a Political Strategy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 66:3 (1980), 289.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 291.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 293.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 293-4.

The EWC's non-position on abortion reflects Brummett's three-part definition of strategic political silence. By the 1970s, abortion rights activism had become "settled ideology" in the feminist movement.¹⁶¹ In the 1980s, evangelicals came to expect their community to actively oppose abortion. The EWC's silence was a violation of expectations among both its parent communities by the early 1980s. Secondly, EWC leaders articulated the coalition's non-position for a specific audience, which included evangelicals, potential EWC members across more conservative Christian communities, and its current membership. Finally, EWC leaders feared that leading evangelicals would interpret the coalition's silence as passive support for abortion rights, a relinquishment of evangelical values.

While the feminist community interpreted WEAL's neutrality on abortion as an anti-abortion position, early EWC leaders predicted that evangelicals would interpret their silence as implicit consent or complicity for abortion rights. After the first TSC meeting, Evon Bachaus remarked: "Sadly, evangelicals have had such a strong reputation for condemning in very strong terms anything we disagree with that our silence may/will be interpreted as taking the most liberal position possible, but again, we can't help that."¹⁶² Such oppositional perceptions of neutral positions are possible because different audiences interpret each coalition's silence differently. Silence is an essential element of communication, yet more than verbal discourse, silence is prone to ambiguity "and susceptible to different interpretations," contingent on specific audiences and contexts.¹⁶³ WEAL, emerging from the liberal feminist movement (specifically in response to perceived gaps in NOW), had to remain intelligible to the feminist movement to retain relevance and authority, recruit new members, and communicate its message effectively to its broader community. By the mid-1970s, this meant that support for abortion rights had to be asserted because, as outlined above, vocalizing support for abortion rights had become integral to feminist activism by this time. Alternatively, the EWC was created in response to perceived gaps in the dominant evangelical culture, seeking to recruit evangelical Christian members. As such, the EWC sought to remain intelligible, authoritative, and credible, primarily within evangelical communities.¹⁶⁴ Bachaus knew that the expectation within evangelical culture was to be adamantly vociferous about topics that evangelicals opposed.¹⁶⁵ In the context of broader evangelical values,

¹⁶¹ Kretschmer, *Shifting Boundaries*, 894.

¹⁶² Letter to TSC members, 11 May 1976, Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 2.

¹⁶³ Adam Jaworski, *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives* (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1993), 47. In verbal discourse, conversely, intentionality can be explained and unpacked in more depth for clarity.

¹⁶⁴ Into its future, the EWC drew less on membership from the evangelical community. The coalition's changing relationship to evangelicalism is explained in more detail in chapter five.

¹⁶⁵ Historian George Marsden notes that the "American revolutionary experience" created two approaches to religion and politics in the new nation, which shaped later evangelical views. One group saw religion as "tribal and divisive" while the other, from which evangelicalism would grow, "saw a more positive role for Christianity in national life" (*Understanding Fundamentalism*, 87). The latter belief system emerged most powerfully in New England and drew on earlier Puritan ideals to support "Protestantism, Puritanism, representative government, virtue, and freedom" (*Ibid*). The Great Awakenings connected Puritanism with democratic ideals and "expanded the cultural influence of...evangelical Protestantism" (87). By the nineteenth century, Marsden notes that, "[e]specially in the North," a movement began to emerge that supported not only individual conversions across the country, but also "strongly favored applying Christian principles to the transformation of society" (88). Connecting personal morality to social reform became integral to nineteenth century evangelical activism, including temperance (24-6); See also Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale

silence was antithetical to the activism and evangelism that are inherent to evangelical identity.¹⁶⁶ Thus, as an evangelical coalition, the EWC was expected to be vocal about what they opposed and, therefore, the coalition's silence was perceived to be an implicit affirmation of abortion.

The EWC's strategic silence, paired with EWC members' own experiences of abortion, provides historiographical nuance to White American conservative evangelicalism during this period. Scholars often trace the emergence of conservative evangelical political mobilization to the mid- to late-1970s, coinciding with the rise of the Christian Right. As religious historian David Watt asserts, "evangelicalism was by 1975 a movement that no American who desired political power could safely ignore."¹⁶⁷ During this period, White conservative evangelicals connected religion, politics, and morality in their fight against "the moral decline of American society."¹⁶⁸ Under the ideological frame of "family values," the New Christian Right positioned the "traditional" nuclear family as the backbone of the American Christian nation.¹⁶⁹ "Family values" rhetoric framed extramarital sex and nontraditional gender roles as threats to the ideal family structure and, therefore, dangerous to the nation. The New Right thus ardently opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, feminism, homosexuality, abortion, and pornography.¹⁷⁰ Scholars also suggest that the New Right encouraged political unity as "conservative white evangelicals and Catholics [grew] impatient with the Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter, who toed a fine line between this emerging conservative morality and the Democratic Party's more liberal platform."¹⁷¹ By 1980, Ronald

University Press, 1989) for a discussion of how democratization is entwined with the development of American Christianity from the period of the American revolution.

¹⁶⁶ As noted in chapter one, activism is one of the four major tenets of evangelicalism as defined by David Bebbington and supported by the NAE.

¹⁶⁷ David Harrington Watt, *A Transforming Faith: Explorations of Twentieth-Century American Evangelicalism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 71.

¹⁶⁸ Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 103; Watt, *A Transforming Faith*, 68-71; Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 8; Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 198-207. As noted previously, a shift in the American political climate followed the Second World War, which created the landscape for the Christian Right by the late 1970s. After the war, Americans began to coalesce "around moral and political sensibilities: conservatives gravitated toward other conservatives, and liberals to other liberals," rather than along denominational lines (Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 59). Petro notes that this shift was caused by many factors, "including the expansion of higher education, greater geographic mobility, and the changing role of women in American society" (Ibid). See also Wuthnow, "Decline of Denominationalism," in *Restructuring*, 71-99.

¹⁶⁹ Dowland, *Family Values*, 2. Robert Self argues that debates about gender, sexuality, and the family transformed America during this period, shaping "how Americans conceived of the nation and the possibility of improving society" (*All in the Family*, 6). Importantly, Self asserts that race is another "catalyst" of political change during this period, as Black activism reshaped the broader political climate from the 1950s onward (Ibid). Self argues that race, sex, and gender are interconnected: "racial equality itself rested on questions of gender and family: many white Americans believed in the pathological gender roles and families of African Americans, and conversely, millions of black and Latino Americans were convinced that the future of their communities was linked to the strength of 'traditional' families" (7).

¹⁷⁰ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 205; Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 59; Hunter *American Evangelicalism*, 103-7.

¹⁷¹ Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 59. Scholars note that in the mid-1970s, Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign instigated American evangelical political engagement. Carter, a Southern Baptist from Georgia, was the first presidential candidate to identify as a "born-again" Christian bringing "widespread publicity...to the evangelical sector" (Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 199); See also Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 2-4. Davison Hunter suggests that Carter's 1976 presidency (and the media's declaration that 1976 was "The Year of the Evangelical" following Gallup Jr. meant that it was "[s]uddenly...acceptable and even socially desirable to become a

Reagan had successfully impressed the New Right with his “pro-life” stance, and White conservative evangelicals became “a crucial bloc of support” for the Republican Party, a relationship that endures today.¹⁷² However, evangelical feminists and the EWC are part of this history. The predominantly White membership of the EWC included conservative evangelicals within its ranks.¹⁷³ Yet the EWC supported feminism, endorsed the ERA, and did not actively oppose abortion. As a coalition at the intersection of evangelicalism and feminism, the history of the EWC blurs historical boundaries. Moreover, as demonstrated by conservative evangelical women who secretly obtained abortions, the blurring of these boundaries better reflects the lived experiences of historical actors themselves.

Evangelicals and Abortion

Before the passage of *Roe v. Wade*, there was no consolidated, unified, national anti-abortion movement. Such a movement was not necessary because abortion had been illegal in most American states for over a century. Roman Catholic organizations maintained a fragmented, though dedicated, opposition to abortion before 1973.¹⁷⁴ Based on Catholic Church tradition, natural law, and papal decrees, Catholics argued that abortion is murder because life begins at conception. Meanwhile, evangelicals looked to the Bible to determine the morality of abortion, and they found that Scripture was not clear on the subject.¹⁷⁵ In 1971, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) released a “Resolution on Abortion” which supported “the sanctity of human life, including fetal life” (an implicit rejection of the feminist rhetoric of “abortion on demand,” which

born-again Christian” (*American Evangelicalism*, 46). Marsden notes that “many conservative evangelicals were delighted” that Carter identified as an evangelical (*Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 242). See also Watt, *A Transforming Faith*, 68. However, throughout Carter’s presidency and “well into the 1970s evangelicals remained politically split,” with most northern evangelicals voting Republican and southern and western evangelicals voting Democratic (Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 23-4); See also David Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 1.

¹⁷² Dowland, *Family Values*, 2; Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 59; Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 238-9.

¹⁷³ By the early 1980s, some EWC chapters discussed creating new coalitions for their “conservative sisters” (Letter to Tammi Sawchuck from EWC Leadership, 3 Sept. 1983, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 12). However, no such separation occurred until the EWC passed the gay rights resolution in 1986, discussed in chapter three.

¹⁷⁴ For a history of the abortion movement before *Roe v. Wade*, including an illuminating depiction of its liberal roots, see Williams, “Partisan Trajectory.”

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 461. Many evangelicals thus saw no contradiction in affirming the moral acceptability of therapeutic abortion in the 1960s. For example, “The Symposium on the Control of Human Reproduction,” a 1968 conference of leading evangelical thinkers co-sponsored by Christianity Today and the Christian Medical Society, professed: “[t]he Bible does not expressly prohibit either contraception or abortion.” Regarding the acceptability of abortion, the evangelical committee of the Symposium was unable to reach a consensus, resolving: “Whether or not the performance of an induced abortion is sinful we are not agreed, but about the necessity and permissibility for it under certain circumstances we are in accord” (“A Protestant Affirmation on the Control of Human Reproduction.” *Christianity Today*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1968): 18-19). The circumstances for which abortion was considered permissible included the mental and physical health of the mother, potential fetal deformities, and pregnancy as a result of rape or incest, among others.

they found frivolous), while also advocating for a broad understanding of therapeutic abortions.¹⁷⁶ The SBC statement “call[ed] upon Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother.”¹⁷⁷

That same year, the NAE released a “Statement on Abortion” that also rejected “abortion on demand,” which they (incorrectly) defined as abortion “for reasons of personal convenience, social adjustment or economic advantage.”¹⁷⁸ The NAE statement recognized “the necessity for therapeutic abortions to safeguard the health or the life of the mother” and in cases of rape or incest.¹⁷⁹ The dominant evangelical understanding of abortion into the 1970s, which rebuffed (and often misrepresented) feminist activism, largely embraced therapeutic abortion as a necessary and acceptable means of reproductive healthcare in specific situations. As distinctions between conservative and progressive evangelical coalitions emerged in the 1970s, progressive evangelicals also subscribed to the belief that the Bible did not prohibit abortion. Ron Sider, a leading progressive evangelical, was not opposed to abortion in the early 1970s because he believed that “the Bible does not say the fetus is a person [so] we cannot assume that abortion is wrong.”¹⁸⁰ As previously noted above, leading evangelical feminists, including Scanzoni and Hardesty in *All We’re Meant to Be*, made similar arguments about abortion by drawing on Scripture.

Evangelicals developed their own coherent and fervent opposition to abortion.¹⁸¹ Francis Schaeffer, a popular evangelical thinker during this period, brought many conservative American evangelicals into the abortion conversation in the late 1970s. Schaeffer identified abortion as part of America’s moral decline into “secular humanism,” which included “women’s liberation, the ERA,

¹⁷⁶ Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on Abortion” (June 1971), in *Before Roe v. Wade: Voices that Shaped the Abortion Debate before the Supreme Court’s Ruling*, eds. Greenhouse and Siegel (New York: Kaplan Publishing, 2010), 72.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ National Association of Evangelicals, “Statement on Abortion” (1971), in Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before Roe*, 73.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ (Q’t’d in Brantley W. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 132). Sider later became a leading “pro-life” advocate among progressive evangelicals, an opinion outlined in his 1987 book *Completely Pro-Life: Building a Consistent Stance on Abortion, the Family, Nuclear Weapons, the Poor*.

¹⁸¹ Much early scholarship on evangelical engagement with abortion followed the narrative promoted by evangelical leaders themselves, which stated that abortion was “the issue that first drew the New Right together,” a main concern from its legalization in *Roe v. Wade*, and a major impetus for the formation of groups such as the Moral Majority, Concerned Women for America, and Family America Inc, among others (Kathy Rudy, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics*, Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1997, 47). See also Dochuk who notes that abortion was the catalyst for the New Right (*From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 345). More contemporary scholarship challenges this history of evangelical participation in the abortion debate, labeled “the abortion myth” by historian Randall Balmer. The “myth” that Balmer identified in this historical narrative was that an outrage over the immorality of abortion was the motivating force for the coalescing of evangelical political activism in the New Right. Balmer argues instead that the movement began “in response to attempts on the part of the Internal Revenue Service to rescind the tax-exempt status of whites-only segregation academies (many of them church sponsored) and Bob Jones University because of its segregationist policies.” Balmer notes that this blatant racism would not have gone over well among the wider evangelical community or American society, and thus the coalition was framed around the more “palatable” debate of the morality of abortion (Randall Balmer, “The Religious Right and the Abortion Myth,” *Politico*, May 10, 2022). For the progressive evangelical entrance into the debate in the 1980s, see Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 128.

gay rights, children's rights, abortion, sex education,...the separation of church and state, the loss of patriotism, and many of the other problems that are tearing America apart today."¹⁸² Jerry Falwell himself credits Schaeffer with convincing him to enter the anti-abortion conversation, which further popularized and validated anti-abortion discourses among conservative evangelicals.¹⁸³ Schaeffer, Falwell, and other leading conservative evangelicals in the rising Christian Right argued that abortion rights, gay rights, and feminism were causing national moral disorder through a dissolution of the "traditional family."¹⁸⁴ The emergent New Right called evangelicals to end American moral degeneration, building on a historically familiar narrative within evangelicalism. Evangelicals "had a long tradition of campaigning against sexual immorality and moral vices, so a campaign against abortion that was linked to a broader defense of sexual morality, moral order, and the restoration of Christian values in government appealed to them."¹⁸⁵

Conservative evangelical women participating in the Christian Right strengthened evangelical opposition to abortion. Leading evangelical Beverly LaHaye created Concerned Women for America as "an alternative to feminism and NOW" in 1979.¹⁸⁶ LaHaye felt that existing women's groups did not speak for conservative Christian women, and CWA was needed "as an avenue for conservative women (and 'like-minded men') to have a voice in political issues that directly affect women and family."¹⁸⁷ The coalition opposed abortion as a central plank from its inception.¹⁸⁸ CWA defined an ideal woman as "naturally nurturing, emotional, intuitive, moral" and argued that such a "righteous" woman became "the arbiter of the nation's future" by passing these qualities on to her children.¹⁸⁹ This ideology reflected existing evangelical representations of gender and womanhood, including the cult of true womanhood and ideas of wifely submission as integral to national Christian morality.¹⁹⁰ CWA also reiterated Schlafly's opposition to abortion as connected to the women's movement. While promoting stay-at-home motherhood and "traditional family values," CWA members engaged with the public sphere, seeking political change through activism. Therefore, their coalition had to rhetorically navigate traditionally feminist ideas of "female identity, political activism, and radical social change" with their promotion of "traditional"

¹⁸² Quoted in Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before Roe*, 297; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 245.

¹⁸³ Melani McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American Evangelicals* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 101.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 100-102. Williams, "Partisan Trajectory," 464-5.

¹⁸⁵ Williams, "Partisan Trajectory," 465.

¹⁸⁶ Siegel, "Abortion and the 'Woman Question,'" 1372. As noted in chapter one, LaHaye was standing on the shoulders of Phyllis Schlafly, a driving force behind the organization and success of this counter-feminist movement from the early 1970s. Schlafly was Roman Catholic, however her leadership in opposition to the feminist movement and the ERA created space for other conservative Christian women to follow in her footsteps, including LaHaye, an evangelical.

¹⁸⁷ Mary Ziegler, "Women's Rights on the Right: The History and Stakes of Modern Pro-Life Feminism," *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Oct. 2013), 252-3; Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, 51. See also Emily Johnson, "Beverly LaHaye Defies Feminism," in *This is Our Message: Women's Leadership in the New Christian Right* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 68-92.

¹⁸⁸ Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, 3.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁹⁰ See chapter one for a discussion of the cult of true womanhood and ideas of wifely submission among evangelicalism.

femininity.¹⁹¹ To do so, CWA leaders identified their coalition and its mission as “the embodiment of ‘true’ or conservative feminism,” in direct opposition to the false feminism of the mainstream women’s movement.¹⁹² This shift proved extremely powerful against the abortion rights movement because CWA’s claim to real feminism granted them access to feminist language and rhetoric, simultaneously validating their authority to speak to women’s issues within the conservative Christian movement as a “feminist” voice. Moreover, as an evangelical Christian organization, CWA was also able to claim religious and moral rhetorical authority in the abortion debate, including identifying as “pro-life.” This unique combination made CWA and other similar conservative women’s groups a formidable opponent for secular feminists.

As conservative evangelicals understood abortion within an overarching framework of national moral decline, they also focused on different biblical interpretations of fetal life. In the early 1980s, Jerry Falwell declared in his book, *Listen, America!*: “[t]he Bible clearly states that life begins at conception,” and thus, legal abortion meant an “indictment of murder against America for killing unwanted babies.”¹⁹³ Such ideas represented a change from the previously widespread understanding that Scripture either made no certain claims regarding fetal life, or that Scripture showed a distinction between fetal life and adult life, for example in Exodus 21:22-25.¹⁹⁴ The Southern Baptist Convention also signaled this tide-change among the broader evangelical community with its “Resolution on Abortion” in 1980. This document declared: “abortion ends the life of a developing human being,” and resolved to support “appropriate legislation and/or a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion except to save the life of the mother.”¹⁹⁵ This statement was a far cry from SBC’s 1971 “Resolution on Abortion” that supported therapeutic abortions “under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother.”¹⁹⁶ Moreover, the 1980 resolution marked the first time the SBC changed its language from “fetal life” (in earlier resolutions) to that of the “unborn” when discussing the fetus (a linguistic strategy popularized by Roman Catholics in the anti-abortion movement).

Progressive evangelicals, including editors of the popular progressive periodicals *Sojourners* and *The Other Side*, “displayed unusual timidity and avoided taking a public stance on abortion through the end of the 1970s.”¹⁹⁷ Conflicted by support for women’s equality and the feminist movement and “a fundamental respect for human life,” progressive evangelical leaders remained on the sidelines of the abortion debate until the 1980s.¹⁹⁸ When they entered the conversation,

¹⁹¹ Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, 98.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁹³ Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Bantam Books, 1980), 145, 143. Jerry Falwell referenced Luke 1:39-44 and Psalm 139:13-16 to support this claim.

¹⁹⁴ See “Evangelical Scholars Endorse Birth Control” *Christianity Today*, vol. 12, no. 25 (1968), 34. See also Letha Scanzoni Letha Dawson Scanzoni, “When Evangelicals Were Open to Differing Views on Abortion,” *Christian Feminism Today*, 2012. <https://eewc.com/evangelicals-open-differing-views-abortion/>; and Williams, “Partisan Trajectory,” 463.

¹⁹⁵ “Resolution on Abortion,” SBC, 1 June 1980, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-abortion-6/>

¹⁹⁶ “Resolution on Abortion,” SBC, 1 June 1971, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-abortion-2/>

¹⁹⁷ Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 132.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

progressive evangelicals rejected the existing conservative perspective (and that of the emergent Christian Right), which isolated opposition to abortion within a politically conservative framework. Instead, progressive evangelical leaders promoted a “completely pro-life” position that included advocating for the social welfare of the child once born, opposition to the nuclear arms race, anti-violence and, significantly for this chapter, support for the feminist movement.¹⁹⁹ Progressive evangelical leaders, including members of Evangelicals for Social Action, understood their opposition to abortion to be compatible with their feminist beliefs because they framed “abortion as an issue of violence against unborn life that trumped debates about women’s choices.”²⁰⁰ Progressive evangelicals, like conservatives, were hardening their opinions about abortion during this period. By 1981, ESA affirmed a “consistent pro-life stance” that involved opposition to abortion, racism, poverty, and nuclear warfare, a position they solidified by 1984.²⁰¹ However, compared to conservatives, progressive evangelicals had more room for latitude regarding abortion, and *The Other Side* continued to assert the previously popular evangelical claim “that abortion appeared both biblically and morally ambiguous.”²⁰²

In the 1980s, the dominant evangelical belief system represented fetal life as clearly defined in Scripture and, therefore, understood abortion to be murder. Evangelicals also began policing dissent within the movement. The publication history of *Brave New People: Ethical Issues at the Commencement of Life*, by an evangelical medical biologist D. Gareth Jones, demonstrates American evangelicals’ hardening views on abortion. Jones aimed to “discover what principles are of importance in making decisions about human life around the time of inception” with a specific focus on “what light the Bible can provide in this area” for Christians.²⁰³ First published in England in 1984 by InterVarsity Press, Jones’ argument for the acceptability of therapeutic abortion “drew wide protest” among many evangelical readers in the United States, who found his views “unacceptable.”²⁰⁴ In *Brave New People*, Jones argued that medicine cannot identify an exact moment when personhood begins.²⁰⁵ Therefore, Jones suggested that “a fetus is part of a...continuum,” and “the processes of this continuum...do not begin at conception; neither do they end at birth.”²⁰⁶ Throughout the text, Jones referred to the fetus as “a potential person” yet explicitly rejected “abortion on demand” and advocated for the significance of fetal life.

Jones believed that his argument was compatible with his evangelical beliefs. However, among American evangelicals, views about the acceptability of abortion had changed. Due to a significant number of complaints and threats by donors to withhold funding, InterVarsity Press withdrew *Brave New People* from publication the same year it was released.²⁰⁷ While InterVarsity’s discontinuation of *Brave New People* represents the changing tide regarding abortion among many

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 128-146. See also Ron Sider, *Completely Pro-Life: Building a Consistent Stance on Abortion, the Family, Nuclear Weapons, the Poor* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1987).

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 129.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 139; See also Bill Kallio, “From Ambivalence to Action,” *ESA Update* (1984), 5.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ D. Gareth Jones, “Preface,” In *Brave New People: Ethical Issues at the Commencement of Life* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985), vii.

²⁰⁴ Randy Frame, “InterVarsity Withdraws a Book Opposed by Prolifers,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 28, no. 13 (1984), 63.

²⁰⁵ Jones, *Brave New People*, 156.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 162.

²⁰⁷ Frame, “InterVarsity Withdraws a Book,” 63.

American evangelicals, Eerdman Press picked up *Brave New People* the following year (1985). Jones included a revised preface to explain himself and defend his position. Jones responded to the first edition's criticism with the following statement:

I cannot state categorically that human/personal life commences at day one of gestation. This, it seems, is being made a basic affirmation of evangelicalism, from which there can be no deviation.... No longer is it sufficient to hold classic evangelical affirmations on the nature of biblical revelation, the person and work of Christ, or justification by faith alone. In order to be labeled an evangelical, it is now essential to hold a particular view of the status of the embryo and fetus."²⁰⁸

Jones expressed sadness and confusion about the dominant evangelical views of fetal life and abortion, which, as a medical biologist, he could not affirm. Jones went on to reiterate his "high regard for fetal life," which he intended to communicate in the previous edition of the book as well.²⁰⁹ Jones concluded:

The difficulty appears to be that my critics recognize only two positions on abortion: the absolute protection of all fetal life, and abortion-on-demand. Since my position does not fit into the former category it must, it appears, fit into the latter — hence, the attempts to demonstrate that I am a typical example of a pro-choice, abortion-on-demand advocate... this is not my position.²¹⁰

The popular evangelical response to Jones' first edition of *Brave New People* represented a real and symbolic rejection of Jones' views about abortion and fetal life among American evangelicals. By 1984, the evangelical collective identity required strict opposition to abortion, except when necessary to save a woman's life.

Conclusion

Abortion became a litmus test issue for feminists in the 1970s and then for evangelicals in the 1980s, with each movement on opposite sides of the debate. As feminists fortified their advocacy for abortion rights as part of the larger struggle for women's social, political, and economic equality, evangelicals entered the abortion conversation. They developed an understanding of abortion as biblically prohibited and morally wrong. When biblical feminists created the EWC in 1974, they could not have known that abortion would become a lynchpin issue among feminists and evangelicals. As the coalition developed, EWC members were aware of differing opinions within the coalition. They recognized that any stance on abortion could lead to schism within the coalition, or even its collapse. As a mechanism to support continued unity toward the EWC's larger goals of biblical equality and advocacy of women's leadership in the church, home, and society, the EWC opted to maintain a non-position on abortion.

²⁰⁸ Jones, "Preface to the Revised Edition," xvii-xviii.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

However, a coalition's success is not only determined by its ability to remain unified, but also by its ability to promote its own goals and impact change within the dominant culture. Kretschmer's recent work shows that unity can result in a coalition's stagnation as leaders and members expend valuable energy maintaining peace in the face of internal conflict. A preoccupation with unity can obscure the fact that some coalition members, who have substantially different values or goals than the parent coalition, might be better off outside of the group. In such circumstances, schisms, rather than signalling failure for a coalition, can be a viable and productive option that allows the parent coalition to better achieve its goals. When applied to the EWC's non-position on abortion, understanding schism as productive illuminates the ways in which maintaining unity stunted the influence of the EWC among its wider communities. The EWC's silence diminished its impact on both of its wider communities by calling into question the coalition's integrity, relevance, and authority as a productive and valuable "insider" among each movement. The emergence of other evangelical women's groups, such as the CWA, further weakened the EWC's insider status. LaHaye and CWA used the abortion debate to increase the rhetorical polarization between feminists and Christians. As Christian women's groups became increasingly more vocal about the immorality of abortion, the EWC became further isolated.

It is at this juncture that evangelical feminists in the EWC could have been of immense value to the feminist movement. Mainstream secular feminists were aware of the rhetorical disadvantage they faced in arguing "the right to choose" against the "pro-life" language of abortion opponents. In March of 1974, NOW leaders mailed a lobbying kit to their members explaining how to approach congressional representatives. NOW leaders encouraged NOW members to meet with local politicians to present the coalition's position supporting abortion rights. They suggested that these meetings could demonstrate that NOW members were "responsible citizens," a necessity to help offset the "bad-mouthing" of NOW by "[t]he Fringe Right Wing crazies [who] have targeted NOW as their political opponents."²¹¹ On the final page of the instruction manual, NOW leaders advised members: "Above all, DO NOT argue the moral rights or wrongs of abortion. We are not for abortion, we are for a person's right to choose for herself without interference. (Those of you who have children can say so, and point out that you did not choose abortion, but you would not force your personal decision on someone else)."²¹² Secular feminists were aware of the emotional and political power of "pro-life" rhetoric, which laid claim to the moral high ground in the abortion debate and framed the taking of a "life" against a woman's need for "choice." NOW leaders, therefore, sought to claim allies within Christian communities to bolster their moral position. In NOW's memo, leaders suggested that if advocates were members of a church, they should mention that their church "believes a person's private moral decision is her own."²¹³

If the EWC had decided to support abortion rights, the coalition could have claimed the same religious and moral language that conservative Christians were weaponizing against secular feminists to argue for abortion rights. Conversely, if the EWC decided to oppose abortion, the coalition's knowledge of the inner workings and rhetorical strategies of the secular feminist movement could bolster the evangelical position. Yet the EWC remained silent, contributing to neither side of the broader debate. In electing to sustain a non-position on abortion, the EWC

²¹¹ Schlesinger NOW Archives, "Plan to Meet with Your Congressional Representatives" from Anne Scott and Jan Liebman, 26 March 1974. MC 96: Carton 54, no. 26.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

continually chose internal unity over a more powerful voice among its broader communities. The EWC also continually chose to maintain itself as a bridge between evangelicalism and feminism against increasingly polarizing discourses about abortion. The EWC's opportunity to increase its influence among its broader movements would be limited to one of its parent communities, not both. As such, the coalition's non-position allowed the EWC to continue to exist at the intersection of evangelicalism and feminism, even if the decision diminished the EWC's overall impact on both movements. Notably, this was not the choice the EWC made regarding another critical and contentious issue for the coalition: gay civil rights. The next chapter examines how and why the EWC abandoned its non-position strategy to support gay rights, and how the coalition handled the major schism that followed.

Chapter Three: Schism

The EWC's First Fracture

Into the 1980s, the EWC weathered typical coalition fluctuations, the most significant of which was the decision to change its name. In 1980, the EWC became Evangelical Women's Caucus International (EWCI) to recognize a small cohort of participants in Canada and signal the coalition's expansion goals. In the summer of 1986, however, the EWCI ceased dealing in "business as usual:" the coalition and the larger biblical feminist movement underwent a momentous transformation.¹

In July of 1986, EWCI members gathered for their biennial national conference. Held in Fresno, California, attendance was low that year, and the fees collected from the few hundred participants were insufficient to cover the event's costs, pushing the coalition into debt.² Still, biblical feminists came together from across the country in friendship and prayer. They attended workshops and lectures that addressed theological and feminist concerns, exchanged ideas and grew relationships with one another in discussion groups, and they read and deliberated Scripture together. National conferences fostered unity and comradery among evangelical feminists by creating a neutral and productive space to "facilitate connections across national and geographic boundaries."³ Conferences also reaffirmed the coalition's goals: to advocate "female-male equality" in the church and broader society and "call both women and men to mutual submission and active discipleship."⁴ However, twelve years into the EWCI's existence, cracks had begun to form in the coalition's collective identity. The Fresno conference exacerbated existing tensions and highlighted the EWCI's precarious unity, ultimately leading to a rupture.

The EWCI held a business meeting on the third day of its five-day conference. This meeting appeared innocuous among other agenda items, and one conference participant remembered that many members spent the California summer day "out roaming and shopping" rather than at the meeting.⁵ However, at the meeting, EWCI leaders presented members with a vote on three major resolutions: the first committed members to working towards racial justice and equality, the second condemned violence against women and children, and the third and most controversial resolution affirmed the EWCI, as a coalition, would take a "firm stand in favor of civil rights protection for homosexual persons."⁶ Although participants ultimately passed all resolutions, the third resolution supporting gay civil rights provoked a heated and lengthy discussion.⁷ In the public-facing EWCI newsletter, leaders glibly chronicled the passage of the resolutions as "not 'business as usual.'"⁸ Internally, however, members found themselves "facing an identity crisis" that would

¹ I have taken this phrase from an article in *Update* by Catherine Bailey, explaining the game-changing events that occurred in 1986, discussed in this chapter ("Not Business as Usual," *Update*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1986), 5-6).

² AWTs: EEWC Archives, Letter to Minnesota Chapter from Alvera Mickelsen, 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 2; Letter to Council Sisters from Britt Vanden Eykel, 8 Aug 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3.

³ Michelle I. Gawerc, "Coalition-Building and the Forging of Solidarity Across Difference and Inequality," *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 3 (2021), 4.

⁴ AWTs: EEWC Archives, "National Statement of Faith," 1979, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 6.

⁵ Letter to Minnesota Chapter from Alvera Mickelsen, 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 2.

⁶ Catherine Bailey, "Not Business as Usual," *Update*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1986), 5-6. While the term "homosexual" is now outdated and considered offensive, it was not pejorative during this period. As such, I have decided to keep "homosexual" when it is part of a quotation to maintain integrity with my archival and historical sources.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

ultimately change the shape of the coalition and the biblical feminist movement itself.⁹ EWCI members grappled with an immediate and substantial exodus from the coalition: almost half of the EWCI's members left in the days, weeks, and months following Fresno.¹⁰ As this chapter demonstrates, the resolution supporting gay rights changed the EWCI's collective ideology, shaking the coalition to its core because the EWCI had not implemented effective mechanisms to sustain solidarity in the face of internal conflict. The Fresno conference triggered a schism that threatened the existence of the EWCI and prompted the development of a new, competing coalition: Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE).

The previous chapters examined how biblical feminists created the EWCI through coalition-building and employed a strategic "non-position" to sustain numerical strength and cohesion among their emergent coalition. These chapters represented the EWCI primarily within an "us" versus "them" framework, whereby the boundaries of the coalition were enforced by maintaining a strict (if broad) distinction between those who counted as "insiders" and those deemed "outsiders." This chapter examines the EWCI's confrontation with internal diversity and schism through the coalition's official support for gay civil rights. First, this chapter contextualizes the process that led the EWCI to pass a resolution affirming gay rights (even as the coalition remained officially neutral on other social justice issues, including abortion). To do so, I address broader feminist and evangelical discourses regarding homosexuality and gay rights from the 1970s through the 1980s, highlighting both the relevance and volatility of this resolution for many EWCI members. Secondly, this chapter examines the EWCI's mechanisms for negotiating internal differences and its response to threats of fracture, which ultimately proved inadequate. I build on the previous chapter's focus on productive schisms to examine the EWCI's first major fracture using recent scholarship on coalition-building across differences to investigate why this schism did not destroy the EWCI. Passing the Fresno gay rights resolution weakened the EWCI numerically, but the coalition endured.

Managing Internal Diversity and the "Thems-Inside"

Navigating internal differences is an important and inevitable component of a successful coalition.¹¹ Conflicts that arise among "insiders" of a group, as opposed to against an external

⁹ Joanne Ross Feldmeth, "Surviving Our Adolescence," *Update*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1986), 2.

¹⁰ Information in the archives differs regarding the exact number of members who left the coalition in the days, weeks, and months after the resolutions were passed. It is commonly agreed upon, however, that before the conference the membership was approximately 650 (see Anne Eggebroten's letter AWTs: EEWCA Archives, "Dear Ginny," Letter to Ginny from Anne Eggebroten, 11 Oct. 1986, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 1; and Spring, "Gay Rights Resolution Divides Members of Evangelical Women's Caucus," *Christianity Today*, vol. 30, no. 14 (1986), 40). By the spring of 1988 the coalition had reached its lowest membership ever, with 259 members (EWC Administrator's Report for 1988, Series 1C, Box 7, Folder, 8).

¹¹ See for example, Elizabeth R. Cole and Zakiya T. Luna, "Making Coalitions Work: Solidarity Across Difference Within Us Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010), 71–98; Michelle I. Gawerc, "Coalition-Building and the Forging of Solidarity Across Difference and Inequality," *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 3 (2021), 1–14; Jill M. Bystydzienski and Steven P. Schacht, *Forging Radical Alliances Across Difference: Coalition Politics for the New Millennium* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001). Reasons for unity among coalitions were elucidated in the previous two chapters.

enemy, can produce a subgroup known as “thems-within” or “thems-inside.”¹² These group members share some of the coalition’s convictions and goals, but differ in meaningful ways, perhaps diverging from the coalition’s ideology or stated purpose. Such a discrepancy can occur among members from the moment they join a coalition or over time as the subgroup’s beliefs change and diverge from those of the parent coalition.¹³ If left unacknowledged, “thems-inside” can threaten a coalition with fracture or failure because, as dissenting members seek to maintain “us status” within the dominant group, they obstruct the unity of the broader coalition.¹⁴ As the previous chapter explained, schism can be a productive and creative force that strengthens a coalition.¹⁵ However, this is only true when a coalition survives its schism and maintains unity among remaining members in the face of fracture.

“Thems-inside” threaten a coalition’s unity because they have often built trusting relationships and shared mutual networks with fellow members. These relationships make it easier for “thems-inside” to recruit coalition members to their divergent positions. If the “thems-inside” acquire enough authority, they can change the trajectory of the coalition by articulating a different collective identity. More often, however, “thems-inside” leave the coalition, weakening the parent group’s impact on the dominant culture through decreased numerical power and a corresponding decrease in available resources. Coalition members who disagree with the “thems-inside” tend to negotiate with this group as they would with outsiders, with one crucial difference: these conflicts tend to be “uglier.”¹⁶ This is because “thems-inside” not only threaten the coalition’s shared goals but also threaten personal relationships and friendships.¹⁷ Conservative Christian members of the EWCI became the “thems-inside” when the coalition began discussing homosexuality in the early 1980s. Leading up to Fresno, conservative members were put on the defensive, arguing against the EWCI core leadership’s clear push toward support for gay rights. This discussion lasted years, and the conservative members who remained within the coalition for its duration soon became aware of their increasingly precarious status as “thems-inside.”

Activists and scholars of coalition-building have articulated strategies to identify the potential threat of “thems-inside” and sustain a coalition in the face of internal diversity. Sociologist Michelle Gawerc has synthesized existing scholarship to identify five main factors necessary for creating and sustaining coalitions across internal differences: “uniting around shared principles while engaging difference; acknowledging and managing inequalities; making space for each other; attention to managing conflicts; and actions that confirm the shared commitments and

¹² Joshua Gamson, “Messages of Exclusion: Gender, Movements, and Symbolic Boundaries,” *Gender & Society* 11, no. 2 (1997), 179–180; See also Kelsy Kretschmer *Fighting for Now: Diversity and Discord in the National Organization for Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 31.

¹³ For example, in the last chapter I examined the creation of Feminists for Life from within NOW membership. From the moment Patricia Goltz and Cathy Callahan (the founders of FFL) joined NOW, they disagreed with NOW’s position supporting abortion, but they joined and remained members because they supported the wider mission of the organization.

¹⁴ Gamson, “Messages of Exclusion,” 180.

¹⁵ See Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 123–144.

¹⁶ Gamson, “Messages of Exclusion,” 179; As Kretschmer notes, schisms can be “relatively conflict free” (6), however among insiders often “factionalism and schism can be quite painful” (128).

¹⁷ Gamson, “Messages of Exclusion,” 179.

negotiated identity.”¹⁸ Gawerc’s components emphasize the importance of recognizing and working to bridge internal differences rather than ignoring them. Recognition of differences ensures that internal power dynamics and inequalities do not disrupt the wider goals of the coalition, which “should become more important than potentially divisive identities.”¹⁹ Recentring the shared goals and collective ideology of the group often takes the shape of internal action, such as protests, which establish a necessary “sense of ‘we,’...[that] enables activists to sustain a shared history, generating and strengthening bonds of solidarity.”²⁰ To mitigate the significance of conflicts related to differences, coalition leaders must create an environment that fosters bonds of solidarity, trust, and commitment among members. Leaders can cultivate such relationships by establishing “shared neutral spaces” where differences can be expressed, including through physical meetings at local or national conferences or by fostering connections over social media.²¹ These spaces are integral for successful coalitions because they allow members to engage in “open and respectful dialog leading to constructive collaboration,” decision-making, and conflict resolution.²² Ultimately, recognizing that conflicts are inevitable in coalitions, coalition leaders should establish ongoing strategies to mitigate discord and maintain cohesion within their groups. Two such strategies involve “developing conflict resolution mechanisms and/or strengthening the relationships that could help them withstand greater conflict.”²³

Coalition-building scholars and activists predict that if a coalition meets most of these requirements, it can survive much internal diversity. Moreover, there are immense benefits for mobilizing across differences, including a wide-reaching network and larger coalition base. Advantages also include increased visibility for the coalition’s goals (resulting in more “pressure on the target”), the creation of a “more powerful statement” as the coalition spans social divisions, and increased empathy for the coalition as “diversity lessens the social distance between the protesters and the regime or security forces.”²⁴ As examined in the previous chapter, the EWCI incorporated some of these mechanisms by maintaining a non-position on the contentious issue of abortion rights among its members. However, when the EWCI took a stand affirming gay rights in 1986, internal divisions within the coalition became unavoidable. In the face of this conflict, EWCI leadership struggled to reassert their coalition’s larger goals to sustain unity.

Internal differences and “thems-inside” do not always threaten a coalition’s unity. It is customary for divergent subgroups to exist within larger coalitions, often unnoticed or ignored, as a coalition deals with more imminent threats to its boundaries. From its inception, the EWCI brought together Christians from multiple denominations across the United States under the umbrella of biblical feminism. However, internal membership negotiations are often triggered by an external observer or audience that challenges the organization’s symbolic boundaries due to internal differences.²⁵ For example, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) originally

¹⁸ Michelle I. Gawerc, “Coalition-Building and the Forging of Solidarity Across Difference and Inequality,” *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 3 (2021), 1.

¹⁹ Bystydzienski and Schacht, “Introduction,” 10.

²⁰ Gawerc, “Coalition-Building,” 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁵ Gamson, “Messages of Exclusion,” 180.

included the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) among its members. This group supported sexual relationships between adults and minors. NAMBLA went quietly unchallenged for many years in the wider coalition (even with widespread disapproval of their beliefs) because the ILGA hoped to sustain coalitional unity. It was not until public outrage drew attention to the existence of NAMBLA within ILGA's ranks that ILGA excluded this subgroup, redefining its own boundaries to explicitly reject NAMBLA's ideology.²⁶ The narrowing of coalition boundaries and "insider" status thus often occurs through "public communications" because, without external pressure, internal conflicts can be ignored or silently negotiated to maintain an external united front.²⁷ The controversial Fresno resolution supporting gay rights was, in part, the EWCI's feminist response to a public conversation about homosexuality and Christianity in the United States. Moreover, the resolutions, once passed, became public knowledge, thereby narrowing the EWCI's boundaries as external pressures from conservative churches and organizations forced many members to leave the coalition. To illustrate why the EWCI took a stand on such a public and controversial issue amidst internal conflicts, this chapter examines the respective framings of homosexuality and gay civil rights among the two main communities the EWCI bridged: evangelicals and feminists.

Evangelicals and Gay Rights

In the 1970s and 1980s, evangelicals understood homosexuality as a disordered and immoral expression of sexuality, an understanding aligned with the dominant American culture at that time.²⁸ However, evangelicals more staunchly opposed homosexuality than other Americans (including other Protestants or Catholics).²⁹ Scholars connect evangelical opposition to homosexuality to increasingly public discourses about sexuality and shifting sexual norms in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly as a response to the emerging gay rights movement.³⁰ Evangelicals opposed gay rights with more vigour than other Christians because they felt that the Bible proscribed same-sex practices.³¹ While this view was not unique to evangelicals among Christians,

²⁶ Ibid., 179-180.

²⁷ Ibid., 180.

²⁸ Dowland, *Family Values*, 160.

²⁹ Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 85, 104.

³⁰ See Dowland, *Family Values*, 160-2; Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 104-5; Johnson, *This Is Our Message*, 168 n.5. The birth of the gay liberation movement in the United States is often traced to the NYC Stonewall Riots in June of 1969. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) emerged following these three-day riots and helped shape the developing movement.

³¹ Heather R. White, a religious historian focusing on sexuality and gender, notes that the Bible did not include the term "homosexuality" until the publication of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) in 1946 (*Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 17). The RSV changed the wording of the King James Version (KJV), the dominant Bible at that time. The KJV translated two Greek nouns (among the list of those who would not inherit the kingdom of God in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10) as "effeminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind." The RSV "streamlined" these two terms into the single word "homosexuals" (1). Evangelical translators responded to the "liberal" RSV in 1978, publishing their own translation: the New International Version (NIV), which "quickly surpassed the King James as America's best-selling Bible" (181). The NIV followed the RSV and "reconfigured an older sodomy tradition into an emergent homosexuality tradition" (182).

evangelicals also viewed homosexuality as sexual promiscuity and viewed sexual promiscuity as a threat to American national morality. Evangelicals framed “deviant” sexual behaviours as “responsible for increased rates of other morally dubious phenomena – divorce, teenage pregnancy, and abortion – for depravity breeds more depravity.”³² As a subculture, evangelicals have consistently navigated “two differing impulses in relating to the broader American culture,” which include defining themselves as separate from the wider culture while also attempting “to exemplify and shape it.”³³ Historically, evangelicals have viewed themselves as “the moral custodians of culture” and have sought to impose social reforms to this end.³⁴ By the late 1970s, evangelicals took up the torch against homosexuality and gay rights in the name of American Christian morality.³⁵

Anita Bryant’s “moral crusade” against gay rights in the late 1970s offers key insights into mainstream evangelical discourses against homosexuality.³⁶ Bryant was America’s sweetheart in the 1970s, when she also became the national face of legal prosecution against gay and lesbian citizens. In 1977 in Dade County, Florida, Bryant led a campaign protesting an anti-discrimination bill that would protect Americans from biases related to “affectional or sexual preferences.”³⁷ Lawmakers designed this bill to protect housing and employment rights for gay and lesbian individuals. However, Bryant framed her opposition to this bill as “protecting America’s children” from the national threat that gay people posed to youth and culture. Bryant’s crusade was strikingly effective and “culminated in a countrywide referendum that overturned the gay-rights amendment.”³⁸

Many of Bryant’s rhetorical strategies and moral arguments reflected wider evangelical ideas. Bryant interpreted the Bible as explicitly forbidding same-sex sexual acts, mirroring the dominant interpretation of Scripture among evangelicals at this time.³⁹ Beyond viewing

³² Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 104.

