

STAINED GLASS MAKES THE CEILING VISIBLE

Organizational Opposition to Women in Congregational Leadership

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While women represent the vast majority of participants in religious organizations in the United States, their participation in top leadership positions within Christian congregations remains remarkably low. In this article, the author uses the National Congregations Study to examine the situations that lead to this “stained glass ceiling” effect, prohibiting women from attaining top congregational leadership positions. The author also investigates similar barriers that exist at other levels of congregational leadership. The results suggest that while a queue-like process appears, the specifically religious nature of these organizations produces barriers that are quite different from the traditional glass ceiling conceptualization.

Keywords: *religion; church leadership; glass ceiling*

For most of Christian history, official church policies excluded women from holding clergy positions. While these policies have changed dramatically within many denominations (Chaves 1997; Jacquet 1988), the number of women rising to clergy positions remains remarkably low (Konieczny and Chaves 2000). Although some have suggested that the clergy is a partially feminizing occupation (Nesbitt 1997), the vast majority of clergy in the United States are still men (85.7 percent, U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996).¹ Similar barriers oppose women’s participation in other forms of religious leadership as well (Finlay 2003; Sullins 2000), although the strongest are

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those keeping women from rising to the highest position in a congregation—head clergy. In this article, I therefore investigate the organizational configurations that result in women's being severely underrepresented in the leadership of religious organizations despite more men than women participating in those same organizations.

I first situate the case of religious congregations' opposition to women's leadership within its historical context. I then review relevant work from the gender occupational and sociology of religion literatures to develop models of the barriers facing women at three stages of congregational leadership. These stages include participation in general leadership activities, speaking in congregational services, and rising to the position of head clergy. I explore each of these models using data from the National Congregations Study (NCS; Chaves 1998), the first nationally representative sample of U.S. congregations.

My multitiered approach shows the existing queue-like process that increases organizational opposition to women's leadership with each increase in level of authority. These models show some significant differences in the barriers to women's reaching head clergy compared to barriers experienced in other occupational settings. Consistent with occupational settings, however, the strongest opposition exists at the organization's highest positions. In addition, these models suggest that the barriers in the religious context may be a particularly salient symbolic marker, providing further differentiation between the religious and general occupational settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women are slightly more involved than men in religious congregational participation and general leadership and recently have even outpaced men in enrollment in seminary programs (Sullins 2000). This pattern stands in stark contrast to the observation that less than 5 percent of all head clergy in U.S. congregations are women (see NCS).² While some researchers have studied what keeps women out of the top positions in congregations, they do so largely with small qualitative studies or single denomination analyses (Finlay 2003; Sullins 2000). By focusing on denominations, variation may be masked, a problem that has been noted in studies of congregational growth (Iannaccone 1996). With this article, I investigate how readily the models developed in the sociology of religion literature extend to a nationally representative sample of congregations. I also develop models of these barriers in relationship to the existing literature on women's exclusion from other forms of organizational leadership (e.g., occupational, governmental, etc.).

Within Christian traditions, both those arguing for and those arguing against women's holding congregational leadership positions frequently draw support from the Bible (Chaves 1997).³ Those who support women's involvement in congregational leadership claim Biblical support for the notion of gender equality and nondifference (Galatians 3:28). They also point to passages that show women in New Testament churches clearly serving in positions of authority (e.g., Titus 2:4-5; Romans 16:1-6; Acts 21:9), suggesting they provide implicit support for women's inclusion in ordained ministry (Witherington 1988). Furthermore, they point out that passages dealing with prophecy in a congregation do not address whether women should participate in this form of leadership but instead prescribe how their participation should take place (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11:4-5; Acts 2:16-18).

Those who contend that congregational leadership should not be open to women focus on passages that they claim support the submissiveness of women within the congregation (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35), which they claim is best summarized with one verse, "The women are to keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak" (1 Corinthians 14:34).⁴ Those arguing for only men in congregational leadership also suggest that the inclusion of "being the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2, 3:12; Titus 1:6) in lists of qualifications for being a deacon or elder implicitly eliminates women from eligibility to fill those (or any other) leadership positions. Interestingly, the majority of these passages do not address leadership but focus on the inclusion or exclusion of women from speaking roles in a congregation (whether teaching, prophecy, or other speaking). While this has been mentioned briefly in previous literature (Chaves 1997; Wallace 1992), it has not directly influenced the ways models have been developed, a distinction I will address in this article.