³³ Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 4.

³⁴ Grant Wacker, “Uneasy in Zion: Evangelicals in Postmodern Society,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, edited by George Marsden (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1984), 24.

³⁵ Heather White shows that, throughout the 1960s, leading evangelicals saw themselves as fighting this battle to save America’s soul where liberal Protestant leaders had failed (*Reforming Sodom*, 123-7). For example, in 1970 Billy Graham chastised mainline liberal clergy, exclaiming, “Where many of these men get the ‘reverend’ in front of their names I do not know...certainly they don’t get it from God” (qt’d in White, *Reforming Sodom*, 124). White shows that evangelicals viewed themselves in opposition to liberal Protestants as the true keepers of the faith who relied solely on biblical authority to promote Godly sexuality (124).

³⁶ In *Recruiting Young Love*, Christian ethicist Mark Jordan demonstrates how Anita Bryant drew on pre-existing evangelical ideals and rhetorical strategies in her opposition to gay rights (129). Therefore, Bryant is an exemplary figure to show the wider evangelical response and understanding of gay rights. Jordan outlines this broader historical discourse throughout *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk About Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

³⁷ Johnson, *This is Our Message*, 38. For a more comprehensive representation of Anita Bryant’s role within Christian discourses on sexuality, see Mark Jordan, “Saving Their Children,” in *Recruiting Young Love*, 129-149

³⁸ *Ibid*, 39.

³⁹ In a letter that Bryant sent to the nine commissioners in January of 1977, before their public hearing and vote on the Dade County antidiscrimination bill, Bryant used 1 Corinthians 6:8-10, Leviticus 20:13, and Jude 7 as a warning against forgetting Sodom and Gomorrah, the point of which she interprets as “lust of men for other men” (Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story: the Survival of Our Nation’s Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1977), 18-20.

homosexuality as sinful, however, the power of Bryant's campaign resided in her depiction of gay people as a threat to the nation's children (and, therefore, the nation's future). Bryant argued that "homosexuals" threatened American youth in two ways. Firstly, gay individuals could become "role models," portraying a "homosexual lifestyle" as a viable option, specifically as teachers of children. Secondly, because same-sex partners cannot reproduce through sexual intercourse, Bryant argued that gay people "must recruit" children to fill out their ranks "as some unnatural quasi species, some alien army."⁴⁰ Bryant's campaign frequently used language identifying gay citizens as a dangerous and "militant" group leading a war against the morals of Christian America. The dangers of this militia included moral disorder and "uncleanness," problems which Bryant suggested had ruined historical empires in the past and would, in turn, destroy America.⁴¹ This rhetoric was not new or unique to Bryant; it drew upon existing (and popular) anti-communist language from the McCarthy era. Bryant simply shifted the emphasis from communists to "homosexuals" as "public enemy number one."⁴² Moreover, the idea that gay citizens constituted a militant and dangerous coalition was part of the wider mainstream evangelical ethos. In 1978, bestselling evangelical author Tim LaHaye warned Americans that "the homosexual community is organized, militant, and demonstrative. As a minority movement in America, it demands that we give it official sanction and acknowledge its 'rights.'"⁴³ LaHaye's rhetoric positioned gay citizens as militant because they were fighting for civil rights.

According to this rhetoric, gay and lesbian citizens could bring the nation to its knees through the dissolution of the family. As a Southern Baptist, Anita Bryant was well-positioned to utilize pre-existing evangelical notions regarding "family values" to protest gay civil rights.⁴⁴ "Family values" was popularized by conservative evangelicals in the emerging Christian Right in the 1970s. This term defined the "traditional" American family as a heterosexual married couple with a reasonable number of "well-tended children" sustained by a stay-at-home mother and breadwinning father.⁴⁵ In this ideological framework, "abortion, feminism, and homosexuality represented a multifaceted 'attack' on the family, which [was] defined as 'the fundamental institution of society, an immutable structure established by our Creator.'"⁴⁶ Because conservative evangelicals positioned the family as the central pillar of American society, any threat to the family

⁴⁰ Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story*, 27, 87; Jordan, *Recruiting*, 143-5. The idea that gay and lesbian people were out to "prey on children" was also represented in Jerry Falwell's *Listen, America!* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 160.

⁴¹ Jordan, *Recruiting*, 140. See also Bryant, "Chapter 12: The Militant Homosexual" in *The Anita Bryant Story*, 135-44. Tim LaHaye also makes this point throughout *Unhappy Gays*, see for example his chapter titled, "It Isn't New," 9-12.

⁴² Jordan, *Recruiting*, 140. The very title of Anita Bryant's book about her campaign shows this rhetorical strategy clearly: *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation's Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality*.

⁴³ See also Tim LaHaye, *The Unhappy Gays: What Everyone Should Know About Homosexuality* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1978), 20.

⁴⁴ Bryant's beliefs were affirmed by her Baptist community: the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) praised Bryant's "courageous stand against the evils inherent in homosexuality" in a resolution passed in 1977 (Johnson, *This is Our Message*, 55). Johnson argues that Bryant was a seminal figure in connecting opposition to homosexuality with the wider rhetoric of "family values" of the Christian Right (39).

⁴⁵ Dowland, *Family Values*, 3. Citing Stephanie Coontz, Dowland notes that this "traditional family" structure is rare in American history, where multi-generational families, single parent families, two working parents, and other variations have been the norm (9).

⁴⁶ Dowland, "'Family Values' and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda," *Church History* 78, no. 3 (2009), 607.

was a threat to America as a nation.⁴⁷ Thus, when Anita Bryant claimed that granting gay citizens civil rights would harm American children, she positioned herself squarely within this conservative evangelical discourse that represented gay rights as a threat to the family and the nation.

Finally, Bryant understood homosexuality to be “a choice, not a birthright,” an ideology aligned with wider evangelical beliefs.⁴⁸ As activists within the emerging gay rights movement argued that people are born with their sexual orientations (and thus, sexual orientation is natural and unchangeable), Bryant represented homosexuality as a decision that went against God’s design and will.⁴⁹ According to Bryant, gay individuals chose to lead sinful sexual lives by practicing behaviours proscribed by Scripture even though they could, at any time, simply “return to full heterosexuality.”⁵⁰ Moreover, Bryant did not separate “homosexual acts” from “homosexual identity” (as some previous Christian thinkers had, represented by the adage “love the sinner, hate the sin”).⁵¹ Ethicist Mark Jordan notes that when Bryant discussed the sexual practices of “homosexuals” she engaged “the odd locution ‘the act of homosexuality,’” instead of “homosexual acts,” intertwining the act with the identity.⁵² Because Bryant saw homosexuality as a choice, she argued that there was no valid reason that a Christian should advocate for “rights” for gay people.⁵³ That being said, Bryant believed that a proper Christian response to gay individuals was still compassion: not to be labelled “a bigot,” Bryant “frequently confess[ed] her love for homosexuals and her desire to bring them back from their sin.”⁵⁴

The Christian mandate “love the sinner, hate the sin” illuminates a key aspect of the logic behind many American evangelicals’ position against gay rights into the 1980s. Cultural and gender theorists Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini argue that this Christian adage, which divorces identity (the sinner) from behaviour (the sin), “allows people to take positions that are punitive toward their fellow citizens, while at the same time experiencing themselves as being not simply ethical, but compassionate and even tolerant of difference.”⁵⁵ According to Jakobsen and Pellegrini, there are significant and dangerous limitations to this type of “tolerance,” which impact the broader American culture through legal discourses. In *Romer v. Evans* (1996), for example, the Supreme Court ruled Colorado’s antigay “Amendment 2” was unconstitutional. Amendment 2 “would have repealed local and statewide ordinances that prohibited discrimination on the basis of ‘homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation, conduct, practices or relationships.’”⁵⁶ Although

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Jordan, *Recruiting*, 141; Dowland, *Family Values*, 164. For more scholarship on evangelicals viewing homosexuality as a choice, see Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) on the ex-gay movement; See also Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow*.

⁴⁹ Jordan, *Recruiting*, 142.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ For a comprehensive challenge to this distinction see Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

⁵² Jordan, *Recruiting*, 141-2.

⁵³ Ibid., 143. See also Tim LaHaye, “What Makes a Homosexual?” in *Unhappy Gays* (61 – 94). Here, LaHaye rejects the notion that humans can be born anything but heterosexual and he affirms Bryant’s position specifically (70-1). This evangelical literature places “rights” in quotation marks to further emphasize the absurdity of such a claim, in their view.

⁵⁴ Jordan, *Recruiting*, 137.

⁵⁵ Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*, 1.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 35.

Romer appeared to signal progress for gay rights, Jakobsen and Pellegrini note that this decision conspicuously did not address the Court's previous ruling in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986). *Hardwick* upheld the constitutionality of existing sodomy laws and ruled that states had the right "and even the moral interest," to control and proscribe sexual encounters between same sex persons.⁵⁷ Jakobsen and Pellegrini suggest that Supreme Court decisions such as these represent the legal implications of "love the sinner, hate the sin" because while "gay identity" is legally protected, "homosexual conduct" remains criminalized, which, ultimately, restricts the freedoms of gay people.⁵⁸ Moreover, the maxim "love the sinner, hate the sin" supported a discursive division that had been deepening in the 1980s in the United States: a separation of religious morality from secular "sexual promiscuity."⁵⁹ Religion and sexuality scholar Anthony Petro notes that during the HIV/AIDs epidemic in the 1980s, "[p]ublic health officials and later the media...cited 'sexual promiscuity,' as opposed to a viral agent, as the cause of AIDS: the implication being that heterosexual monogamy was the clear remedy."⁶⁰ This rhetoric drew on popular conservative Christian discourses around homosexuality and HIV/AIDs, including the idea that the disease was "God's punishment for homosexuals."⁶¹ Petro notes, "[t]he conflation of sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and AIDS led many Americans to infer that the purportedly immoral lifestyle of homosexuals was a central reason for the outbreak and spread of the disease."⁶² Consequently, during this period, queerness became inextricably entangled with the "secular," positioned in opposition to the "traditional values" promoted by conservative evangelicals, including heterosexual monogamy within marriage.⁶³ In the 1970s and 1980s, evangelicals predominantly

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3, 94.

⁵⁹ Contemporary queer theory challenges this rhetorical construction, articulating overlaps and intersections between the secular and the religious and between queerness and the religious. For example, in her chapter "Born Again at Stonewall," Heather White demonstrates how "gay liberation, in both ideology and practice, was profoundly shaped by religion, even by specifically Christian beliefs and practices" (*Reforming Sodom*, 140). Gender, sexuality, and religion scholar Melissa Wilcox coined the term "religionfuck" to describe the ways that queer activism can "challenge and undermine cultural assumptions about the ways religious identities, roles, practices, beliefs, and appearances cohere" (*Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 85). Wilcox conducted an ethnographic study of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an activist group of "queer nuns" that emerged in San Francisco in 1979. Wilcox found that the Sisters simultaneously enacted and parodied Roman Catholic imagery and language. In so doing, they created a powerful activism that made the community more comprehensible and impactful within the wider culture and challenged boundaries around "proper" religion and gender.

⁶⁰ Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 23-4. For more on mainline and conservative Christian conflations of homosexuality as promiscuity during this period, see Heather White, "Sanctified Heterosexuality," in *Reforming Sodom*, 108-137).

⁶¹ Jerry Falwell qt'd in Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 24.

⁶² Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 24.

⁶³ Petro notes: "Building on a history of battles between Christians and the gay rights movement [by the late 1980s,] religion and homosexuality have often appeared antithetical to one another" (*After the Wrath of God*, 139). Petro examines an activist strategy by AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and the Women's Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM!), two groups seeking to draw attention to the Roman Catholic Church's "public opposition to homosexuality, abortion, and safe-sex education" during the HIV/AIDs epidemic in the 1980s. The two coalitions staged a "die-in" during a Catholic service in 1989, where protestors fell in the aisles and "others shouted at the cardinal as he began his homily, calling him a murderer" (138-9). Critics of this protest argued that the protestors were not criticizing Church leadership, but Roman Catholicism itself. Petro notes, "Such accounts represented the protest as a battle between secular activists and sacred tradition—homosexuals and feminists

viewed homosexuality as sinful and promiscuous sexuality, which threatened Christian American values. This view was both bolstered and reified by broader cultural discourses that conflated homosexuality with improper, immoral, and dangerous sexuality. This dialectical framing constrained evangelical support for gay rights and contributed to the EWCI's precarity in its decision to support gay civil rights in 1986. However, the EWCI was also part of the broader feminist movement, which had a very different understanding of homosexuality and gay rights during this period.

Secular Feminists and Gay Rights

The mainstream feminist movement advocated for gay civil rights from the 1970s onward. While lesbians and gay people had participated in the feminist movement from its inception, both in radical and liberal coalitions, "it was not until the emergence of the gay liberation movement that lesbians demanded recognition and support from the women's movement."⁶⁴ Leaders in the liberal women's movement initially reacted to such demands with disdain and fear, rejecting any affiliation with homosexuality. This initial hostility was, in part, because opponents of the feminist movement frequently accused feminists of being lesbians to further scandalize and marginalize the movement.⁶⁵ Betty Friedan exemplified this early feminist response in her role as the first president of NOW from 1966 to 1970. Friedan famously claimed lesbians were a "lavender menace," a dangerous threat that diminished the feminist movement's credibility and distracted from the movement's goals.⁶⁶ Friedan's sentiment represented and confirmed a widely held belief among NOW members that "an open acknowledgement of and discussion about lesbianism would undermine the movement."⁶⁷ In other words, these leaders and members of NOW saw lesbians as "thems-inside" the feminist movement, as a distracting subgroup that threatened the cohesion of the wider coalition by promoting a divergent agenda. These internal fears came to a head in 1969 when NOW leadership fired Rita Mae Brown, a prominent lesbian feminist activist, from her position as editor of NOW's newsletter in New York. Brown had been advocating for lesbian rights in the newsletter and attributed her termination to rampant homophobia in NOW.⁶⁸ Brown left NOW with a small group in an event now known as "the lesbian purge."⁶⁹ Friedan, as the leader of

against innocent parishioners and the church" (139). See also, Melissa Wilcox *Queer Nuns*. Wilcox found in her research "the common assumption...that queer people who are religious must be both terribly oppressed and part of a negligibly small group" (86). Wilcox goes on to note of these assumptions, "[n]either is true as a general rule" (Ibid). See also White, *Reforming Sodom*, 109.

⁶⁴ Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization," *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon D. Morris, and Carol McClurg Mueller (Yale University Press, 1992), 108. I focus on the liberal movement here, since that is the movement that EWCI largely participated in, through groups such as NOW. For a more comprehensive history of lesbianism in the wider women's movement, including how radical feminists reacted to lesbianism, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 210-241.

⁶⁵ Taylor and Whittier, "Collective," 108.

⁶⁶ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 48; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 212.

⁶⁷ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 48.

⁶⁸ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 213; Kretschmer, *Fighting*, 49.

⁶⁹ Kretschmer, *Fighting*, 49.

NOW, continued to prohibit lesbians from obtaining leadership positions during the 1970 elections.⁷⁰

Many lesbian activists fought exclusion and rejection by organizations such as NOW from within the feminist movement. The Second Congress to Unite Women, held on May 1, 1970, in New York City, marked a transformative moment in lesbian feminist activism. Recounted in the underground newsletter *Rat*, “about 300 women were quietly sitting in the auditorium...waiting for the Congress to come to order. The lights went out, people heard running, laughter, a rebel yell here and there, and when those lights were turned back on, those same 300 women found themselves in the hands of the LAVENDER MENACE.”⁷¹ The Lavender Menace was a protest group of lesbian feminists, including Rita Mae Brown, who reappropriated Friedan’s derogatory label. Seventeen Menace members stormed the stage during this Congress meeting wearing t-shirts with “lavender menace” written across the front. As the protestors opened their discussion, others (both Menace members and regular audience members) joined the demonstrators on stage, and “for two hours the protestors held the floor as they talked about what it was like to be a lesbian in a heterosexist culture.”⁷² During this meeting, Congress passed resolutions proposed by the Lavender Menace, bringing the concerns of gay and lesbian members within the feminist movement to the forefront. This activist tactic helped heterosexual leaders understand the connections between opposing discrimination against the gay and lesbian community and the broader feminist movement’s struggle for equality.

In December 1970, *Time* magazine published an editorial attempting to discredit the feminist movement because of lesbian and bisexual participants.⁷³ By this time, however, leading feminists were no longer intimidated by such accusations. In a press conference responding to the *Time* article, prominent activists, including Ti-Grace Atkinson, Susan Brownmiller, and Gloria Steinem, declared support and collaboration with lesbian and gay rights activists. The activists asserted that the feminist and gay rights movements were “struggling towards a common goal:” equality in society, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.⁷⁴ By mid-1971, National NOW passed a resolution to advocate for “lesbianism as a legal and moral right,” designating gay rights as a priority within the broader mainstream feminist movement, a connection that persists today.⁷⁵ This declaration of support, however, caused a rift within the feminist movement; the more conservative members refused to endorse lesbianism and many such members left NOW, often forming new groups.⁷⁶

EWCI: Support for Gay Rights

⁷⁰ Ibid.; Not all lesbians were pushed out of NOW in this “purge,” and those who remained continued to fight for recognition and their rights from within the organization (see Kretschmer, *Fighting*, 130).

⁷¹ Q’t’d in Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 215. Emphasis in original.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ “Women’s Lib: A Second Look,” *Time*, December 14, 1970, 50.

⁷⁴ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 219.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kretschmer, *Fighting*, 49.

In bridging evangelical and feminist ideologies, biblical feminists navigated oppositional perspectives regarding homosexuality while maintaining their own activist agenda. By the time the EWCI officially declared its support for gay civil rights in 1986, EWCI leaders and members had been debating passing a gay rights resolution for at least two years. This internal conversation, preserved in the EWCI archives, highlights how various coalition members understood homosexuality and the role of a feminist evangelical coalition. Participants at every level of the coalition were aware of internal disagreement regarding coalitional support for gay civil rights for years before Fresno. Members also knew that, within the EWCI, there were many diverse Christian perspectives regarding the acceptability of homosexuality.

At the sixth national conference in Wellesley, MA, in 1984, EWCI leaders proposed a series of social justice resolutions to supplement their coalition's only existing resolution (support of the ERA). These resolutions included "support for nuclear disarmament, the right to abortion, rights for homosexual persons, and reaffirmation of our support for the ERA."⁷⁷ After much discussion among conference participants, the EWC reapproved the ERA resolution but tabled all others.⁷⁸ EWCI leaders explained this decision in *Update*, noting, "[T]he resolutions were meant to promote dialogue and openness, in actuality they resulted in divisiveness, discord, and polarization; in short, they turned out to be counterproductive for our organization."⁷⁹ EWCI leaders were surprised by this conflict because they had not initially considered these topics to be contentious. The Wellesley proposals sparked difficult conversations among EWCI members, highlighting oppositional views within the coalition. Many members argued that regardless of the issues, EWCI leadership was wrong to propose any resolutions because resolutions distract from the original Statement of Purpose: promoting biblical gender equality. Accepting this criticism, EWCI leaders backed off the resolutions and instead established task forces to research each social issue. The task force members were to present their findings through workshops at the next conference (to be held in Fresno, California in 1986).⁸⁰ The conference program coordinator, Kaye Cook, wrote to the designated workshop leaders: "Please respect our decision to take no stand as an organization on such issues as homosexuality and abortion. We are not unaware of the importance of these issues.

⁷⁷ AWTS: EEWC Archives, Letter to Members from Executive Council (draft), Sept. 1986, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 2. Throughout the EWCI's existence members advocated for world peace and refuted militarism, nuclear weaponry, warfare, and violence. Peace advocacy and anti-war protests remained part of a discussion among the wider progressive evangelical movement from which the EWCI emerged. Leaders of this movement, including Jim Wallis, came together in protest of the Vietnam War in the 1970s; the ESA's manifesto, the *Chicago Declaration*, also challenged American militarism, war, and violence. Brantley Gasaway, a scholar of progressive evangelicalism, notes that peace activism among progressive evangelicals continued throughout the 1980s as "progressive evangelicals joined other peace activists in widespread protests against America's military interventions in Central America and nuclear weapons development program." Gasaway also notes that this activist focus continued into the early 2000s, when most evangelicals supported the US invasion into Iraq, progressive evangelicals worked to "to sway public opinion against the wars" (Gasaway, "The Political Legacy of Progressive Evangelicals," interview with Eric C. Miller, *Sojourners*, <https://sojo.net/about-us/news/political-legacy-progressive-evangelicals>). Historian Seth Dowland demonstrates that opposition to nuclear disarmament fell under the banner of "family values," along with opposition to feminism, gay rights, and abortion, for conservative politicians and ministers in this period (*Family Values*, 10-11).

⁷⁸ AWTS: EEWC Archives, Letter to Members from Executive Council (draft), Sept. 1986, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 2.

⁷⁹ Nancy Hardesty, "More on the Resolutions Debate," *Update*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1986), 6.

⁸⁰ Bailey, "Not Business as Usual," 5.

We believe however that each one of us is responsible before God for the stand we take.”⁸¹ Cook explained to the workshop coordinators that discussions of such issues caused participants “to polarize on topics and the focus and purpose of the conference became blurred.”⁸² In the name of unity and prioritizing advocacy for biblical gender equality, the EWCI temporarily tabled the issue of resolutions.

The rejection of resolutions at Wellesley piqued the curiosity of EWCI leaders. They wanted to know more about how the majority of EWCI members, including those not in attendance at the conference, felt about social justice resolutions. Thus, later that same year, the executive council mailed a follow-up questionnaire to all 650 EWCI members. However, the survey results (returned by 134 members) were indecisive, “reflect[ing] a virtual split among members as to whether EWCI should delve into other social justice issues.”⁸³ EWCI leaders collected the responses from this poll for their archives and provided a snapshot of the results to the broader membership in a 1985 issue of *Update*. The survey asked members to select one choice from a series of options, then return the ballot to the council by mail. The options were:

- A. I believe that EWCI should only take a position on the ERA and should not be passing other resolutions.
- B. I believe that EWCI should be considering other issues and should be working on and passing resolutions
- C. Both A and B
- D. I do not feel strongly about whether or not EWCI should be passing resolutions.⁸⁴

Some members simply circled their preferences and returned their ballots; however, many respondents also included a written explanation for their choices. These responses depicted immensely diverse opinions, both on the use of resolutions as a means of unifying (and narrowing) the group and on the content of the resolutions themselves. A significant number of participants addressed homosexuality and gay rights specifically in their replies (since this was part of the conversation at Wellesley). These explanations also emphasized the importance of grappling with such questions among EWCI participants. Members wrote to the EWCI headquarters to define their boundaries for the coalition, describing how they personally reconcile their feminism and evangelicalism relative to the wider society and through their relationships with the EWCI. As with the internal debates on abortion rights examined in the previous chapter, poll responders frequently utilized pragmatic reasoning in defending their choices. For example, participants addressed the challenges of recruiting new members and defining the EWCI in relation to “secular” feminism, as well as possible reactions from the broader evangelical community. Beyond practical reasons, many members also mentioned the moral implications of their selections, highlighting the diversity of beliefs regarding the intersection of feminism and Christianity on broader social justice issues.

⁸¹ Q’t’d in Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 94.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Letter to Members, 1986, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 2. See also, Spring, “Gay Rights Resolution Divides Members of Evangelical Women’s Caucus,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 30, no. 14 (1986), 40.

⁸⁴ AWTs: EEWCI Archives, “Results of EWCI Membership Poll,” 1984, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 3.

Many of the participants who chose option “A” against the resolutions (fifty-nine members) reasoned that resolutions on controversial issues, such as sexuality, would divide the group. They argued that such a division was not worth its risks, which included the potential loss of members or, worse, the total collapse of the coalition. One participant warned that passing resolutions would “drive out people on one side or the other,” noting, “we simply do not have enough members that we can discard all who oppose – or who favor – endorsing abortion or homosexuality.”⁸⁵ Another common response within this category articulated other avenues available to feminists who wanted to take up such struggles, often directly mentioning the National Organization for Women’s position supporting gay and abortion rights. As one member noted: “There are enough groups already concerned with side issues. If EWC becomes another NOW, count me out.”⁸⁶

These responses also demonstrated the ongoing boundary construction between the EWCI and NOW, a border maintained by committees such as the EWC/NOW Working Relationship, introduced in chapter two. Passing the buck, so to speak, on controversial social issues was a strategy the EWCI employed from its inception. For example, in her letter to the Steering Committee in 1976, Evon Bachaus suggested that other coalitions (including NOW) were handling issues such as abortion and gay rights as part of their core collective identities, which left the EWCI free to avoid engaging with such concerns.⁸⁷ Many of the poll responses aligned with the coalition’s initial reasoning for silence on the abortion issue, as noted in the previous chapter. They suggested that the alliance, though ten years old by the time of the poll, was not numerically powerful enough to take a controversial or risky position on social justice issues. Significant to this reasoning was the belief that a position on these issues was not integral to the movement or the definition of biblical feminism as these responders understood it: “EWC should not take a position as an organization around issues which are not central to Biblical feminism.”⁸⁸ Multiple respondents argued that passing resolutions on issues such as gay civil rights would “dilute” the EWCI’s mission to promote biblical feminism.⁸⁹ This reflects a critical boundary negotiation within the coalition, revealing that some members did not consider support for gay rights essential to their feminist commitments, even as the broader feminist movement defined such support as integral to the struggle for equality. Representing gay rights as a distraction from their message of biblical equality, these EWCI members policed the border where evangelical and feminist values clashed by reinforcing their coalition as necessarily distinct from “secular” feminism.

Many poll responses revealed a palpable anxiety regarding the EWCI’s position within the wider evangelical community. These responses saw social justice resolutions as threatening an already precarious relationship. One responder stated that although they agreed with the content of the resolutions, they felt “very strongly that the church in the US and Canada is not ready for us to take those kinds of stands.”⁹⁰ Moreover, beyond their churches not being ready for such resolutions, many responders warned that the EWCI would lose authority within the evangelical movement: “our credibility as Evangelicals is seriously damaged because we are becoming identified with more and more causes they regard as heretical, while we actively support almost

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ AWTs: EEW Archives, Letter to TSC members, 11 May 1976, Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 2.

⁸⁸ “Results.”

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

nothing in which they are interested.”⁹¹ Another member cautioned, “If EWC becomes involved in other issues besides feminism, its influence on the contemporary church will be dissipated.”⁹² This reply distinguishes social justice concerns, such as gay rights, from the goals of feminism. As such, this response demonstrates the permeable boundaries of feminist activism available to EWCI members at this time (avenues that were closed to “secular” feminists in groups such as NOW, as explained in the previous chapter). Finally, group “A” responses indicated an understanding of existing evangelical and Christian boundaries regarding abortion rights and homosexuality, and the potential consequences of contradicting or challenging these boundaries. These responders framed the EWCI as the “thems-inside” of the wider evangelical community: a subgroup that was still fighting to maintain insider status, while attempting to transform the dominant understanding of gender hierarchy in mainstream evangelicalism.

Beyond pragmatic reasons for rejecting resolutions, many responses emphasized a Christian moral responsibility related to social justice issues. There was much diversity among these views. Notably, EWCI members displayed a keen awareness of this diversity within their coalition, arguing such tension ought not to be disturbed or pushed to its possible limit by incorporating official resolutions. One responder noted, “I strongly think we need to support our gay sisters even if we pass no other resolutions – but then, I’m told that’s a more controversial point than my own pet [project] – peace so there you are!”⁹³ Another member declared, “...EWC would lose many members if it took positions on abortion, homosexual practices, the nuclear freeze, etc.”⁹⁴ This responder expressed that she felt animosity in the feminist movement toward more conservative members but reminded EWCI leadership that conservatives remain a part of the biblical feminist community. This member felt ignored by the “secular” feminist movement and the EWCI’s proposal of social resolutions both triggered these emotions and contradicted this member’s conservative views.

Other members protested homosexuality from a Christian perspective, asserting that homosexuality is a sin proscribed in Scripture. One responder made sure to distinguish between practicing homosexuality and *being* a “homosexual:”

I whole-heartedly support the EWCI resolution which indicates we should take a firm stand to support with love homosexual persons in an attitude of justice which is against the oppression involved in sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism or homophobia. However, I need to ask this question: Does our resolution mean that we support and affirm the acts of homosexual behavior that, in my opinion, there is sufficient biblical support to indicate that God abhors (again emphasizing that God in no way abhors the person who commits such sin).⁹⁵

This participant promised tentative support for the resolution if it reflected a “love the sinner, hate the sin” Christian ideal. For this member, engaging in “homosexual behaviour” is forbidden by God in Scripture, a point that the EWCI must articulate. Other responders felt that the resolution

⁹¹ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

blatantly supported homosexuality as a lifestyle under the guise of supporting the civil rights of gay persons:

To me, the purpose of the proposed resolution (perhaps not in the “letter” but in the “spirit”) is to condone homosexuality, the implication is there that homosexuality is a “created” way of life vs. learned behavior. I with my, though not vast, educational experience can’t make that definite a conclusion. And then the question turns to homosexuality and, do we still say the word, deliberate sin...I have enough reservations on the subject where, if a resolution such as the one suggested was adopted (therefore representing all of EWCI), I in good conscience would need to withdraw my membership. Not that I’m such a vital member but I may be typical of others and what would happen if resolutions of this nature were incorporated into EWCI.⁹⁶

These responses demonstrate members’ careful decision-making processes as they weighed their various understandings of sin and Christian morality against potential social justice resolutions. These decisions were powerful for many members, a reality underscored by those coalition members who threatened to exit the EWCI if the group advocated the “wrong” position.

Another fifty-nine members selected option “B” in the poll, voting that EWCI should discuss social issues and pass resolutions. As with the option “A” responders, these participants noted the dangers of isolating members and demonstrated cognizance of the diversity of opinions on social issues within the coalition. However, a number of these responders argued that taking a stand was worth the risks because fighting for social justice was an inherently Christian action. Many members drew a boundary around their Christianity and their feminism that encompassed social justice issues and that outweighed the potential pragmatic consequences of alienating members who might disagree.⁹⁷ One responder contended:

As a Christian who is committed to social justice as part of the New Covenant – “To love one another as I love you” in practice, taking a stand on ERA, peace, political involvement, racism...is simply part of being faithful and following Christ.”⁹⁸

Another member noted, “Whether we like it or not, we live in the world and must...deal with the pressing social issues of our time,” going on to ask, “Has this not always been one of the ongoing tasks of the Church?”⁹⁹ This reasoning mirrored early progressive evangelical arguments that American evangelicalism, from its inception, has involved a social justice agenda (see my discussion of Jim Wallis in chapter one, for example). Beyond aligning resolutions with a Christian worldview, some responses also suggested that the passage of resolutions was foundational to the original purpose of the EWCI:

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ A focus on social justice as a Christian ideal is aligned with Black evangelicalism and with the original ESA boundaries, as discussed in chapter one.

⁹⁸ “Results.” Emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Is EWC going to be about simply upward mobility for women, or is it going to be about human justice in the fullest sense? Or, are we going to be content with a myopic and somewhat self-serving outlook on the world, or do we honestly believe in the active discipleship part of our purpose statement? Undoubtedly we will lose some members if we move in the direction of taking positions and passing resolutions. But that is probably a risk worth taking.¹⁰⁰

Participants across all poll categories acknowledged the risks associated with taking a position on controversial subjects for evangelicals. Members feared potential pushback from other evangelical groups and acknowledged the real repercussions groups such as NOW were already facing among evangelicals. One poll responder recognized that the coalition was “in a difficult position because if we pass the measures/resolutions, we will be grist to the mill of ‘Concerned Women for America,’ which has already mounted a scurrilous attack on NOW.”¹⁰¹ However, this same responder went on to note, “If we remain politically inactive...we will fail to take the prophetic stance the Scriptures call us toward...we must serve God rather than worrying about those who feel free to misrepresent our motives and our faith.”¹⁰²

Across the poll responses, members used Scripture to validate or refute the proposed resolutions. An internal debate arose due to the EWCI’s interpretation of Scripture. As explained in chapter one, biblical feminists have consistently aligned with the broader evangelical community to affirm the importance of biblical authority. Into the late 1980s, the EWCI’s Statement of Faith identified the Bible as “the infallible guide and final authority for Christian faith and life.”¹⁰³ However, the shared belief in biblical authority did not result in homogenous views regarding social and political action among EWCI members. Rather than acting as a definitive rulebook to unite the coalition, the Bible validated diverse opinions as each member interpreted Scripture according to individual beliefs and church affiliations.¹⁰⁴

Biblical interpretative discrepancies within the EWCI represent a microcosm of the wider evangelical community and the Protestant movement. A founding principle of the Protestant Reformation, leading Reformers encouraged Christians to personally engage with and interpret Scripture for themselves.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the history of Protestantism, this tenet has contributed to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ AWTs: EWC Archives, “Executive Council Meeting 1978,” Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 4. For more information on the EWCI’s faith declarations and how they change over time, please see chapter five.

¹⁰⁴ Scholars of social movement theory and religion have noted that interpretive ambiguity in sacred texts can create divergent goals for social activism among adherents. For example, Christian Smith notes, “[i]t is possible, therefore, for faith-based activists to find in their sacred texts—perhaps especially when important political interests are at stake—legitimations for a variety of political, organizational, and tactical approaches that may satisfy their movement’s needs” (*Disruptive Religion*, 13). Pamela Cochran examines historically shifting views of scriptural infallibility among evangelical feminists and the evangelical movement more broadly in *Evangelical Feminism: A History*. Chapter five of this dissertation explores the EWCI’s changing relationship to Scripture as a coalition.

¹⁰⁵ One of the major theological principles of the Protestant Reformation was *sola scriptura*, scripture alone. This tenet was part of the wider rejection of what Reformers saw as the unjustified and corruptive power of Roman Catholic clergy to mediate between lay Christians and God. Among American evangelicals, “the ability of individuals to accept the offer of salvation and to read the Bible for themselves” has been essential from the early nineteenth

heterogeneity, discord, and schism. Protestant leaders and churches have advocated unique interpretations of the Bible and prioritized different passages and themes. Contradictory Protestant interpretations of Scripture also shaped American history. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American Protestants used Scripture to argue oppositional views regarding the institution of slavery. Evangelicals participated on both sides of this debate and it “divid[ed] the nation’s evangelical churches against themselves.”¹⁰⁶ Historian Mark Noll has demonstrated that anti-abolitionists had an advantage when it came to referencing Scripture: “[T]he defenders of slavery could quote many more texts that simply took the institution for granted, or even regulated its operation, than there were passages that, even by implication, questioned its propriety.”¹⁰⁷ Abolitionists, alternatively, shifted the interpretive focus away from individual passages and appealed to broader themes in Scripture. They argued that “the defining message of the Bible” included justice, freedom, and equality for all persons.¹⁰⁸ The American biblical debate over the legitimacy of the institution of slavery is perhaps the most well-known example of a Protestant conflict resulting from Protestantism’s relationship with Scripture. However, as the EWCI makes clear, examples abound and persist today.

Based on the inconclusive results of the EWCI’s survey, in 1985 the executive council resolved that “it would not be appropriate...to take an official position on any of the resolutions.”¹⁰⁹ EWCI leaders viewed the diversity among their membership as a positive sign for the ongoing success of their coalition. In a letter to EWCI membership after the survey, the national coordinator noted, “The one thing that became very clear [with this poll] was the support members feel for the primary task of EWCI – to spread the good news in our churches that all of us are created equal and that all of us have the responsibility to participate fully in the work of the church.”¹¹⁰ Leadership promoted the results of the questionnaire as reflecting continued group cohesion regarding the EWCI’s foundational principles. While the alliance did not reach a consensus on other social issues, including gay rights and abortion rights, leaders did not yet consider these issues to be integral to the group’s goals or “important enough” to warrant the inevitable fallout from taking a stance. However, the priorities of EWCI leaders visibly shifted at the Fresno conference the following year, and the battle to support gay rights became a core issue for the coalition. As the leadership directed the coalition in a socially progressive direction, members who fought against resolutions became the “thems-inside” of the EWCI, advocating an ideology that was unaligned with the coalition’s core.

Why Gay Rights?

century. Prior to this period, Puritans and Anglicans “stressed the authority of God and viewed believers as part of a community rather than as autonomous individuals” (Dowland, *Family Values*, 13).

¹⁰⁶ Mark Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 34.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁸ For example, nineteenth century abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher argued for this broad view of the message of Scripture (Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 44).

¹⁰⁹ Letter to Members, 1986, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 2; See also Bailey, “Not Business,” 5.-6.

¹¹⁰ AWTs: EEWc Archives, Letter to Members from Kathryn Neufeld, Dec. 1984, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 3.

From the EWCI's inception, founders grouped "lesbianism and abortion" together and argued that the coalition should avoid taking a stand on such controversial topics for evangelicals.¹¹¹ So why did the EWCI decide to support gay civil rights in the mid-1980s while remaining officially silent on abortion rights? External evangelical coverage of the Fresno conference argued that a disproportionately powerful pro-lesbian force within the EWCI pushed through the resolution on gay civil rights.¹¹² Journalist Beth Spring, writing for *Christianity Today*, proclaimed: "Lesbians in EWCI number only about 20 or 30 women, less than 5 percent of total membership," however, "advocates of homosexual rights...such as Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and Nancy Hardesty, exercise strong influence in EWCI."¹¹³ Spring challenged the validity of the EWCI's resolutions by suggesting Mollenkott, Hardesty, and others abused their power to advance a gay rights agenda. However, internal EWCI discourses betray a general feeling of precarity rather than power among the EWCI's gay and lesbian members and other "advocates of homosexual rights." The EWCI's early decision to sideline discourses regarding homosexuality had sent a clear message to lesbian and gay members in the coalition. One anonymous "lesbian member of and participant in EWC" responded to the 1984 poll explaining,

As a gay person I do not like feeling that I am "welcome" only if I remain invisible as a gay person. It is not a question of whether one segment of EWC feels magnanimous enough to "let" me participate or to allow me to belong. I am a part of EWC. But I constantly get the message that I am the other. I do not want this issue to remain hidden and covered any longer. My perception is that the gay issue is the one that is most untouchable.¹¹⁴

This participant sought to claim space for herself in the coalition despite feeling othered and silenced as a lesbian member, revealing an underlying tension facing gay EWCI participants. This member also saw this tension as connected to broader Christian discourses regarding homosexuality, warning the EWCI not to "stagnate into a homogenous ingrown group trying to nurture itself and dying slowly—the same deadened direction the church has so often taken."¹¹⁵

Among the openly gay members in the coalition by 1986, many had "come out" privately to close friends years before identifying as gay within the broader coalition. Leading EWCI member Virginia Mollenkott disclosed her sexual orientation to Letha Scanzoni in the mid 1970s as they undertook a book project together on social issues and Christian ethics. Mollenkott, an English professor at William Paterson University in New Jersey, had established herself as a prominent

¹¹¹ See chapter one. AWTs: EEWC Archives, Letter to TSC members, 11 May 1976, Series 1B, Box 1, Folder 2.

¹¹² See for example Beth Spring, "Gay Rights Resolution Divides Members of Evangelical Women's Caucus," *Christianity Today*, vol. 30, no. 14 (1986).

¹¹³ Spring, "Gay Rights Resolution," 40. Spring claims that the estimate of EWCI lesbians came from "the organization's officials," but she does not cite her source by name. Elsewhere Anne Eggebroten had asserted this numerical claim (see "Evangelical Women's Caucus Backs Gay Rights," in the *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1986, 5). The estimate, of course, only refers to "out" or "visible" lesbian members at this time. Spring's article echoed the sentiment of the ex-members of the EWCI who went on the form Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) Alvera Mickelsen and Cathy Kroeger, discussed below. Mickelsen and Kroeger argued that "the Lesbians had influence in the EWC far beyond their number" (Letter to Minnesota EWCers from Alvera Mickelsen, 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder, 1).

¹¹⁴ "Results." Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

evangelical scholar and activist by the 1970s, having already authored four books. Born in 1932 in Philadelphia, PA, to a working-class family “of extremely conservative evangelicals,” Mollenkott (née Ramey) knew that she was a lesbian from a young age but did not embrace this identity until much later.¹¹⁶ Raised in the Plymouth Brethren Church, at eleven, Mollenkott was sent to a Christian boarding school in Florida when her mother learned she was in love with an older woman. At the boarding school, “the administrators chastised her for her lesbianism, using the Bible to ‘clobber her,’” an oppressive tactic Mollenkott experienced many times in her life.¹¹⁷ As a young adult, Mollenkott attended Bob Jones University and, while there, married fellow student Fred Mollenkott on the advice of her professors, in the hopes of “curing” her homosexuality.¹¹⁸

In the 1960s, Mollenkott began “to liberate [herself] from the fundamentalist belief system...gain[ing] the courage to read the Bible as carefully as [she] had been trained to read any other text.”¹¹⁹ For Mollenkott, this meant rejecting fundamentalism’s strict biblical inerrancy, which taught that “the Bible was virtually dictated by God and is without error or contradiction.”¹²⁰ Finally taking off her “fundamentalist blinders,” Mollenkott “began to read the Bible with attention to literary formats, historical context, what words meant at the time the text was written, the use of imagery, analogy, symbol, and so forth.”¹²¹ Through this hermeneutical approach to Scripture, Mollenkott became “radicalized by the Bible,” finding empowerment, liberation, feminism, and validation for her own identity within its pages.¹²² Armed with her own interpretation of the Bible, Mollenkott claimed an identity for herself as part of the “evangelical left,” explaining:

Evangelicals come in a continuum that runs the political gamut from extreme left to extreme right. What Christian evangelicals have in common is that meaningful living requires a direct personal relationship with God, and that the Bible should be taken seriously. But what that means can differ widely, and our social attitudes differ tremendously.¹²³

In 1973, Mollenkott divorced her husband, and in 1975, she told Letha Scanzoni that she was a lesbian.¹²⁴ Scanzoni grew pale at Mollenkott’s confession and Mollenkott lamented, “it is a terrible thing to be a person who has news to tell that can drain the blood out of a good friend’s face.”¹²⁵ Scanzoni later explained her reaction was “from neither a judgment of her nor a rejection of her,

¹¹⁶ Mollenkott, “Feminism and Evangelicalism,” 2010, <https://www.virginiamollenkott.com/feminismandevangelicalism.html>.

¹¹⁷ Penelope Green, “Virginia Mollenkott, 88, Dies: Feminist Found Liberation in the Bible,” *New York Times*, 31 October, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/26/books/virginia-mollenkott-dead.html>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Mollenkott, “Feminism and Evangelicalism.”

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. This hermeneutical approach, which examines the historical context, authorship, and literary structure of the Bible, is known as higher criticism. This method was developed by 18th century German biblical scholars. For a discussion of how American evangelicals engaged higher criticism in the 1960s and 1970s, see Pamela Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 20-21.

¹²² Mollenkott, “Feminism and Evangelicalism.”

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Greene, “Virginia Mollenkott.”

¹²⁵ Scanzoni and Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual my Neighbor?* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994): viii.

but an involuntary physical response out of shock” having “not knowingly ever met a person who identified as lesbian or gay” before.¹²⁶ Quickly recovering from her surprise, Scanzoni decided with Mollenkott to narrow the focus of their book to address homosexuality from a Christian perspective. The authors wrote *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, published in 1978.¹²⁷ At this time, Mollenkott was still “closeted” publicly; it was not until the mid-1980s that Mollenkott spoke openly about her sexual orientation in the EWCI or to the public.

Mollenkott was aware of the tension surrounding discourses about homosexuality in the EWCI even among her friends. In 1986, Mollenkott wrote a letter to her friend and *Update* editor Virginia Hearn, recognizing that homosexuality was “an issue I know you find difficult.”¹²⁸ In this letter, Mollenkott identified herself as a lesbian, which was Hearn’s first confirmation of the “rumours” circulating among the EWCI about Mollenkott.¹²⁹ Mollenkott wrote to Hearn:

I have heard that you are very afraid I will state my lesbianism in my plenary speech at EWC [in Fresno in 1986]; and frankly I had not thought of doing so until I heard the rumors that I would. (I never said I would, either in private or public....in one workshop [I] said I hoped I would not be disinvited from EWC now that I have openly affirmed the orientation God bestowed upon me at birth or whenever!) At present I am asking God to show me what would be best for the organization, for my lesbian sisters and gay brothers, and for the fledgling feminists at the conference.¹³⁰

Regardless of Mollenkott’s decision to discuss her sexuality at the 1986 conference, many EWCI members considered Mollenkott to be “already out” by Fresno.¹³¹ Mollenkott had publicly acknowledged her homosexuality at a conference on sexuality at the University of Pacific one year earlier.¹³²

Founding member Nancy Hardesty also told her close friends Virginia Mollenkott and Letha Scanzoni that she was gay in 1975. Like Mollenkott, Hardesty did not immediately share this

¹²⁶ Letha Scanzoni, “Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, My Coauthor, My Friend: A Special Remembrance,” *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/virginia-ramey-mollenkott-my-coauthor-my-friend-a-special-remembrance/>; Scanzoni had been researching and writing about homosexuality and gay marriage with regards to Scripture and theology (“in the abstract”) since at least 1973, in *Sex is a Parent Affair* (Raleigh North Carolina: Regal Books).

¹²⁷ This story is recounted by Mollenkott and Scanzoni in the preface to the 1994 revised and updated edition of *Is the Homosexual my Neighbor?* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994): vi-ix.

¹²⁸ Letter to Ginny Hearn from Virginia Mollenkott, Jan. 9, 1986, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 10.

¹²⁹ Ibid. Hearn wrote to Mollenkott in 1987: “I didn’t know you were a lesbian until you yourself told me that you were in a January ’86 letter” (Letter to Virginia Ramey Mollenkott from Virginia Hearn, Oct. 6, 1987, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 10). In an earlier letter (May 1986) Hearn suggested that rumours had been circulating regarding Mollenkott’s sexual orientation: “Long, long ago you evidently told Carla Brewington that you were a lesbian, and that statement--wrongly, in my opinion--quickly got back to me here in California via the grapevine” (Letter to Virginia Mollenkott from Virginia Hearn, May 12, 1986, Series 2B, Box 5, Folder 4).

¹³⁰ Letter to Ginny Hearn from Virginia Mollenkott, Jan. 9, 1986, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 10. By the early 2000s, Mollenkott identified as a “transgender lesbian” and spoke openly about this identity in articles in the EWCI’s newsletter *Christian Feminism Today* (previously *Update*) (“Virginia Ramey Mollenkott,” *Christian Feminism Today*, Winter, January-March 2007, 6).

¹³¹ Hearn acknowledged that both her and Anne Eggebroten agreed that by the conference, Mollenkott was “already out” (Letter to Virginia Mollenkott from Virginia Hearn, May 12, 1986, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 10).

¹³² Ibid.; Letter to Ginny Hearn from Virginia Mollenkott, Jan. 9, 1986, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 10.

information with the broader coalition.¹³³ Hardesty officially mentioned that she was living as a lesbian to the EWCI community only after the Fresno conference.¹³⁴ Despite not yet being “out” to the EWCI, Hardesty participated in the coalition’s “lesbians and friends” workshops, which began in the early 1980s and discussed Christianity and homosexuality.¹³⁵ In 1986, Hardesty chaired the Fresno business meeting where the gay civil rights resolution passed and, having been an active supporter for gay rights within the coalition in the past, some members accused her of usurping the role of chair to promote a gay-rights agenda.¹³⁶ Hardesty denied any clandestine pre-planning and remembers the Fresno vote with joy and sadness.¹³⁷ Hardesty was acutely aware of the stakes of supporting gay civil rights within the evangelical community as “some members angrily reminded her that the cost of the vote could be as high as losing their jobs.”¹³⁸ Even after the EWCI affirmed support for gay rights, Hardesty “continued to feel the weight of marginalization” as a gay person within both the coalition and the broader evangelical community.¹³⁹ Despite feelings of alienation, Hardesty supported the EWCI’s continued affiliation with the evangelical community through the 1980s, protesting a proposal to remove “evangelical” from the coalition’s title in 1988.¹⁴⁰ Hardesty herself remained a member of the Episcopal Church, which she had joined in 1964, where she “was always aware of gay priests and bishops within the church, as well as lesbian priests after women were officially ordained in 1976.”¹⁴¹

EWCI leadership openly contested Spring’s claims in *Christianity Today* that a few influential gay and lesbian members swayed the coalition’s vote in Fresno. In an article for the popular progressive evangelical magazine *The Other Side*, founding member Anne Eggebroten explained that all three of Fresno’s resolutions were, in part, a result of the demographics of conference attendees. Eggebroten wrote: “Among us were a black woman and some women who had been victims of violent abuse as children or wives. We decided that the three issues closest to our hearts

¹³³ Horner, “Becoming All We’re Meant to Be,” 371, 377. In 1975 there were rumours within the EWCI that Hardesty and Mollenkott were lesbians. Anne Eggebroten wrote to them to ask if the rumours were true, and they apparently both denied the accusations at that time (Ibid., 376).

¹³⁴ Virginia Hearn noted that she “didn’t realize that Nancy H. had decided to live as a lesbian until the middle of the council meetings after the Fresno conference. Britt [Vanden Eykel] said the same” (Letter to Virginia Ramey Mollenkott from Virginia Hearn, Oct. 6, 1987, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 10).

¹³⁵ Hardesty remembers the first such workshop occurring in 1982 at the Seattle, WA conference. Anne Eggebroten remembers the first workshop in 1984 at the Wellesley, MA conference (Horner, “Becoming All We’re Meant to Be,” 371, 376).

¹³⁶ Ibid., 371-2.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 373.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ The EWCI’s name change is discussed at length in chapter five. Hardesty continued to advocate that EWCI maintain its evangelical identity voting to keep the name Evangelical Women’s Caucus in the 1988 ballot for the coalition’s name change (discussed in chapter five). On her returned ballot, Hardesty wrote, “‘evangelical’ is a name we need to retain as a witness” (Hardesty, “Ballot,” 1988, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 3).

¹⁴¹ In a 2005 issue of *Update*, Nancy Hardesty explained that she had been an “active member of the Episcopal Church for twenty-five years, from [her] confirmation in 1964...to 1989” (Hardesty, “From the Bookshelf,” *EEWC Update*, Fall, Oct-Dec 2006, 11). Although less active after 1989, Hardesty confirmed that she had never “left” the Episcopal Church in correction of Pamela Cochran’s biographical comments in *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (Ibid.).

were racism, family violence, and civil rights for homosexual persons.”¹⁴² Eggebroten also noted that leading up to Fresno, “important changes of heart were taking place among some EWCI members and leaders with regard to how homosexual persons ought to be treated in our society and in our churches.”¹⁴³ The presence of gay members in the EWCI, along with internal pressure from these members and their allies within the coalition, contributed to the Fresno resolution conversation.¹⁴⁴ However, this does not explain fully why the EWCI passed these resolutions while others, such as a resolution on abortion rights, were left off the docket.¹⁴⁵

The 1984 poll responses demonstrate that EWCI members knew that some of the most powerful pushback against civil rights for gay people, which began in the mid-1970s, was coming from evangelicals. Scholars have identified deeply engrained conservative Christian ideologies, specifically regarding sex, sexuality, and gender, as shaping public policies and laws governing sexuality in the United States.¹⁴⁶ As previously mentioned, in 1986 the Supreme Court ruled in *Bowers v. Hardwick* to “[uphold] the constitutionality of sodomy statutes, finding that states did have the right and even the moral interest to regulate and criminalize consensual sexual activity between persons of the same sex.”¹⁴⁷ Jakobsen and Pellegrini identify *Hardwick* as a strong example of “the state’s dependence on religion to justify sexual regulation,” arguing that the Supreme Court decision employed specifically Protestant morals to enshrine “correct,” acceptable (hetero)sexuality into law.¹⁴⁸ Thus, at the time of Fresno, gay civil rights were under siege in the wider American landscape, and this precarity powerfully impacted gay and lesbian evangelicals.

¹⁴² Anne Eggebroten, “Handling Power: UnChristian, Unfeminine, Unkind?” in *The Other Side*, Dec. 1986, 22. Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1. Eggebroten was an ally for the gay rights movement within the EWCI having “changed her theological position” after reading *Is the Homosexual my Neighbor?* (Horner, “Becoming All We’re Meant to Be,” 375-6). Though married to a man, in 2022 Anne Linstatter (previously Eggebroten) wrote a lifestyle article for the *Los Angeles Times* asserting: “If I were single again, maybe I’d take a lover or be bisexual” (“L.A. Affairs: At 73, I Fantasize about Bisexuality. But What About my 50-Year Marriage?” *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 2022. <https://www.latimes.com/lifestyle/story/2022-06-17/la-affairs-anne-linstatter-los-angeles-single-sex-explore-bisexuality-marriage-relationship>).

¹⁴³ Eggebroten, “Handling Power,” 22.

¹⁴⁴ A leading lesbian member of the EWCI, Jeanne Hanson, remembers strongly supporting the gay civil rights resolution at Fresno. Hanson had joined the EWCI in 1978 and was the national coordinator from 1983 to 1984. In 2018, at the coalition’s national conference, Hanson remembered the Fresno resolution debate, explaining, “I could not understand the hypocrisy of having lesbian and gay members in our organization and not being willing to support them in the organization and in the country. So I was sitting there listening to the debate...But I just had to get up. I took the mic and I spoke up and I said, ‘We cannot be hypocrites anymore. We have to pass this resolution. We have to’” (Hanson, “You’ve Got to Stand Up and Speak Up,” *CFT*, <https://eewc.com/stand-up-and-speak-up/>).

¹⁴⁵ As noted in chapter two, Eggebroten’s 1994 book *My Abortion My Choice* proved that EWCI women were having abortions themselves and/or supporting women who had abortions. Thus, the resolutions were not simply based around the identity of EWCI participants.

¹⁴⁶ Jakobsen and Pellegrini, for example, argue that Americans must “come to terms with the fact that Christianity, and often conservative Christianity, functions as the yardstick and measure of what counts as ‘religion’ and ‘morality’ in America,” which, in turn, dictates legal proscriptions on sexuality (13). They suggest in a statement that mirrors how evangelicals such as Anita Bryant understand their relationship with the state, that “theological pronouncements have become so institutionalized in the official life of the nation that they can be taken for just good old American values” (3). See also Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 1.

¹⁴⁷ Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*, 22.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-30.

Although abortion had also become a hot-button issue among evangelicals by this time (discussed in the previous chapter), abortion remained technically legal in the United States. As such, abortion was not of imminent concern for evangelical feminists in the same way as gay civil rights.¹⁴⁹

In straddling feminist and evangelical ideologies (and the evangelical influence on public policy and human rights), the EWCI assumed a particular position in this debate: they advocated for civil rights for gay people while explicitly not supporting homosexuality “as a lifestyle.” This distinction was crucial for the EWCI leadership, as can be seen in a letter written by Britt Vanden Eykel, the national coordinator of EWCI, following Fresno:

We...received a lot of negative responses from the evangelical community from the passage of the resolution endorsing civil rights for homosexuals, primarily because many felt that we were endorsing the gay lifestyle. However, we reemphasized that we were only taking a stand for social justice and civil rights, and not making a theological statement.¹⁵⁰

In *Christianity Today*'s coverage of the controversial gay rights resolution, Vanden Eykel reiterated that the resolution was “not any kind of endorsement of the gay lifestyle or comment on biblical interpretation.”¹⁵¹ EWCI leaders did not intend the coalition's resolution on gay civil rights to be a moral or theological statement about homosexuality as an acceptable or appropriate lifestyle; the resolution was simply a response to legal and political restrictions that endangered gay persons. The EWCI intended its somewhat slippery distinction between rights and morality to mitigate backlash from the evangelical community, and to align the EWCI with broader discourses within the progressive evangelical movement. Ron Sider, a leading member of Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), was also interviewed by *Christianity Today* about the EWCI's resolutions. Sider confirmed that the ESA “continue[s] to believe that civil rights is something all people should have.”¹⁵² However, he reiterated “that his organization would be careful not to ‘endorse a crusade whose aim is legitimizing an unbiblical lifestyle.’”¹⁵³ Thus, the EWCI's prioritization of support for gay rights increasingly isolated the coalition from the wider progressive and conservative evangelical communities.

The Fallout from Fresno

A small group of EWCI members proposed the gay rights resolution as one of three resolutions at the seventh plenary conference in Fresno, California. As noted, the resolutions included “justice and equality for all racial minorities,” to “deplore violence against women and

¹⁴⁹ This is not to suggest that abortion was accessible to all pregnant persons. Restrictions on funding through the passage of the Hyde Amendment (1977), for example, limited access to legal abortion for many women. It is of note here that the demographic makeup of the EWCI throughout its history was always majority middle to upper-class White women. This demographic was most likely to be able to exercise their right to abortion, if needed.

¹⁵⁰ AWTs: EEWCA Archives, Letter to Claire from Britt Vanden Eykel, 3 Feb. 1988, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 3.

¹⁵¹ Beth Spring, “Gay Rights Resolution Divides Membership of Evangelical Women's Caucus,” *Christianity Today*, vol.10, no. 14 (1986), 42.

¹⁵² Ron Sider qtd in Spring, “Gay Rights,” 43.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

children,” and a “firm stand in favor of civil rights protection for homosexual persons.”¹⁵⁴ Despite trepidations and internal objections, EWCI leaders conducted a vote immediately after presenting the proposals at the business meeting. In this vote, eighty members supported the resolutions, sixteen members opposed them, and twenty-three members abstained.¹⁵⁵ This vote prompted many members to reevaluate their relationship within the coalition, as many participants felt that the EWCI leadership had mishandled the resolutions and the meeting. Many members felt these resolutions dramatically changed the EWCI’s collective identity. Approximately 300 participants, nearly half of the total membership, withdrew from the EWCI following Fresno.¹⁵⁶ Members grappled with the decision to stay or go; many wrote to the executive council to explain their choices.¹⁵⁷ These records offer valuable insights into this schism and EWCI’s evolving direction.

Many EWCI members expressed bewilderment and displeasure with the decision to present resolutions at Fresno, particularly given that the business meeting vote represented only twenty percent of EWCI membership.¹⁵⁸ Firstly, the passage of resolutions contradicted the coalition’s previous acceptance of divergent opinions, signified by the EWCI’s prior rejection of resolutions. Secondly, many members expressed that the EWCI leadership acted coercively and surreptitiously in their approach to the resolutions.¹⁵⁹ The resolutions were prepared the night before the meeting by a smaller group or prominent members, including founder Anne Eggebroten, who “wrote and introduced the resolution.”¹⁶⁰ This subgroup apparently only notified Nancy Hardesty, the chair of the business meeting, in advance about their plan to propose resolutions.¹⁶¹ After the events of the Fresno business meeting, many members expressed opposition to the way leaders presented and handled the resolutions, noting the resolutions “were unexpected, undemocratically pushed through, and fiercely divisive.”¹⁶² Numerous members contended that EWCI leadership acted in an insular and self-interested way, exploiting their power and authority by allowing resolutions to pass that did not represent the broader coalition’s best interests or perspectives. A letter to individual chapters from the National Executive Committee after Fresno acknowledged that “[m]any members expressed anger, sorrow, betrayal, surprise,

¹⁵⁴ Virginia’s Hearn Edits to Catherine Bailey’s Letter to Members Draft. 29 Sept. 1986. Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 2; See also Catherine Bailey, “Not Business as Usual,” *Update*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1986), 5-6.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Letter to Claire, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 3. This letter notes by Feb of 1988 the membership was 366, “about half of membership before Fresno”). The executive council reported that EWCI had their lowest membership ever in the spring of 1988, with 259 members remaining, and by January of 1989 they had 294 members. (Administrator’s Report for 1988, Series 1C, Box 7, Folder 7).

¹⁵⁷ Many members wrote to the council to commend the passing of these resolutions as well. See for example Letter to EWCI Executive Council from Dr. Jean H. Orost, 15 Nov. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1; Letter to Dan Swartz from Reverend Dawn Richards, 19 Dec. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1; Letter to EWCI Executive Council from Margaret H. Fuad, 14 Nov. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1.

¹⁵⁸ Letter to Reta Finger from Virginia Hearn, 8 May 1987, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 4; Letter to EWC Sisters, 23 July 1986, Series 1B Box 4 Folder 3.

¹⁵⁹ Letter to EWC Sisters, 23 July 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3; Letter to Claire, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 3; Catherine Bailey, “Not Business as Usual,” *Update*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1986), 5; See also “Feminism vs. Lesbianism” in *Cornerstone*, vol. 15, no. 80, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1.

¹⁶⁰ “Women’s Caucus Passes Pro-Homosexual Resolution,” *Eternity*, vol. 37, no. 10 (1986), 13.

¹⁶¹ Letter to Reta Finger, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 4. As noted above, Nancy Hardesty refutes having any prior knowledge about the resolutions.

¹⁶² “Handling Conflict: The Fallout from Fresno,” *The Other Side*, Dec. 1986, 24, 41, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1.

and/or disappointment at the methods utilized to push these resolutions through at the business meeting; methods which to many were reminiscent of authoritarian tactics historically used against women in a patriarchal system.”¹⁶³ One member, who ended up leaving the coalition, considered the proposals to be part of a furtive agenda:

The procedure was carefully orchestrated-- beginning with a resolution favoring civil rights for blacks [sic], then one supporting battered women. And finally the one they were aiming for--recognition of lesbians. The speakers were lined up for each resolution. The lesbians were there in force. No one was prewarned and prepared to deal with the implications of the resolution.¹⁶⁴

These internal correspondences demonstrate that Fresno’s resolutions greatly diminished trust among coalition members. As noted in the first chapter, trust is essential in a coalition to maintain unity, as without it, members are likely to leave the coalition. Trusting in a coalition involves members believing that the leaders have their “interests at heart” and can adequately enact those interests on their behalf.¹⁶⁵ Even a leading member who voted for the resolutions, and remained within the organization following Fresno, expressed this sentiment in a personal letter to another member:

[Although the] Council had decided and reported in Update that the organization simply couldn't handle matters on which there was essentially a 50/50 split in the membership, [the leaders of the business meeting] decided that the Council's opinion was merely advisory and went ahead with it anyway. Nancy volunteered to chair the meeting, well aware of what was coming before it happened....As the editor, I find the incongruity between what we published, and then what was permitted to happen at the business meeting, very embarrassing. When the resolution issue was forced through, I voted for all of them, but I don't think they should have been forced through. In retrospect, I'm not sure I should have done so, but rather abstained...¹⁶⁶

Even core participants in the coalition, who, as noted in the previous chapter, are usually congruent in their ideology, questioned their participation in the EWCI due to the manner in which the coalition passed the resolutions. Although this member ultimately remained within the group, she had doubts about the coalition’s ability to represent her best interests. She also questioned the EWCI’s competence as a group to enforce the coalition’s wider goals, losing trust in their processes.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, coalition leaders typically design conferences to serve as “neutral shared

¹⁶³ Letter to EWC Sisters, 23 July 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3; Letter to Claire, Series 1B, Box 2, Folder 3; Catherine Bailey, “Not Business as Usual,” *Update*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1986), 5.

¹⁶⁴ AWTs: EEWc Archives, Letter to Minnesota EWCers from Alvera Mickelsen, 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder, 1.

¹⁶⁵ Gawerc, “Coalition-Building,” 3.

¹⁶⁶ Letter to Reta Finger, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 4.

¹⁶⁷ The national coordinator also wrote of her own feelings of betrayal at the selection of Nancy Hardesty to chair the meeting, as they had previously agreed on a different member to do so (Letter to EWC Sisters, 23 July 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3). Although these two leading members remained within the group and backed these positions publicly, there was much internal turmoil and discrepancy over the passage of these resolutions even in the group’s core.

spaces” for group camaraderie, community building, shared decision-making, and conflict resolution. Due to the perception of secrecy and the general bamboozlement felt by members during Fresno, the EWCI conference became a site of tension, pressure, and division, where many members felt excluded and ignored. The EWCI’s internal conversation regarding Fresno reveals a coalition struggling to navigate internal differences, leaving many participants feeling disrespected, neglected, and exploited by power imbalances within their coalition.

Recognizing that some members felt betrayed, the EWCI leadership set out to “regain trust, mutuality, and consensus” in the aftermath of Fresno.¹⁶⁸ Over the next few years, EWCI leaders implemented different mechanisms to sustain the coalition, entering a period focused on damage control. The executive council proposed a new, straightforward procedure for the passage of future resolutions, stipulating that members must submit their resolutions to the executive council at least two months before a vote. Leaders designed these regulations to increase transparency regarding resolutions and circumvent any pressures members might feel to vote a certain way, an anxiety expressed by participants who felt ambushed at the Fresno business meeting.¹⁶⁹ Moving forward, resolutions also required twenty-five signatures before the meeting to be proposed, and would be presented to “the entire membership for a ballot vote in order that our actions receive the endorsement of the majority of our members.”¹⁷⁰

This proposed solution appeased some of the members who were threatening to leave the coalition after Fresno. For example, Susan McCoubrie initially wanted to withdraw from the EWCI fearing that the gay rights resolution “would also be perceived as an endorsement of the lifestyle which, as a corporate policy, is inappropriate for EWCI.”¹⁷¹ McCoubrie decided not to “bag it,” however, following the leadership’s changes in the by-laws regulating resolutions for the future.¹⁷² Significantly, McCoubrie’s decision to stay was a response to a personal letter from an executive council member: EWCI leaders wrote individual letters to numerous distressed members to address their concerns and to express gratitude for each member’s continued support of the coalition. A common conflict resolution tactic involves focusing on “strengthening relationships” in a coalition to increase loyalty among the group, to promote feelings of inclusion, and to help the coalition “withstand greater conflict.”¹⁷³ The EWCI leadership attempted to create deeper bonds and feelings of value among members by personally reaching out to members. However, as the numerical loss following Fresno demonstrates, such a solution did not appease all members, many of whom had already lost faith in the coalition’s leadership, questioning their capacity to organize democratically and uphold diversity within the coalition.

The fallout from Fresno highlighted the inefficacy of the EWCI’s existing mechanisms to mediate diversity. To quash resentments and fractures the day after the business meeting, conference organizers planned an open mic session for members to express their concerns about the passage of the resolutions. However, this open mic left some dissenting members feeling further isolated. Alvera Mickelsen, who rejected the resolutions, reported that the meeting “began with a discussion to confront our ‘homophobia.’ So anyone who objected to official recognition of

¹⁶⁸ AWTs: EEWc Archives, Letter to EWC Sisters, 23 July 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ AWTs: EEWc Archives, Letter to Patricia Mollo from Susan McCoubrie, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Gawerc, “Coalition-Building,” 7.

lesbians as congruent with EWC was 'homophobic!' That approach is clearly a form of emotional battering unworthy of any group that calls itself Christian."¹⁷⁴ While the initial open mic may not have mollified members feeling excluded, a letter that national coordinator Vanden Eykel sent to each chapter on behalf of the executive council received "very positive feedback."¹⁷⁵ Vanden Eykel's goal in writing this letter was "to prevent a major schism" in the coalition, and in response to it, many chapters and individual members "indicated that they want to hang in there with EWC and see this thing through. This includes the Texas, Minnesota, Portland, Southwest, Chicago, and Boston chapters."¹⁷⁶ While Vanden Eykel's letter affirmed the passage of the resolutions, she also voiced her own surprise and feelings of betrayal at the proposed resolutions, commiserating with the more indignant members. Her letter also attempted to diminish the importance of gay rights for the EWCI:

...as individuals we should take a stand for justice where we see oppression, but we must decide on what issues we are called to work. If we spread ourselves too thin and try to carry too many burdens, we will only burn ourselves out and become ineffective in all areas. This is equally true for EWC as an organization....Those who feel that homosexual issues take priority over our purpose and ministry should join and work with...other organizations whose specific purpose is to educate the church on the homosexual issue.¹⁷⁷

By suggesting members engage in gay rights activism in their personal lives and through participation in other groups, Vanden Eykel deprioritized the gay rights resolution for the EWCI. However, other leaders within the EWCI core supported the resolution and resented such a deflection. Vanden Eykel then followed-up privately with her "Council sisters," apologizing if others were "offended, appalled, disgusted, etc." by her letter, which she realized was "a little heavy handed."¹⁷⁸ By attempting to appease dissenting members, Vanden Eykel had slighted some of the remaining members, including those on the executive council.

A similar attempt to avoid schism, which dismissed the views of existing members, occurred in the national newsletter's coverage of Fresno. An article in *Update* by Catherine Bailey recounted the events of the business meeting for the wider EWCI membership. Bailey attempted to present an honest view of the events to lessen distrust and suspicion among members. Bailey first acknowledged the decisions at the Wellesley conference and the ensuing poll that showed members were divided on the issue of resolutions: "Because of the inherent diversity of our membership, it had been concluded...that it was not appropriate for our organization to take an official position on any of the issues presented at the Wellesley conference. Thus, provisions were not made by the EWCI Executive Council to deal with future resolutions."¹⁷⁹ Bailey then acknowledged that the resolutions were presented "by a group of members still concerned about proposing similar resolutions," claiming that their passage resulted in "confusion, conflict, and hurt

¹⁷⁴ Letter to Britt Vanden Eykel from Alvera Mickelson, 13, Aug. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder, 1.

¹⁷⁵ AWTs: EEWc Archives, Letter to Council Sisters from Britt Vanden Eykel, 8 Aug. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3; Letter to EWC Sisters, 23 July 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3.

¹⁷⁶ Letter to Council Sisters from Britt Vanden Eykel, 8 Aug. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3.

¹⁷⁷ Letter to EWC Sisters, 23 July 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3.

¹⁷⁸ Letter to Council Sisters, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3.

¹⁷⁹ Catherine Bailey, "Not Business as Usual," *Update*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1986), 5.

for many.”¹⁸⁰ Simultaneously, Bailey asserted that many members were pleased that the EWCI was willing to “deal with such difficult issues,” concluding her article with a pointed question: “Given our many diversities, how does EWCI as an organization move into the next 10 years under our central theme of biblical equality?”¹⁸¹

In a personal correspondence following this article, Anne Eggebroten wrote to the editor of *Update*, Virginia Hearn, to express her concern over the portrayal of the business meeting: “I suppose the point of everything [in the article] is to placate those upset members (a minority) who are considering leaving EWC. I suppose you see that as an important function of the newsletter at this point. OK, so be it, but I consider the article heavily slanted toward them.”¹⁸² These correspondences illustrate some of the challenges involved in maintaining harmony and resolving differences within the EWCI. To sustain the coalition, EWCI leaders attempted to recenter the coalition’s original goals after Fresno, while incorporating new priorities, embracing diversity, and supporting members with divergent opinions. This balancing act was unsuccessful because the coalition’s leadership was not able to effectively argue that Fresno’s resolutions would not detract from the original aims of the coalition (the coalition’s “common ground”).¹⁸³

In the same letter to all chapters that outlined the new resolution regulations after Fresno, Vanden Eykel attempted to remind the group of their original goals and reassert the priorities of the EWCI:

We need to reaffirm that our purpose as an organization is still that which is stated in our by-laws: “to present God’s teaching on female-male equality to the whole body of Christ’s church; and to call both women and men to mutual submission and active discipleship.”¹⁸⁴

However, for many members, the damage had already been done; they saw the passage and leadership’s upholding of the gay rights resolution as detracting and distracting from the group’s original goals. Dissenting members understood the Fresno resolutions as transformative to the collective ideology of the coalition, shifting its focus toward a social justice agenda that their Christian beliefs did not support. Alvera Mickelsen noted, “It pains me very much to give up on EWCI. There are wonderful people in the group whom I love dearly. But...we permitted ourselves to be swamped and lose our direction.”¹⁸⁵ One member from Boston took six months to decide whether to remain within the EWCI, hoping time would help her reconcile her emotions around Fresno. However, this member eventually resigned, writing:

My calling within EWC has always been to reach out to women like myself – women who have grown up in conservative traditions who are often unable to recognize the oppression

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸² “Dear Ginny,” Letter to Ginny from Anne Eggebroten, 11 Oct. 1986, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 1.

¹⁸³ Gawerc, “Coalition Building,” 5.

¹⁸⁴ Letter to Members of the EWC/GBC Board from Helen Bray Garretson, 16, Jan. 1987, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3.

¹⁸⁵ Letter to Britt Vanden Eykel from Alvera Mickelsen, 13 Aug. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder, 1.

they endure. I feel that EWCI has lost its cutting edge in that ministry by endorsing such strong, yet tangential political positions in the resolutions.¹⁸⁶

These members left because the coalition no longer reflected their personal goals and their Christian ideals. Many of the departing participants took issue with the content of the gay rights resolution because it was particularly difficult for the more conservative evangelical members and for members who were affiliated with conservative Christian denominations. As noted, many EWCI members feared “that conservative churches would consider this to be an affirmation of the gay lifestyle,” rather than simply a pronouncement supporting civil rights for everyone.¹⁸⁷ One member resigned because the Fresno resolutions threatened her employment at a conservative Christian institution: “as president of the Conference on Christianity and Literature I cannot be involved in the current controversy.”¹⁸⁸ This resignation echoes Gamson’s argument that internal disputes are often made public due to external pressures through “public communications.”¹⁸⁹ Differing opinions were evident among EWCI members before these resolutions, yet only when the group took a public stand in favour of gay civil rights did the more conservative members disassociate themselves from the coalition, fearing repercussions from their churches and communities.

The EWCI’s resolutions were brought into the evangelical public sphere by popular evangelical media. The mainstream evangelical periodical *Eternity* reported that the EWCI passed a “Pro-Homosexual Resolution,” which resulted in “[a] serious disruption” for the coalition.¹⁹⁰ This framing recalls the fears that members expressed about evangelical perceptions of their support for “a gay lifestyle.” The short article included an interview with Anne Eggebroten, who reiterated the EWCI’s party-line: “We have not said that theologically homosexual behavior is okay with God: we took a stand on civil rights.”¹⁹¹ Beth Spring’s article in *Christianity Today* centered the experiences of dissenting members, including Catherine Kroeger and Alvera Mickelsen. Kroeger and Mickelsen were two prominent EWCI members who resigned following the Fresno resolutions.

¹⁸⁶ Letter to Members of the EWC/GBC Board, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3. Mickelsen uses the term “ministry” to describe the EWCI here, and this language is significant. In this context, Mickelsen uses this term to signal to one of the goals of the coalition from its inception, which was to attempt to reach women in more conservative churches with a message of biblical gender equality. In a different example from the archives, after the Fresno exodus EWCI coordinator Britt Vanden Eykel wrote to remaining EWCI members in *Update*, imploring them to agree on the coalition’s “basic ministry” moving forward to reestablish unity (“NOT a Swan Song,” *Update*, vol. 12 no. 2 (Summer 1988), 8b). According to scholar and EWCI member Sue Horner, “[b]y ‘basic ministry’ Vanden Eykel was referring to the founding ‘evangelical’ ethos, regardless if current members no longer belonged or worshipped in evangelical churches.” Horner explains that Vanden Eykel was speaking against a coalitional name change to include “ecumenical” in this context (Horner, “Becoming,” 260-1). I use the term “coalition” in this dissertation as a more neutral and all-encompassing categorization of the EWCI, and to better locate the EWCI within coalition-building theory.

¹⁸⁷ Letter to Patricia Mollo from Susan McCoubrie, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder; Bailey, “Not Business as Usual,” 5-6. Ron Sider, chair of ESA, responded to EWCI’s Fresno resolutions by noting, “ESA [is] opposed to practicing homosexuality...At the same time, we continued to believe that civil rights is something all people should have.” He went on to say that ESA has no similar resolution and that they would not “endorse a crusade whose aim is legitimizing an unbiblical lifestyle” (Spring, “Gay Rights Resolution,” 43).

¹⁸⁸ EWC Archives, Letter from Margaret Hannay, 9 Oct. 1986, Series 1C, Box 6, Folder 3.

¹⁸⁹ Gamson, “Messages of Exclusion,” 180.

¹⁹⁰ “Women’s Caucus Passes Pro-Homosexual Resolution,” *Eternity*, vol. 37, no. 10 (1986), 13.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

By focusing on the exodus of the more conservative members, Spring identified Fresno as “fractious.”¹⁹² In the *Christianity Today* article, EWCI national coordinator Britt Vanden Eykel declared, “We have not been palatable to the conservative church with any part of our message...There is a limit to how much we can sacrifice our principles.”¹⁹³ This comment positioned conservative church members as outside of the parameters of the EWCI’s boundaries, showing Christians with conservative beliefs to be “thems-inside” attempting to co-opt the goals of the coalition.¹⁹⁴ Notably, as demonstrated in this chapter, this was not how conservative members saw themselves in the coalition before Fresno. Finally, Ron Sider, of the ESA, distanced the progressive evangelical movement from the EWCI (which had not been affiliated with the ESA after the split in 1975) by proclaiming that the EWCI’s resolution supported homosexuality. Sider identified this support to conflict with ESA goals: “All along, ESA has been opposed to practicing homosexuality, and that continues to be our clear stand.”¹⁹⁵ Most significantly, in the *Christianity Today* article, Kroeger and Mickelsen were positioned as the authorities on biblical feminism as they argued, “that EWCI’s actions will damage its ability to work with church women from other nations just beginning to learn about biblical equality.”¹⁹⁶ Kroeger and Mickelsen implied that Vanden Eykel, Hardesty, and all remaining EWCI members who supported the gay rights resolution, were no longer valid participants in the biblical feminist community.¹⁹⁷

During the backlash from Fresno, EWCI leaders acknowledged, with regret, that members associated with “conservative churches or organizations may feel they can no longer participate in EWCI.”¹⁹⁸ However, the EWCI’s public stand affirming support for gay civil rights signalled an important shift for others. Regarding the resolutions, Nancy Hardesty noted: “A number of us have been saying for years that the organization has to move forward or die...This is a step of maturity within the [EWCI] to say we’re willing to target harder issues.”¹⁹⁹ The EWCI executive council convened to process the reactions these resolutions had provoked among members. In a letter to members, Vanden Eykel explained what the leaders concluded in this meeting:

If we all did believe in civil rights for all people, then...we needed to confront our fear of what the conservative church would read into this resolution, and take a stand for justice. Many churches and organizations have taken a similar stand for gay civil rights and survived to tell about [sic]. Perhaps it is time we called the church to accountability in the need to

¹⁹² Spring, “Gay Rights Resolution Divides Members of Evangelical Women’s Caucus,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 30, no. 14 (1986), 42.

¹⁹³ “Evangelical Women’s Caucus Passes Pro-Homosexual Resolution,” *Eternity*, vol. 37, no. 10 (1986), 13; Spring, “Gay Rights Resolutions,” 42.

¹⁹⁴ In an internal letter from Vanden Eykel to Mickelsen, Vanden Eykel notes she was misquoted in the *LA Times* coverage, clarifying that she “care[s] deeply about the more conservative among us. For that reason I could not imagine ever pushing for any official approval of even a firmly committed lesbian covenantal relationship” (Letter to Alvera from Britt, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder, 2).

¹⁹⁵ Spring, “Gay Rights Resolutions,” 43.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Among some of the EWCI leadership, this coverage was not cause for concern. As one leader wrote to another member: “I have read the *CT* coverage on us and I find it amusing. I don’t think it will hurt us...I was really amused by Ron Sider’s attempts to distance his group from our position - yet still claim to be justly in favour of civil rights for everyone” (Letter between leaders, 11 Oct. 1986, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 3).

¹⁹⁸ Spring, “Gay Rights Resolutions,” 42.

¹⁹⁹ *Q’t’d* in Spring “Gay Rights Resolutions,” 43.

recognize the existence of homosexuals in their midst and to deal with their needs in a realistic manner.²⁰⁰

Thus, as with the mainstream feminist movement that supported gay civil rights, EWCI members at Fresno (and those who remained in the aftermath) decided it was time to take a public stand on this critical issue for their community, even if it meant splintering the movement.

Beyond the threat of losing conservative evangelical affiliations and employment opportunities, some EWCI members also felt personally morally culpable for the resolutions, protesting from a Christian standpoint. One member, who signalled her conservative values by identifying herself as “Mrs. W. Paul Colwell,”²⁰¹ wrote to the council for clarity on the language of the third resolution: did this resolution support the practice of homosexuality? After receiving the council’s response (the resolution was an affirmation of civil rights only), Colwell wrote back to encourage leaders to “reconsider” this endorsement, which she saw as unbiblical and anti-Christian, “for the good of our young people.” Colwell explained:

I believe as Evangelical women we are meant to ‘love the sinner, but not the sin.’ We are to witness to the homosexuals Jesus’ love for them - that He gave His life that they can be free of sin, and have everlasting life....I don’t believe endorsing civil rights for homosexuals is hardly what Jesus would do – or St. Paul. Homosexuality is not only an abhorrence to God, but the homosexual’s community has become arrogant, aggressive, political aiming to draw in as many as they can into their life style [sic].²⁰²

Colwell’s response aligned with dominant evangelical views explained above. For example, Colwell considered homosexuality to be a lifestyle in opposition to Christian values, as dictated by her interpretation of the Bible. However, she rhetorically extended “compassion” toward gay individuals as sinners, while also expressing fear that gay people were recruiting members into their community, especially children. Colwell, like Anita Bryant and Timothy LaHaye, felt that gay citizens were dangerous to the wider culture (inferred to be heterosexual and upholding Christian values). Colwell goes on to proclaim God’s “Power” and “Glory,” in the HIV/AIDS crisis because “AIDs is curtailing the threat and epidemic of homosexuality in a way we humanly never could.”²⁰³ Linking HIV/AIDs with homosexuality, as part of God’s punishment for engaging in “sinful” sex, was also part of conservative evangelical discourse in the 1980s. Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, infamously connected this ideology with evangelical national responsibility: “AIDS is not just God’s punishment for homosexuals, it is God’s punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals.”²⁰⁴ When the EWCI passed their resolutions at Fresno, they explicitly rejected this view of homosexuality, and, consequentially, they also excluded members who held such views.

During the “Fallout from Fresno,” Catherine Kroeger and Alvera Mickelsen resigned from the EWCI and launched a new coalition “to raise a concerted evangelical voice attesting to the

²⁰⁰ AWTs: EEWC Archives, Letter to EWC Sisters, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 3.

²⁰¹ See the discussion on naming in chapter two.

²⁰² EEWC Archives, Letter to “Mrs. Vanden Eykel,” from True Colwell, 10 June 1987, Series 1C, Box 7, Folder 3.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Qt’d in Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 24.

equality and ministry of women as set forth in the Scriptures.”²⁰⁵ This organization would become Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). In her resignation letter, Catherine Kroeger insisted that her resignation was “in disagreement with the passing of the resolution (not the substance of the resolution but the disbarment of our conservative sisters).”²⁰⁶ This distinction was Kroeger’s attempt to articulate her continued alignment with a wider feminist ideology that affirmed rights for all persons (including gay people). Alvera Mickelsen also affirmed this distinction, noting in her resignation:

To pretend that this was a “civil rights” issue is ridiculous. Most of us believe in civil rights for everyone—even criminals. The crucial phrase was not “civil rights” but rather, “in recognition of the presence of the lesbian minority in EWCI.” That’s what the battle was about—official recognition of lesbianism as being congruent with EWCI.²⁰⁷

Kroeger and Mickelsen felt that conservative Christians no longer had a place in the EWCI. In fact, according to Mickelsen, the coalition was becoming “a lesbian support group.”²⁰⁸ When Kroeger and Mickelsen left the EWCI, they took approximately thirty-seven members with them and created the CBE. They formed Christians for Biblical Equality as an organization to reassert the foundational goals of biblical feminism, goals from which they felt the EWCI had strayed.²⁰⁹ Mickelsen and Kroeger’s exit and subsequent development of a new biblical feminist coalition reflected the EWCI’s inability to negotiate diversity and sustain internal unity within its coalition.²¹⁰

Conclusion

After Fresno, the EWCI became a different coalition with a new collective ideology. The EWCI was previously able to support a diverse group of Christians by asserting broad goals that advocated for the biblical equality of the sexes, called Christians to mutual submission and active discipleship, and supported the ERA. Following Fresno and the EWCI’s declaration of support for gay civil rights, political and religious diversity diminished within the EWCI as many of the more conservative members withdrew from the group. This massive exodus was the result of the EWCI’s insufficient mechanisms to maintain unity in the face of difference (and threats of schism). Some members left the EWCI because they felt that leaders ignored their expressed discordance with the resolutions. Ongoing internal conversations regarding social justice goals within the EWCI, which began years before the Fresno resolutions, positioned the more conservative members as

²⁰⁵ “Handling Conflict: The Fallout from Fresno,” *The Other Side*, Dec. 1986, 24, 41, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1; “Dear Friends,” Letter from Catherine Clark Kroeger, 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1; CBE will be discussed at length in the fifth chapter to show the productive and collaborative nature of this schism in the long term for EWCI and the broader biblical feminist movement.

²⁰⁶ Minutes of the Council Meeting EWCI, 6, 10-13 July 1986, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 10.

²⁰⁷ Letter to Minnesota EWCers from Alvera Mickelsen, 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder, 1.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; “A Message to my Minnesota EWC Sisters,” Nov. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ As outlined in the previous chapter, schism is not always negative for a coalition or its broader movement. The productivity and collaborative components of the EWCI-CBE split are discussed in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

the “thems-inside” of the coalition. The EWCI archival records demonstrate that these conservative members were aware of their peripheral status within the group, as the core held a more progressive view on various social issues. Thus, when the EWCI passed the resolutions at Fresno, many members felt disrespected and lost trust in the coalition's ability to represent them and promote their goals. Others withdrew from the EWCI because of external pressures from their churches or because of their own beliefs about the sinfulness of homosexuality and gay civil rights. EWCI leadership attempted to mediate these fractures by reprioritizing the original goals of the alliance and by insisting that the resolution was about civil rights for all persons, rather than a theological statement about homosexuality. However, these mediational mechanisms proved to be too little too late for many members and they did not stop the mass exodus after Fresno.

Although the EWCI faced its first significant schism during this period, it is notable that this split, which dramatically reduced the total membership, did not destroy the alliance. Nor did it have a net negative impact on the broader biblical feminist movement. As noted in chapter two, schisms can be productive and creative. They often provide new spaces for activism, allowing different participants to support similar collective goals. Furthermore, when antagonistic members leave, internal conflict within the parent coalition decreases, allowing the remaining members to concentrate on reassessing the coalition's goals and agenda. This is precisely what occurred following Fresno: conservative members left the EWCI to create a new group called Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). These dissenting members formed this new coalition to advocate for the EWCI's original goals as they understood them: gender equality in the church and the larger society as a biblical, Christian principle. As chapter five explains, CBE eventually collaborated with the EWCI to fight for gender equality, representing an expansion and strengthening of the Christian feminist movement. Moreover, when the more conservative Christian feminists departed from the EWCI, the remaining coalition members claimed a new identity, which altered the nature of the coalition itself. In the aftermath of Fresno, enduring members found “reprieve,” using this period of calm to regroup and refocus on their new targets and strategies, including a more active social justice agenda.²¹¹ The fifth chapter of this dissertation examines the EWCI's new shape and trajectory after the Fresno resolutions. Before that discussion, however, chapter four examines a genuine failure in the EWCI's coalition-building efforts: the alliance's inability to attract and represent racially diverse Christians.

²¹¹ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 129-130.