In the past century, the proportion of Christian denominations that prohibit women from top organizational leadership positions declined from nearly 93 percent to less than half (Chaves 1996). Some researchers have shown that while gender biases in official policies of many organizations have similarly changed in the past several decades, the unofficial practices often fail to match these policy changes (Acker 1974; Reskin 1993; Weick 1979). The mismatch between official organizational policy and actual organizational practices, that is, loose-coupling, is well established in the organizational literature (Weick 1979) and has been suggested for churches in particular (Chaves 1997). For example, hiring that is based primarily on informal networks is more likely to remain sex segregated than that which relies on more formalized screening criteria (Braddock and McPartland 1987; Roos and Reskin 1984), as is that that relies more on internal than external hiring markets (Baron and Bielby 1985). Furthermore, in the religious context, the above discussion of Biblical justifications for women's

exclusion from leadership may represent a different form of loose-coupling, which detaches the reasons given for their exclusion (perceived prohibitions against speaking) from the actual positions to which those prohibitions are applied (general pastoral leadership).

Reskin and Roos (1990) introduced the idea of gender queues, which accounts for observed high levels of gender segregation in occupational settings produced when potential employees outnumber employer needs. They suggest that while these gender differences are diminishing in some settings, in the many where they do remain, they are produced, at least in part, through the simultaneous rankings of jobs by applicants and potential employees by organizations, which continue to favor men. While most research describing these gender discrepancies focuses on for-profit firms, some recent work shows that there are similar barriers to women in national legislatures (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Paxton and Kunovich 2003), in political advocacy groups (Shaiko 1996), and in labor movements (Fonow 2003; Martin 2006). This article, in part, examines how these barriers translate to women in the congregational context.

Traditional labor markets are frequently described as filters in which each successive job level demands increased skill and commitment from those filling the position. A similar staging process exists in the congregational setting and frames the way I will now discuss the models developed here. I draw on existing literature to give a picture of what we should expect at several levels of religious involvement: participation, general leadership, seminary education, congregational preaching, and reaching the head clergy position. In following this stage approach, I approximate how a queue-like process develops in the religious context.

The first stage of involvement in a religious congregation is participation. Existing research consistently shows that women compose the largest proportion of religious participants (Bruce 2002; Miller and Hoffman 1995; Sherkat 1998; Smith et al. 2002; see Figure 1 below for NCS congregations). Beyond composing the majority of congregational participants (mean = 56 percent women; see NCS), women also contribute a substantial majority of a congregation's general leadership (mean = 59 percent women; see NCS). These figures are consistent with other work that shows that women hold about half (or a slight majority) of American congregational leadership positions (Bruce 2002). Ozorak (1996) suggests that the existing contradiction between these observed high levels of women's participation in religion and their low representation among the leadership can help to create legitimating stories for women's religious experiences, which are different from those that produce congregational leadership. As a result, the very discrepancies observed therefore may reproduce or even exacerbate the