Chapter Four: Failure

The EWCI and the Challenges of Racial Inclusivity

In 1984, EWCI leaders surveyed the coalition to determine whether the EWCI should pass resolutions on “social concerns” beyond its ongoing support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).¹ One anonymous participant responded:

I am embarrassed and appalled that EWC cannot even say: We are against racism and we recognize the centrality of the issue of racism to large numbers of women in today’s world. The message that comes across from such an attitude, whether we intend it or not, is that EWC is primarily for white women.²

For this member, the EWCI’s sole focus on the ERA was myopic. She believed that as a feminist and Christian coalition, the EWCI ought to implement, at the very least, a resolution against racism. In practice, the EWCI was “primarily for white women,” an unfortunate truism reflected by group membership from the coalition’s inception.³ Leaders and members saw the underrepresentation of women of colour in the EWCI as a deficiency and often sought solutions.⁴ They discussed race, racism, and the ongoing racial homogeneity of their alliance, and, as the coalition grew, many participants voiced similar concerns to the above quote. EWCI leaders and members recognized the benefits of coalescing across racial divides, including strengthening the coalition’s numbers, incorporating diverse perspectives and solutions, and representing and advocating for a broader Christian constituency. A more inclusive demographic would strengthen the coalition’s ability to obtain its goals of promoting biblically ordained gender equality and women’s leadership in the church, society, and home. Moreover, many participants felt that inclusivity better represented their Christian message: “‘To love one another as I love you’ in practice, taking a stand on ERA, peace,...racism, poverty, sexism/heterosexism...is simply part of being faithful and following

¹ During the EWCI’s first twelve years, the coalition focused their social activism toward passage of the ERA, often teaming up with NOW to bring awareness to the importance of this amendment for evangelicals, contributing a Christian perspective to NOW’s activism. In 1982, National EWCI officially partnered with NOW for the “final ERA push” (“EWC Joins NOW in Final ERA Push,” *Update*, vol. 6 no. 1 (1982): 1, 3-5). By the time of this poll, the EWCI had a membership of approximately 650 people. This membership-wide poll is discussed in chapters two and three as well.

² AWTS: EWC Archives, “Results of EWCI Membership Poll,” 1984, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 3.

³ In an interview with me, Letha Scanzoni noted that most members even in 2022 were White, although there was more diversity than previous years, “including in prominent positions (officers, winners of the Hardesty scholarship, etc.).” Scanzoni noted that attempts to recruit women of colour were ongoing (email interview, 27 July 2022). These efforts might seem naïve to the contemporary reader. However, the EWCI archives demonstrate that many members of the coalition truly desired to reach women of colour with their message of biblical equality, and attempts to do so were sincere, which is why I treat them as such in this chapter.

⁴ This observation is not meant to erase or ignore that some people of colour did participate in the EWC. I am only drawing attention to the fact that most members were White and that, as this chapter shows, the coalition struggled to reach across racial barriers throughout its existence.

Christ.”⁵ However, EWCI leadership did not know how to effectively reach Black women and women of colour nor how to create a coalition that sufficiently appealed to and served them.⁶

Throughout the 1980s, leaders and members proposed various methods to expand the coalition’s influence across racial divides. The EWCI implemented new strategies at every structural level, with limited success. At the individual level, EWCI leaders encouraged members to bring friends (specifically, women of colour) to meetings.⁷ At the local chapter level, the national office set goals to help foster racial inclusivity: “This Council shall once again affirm its commitment to involving minority women and to encourage chapters in efforts to include such women.”⁸ At the national level in 1984, the EWCI created a task force on “Women of Color” to conduct research and present a methodology for outreach to diverse communities with the coalition’s message of biblical gender equality.⁹ The EWCI’s first concrete resolution advocating for a more racially inclusive coalition occurred at the Fresno conference in 1986. Michelle Borba, one of the relatively few Black members in the EWCI, attended the open mic session of the Fresno business meeting and presented the following motion: “[R]ecognizing the profound oneness of all women in Christ, we commit ourselves to work for justice and equality for all racial minorities.”¹⁰ In response, EWCI participants debated whether they should pass any resolutions. Members opposing the resolutions cited the EWCI’s rejection of resolutions at Wellesley in 1984 and the ensuing membership survey, which confirmed that there was no consensus about passing resolutions. However, Anne Eggebrotten, who was also at the Fresno business meeting, later recalled that the debate regarding resolutions was swiftly intercepted:

Joyce Williams of Kansas City, who had worked hard to get more black women to come to the Fresno conference, stood up and said words to the effect of, “If this organization can’t even make a verbal stand against racism, I guess we might as well all pack up our Bibles and go home.” The tabling was defeated; the motion passed.¹¹

Although the coalition passed the resolution to fight racial discrimination, the victory was short-lived. The EWCI all but abandoned this resolution in Fresno’s immediate aftermath as leaders and members dealt with the repercussions of Fresno’s third resolution supporting gay civil rights (discussed in chapter three). As the EWCI recovered from the exodus of members following Fresno, remaining members revisited the EWCI’s larger goals, including racial inclusivity. In 1988, co-coordinator Kaye Cook reminded members, “We need to address the first two resolutions at

⁵ AWTs: EEWc Archives, “Results of EWCI Membership Poll,” 1984, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 3.

⁶ EEWc Archives, Virginia Hearn qt’d in Courtney Goto, “Evangelical Women’s Caucus,” 1989, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 7. In an interview with me, Letha Scanzoni confirmed this sentiment: that conversations about inclusion and diversifying the coalition were common among members and leaders, “but often it was hard to attract certain groups because they had their own groups or at times did not feel welcome or provided higher or gave higher priorities to other causes and struggles.” (Email interview, 27 July 2022).

⁷ EEWc Archives, Letter to Claire, 6 Aug. 1987, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 6.

⁸ EEWc Archives, “Section XIV. General Policies/Resolutions,” 1987, Series 1B Box 4, Folder 7. This resolution was tabled in 1984-5.

⁹ EEWc Archives, “Minutes of the Council Meeting,” 23 June 1984, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 2.

¹⁰ Anne Eggebrotten, “Handling Power: UnChristian, Unfeminine, Unkind?” in *The Other Side*, Dec. 1986, 22, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

Fresno, on domestic violence and the international family of women, as well as the third resolution on homosexuality.”¹²

By 1990, the EWCI’s national newsletter reflected the coalition’s priority to recognize the “international family of women.” *Update*’s editors showcased articles that discussed feminism, Christianity, and race.¹³ The 1990 summer issue, subtitled, “The International Family of Women,” featured a cover story by co-coordinator Kaye Cook discussing her experience interviewing Black women in East and South Africa during the summer of 1988. In her article, Cook expressed admiration and respect for the women she interviewed, asserting “I am proud to stand with them in [sic] the international family of women.”¹⁴ Cook also declared that during her time in Africa she “became convinced that American, white, middle-class feminism is ethno-centric, self-destructive, and unbiblical,” noting that it was “missing an incredible richness.”¹⁵ Cook did not elaborate on this statement, nor did she offer any potential solutions to this problem. Thus, Cook’s proclamation incited immediate backlash from EWCI members. A letter from a member in Arizona, published in the following issue of *Update*, called Cook’s claim “a gratuitous and false insult.”¹⁶ The letter’s author argued that “[i]t is not by hating ourselves that we respect and learn from our sisters, [n]or by guilt that we are compelled to reach out to them...feminism is rich, and enriches, wherever its light shines: Africa, here, wherever.”¹⁷ In the subsequent issue of *Update*, then coordinator Susan Garrison briefly defended Cook’s comment, noting that she “did not read [Cook’s] words as an attack on me or anyone else.”¹⁸ Nonetheless, Garrison still disagreed with Cook, noting that she would have only supported a statement with the following wording: “To the extent that American feminism is focused on the problems, issues, or whatever of those in the white middle class, it is self-destructive and unbiblical.”¹⁹ This dialogue indicates that EWCI leaders were seeking to engage with emerging womanist and feminist critiques of the mainstream feminist movement, including its failure to address the intersections of racism and sexism.²⁰ However, by introducing a cursory

¹² Kaye Cook, “Are We Evangelical or Ecumenical,” *Update*, vol. 12, no. 3 (March-May 1988), 8d.

¹³ In the spring of 1990, *Update*’s cover story was a reprint of “My Call to Preach the Gospel” by Jerena Lee, the first Black woman authorized to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the nineteenth century (*Update*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 1990)). This marked a shift in prioritizing conversations about race, feminism, and Christianity. In comparison, in 1988 the editors published an excerpt from Septima Clark’s *Ready from Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement—A First Person Perspective*, which ran only on pages six and seven of the newsletter (Septima Clark, “Women’s Roles,” *Update*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 1988), 6-7). Of the following six issues of *Update* (up to Fall 1991), four featured cover stories discussing race, Christianity, and feminism including two on womanist theology, and one on liberation theology.

¹⁴ Kaye Cook, “An Incredible Richness,” *Update*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ Claudia Ellquist, “Credible Feminism?” *Update*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Fall 1990), 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Susan Garrison, “Coordinator’s Comment,” *Update*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Winter 1990-1), 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker is widely recognized as coining the term “womanist” to articulate an expression of feminism that centers the histories and experiences of Black women. In her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Walker highlights the connection and distinction between womanism and feminism, stating: “Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender” (xii). Womanist theologian Delores Williams explains how this term extends to religious Black women, noting, “many women in church and society have appropriated it as a way of affirming themselves as *black* while simultaneously owning their connection with feminism and with the African American community, male and female. The concept of womanist allows women to claim their roots in black history, religion, and culture” (“Black Theology and

criticism of White, middle-class feminism without offering evidence or solutions, Cook's article provoked a defensive response among EWCI members, creating an unreceptive atmosphere for discourse. The EWCI was not yet ready to address racial and class privileges within its own coalition or the broader feminist movement, nor to acknowledge how such privileges have historically shaped feminism in ways that disadvantage (and harm) poor women, women of colour, and Black women.²¹

In the winter of 1990 and the spring of 1991, *Update* editors ran a two-part cover story by Dr. Toinette Eugene, a Black womanist theologian who had recently joined the EWCI. The series was an excerpt from Eugene's keynote speech at the EWCI's 1990 national conference in Chicago. Eugene defined "womanists" for her EWCI audience as "women of faith who are also women of color."²² Drawing on Alice Walker's foundational definition of womanism, Eugene explained that a womanist is "'outrageous, audacious, courageous, or wilful [sic]' in behavior – one who is 'responsible, in charge, serious.' In other words, MILITANT."²³ In the first section of the two-part series, Eugene discussed the civil rights movement and identified Rosa Parks as "a mystic as well as a militant woman of God." According to Eugene, Rosa Parks "modeled a way of being for all people who have to come to grips with injustice in social and religious situations."²⁴ Significantly, Eugene did not criticize the predominantly White mainstream feminist movement, instead raising the voices and experiences of Black women and poor women in their fight for equality in the church and society.

In the second part of Eugene's series, published in the ensuing issue of *Update*, Eugene advocated for a cross-cultural, feminist/womanist coalition to fight racism, classism, and sexism in the church and society. As Eugene explained, "community building and coalitions are crucial to the success and solidarity for those who want to live together in peace and harmony, I am also personally and painfully aware of occasions when there have been enormous gaps in trust and responsibility which we have displayed toward one another."²⁵ Eugene went on to ask,

Folks, when we leave here, what will bind me to you and you to me in ways which will further us beyond the warm affection we hold for one another? I submit to you that a firmer accountability is called for so that we are compelled to give up the excuses and excesses which delay our action on behalf of doing justice and changing patterns that promote racism and sexism in our smaller circles and in our larger institutions.²⁶

The recorded responses to Eugene's keynote and *Update* articles were positive. One male EWCI member, a Presbyterian minister, noted that he found Eugene's keynote "especially inspiring" and was happy it was reprinted in *Update* because he "was able to use some of her insights in

Womanist Theology," *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, eds. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 58–72).

²¹ The case study at the end of this chapter (on sterilization abuse) provides one example of how White, middle-class feminist priorities not only ignored, but harmed women of colour, Black women, and poor women.

²² Eugene, "Regardless: An Attitude of Being for Women Under Fire," *Update*, vol. 14, no. 3, (Winter 1990-1), 2.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Eugene, "We Have Not Here a Lasting City," *Update*, vol. 15, no. 1, (Spring 1991), 4.

²⁶ Ibid.

sermons.”²⁷ Another member called Eugene’s discussion “a rousing call to commitment for justice.”²⁸ Despite the EWCI’s awareness and ongoing efforts to include women of colour in the coalition, the influx of cover stories discussing race, feminism, and Christianity in 1990 and 1991, and EWCI members’ positive reactions to Eugene’s *Update* articles, this chapter demonstrates that the EWCI did not achieve its goal of becoming a racially inclusive coalition.

The evangelical and feminist communities, which the EWCI bridged, also faced challenges in building inclusive and representative coalitions across racial boundaries. Because racial inclusivity and diversity were important goals for the EWCI, this chapter presents the EWCI’s inability to bridge racial divides as a failure of the coalition. However, a coalition’s failures do not simply represent defeat; they also provide insights into limitations and deficiencies regarding a coalition’s transformative potential (both internally and in conversation with its matrix). Therefore, by analyzing the EWCI’s failure, this chapter also examines larger discourses regarding race, gender, and sexuality within biblical feminism, feminism, and evangelicalism in the United States. To understand the EWCI’s inability to attract and represent women of colour, this chapter first explores problems that activists and scholars have identified in coalescing across racial differences.

Before I begin, however, I must address my methodological approach in this chapter because it differs from that of the other chapters in this dissertation. This chapter addresses why women of colour did not join the EWCI; however, since the EWCI ultimately failed to bridge racial divides, the perspectives, experiences, and voices of women of colour are largely absent from the EWCI’s archives.²⁹ To interrupt this archival silence and engage with perspectives from women of colour in this chapter, I supplemented my central archive with the Sophia Smith Collection (SSC) of Women’s History and the National Organization for Women (NOW) archives.³⁰ Using these collections, this chapter presents a case study of second-wave feminist discourses between women of colour and White women regarding sterilization abuse in the United States. Sterilization abuse has predominantly impacted women of colour and Black women throughout American history, and their activism connected sterilization abuse with broader feminist goals for reproductive autonomy, including access to abortion and birth control. This chapter’s case study presents second-wave feminist discourses that explore the intersection of race and gender, addressing issues at the heart of the feminist movement, including race, bodily autonomy, reproductive healthcare, and female sexuality. This case study highlights some of the challenges that feminist coalitions faced as they attempted to bridge racial divides, challenges that can also be applied to biblical feminists. This chapter presents the SSC and NOW archives against and in conversation with the silences in the EWCI archives. By engaging feminist theories of power, voice, and silence, I also explore the challenges of collecting, constructing, and maintaining archives to identify and understand the gaps in the EWCI archives.

²⁷ David Abbott, “The Male Presence in EEWC,” *Update*, vol. 20, no. 3 (Fall 1996), 5.

²⁸ Margaret Arighi, “Representative’s Report,” *Green Leaf*, vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn 1990).

²⁹ As noted above, the editors of the EWCI’s national newsletter, after the mid 1980s, often included the perspectives of Black women and women of colour. However for this chapter, I am seeking conversations between women of colour and White women within the coalition, or about their coalition, which were largely absent from the EWCI archival records.

³⁰ This case study utilizes the Sophia Smith Collection of Women’s History at Smith College in Northampton, MA, and the NOW Records at the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Since the 1970s, scholars have recognized archives as “spaces of power” that reveal historical and ongoing processes to determine which narratives and voices are preserved in archival records.³¹ Much contemporary archival scholarship seeks to identify and represent historically excluded perspectives.³² By analyzing power structures, historians and archivists have concluded that marginalized individuals and communities are most often erased or ignored in the construction of archives.³³ This omission has real and enduring consequences. For example, scholars connect archives and memory, noting that “[m]emory relies on the continuing existence of the physical traces produced by members of society in their activities.”³⁴ Thus, the systemic exclusion of marginalized communities from archival records contributes to the expunging of the social memories and histories of these groups. This erasure also robs these communities of “the ability...to seek accountability” for historical wrongs committed against them, an omission which shapes the present and future of marginalized communities.³⁵ Furthermore, when the recorded history ignores marginalized communities, it becomes more difficult for them to form a collective identity in the present. Archivist Rodney Carter explains, “the sense of a shared past is lacking. Knowledge of the commonalities that link individuals together is missing.”³⁶ While marginalized communities can construct an identity around the shared experience of this lack or absence, in text-based societies such an identity is “more easily forgotten and distorted” than the identities “preserved” in documented histories.³⁷

Black feminist theorists have produced much of the scholarship challenging gaps and silences in archives.³⁸ As early as 1925, the pioneering Black feminist activist and scholar Anna Julia Cooper problematized archival absences in her Sorbonne dissertation on French responses to the Haitian revolution. According to gender studies scholar Vivian M. May, Cooper’s thesis demonstrated that “foundational silences ripple forward over time with a multiplying effect. [Cooper] argued that patterns of silencing Black women’s ideas, erasing (or never recording) their

³¹ Rodney Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence,” *Archivaria* 61: Special Section on Archives, Space and Power, (2006), 216.

³² Two seminal texts often referenced in this field include Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London, 1974) and Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, 1996). However, as noted later in this paragraph, gender studies scholar Vivian M. May argues that already in 1925, Black feminist, scholar, and activist Anna Julia Cooper had identified and challenged archival gaps, particularly regarding enslaved persons, in her Sorbonne dissertation (Vivian M. May, “Anna Julia Cooper, Archival Absences, and Black Women’s ‘Muffled’ Knowledge,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 40, no. 2 (2021): 241–72).

³³ Carter, “Of Things Said,” 219.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

³⁶ Carter, “Of Things Said,” 221. Jennifer Morgan quotes Derrida’s *Archive Fever* (27) to reiterate that “[t]he archive suggests itself as the place that houses the past, but in fact, its meaning is primarily that of the future—the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. If we want to know what this will have meant, we will only know in the times to come. Perhaps.” (“Archives and Histories of Racial Capitalism: An Afterword,” *Social Text* 33, no. 4 (2015): 153–61).

³⁷ Carter, “Of Things Said,” 222.

³⁸ See for example, Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe*, No. 26 (2008): 1-14; Hartman, “Response: The Dead Book Revisited,” *History of the Present*, 6, No. 2 (2016), 208-15; Jennifer Morgan, “Archives and Histories of Racial Capitalism: An Afterword,” *Social Text*, 33, No. 4 (2015), 153-61; Andréa N. Williams, “Recovering Black Women Writers in Periodical Archives,” *American Periodicals*, 27, No. 1 (2017), 25-28.

histories, and curtailing their lives must be understood as part of slavery's ongoing legacy.”³⁹ Through her scholarship, Cooper pioneered a discourse about the importance of identifying and challenging omissions in the archives, previously unseen or overlooked.

Contemporary scholarship, often at the intersection of race and gender, proposes various remedies for archival exclusions. Cooper's method is one possible solution: identifying and problematizing lacunae in the preserved records while looking for traces of omitted perspectives to fill in the gaps or point to alternative histories. Another possible solution involves probing the silences to find “the counternarrative” also housed within the archive, which reveals the dominant narrative's biases.⁴⁰ A major challenge of such remedies, scholars note, is resisting the urge to “give voice” to the individuals and communities missing from the archive; speaking on behalf of marginalized subjects is an act of privilege and control that recreates the power structures such scholarship seeks to resist.⁴¹ For my purposes, resolving gaps in the EWCI archives requires a bit more creativity than mining archival silences. Black women and women of colour are not being actively excluded or omitted in this archive; they are not present simply because they did not participate in the coalition in large numbers. Thus, this chapter incorporates additional archives to illuminate the challenges involved in coalescing across racial divides to understand why Black women and women of colour were absent from the coalition itself. Addressing this gap is important because, while the nature of the silence in the EWCI archive is different, the results are the same: women of colour and Black women are erased from the evangelical feminist movement and White women's perspectives and concerns are prioritized. Consequently, the EWCI archive presents an incomplete history of the biblical feminist movement.

Evangelicals, Race, and Coalitions

In the 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. famously proclaimed that eleven o'clock Sunday morning was the most segregated time of the week in the United States. King himself faced challenges in constructing interracial coalitions in the civil rights movement. For example, King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) launched the Poor People's Campaign in 1968, which sought to unite Black Americans with “the millions of non-Negro poor,” including Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, poor White Appalachians, and others, to fight

³⁹ May, “Anna Julia Cooper,” 243.

⁴⁰ Scholars that propose this solution contend that the archive's own undoing can be located within the archive itself. As Derrida notes “... the archive – the good one – produces memory, but produces forgetting at the same time ... [T]he trace is at the same time the memory, the archive, and the erasure, the repression, the forgetting of what is supposed to be kept safe” (qt'd in Carter, “Of Things Said,” 223). The seams of the archive reveal its construction, which points to biases and absences. See also May, “Anna Julia Cooper,” 242; Hartman, “Venus,” 3.

⁴¹ Hartman, “Venus,” 12; Hartman reminds historians and scholars to respect the restrictions of the archives and to not step outside of the boundaries of the stories that can be imagined or told from within the absences: “As a writer committed to telling stories, I have endeavored to represent the lives of the nameless and the forgotten, to reckon with loss, and to *respect the limits of what cannot be known*” (my emphasis, Hartman, “Venus,” 4); Morgan, “Archives and Histories,” 157. For feminist theory discussing the problem of giving voice to others, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271–313; See also Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique* 20, no. 20 (1991): 5–32.

poverty.⁴² The media recognized this campaign as the most “radical” operation the SCLC had ever undertaken because of its “aggressive inclusion and recruitment of nonblack minorities.”⁴³ Such an interracial coalition was unprecedented in the movement. A significant challenge for the Poor People’s Campaign involved managing diverse goals among participants, as different racial groups experienced poverty through distinct systems of oppression. For example, Mexican Americans and Native Americans prioritized their “history of lost land, culture, and livelihood,” while many Black activists emphasized a “narrative of jobs or income” in their struggle.⁴⁴ Activists from various groups participated in the Poor People’s Campaign, contributing to the development of new networks and innovative activist strategies. Ultimately, however, interracial bridges were unsuccessful in this alliance.⁴⁵ Specifically, many non-Black participants felt overlooked by the coalition and media representations of the campaign. Historian Gordon Mantler explains, “Mexican American issues received little national exposure. Nor did Chicano activists achieve their officially stated priorities in the campaign—particularly U.S. recognition of their claims to land grants dating to the mid-nineteenth century.”⁴⁶ The SCLC was not able (or, perhaps, not willing) to navigate internal power structures to ensure that the coalition addressed and resisted oppressive poverty systems across racial divides.⁴⁷

Activists and scholars of transnational coalition-building have identified racial differences as substantial obstacles to constructing a collective identity, which is crucial for a coalition’s success.⁴⁸ Race is an “embedded identity,” a part of human experience and interaction that is “deeply bound to the patterns of everyday life” (other embedded identities include religion, sex, gender, language, and class).⁴⁹ Embedded identities are so deeply woven into a person’s life that their impact might go unnoticed or be misunderstood by those who do not share the same identity and its associated challenges. Coalition theorists have found that embedded identities are often not discussed among group members, which can exacerbate misunderstandings and lead to conflicts. Instead, relational imbalances within the coalition are often “displaced onto other differences over power, organization, or strategy, making them difficult to comprehend and resolve.”⁵⁰ If White and White-passing coalition members do not work to understand racial oppression, related power inequalities will not be addressed and resolved. Ignoring power inequalities can lead to conflict and tension, particularly regarding leadership roles within the

⁴² Quoted in Gordon K. Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974*, Justice, Power, and Politics (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 97.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Mantler, *Power to the Poor*, 123.

⁴⁵ For more information on how participants and activists grew from this movement and the coalitions that arose from participation in this movement, see Mantler, *Power to the Poor*.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁷ The Poor People’s Campaign was interrupted by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April of 1968. However, scholars suggest that King’s death ultimately strengthened the Campaign’s efforts, uniting activists in their grief and anger. In May of 1968, Coretta Scott King, civil rights activist and the late King’s wife, launched the Freedom Train march on Washington by laying a wreath where King was killed in Memphis, and the poor began to march, led by King’s successor at the SCLC, Ralph Abernathy (Mantler, *Power to the Poor*, 122, 129, 133).

⁴⁸ Gawerc, “Coalition-Building,” 2; Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith, “Factors Affecting Conflict and Cooperation in Transnational Movement Networks,” in *Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 239. See also Gawerc, “Coalition-Building,” 2.

⁴⁹ Bandy and Smith, “Factors Affecting Conflict,” 238.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 238-9.

coalition. When a coalition ignores racial power dynamics, it also becomes more difficult for members to build trusting and empathetic relationships.⁵¹ Beyond these concerns, studies also show that individuals do not tend to coalesce across different embedded identities. These identities shape an individual's experience of injustice, influencing the type of coalition they support.⁵² Embedded identities often also dictate the frame of activism, preferred tactics, and the structure an individual looks for in a coalition, which increases racial homogeneity in many alliances.⁵³ Race has a particularly unique and salient history in America as an embedded identity that has become "indivisible from American life."⁵⁴ Specifically, the "gulf" between Black and White Americans is of paramount importance in thinking through coalitions across race, as this divide is "more vast and the history longer in comparison to [relationships between other races]" in the United States.⁵⁵ As noted in previous chapters, successful coalitions require members to prioritize the group's goals over potentially divisive differences, thereby uniting participants towards a shared objective.⁵⁶ For the reasons presented, achieving this unity becomes harder across different embedded identities. But it is not impossible.

As Martin Luther King Jr. faced challenges building cross-racial coalitions in the civil rights movement, he explicitly directed his comment about Sunday mornings to American Christians. By the 1960s, racially separate institutions and worship services were a historical and ongoing reality for American evangelicals. As noted in chapter one, evangelicals were among the leaders of the abolition movement in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ However, "other evangelicals, North as well as South, either tolerated or defended the institution [of slavery]."⁵⁸ Much scholarship has examined how evangelicals utilized the Bible to either defend or dispute the institution of slavery, a disagreement that created deep and lasting fissures between northern and southern evangelical institutions, and between many Black and White evangelicals.⁵⁹ Regardless of whether evangelicals

⁵¹ Gawerc, "Coalition-Building," 2.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 6. This is not to suggest that race is not important in other countries, but to articulate that the American historical development and creation of race has established this identity as integral to American citizenship in its own way. For a more popular approach to this idea, see Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2019).

⁵⁵ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 11.

⁵⁶ Bystydziński and Schacht, "Introduction," 10.

⁵⁷ Chapter one noted that progressive evangelicals in the twentieth century highlighted nineteenth century evangelical participation in social reform movements, including abolition. For example, Jim Wallis and leaders of the ESA laid claim to an evangelical lineage of social activism from this era. See also Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 83; Paul Boyer, "Back to the Future - Contemporary American Evangelicalism in Cultural and Historical Perspective," in *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, ed. Axel R. Schäfer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 22; Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 20. Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 12.

⁵⁸ Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 14.

⁵⁹ Mark Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 66. A useful resource that centers various scriptural interpretations regarding slavery is Mark A. Noll's *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Also, Mason I. Lowance has curated an important sample of primary sources that represent both pro and anti-slavery biblical arguments from this era: *A House Divided: The Antebellum Slave Debates in America, 1776–1865* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003),

supported the theological validity of the institution of slavery or not, evangelical worship services across the nation became more racially divided throughout the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ Historian Mark Noll notes that “the enduring reality of racism” in the United States continued to stifle potential relationships between White and Black evangelicals.⁶¹ For most of the nineteenth century, White evangelicals “constituted the largest and most influential body of religious adherents in the United States.”⁶² Such influence positioned White evangelical institutions as a “bellwether to segregation in other spheres of life” in America into the twentieth century.⁶³ Finally, by the time of the civil rights movement, White southern evangelicals were widely defending segregation in the name of Christianity, and White northern evangelicals busied themselves combatting communism and liberal theologies, largely avoiding the topic of segregation.⁶⁴ Northern evangelicals focused on “changed hearts and not changed laws” because they understood racism as a sin committed by one individual against another, rather than a systemic problem.⁶⁵ This ideological frame prioritized individual conversion and personal accountability in the fight against racism. In recent decades, scholars have found that this ideology, which shaped the evangelical landscape of the 1970s, persists among White evangelicals.

In 2000, sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith released *Divided by Faith*, a groundbreaking study of American evangelicals. Emerson and Smith determined that American evangelicalism promotes “accountable freewill individualism,” a worldview that centers individualism, meritocracy, and anti-structuralism, and prevents White evangelicals from understanding systemic oppression.⁶⁶ The authors suggested that even contemporary evangelicals who tend to “enthusiastically support the idea of racial equality,” understand racism as an

51–115. For a classic resource that examines how Black Protestants understood slavery and the Bible throughout this period, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford University Press: 1978).

⁶⁰ This racial separation was a type of two-way street, as Black Christians in the South responded to racist and oppressive structures in forcibly “integrated” churches after the Civil War by leaving and creating their own communities. Black Christians “found they preferred the autonomy of their own churches and gradually withdrew to form all-black congregations” (Carolyn R. Dupont, *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1975* (New York University Press, New York, 2013): 28). See also, George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 48. While much scholarship has outlined southern racial divisions, prominent Black evangelical leader William Pannell noted that this feeling of isolation among Black Christians spanned the nation, impacting Northern congregations as well. (Pannell, “The Religious Heritage of Blacks,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed David F Wells and John D Woodbridge, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 97). Richard J. Boles traces a shift in northern Protestant churches from widespread interracial worship services in the eighteenth century to segregated churches in the nineteenth in *Dividing the Faith: The Rise of Segregated Churches in the Early American North* (NYU Press: 2020).

⁶¹ Noll, *God and Race*, 65.

⁶² Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 12; Darryl G. Hart notes that evangelical numerical dominance changed between 1870 and 1910, because of “a large influx of immigrants” during this time (*That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century*, 206).

⁶³ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 39-40.

⁶⁴ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 46; Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 13; Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 77.

⁶⁵ Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 82; Marsden, *Understanding*, 47. For more information on White evangelicals’ responses to the civil rights movement, see Chris J. Evans, “White Evangelical Protestant Responses to the Civil Rights Movement,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 102, no. 2 (2009): 245–73.

⁶⁶ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 78-9.

“individual-level prejudice.”⁶⁷ This worldview ignores and erases structures of oppression, which therefore remain unchallenged. For example, the prioritization of individual action and sin helps explain why many White evangelicals oppose social programs such as affirmative action: this ideological frame supports “[placing] sole blame for gaps in black and white achievement on black Americans themselves.”⁶⁸

Emerson and Smith argued that evangelical individualistic thinking created a problematically restrictive view of American culture among evangelicals. The authors explained that America was a “racialized society” where “race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.”⁶⁹ Similar to the notion of race as an “embedded identity,” Emerson and Smith recognized that race influences an individual’s access to “economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards” in the United States.⁷⁰ This racialized reality has persisted despite legislative improvements instigated by the civil rights movement.⁷¹ Race has also influenced the way evangelicals have understood, preached, and used the gospel in America: Black evangelicals have consistently navigated racially oppressive systems in practicing their faith. In contrast, White evangelicals have benefitted from racial privilege and maintenance of the status quo. Moreover, race has shaped how evangelicals build coalitions. By denying the existence of systemic racism (and, thus, the lived experiences of non-White Americans), dominant White evangelical ideology precluded the construction of trusting and empathetic interracial alliances.

Comparing the goals of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA) highlights the obstacles that hindered cross-racial coalition-building among American evangelicals in the twentieth century. As noted in chapter one, neo-

⁶⁷ Ibid., 79, 89; Dupont also notes that, “[t]hough most evangelicals today believe that Christianity requires a commitment to racial equality, they continue to frame morality, and especially racial morality, in individual terms” (*Mississippi Praying*, 14).

⁶⁸ Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 14; 35; Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 75, 79. As noted later in this chapter, this evangelical worldview was identified and challenged by the progressive evangelical movement in the twentieth century (Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 81); Historian Ryon Cobb found that even though many evangelicals actually read *Divided by Faith*, which was promoted within their churches, “white racial attitudes have remained largely the same: an individual’s perceived lack of prejudice or an individual’s attention to issues of personal race relations *always* trumps the structural” (“Still Divided By Faith? Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America, 1977–2010,” in *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion after Divided by Faith* eds. J. Russell Hawkins and Phillip Luke Sinitiere (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 129); See also Eric Tranby and Douglas Hartmann, “Critical Whiteness Theories and the Evangelical ‘Race Problem’: Extending Emerson and Smith’s *Divided by Faith*,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 3 (2008): 341–59. In this 2008 article, sociologists Tranby and Hartmann agree with Emerson and Smith’s thesis that “individualism...blinds white evangelicals to structural inequalities involving race...” However, the authors engage critical race theory and whiteness studies to push this argument further, suggesting that “evangelical individualist culture is more deeply racialized” by anti-Black stereotypes than Emerson and Smith originally articulated (342). Tranby and Hartmann argue that individualism “also provides a discourse and way of thinking that allows its adherents to justify, rationalize, and legitimate the racial status quo...by assigning blame to those who are disadvantaged by race and, more importantly, by naturalizing and normalizing the very cultural practices, beliefs, and norms that privilege white Americans...” (Ibid).

⁶⁹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 7. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁰ Emerson and Smith are quoting Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Amanda Lewis (*The “New Racism”: Toward an Analysis of the U.S. Racial Structure, 1960s–1990s* (1997), 474), in *Divided By Faith*, 7.

⁷¹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 7.

evangelicals formed the NAE in 1942 “to provide a united voice and a cooperative clearing house for conservative Protestants.”⁷² The founders of this new coalition came from the fundamentalist movement, seeking to correct fundamentalism’s isolationism.⁷³ The NAE’s first meeting attracted 200 participants from thirty-four denominations across the nation, including “the most powerful and influential white fundamentalist men in the nation.”⁷⁴ From its inception, the NAE neither included nor appealed to many Black Protestants. Although Black Protestants and White fundamentalists shared doctrinal similarities, racism within the NAE prevented interracial coalition building.⁷⁵ Early NAE leaders recognized race as a wedge issue that could hinder their coalition’s inroads among conservative White Protestants from the largest southern denominations, including Southern Presbyterians (Presbyterian Church United States) and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).⁷⁶ By actively seeking to involve and include denominations that promoted racial segregation, the NAE signalled to Black evangelicals that they were not welcome within the emerging coalition.⁷⁷ Moreover, some early NAE leaders were known segregationists themselves, which also created tension for White evangelical supporters of integration in the coalition. Many integrationists, however, “did not want to endanger the newfound evangelical unity by pressing a divisive issue too strongly.”⁷⁸ Thus, for many Black Protestants, the NAE remained unappealing at best and dangerous or dubious at worst.

Black evangelical leaders formed the National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA) in 1963 as a coalition for Protestants who were “dissatisfied with the predominantly white National Association of Evangelicals.”⁷⁹ The NBEA initially included Black and White evangelical participants and supporters. However, by 1970, a radicalized group of Black evangelicals within the coalition successfully rallied to separate the NBEA from White evangelical affiliations. This “newly militant emphasis” in the NBEA discouraged White leadership in the coalition, which resulted in “a major exodus of both white and Black members.”⁸⁰ During this schism, NBEA leaders and members criticized White evangelicals’ refusal to advocate for racial equality, claiming such a worldview was “preach[ing] the Gospel and let[ting] the world go to hell.”⁸¹ By forming separate institutions, Black evangelicals sought to correct the incorrect priorities in the predominantly White movement which

⁷² Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 141.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 285.

⁷⁵ Black Protestants widely sympathized with the fundamentalist side of the fundamentalist-modernist debate of the early twentieth century, which the NAE grew out of, because of their social and theological conservatism. Black Protestants like White fundamentalists, sought to uphold “the ‘old time religion’ and spread[] the gospel message in what they saw as a fallen world” (Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 4).

⁷⁶ Miles S. Mullin, “Neoevangelicalism and the Problem of Race in Postwar America,” in *Christians and the Color Line*, 21-2.

⁷⁷ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 286-7. See also Mullin, “Neoevangelicalism,” 22; Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 82-5.

⁷⁸ Mullin, “Neoevangelicalism,” 21.

⁷⁹ Milton G. Sernett, “Black Religion and the Question of Evangelical Identity,” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, eds Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 143-4.

⁸⁰ Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 101-102.

⁸¹ Quoted in James S. Tinney, “Black Evangelicals Expanding the Fold,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 19, no. 15 (1975): 41.

focused too much “on winning the hearts and minds of the unconverted as opposed to using evangelism as a means to fight injustice.”⁸²

While some Black evangelicals supported racial separation, by the 1970s others, including leading Black evangelists Tom Skinner and John Perkins, argued that racial reconciliation was part of God’s plan. Leaders in this movement identified interracial worship as a goal prescribed by Scripture, citing Ephesians 2:14-15: “Christ has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”⁸³ The racial reconciliation movement challenged existing segregation and racial hostilities among evangelicals, promoting unity and equality across racial divides. Skinner, Perkins, and other early leaders proposed four steps for success: engaging in “primary relationships across race,” specifically, close friendships; acknowledging “social structures of inequality,” including racial discrepancies in access to education and housing; White evangelicals had to repent, asking forgiveness for “their personal, historical, and social sins”; and Black evangelicals had to forgive White evangelicals, repenting their own “anger and...hatred” at White evangelicals and a racist system.⁸⁴

Tom Skinner promoted racial reconciliation in his keynote speech at the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship’s Urbana Conference in Champaign-Urbana, IL, in 1970. Over 11,000 college students, the majority of whom were White, listened as Skinner took the historical White evangelical church to task for its complacency in America’s shamefully racist past.⁸⁵ Skinner declared, “[T]he evangelical church in America supported the status quo. It supported slavery; it supported segregation; it preached against any attempt of the black man to stand on his own two feet.”⁸⁶ According to Skinner, the Christ of the New Testament would not stand for complicity in systems of oppression. “[Christ] was a gutsy, contemporary, radical revolutionary” who came to upend the “demonic human system” of racism, sin, jealousy, and hate “to establish his own kingdom in the hearts of men.”⁸⁷ Skinner called on his audience to accept and promote true Christian liberation, which specifically involved liberation for the racially oppressed. Skinner’s speech marked a tide change from InterVarsity’s prior conference in 1967, which Black students had called “a ‘white’ event, not only in terms of attendance, but also in terms of vision.”⁸⁸ Some young Black evangelicals, including Carl Ellis, a student at Hampton University, lobbied InterVarsity after the 1967 conference to ensure that more Black students would attend the next gathering.⁸⁹ Conference organizers appointed Ellis to the organizing committee for the 1970 event, and he orchestrated Skinner’s invitation as the keynote speaker.⁹⁰ Although, as noted, most attendees at the 1970 conference were still White students, Skinner’s presence and message signalled to Black

⁸² Hannah Jo Dorfman, “Contesting the Faith: Late Twentieth Century American Evangelicalism in Black and White,” *Thesis* (Tufts University, 2015), 44.

⁸³ Quoted in Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 54.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 54-5.

⁸⁵ Edward Gilbreath, “A Prophet out of Harlem” *Christianity Today*, vol. 40, no. 10 (1996), 36.

⁸⁶ Tom Skinner, “The US Racial Crisis and World Evangelism,” (1970), *Transcript* (InterVarsity, Urbana), <https://urbana.org/transcript/us-racial-crisis-and-world-evangelism-1970>

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Previously known as the Hampton Institute, Hampton University is a historically Black institution in Virginia.

⁹⁰ Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 103.

attendees that “a new day was imminent” for race relations among American evangelicalism in 1970.⁹¹ That day has yet to come.

Despite their racially distinct memberships, the NAE and the NBEA shared one commonality significant to this chapter: they were both led and numerically dominated by men.⁹² Black and White evangelicals tended to share conservative social values, a consequence of their similar relationships with Scripture. Both Black and White conservative evangelicals interpreted Scripture as promoting “traditional” gender roles, including male headship and female submission (as well as prohibiting homosexuality and abortion).⁹³ Adherence to this ideology discouraged female leadership and restricted female participation within both coalitions.⁹⁴ Historian Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews illustrates the unique blend of liberal/progressive and conservative/traditional beliefs among Black evangelicals in the United States. Black evangelicals fought for racial equality in the church, home, and society, yet advocated subordinate roles for women in these same venues. Swetnam Mathews notes, “African Americans created their own traditionalist conservative evangelicalism. It drew heavily from what they perceived as traditional Protestant doctrines but could also include more progressive notions.”⁹⁵ Both Black and White evangelicals understood the Bible to be inerrant and authoritative. However, because Black evangelicalism developed within a racist society, social justice advocacy (specifically regarding racial justice) had always influenced Black evangelical interpretations of Scripture. This historical frame connected the newer generations of Black evangelicals “to the faith of the generations before them.”⁹⁶ However, Black evangelical critiques of racism did not translate into other typically “progressive” ideals, such as

⁹¹ Skinner, “The US Racial Crisis.”

⁹² Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 286-7; Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals – no mention of women in this chapter*.

⁹³ For more on the overlaps between Black and White conservative evangelicals, see Swetnam Mathews, “‘Only the Gilded Staircase to Destruction:’ African American Protestants Confront the Social Challenges of Modernity,” in *Doctrine and Race*, 98-125.

⁹⁴ Studying Black evangelical constructions of kinship, Todne Thomas found that Black evangelical women often prioritized community life over their issues with the “gender politics” of their churches (*Kincraft*, 139). Thomas interviewed Sister Regina Manchester, a member of the Dixon Bible Chapel (DBC), a church that prohibited “women speaking or teaching in mixed-sex adult groups” (*Ibid*). Thomas found that while Sister Manchester did not agree with the gendered restrictions, she remained committed to participating in church activities and community-building, largely at the request of her church sisters (139-140). According to Thomas, DBC church sisters constructed a friendship-based sisterhood “built upon the ground of common experience” (144). To an outsider, this sisterhood might appear to “reinforce[] a gendered division of labor and an image of female domesticity,” as the women cooked for the church and discussed their experiences of motherhood (144-6). However, Thomas draws on bell hooks’ concept of “homeplace” to complicate a binary representation of space as domestic/private versus public. “Homeplaces,” are “spaces of care and nurturance presided over by African American women, not as an outgrowth of their social location as women but out of their commitment to producing recuperative spaces for their community” (151). According to Thomas, “[w]omen and kitchens emerged as central fixtures in the production of homeplace and community” for the DBC sisters. “By creating and embodying shared substances in the kitchen, Afro-Caribbean and African American churchwomen occupied important social and spatial locations for kin-making,” strengthening their broader church communities (152). Constructing a sisterhood based on shared experiences and church-based kinship ties precluded Black evangelical women from joining predominantly White Christian coalitions, including the EWCI.

⁹⁵ Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 2. For example, Black evangelical opposition to abortion is not linked with voting Republican, as it is with White evangelicalism.

⁹⁶ Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 4.

gender egalitarianism. This distinction reinforced the male-dominated evangelical landscape into which the EWCI would soon enter as part of the progressive evangelical movement.

The EWCI, Progressive Evangelicals, and Race

Progressive evangelicals began mobilizing in the 1960s to support the civil rights movement and to reject racism within evangelical communities. Baptist minister Fred Alexander, his wife Anne, and his son, John launched *Freedom Now* in 1965, a seminal magazine outlining progressive evangelical ideals and goals. In *Freedom Now*, the Alexanders identified racism, or, at the very least, apathy regarding anti-racist activism, as endemic within evangelicalism. *Freedom Now* linked this apathy to a prioritization of personal conversion and prevailing individualism within evangelicalism, a conclusion that, as noted above, Emerson and Smith would articulate forty years later.⁹⁷ Contributors to *Freedom Now* and other early leaders in the progressive movement, including Jim Wallis, challenged this individualism. Progressive leaders argued that evangelical participation in civil rights activism aligned with evangelical theology and history. For progressive evangelicals, “Christians must measure social conditions and public policies by biblical standards of justice...and effective reforms of injustices require political activism.”⁹⁸ The progressive evangelical movement therefore challenges Emerson and Smith’s conclusions regarding White evangelicalism. In 2013, evangelical scholars revisited Emerson and Smith’s thesis to incorporate this nuance: progressive evangelicals made significant strides toward structural racial reconciliation during the 1960s and 1970s, whereas conservatives did not.⁹⁹ As the progressive movement developed, participants recognised racial oppression as part of an “unjust social system[]” rather than simply a product of racist individuals.¹⁰⁰ The progressive movement thus promoted a more “comprehensive interpretation of sin” than the conservative evangelical focus on individualism. The progressive movement drew on an evangelical history of social reforms that represented both individual and social depravities as “offenses against God.”¹⁰¹

Emerson and Smith identified racial isolation as a key factor in White evangelical misunderstandings about structural racism in the United States. However, many leading White

⁹⁷ Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 9.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 30; Jim Wallis was known to declare: “I am a nineteenth-century evangelical born in the wrong century” because of the early Christian goals of that era in “fighting for social justice” which Wallis affirmed (qt’d in Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 7), see Chapter One.

⁹⁹ See Brantley W. Gasaway. “Glimmers of Hope”: Progressive Evangelicals and Racism, 1965–2000,” in *Christians and the Color Line*, 72–99. See also Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). Beyond this significant correction, scholars in this anthology found that Emerson and Smith’s thesis remains widely accurate regarding White evangelical’s experience and understanding of race in America. Historian Ryon Cobb found that even though many evangelicals actually read *Divided by Faith*, promoted within their churches, “white racial attitudes have remained largely the same: an individual’s perceived lack of prejudice or an individual’s attention to issues of personal race relations *always* trumps the structural” (Ryon Cobb, “Still Divided By Faith? Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America, 1977–2010,” in *Christians and the Color Line*, 129).

¹⁰⁰ Brantley W. Gasaway, “‘Glimmers of Hope’: Progressive Evangelicals and Racism, 1965–2000,” in *Christians and the Color Line*, 74.

¹⁰¹ Ibid; David R. Swartz, “The Evangelical Left and the Move from Personal to Social Responsibility,” in *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, 212.

progressives in the 1960s and 1970s interacted with Black Americans and Black culture in ways that White conservative evangelicals did not. For example, Fred Alexander taught at a Black Bible College in Cleveland Ohio, while also living in an integrated neighbourhood.¹⁰² Jim Wallis, born in a suburb outside Detroit, explored predominantly Black inner-city communities during his teenage years. During this period, Wallis developed interracial friendships that he later credited with "inspiring his entrance into progressive politics by the 1960s."¹⁰³ Ron Sider, a leading member of Evangelicals for Social Action, lived in a mainly Black neighbourhood during his doctoral studies at Yale University, and he later attributed interactions with his Black landlords as influencing his understanding of race in America.¹⁰⁴ Sider remembered that he and his wife "sat with [his landlords] the night that Martin Luther King was killed, [and] we felt their pain."¹⁰⁵ Interracial encounters and relationships helped these early progressive leaders develop empathy and understanding for Black Americans, leading to their participation in the civil rights movement and an awareness of racial systemic oppressions in the United States.

Battling structural systems of racial oppression, however, was not always a goal for progressives. John Alexander, Fred Alexander's son, initially shared the predominant White conservative view of "soulwinning as the singular fix for racism."¹⁰⁶ In the early editions of *Freedom Now* the magazine reflected the view "that changing hearts, not laws, could best transform society."¹⁰⁷ It quickly became clear to leaders, however, that individual conversion did not resolve racism, even in their own families and communities. In Fred Alexander's Baptist congregation, for example, many evangelicals "remained flagrantly racist," denouncing interracial marriage and supporting segregation.¹⁰⁸ By 1969, John Alexander took charge of *Freedom Now* and renamed the magazine *The Other Side*, spearheading a more inclusive social justice agenda for the publication. Alexander wanted *The Other Side* to move "beyond the black-white issue" and to incorporate discussions of sexism, capitalism, living modestly, and economic injustice in the United States.¹⁰⁹ This name change reflected the larger progressive movement as well; by the second Thanksgiving Workshop of the Evangelicals for Social Action in 1974, the ESA established multiple task forces to address similar social justice concerns, including racism and sexism.

NBEA president William Bentley chaired the 1974 ESA task force on race and Nancy Hardesty chaired the one on women (which eventually became the EWCI, as noted in chapter one). The separation of discussions on race and gender into distinct caucuses, while contributing to the

¹⁰² Gasaway, "Glimmers of Hope," 92.

¹⁰³ Ibid. To be able to enter and leave racialized communities at will is a marked privilege of Whiteness, as is the option of "racial isolation" in general. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks notes that as a person on the margins of society, "We looked both from the outside and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on them margin. We understood both...Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center" (qt'd in "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," 156). In this quote, hooks argues that Black people must engage with the White world (the world of the oppressor) simply to survive at the margins of that world.

¹⁰⁴ Gasaway, "Glimmers of Hope," 92.

¹⁰⁵ Qt'd in Gasaway, "Glimmers of Hope," 92-3.

¹⁰⁶ Swartz, "The Evangelical Left," 213.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.; Swartz notes that the Alexanders came from a Southern Baptist background and were speaking about Christians within Baptist congregations in the South specifically.

¹⁰⁹ Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 31; Swartz "The Evangelical Left," 216.

ESA's wide range of resolutions in its manifesto, prevented certain kinds of coalitions within the group. For example, Black women faced the decision to participate in either the task force on racism or the one on sexism. By dividing and separating these social issues, the ESA modeled a coalition structure that precluded interracial community building within its own organization, and which, as discussed further below, left Black participants feeling isolated and underprioritized. This structural division also dictated the racial makeup of the emergent EWCI: all the Black women present at the 1974 Chicago conference attended the caucus on race, leaving White women alone in developing a caucus on gender.¹¹⁰ In a later issue of EWCI's *Update*, Black EWCI member Michelle Borba explained to *Update's* predominantly White readership why Black women tend to prioritize racial issues over gender issues when forced to choose. According to Borba, "Because black women experience discrimination and oppression on the basis of their color first, rather than their sex, black women naturally choose to put their fighting efforts toward the struggle to end racial inequality, efforts that are germane to insuring survival and a satisfying quality of life."¹¹¹ Although the progressive evangelical movement, like the conservative movement, was predominantly White and male, Black and White women and Black men participated in the task forces and helped grow the burgeoning movement. Ultimately, however, biblical feminists and Black evangelical leaders split from the ESA. Each group determined that the ESA did not adequately represent the unique experiences and needs of women and Black evangelicals in the United States.

The EWCI became independent of Evangelicals for Social Action in 1975. However, maintaining relationships within the progressive movement facilitated the EWCI's growth in its formative years. In an internal memo circulated in 1978, the EWCI executive council acknowledged the importance of the editors of *The Other Side*, who had managed the EWCI's financial contributions through their own tax-exempt status prior to the EWCI acquiring nonprofit status.¹¹² The EWCI and *The Other Side* maintained a relationship throughout this period, periodically exchanging mailing lists and advertising conferences and events to one another.¹¹³ Leading EWCI members frequently contributed to *The Other Side*, using this platform to explain important coalition decisions and EWCI news to the broader progressive community.¹¹⁴ By the early 1980s, the EWCI and ESA sought to work together towards mutual goals. In April of 1983, Sharon Anderson, the communications contact for ESA, reached out to Ann Moor, the editor of EWCI's *Update*. The two had met years prior at an EWCI conference. Anderson reminded Moor of the EWCI's roots in the ESA, lamenting that "the two organizations haven't networked in years." Anderson stated, "I'd like to remedy that," adding Moor and the EWCI to the ESA's mailing list and requesting EWCI's newsletter in return. Anderson commended the EWCI's "fine work" and sought to reconnect the two organizations.¹¹⁵ For her part, Moor was receptive to this relationship,

¹¹⁰ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 15.

¹¹¹ Michelle Borba, "Black/White Feminist Differences," *Update*, vol. 9, no. 3 (Fall 1985), 12-13.

¹¹² EEWC Archives: Margaret Hannay, "EWC Organization Day," Spring 1978, Series 2A, Box 1, Folder 1; The EWCI became a non-profit in its own right in 1979 ("What is EWC Nationally?").

¹¹³ EEWC Archives: Letter to Executive Council from Florence Brown, 5 Oct. 1991, Series 1A, Box 1, Folder 5.

¹¹⁴ See for example, Anne Eggebroten, "Handling Power: UnChristian, Unfeminine, Unkind?" in *The Other Side*, Dec. 1986, 22. Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1.

¹¹⁵ EEWC Archives, Letter from Sharon Anderson to Ann Moor, *Evangelicals for Social Action*, 18 April 1983, Series 1B, Box 2 Folder 12.

responding: "I'm...pleased that you want to facilitate networking between our two organizations. Many in the EWC have expressed an interest in, and concern about, keeping in closer touch with ESA."¹¹⁶

By August 1983, the two coalitions were discussing racial diversity and anti-racist policies within the progressive movement. ESA representatives reached out to the EWCI to request research materials for the new section on racial and sexual discrimination in ESA's workshop manual. The ESA representative wrote to the EWCI, "I'm looking in many places as I'm doing my research...So I'm not relying totally on you for help [in] the area of discrimination against women. But I have been thinking that you might be able to help me more than any other resource."¹¹⁷ The correspondence between the EWCI and ESA revealed the coalitions' mutual goals opposing racial and gender discrimination. However, both coalitions remained predominantly White throughout this period; neither group succeeded in attracting Black evangelical members.

In general, White conservative evangelicals did not share progressive evangelical experiences building cross-racial relationships or resisting racial divisions.¹¹⁸ American geographical distinctions are important to consider here because discrete race relations developed among northern states as compared to southern states from the antebellum period onward.¹¹⁹ The White progressive leaders discussed in this chapter were mainly situated in northern states, which influenced their desire and ability to access and move freely between Black and White communities.¹²⁰ Much scholarship has examined the segregation and disenfranchisement laws of the South leading up to the civil rights movement, and religious studies scholar Carolyn Dupont

¹¹⁶ EEWC Archives: Letter from Ann Moor to Sharon Anderson, *Evangelical Women's Caucus*, 16 May 1983, Series 1B, Box 2 Folder 12.

¹¹⁷ EEWC Archives: Letter from Jim Lucas to the EWC National Office, *Evangelicals for Social Action*, 6 Aug. 1983, Series 1C, Box 9, Folder 6.

¹¹⁸ Gasaway, "Glimmers of Hope," 75; Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 46.

¹¹⁹ For an introduction (and helpful bibliography) to the intersections of race, religion, and politics across the nation, see Mark Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press). For an overview of the distinct development of race relationships in the American South from the colonial period to the civil rights movement see, David Brown and Clive Webb, *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). For an overview of southern race discourses alongside southern religion, see Paul Harvey, *Christianity and Race in the American South: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). While much scholarship has emphasized racism and segregation in the South from the time of slavery through the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the "Jim Crow" disenfranchisement and segregation laws leading to the Civil Rights Movement, historians have recently drawn attention to racism and segregation in the northern states during this period as well. For a discussion of race and slavery in the North during the antebellum period, see Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005). For an examination of the White northern construction of towns and cities that prohibited Black Americans from settling there see James E. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: New Press, 2005).

¹²⁰ Scholars have shown that segregation existed in the American North, albeit often in different forms than the "Jim Crow" disenfranchisement and segregation of the South. For examples see Noll, *God and Race* and Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, noted in the previous footnote. While historians have discredited an oversimplified binary of an integrated North versus a segregated South, there was a push within the North toward imposing racial integration on the South during the 1960s which involved White evangelicals. For example, in the mid 1960s many White ministers from northern states traveled to the American South to help advocate for integration from a Christian perspective (Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 12). This context helps explain available White evangelical cultures and discourses in the North, with which these progressive leaders engaged.

provides important nuance to the concept of “racial isolation” during this period in the South.¹²¹ Examining the history of White evangelicalism in Mississippi, Dupont argues that racial segregation was not about physical isolation, but was an ideological construction that stipulated “maintaining superiority” rather than reflecting “actual separation” between races.¹²² Dupont demonstrates that segregated evangelical communities in Mississippi “belied the racially mixed reality” of the state, noting, “for all Mississippi’s insistence upon maintaining segregation, the races lived in close physical proximity.”¹²³ Framing racial separation as part of “a neatly dichotomized imagined world,” Dupont argues,

whites brought blacks into close quarters for a variety of reasons, most often when they needed the benefit of their labor...Even whites of modest means hired African Americans to cook their food, wash and wipe their naked children, clean their toilets, and launder their underclothes. White Mississippians repeatedly, if inadvertently, acknowledged their abundant and intimate interracial contact when they argued that these quotidian interactions placed them in a position to know African Americans better than northerners did.¹²⁴

Thus, racial isolation was a mindset, a way of conceptualizing and creating the world that needed to be “acted out by everyone with careful coaching and plentiful intimidation.”¹²⁵ This ideological isolation was as effective as physical isolation; it hindered meaningful interactions and the development of connections across racial boundaries, which, as previously noted, are integral for building relationships of empathy, trust, and community across racial divides. As this chapter has shown, the emerging NAE dismissed concerns about race to accommodate and maintain unity among southern conservative leaders and denominations. Many progressive evangelical leaders came from northern churches, which influenced their relationship to race, their personal experiences with Black Americans, and their encounters with structures of racial oppression. Geographical limitations also impacted the racial make-up of the EWCI. While the EWCI prided itself on its national reach, it had few chapters in the American South.¹²⁶

Bridging racial divides was as challenging for the White progressive movement as it was for White evangelical feminists. Racial tensions came to a head at the 1975 ESA conference, splintering the progressive movement. From ESA’s inaugural conference in 1973, intimations of racial discord threatened the movement’s cohesion; many White participants at this meeting still advocated the traditional evangelical belief that social change would follow from “changing individual consciences.”¹²⁷ After the passage of action resolutions at ESA’s 1974 meeting, including “affirmative action programs, [and] the involvement of black representatives in national and

¹²¹ Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*; For an accessible overview of this subject from four historians in conversation, see: Justin Taylor, “A Conversation with Four Historians on the Response of White Evangelicals to the Civil Rights Movement,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 1 July 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/a-conversation-with-four-historians-on-the-response-of-white-evangelicals-to-the-civil-rights-movement/>

¹²² Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 26.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹²⁶ See the introduction for more information about the EWCI’s relationship with the American South.

¹²⁷ Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 85.

international church bodies,” founder Ron Sider expressed fears that the ESA was stretching itself too thin.¹²⁸ At the 1975 conference, Black evangelicals noted some racist undertones during meetings that impacted “the individuals, the structure, and the methodology of the entire weekend.”¹²⁹ William Bentley responded to this atmosphere by standing up during a workshop and declaring: “I question whether you people can even see us blacks.”¹³⁰ Bentley’s statement caused angry outbursts and shouting among those present.¹³¹

ESA leadership did acknowledge criticism from Black community members. They replaced their existing planning committee with a more diverse group: four White women (all of whom participated in the EWCI: Evon Bachaus, Lucille Dayton, Judy Brown Hull, and Karen Michaelson), four White men, and eight Black members, chosen by Bentley.¹³² Moreover, ESA leadership declared that the 1976 meeting would be dedicated to confronting racism.¹³³ Some participants criticized this action as insufficient to address racial divisions within the movement. Such critiques suggested that ESA should “extend support to organizations already involved in fighting racism,” including Voice of Calvary Ministries in Mississippi founded by John Perkins and the Evangelical Christian Urban Ministries of Boston (ECUMB), which worked to elect Black citizens to school boards controlled by White people.¹³⁴ Other members felt that ESA’s struggle against racism was outdated and withdrew from the coalition claiming “that Bentley is still fighting the battles of the 1960s and is trying to drag the ESA down to his level.”¹³⁵ Jim Wallis also announced his resignation from his leadership role in the alliance “because the ESA was becoming too structured and institutional” for his liking.¹³⁶ In the years following these discourses, ESA shifted its focus toward “education, networking sessions, publications, and consultations,” retreating from direct attempts to influence public policy.¹³⁷ For many progressive evangelicals, this retreat represented a loss of relevance for the coalition.

By the 1980s and 1990s, White evangelicals in conservative coalitions discovered the message of racial reconciliation promoted by Black evangelicals, and many found it compelling. However, in conceptualizing racial reconciliation through the lens of “accountable freewill individualism,” White evangelicals popularized a fundamentally altered version of this ideology. White conservative evangelicals promoted “individual reconciliation,” rather than the message of the early movement, promoted by Black evangelicals, which supported systemic social change.¹³⁸ The Promise Keepers are the most well-known evangelical organization advocating individual racial reconciliation. Founded in 1990 by former football coach Bill McCartney, this Christian men’s group upholds seven promises including a commitment “to reaching beyond any racial, denominational,

¹²⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹²⁹ Bonnie Greene qt’d in Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 88.

¹³⁰ Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 87. Emphasis in original.

¹³¹ Ibid., 87-8.

¹³² “Chicago Crisis,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 20, no. 1 (10 October 1975), 57; See also Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 88.

¹³³ Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 88.

¹³⁴ Greene qt’d in Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 88.

¹³⁵ “Chicago Crisis,” *Christianity Today*, 57.

¹³⁶ Ibid.; See also Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 88.

¹³⁷ Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 90.

¹³⁸ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 67.

generational, and cultural barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.”¹³⁹ The Promise Keepers’ reconciliation agenda focused on “encouraging individual repentance and the development of intentional, long-term relationships with men from different ethnic backgrounds, preferably in one’s local church,” rather than on addressing legal, social, and economic systems of racial oppression.¹⁴⁰ Essentially, the Promise Keepers supported the first step of Skinner, Perkins, and other early leaders’ four-step programme of racial reconciliation, outlined above. The Promise Keepers’ dismissal of the social component of racial oppression was highlighted during an NBEA conference in 1995 when leaders invited Bill McCartney to speak. When asked about how the Promise Keepers planned to address “the anti-affirmative action atmosphere” in the United States, McCartney skirted the question.¹⁴¹ Framing racism as an individual problem neglects the important constructions of racist systems that disadvantage non-White Americans, including unequal access to education, housing, and employment opportunities, among others. By shifting the racial reconciliation movement away from structural oppression to focus on individual relationships and action, White conservative evangelicals diminished the transformative potential of the movement.

Building Feminist Coalitions across Racial Divides

Beyond evangelical circles, the EWCI also engaged with feminist networks and frameworks regarding interracial coalition-building. Second-wave feminist coalitions had been attempting to bridge racial divides since the movement’s emergence in the 1960s. Despite the predominant historical narrative that represents early second-wave feminism as a movement constructed by and for middle-class White women, recent scholarship highlights successful historical interracial feminist coalitions.¹⁴² For example, Black women who were welfare recipients fought for reform within the welfare system, launching the welfare rights movement through the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). NWRO, from its inception in 1966, was an interracial movement that brought poor women together in their fight for “expanded welfare budgets, more equitable and respectful treatment of welfare recipients, the right of recipients to have private store credit, and an income maintenance program,” among other concerns.¹⁴³ In this coalition, poverty united members and trumped racial divides. Founder Johnnie Tillmon explained, “We can’t afford racial

¹³⁹ “Seven Promises,” *Promise Keepers*, <https://promisekeepers.org/promise-keepers/about-us/full7promises/>; See also Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 65.

¹⁴⁰ Mullin, “Neoevangelicalism,” 34.

¹⁴¹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 66.

¹⁴² During the 1980s the representation of feminist history as by and for White women became “fixed as ‘common knowledge’” as feminist scholarship proliferated and a division was constructed between lived experience/practice and feminist theory (Sara Evans, “Foreword,” in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, edited by Stephanie Gilmore, viii). Gilmore rightfully notes that this representation of the second-wave movement has “tremendous staying power” (Gilmore, “Thinking about Feminist Coalitions,” 1). This narrative is problematic because it is untrue, but also because it erases the participation of women of colour, women from lower classes, and religious women within the movement.

¹⁴³ Mantler, *Power to the Poor*, 103; See also Premilla Nadasen, “‘Welfare’s a Green Problem:’ Cross-Race Coalitions in Welfare Rights Organizing,” in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, edited by Stephanie Gilmore, 179. The NWRO, in many ways, achieved the interracial coalition that the Poor People’s Campaign struggled to obtain. For more on the role of the NWRO in the Poor People’s Campaign, see Mantler, *Power to the Poor*, 103-5.

separateness. I'm told by the poor white girls on welfare how they feel when they're hungry, and I feel the same way when I'm hungry."¹⁴⁴ The anti-rape movement in America exemplified another cross-racial coalitional success. This movement positioned rape as "a bridge issue" that was able to "unite[] radical, liberal, white, and black feminists....in the common cause to develop an antirape ideology, attenuate the trauma experienced by the rape victim, and elaborate strategies to eradicate rape."¹⁴⁵ Thus, coalitions across race succeeded within the feminist movement when they constructed a collective ideology around an issue that superseded racial conflicts or misunderstandings. However, building inclusive and expansive coalitions remained a particularly arduous task, and an exception to the rule, due to the difficulties involved in bridging embedded differences.

In the 1960s, most leaders and rank-and-file members within liberal and radical feminist organizations were White, middle-class women.¹⁴⁶ Some early members had participated in the civil rights movement, gaining coalition-building strategies, organizational skills, and the confidence "to break out of confining, traditional roles."¹⁴⁷ These participants brought this toolkit into the feminist movement in the mid-1960s.¹⁴⁸ As White women founded and joined early second-wave feminist coalitions, many Black women activists continued to participate in the civil rights and Black Power movements without joining the women's movement.¹⁴⁹ The emerging feminist movement represented gender as distinct and discrete from race, and many Black activists

¹⁴⁴ Q't'd in Nadasen, "'Welfare's a Green Problem,'" 178. It should be noted that while this coalition represented welfare recipients of all races and involved some prominent non-Black activists, the "the organization was an estimated 85 percent African American and had been viewed as a 'recognized and legitimate partner' in the black freedom struggle" (Mantler, *Power to the Poor*, 213).

¹⁴⁵ Maria Bevacqua, "Coalition Politics in the Antirape Movement," in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, edited by Stephanie Gilmore, 164.

¹⁴⁶ Jennifer Nelson notes that even radical feminist groups, like the Redstockings of New York, were "almost all white and of middle-class background" despite their efforts to fight racism (*Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 23).

¹⁴⁷ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 26. See also Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980*, (Duke University Press: 2005), 9. Springer notes that Black women also developed "a repertoire of strategies" through participation in the civil rights movement, which they later also brought to feminist organizing (21). This is not to suggest that all early White feminists first participated in the civil rights movement, nor that this is the only taproot for their organizing. Another important root is the labour movement, where many early second-wave feminists began their activist careers, including Aileen Hernandez, Pauli Murray, and Betty Friedan. There is also often overlap for individual activists (and the movements that they represent), as many individuals participated in multiple movements concurrently or over the course of their activist careers. Moreover, as the civil rights movement transformed into discourses of Black Power, White participants tended to be excluded from Black led coalitions, pushing White women activists into the feminist movement (Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 26). For example, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), under the leadership of Stokely Carmichael, asked White members to resign in 1967. For more on the reasons for this shift to an all-Black coalition, see Septima Poinsette Clark and Cynthia Stokes Brown, *Ready from Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1990): 72-80; For more information on Black women's roles in the SNCC, see Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2003): 207-221.

¹⁴⁸ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 26; Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Springer identifies four major reasons that Black women *en masse* did not join the early feminist movement: "(1) perceived increasing relational tensions between black women and men, (2) worries about black women's activist energies being diverted from the civil rights movement, (3) black and white women's distrust of one another, and (4) racist history and cultural stereotypes" (*Living for the Revolution*, 29).

recognized that feminists prioritized gender struggles above other oppressions.¹⁵⁰ The early second-wave movement viewed “racism [as] a kind of add-on, an extra burden of oppression that black women carried on top of their basic oppression as women.”¹⁵¹ Thus, into the 1970s, Black women activists were confronted with an abysmal choice: “pledging membership to a movement against racism or chauvinism,” because neither the civil rights nor the feminist movements united gender- and sex-based discrimination.¹⁵² Aligned with Michelle Borba’s explanation in *Update* discussed previously, many Black activists prioritized the fight against racial discrimination over that of gender during this period.¹⁵³

By the 1970s, Black women were developing feminist coalitions to reflect their unique experiences of oppression and support their own goals.¹⁵⁴ Black women coming out of the civil rights and Black nationalist movements “held different priorities from those of white feminists,” which included an emphasis on intersecting gender and racial oppressions.¹⁵⁵ Black feminist organizations discussed and addressed issues such as “employment, health care, sexuality, drug abuse, alcoholism, incarcerated women, ex-offenders, child care, rape, and consciousness-raising.”¹⁵⁶ In 1968, Black activist Frances Beal formed the inaugural Black Women’s Liberation Caucus (BWLC). Beal created the BWLC under the umbrella of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). However, in 1969, the BWLC became an independent organization, changing its name first to the Black Women’s Alliance (BWA), then to the Third World Women’s Alliance (TWWA) to reflect and support the participation of non-Black women of colour and their interconnected struggles.¹⁵⁷ In 1973, Margaret Sloan-Hunter, a Black activist and founding editor of *Ms.* magazine with Steinem, helped create a second organization: the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). The NBFO “held open the door for other black feminist organizations,” dictating goals and shaping the direction of the emerging movement.¹⁵⁸ From the Boston Chapter of the NBFO, Black feminist lesbians formed the Combahee River Collective to advocate their specific social justice goals.

¹⁵⁰ According to Springer, when Black feminists created their own coalitions, they sought to “inject an antiracist politic and shift the focus from solely gender oppression” in the existing women’s movement (*Living for the Revolution*, 51).

¹⁵¹ Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 366.

¹⁵² Ula Taylor, “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis,” (*Journal of Black Studies*, Nov. 1998, Vol. 29, No. 2), 240-1. See also Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 21. Springer also explains that while Black women faced sexism within the civil rights movement, “Black male movement leaders often delegated leadership responsibilities to black women, and, hence, black women did not experience the same degree of sexism as white women” (*Living for the Revolution*, 26).

¹⁵³ Springer notes that Black women in Black nationalist movements fought against sexism in the movements and advocated for their abilities as leaders. Predominantly, Black women remained within these organizations and “declared primary allegiance to ending racism out of the belief that issues of racial oppression were more pressing than gender discrimination” (*Living for the Revolution*, 26-7).

¹⁵⁴ I am talking about the emergence of Black feminism as a specific and separate movement here. This is not to ignore or erase Black women and women of colour who participated in the early feminist movement, alongside White women.

¹⁵⁵ Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 27.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 47-9.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

As was common among Black feminist organizations, the Combahee River Collective allied themselves with Black men and the struggle against racism. According to the founders of the Combahee River Collective:

Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors.¹⁵⁹

Black feminists created coalitions to advocate for their best interests and unique goals as Black women. Identifying a lack in the existing feminist movement, Black feminists aligned themselves with other Black activists in the fight for racial equality. However, while declaring comradery with Black men in the fight against racism, Black feminists simultaneously opposed chauvinism within the civil rights and Black Power movements.¹⁶⁰ Black activist Septima Clark, an executive staff member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) who worked alongside Martin Luther King Jr, identified a lack of respect for women “as one of the weaknesses of the civil rights movement.”¹⁶¹ Speaking about her experience working within the SCLC, Clark explained: “It’s a man’s organization, and I don’t think women’s words had any weight whatsoever.”¹⁶² Black feminists thus faced unique challenges within the civil rights and women’s movements. The NBFO’s Statement of Purpose highlighted the delicate balance required of emergent Black feminist coalitions as they navigated their relationships with these movements. The Statement declared: “The [Women’s] Movement has been characterized as the exclusive property of so-called white middle-class women and any black women seen involved in this Movement have been seen as ‘selling out, [and] ‘dividing the race.’”¹⁶³ According to the leaders of the NBFO, such assumptions were nothing more than “an assortment of nonsensical epithets.”¹⁶⁴ NBFO leaders laid claim to

¹⁵⁹ “The Combahee River Collective Statement” in *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present*, Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 180.

¹⁶⁰ Taylor, “The Historical Evolution,” 241; See also Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 26-7; See also Black activist Kathleen Cleaver’s account of sexism within the movement and why she moved into the Black feminist movement. Qt’d in Jacquelyn Grant, “Black Women and the Church,” in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*, eds. Gloria Hall, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1982), 146-7.

¹⁶¹ Clark, “Women’s Roles,” *Update*, vol. 12 no. 1 (Spring 1988): 7. See also Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 22-23.

¹⁶² Qt’d in Mantler, *Power to the Poor*, 91. Black activist Ella Baker voiced similar criticisms of the SCLC. While Black women reported sexism within Christian and non-Christian coalitions in the wider civil rights and Black Power movements, I did not find evidence of separate Black evangelical women’s coalitions emerging during this time. Black theologian Jacquelyn Grant notes, “there is usually a direct relationship between what goes on in the Black church and in the Black secular community. The status of Black women in the community parallels that of Black women in the church” (“Black Women and the Church,” 145). This interconnection between the wider civil rights and Black Power movements and Black Christian activism helps illuminate why separate Black women’s evangelical groups were not prevalent at this time because Black feminists and womanists fighting for leadership roles did not necessarily separate this activism from their participation in “secular” Black feminist coalitions.

¹⁶³ “National Black Feminist Organization Statement of Purpose,” in *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present*, Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 173.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

their own feminism, creating new and complex opportunities within the broader feminist movement, without mandating interracial coalitions.

Case Study: NOW and Sterilization Abuse

As the second-wave feminist movement grew, so did its vitality and racial complexity. And feminist activists continued to encounter problems in building cross-racial coalitions. Sterilization abuse is a devastating problem that has predominantly impacted women of colour, Black women, and poor women in the United States. Discourses about sterilization, reproduction, and reproductive healthcare among women of colour, Black women, and White women within the secular feminist movement illuminate ideological challenges that coalitions confront when navigating racial differences. This case study examines the National Organization for Women's failure to oppose sterilization abuse effectively into the 1970s. As previously mentioned, many EWCI members were active in NOW during this period, and the EWCI officially teamed up with NOW at the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s to endorse the passage of the ERA.¹⁶⁵ The ongoing relationship between the EWCI and NOW allows me to draw certain parallels between these organizations. As such, this case study provides insights into why both coalitions struggled to attract and effectively advocate for Black women and women of colour.

Sterilization is an irreversible method of contraception that requires surgical intervention, and it has a long and troubling history in the United States. This medical procedure prevents an ovum and sperm from uniting by severing a part of (or the entire) reproductive tract. This chapter focuses on female sterilization, which includes hysterectomies (removal of the uterus), tubal ligation (clamping or otherwise closing the fallopian tubes), and salpingectomy (removal of a part of or the whole fallopian tubes).¹⁶⁶ Sterilization is connected to ideologies of population control and negative eugenics and has been employed to limit births for those deemed "unfit" under various frameworks of ideal citizenship. These frameworks shift over time, but they have consistently divided people along racial and ethnic lines and by physical and mental ability.¹⁶⁷ Forced, coerced, or otherwise involuntary sterilizations (referred to here as sterilization abuse) were performed most significantly on Black, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Native American women in the United States from the 1950s through the 1970s. A potent statement from Black reproductive rights activist Loretta Ross depicts the pervasiveness of this abuse. Ross, who was sterilized without her consent at the age of twenty-three, asserted, "I began reading more and paying more attention to how many women were sterilized. I mean, I looked at my sister and my mother...there were very few women who were ovulating in my family by their thirties."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ "EWC Joins NOW in Final ERA Push," *Update*, vol. 6 no. 1, (May 1982): 1, 3-5. Horner, "Becoming," 207.

¹⁶⁶ The sterilization procedure available to men is called a vasectomy. This surgical procedure involves severing and sealing the tubes (called the vas deferens) that transport sperm from the testicles.

¹⁶⁷ For a more comprehensive history see *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization, and Reproductive Choice* by Thomas Shapiro (1985); see also Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, and Angela Davis, *Women Race and Class* for a breakdown of the early birth control movement as connected to eugenic ideologies.

¹⁶⁸ Loretta Ross, "Voices of Feminism Oral History Project," by Joyce Follett (Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, 2004-2005), 79-80. In this interview, Ross explains that she received a hysterectomy in 1976, while she was unconscious, in an effort to save her life after her fallopian tubes had ruptured (78). Ross had been fitted with the Dalkon Shield, an intrauterine device, at Howard University a few years prior to this emergency hysterectomy. For

Activists representing (and often from within) impacted communities had been fighting to expose sterilization abuse for decades by the time the epidemic became “a scandal worth reporting” with the now infamous Relf sisters.¹⁶⁹ Mary Alice Relf (age twelve) and Minnie Relf (age fourteen) were sterilized without their knowledge in Montgomery Alabama in 1973 as part of a federally funded project “designated to fight the war on poverty.”¹⁷⁰ The young Black sisters were sterilized because they were poor and their reproductive capacities were deemed a liability by welfare officials. Because the Relf parents were “uneducated farmhands” and welfare recipients, welfare officials kept tabs on the family. In the early 1970s, these state officials suspected that “boys were ‘hanging around’ the girls” and sought a solution to ensure the Relf sisters would not further strain the American welfare system by having children.¹⁷¹ Welfare officers decided that the sisters were too ignorant to sustain alternate, less invasive methods of birth control of their own accords, requiring that the girls be sterilized instead. Neither the sisters nor their parents were made aware of this decision until after the procedures had been completed.¹⁷² Such racist and paternalistic rationalizations for sterilizing poor women and women of colour were not unique to welfare officials during this era. For example, one doctor explained his role in the sterilization campaign as follows: “As physicians we have obligations to our individual patients, but we also have obligations to the society of which we are a part....The welfare mess...cries out for solutions, one of which is fertility control.”¹⁷³ The Relf sisters’ case illuminates economic, racial, and eugenic discourses involved in the forced sterilization of Black girls and women. Mary Alice and Minnie Relf’s nonconsensual sterilizations attracted widespread media attention that instigated massive public outrage. It was the Relf sisters’ forced sterilizations that finally brought the pervasive problem of sterilization abuse to the national stage.¹⁷⁴

Largely due to increased public pressure following the Relf case, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) proposed guidelines in 1974 to govern sterilizations across the United States. These guidelines offered two important changes to existing practices: firstly, they

six months leading up to the surgery, Ross had been experiencing health problems and had been seeing the head OB/GYN at George Washington University Hospital. Ross recalls that this doctor diagnosed her “as having some bizarre, rare venereal disease...that returning GIs from Vietnam had brought back” (76-77). Ross notes, “this man had me on various treatments and antibiotics around trying to address the growing infection in my fallopian tubes;” he did not remove her IUD (76-7). The real reason for Ross’ increasing illness, however, was the Dalkon Shield, which had “a design flaw in that it had a string hanging down from it that was literally there only to aid the doctor in removing it...[which] allowed bacteria to wick up that string into one’s uterus” (76). Moreover, the dangers of this IUD were, by that time, available to doctors “paying any attention,” and well known to the creator of the Dalkon Shield, A.H. Robins (78-9). Although Ross states in this interview that she believes her hysterectomy was necessary to save her life, she considers herself a “victim of sterilization abuse” because of the months of “misdiagnosis and maltreatment” which likely would have prevented such extreme measures (79). For more information on the creation of the Dalkon Shield and its dangerous effects, see Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 271-83.

¹⁶⁹ Davis, *Women Race and Class*, 215.

¹⁷⁰ Shapiro, *Population Control Politics*, 89-90.

¹⁷¹ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 93; Shapiro, *Population Control Politics*, 90.

¹⁷² Shapiro, *Population Control Politics*, 90.

¹⁷³ Quoted in Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 92. Angela Davis responds to this line of reasoning by pointing out its major flaws: “As if having fewer children could create more jobs, higher wages, better schools etc., etc.” (*Women Race and Class*, 205).

¹⁷⁴ Davis, *Women Race and Class*, 216-7.

forbid anyone under the age of twenty-one, or who otherwise could not legally consent, from being sterilized. Secondly, the guidelines designated a mandatory seventy-two-hour waiting period after a patient provided consent before a physician could perform the sterilization.¹⁷⁵ HEW proposed these regulations to curb existing consent problems, which included obtaining coerced permission while women were in labour, under anesthesia, or as physicians withheld pain medication until “consent” was provided.¹⁷⁶ The guidelines also sought to thwart uninformed sterilizations where the patients only found out they had been sterilized after the surgery had been performed.¹⁷⁷ Many sterilization abuse activists found HEW’s guidelines to be a step in the right direction but ultimately not impactful. Multiple studies found that the regulations were “unmonitored and unenforced,” and that many hospitals across the country were completely unaware that the guidelines even existed.¹⁷⁸

Anti-sterilization abuse activists, including members from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Center for Constitution Rights (CCR), and the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CESA), emphasized the limited reach of the HEW regulations. These coalitions proposed a new set of comprehensive, effective, and enforceable guidelines to HEW to prevent sterilization abuse. These new guidelines upheld the stipulation that a person could not provide consent under twenty-one years of age. They also increased the waiting period from seventy-two hours to thirty days. Anti-sterilization abuse activists presented these updates to HEW in 1977 at the National Conference on Sterilization Abuse in Washington D.C. In 1978, HEW included these revisions in its newly released and widely publicized guidelines. While many women’s rights organizations and the women’s health movement rallied behind these new regulations to prevent sterilization abuse, National NOW strongly opposed these recommendations.¹⁷⁹

National NOW’s executive board opposed sterilization abuse in the United States, but they specifically rejected the HEW Sterilization Guidelines. NOW refuted two of the integral components of these new regulations: the thirty-day waiting period and the minimum age requirement (of twenty-one) for obtaining a voluntary sterilization. National NOW’s position on sterilization was that it was an important method of birth control and as such, NOW resolved that the guidelines were “paternalistic and a denial of women’s right to reproductive choice.”¹⁸⁰ National NOW’s emphasis on access and choice led NOW to oppose any potential obstructions to sterilization as a means for a woman to control her fertility. By framing sterilization in this way,

¹⁷⁵ Shapiro, *Population Control Politics*, 138.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 90-1.

¹⁷⁷ Nonconsensual sterilizations that were only revealed to female patients after they had been performed were such common occurrences among poor Black women in the South that these women colloquially referred to this phenomenon as a “Mississippi appendectomy.” According to historian Rebecca Kluchin, the “Mississippi appendectomy” refers to “the secret sterilization via hysterectomy of poor black women who entered hospitals for abdominal surgeries – like cesarian sections and appendectomies – and left, unknowingly, without their uteruses” (*Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950-1980* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 73).

¹⁷⁸ Shapiro, *Population Control Politics*, 90-1; Meg Devlin O’Sullivan, “Informing Red Power and Transforming the Second Wave: Native American Women and the Struggle against Coerced Sterilization in the 1970s,” *Women’s History Review* 25, no. 6 (2016), 971.

¹⁷⁹ While National NOW opposed these regulations, some local chapters voiced strong support for the HEW Guidelines including NOW NYC, NOW Boston and NOW Middlesex. This seeming dissention was made possible by the intentional structuring of NOW from its inception, where local chapters were granted a lot of autonomy.

¹⁸⁰ “NOW Resolution” (*CARASA News*, Vol. 2 No. 10, Nov. 2, 1978), 4.

NOW disregarded the complicated context of abuse with this procedure, which impacted Black women and women of colour. However, this frame made sense within the reproductive rights context that White middle-class women had been promoting, relative to the specific and historical struggles White women faced against their reproductive freedoms.

Historically in the United States, White middle-class women (who, as mentioned, dominated the rank-and-file membership of NOW from its inception), were often unable to obtain voluntary sterilizations. Historian Jennifer Nelson explains, “[p]hysicians often rejected white middle-class women for sterilization if they were young and had no children. It was assumed these women would change their minds and want children later in life.”¹⁸¹ Based on such interactions, White middle-class feminists identified paternalism within the healthcare systems. In their struggle for reproductive freedom, White women sought to overcome structures of condescension and infantilization that ignored and denied their choices.¹⁸² NOW was not alone in this line of reasoning; the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) shared a similar perspective and joined NOW in opposition of the HEW Guidelines.¹⁸³ By the late 1970s, liberal feminists were very familiar with “choice” as a rhetorical framework in the struggle for reproductive rights. Both liberal and radical women’s groups embraced this rhetorical strategy in the early movement to repeal abortion laws in the 1960s.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, feminists effectively employed “choice” rhetoric in the battle to overturn abortion restrictions federally, which resulted in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Thus, White feminists continued to strategically engage “choice” language in their ongoing struggle for reproductive freedom during this era.

Angela Davis, a leading Black activist, recognized that White middle-class women were fighting an important battle for their reproductive freedom. However, Davis explained that in this instance White women were fighting against “further inconveniences” to contraceptive access.¹⁸⁵ When weighed ideologically against the reality of sterilization abuses impacting women of colour, Black women, and poor women, Davis contended: “whatever the inconveniences for white middle-class women, a fundamental reproductive right of racially oppressed and poor women is at stake.”¹⁸⁶ Moreover, Davis linked restrictions against sterilization with access to abortion and contraception as part of a wider struggle for reproductive freedom for all women. Davis asserted, “women of color are urged, at every turn, to become permanently infertile, white women enjoying prosperous economic conditions are urged, by the same forces, to reproduce themselves.”¹⁸⁷ However, in 1978, neither NARAL nor National NOW understood the struggles for abortion rights and against sterilization abuse to be two sides of the same coin. An interview with Meredith Tax illustrates the disconnect between sterilization activists and groups arguing for abortion rights as a single-issue. Tax was co-chair of the Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization

¹⁸¹ Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 5.

¹⁸² *Ibid*; see also Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 95. These were also key issues that sparked the women’s health movement (although it must be noted, the major organizations within this movement adamantly backed the HEW Guidelines).

¹⁸³ NARAL was founded as the National Association for Repeal of Abortion Laws but changed its name in 1973 to the National Abortion Rights Action League, and then again in 2003 to NARAL Pro Choice America. I use the Action League name because at this time (1974-1978), that was the coalition’s name.

¹⁸⁴ This rhetorical framing is explained in detail in chapter two.

¹⁸⁵ Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, 221.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

Abuse (CARASA), founded in 1977. Describing her attempts to recruit National NOW and NARAL to work with CARASA to fight involuntary sterilizations, Tax explained:

NOW and NARAL didn't want to work on sterilization abuse. They thought it was better just to work on abortion and, in fact, NARAL at that point was still...taking out ads in the New York Times saying...'If we don't have abortion rights, the welfare roles [sic] will rise and there will be too many welfare babies'...Awful stuff."¹⁸⁸

Tax's statement shows that NARAL promoted neo-eugenic ideologies from the population movement in its fight for abortion rights. This framework for advocating abortion rights precluded support for the anti-sterilization abuse movement. In appealing to population control ideologies in their *NYT* ads, NARAL sacrificed the needs and protections of poor women and, disproportionately, women of colour (who had already been labeled socially burdensome through stereotypes such as the "welfare queen" and the "pregnant pilgrim") in the name of abortion rights.¹⁸⁹ The logic was: we need abortion in order to control the fertility of the "hyper-fertile" and economically-draining women of colour in the United States. Tax demonstrates how NOW and NARAL's fight for abortion rights was sometimes at the expense of an inclusive idea of reproductive freedom that would also benefit women of colour and poor women. Rather, NOW and NARAL understood the HEW Guidelines (specifically the thirty-day waiting period and the age restriction), as another hindrance to a White woman's access to reproductive control. Access to sterilization represented, for middle-class White women, the effective end to the risk of unwanted pregnancies in a climate where the government restricted this reproductive choice.¹⁹⁰ Many White feminists perceived sterilization regulations as another example of medical, institutional paternalism that both denied and disrespected a woman's ability to make medical decisions for herself.

This context helps illustrate why National NOW found the HEW Guidelines problematic while still officially opposing sterilization abuse. NOW presented its own six-part solution to end abuse, as an alternative to HEW's suggestions. NOW's resolutions better aligned with its general apprehension of government interference, prioritizing access to the procedure. National NOW's proposal began with the implementation of an educational program to "strengthen informed consent regulations....directed toward both physicians and clients."¹⁹¹ The document concluded with the proposal of punitive legislative consequences for "doctors and institutions who violate sterilization laws."¹⁹² Meredith Tax responded to NOW's suggestions in CARASA's newsletter. Tax admitted that the resolutions appeared "stronger and more punitive than the [HEW] guidelines

¹⁸⁸ Meredith Tax, "Voices of Feminism Oral History Project," by Kate Weigand (Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, 2004), 48.

¹⁸⁹ See Roberts, *Killing the Black Body* for more information on the invention of these stereotypes and the problems they created for women of colour.

¹⁹⁰ Rebecca M. Kluchin, *Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950-1980* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 185; Nelson, *Women of Colour*, 143. The formation of CARASA as a reaction to the Hyde Amendment specifically connected abortion access and sterilization abuse, noting that "in the absence of adequate income, birth control, childcare, and health care, we cannot assume that the rise in sterilization is a result of 'free choice'" (O'Sullivan, "Informing Red Power," 975).

¹⁹¹ "NOW Resolution," 4-5.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

since it relies on the criminal courts rather than HEW.”¹⁹³ Tax also agreed with NOW’s suggested increase in education and publicity regarding sterilization abuse, stating that CARASA “will be happy if national NOW joins us in these efforts.”¹⁹⁴ Ultimately, however, Tax found NOW’s proposal wanting. Tax specifically criticized NOW’s focus on “post-abuse penalties” rather than “on-the-spot prevention.”¹⁹⁵ Sterilization abuse activists were aware of the importance of preventative measures to curb coerced and forced sterilizations during labour, childbirth, and abortion procedures, which were all well-documented occurrences for women of colour and low-income women. By dismissing such measures, National NOW demonstrated to Tax that it lacked an understanding of the existing climate and “the social and economic realities of abuse.”¹⁹⁶ In its focus on “reproductive choice,” National NOW (and NARAL) missed the important and integral connections between abortion rights and sterilization abuse.

In 1978, following National NOW’s opposition to the HEW sterilization regulations, CARASA launched a letter writing campaign to refute NOW’s position. Addressed to the president of NOW, Eleanor “Ellie” Smeal, letters flooded into National NOW headquarters. Most of the letters’ authors noted “shock,” “surprise,” and “dismay” at NOW’s opposition to HEW’s proposed regulations and entreated the executive board to change its position. These letters provide a compelling glimpse into conversations among feminists/activists about race and sterilization in the United States. Rhonda Copelon and Nancy Stearns, two feminist lawyers, submitted a letter on behalf of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) outlining the importance of the waiting period that NOW rejected. Copelon and Stearns explained that potential sterilization patients must “have adequate time away from the medical facility in a noncoercive atmosphere to make this irreversible decision.”¹⁹⁷ In their letter, the lawyers also spelled out connections between abortion access and sterilization abuse as part of an all-encompassing ideology of reproductive freedom: “The necessity of these [HEW] guidelines is accentuated today by the increasing unavailability of Medicaid funding for abortion in this country.”¹⁹⁸ Referring to the recent passage of the Hyde Amendment, the lawyers reiterated: “Poor women, already the primary victims of sterilization abuse, become more vulnerable to the pressu[r]es exerted by social workers and doctors when the option of abortion is no longer available.”¹⁹⁹ Stearns and Copelon’s letter to Smeal demonstrated that low income and poor women’s reproductive “choices” were increasingly circumscribed. They suggested that a women’s organization with the foundation and reach of NOW ought to be advocating specifically for these women. The lawyers argued, however, that NOW’s position fostered distrust among poor women and women of colour, whose best interests were not represented by NOW’s proposal.

Antonia Hernandez, an attorney and activist, also emphasized this connection to National NOW. In her letter to NOW, Hernandez noted, “In light of the government refusal to fund abortions, your decisions will deprive poor women of their basic right to control their bodies and

¹⁹³ Meredith Tax, “Analysis,” (*CARASA News*, Vol. 2 No. 10, Nov. 2, 1978), 5.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ NOW Archives: Letter to Eleanor Smeal from Rhonda Copelon and Nancy Stearns, 14 Aug. 1978, Carton 96, Folder 29. The CCR is a justice-oriented group founded in 1966 to litigate and advocate for underrepresented communities.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* The Hyde Amendment was passed in 1976 and prohibited Medicaid funding for abortion, essentially making abortion inaccessible to poor women across the country.

force them into accepting sterilization as the only alternative to unwanted pregnancies.”²⁰⁰ Hernandez located her argument within the rhetorical framework of control, choice, and access promoted by National NOW: “I am aware and concerned over the erosion of our rights to control our reproductive lives,” wrote Hernandez, “however, the position NOW takes further erodes such rights and smacks of racism and paternalism.”²⁰¹ In locating her resistance to NOW’s position in this context, Hernandez illustrated deep connections between choice, control, and reproductive freedom that all women share in this struggle. Furthermore, Hernandez identified herself in this struggle: “As a Chicana I continue to be amazed at N.O.W.’s disregard for the rights of the poor Chicana woman.”²⁰² Hernandez’s letter declared that support for the HEW Guidelines was an issue that affected racialized women like herself, showing how NOW’s position isolated these communities and divided the movement. These letters from Stearns, Copelon, and Hernandez represent early attempts to broaden the scope of reproductive rights within the majority White women’s movement, demonstrating a recognition of the necessity of getting liberal feminism on board with this widened agenda for best results.

Although Hernandez identified the racist and paternalistic implications of NOW’s opposition to HEW’s guidelines, rarely did the archived letters suggest that NOW was being outright racist. Those who took the time to write to the national organization expressed faith in NOW. They wrote letters with an educational tone and expected that NOW would heed their warnings. However, a few letters did center the dangerous consequences of NOW’s opposition to the HEW Guidelines. Liz Lee, writing on behalf of the Organization of Asian Women, noted: “We feel this decision indicates NOW’s insensitivity and lack of awareness of the needs and issues of poor and minority women.”²⁰³ Lee wrote her letter as a woman of colour, reminding president Smeal that “[s]terilization abuse directly affects us because we are the women who are most dependent on public medical facilities for our health care needs.”²⁰⁴ Also locating this argument within the rhetorical framework of choice and access, Lee argued that when physicians and hospitals disrespect a patient’s rights to informed consent with “negligence and misinformation about sterilization” they are “violating our right to choose.”²⁰⁵ Dr. Helen Rodriguez-Trias and Karen Stamm, two founders of the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CESA), wrote to National NOW on behalf of their organization, voicing concerns about the racist and classist consequences of NOW’s position. Rodriguez-Trias, the chief of pediatrics at New York City’s Lincoln hospital and reproductive rights activist Stamm, whose organization (CESA) had been integral in creating public awareness for the problem of sterilization abuse (and central in developing the HEW Guidelines), expressed “shock[] and anger[]” at NOW’s lack of support.²⁰⁶ The two activists noted that NOW’s opposition to HEW, which they also pointed out would harm women of colour specifically, reflected clandestine problems in the wider health care system: “Sexism in health care is well

²⁰⁰ NOW Archives: Letter to Eleanor Smeal from Antonia Hernandez, 21 Sept. 1978, Carton 96, Folder 29.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ NOW Archives: Letter to Eleanor Smeal from Liz Lee, Organization of Asian Women, 5 Sept. 1978, Carton 96, Folder 29.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ NOW Archives: Letter to Eleanor Smeal and Members of the Board of the National Organization for Women from Helen Rodriguez-Trias and Karen Stamm, 9 Aug. 1978, Carton 96, Folder 29.

documented. Racism is likewise, equally prevalent, though less publicized.”²⁰⁷ They called attention to this issue in hopes that NOW would confront not only the racist implications of its position in this matter, but also its relevancy as a women’s organization that does not represent the majority of women. According to Rodriguez-Trias and Stamm, “NOW’s National Board has turned back the clock to an earlier time when the concerns of the women’s movement were almost exclusively those of white middle-class women.”²⁰⁸

Many of the letters in CARASA’s campaign encouraged NOW leadership to confront the consequences of its decision: particularly, who benefits, who suffers, and at what cost? Liz Lee asserted, “you have supported abortion as a right of women: Sterilization abuse is an infringement of our rights. We urgently ask you to reconsider your position on this matter.”²⁰⁹ Lee, and others, were aware of NOW’s history as a majority White women’s coalition and NOW’s enduring reputation as ineffectual for non-White women. As feminists and activists, many of the letter writers did not want NOW’s problematic reputation to persist or to remain, at least partly, accurate. Thus, letter writers encouraged NOW leadership to reflect upon how they were being perceived, seeking to help National NOW understand and empathize with issues that impacted women outside of their immediate socio-political circles. For example, Claudia Dreifus’ letter articulated a fear that NOW was losing significance, credibility, and relevance as a feminist organization:

[This position] speaks badly for the women’s movement at a moment when we need to make all the coalitions we can. For years we’ve had to fight the s[t]igma of being ‘just a middle-class women’s movement,’ and while it is right for middle-class women to fight for their own liberation, we do not have to do so by ignoring the plight of indigent females.²¹⁰

Introducing herself as a member of NOW and a women’s health writer, Dreifus noted that “a women’s rights organization should for reasons of good politics and good morality, be on the side of the rights of our poorer sisters.”²¹¹ Dreifus argued that such a position would support the HEW Guidelines.²¹² Many other authors also identified themselves as members of NOW, expressing surprise and bitterness at the news of NOW’s opposition to HEW’s guidelines. These records demonstrate that the National NOW’s rejection of HEW’s guidelines did not represent the views of all members in the organization; many felt betrayed by this position and considered NOW’s stance harmful to women across the United States. Rose-Jean Art, the first President of the San Fernando Valley Chapter of NOW, found it “incomprehensible” that NOW stood in opposition to “informed consent to sterilization operations,” declaring: “We have met the enemy and they are us!”²¹³

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Letter to Eleanor Smeal from Liz Lee.

²¹⁰ NOW Archives: Letter to Ellie Smeal from Claudia Dreifus, 9 Aug. 1978, Carton 96, Folder 29.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ NOW Archives: Letter to Eleanor Smeal from Rose-Jean Art, 21 Sept. 1978, Carton 96, Folder 29.

Letter writers expressed concern not only with NOW's inability to connect abortion rights and sterilization regulations, or the racist insinuations and consequences of NOW's position, but also the divisive potential of this decision. These letters expressed fear that the fractures NOW's opposition had sparked not only challenged NOW's unity, but also exacerbated discrepancies across race and class within the broader reproductive rights and women's movements. Dreifus noted, "Right now we need working-class white female support and black and Chicana support for the ERA."²¹⁴ Dreifus acknowledged that NOW's refusal to endorse the HEW Guidelines would negatively impact each of these groups, and they might stop supporting NOW in its other important struggles. According to Dreifus, "the Board's motion is a terrible set-back," which would ensure "division and dissention" within the movement.²¹⁵ Rodriguez-Trias and Stamm reminded Smeal about the women's movement's history of dangerous and "unwitting" alliances, such as those "whose aims were not reproductive freedom, but population control."²¹⁶ These activists conceded that some of these early alliances were made from a place of ignorance, as the (White) feminist movement was initially unaware of the racist undertone of population control discourses. However, as time passed these alliances "ignored the very real fears of Black, Hispanic, and Native women who knew all too well that they and their families were the very targets that the population agencies aimed to control."²¹⁷ With the information the National Organization for Women now had, even just from the letters of this campaign, National NOW could not claim ignorance of the potential harm imposed by its opposition to the HEW Guidelines. NOW's decision recalled a problematic past that threatened women of colour and poor women. Moreover, these two communities represented the majority of women in the United States. As such, NOW's stance signified "an unrepresentative, divisive position with regard to sterilization regulation."²¹⁸ Rodriguez-Trias and Stamm recognized the real stakes involved in maintaining unity within these movements:

It is now plain to us all, when every right we have won, and even those we have taken for granted may be revoked, that we must not let the women's movement become fragmented, disunified, or our losses will be catastrophic."²¹⁹

Writing to Smeal on behalf of the National Women's Health Network (NWHN), Belita Cowan also contended that NOW's position could result in devastating divisions within the women's movement. The NWHN was an umbrella organization for the women's health movement, which, by the late 1970s, had prioritized the fight against sterilization abuse. Cowan's letter reminded Smeal that "most of the women's organizations except NOW testified at HEW's sterilization guidelines hearings," highlighting the solidarity among other organizations on this issue.²²⁰ For Cowan, since "most of the women's groups have taken a position in support of HEW's guidelines" fractures caused by NOW were particularly evident and had serious implications. Cowan asked

²¹⁴ Letter to Ellie Smeal from Claudia Dreifus.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Letter to Eleanor Smeal from Helen Rodriguez-Trias and Karen Stamm.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ NOW Archives: Letter to Ellie Smeal from Belita Cowan, 18 Aug. 1978, Carton 96, Folder 29.

NOW to reconsider their position in the name of unity: "Once again, it looks like all of us are fighting each other....and all of us stand to lose."²²¹

Conclusion

The EWCI's major failure as a coalition was its inability to engage women of colour and Black women effectively, or to adequately represent their experiences and struggles within the biblical feminist movement. As a feminist coalition, the EWCI recognized the importance of diversity within its ranks, both for its outreach and to enhance the inclusivity of its message. The EWCI archives reveal that participants made numerous attempts to diversify their membership. However, from the EWCI's first meeting as a task force "on women," separated from the task force "on race" within the ESA, the coalition was primed to neglect and misrepresent the interdependent relationship between race and gender. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the EWCI struggled to connect race and gender oppressions, and therefore remained unappealing to Black women and women of colour. The EWCI remains predominantly White and middle-class today, a reality that continues to limit the coalition's ability to advance a racially inclusive agenda.

The EWCI's roots in and ongoing relationships with progressive evangelicalism and mainstream feminism influenced the positions the EWCI chose to represent as a coalition. While the EWCI fought for gender equality in the church, home, and society, Black Christian feminists and womanists during this period were also fighting for leadership roles in their churches and respect and recognition for their God-given gifts as provided through the Holy Spirit.²²² Significantly, however, Black Christian activists also reminded their communities that "a radical split cannot be made between racism and sexism. Black women are oppressed by racism and sexism."²²³ Until the EWCI actively connected race and sex discrimination as integral to the coalition's goals, it could not attract or effectively advocate for Christian women of colour and Black women.

CARASA's letter-writing campaign offers insights into the discourses within the secular feminist movement at the intersection of gender and race. Sterilization abuse activists argued that HEW's guidelines could protect Black women and women of colour. They also argued that waiting periods and age restrictions were necessary to prevent the most common sterilization abuses. Sterilization abuse activists viewed National NOW's rejection of HEW's guidelines as indicative of a lack of awareness about the historical injustices faced by Black women and women of colour. They criticized NOW's disregard for the distinct forms of reproductive oppression experienced by

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² See Jacquelyn Grant, "Black Women and the Church," *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, eds. Gloria Hall, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1982). Grant's argument is similar to Letha Scanzoni's first published feminist argument for female leadership in the church in her 1966 article "Woman's Place: Silence or Service?" published in *Eternity* magazine. Here, Scanzoni contested biblical arguments made by conservative Christians to prohibit women teaching audiences where men are present, arguing that "The Holy Spirit has distributed His spiritual gifts to women, and He is using them" (15). Scanzoni then asked rhetorically, "Is it God's intention that [women] must feel they are sinning by serving?" (Ibid). Scanzoni supported women's expression of their spiritual gifts, even if that expression took the form of potentially teaching or missionizing to men, or as leadership in the church ("Woman's Place: Silence or Service?" *Eternity*, February 1966).

²²³ Grant, "Black Women and the Church," 148.

racialized women in the United States. Activists warned NOW about a growing distrust regarding the coalition's ability to advocate for the rights of racialized women, an incredulity occurring both within NOW and within broader sterilization activist circles. The case study also depicts feminist and anti-sterilization abuse activists' fears of disunity in the movement and apprehension regarding NOW's ability to impact change. The EWCI has engaged with similar discourses throughout its existence. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, by the 1980s, EWCI members questioned the coalition's relevance and effectiveness within the church and broader society, arguing that its advocacy was incomplete without a direct and explicit commitment to combat racism.

When the EWCI formally addressed racism as a central pillar through its 1986 resolutions, the coalition experienced greater internal cohesion and expanded its reach among women of colour and Black women. Betty Hanna-Witherspoon, a Black fair housing activist and steward at the Ward African Methodist Episcopal Church, gave a plenary address at Fresno. Hanna-Witherspoon noted,

I and other women of color have come to know EWCI much better in these last few days...Some of us will not [join], but some of us will. Brenda, who had to leave yesterday – a young, dynamic black woman – left a word for you. “Tell them I’m going to join. Tell them that their attempts at inclusiveness have not been in vain.”²²⁴

The Fresno resolutions were a positive first step toward inclusivity. Unfortunately, the EWCI's anti-racist resolution (and first concrete push toward connecting its fight against sexism with racism) fell by the wayside as the coalition navigated the fallout from the Fresno gay rights resolution.

Reading the silences in the EWCI archives against discourses about sterilization abuse in the NOW and SSC archives reveals fundamental conditions for building coalitions capable of bridging racial boundaries. To build a coalition that appeals to and effectively supports White women, women of colour, and Black women, it is imperative to recognize the interdependent relationship between race- and sex-based oppression. The case study demonstrated that such recognition emerges through cultivating relationships of trust and empathy, as well as increasing dialogue across racial divides. The EWCI has not yet achieved this goal. When a coalition's failures do not destroy it, they reveal the limitations and transformative potential of the coalition, both internally and among its matrix. For the EWCI, failing to include women of colour within its membership demonstrated the limits of the coalition's reach and influence among feminists and evangelicals. The EWCI's collective ideology and goals principally appealed to White middle-class women, and the coalition's social activism predominantly impacted the lives of White middle-class women. The EWCI thus lacked the transformative potential to create change for many women in the United States, indeed, for the majority of women in the United States. The EWCI's failure also conveyed a message about the broader evangelical and feminist movements, both of which lacked inclusivity and diversity. The racial homogeneity within these movements limited the reach and impact of each coalition, weakening the EWCI's ability to achieve its goal of racial inclusivity.

²²⁴ Betty Hanna-Witherspoon, “Christian Black Women: Our Struggle Toward Feminism,” *Update* (Winter 1986-7), vol. 10, no. 4, 1.

Chapter Five: Evolution Coalitions in Relationship

Scholars of biblical feminism frequently tell the story of the Evangelical Women's Caucus International's "rise and fall."¹ The typical narrative suggests that while the EWCI emerged under the umbrella of progressive evangelicalism, the coalition and its members gradually lost viability among an increasingly influential and conservative evangelicalism. Historians and sociologists equate the coalition's trajectory out of mainstream evangelicalism with the EWCI's escalating feminist activism and broader social justice agenda. This narrative usually suggests that the EWCI's 1986 resolution supporting gay civil rights sounded the death knell for the coalition among mainstream evangelicals. Then, the emergent competing coalition Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) usurped biblical feminist authority, at least until a "backlash" movement to biblical feminism challenged the validity of biblical gender egalitarianism.² Scholars differ on whether the EWCI left the evangelical movement through its own volition or because evangelical "power brokers" pushed it out by policing the movement's boundaries.³ Regardless of precisely how it transpired, scholars contend that the EWCI lost influence among mainstream evangelicals from the mid-1980s and fell outside the fold of evangelicalism-proper by the 1990s.⁴

Some EWCI members, however, contested their scholarly removal from evangelicalism. In 2005, long-time member Anne Eggebroten defended her evangelical identity in the face of such criticism:

In recent years, as right-wing evangelicalism has come to be associated with militarism and bigotry, I have reflected on whether to continue to identify as an evangelical. I've

¹ This historiography is elucidated in the introduction of this dissertation. This specific phrasing is from Isaac Sharp's *The Other Evangelicals*, 190. In 2003, Julie Ingersoll had articulated this trajectory for the EWCI in *Evangelical Christian Women*, explained in the introduction of this dissertation. In 2004, Sally Gallagher argued that evangelical feminists were a successful subculture within evangelicalism; however, biblical feminists remained marginalized because discourses regarding gender delineated the boundaries of acceptable evangelicalism ("The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism." *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 3 (2004), 216). In 2005, Pamela Cochran also traced the distancing between the EWCI and evangelicalism-proper, based on the coalition's changing priorities and social activism (*Evangelical Feminism*). Andrea Smith followed Cochran's historical overview of the EWCI, positioning the coalition as moving outside of evangelical boundaries over time. Smith concurred with Cochran's conclusion that the EWCI was usurped by the CBE for evangelical influence and identity (*Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 142).

² As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, scholars disagree as to whether CBE retained influence within evangelicalism-proper. Julie Ingersoll takes the CBE as representative of the biblical feminist movement in her book *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles*. Pamela Cochran argues that CBE was able to sustain its status within mainstream evangelicalism because of its inerrant approach to Scripture (*Evangelical Feminism*, 177-9). Isaac Sharp argues, conversely, that all biblical feminists (including CBE) had lost influence within the evangelical mainstream by the late 1980s because the belief in biblical gender egalitarianism had become "theologically suspect" (*The Other Evangelicals*, 196).

³ Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 23.

⁴ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 178-9. Sharp locates the waning of the biblical feminist movement much earlier, with Scanzoni and Mollenkott's controversial publication affirming the biblical acceptability of homosexuality in *Is the Homosexual My Neighbour?* published in 1978 (*The Other Evangelicals*, 193).

concluded, yes, I am an evangelical, based on the Greek roots of the word (*euangelion* “good news”) and based on my allegiance to Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible.⁵

Aware of shifting perceptions of American evangelicalism and an increasingly influential conservative constituent, Eggebroten reflected on her relationship with evangelicalism and determined that she still fit within its boundaries.⁶ By drawing on biblical feminists’ discourses about their own identities and the EWCI’s coalition-building project, this chapter complicates the typical representation of biblical feminist history. I demonstrate that the discrete and dialectical classifications implied by the existing historical narrative were more permeable and slippery in lived experience. Biblical feminists pushed against the classifications “evangelicalism” and “feminism,” with the result that sometimes the categories pushed back, and sometimes they moved and changed. However, biblical feminists remained in relationship with these classifications. Focusing on the EWCI’s separation from mainstream evangelical values disregards ongoing reciprocal relationships between the EWCI and mainstream evangelicalism. This narrative also omits or negates the experiences and self-understandings of coalition members who continued to identify as evangelical throughout this period. By examining the EWCI in relationship with its matrix, this chapter suggests that the EWCI/CBE split was transformative and productive for both the evangelical and biblical feminist movements. Moreover, the EWCI’s shifting collective identity throughout the 1980s and 1990s created new discourses and points of exchange between evangelicals and biblical feminists, which, in turn, altered these identity categories. The historical and ongoing relationships between biblical feminism and its matrix continue to shape both coalitions and the matrix itself.

This chapter employs philosopher Ian Hacking’s concept of “interactive kinds” as a theoretical framework to examine the relationships between evangelicals and feminists and analyze the impacts of these exchanges. Hacking uses the idea of “interactive kinds” to discuss disease as a classification. Hacking identifies two seemingly oppositional perspectives of analysis for disease: social constructionism and biology.⁷ Rather than prioritizing one view as more accurate than the other, Hacking argues for the mutual existence of both perspectives. Stepping outside of a binary “either/or” framing, Hacking seeks to “create a space in which both ideas can be developed without...confrontation.”⁸ By placing social constructionist and biological perspectives in conversation, Hacking demonstrates that each view contributes unique value toward a more comprehensive understanding of disease while also indicating the limitations of the alternate view. Using this comprehensive approach, Hacking develops more pertinent questions, including how the “classification” of disease exists in relationship with humans and society.

Hacking uses the term “kinds” to focus on the classification or the *kinds* of individuals within a category rather than on the individuals themselves.⁹ For example, when discussing Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Hacking is not concerned with individual children who may

⁵ Anne Eggebroten, “A Personal Reaction to Pamela Cochran’s Evangelical Feminism,” *Update*, vol. 29, no. 3 (Oct-Dec 2005), 10.

⁶ The shift toward conservatism within mainstream evangelicalism, which includes the rise of the New Christian Right, is discussed in this chapter under the section “The Shifting Matrix: A Conservative Push.”

⁷ See for example, Hacking, “Madness: Biological or Constructed?,” 100-124.

⁸ Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*, 101.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

have ADHD but the “*kinds* of children, fidgety, hyperactive, attention-deficient.”¹⁰ This distinction is important because Hacking argues that the classification systems in place within a society shape how individuals act. According to Hacking, “People...are agents, they act...under descriptions. The courses of action they choose, and indeed their ways of being, are by no means independent of the available descriptions under which they may act. Likewise, we experience ourselves in the world as being persons of various kinds.”¹¹ Thus, “interactive kinds” is a “concept that applies not to people but to classifications, to kinds, to the kinds that can influence what is classified.”¹² Significantly for Hacking, the ways individuals act also shape classification systems in a kind of feedback loop: “because kinds can interact with what is classified, the classification itself may be modified or replaced.”¹³ “Interactive kinds” thus challenge the idea that classifications are passive, pre-existing categories in the world. Instead, classifications are shaped and defined by human engagement and practices in the broader matrix. By employing the concept of “interactive kinds,” Hacking reveals the complex relationships between classifications and labels, exposing inevitable and reciprocal exchanges that continually alter each kind and classification as they interact with one another.

Within this theoretical framework, “biblical feminists,” “evangelicals,” and “feminists” are “interactive kinds” because these labels represent kinds of people who exist within classifications (namely, biblical feminism, evangelicalism, and feminism, respectively). To understand the relationship between these kinds, I examine the feedback loop involved in the interactions between biblical feminists, evangelicals, and feminists and their classifications. For example, as the identity of “biblical feminist” shifts and changes, so too does the broader movement of biblical feminism and its matrix, which includes feminism and evangelicalism. This changing matrix, in turn, changes the identity category of “biblical feminist.” By applying Hacking’s framework in this chapter, I highlight reciprocal and ongoing interactions and changing classifications created by biblical feminists in relationship with their matrix, which better reflects the messy reality of coalition-building. Rather than focusing on conflicts and tensions between biblical feminists, secular feminists, and the evangelical movement, this chapter demonstrates that the interactions among these kinds fostered new spaces of discourse and new ways of being both a biblical feminist and an evangelical.

The Shifting Matrix: A Conservative Push

Historians and sociologists have identified a shift towards conservatism within American mainstream evangelicalism by the 1980s.¹⁴ Despite earlier predictions that progressive evangelicals might come to dominate the movement, by the late 1970s, the burgeoning New Christian Right marked a discernable shift in favour of social, political, and religious conservatism

¹⁰ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. Hacking contrasts “interactive kinds” with “indifferent kinds,” which do not interact consciously with their matrices. For example, Hacking argues that while the classification “children” is an interactive kind, “quarks” are indifferent because “calling a quark a quark makes no difference to the quark” (104).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 214; See also Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 59.

among evangelicals.¹⁵ The Christian Right created relationships that endure today and remain part of the broad matrix of the biblical feminist movement. For example, in 1980, White conservative evangelicals declared their support for Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party, an affiliation that continues to this day.¹⁶ Most significantly for my purposes, the new alliances formed during the rise of the Christian Right crossed pre-existing coalition boundaries, including those based on faith. Previously, American religious coalitions largely followed denominational lines, with Protestants and Roman Catholics forming separate coalitions that advocated for distinct causes.¹⁷ However, by the late 1970s, the Christian Right constructed new allegiances with new boundaries, prioritizing shared social and moral values.¹⁸ While the roots of this “realignment” in the United States began in the aftermath of World War II, by the 1980s these alliances appeared stable, and many remain unchanged to the present day.¹⁹

To highlight themes discussed throughout this dissertation, this chapter focuses on the “morality politics” implemented by the Christian Right.²⁰ As the emergent Christian Right conflated specific conservative Christian values with ideas of nationhood, family, and the body, the New Right movement prioritized issues at the heart of the historical relationship between the biblical feminist movement and the evangelical movement: gender, reproductive rights, homosexuality, and race. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, conservative evangelical leaders successfully rallied evangelical political mobilization in the “war” against national moral decline.²¹ By the time the EWCI passed its resolution supporting gay civil rights for in 1986, the dream of progressive evangelical supremacy in the movement was a distant memory. However, even as a growing conservatism dominated the evangelical mainstream, biblical feminism remained in relationship with the mainstream movement and continued to shape the broader matrix.

As part of the emerging Christian Right movement, Beverly LaHaye created Concerned Women for America (CWA) in 1979 as a conservative evangelical women’s coalition. LaHaye formed CWA in response to the perceived influence of the secular feminist movement embodied by NOW. In a now-famous story, LaHaye’s “political awakening” occurred as she watched Barbara Walters interview Betty Friedan on television. As the two women discussed the emerging second-wave feminist movement, LaHaye exclaimed to her husband: “They don’t speak for me!! And I don’t think they speak for the vast majority of women in America.”²² LaHaye formed the CWA to

¹⁵ David Swartz shows that in the early 1970s, with the emergence of the progressive movement, the future of evangelicalism was unpredictable. When Evangelicals for Social Action was formed in 1973, for example, the *Washington Post* predicted that the progressive evangelical movement would dominate the wider American evangelical scene into the future (as it turned out, of course, evangelical conservatism would in fact become the dominant voice of evangelicalism) (David Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 1). See also Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 213.

¹⁶ Anthony Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 59; Dowland, *Family Values*, 2.

¹⁷ Chapter two discusses this shift because evangelical’s hesitated to join the anti-abortion movement throughout the 1970s, in part, because the movement was led by Roman Catholics. Evangelicals could not easily join forces with Catholics and bridge the divides they saw between their beliefs.

¹⁸ Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 239; Petro, *After the Wrath*, 58-9; James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 43.

¹⁹ Petro, *After the Wrath*, 59.

²⁰ This phrase comes from Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 122.

²¹ Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives*, 122; Wuthnow, “Mobilization on the Right,” in *Restructuring*, 173-214; Williams, “Moral Majority,” in *God’s Own Party*, 160-186.

²² Qt’d in Johnson, *This is Our Message*, 79. Emphasis in original.

lobby the United States government on behalf of conservative women's values. CWA was specifically concerned with issues of gender, sexuality, and the family, and the coalition rallied against gay rights, abortion rights, and feminism. While LaHaye openly recognized the role of CWA in opposition to secular feminist groups such as NOW, the existence of evangelical feminist groups also shaped the larger matrix within which CWA emerged, influencing the relationships between all those involved.

LaHaye rhetorically positioned Christians and feminists in an antagonistic relationship, claiming that an American woman has two choices: "She can join the feminists and spend her life with the family agitators who would destroy the 'patriarchal' system; or she can join those who are working to preserve Christian morality and the traditional family."²³ This binary framing erases evangelical feminists. At best, LaHaye ignores their existence, and at worst, she implies that they are not real Christians because of their feminist ideals. The EWCI archives suggest the latter as they document conversations between members of the CWA and the EWCI, demonstrating that biblical feminists and CWA members were aware of one another. The EWCI archives often depict CWA members as chastising EWCI members for straying from "true" evangelicalism. For example, "Mrs. W. Paul Colwell," a CWA member and "[a] concerned mother and grandmother," wrote to the EWCI after learning of the passage of their 1986 resolution affirming gay rights. Colwell asserted, "As Evangelical Women I would gather that you do believe in God's Word in the Bible as true."²⁴ Colwell then cited Scripture to validate her belief that "[a] homosexual is in defiance of God's Word through Jesus" and anyone engaging in homosexual intercourse "cannot be considered a son of God."²⁵ Importantly for Colwell, all hope was not lost for the EWCI as a Christian coalition: it just had to stop supporting rights for gay people. Colwell explained, "Your decision can be the light for homosexuals to continue in their sin against God, who said it was an abomination to Him. Perhaps you will consider your decision and retract it, so that some homosexuals will be led to Christ that might not otherwise."²⁶ As a "concerned" evangelical woman, Colwell encouraged EWCI leadership to align their coalition with the CWA's conservative position rejecting homosexuality. Colwell felt that this decision would save souls.

EWCI leaders constructed thoughtful replies to CWA members' letters. They sent informational pamphlets, literature, and cautiously worded accounts of their coalition's positions to reiterate their values in opposition to CWA tenets against homosexuality and the ERA, among others.²⁷ EWCI members were aware of the broad reach and powerful influence of CWA. CWA's exact membership, which LaHaye claimed to be upwards of 200,000 by 1983, remains unsubstantiated. However, scholars suggest "that CWA garnered significant interest in its first half decade of existence," and the coalition's membership was most likely equivalent to other successful conservative women's groups, including Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum.²⁸ CWA had also

²³ Qt'd in Johnson, *This is Our Message*, 68.

²⁴ EEWCI Archives, Note to the President of the EWC from Mrs. W. Paul Colwell, 19 Jan. 1987, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

²⁷ EEWCI Archives, Letter to Council Members from Britt Vanden Eykel, 29 April 1986, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 10.

²⁸ Johnson, *This is Our Message*, n.4, 176-7. Johnson notes that CWA claimed over 200 000 members by 1983 (68). However, CWA has been accused of inflating membership numbers by "including anyone who has even been a member of the organization regardless of their current status," and thus these numbers cannot be verified (n.4, 177). Chapter two briefly discusses Phyllis Schlafly and her role in the anti-abortion movement.

strategically moved its headquarters from San Diego, CA, to Washington, D.C., to better lobby the United States government by this time.²⁹ As noted in chapter three, EWCI members even expressed concerns about becoming “grist to the mill of ‘Concerned Women for America’” after witnessing CWA’s “scurrilous attack on NOW.”³⁰ Despite CWA’s influence, the EWCI resisted the conservative evangelicalism promoted by Concerned Women for America. EWCI leaders often received letters of appreciation from new members, who were relieved to have discovered an evangelical women’s coalition that advocated progressive views. These letters explained that by the 1980s, available options for politically or socially engaged evangelical women were limited, consisting almost exclusively of conservative women’s groups such as the CWA.³¹

LaHaye created the CWA as part of a burgeoning grassroots movement of conservative religious women’s organizations emerging in Southern California.³² Historian Emily Johnson highlights LaHaye’s relationship with other conservative activists in Southern California, demonstrating that LaHaye “drew inspiration” from existing conservative women’s religious groups in the 1970s before CWA’s move to Washington, D.C.³³ Following the Second World War, large-scale migration from the southern states into California, including southern evangelicals, influenced “the conservative theologies that would undergird national conservative Christian movements in the decades to come.”³⁴ This setting proved uniquely fertile for conservative women’s political activism as Southern Californian housewives “developed their social networks into political ones, hosting coffees and luncheons to inform friends and neighbors about pressing local issues” throughout the 1960s.³⁵ Housewives, dentists, doctors, ministers, and engineers in Southern California constituted the “suburban warriors” who revitalized American conservatism.³⁶ This grassroots movement transformed conservatism “from a marginal force preoccupied with communism in the early 1960s into a viable electoral contender by the decade’s end.”³⁷

While conservative women’s groups influenced LaHaye in Southern California, the EWCI also had its headquarters in Southern California in 1979.³⁸ At this time, the EWCI was five years old

²⁹ Johnson, *This is Our Message*, 68.

³⁰ EEW Archives, “Results of EWCI Membership Poll,” 1984, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 3; Johnson traces CWA’s early success, expanding to more than one thousand local chapters across forty-nine states in its first seven years (*This is Our Message*, 82-3).

³¹ EEW Archives, “Results of EWCI Membership Poll.”

³² Johnson, *This is Our Message*, 68-9; Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, 115; Marjorie Spruill suggests that “years of watching [Phyllis] Schlafly’s success” with the Eagle Forum, likely also influenced her decision to form the CWA (*Divided We Stand*, 299). For more on this emerging grassroots activism among conservative evangelical women, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

³³ Johnson, *This is Our Message*, 68-9; 78; See also Dochuk, *From Bible Belt*, 351-3; See also Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

³⁴ Johnson, *This is Our Message*, 68. Johnson is drawing on Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*.

³⁵ Johnson, *This is Our Message*, 78.

³⁶ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 56, 71.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ As of 1977, EEW moved its national office from Minneapolis, MN, to Los Angeles, CA. By the mid 1980s the coalition relocated its headquarters to New York state.

and part of the Southern Californian evangelical matrix into which CWA entered in the late 1970s. Moreover, EWCI members helped normalize evangelical women's engagement in the public sphere and activism within their communities. Biblical feminists advocated gender equality and female leadership in major evangelical magazines, including *Christianity Today*, *The Other Side*, and *Christian Century*. The EWCI helped create unique inroads for women within evangelicalism, which other evangelical women could utilize to promote discrete, sometimes antithetical, goals. CWA members engaged with public and political avenues, first explored by the EWCI, when CWA entered the broader conversation in 1979. One consequence of this shift, ironically, was that these conservative coalition members used these avenues to promote submissive roles for women as stay-at-home wives and mothers.³⁹

Expanding the Matrix: the EWCI/CBE Schism

When biblical feminists began discussing a position on gay rights in the 1980s, conservative women's coalitions were becoming increasingly visible, transforming the evangelical and feminist matrix. Groups such as CWA appropriated feminist language, claiming to represent a new "true feminist" identity in female submission.⁴⁰ As conservative female leaders engaged in political activism, they expanded acceptable enactments of evangelical womanhood in the public sphere, even as they advocated for stay-at-home motherhood among women.⁴¹ Conservative evangelical women's coalitions aligned with mainstream evangelical gender ideology, supporting a husband's headship and protesting biblical egalitarianism. These coalitions argued that the EWCI's promotion of gender equality was a concession to "secular" (meaning false) feminist values.⁴² For example, in the 1980s, homosexuality was a primary focus for secular feminists in the United States. At the same time, many conservative evangelicals considered homosexuality to be a sin and protested gay civil rights.⁴³ When the EWCI declared its official support for gay civil rights at the Fresno conference, dissenting members formed Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). The EWCI-CBE split underscored biblical feminist tensions regarding homosexuality and gay rights. CBE's Statement of Faith, largely analogous to EWCI's, differed acutely in one regard: the CBE statement included the declaration: "We believe in the family, celibate singleness, and heterosexual marriage as the patterns God designed for us."⁴⁴

By building a new coalition out of the EWCI after Fresno, the "more conservative" founders of Christians for Biblical Equality expanded the biblical feminist movement. CBE leaders did not view themselves as usurping the EWCI. Instead, they created the CBE to fill a gap in the broader

³⁹ Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, 98.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of how CWA members laid claim to the label "feminist," see chapter two of this dissertation. See also Smith, "All Things to All People: CWA as 'True' Feminism," in *Righteous Rhetoric*, 95-126.

⁴¹ For further discussion of how conservative women navigated public and political leadership roles while promoting stay at home motherhood and wifely submission, see Johnson, *This is Our Message*; see also Smith, "All Things to All People: CWA as 'True' Feminism," in *Righteous Rhetoric*, 95-126.

⁴² This had been a criticism of the biblical feminist movement from its inception, addressed in Letha Scanzoni's keynote speech in 1978 "Marching," 130.

⁴³ Please see chapter three for a detailed discussion regarding homosexuality, feminism, and biblical feminism in the United States.

⁴⁴ Q't'd in Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 153.

movement promoting biblical gender equality while condemning homosexuality and rejecting a broader social justice agenda. When founding CBE member Alvera Mickelsen withdrew her membership from the EWCI, she accused the coalition of having deviated from its original purpose of promoting biblical gender equality. As previously noted, Mickelsen argued that the EWCI had instead become “a lesbian support-group.”⁴⁵ By forming the CBE, conservative biblical feminists established another legitimate avenue for socially, politically, and theologically conservative evangelical feminists to participate in the biblical feminist movement without supporting gay rights. The emergence of the CBE not only created a new kind of evangelical feminism but also contributed to changes in the EWCI’s own identity. Each group navigated the expanded biblical feminist matrix, working to establish itself as a distinct organization with unique goals.

Leading up to the EWCI’s first national conference after the CBE schism, leaders prepared members for a conversation about the coalition’s future. Coordinator Britt Vanden Eykel asked the EWCI’s “major question” in *Update* before the 1988 conference: “What do members want and expect from this organization?”⁴⁶ Vanden Eykel first acknowledged feelings of loss among EWCI members after the CBE split: “it is discouraging at times to witness the ebb and flow of our membership ranks, and the rise and fall of chapters.” However, the coordinator instilled hope by reminding members that this was not a new problem for the EWCI: “historically this has been the growth pattern of EWCI since its inception.”⁴⁷ Vanden Eykel attempted to reunite remaining members by asserting the continued purpose and significance of the coalition: “EWCI’s distinctive service is as a nondenominational organization of evangelical Christians that provides encouragement, communication, education, and prayer support...We let the world know that the movement is still alive, will not go away, and must be dealt with. We attempt to bring Christ to secular feminists, and liberation to oppressed Christian women.”⁴⁸ Noting the coalition’s broader goals and helping members look beyond the pain caused by the CBE fracture, Vanden Eykel reframed the schism as a gain rather than a loss. She stated, “[t]he exciting thing is that people who received their initial empowerment from EWC are continuing to make a difference, either individually through their example and leadership, or in groups working for specific change.”⁴⁹

The 1988 conference, held in Chicago IL, did unify remaining EWCI members, proving to be a space for healing and rebuilding trust within the coalition. Reflecting on the conference in *Update*, one member explained, “The openness and intensity experienced at Chicago were cathartic for many of those who were wounded at Fresno, and bound together many who were present at this conference.”⁵⁰ According to another member, “in Fresno there was such anger, hostility, and pain that weren’t healed. This was truly a healing conference” where “calmness and peaceful spirit” prevailed.⁵¹ Another participant expressed that “it was not necessary to compete or impress people [at this conference]. A good support system was at work.”⁵² Former national

⁴⁵ AWTs: EEWCI Archives, “Dear Minnesota EWC’ers,” (1986), Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1. See chapter three for more details on Mickelsen’s decision to leave the EWCI.

⁴⁶ Vanden Eykel, “NOT a Swan Song,” *Update*, vol. 12 no. 2 (Summer 1988), 8a.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 8b.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Cook, “Are We Evangelical,” 8d.

⁵¹ “Personal Comments,” *Update*, vol. 12 no. 3 (Fall 1988), 8c.

⁵² *Ibid.*

coordinator Joyce Quiring Erickson (1978-1980) reflected on the “many voices and many stories” that had emerged within the group over the years.⁵³ Erickson recalled the debate over resolutions that began at the 1984 Wellesley conference and acknowledged the diversity of sentiments expressed by members during this turbulent and transitional time. Erickson noted: “some of those voices have been angry, some have been conciliatory, some have been puzzled, some have been indignant—but one element that is common to them all is the pain in those voices.”⁵⁴ Erickson portrayed a comradeship in shared suffering among EWCI’s remaining members, suggesting that the coalition could grow stronger as members embraced their diversity and developed empathy for one another. The 1988 conference thus marked a revitalization for the EWCI as the coalition shored up its goals after its first major schism. These strategies of support and solidarity proved crucial for the continued survival of the coalition.

As members wrote into *Update* to express that the Chicago conference was helpful and restorative, EWCI leaders published these positive reflections as part of the coalition’s outward-facing narrative. However, these reviews are not the whole story. Internal conversations documented in the archives betray continued pain and animosity among EWCI members from the CBE fracture. Schisms not only split an organization, but they can also sever friendships and terminate long-held relationships, making schisms uniquely personal. In the context of this fracture over EWCI’s support for gay rights, members in each organization disagreed upon proper Christian beliefs and practices regarding social justice and homosexuality. Moreover, some gay and lesbian members of the EWCI felt personally targeted by this split. These stakes made this schism particularly painful for the participants involved, as members repudiated the sinful actions of their peers while defending their own paths to salvation.⁵⁵

Many EWCI participants expressed anger and betrayal when ex-EWCI members Alvera Mickelsen and Cathy Kroeger founded CBE and drafted other EWCI members. In an interview with *Christianity Today* in October of 1986, Kroeger announced that she had recruited thirty-seven members from the EWCI to launch her new coalition.⁵⁶ This news surprised EWCI leadership, who immediately contacted Kroeger for more details. Kroeger’s reply informed EWCI leaders “that a newsletter will be released later in November,” and that her intentions were “to keep an avenue open for networking, support and serve as a resource for those who could not accept EWCI with the gay rights resolution ‘rider’ attached to it.”⁵⁷ In response to the *Christianity Today* coverage of the emergent CBE, one EWCI leader wrote to another, “[the article] makes Cathy Kroeger look like

⁵³ Erickson, “Many Voices, Many Stories,” *Update*, vol. 12 no. 3 (Fall 1988), 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ As chapter three notes, EWCI leaders adamantly rejected the claim that the Fresno resolution supporting gay civil rights was a “theological” statement about the acceptability of homosexuality. EWCI leaders argued that the resolution was simply about advocating civil rights for all people. This statement was rebuffed by CBE leaders who asserted that they too supported civil rights for all people, even, as Mickelsen declared, “prostitutes and drug users.” In her rebuttal to the EWCI’s claims, Mickelsen argued that the resolution should be revised to state: “we take a firm stand in favor of civil rights for those involved in extra-marital sex” (AWTS: EEWCI Archives, Alvera Mickelsen, Letter to Britt Vanden Eykel, 13 August 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1).

⁵⁶ Beth Spring, “Gay Rights Resolution Divides Membership of Evangelical Women’s Caucus,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 30, no. 14 (3 October 1986), 41; Many EWCI members decided to join CBE while maintaining their membership in EWCI. This participant overlap further troubles the binary positioning of these two groups as in conflict.

⁵⁷ EEWCI Archive, “To my Sisters and Brothers in Christ,” Nov. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 5.

exactly what she is - a backbiting busybody” who would not be missed in the EWCI.⁵⁸ Such a personal attack indicates the hurt simmering below the surface of this schism, which was mutual across both coalitions. Religious studies scholar Julie Ingersoll flagged the pain of this split in her interviews with evangelical feminists from CBE in the late nineties: “nearly a decade after the split between the Evangelical Women’s Caucus and the Christians for Biblical Equality, I found women still so pained by the event that they had difficulty talking about it.”⁵⁹ According to Ingersoll, this reaction “makes sense only when we take into account the centrality of this community to these women.”⁶⁰ In interviewing women who either maintained membership in both coalitions or chose one coalition over the other, Ingersoll found that the biblical feminist community was integral for participants because “the women viewed these groups as refuges from the larger subculture, which they felt undermined their value as human beings.”⁶¹ The experiences of pain from this conflict among EWCI and CBE members do not detract from the overall productivity of the schism. However, these experiences underline the difficulties involved in such fractures, elucidating the challenges both coalitions must overcome to facilitate internal healing and survival.

When members leave a coalition with the intention of creating a new one, they often retain an appreciation for the parent coalition. Even scorned members do not seek the demise of the parent coalition in most cases. Instead, they seek to enact their own agenda by expanding the movement’s parameters and creating new coalitions for like-minded members to join.⁶² This kind of relationship eventually occurred between the EWCI and CBE, despite the initial hurt feelings among members, as both coalitions came to understand one another’s value. In a handwritten note soon after CBE’s formation, founder Catherine Kroeger assured EWCI leadership: “I have no desire to steal members, but would like to provide an alternative for those who feel abandoned [sic].”⁶³ Kroeger even suggested that “[t]wo organizations might spread the news twice as far.”⁶⁴ EWCI members, recovering from the betrayal of the schism, took longer to share this perspective. EWCI member Mary Karne attended the first national conference of CBE in July of 1989 and reported on the event in *Update*. Her account of the experience included some negative aspects, for example “the feeling everyone was walking on eggs [sic] to stick strictly to the one issue of biblical equality...[which] created an ambience of narrowness and suppression.” However, overall, Karne concluded: “I believe there is much ministry for both CBE and EWC. We will reach different audiences, and our efforts will be more complementary than competitive.” Indicating the more

⁵⁸ I have kept this discussion anonymous to protect the privacy of this member. EEWC Archives, Letter between leaders, 11 Oct. 1986, Series 2B, Box 3, Folder 3. The gendered nature of this insult also points to the broader American matrix during this period. As first discussed in chapter two, this matrix included conservative women’s groups, such as CWA, that appropriated feminist strategies to advocate female submission. The EWCI leader’s gendered slight might simply reflect internalized misogyny, but it also strategically frames Kroeger’s enactment of female leadership as superficial and meddling. Such a remark rhetorically separates Kroeger from EWCI members, perhaps intending to align Kroeger with conservative evangelical women fighting for female subjugation. Whatever the intention, this insult highlighted Kroeger’s gender, which signaled discrepancies regarding women’s roles within the biblical feminist movement, and evangelicalism more broadly.

⁵⁹ Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*, 45.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. The importance of community is also highlighted in the introduction of this chapter by Eggebroten and Mollenkott’s responses to Cochran’s exclusion of the EWCI from evangelicalism.

⁶² Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 128.

⁶³ EEWC Archives, Letter to Juanita from Cathie, 21 July 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

conservative views of the CBE, Karne noted, “The conference convinced me that CBE will reach many desperately hurting women in churches where they have an entree [sic] and EWC at the present time does not.”⁶⁵

By 1991, the EWCI seemed to have accepted the CBE, and EWCI leaders had staked a claim in the CBE’s formation and continued success. Responding to an inquiry from a potential recruit asking for the differences between the EWCI and CBE, the EWCI administrator wrote:

Christians for Biblical Equality is a breakoff [sic] from our own group and the original nucleus of this group was made up of former members of EEWC...Their focus does not have the ecumenical one that we do. They really are carrying on with many of our original purposes and reaching people who have modified their views, largely the result of the efforts of EEWC and other such groups.⁶⁶

In this response, the administrator actively distinguished the Evangelical Women’s Caucus as more “ecumenical” than the CBE. This reply reflected the coalition’s recent name-change, discussed below: in 1990, the EWCI became the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus (EEWC). Beyond highlighting the EWCI’s role in rearing CBE leadership, EWCI leadership also eventually defended the role of CBE within the biblical feminist movement, specifically against accusations that the CBE threatened the EWCI. As explained in my dissertation’s introduction, Pamela Cochran’s history of biblical feminism positioned the CBE as usurping the “evangelical” title among the biblical feminist movement. When Anne Eggebroten reviewed Cochran’s book in *Update*, she addressed this accusation: “We thank God (sometimes publicly at our conferences) for the successful ministry CBE is having...” Eggebroten also explained, “[W]e occasionally exchange emails with CBE leaders to that effect. CBE has had literature tables at some EEWC conferences...”⁶⁷ Eggebroten defended the relationship between the two coalitions as more collaborative and congenial than Cochran’s book recognized.

Although schism can be productive, it can also create competition for resources that can damage both new and existing coalitions. Sociologist Kelsy Kretschmer notes that “all groups must compete for the same scarce resources, especially money, members, and media attention.”⁶⁸ EWCI members struggled with this competition with the emergence of CBE. Reporting on the “viability” of the EWCI in 1989, the EWCI’s administrative assistant explained: “Re: Christians for Biblical Equality – This group has siphoned off some of our energetic leadership.”⁶⁹ Understanding that the groups were competing for members, credibility, and resources, the administrator signalled an impending crisis for the EWCI: “Since membership is half what it used to be it means that [the income from membership fees] is also much reduced. We need to raise fees just to keep afloat...Several of the members whom we have lost were good contributors.”⁷⁰ Competition for

⁶⁵ Mary Karne, “Members on the Move,” *Update*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Winter 1989-90), 10.

⁶⁶ In 1990, the EWCI changed its name to Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus (EEWC), discussed in the following sections. EEWC Archives, Letter to Michelle Prentice from Florence Brown, 22 April 1991, Series 1C, Box 7, Folder 12.

⁶⁷ Eggebroten, “A Personal Reaction,” 9.

⁶⁸ Kretschmer, *Fighting for Now*, 134.

⁶⁹ EEWC Archives, “E.W.C. Viability Report,” (1989), Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

the limited resources available to evangelical feminists certainly created early tensions between the EWCI and CBE.

However, this competition also forced the two groups to eke out individual paths within the broader movement. Only after the CBE split did the EWCI declare “social justice” integral to its coalition, a goal it continues to assert today. In 1987, national coordinator Britt Vanden Eykel responded to a written request for information about their group by explaining: “Our membership is comprised of evangelical Christians who are also interested in promoting justice for the oppressed. We do not dictate our members [sic] specific positions on social, political, or theological issues....However, our agreement with the evangelical statement of faith of our organization unites us all.”⁷¹ This shift toward social justice was also recognized internally between coalition members: in 1989, the EWCI’s administrative assistant remarked, “our initial target was the evangelical or fundamental Christian community. We aimed our ministry toward women and their position in the church. Social issues were peripheral. We have reversed those two emphases [sic].”⁷² CBE leaders, alternatively, established their coalition as a haven for more conservative biblical feminists who wished to focus only on promoting biblical gender equality.⁷³ The CBE’s formation expanded the biblical feminist movement, and biblical feminists now had a choice between joining one or both coalitions.

In Hacking’s terms, as an interactive kind, “the biblical feminist” is “a moving target.”⁷⁴ Hacking explains that “moving targets” occur because “new knowledge about [the kind]...becomes known to the people classified, changes the way these individuals behave, and loops back to force changes in the classifications and knowledge about them.”⁷⁵ New information about “the biblical feminist” *as a kind* emerged with discourses about homosexuality, social activism, and conservative identity markers within the EWCI. As EWCI members became aware of these discourses, they changed their behaviour: some left the coalition and reclaimed “biblical feminist” for themselves, some stayed within the EWCI but rejected the perceived changes, and some regrouped and reconstructed the EWCI’s collective identity in biblical feminism. These interactions transformed the classification “biblical feminism” by expanding the parameters of the label and shifting and solidifying the borders between the kinds. These interactions shaped evangelicalism more broadly, creating new discourses about who can claim the label “evangelical.”

⁷¹ EEWCI Archives, Letter to Rosetta Thomas from National Coordinator Britt Vanden Eykel, 22 Aug. 1987, Series 1C, Box 7, Folder 3.

⁷² “E.W.C. Viability Report.”

⁷³ Founding CBE member Cathy Kroeger’s resignation as the 1988 EWCI conference coordinator reflects the boundary that she saw being drawn between the EWCI and conservative Christians. Kroeger resigned from the conference “with love for her sisters and in disagreement with the passing of the resolution [supporting gay civil rights] (not the substance or the resolution but the disbarment of our conservative sisters)” (Minutes of the Council Meeting EWCI, 6, 10-13 July 1986, Series 1B, Box 3, Folder 10). In Mickelsen’s resignation letter from the EWCI, she declared, “I feel we have a ministry to bring the gospel of freedom to women in evangelical churches. We cannot afford to have that ministry diminished by association with a national group strongly influenced by a sub-rosa philosophy and approach that we cannot support biblically” (Letter to Britt Vanden Eykel from Alvera Mickelson, 13, Aug. 1986, Series 1B, Box 4, Folder, 1).

⁷⁴ Hacking, “Madness: Biological or Constructed?,” 105.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

A New Name for a Changing Kind

At the EWCI's 1990 biennial conference, also held in Chicago, IL, members voted to change the name of the coalition to the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus (EEWC). A conversation about the coalition's name had been ongoing since the EWCI's inception, and members revived it every few years.⁷⁶ This particular iteration of the discussion began in earnest in 1988 as part of "a reorganization" of the coalition, two years before the affirmative vote to change the name.⁷⁷ After the coalition passed the gay civil rights resolution in Fresno, many of the "more conservative" members left the EWCI. Recognizing this demographic shift and wanting to better reflect the views and goals of the newly refined membership, the executive council broached the topic of a potential name change in a 1988 issue of *Update*. Hoping to keep the same initials as the original coalition, the council proposed the name "Ecumenical Women's Coalition."⁷⁸ This proposal sparked a conversation that reflected internal changes within the membership and coalition dynamics, as well as the interactive nature of biblical feminism in relationship with its matrix.

The executive council introduced the name-change proposal in *Update* and asked founding member Letha Scanzoni to share her perspective on the discussion. Scanzoni used this opportunity to explore tensions among EWCI members regarding the labels "evangelical" and "ecumenical." Scanzoni articulated internal concerns among members as follows:

Those who feel that the word *ecumenical* better describes us tend to have a negative image of the word *evangelical*, seeing it as too narrow and confining because of the popular understanding of the word as a synonym for *ultraconservative* or *fundamentalist*. They do not wish to be identified with fundamentalist interpretations of Scripture and a right-wing social/political agenda.⁷⁹

Drawing on personal conversations with members, Scanzoni argued that, for these participants, "the label [evangelical] has a powerful grip that clamps down on them and reins them in when they want to explore new ideas."⁸⁰ Scanzoni referenced conservatism in the broader movement and corresponding tensions for biblical feminists, asserting that members who wanted to move away from the evangelical label "may [have] grow[n] weary of being constantly called to task by certain conservative Christians who accuse EWC of 'departing from the faith.'"⁸¹

Scanzoni also acknowledged problems with the label "ecumenical" for biblical feminists, many of whom came from evangelical communities that had historically challenged the goals and message of the ecumenical movement.⁸² Scanzoni noted, "A problem arises...because the word in

⁷⁶ The last name change occurred in 1980 when the EWC added "International" to its name, becoming the EWCI.

⁷⁷ Horner, "Becoming," 263; Letha Scanzoni, "Are We Evangelical or Ecumenical?" *Update*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Fall 1988), 9.

⁷⁸ Scanzoni, "Are We Evangelical or Ecumenical?," 8d.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 8d-9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² The ecumenical movement, which emerged in the early twentieth century, was established to unite Christians across different branches and Protestant denominations to better articulate and spread a cohesive message of

many people's minds is linked to the *ecumenical movement*, which has emphasized efforts toward organizational unification to achieve universal Christian unity. If we change our name, we might be thought to be simply an arm of that movement, thereby losing our distinctiveness."⁸³ Scanzoni rejects this connotation of the label, noting: "It is not at all out of order to describe ourselves as ecumenical. The word means 'pertaining to the whole Christian church' (Random House Dictionary)."⁸⁴ For Scanzoni, this dictionary definition has accurately described the EWCI from its inception as she recalled that the EWCI's first conference in 1975 included "23 religious groups...among the 360 women and men" from across the United States and Canada, which "was clearly an ecumenical gathering."⁸⁵

Scanzoni's article discussed diversity within the EWCI, including members who continued to identify as evangelical. Scanzoni asserted: "many EWCI women are perfectly comfortable with the word *evangelical* and do not feel that such a good word should be surrendered to those who feel that they and they alone have a right to it."⁸⁶ Alternatively, Scanzoni noted, "[m]any EWC members and conference attendees are not members of bodies commonly associated with the evangelical establishment."⁸⁷ For Scanzoni, the multiplicity of beliefs and identities reflected

Christianity. By the 1960s, mainstream evangelicals had been discussing problems with the goals of the ecumenical movement, represented by the World Council of Churches created in 1948. For example, the editors of *Christianity Today* questioned whether distinct evangelical goals were effectively represented by ecumenism as a movement. In 1966, Carl F. Henry pointed out some problems within the ecumenical movement from an evangelical perspective. Henry asked, "Why do many in the ecumenical movement stress service at the expense of proclamation, and leave men to die in their sins though their temporal condition may have been improved? How can the evangelical ignore the ecumenical voices loudly proclaiming that all men are already reconciled to God and that they need only be informed of their divine adoption?...The evangelical's problem, even in the midst of love and truth in Jesus Christ, is whether to compromise his conscience by joining men and movements that do not effectively discipline those who deny ordination vows and who preach what the Word of God condemns" (Henry, "Evangelicals in the Ecumenical Movement," *Christianity Today*, vol. 10, no. 19 (June 1966), 20-21).

⁸³ Scanzoni, "Are We Evangelical or Ecumenical?," 9. Scanzoni's concern here reflects broader and ongoing discourses regarding the ecumenical movement among evangelicals, noted in the previous footnote.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. Scanzoni notes here that among the churches represented at the first conference were "Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Mennonite, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Baptists, Reformed, Christian Reformed, Brethren in Christ, Assemblies of God, Church of God, Quaker, 'Jesus People,' Nazarene, Evangelical Free, Wesleyan Methodist, Free Methodist, messianic Judaism, Evangelical Covenant, nondenominational, United Church of Christ, and Unitarian Universalist" (Ibid).

⁸⁶ Ibid. I did not find any statistics or surveys regarding evangelical identity among the EWCI membership during this period. However, it is evident that leaders felt that many members came from evangelical circles and continued to identify with this label. Another EWCI leader, Anne Eggebroten, supported keeping "evangelical" in the coalition's name. In August of 1988, before Scanzoni's *Update* article was published, Eggebroten wrote to the national council to explain her views. Eggebroten noted, "If it comes to a vote, I will vote to keep the same name or nearly the same name. The word 'evangelical' is one many but not all of us would use to describe ourselves. I use it for myself; my theology is closer to evangelical than to anything in liberal churches I've visited..." (Eggebroten, "Memo to EWCI National Council," 28 August 1988, Series 1C, Box 7, Folder 8). At the EEWC's 1996 national conference, member and psychology professor Kaye Cook surveyed 120 coalition members regarding evangelical identity. Cook found that 56 percent of the respondents described themselves as evangelical. While more than half of EEWC members claimed this label, this percentage was much lower than CBEs. In 1995, Cook surveyed 250 members of CBE and found that 85 percent of respondents described themselves as evangelical (Horner, "Becoming," 412-13).

⁸⁷ Scanzoni, "Are We Evangelical or Ecumenical?," 9.

among EWCI membership suggested, “Our coming together is an ecumenical gathering.”⁸⁸ Not wanting to negate the evangelical roots of the coalition nor ignore the members who continued to accept the label, Scanzoni proposed keeping the current name but adding a “subtitle:” “The Evangelical Women’s Caucus: An Ecumenical Coalition.”⁸⁹

In this same issue of *Update*, the executive council demonstrated an awareness of the interactive and shifting nature of biblical feminism. Newly elected co-coordinator Kaye Cook cited “societal changes” as a reason for the proposed name change, noting “[b]iblical feminism isn’t what it used to be.”⁹⁰ Cook acknowledged that biblical feminism had realized some of its original goals as denominations increasingly ordained women and “issues of equality in the church, family, and workplace are increasingly voiced in our churches.”⁹¹ Cook asserted that even Christians “who are uncomfortable with the label of feminism” are discussing these issues.⁹² Recognizing that “[b]iblical feminists too have changed,” Cook explained that evangelical feminists had shifted their focus from women as “the issue” to fighting for “issues that women and men share,” including pay equality, domestic violence, gay rights, and the feminization of poverty.⁹³ According to Cook, the EWCI needed to recognize and engage with this changing matrix to sustain its relevance in the biblical feminist movement and to ensure the coalition’s purpose continued to align with broader feminist goals.

Scholars of evangelicalism have also examined the shifting landscape of biblical feminism and mainstream evangelicalism in the United States during this period. In a study of gender ideals and practices among American evangelicals, sociologist Sally K. Gallagher identified a shift toward egalitarianism in evangelical literature by the mid-1980s. However, Gallagher qualifies this shift as a “pragmatic turn,” reflected in the lived experiences of “ordinary evangelicals,” or the rank-and-file adherents.⁹⁴ Gallagher pointed to broad changes in American culture that required evangelicals to accept a version of gender equality in the workplace and the home. For example, the success of second-wave feminist activism “had removed major legal barriers to women’s employment and promoted ideals of women’s equal rights.” Also, the changing economy in the 1970s and 1980s “effectively undermined the viability of the one-earner, middle-class household, replacing the breadwinner-homemaker family ideal with a dual-earner, heavily indebted, middle-class reality.”⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Cook, “Are We Evangelical or Ecumenical?” *Update*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Fall 1988), 8d.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid. Already by the 1980s, the impact of feminism (both biblical and secular) pushed conservative evangelicals “to at least pay lip service to the idea that women should have equal pay for equal work, should have equal employment and educational opportunities, and are equal to men before God” (Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 138). In 1983, Jerry Falwell, a leading voice among conservative evangelicals, asked: “How much thought have we given to what has caused the rise of feminism? Could it be that we failed to objectively consider some legitimate inequities that need balancing?” Falwell even suggested: “Too many Fundamentalist Christians have wrong mental attitudes toward women” (qt’d in Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 138).

⁹³ Cook, “Are We Evangelical or Ecumenical?” *Update*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Fall 1988), 8d.

⁹⁴ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 56.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 128. In a historical study of the American family, historian Stephanie Coontz called the breadwinning father, stay-at-home mother, single income family “the elusive traditional family.” With this phrase, Coontz highlighted that this idealized 1950s familial structure has been very rare throughout American history (*The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic, 1992): 8-14). See also Robert O. Self, *All in the Family*, 3-4.

As evangelicals increasingly embraced a two-income household, they mirrored broader shifts among middle-class White Americans. This shift required an ideological pivot within popular evangelical literature:

women's employment, the growing need for quality childcare, and the destabilizing of men's jobs reflected the experience of the majority of evangelical households. The question was no longer "should women work" or "what are acceptable motivations for women's employment" but how to support families in which husbands and wives were both employed.⁹⁶

Gallagher emphasized that evangelicals based this tide change on practicality; it did not reflect changing interpretations of biblical gender ideals and gender essentialism within evangelicalism.⁹⁷ Although evangelical authors necessarily recognized changing economic requirements among evangelical families with "fewer theological and ethical objections to women's employment."⁹⁸ Gallagher's study of popular evangelical literature during this period showed that evangelical authors continued to use "men's and women's essential natures" to explain acceptable roles for women, which included female submission in the home, church, and broader society.⁹⁹

Scholars suggest that gender essentialism was at the heart of the debate between mainstream evangelicals and biblical feminists beginning in the 1970s.¹⁰⁰ Gender essentialism stipulates that gender is a biological category that determines innate and unchangeable traits unique to women and men. Evangelicals looked to the Bible to decipher these traits: "Gender essentialists would argue that difference and hierarchy were divinely ordained, biologically self-evident, and determinative of adult personality and roles."¹⁰¹ Biblical feminists, alternatively, articulated "that the more fundamental truth of Scripture is the redemption of humankind from the hierarchy imposed after the fall...and the creation of a new humanity—the church—in which each should exercise the gifts God has given for the good of the whole body."¹⁰² Broader economic and cultural shifts required American families, including evangelical families, to adapt to dual-income households. However, embracing a gender essentialist ideology tempered discourses regarding gender egalitarianism among evangelicals. This ideology created firm boundaries that limited a woman's work relative to her reproductive capacity and biological duty as a mother. In popular literature, "women's employment remained couched in the language of personal family

⁹⁶ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 132.

⁹⁷ Evangelical historian David Watt's earlier findings support and nuance Gallagher's conclusions about a pragmatic shift that resulted in changing or challenging existing evangelical conservative gender roles. Watt notes that, "Largely because they needed money, but also because they found traditional roles so stultifying, evangelical women frequently ignored the traditionalist's warnings about the danger of their working outside the home" (*Transforming Faith*, 104).

⁹⁸ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 132.

⁹⁹ Ibid. See the introduction and chapter one of this dissertation for a discussion on evangelical gender essentialism and historical evangelical views of gender more broadly.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 49. See also Seth Dowland, *Family Values*, 130-1.

¹⁰¹ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 49; Dowland, *Family Values*, 11.

¹⁰² Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 49. See chapter one for more information on how biblical feminists understood gender in the Bible.

decision—a choice that should be made in the context of existing responsibilities, taking care to preserve time for self, spouse, and children.”¹⁰³

Feminist discourses (both biblical and secular) also impacted available roles for American evangelical women. Gallagher noted that by the 1980s, even gender essentialists “would increasingly write in ways that avoided, minimized, or muted those aspects of their vision of gender relations that biblical feminists found particularly problematic.”¹⁰⁴ For example, in popular literature, marriage counsellors shifted their language to describe the marital relationship as a “partnership of a husband and wife,” rather than a gendered hierarchy where the wife submits to the husband’s headship.¹⁰⁵ While this language de-emphasized gender distinctions within the home, the partnership still required that both parties “recognize their essential differences and needs” as husband and wife, implying the husband’s headship and the wife’s submission as part of God’s natural order.¹⁰⁶ In practice, evangelical familial structures and gender expression largely reflected broader American trends, which included sharing household tasks and mutual employment between spouses.¹⁰⁷ Significantly, however, evangelical leaders continued to advocate for male “headship” as a “strategic boundary that is essential to maintaining subcultural religious integrity” for evangelicals.¹⁰⁸ This ideology continued to limit evangelical women’s roles and status. Thus, despite the hopeful changes that Cook noted in *Update* in 1990, biblical feminists continued to face powerful resistance to their message of biblically ordained gender equality.¹⁰⁹

In advocating for the EWCI’s name change in *Update*, Cook mentioned Christian discomfort with the label “feminist.” Among evangelicals specifically, Concerned Women for America fostered ongoing uneasiness regarding feminism, positioning a feminist value system in opposition to Christian ideals. Bestselling female evangelical authors, including Marabel Morgan (discussed in chapter one) and Elisabeth Elliot, were also powerful detractors of feminism. In *Let Me Be a Woman* (1976), Elliot dedicated a collection of essays about marriage and womanhood to her recently engaged daughter, Valerie. Throughout her book, Elliot advocated gender essentialism as a God-given truth, asserting that “God created male and female, the male to call forth, to lead, initiate and rule, and the female to respond, follow, adapt, submit.”¹¹⁰ By representing gender in this way, Elliot argued that a woman’s reproductive capacity determined her role in the world:

¹⁰³ Ibid., 133. See also Watt, *A Transforming Faith*, 101-4.

¹⁰⁴ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 58.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 175. In his earlier review of evangelical literature and culture, Watt also contended that “[s]ome evangelical households were organized in ways that would have appalled the traditionalists. Writing in the 1970s, an evangelical journalist named Sharon Gallagher recalled that she and her father had seen her mother paint the house, lay linoleum, and handle all of the family’s driving. Another evangelical writer [Virginia Hearn] recalled her father taking care of the family grocery shopping and helping with the cooking” (*A Transforming Faith*, 101). Watt also suggests that “evangelicals’ quiet acceptance of changing gender roles continued throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s” (Ibid., 107).

¹⁰⁸ Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 84. See also Dowland, *Family Values*. As noted, Sharp later reaches a similar conclusion in his analysis of evangelical boundary policing.

¹⁰⁹ A major challenge to biblical feminist’s advocacy of biblical gender equality emerged with the conservative evangelical backlash movement to biblical feminism, explained below.

¹¹⁰ Elisabeth Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman: Notes on Womanhood for Valerie* (Wheaton Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976), 59. See also Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 52.

Every normal woman is equipped to be a mother. Certainly not every woman in the world is destined to make use of the physical equipment but surely motherhood in a deeper sense, is the essence of womanhood. The body of every normal woman prepares itself repeatedly to receive and to bear. Motherhood requires self-giving, sacrifice, suffering.¹¹¹

As Gallagher explains, for Elliot women are “suited to the task, body and soul, and find fulfillment in the tasks associated with receiving, bearing, nurturing, and serving.”¹¹² In her guidelines of correct womanhood and marital success, Elliot explicitly rejects feminism and feminist ideals: “[t]here is a fundamental and to me quite puzzling omission in most ‘feminist’ discussion — the failure to talk at all about femininity.” For Elliot, this perceived omission by feminists was intentionally manipulative: “Perhaps it is because the elements of rule, submission, and union are part and parcel of femininity itself and of far more lasting and universal importance than any culturally defined notion. To get at this the place to start, obviously, is the body itself.”¹¹³ Elliot’s gender essentialism, which limited women’s roles, precluded any reconciliation with existing feminist ideals regarding gender equality in the home, church, and society.

Finally, an emerging backlash movement encouraged evangelical uneasiness with feminist goals and ideals. Christian ethicist Isaac Sharp has argued that this backlash movement made feminism “effectively untouchable” for mainstream evangelicals, facilitating the official exclusion of biblical feminists from evangelicalism.¹¹⁴ This movement emerged when a group of conservative evangelical leaders met in Danvers, MA, in 1987, creating the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW). Founding members formed their coalition to address a perceived dangerous increase in “confusion over sex roles among Christians.”¹¹⁵ In 1989, CBMW published the Danvers Statement in *Christianity Today*, its manifesto opposing biblical egalitarianism. In 1991, CBMW leaders published an anthology of essays on gender, which became the movement’s foundational text: *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism*. The editors of this text, Wayne Grudem and John Piper, specifically named Nancy Hardesty, Letha Scanzoni, and Alvera Mickelsen, among others, for promoting the incorrect idea that the Bible supports equal roles for women and men in the church and the home. Evangelical feminists, rather than secular feminists, were singled out for criticism “because they do not reject the Bible’s authority or truthfulness.”¹¹⁶ Because biblical feminists employed Scripture to articulate their position on gender egalitarianism, the CBMW found them particularly threatening. The editors noted, “We consider these authors to be brothers and sisters in Christ, and we have endeavoured to respond to them in sincerity and love. Yet we also consider their essential position to be wrong in the light of Scripture, and ultimately harmful to the family and the church.”¹¹⁷

Conservative evangelicals formed CBMW in response to the evangelical feminist movement, as articulated by the subtitle of the coalition’s seminal text. However, Grudem and

¹¹¹ Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman*, 61-2. See also Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 52.

¹¹² Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 52.

¹¹³ Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman*, 60.

¹¹⁴ Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 196-7.

¹¹⁵ “Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood,” *Christianity Today*, 13 Jan. 1989, vol. 33, no. 1, 40-1.

¹¹⁶ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton Ill: Crossway Books, 1991), xiii.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Piper argued that disputing biblical feminism was only a secondary aim of their book and coalition. They explained, “[O]ur primary purpose is broader than that: We want to help Christians recover a noble vision of manhood and womanhood as God created them to be.”¹¹⁸ According to CBMW leaders, the coalition’s *raison d’être* was to promote “complementarianism” as a new way to interpret gender in the Bible. Grudem and Piper invented this neologism to replace what they saw as the less accurate terms “traditionalist” and “hierarchicalist” in describing evangelical gender ideology.¹¹⁹ For CBMW leaders, “complementarity” better explained God’s creation of women and men as equal “but different in roles.”¹²⁰ This distinction necessitated that men hold leadership positions in the church and the home. According to Sharp, from its inception in 1987, this movement “became massively influential in the US American evangelical world,” and “complementarianism spread like wildfire,” effectively pushing biblical feminism to the margins of evangelicalism.¹²¹ Whether this movement successfully marginalized biblical feminists, the biblical manhood movement sparked new discourses among evangelicals. The CBMW provided space for evangelicals to join this new movement, identify with complementarianism, or reject this new ideology. This new coalition reshaped the wider evangelical matrix, creating a looping effect whereby it impacted all participants. The public nature of the conversation between CBMW and evangelical feminists illustrates this result.

CBMW and CBE both entered the evangelical matrix in 1987, and CBE quickly became CBMW’s “primary sparring partner.”¹²² The CBMW released the Danvers Statement in January 1989. In response, CBE leaders “expedited” a twelve-point statement outlining their coalition’s tenets, released in April 1990.¹²³ *Christianity Today* published both declarations. By reading these two documents side by side, it becomes evident that CBE was in dialogue with CBMW. For example, the third “Affirmation” in CBMW’s Danvers Statement asserted: “Adam’s headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin.”¹²⁴ In comparison, CBE’s fifth “Biblical Truth” declared: “The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹¹⁹ Piper and Grudem noted, “We are uncomfortable with the term ‘traditionalist’ because it implies an unwillingness to let Scripture challenge traditional patterns of behaviour, and we certainly reject the term ‘hierarchicalist’ because it overemphasizes the structured authority while giving no suggestion of equality or the beauty of mutual interdependence” (*Recovering*, xiv).

¹²⁰ Piper and Grudem, *Recovering*; xiv. See also “Questions and Answers about the Council” *Christianity Today*, 13 Jan. 1989, vol. 33, no. 1, 40. For more scholarship discussing complementarianism see Dowland, *Family Values*, 139-142; Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 56-61; J. P. Bartkowski, *Remaking the Godly Marriage: Gender Negotiation in Evangelical Families* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001). 2004; Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 198-200; Debra Bendel Daniels, “Evangelical Feminism: The Egalitarian-Complementarian Debate,” *PhD Diss.* (Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003); Marion Maddox, “‘Rise Up Warrior Princess Daughters’: Is Evangelical Women’s Submission a Mere Fairy Tale?” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 1 (2013), 9–26; Alicia Sowinska, “Ambiguous Women: Debates Within American Evangelical Feminism,” *European Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 3 (2008), 167–80.

¹²¹ Sharp, *The Other Evangelicals*, 200-202.

¹²² Piper and Grudem, *Recovering*, 406-416.

¹²³ Michael G. Maudlin, “Women’s Roles: New Statement Affirms Equality of Men, Women,” in *Christianity Today*, 18 Aug. 1989, vol. 33, no. 11, 38.

¹²⁴ “The Danvers Statement,” *Christianity Today*, 13 Jan. 1989, vol. 33, no. 1, 41.

effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order."¹²⁵ Danvers' fifth "Affirmation" stated, "...Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community."¹²⁶ Whereas CBE's eleventh "Truth" stated, "The Bible teaches that husbands and wives are heirs together of the grace of life and that they are bound together in a relationship of mutual submission and responsibility...The husband's function as 'head'...is to be understood as self-giving love and service within this relationship of mutual submission."¹²⁷ Both statements drew on Scripture to validate opposing perspectives on biblical gender roles, and CBE leaders ensured that they effectively addressed and countered each of CBMW's points. In 1991, Grudem and Piper published *Recovering Biblical Manhood* where they criticized CBE's twelve "Biblical Truths" line by line and promoted their own ideas about gender in evangelicalism.¹²⁸

Beyond the public eye, EWCI members also discussed the emerging backlash movement among themselves. In 1989, before CBE released its Truths or Grudem and Piper published CBMW's book, EWCI member Janet Fischer reviewed the Danvers Statement in *Update*. Fischer titled her article, "The Good News Is...They've Noticed Us." In reading the manifesto, Fischer found that CBMW's claim that "Adam's headship in marriage...was not a result of sin" was "the most significant" affirmation of the Danvers Statement.¹²⁹ For Fischer, this statement "set[] forth traditional hierarchical roles for men and women, placing men at the top of the hierarchy in home and church."¹³⁰ Expressing "sadness" that this new coalition represented yet another divide among evangelicals, Fischer articulated a common thematic that Grudem and Piper also promoted: "Jesus prayed for us, his followers, to be one."¹³¹ Fischer went on to argue that "CBMW is saying nothing new. We've heard this before...we've finally thought about it and rejected male supremacy as a false doctrine."¹³² Despite this redundant ideology, Fischer still perceived the CBMW as a threat to biblical feminism and encouraged EWCI members to continue promoting their message: "it becomes even more important now for EWC to continue the work we set out to do: encourage each other in our faith and our human dignity given to us by God, [and] exercise our gifts responsibly in our churches, homes and society."¹³³ CBMW's formation proved to EWCI members that their message of biblical gender equality was reaching an audience and provoking discussion, and they took solace in this knowledge. As Evon Bachaus declared during EWCI's formative early years: "the action is in the reaction."¹³⁴

In response to the emerging backlash movement, EWCI leaders began to see CBE as a biblical feminist ally, prioritizing shared goals between the two coalitions to fight a new common enemy. In an issue of *Update* following CBMW's Danvers Statement, Anne Eggebroten represented the CBMW as a reaction to (and proof of) biblical feminism's success. Eggebroten noted, "We

¹²⁵ "Men, Women and Biblical Equality," *Christianity Today*, 9 Apr. 1990, vol. 34, no. 6, 36.

¹²⁶ "The Danvers Statement," 41.

¹²⁷ "Men, Women and Biblical Equality," 36.

¹²⁸ *Christianity Today* rated *Recovering Biblical Manhood* Book of the Year in 1993.

¹²⁹ Fischer, "The Good News Is...They've Noticed Us," *Update*, vol. 13 no. 2 (1989), 8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*; Piper and Grudem note that they "hope that this controversy will move toward resolution in many fellowships and eventually in the church as a whole," also asserting an uneasiness with the divisions of the church created by these different perspectives (*Recovering*, 418).

¹³² Fischer, "The Good News," 8.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Qu't'd in "Another Countermovement," *Update*, vol. 13 no. 2 (1989), 9.

carried out our purpose so well, in fact, that many evangelicals became alarmed about the ‘increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism’...They were so worried that in 1987 they formed an organization to oppose the principles of biblical feminism: The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.”¹³⁵ *Update* ran Eggebroten’s article during the EWCI’s ongoing name-change discussion, and Eggebroten acknowledged that the EWCI “continues to agonize over identity and purpose.”¹³⁶ However, Eggebroten seemingly understood that by joining forces, the EWCI and CBE could better counter CBMW. Eggebroten introduced this relationship by lightheartedly joking about the EWCI/CBE schism: “In true evangelical style, we split over this question of identity.”¹³⁷ Eggebroten then presented CBE as an important arm of the biblical feminist movement, which “took on the more specific goal of primarily reaching evangelical women” with the biblical feminist message.¹³⁸ While Eggebroten suggests that CBE “seems to be doing a good job of it,” tension persists in her article as she contends that CBE found success “by defining itself as *not* EWC, *not* dangerous.”¹³⁹ Despite lasting resentments from the schism, the formation of CBMW facilitated the mending of the relationship between the EWCI and CBE. One year earlier in *Update*, coordinator Britt Vanden Eykel had reminded readers that Christians advocating messages of gender equality outside of the boundaries of the EWCI must be understood “as a multiplied effect of our ministry rather than as competition. We must not lose sight of our goal, which is to bring change in church and society, opening both to acceptance of women as full partners with men.”¹⁴⁰ The emerging CBMW pushed EWCI members to finally enact such solidarity.

The Shifting Matrix: Reconceptualizing Submission

The developing relationship between biblical feminists and CBMW contributed to a shift in evangelical representations of biblical hierarchicalism and female submission. For example, religion scholar R. Marie Griffith traced changing perceptions of female submission within Women’s Aglow Fellowship into the 1990s. Conservative evangelical women formed Aglow in 1967 to address the disappointment of Christian housewives with the emerging women’s liberation movement.¹⁴¹ Griffith notes that “[l]ike Anita Bryant, Marabel Morgan, Beverly LaHaye, and other popular spokeswomen for evangelical Christianity, early Aglow leaders celebrated what they considered the God-ordained roles of wife and mother as the source of true liberation for women who properly pursued and fulfilled them.”¹⁴² From its inception, Aglow promoted a conservative evangelical gender hierarchicalism: “just as children are to obey their parents – or, to switch metaphors, just as the Church is to obey Christ – women are to be in submission to men as their

¹³⁵ Eggebroten, “EWC: Called to Be,” *Update*, vol. 13 no. 2 (1989), 1-2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Vanden Eykel, “NOT a Swan Song,” *Update*, vol. 12 no. 2 (Summer 1988), 8b.

¹⁴¹ R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 45.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

leaders.”¹⁴³ However, Griffith found that submission was not a stagnant concept among evangelicals, “but is rather a doctrine with a fluid history.”¹⁴⁴ Evangelicals changed their ideas of submission with their changing matrix and by 1995, Aglow leadership had replaced a traditional view of wifely submission with “the ‘authentic’ God-given message of mutual submission and intimacy between men and women.”¹⁴⁵

This message was more akin to CBE and the EWCI than the conservative evangelical biblical manhood movement. Griffith attributed Aglow’s transformation, in part, to changing roles and identities available to Aglow women in their broader culture: “As increasing numbers of charismatic women have become divorced, single mothers, the older ideal of the happy, submissive wife has given way to newer models of women warriors battling the forces of Satan and helping each other surmount the ordinary obstacles of their lives.”¹⁴⁶ As previously mentioned, Aglow women were in conversation with the secular women’s movement and initially presented female submission as “true liberation” in response to feminist ideals. However, the feminist movement also helped shape the broader American landscape, which Griffith argues influenced Aglow members’ perceptions of submission, including divorce reform and financial childcare protections for mothers.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, the EWCI archives indicate that Aglow members engaged in conversations with EWCI members and exchanged coalition information.¹⁴⁸ The impact of biblical feminism on Aglow’s changing discourses seemed evident to me, so confirming this connection was significant. In 1985, for example, an author of an Aglow Bible study asserted that the doctrine of submission did not make women “second-class citizens.”¹⁴⁹ This language evokes early biblical feminist publications, including Ruth A. Schmidt’s *Christianity Today* article, “Second-Class Citizenship in the Kingdom of God,” and Nancy Hardesty’s *Eternity* article, “Women: Second Class Citizens,” both published in 1971.¹⁵⁰ These articles helped launch the biblical feminist movement, arguing that the church had incorrectly rejected biblical, God-given gender equality by treating

¹⁴³ Ibid., 62.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 178.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 45.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 197-8. In *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, sociologist Sally K. Gallagher traced a similar shift in understanding of women’s and men’s roles within the conservative hierarchicalist movement beginning in the mid 1980s, which grappled with “the changing reality of evangelical family experience as many couples discovered that wives’ employment was no longer an option but a necessity” (56). According to Gallagher’s research, this reckoning led to “the emergence of a more ideologically muted and pragmatic gender egalitarianism” in popular conservative evangelical literature that began to refer to the husband-wife relationship as a kind of partnership (Ibid). Significantly, however, this language shift continued to assert male authority in the home constructing a new ideology linking partnership and hierarchy, which was “intended to defuse concern that subordination devalues women and reinforces men’s privilege within marriage” (58).

¹⁴⁷ For more on how second-wave feminists shaped divorce laws and childcare financial protections in the United States in this period, see Mary Ziegler, “An Incomplete Revolution: Feminists and the Legacy of Marital-Property Reform,” *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* 19, no. 2 (2013). An American legal scholar, Ziegler demonstrates that feminists, including the National Organization for Women, helped revolutionize divorce and family law in the 1970s and 1980s. Ziegler notes that in the late 1970s, NOW promoted “measures such as those calling for equal or equitable distribution of marital property and laws recognizing the contributions of homemakers in the division of marital property....Equitable property division, rare in 1970, became the norm in all but ten states by the mid-1980s” (261).

¹⁴⁸ EEWC Archives, Information Packet, 1975-7, Series 1C, Box 1, Folder 10.

¹⁴⁹ Q’t’d in Griffith, *God’s Daughters*, 185.

¹⁵⁰ See footnote 3 in the introduction of this dissertation.

women as “second class citizens.” Whether the Aglow author’s reference was intentional or not, ideas circulating among biblical feminists appear to have influenced members of the Aglow Women’s Fellowship. Each of these interactions shaped ideas of submission among evangelicals and changed the evangelical matrix.

Within this larger context, EWCI members discussed changing the name of their coalition. Following co-coordinator Kaye Cook’s explanation in *Update*, EWCI leaders mailed the name-change ballot to all 300 EWCI members, and an unprecedented number of responses flooded the national office. Almost 200 members returned their ballots, a sixty-four percent response rate.¹⁵¹ Delighted, Cook remarked on the sheer volume of replies, the hand-written explanations of individual voters, and the many suggestions for alternative names. For Cook, this feedback signaled that EWCI members “care deeply about the organization.”¹⁵² However, the survey results were inconclusive: one-third of respondents voted to keep the current name, two-thirds voted for some kind of change (but not necessarily the council’s proposed “Ecumenical Women’s Coalition”), and over half of the respondents voted to keep “evangelical” in the name.¹⁵³

Members provided several reasons for retaining the “evangelical” label, reflecting the broader matrix previously discussed. Some members wanted to signal the EWCI’s distinct goals as separate from the secular feminist movement, and others wanted to keep communication open within the evangelical community, particularly “because there seems to be more of a problem there and need for support.”¹⁵⁴ For others, “evangelical” sustained a connection to the group’s past. For others still, it represented the priorities of the coalition’s present and future, including witnessing Christ and sharing the “good news.”¹⁵⁵ Aware of the term’s changing connotations and increasing conservatism, one voter remarked: “I don’t want to [surrender] the word to the moral majority few.”¹⁵⁶ These responses indicated that EWCI members were aware of ongoing discussions regarding the term “evangelical,” including its increasing precariousness for progressively-minded Protestants.

Of those who voted to eradicate “evangelical” from the coalition’s name, some members identified the label’s increasing affiliation with “fundamentalists” as a misrepresentation of the EWCI’s goals, which created confusion for potential members.¹⁵⁷ Some members identified themselves as non-evangelicals (including Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians) and wanted a more inclusive name to reflect their participation. As for the terms “caucus” or “coalition,” some voters agreed with the rationale of the leaders (that caucus was too political). Others noted that the EWCI should keep the term to signal their historical foundations as a caucus “on women” under the purview of the ESA. Still, others believed that the coalition was political and that the name should reflect this mission.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵¹ EEWC Archives, Letter from Co-Coordinator Kaye Cook and Sue Horner on Bylaw Changes, 1989, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 7.

¹⁵² Cook, “A Rose is a Rose is a Rose,” *Update*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Summer 1989), 4.

¹⁵³ EEWC Archives, Letter from Co-Coordinator Kaye Cook and Sue Horner on Bylaw Changes, 1989, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 7.

¹⁵⁴ “Change the Name? Or Keep it the Same?” (1988), Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

After counting the votes, EWCI leaders weighed the positive aspects of change against the negatives. EWCI leaders feared that incorporating under a new name was expensive, that members dissatisfied with the new name might leave the coalition, and that the coalition would lose any existing name recognition.¹⁵⁹ In light of these internal discourses, in 1988, the executive council opted to keep the coalition's current name (EWCI). However, leadership agreed to revisit the question at their next business meeting in 1990.¹⁶⁰

At the 1990 meeting in Chicago, a small majority approved a name change: forty-eight in favour, fourteen opposed, and sixteen abstained.¹⁶¹ The EWCI officially became the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus (EEWC). For the coalition's leaders, the new name better reflected "both our heritage as Biblical feminists and the inclusive nature of our membership."¹⁶² Newly elected coordinator Susan Garrison explained this decision to the national membership in the next issue of *Update*:

The goals of recognizing our evangelical heritage as well as emphasizing our interdenominational and general inclusiveness seemed embodied in both the words 'evangelical' and 'ecumenical.' Not wanting one word to minimize the other, we agreed to propose the name 'Evangelical & Ecumenical Women's Caucus.'¹⁶³

The executive council paired the name change proposal with a proposal to amend the organization's bylaws and restructure the EEWC into a centralized board with individual membership, rather than chapter-based affiliations.¹⁶⁴ Leaders suggested this change because many chapters had communicated to the national council that they were experiencing decreased interest and participation and having trouble recruiting new members.¹⁶⁵ This new structure meant that incoming members paid dues to the general organization rather than to their local chapter (previously, one-half of membership dues would go to the national organization and one-half to the local chapter). EWC leaders hoped this new design would "revitalize" the fledgling chapters and strengthen and stabilize the organization's core.¹⁶⁶ In 1990, the EEWC had seven chapters: Delaware Valley, PA, Southwest, Chicago, Michigan, Bay Area, Greater Boston, and Indiana, as well as three chapter affiliates: Seattle, New York, and Atlanta.¹⁶⁷

Revising the Statement of Faith

As part of the name-change ballot in 1988, the EWCI executive council proposed revisions to the organization's Statement of Faith. Leaders felt that a change was needed to eliminate the

¹⁵⁹ Cook, "A Rose," 4-5.

¹⁶⁰ Cook, "A Rose," 4-5; Horner, "Becoming," 268; Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 177.

¹⁶¹ Margaret Arighi, "Secretary's Summary of Meetings," *Update*, vol 14, no 2 (Fall 1990), 9.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Susan Garrison, "Coordinators' Comment," *Update*, vol 14 no 2 (Fall 1990) 8-9.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*; See also Horner, "Becoming," 272.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9. See also Horner, "Becoming," 272.

¹⁶⁷ Margaret Arighi, "Secretary's Summary," 9; Horner, "Becoming All We're Meant to Be," 272.

“hierarchical and androcentric language” in the coalition’s existing statement.¹⁶⁸ The proposed revised statement, therefore, replaced words such as “fellowship” with “relationship”; “humankind” with “all people”; and described God as “Redeemer, and Sustainer of all” instead of “Ruler.”¹⁶⁹ Beyond inclusive terminology, however, a more “monumental” change was proposed that involved the coalition’s relationship with Scripture.¹⁷⁰ The EWCI’s previous Statement of Faith identified the Bible as “the infallible guide and final authority for Christian faith and life.” Leaders suggested that the new statement identify the Bible as “a central guide” instead.¹⁷¹ Sue Horner, co-coordinator with Kaye Cook, was tasked with explaining these changes to EWCI members in *Update*. According to Horner, changing “the definition of the Bible from the infallible guide to a central guide is in response to a broader understanding of God’s witness...God is made known to us not only through the written words of the Bible, but also in the broader historical traditions of the church and in the working of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷² Horner explained that terms such as “infallible and final” were restrictive and did not accurately reflect “the multiplicity of perspectives that our membership represents.”¹⁷³ Finally, Horner recognized the significance of this semantic shift and the potential backlash it could create, particularly among evangelical members. Horner defended the new statement as not “a weakening of EWCI’s biblical basis,” but rather an effort to embrace different views within the organization and “the diversity of ways that God is revealed to us.”¹⁷⁴ For EWCI leadership, these statement changes better embraced and reflected the different perspectives among members without rejecting the biblical foundations of the coalition.

The results of the mail-in vote shed light on the coalition’s changing collective identity and the myriad of ways members understood and navigated their changing relationships within their matrices. Most voters believed that removing “infallible” from the Statement of Faith signalled a move away from evangelicalism-proper.¹⁷⁵ However, respondents differed on whether this was a positive or negative decision for the coalition. One voter exclaimed: “EWC’s unique calling is to be an evangelical feminist organization,” but “[c]alling the Bible ‘a central’ guide...is not an evangelical statement of faith. The proposed change weakens the authority of the Bible as a support for Christian feminism.”¹⁷⁶ Another member noted: “Several of the changes imply a less evangelical statement. If we are not going to be strongly evangelical, why are we needed? Lots of other religious groups have women’s committees and orgs.”¹⁷⁷ Another member saw the suggested changes as the death knell for the coalition, noting, “If...the EWC is dead, then it is time to say so and to announce that another group is ‘taking over the furniture.’”¹⁷⁸ A member who was pleased

¹⁶⁸ Horner, “Are we Evangelical or Ecumenical,” 10.

¹⁶⁹ EEWC Archives, “EWCI Ballot for Name Change and Statement of Faith Revision,” 1988, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 3.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Horner, “Are we Evangelical or Ecumenical,” 10. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Pamela Cochran also makes this argument about the Statement of Faith in *Evangelical Feminism* (178-9).

¹⁷⁶ “Change the Name? Or Keep it the Same?” (1988), Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 2.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

about this possible shift away from evangelicalism responded, “I have just reduced my membership to ‘magazine only’ because I’ve become less evangelical recently. I appreciate the changes.”¹⁷⁹

Other members did not equate the new Statement of Faith with a shift from evangelicalism. One member suggested the coalition change its name to “Evangelical Women’s Coalition” while asserting, “I love the new statement.”¹⁸⁰ This member explained, “To me, evangelical means witness. We hold the Bible as central but it is not so much what we believe as how we believe it. To me the how is active witness...Those who do not so believe could at least honor the importance of active spiritual witness for justice and peace from a Biblical basis.”¹⁸¹ Ultimately, the vote revealed members’ indecision regarding the suggested changes. The mail-in ballot was deemed inconclusive. Sixty members voted to continue to define the Bible as “the infallible guide” in the Statement of Faith whereas 110 members voted for “a central guide.” Twenty members wrote in a different suggestion not listed on the ballot: “*the* central guide.”¹⁸² Of the members who suggested this option, many felt that using an indefinite article weakened the authority of Scripture too much for the coalition.¹⁸³ Ultimately, because so many members submitted new suggestions, the council ruled that further discussion was needed before revising the Statement of Faith. The council opted to revisit the statement with the name change proposal at the 1990 conference.¹⁸⁴

At the 1990 conference, the coalition became the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus (EEWC), and participants continued discussing the Statement of Faith. After the conference, leadership sent another mail-in ballot to all members, and this time, eighty-nine percent of the returned votes affirmed the revisions.¹⁸⁵ By 1991, the EEWC’s Statement of Faith read: “We believe the Bible is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and is a central guide and authority for Christian faith and life.”¹⁸⁶ EEWC leaders were aware that some members preferred “*the* central guide,” and in 1992, newly elected coordinator Joyce Erickson addressed this concern in *Update*. Erickson understood that some members were concerned about “ground[ing] our beliefs and actions as individual feminists and as an organization in biblical understanding and commitment to the Scriptures as authoritative.”¹⁸⁷ In response, Erickson explained that this concern was unfounded: “I do not believe our organization is backing away from that commitment; as a central guide, the Bible illuminates and informs all our attempts to understand our faith and ourselves.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ EEWC Archives, Ballot, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 3.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² My emphasis. EEWC Archives, “Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting,” 21-23 July 1989, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 7. See also EEWC Archives, “Change the Name? Or Keep It the Same? Report to the Board,” 5 February 1989, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 7. See also Horner, “Becoming All We’re Meant to Be,” 268.

¹⁸³ For example, one participant crossed out “a” and wrote in “the” central guide, noting: “Don’t weaken it too far” (Ballot, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 3).

¹⁸⁴ EEWC Archives, “Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting,” 21-23 July 1989, Series 1B, Box 5, Folder 7.

¹⁸⁵ EEWC Archives, Letter to Council Members from Florence Brown, 5 Oct. 1991, Series 1A, Box 1, Folder 5. See also Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 177.

¹⁸⁶ EEWC Archives, “Amended and Restated Bylaws of the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus,” Aug. 1991, Series 1A, Box 1, Folder 5.

¹⁸⁷ Joyce Erickson, “Coordinators Comments,” *Update*, vol 16 no 1 (Winter 1992), 6.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Other significant changes to the coalition's name and Statement of Faith occurred into the new millennium. In 2005, as the EEWC responded to internal and external changes (including increasing public access to the internet), the council decided to change the name of their newsletter from *Update* to *Christian Feminism Today*. The name change was designed to "identify who we are and what we're about, and...[to] bring internet web searches for key words related to Christian feminism directly to our 'door.'"¹⁸⁹ EEWC leaders named the coalition's website *Christian Feminism Today*, and in 2009, leaders and members renamed the coalition itself, although it remains incorporated as EEWC today.¹⁹⁰ The EEWC changed the Statement of Faith significantly again in 2007 as the council proposed revisions to "reflect and be consistent with EEWC's stated practice of welcoming people of all gender identities."¹⁹¹ The new statement aimed to eliminate language that implied a gender binary, replacing terms such as "the community of women and men" with "a community of people," for example.¹⁹² This change passed by a majority vote, and the EEWC amended its Statement of Faith.

Defying Descriptions

Scholars of biblical feminism often point to the EEWC's name and Statement of Faith changes as evidence that the coalition had lost influence among mainstream evangelicals. In *Evangelical Feminism: A History*, Pamela Cochran concluded that by the 1990s, the EEWC was no longer within evangelical boundaries, largely due to the coalition's relationship to Scripture.¹⁹³ Cochran noted that evangelicals have historically debated the parameters of biblical authority, negotiating apparent contradictions in Scripture and deciphering whether the text is without error "on every topic on which it touches, from faith to science to psychology."¹⁹⁴ Tracing this negotiation to the neo-evangelicalism of the 1950s, Cochran found that during the 1970s and into the 1980s, "the most vexing question" about biblical authority involved determining which scriptural principles were universal (applying to everyone across time and space) versus culturally limited (intended to be a guideline for a particular location, time, or circumstance).¹⁹⁵ This question was also of immense importance to biblical feminists as they grappled with the authority and applicable contexts of biblical passages that had historically been used to subjugate women.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ Claire Beutler-Cruise, "Council Meeting Report," *EEWC Update: Christian Feminism Today* (2005), vol. 29, no. 2, 10.

¹⁹⁰ "Our Origin," *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/about/>

¹⁹¹ EEWC Archives, Linda B. Brebner, "Response Required – Proposed Bylaws Change," 1 Oct. 2007, Series 1A, Box 1, Folder 7.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Cochran argues that "conflicting views of biblical authority" was the root of the schism between evangelical feminists and homosexuality was simply "the social issue that revealed the differences beneath the surface of biblical feminist solidarity" (*Evangelical Feminism*, 91).

¹⁹⁴ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 3-4. Cochran notes that, before the 1970s, American evangelicals considered the Bible "inerrant" (containing no errors on any subject). A distinction, which occurred among many evangelicals after the 1970s, was the view that the Bible is "infallible," meaning it contains no errors regarding Christian faith and practice (see also Andrea Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, 134-5).

¹⁹⁵ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 166.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* For example, biblical feminists dealt specifically with Bible passages that seemed to require women to remain silent in church (1 Cor 14:34-35), instructed wives to "submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to

Cochran argued that, as part of the broader evangelical matrix, biblical feminists helped shift acceptable boundaries of biblical interpretation within evangelicalism “away from inerrancy” toward engaging modern “methods of interpretation” into the 1980s.¹⁹⁷ However, for Cochran, the EEWC lost the ability to engage with or influence mainstream, authoritative evangelicalism when it prioritized social justice concerns over biblical authority and acceptable methods of biblical interpretation. For Cochran, when the EEWC affirmed support for gay rights in the mid-1980s, the coalition “gave greater weight to the authority of reason and experience” over the “unique authority of scripture in determining doctrine.”¹⁹⁸ Cochran argued that the CBE, conversely, maintained a biblical feminist presence within evangelicalism-proper because it interpreted Scripture as condemning homosexuality. With this interpretation, the CBE “regarded the Bible as the ultimate authority of right and wrong” and sustained its influence among mainstream evangelicals.¹⁹⁹ Cochran argued that an evangelical, using accepted evangelical tools to interpret Scripture, cannot conclude that the Bible supports homosexuality as a viable Christian path.

As soon as Cochran’s book was published, EEWC members began to refute their scholarly exclusion from evangelicalism. In 2005, Anne Eggebroten reviewed Cochran’s text in *Update*, explaining that “the biggest issue in the book is whether the EEWC is still evangelical,” which Cochran concluded it was not.²⁰⁰ However, Eggebroten challenged some of Cochran’s claims. For example, in a footnote, Cochran suggested that by 1994, “traditional evangelicals [were] marginalized in the EEWC.”²⁰¹ Eggebroten argued that the coalition remained a supportive and viable space for such evangelicals as “EEWC leaders individually and at conferences make a point of welcoming inquirers who are more traditional.”²⁰² Moreover, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, Eggebroten continued to identify as an evangelical even as the broader movement changed. Her decision was the result of much internal deliberation; thus, in the face of Cochran’s scholarly rejection, Eggebroten noted, “apparently that reflection was a waste of time; others will examine me and EEWC and decide whether or not we are truly evangelical.”²⁰³

Cochran’s *Evangelical Feminism* represented EEWC member Virginia Mollenkott as a powerful force leading the coalition away from correct evangelical engagement with Scripture. Cochran compared Mollenkott’s “liberal” approach to Scripture with that of fellow EEWC member (and later CBE member) Patricia Gundry, a “more conservative” biblical feminist. Cochran exemplified the work of these two authors because they represented “the more prolific and well-read” evangelical feminist writers of this period.²⁰⁴ According to Cochran, Gundry’s approach to

the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22), or disallowed women from being able to “teach or to assume authority over a man” (Timothy 2:12), among others.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 3-4; 64.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 106.

²⁰⁰ Eggebroten, “A Personal Reaction,” 9-10.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 9. See also Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 221.

²⁰² Eggebroten, “A Personal Reaction,” 9.

²⁰³ Ibid., 10.

²⁰⁴ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 45, 53-4. See also Cochran’s n.26, page 202. Pat Gundry was a member of EEWC and, later, CBE. Her book *Woman Be Free!* (New York: Zondervan, 1977) was impactful for the early biblical feminist movement.

Scripture supported “the evangelical conviction that the Bible, not culture, is the ultimate guide for Christian action.”²⁰⁵ In Cochran’s comparison:

Gundry and the more conservative evangelical feminists remained committed to a strict definition of biblical authority that did not allow them to ignore certain of Paul’s statements on women, whereas Mollenkott argued that a commitment to biblical authority was not incompatible with the view that some of Paul’s pronouncements were simply wrong because they were based on his limited human perspective.²⁰⁶

For Cochran, Mollenkott’s hermeneutical approach to Scripture, specifically her suggestion that Paul’s writings reflected human fallibility, was provocative to many evangelicals, including other biblical feminists.²⁰⁷ Cochran noted that “[m]any evangelicals questioned whether this hermeneutic for determining cultural limitations was legitimate and if it upheld biblical inspiration.”²⁰⁸ According to Cochran, resistance to Mollenkott’s hermeneutics contributed to the broader conversation regarding biblical authority, which led to mainstream evangelicals focusing on the problem of “how to determine when a text was culturally conditioned.”²⁰⁹

For Cochran, as the hermeneutical debate developed, only the “conservative” feminist approach to Scripture remained within the shifting boundaries of evangelicalism into the 1980s. The more “liberal” biblical feminists, and “specifically Virginia Mollenkott,” extended these boundaries too far, ultimately forcing “an awkward fit” between feminist interpretations of Scripture and “traditional” evangelical methods.²¹⁰ Cochran acknowledged that Mollenkott “claimed a location within evangelicalism” that included declaring “a belief in the traditional doctrines of the Christian community: the authority of scripture, the efficacy of Christ’s atonement on the cross, the necessity of a personal salvation experience, and the importance of evangelism and a transformed life.”²¹¹ However, *Evangelical Feminism* emphasized Mollenkott’s “lack of connection to the broader evangelical movement,” the proof of which was found in Mollenkott’s reliance upon “ties, socially and theologically, to organizations outside the [evangelical] coalition.”²¹² Cochran also challenged Mollenkott’s frequent citations in her work from authors who were not “primarily traditional evangelicals,” including sociologists, psychologists, feminist poets, and biblical feminists as proof of her disconnect from evangelicalism.²¹³ Thus, Cochran

²⁰⁵ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 45. Andrea Smith also compares Gundry and Mollenkott’s relationship with Scripture, supporting Cochran’s binary analysis. Smith writes: “Virginia Mollenkott and Patricia Gundry characterize two important strands of evangelical feminist biblical exegesis...Gundry presumes biblical inerrancy (the Bible contains no errors of any kind), while Mollenkott presumes neither inerrancy nor infallibility (the Bible teaches no errors regarding Christian doctrines of faith or practice)” (*Native Americans and the Christian Right* Smith, 134-5).

²⁰⁶ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 45.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 53-4.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 57. This dissertation introduces Mollenkott’s personal approach to Scripture in chapter three.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71-2.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 72.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

rejected the validity of Mollenkott's continued self-identification as an evangelical, concluding that Mollenkott's writings betrayed her real position as an outsider.²¹⁴

Virginia Mollenkott, like Eggebroten, responded to Cochran's claims in *Update*, defending her right to call herself an evangelical:

Since Pamela Cochran seems to view me as the most non-evangelical member of EEWC, I would like for the record to assert that I agree with all of David Scholer's guidelines for determining the cultural relativity of a Bible passage (summarized by Cochran on pp. 167-169). Furthermore, I practice them...If these are, as Cochran suggests, the "Evangelical Principles of Interpretation" (p. 165), then I must be evangelical, whether or not the traditional evangelical community likes the conclusion I have reached.²¹⁵

Mollenkott adamantly rejected Cochran's determination that she was not appropriately evangelical in her relationship to Scripture. Mollenkott argued that she adhered to the same biblical standards of interpretation that Cochran identified as acceptable for evangelicals, which included guidelines for determining universal versus limited biblical passages outlined by New Testament scholar David Scholer.²¹⁶ Scholer's rules, for example, stipulated that evangelicals must decipher "the central core of the gospel message" to determine its limitations because if the passage highlights this core message, it is likely to reflect universal principles. Scholer also suggested that the "frequency of a topic indicates the emphasis placed on it...baptism is mentioned ...often, and so it is more likely to be a universal teaching."²¹⁷ Mollenkott argued that if Cochran defined adherence to these rules as the determining factor of evangelical identity, then Cochran was wrong to exclude Mollenkott from this status and community.

By defending their personal beliefs in *Update*, Mollenkott and Eggebroten highlighted the significant stakes of being excluded from evangelicalism. Cochran's conclusions did not just discredit claims to a label for Mollenkott and Eggebroten (and other EEWC members) or criticize their relationship with Scripture. By rejecting the EEWC's claims to evangelicalism, Cochran challenged how some EEWC members expressed and practiced their faith and fit in with their communities. Eggebroten explained, "It is painful to be excluded...from the kind of Christianity to which I still feel an allegiance...My commitment to biblical authority, my hermeneutics, and my

²¹⁴ Ibid., 74. Cochran further notes that Mollenkott "had little exposure to institutional evangelicalism," and "few ties to traditional evangelical organizations like Bible schools (such as the Moody Bible Institute), seminaries (Fuller Theological Seminary, Gordon Conwell, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Dallas Theological Seminary), or parachurch groups (InterVarsity, Youth for Christ)" (72-3).

²¹⁵ Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "Cochran's Evangelical Feminism – Yet Once More," *Update*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Jan-March 2006), 3.

²¹⁶ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 168-9.

²¹⁷ Ibid. Scholer's remaining principles, according to Cochran, include: "(3) Descriptive passages should be distinguished from didactic ones. Descriptive passages should...be related to normative teachings in order to be authoritative... (4) Notice when the New Testament has a consistent witness on a particular point and when there are differences. When there are differences, the teaching may not be universal...(5) One must also discern the difference between principle and application. The former may be absolute, whereas the latter is variable...(6) Ask whether any other passages of scripture specifically limit a text...(7) The more cultural options that are open to the writer, the greater is the likelihood of cultural relativity...(8) it is important to compare the cultural setting of New Testament times with that of one's own time..." (*Evangelical Feminism*, 168-9).

behavioural norms are suddenly not good enough. It's like becoming a leper overnight."²¹⁸ Cochran's conclusions brought up feelings of fear and rejection that were familiar to Eggebroten, and she recalled the first time she voiced feminist ideas among fellow evangelicals: "It reminds me of how I felt in 1970 when I first cautiously expressed interest in women's issues to other members of InterVarsity on my college campus."²¹⁹ Mollenkott also found Cochran's conclusions to be painfully reminiscent of exclusionary and harmful discourses she had experienced: "Having felt the pain of being forced into limited roles defined by 'strict outlines' crafted by white men, we feminist women should not inflict such pain upon others."²²⁰

Eggebroten and Mollenkott represented just two of many EEWC members who expressed surprise and dismay with Cochran's deductions in *Evangelical Feminism*. Numerous EEWC members continued to self-identify as evangelical, with thoughtful and increasingly defensive justifications for claiming this description. Yet, this conversation was nothing new for evangelical feminists; EEWC participants have consistently defended their right to call themselves "evangelicals." As the EEWC mediated Christian and feminist ideals regarding gender, sexuality, and race, the coalition consistently negotiated questions of identity within its ranks and external challenges from the broader evangelical community. Cochran's scholarly gatekeeping of evangelicalism-proper was simply the most recent and public iteration of an ongoing discussion.

Conclusion

The EEWC continued to grow and change throughout the 1990s and 2000s and today exists as the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus – Christian Feminism Today (EEWC-CFT). In its most recent iteration, the EEWC-CFT has redefined itself once again as a social-justice-oriented group of Christian feminists from diverse traditions. The EEWC-CFT continues to prioritize gender equality and Scripture, declaring on its website: "We believe answers to hard questions can be found through careful feminist examination of the Bible."²²¹ The coalition also proudly asserts its historical and ongoing support for "LGBTQ people in church and society."²²² In the biblical feminist matrix, the EEWC-CFT and CBE continue to interact with one another. Anne Linstatter (previously Eggebroten) recently wrote an article for CFT's website reflecting on the ongoing relationship between the two coalitions. Linstatter noted, "LGBT issues continue to distinguish CBE from EEWC-CFT, but as social attitudes and laws in the US change, CBE too is evolving."²²³ For Linstatter, an important symbol of CBE's shifting classification is that it removed its anti-homosexuality position from its Statement of Faith, placing it in "a less prominent place on the website" as a "core value" instead.²²⁴ Despite this perceived weakening of CBE's stance against homosexuality, Linstatter

²¹⁸ Eggebroten, "A Personal Reaction," 10.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Mollenkott, "Cochran's Evangelical Feminism," 4. Cochran does not identify herself as a feminist in *Evangelical Feminism*, therefore it is unclear if Mollenkott is referring to Cochran as a feminist here, or if she is referring to feminist women creating exclusionary boundaries for one another in general.

²²¹ "About," *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/about/>.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Anne Linstatter, "CBE and EEWC: Sisters after All," *CFT*, <https://eewc.com/cbe-and-eewc-sisters-after-all/>

²²⁴ Ibid. See also "CBE's Mission and Values," *CBE International*, https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary_page/cbes-mission/#StatementofFaith.

acknowledged that the two coalitions still held different views “on the same-sex issues that divide our country.”²²⁵ According to Linstatter, however, both coalitions are valid and valuable avenues for biblical feminist work: “We are sister organizations after all, working to bring the good news of healing and wholeness in Jesus to all women.”²²⁶

Applying Hacking’s concept of “interactive kinds” offers a reinterpretation of the histories of biblical feminism, evangelicalism, and feminism from the 1970s. Highlighting the reciprocity between biblical feminists, evangelicals, and feminists illustrates how these relationships have shaped and reshaped available categories in their matrices, creating new identities and ways of being. Biblical feminism’s dynamic matrix included an increasingly conservative mainstream evangelicalism, which was reflected and perpetuated by institutions within the New Christian Right; emerging conservative evangelical women’s coalitions that shaped gender roles and laid claim to “true” feminism; a new biblical feminist coalition (CBE) that expanded the movement and created competition for the EEWC; and new descriptions, including “complementarianism,” under which evangelicals could act. Within this changing matrix, biblical feminists and the EEWC changed. The coalition’s name-change and modified Statement of Faith reflected EEWC members’ acute awareness of shifts regarding the label “evangelical.” Biblical feminism continually negotiated its position amidst these transformations. In a looping effect, changes within biblical feminism also changed its matrix. Examining biblical feminists as an “interactive kind” challenges the common dialectical framing that the EEWC was on a trajectory toward feminism and away from evangelicalism. Hacking’s argument that categories are active, in relationship with their matrix, and reciprocal, provides a more comprehensive glimpse into biblical feminism and evangelicalism as classifications. Biblical feminists continue to push boundaries within and through their coalitions, and they continue to disrupt, influence, and alter their broader matrix.

²²⁵ Linstatter, “CBE and EEWC.”

²²⁶ Ibid.

Conclusion

How Do Movements Begin?

Letha Scanzoni, foremother of the biblical feminist movement, passed away in January of 2024 as I was finishing this dissertation. I was fortunate to interview Letha Scanzoni in 2022, and her work and message have been integral to this project. However, it is the record of Scanzoni's life, faith, and feminism, as represented in her obituaries, that frames this conclusion. Multiple media platforms, including *The New York Times*, *Christianity Today*, and, of course, *Christian Feminism Today*, reported on Scanzoni's death. How these obituaries portrayed Letha Scanzoni and biblical feminism more broadly reveals the intersections between biblical feminism and its matrix, as well as ongoing tensions between evangelicals, feminists, and biblical feminists around sexuality and gender. The obituaries also illuminate political, social, and religious polarization in the broader contemporary American landscape.

The *New York Times* obituary remembers Letha Scanzoni as "an evangelical author" and a "pioneer of evangelical feminism."¹ The *Times* then pivots to position Scanzoni within a secular feminist context, emphasizing that Betty Friedan's best-selling *The Feminine Mystique* was part of the climate within which Scanzoni began writing. The obituary notes that Scanzoni "had the same questions as her secular sisters: Should women be submissive to their husbands and stay out of leadership roles in the church, as many fundamentalist Christians believed?" Tracing Scanzoni's work on women's roles and biblical equality, the *Times* notes the powerful impact of Scanzoni's writing on her biblical feminist community. Historian Kristin Kobes Du Mez, interviewed for the obituary, explains the "immediate" backlash that Scanzoni (and other pioneering biblical feminists) experienced in representing early biblical feminist ideals as evangelicals solidified an ideology of female submission and male headship. However, Du Mez positions Scanzoni as a powerful force of resistance against this ideology, noting, "Letha was such a threat because she presented her case for feminism in evangelical terms, making it hard for critics to depict feminism as a wholly secular movement intent on undermining traditional Christianity."²

In comparison, the *Christianity Today* obituary introduces Letha Scanzoni as having "launched a biblical feminism movement but lost influence among evangelicals because of her support for LGBTQ affirmation."³ The obituary notes that Scanzoni "continued to identify as an evangelical. And she always insisted her beliefs were based in the Bible," despite being "marginalized" by the broader evangelical community.⁴ While the *Times* framed Scanzoni's feminist journey in relationship with secular feminism, according to *Christianity Today*, "Scanzoni didn't think of herself as a rabble-rouser or a crusading feminist. Nor, she later recalled, did anyone else. 'Most people thought of me as a homemaker, a stay-at-home mom,' she said."⁵ In tracing Scanzoni's writing and its impacts, the *Christianity Today* obituary highlights how her

¹ Penelope Green, "Letha Dawson Scanzoni, Pioneer of Evangelical Feminism, Dies at 88," *New York Times*, 30 January, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/30/us/letha-dawson-scanzoni-dead.html>.

² Du Mez qt'd in Green, "Letha."

³ Daniel Silliman, "Died: Letha Dawson Scanzoni, Who Argued Feminism Is Biblical," *Christianity Today*, 5 February 2024, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2024/february/obit-letha-dawson-scanzoni-feminism-biblical-evangelical.html>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

feminist views, including support for gay rights, made her “unwelcome in places she had been welcome before. Invitations to speak at evangelical conferences and colleges stopped coming. Pitches to write for evangelical outlets stopped being accepted.”⁶ In the *Times* obituary, Du Mez portrayed Scanzoni as a formidable and influential figure; however, in the *Christianity Today* obituary, Scanzoni appears almost as a wannabe evangelical, a pariah attempting to lay claim to a community that had already determined: “She was no longer welcome.”⁷

As might be expected, the *Christian Feminism Today* obituary is both lengthier and more personal than the articles in the *New York Times* and *Christianity Today*. Although Scanzoni retired from the EEW-CFT in 2013, she maintained friendships within the community into her final years, including with the author of the *CFT* obituary, Kendra Weddle.⁸ The *CFT* article introduces Scanzoni as “an evangelical [who] was widely recognized for her unwavering advocacy for and support of LGBTQIA+ persons as well as feminism as a commitment required by Christian faith.”⁹ *Christian Feminism Today* highlights Scanzoni’s extensive corpus of publications, underscoring the significance of her work for biblical feminism. Weddle also declares that “no one has had more influence on the [EEWC-CFT] than Letha,” citing Scanzoni’s “published articles, speaking engagements, and plenary addresses at...national meetings” as providing meaningful leadership to the coalition.¹⁰ Noting that “Letha always saw herself as an evangelical,” Weddle validates Scanzoni’s evangelicalism, noting, “She knew Scripture and could quote chapter and verse with the most ardent biblical scholars. But more than that, the Bible was a constant source of inspiration and guidance. She also experienced a vibrant relationship with Christ.”¹¹

The *New York Times* and *Christianity Today* obituaries discussed Scanzoni’s precarious position within evangelicalism, highlighting the backlash from the community (*NYT*) and Scanzoni’s presumed excommunication from evangelicalism (*CT*). The *Christian Feminism Today* tribute, conversely, acknowledged the challenges that Scanzoni faced in claiming an evangelical identity but defended her evangelical status. Weddle noted, “Despite her faith, evangelical insiders worked to keep Letha on the margins (see *The Other Evangelicals* by Isaac B. Sharp). Her critics often argued that she had fallen victim to the slippery slope—the idea that once someone embraces one belief outside of the mainstream, subsequent beliefs beyond a theological boundary will become accepted as well.”¹² According to *Christian Feminism Today*, Scanzoni overcame such critiques with a “Love Thy Neighbor” approach to faith: “where empathy and relationships are centered as opposed to rules or restrictions...loving thy neighbor viewed God as love, centering people as made in the image of God.”¹³ Moreover, Weddle argued that Scanzoni’s

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kendra Weddle co-authored a book about Scanzoni’s life and work as a pioneering biblical feminist with fellow EWC member and biblical feminist scholar Jann Aldredge-Clanton in 2018: *Building Bridges: Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Friends* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers). Weddle also noted her ongoing friendship with Scanzoni and Scanzoni’s continued impact on Weddle’s life in the *CFT* obituary (Weddle, “Letha Dawson Scanzoni: A Christian Feminist Voice,” *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/letha-dawson-scanzoni-a-christian-feminist-voice/>).

⁹ Weddle, “Letha Dawson Scanzoni: A Christian Feminist Voice,” *Christian Feminism Today*, <https://eewc.com/letha-dawson-scanzoni-a-christian-feminist-voice/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. Weddle also cites her book on Scanzoni for more on this approach (*Building Bridges*, 44).

co-authorship of *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, which cost her “income and status” within evangelical circles, was an inherently Christian act. According to Weddle, although Scanzoni “never talked about it this way,” such “an example of sacrifice” was “the most important ethic Jesus taught.”¹⁴

The *Christian Feminism Today* article emphasized the collaborative relationship between evangelicalism and feminism in Scanzoni’s life and work. Weddle cited Christian author Brian D. McLaren’s excerpt about Scanzoni from Weddle’s most recent book:

Many think of Letha Dawson Scanzoni above all as a feminist, and that is no doubt legitimate. But I think of her first and foremost as a courageous biblical interpreter, because when I was a young evangelical, I watched her take the same biblical texts that the [white male] evangelical gatekeepers used to oppress others and instead use them to liberate.¹⁵

Weddle also cited her co-author, Jann Aldredge-Clanton’s excerpt: “The call to gender justice could reach me only through the Bible. *All We’re Meant to Be* transformed my life with new revelations from the Bible.”¹⁶

These three obituaries portray Letha Scanzoni’s faith, feminism, work, and influence in different ways. The distinct focuses of each represent ongoing tensions between the evangelical, feminist, and biblical feminist movements. The *New York Times* and *Christianity Today* obituaries enforce boundaries between evangelicalism and feminism; they highlight the problems that Scanzoni’s identity posed at the intersections of these ideologies, specifically regarding gender and sexuality discourses, including Scanzoni’s advocacy for LGBTQIA+ rights. The *Christian Feminism Today* obituary, conversely, emphasizes Scanzoni’s ability to bridge these ideologies. Weddle suggests that Scanzoni’s relationship to Christ and Scripture makes her an evangelical, regardless of criticisms. Most interestingly, Weddle aligns Scanzoni’s LGBTQIA+ activism with Christian values, arguing that the sacrifices and struggles that Scanzoni faced through this activism made her an ideal Christian role model.

By tracing the coalitional history of the Evangelical Women’s Caucus, this dissertation demonstrates that these tensions are not new to biblical feminists. From the EWC’s inception, biblical feminists have navigated pushback, conflict, and rejection within their broader matrices. Such challenges are inherent in coalition-building because activists create coalitions to transform the status quo. Early biblical feminists established the EWC to challenge the dominant gender ideology among evangelicals that supported wifely submission and a husband’s headship in the marital relationship. The EWC advocated for biblical gender equality and supported women’s leadership in the church, home, and society. In so doing, the EWC struck a nerve within the broader evangelical community. As the coalition developed, biblical feminists employed strategies to sustain internal unity and external credibility among their broader movements. Biblical feminists chose their coalition’s battles carefully: they decided to maintain a “non-position” on the increasingly polarizing topic of abortion. Later, however, they took a stand

¹⁴ Weddle, “Letha Dawson Scanzoni.”

¹⁵ Ibid.; Weddle and Aldredge-Clanton, *Building Bridges*, p. xviii.

¹⁶ Ibid.

against mainstream evangelical views and decided to support gay rights. The EWC also attempted to expand its reach beyond mainstream evangelical racial homogeneity to support and advocate for Christian women of colour and Black women, a goal which the coalition failed to achieve. At various points throughout the EWC's history, evangelicals and scholars of evangelicalism have challenged the coalition's evangelical status due to existing tensions. Yet the coalition survives today and continues to shape and be shaped by its matrix.

Because coalitions are created in response to a perceived problem with the status quo and sustained in relationship with their matrices, coalitions are historically and culturally contingent. By examining the EWC's strategies, successes, failures, and relationships as a coalition, this dissertation highlights broader cultural and historical discourses within the American landscape. For biblical feminists, these discourses have centered around gender and gender roles, reproductive rights, sexuality and gay rights, and race and racism. These issues remain integral to contemporary discourses about polarization in American culture and, as such, require consistent negotiation among diverse coalitions. How coalitions engage with these debates influences the kinds of alliances they form and their ability to build relationships within the broader American climate.

Biblical Feminism and Contemporary Discourses

Part of America's contemporary popular narrative asserts that social, religious, and political issues have polarized the country. Politicians and the media perpetuate this idea, which is reflected by opinion studies of the American population. In his inaugural speech as President of the United States in 2021, Joe Biden proclaimed: "I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new.... We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal."¹⁷ Media outlets, including the *New York Times*, *Fox News*, and *Christianity Today*, among others, have reported on the problems of contemporary polarization within the American political and religious climate over the last decade.¹⁸ While reflecting on surveys of Americans over the past few years, in 2020 the PEW Research Center determined that, "Americans have rarely been as polarized as they are today."¹⁹

¹⁷ Joseph R. Biden Jr., "Inaugural Address by President Joseph R. Biden Jr.," Jan. 20, 2021, The United States Capitol, video and transcript, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55656824>.

¹⁸ See Blake Hounshell, "Measuring America's Divide: 'It's Gotten Worse,'" *New York Times*, July 27, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/27/us/politics/vanderbilt-unity-index.html>; Nikolas Lanum, "Young, White men and Women Polarized Over Political Leanings and Feminism: Survey," *Fox News*, November 11, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/media/young-white-men-women-polarized-political-leanings-feminism-survey>; "How Should the Church Respond to Political Polarization?" *Christianity Today*, September 21, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/september-web-only/brazil-evangelicals-church-political-polarization.html>; *Ms. Magazine*, following a NARAL study, criticizes media reports of polarization among Americans regarding abortion as misrepresenting the American public and creating a more severe binary than exists (Zoe Larkin, "Abortion Media Coverage Is 'Deeply, and Problematically, Politicized' Says Study," *Ms. Magazine*, January 7, 2020, <https://msmagazine.com/2020/07/01/abortion-media-coverage-is-deeply-and-problematically-politicized-says-study/>).

¹⁹ Michael Dimock and Richard Wike, "American is Exceptional in the Nature of its Political Divide," *Pew Research Centre*, November 13, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/11/13/america-is-exceptional-in-the-nature-of-its-political-divide/>.

The PEW researchers noted that, leading up to the 2020 presidential election, “eight-in-ten registered voters in both camps [Democrats and Republicans] said their differences with the other side were about core American values.”²⁰ American “core values” include issues discussed throughout this dissertation, including gender, reproductive rights, sexuality, and race. Moreover, the polarization narrative has roots in these discourses, including continued connections between the Republican Party and White evangelicals (discussed in chapter five), and Democrats and abortion rights (and thus, feminists, as discussed in chapter two).²¹

American sociologist James Davison Hunter introduced the narrative of American polarization in the early 1990s, popularizing the idea that the United States was undergoing a “culture war.” Hunter defined cultural conflict “as political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding.”²² Hunter argued that the American culture war involved political disputes over reproductive rights (“abortion”), race and gender (including “affirmative action and quotas”), and sexuality (“gay rights”), among other issues.²³ These conflicts emerged out of the social and cultural changes of the 1960s, including the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, and the gay rights movement.²⁴ For Hunter, the foundation of the conflict centered on moral authority and conflicting moral visions, including how “people determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong acceptable or unacceptable, and so on.”²⁵ And according to Hunter, the stakes of this conflict were high: “Our most fundamental ideas about who we are as Americans are now at odds.”²⁶

Scholars continue to debate whether Hunter’s “culture war” thesis accurately represents the American social, political, and religious landscape.²⁷ The parameters of that discussion are

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Daniel K. Williams traces historical diversity between Republican and Democratic positions on abortion rights, noting that the contemporary boundaries of Democrats supporting abortion rights were solidified in the 1990s (“The Partisan Trajectory,” 467); see also Spruill, *Divided We Stand*.

²² James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 42.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Andrew Hartman, “The Sixties as Liberation,” in *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 9-37; see also Thomas Carothers, “The Long Path of Polarization in the United States,” in *Democracies Divided: The Global Challenge of Political Polarization*, eds. Andrew O’Donohue and Thomas Carothers (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2020), 65. Hunter does not elaborate at length on the roots of the current polarization climate because “a full explanation would require a separate volume” (*Culture Wars*, 62). However, Hunter does suggest that, after World War II, “the transformation of our economy from an industry-oriented to an information-oriented system,” and increasing rates of higher education for Americans, contributed to new ideas about how “Americans should order our lives together” (62-3). Hunter suggests these “societal changes have been firmly established since the 1960s” (63).

²⁵ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 48.

²⁶ Ibid., 42.

²⁷ Rhys H. Williams argues that the culture war narrative suggests a false clear ideological binary, which does not reflect the actual American landscape: “Public opinion is more diverse, less radical, and not nearly as coherent as the image of a culture war suggests” (“Religious Social Movements in the Public Sphere: Organization, Ideology, and Activism,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 322). Williams cites the following two sociological studies to prove his point: DiMaggio, Paul, John Evans, and Bethany Bryson. “Have American’s Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?” *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 3 (1996), 690–755; Daniel Olson, “Dimensions of Cultural Tension Among the American Public,” in *Cultural Wars in American Politics: Critical Reviews of a Popular Myth*, ed. Rhys H. Williams (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997), 237-57). Sociologist Robert Wuthnow has argued that a cultural realignment occurred between

beyond the scope of this project, however this dissertation agrees with Hunter's claim that an ideological shift occurred in American culture in the 1960s and 1970s, signaled by the creation of new and previously unexpected coalitions.²⁸ According to Hunter, Americans' differing views regarding social and "moral" issues remade the boundaries of pre-existing alliances, and this divide "cut[] across the old lines of conflict, making the distinctions that long divided Americans – those between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews – virtually irrelevant."²⁹ Hunter labelled these new coalitions "unlikely alliances" because they transgressed previously established groups of faith traditions and fostered novel relationships between old enemies.³⁰ These new coalitions were revolutionary in breaking down existing boundaries and exposing the instability of previous coalitions. The Evangelical Women's Caucus was one such alliance that sought to bridge divides and create a revolutionary coalition between potentially conflicting ideologies.

The current representation of American polarization in the media and among the population revolves around the very issues that have shaped the EWC from its inception: gender, reproductive rights, sexuality, and race. The EWC's coalition history is therefore also a history of the construction, maintenance, and negotiation of the social, political, and moral boundaries that continue to shape American identity discourses. Moreover, just as silences and absences within an archive reveal alternative stories or the archive's own "counternarrative," the coalition history of the EWC reveals the fault lines of contemporary coalitions.³¹ Uncovering these fault lines provides space to imagine other "unlikely alliances," and with them, a new present. The EWC's history also reminds us that the boxes we construct to understand the past as historians and scholars are, in fact, constructions. Historical reality does not obey the confines of such categories. As feminist historian Sara Evans notes, "[i]f human identities are both multiple and fluid, the human communities generated by grassroots organizing are similarly never fixed and always filled with competing perspectives and interests."³² By examining biblical feminism through the lens of coalition-building, this dissertation highlights the complexity, contradictions, and nuances involved in identity construction and activism. Biblical feminists complicate historical categories, and their coalitions reflect "what we know intuitively from our own experiences but rarely acknowledge in the lives we study historically...[that] people travel in many circles at the same time."³³

The Evangelical Women's Caucus transgressed boundaries and created new identities and discourses, which continue to impact the American landscape. The obituaries for Letha Scanzoni in the *New York Times* and *Christianity Today* suggest the enduring impact of biblical feminism, evidenced by the ongoing backlash against the biblical feminist movement represented in these

religious conservatives among all denominations versus religious liberals of all denominations, see for example *The Restructuring of American Religion*; and *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989). See also James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe, *Is There a Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006).

²⁸ See also Petro, *After the Wrath of God*, 59.

²⁹ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 43. Emphasis in original. See also Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*; Petro, *Wrath*, 59.

³⁰ Ibid., 48; Andrea Smith also uses this phrasing in *Native Americans and the Christian Right*.

³¹ Morgan, "Archives and Histories," 154; see also Vivian M. May, "Anna Julia Cooper," 247. For more on archives as spaces that reveal their own limitations and subvert their own stories, see chapters one and four.

³² Evans, "Foreword," x.

³³ Gilmore, "Thinking about Feminist Coalitions," 5.

articles. Both obituaries seek to separate evangelicalism from feminism and demarcate the boundaries between Scanzoni's feminist and evangelical values. However, in the *Christian Feminism Today* obituary we are reminded that such divisions are not as clear or stable as they might appear; the *CFT* record of Scanzoni's life highlights the bridges she built between evangelicalism and feminism in her life, faith, and activism. Contemporary scholars and activists can draw on the EWC's history of coalition-building to develop strategies that challenge current divisions and build new transformative coalitions. Perhaps Letha Scanzoni can continue to provide guidance in this process: "Now, how do movements begin?" she asked her fellow EWC members at the coalition's fortieth anniversary conference. "They begin with questions. They begin with the sense that the thing you're being told isn't really what is happening. Then other people start asking the same questions, and these people get together. A movement starts."³⁴

³⁴ Scanzoni, "Let Justice Roll on Like a River," *Christian Feminism Today*, 2014, <https://eewc.com/letha-dawson-scanzoni-50-years-biblical-feminism/>.

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