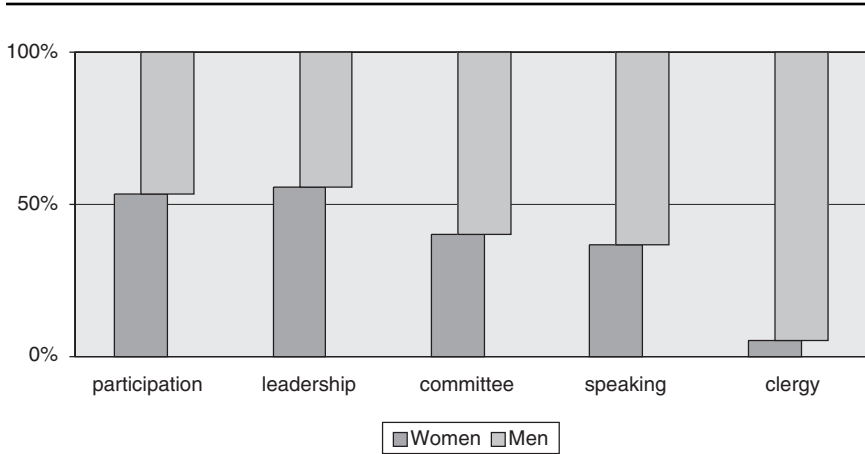


Figure 1: Gender Composition of Different Forms of Religious Participation

existing underrepresentation of women among congregational leadership described in the models below. The first stage of this model will therefore address what contributes to the gendered proportion of a congregation's general leadership participation as the most inclusive form of leadership that will be examined in this article.

Perhaps the most consistently addressed prediction in previous research addressing gender in religious organizational leadership is the difference between religious traditions, particularly within Protestant Christianity. Structural inertia theorists suggest that older organizations are more resistant to change, which would predict that fewer women should be found in positions of leadership in older congregations than in newer ones. Sociologists of religion (Chaves 1997; Konieczny and Chaves 2000) have traditionally conceptualized this more in terms of theological histories than simply organizational characteristics. While my models will include both possibilities, consistent with previous research in religious contexts in particular, I predict the following:

Hypothesis 1: Congregations of mainline denominations should have more women in all positions of leadership than conservative/evangelical congregations.

Existing literature shows that most organizations have a tendency toward homophily (Baron and Bielby 1985; Kalleberg et al. 1996; McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1987), suggesting that we should see greater

representation of women among all levels of leadership in congregations with higher representation of women. This prediction also coincides with existing findings in another vein of the sociology of religion literature, which frames the relationship slightly differently, instead suggesting it as an issue of availability. Researchers have shown that congregations that do not have sufficient resources are more likely to draw women leaders than those with comparatively more resources. They argue that availability of men in a congregation is but one of these necessary resources for men to be recruited as leaders. These researchers (Konieczny and Chaves 2000) find that congregations that are smaller, have fewer staff, are located in urban, poor, and Southern regions reflect this relative resource scarcity as compared to their larger, suburban, affluent, non-South counterparts. Either of these options suggests the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Congregations with fewer men, and those congregations that are otherwise resource poor should be more likely to have women in all positions of leadership than comparatively resource-rich congregations.

The next step in climbing the congregational leadership ladder, speaking in weekend worship services, is increasingly split along gender lines (Chaves 1997; Wallace 1992). Previous research finds considerable participation by women in this form of congregational leadership despite the fact that it is the topic most directly related to the prohibitions drawn from the Bible (see above). Interestingly, researchers find that it is quite common for congregations to indicate their willingness to allow women to fill the pulpit, regardless of their stated position on women's ordination (Purvis 1995; Wallace 1992). Following the scriptural debate concerning women's congregational leadership, a congregation's belief in the inerrancy of scripture should contribute to the number of women speakers in their weekend services, but it is unclear what effect this belief should have on the gender composition of other leadership positions, although it will be included in each of the stages I investigate below. Formally,

Hypothesis 3: Congregations that believe in the inerrancy of scripture should have fewer women speaking in weekend services than those without a similar belief.

Case studies and small sample research of Black Protestant congregations and denominational-specific analyses of Roman Catholics suggest these congregations frequently have women serving in positions of congregational

leadership but do so more out of necessity than due to doctrinal beliefs in gender equality and that they frequently will have the strongest barriers keeping women out of official leadership positions (Purvis 1995; Wallace 1992). Consistent with this research, I expect the following:

Hypothesis 4: Black Protestant and Roman Catholic congregations should have more women serving in general congregational leaderships and speaking in weekend services than their mainline counterparts but be less likely to have women in head clergy positions.

The loose-coupling of organizational policies and practices can produce employment sectors that are predominantly feminized or in the process of feminization. These sectors, dominated by women, commonly exhibit significantly lower stability and compensation. Even in the rare cases that exhibit slightly more equitable hiring practices, women are still frequently found in positions significantly lower on the "corporate ladder" than their male counterparts (Moore 1988; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). Furthermore, in the few instances where women do reach the top positions within their organizations, they are still significantly undercompensated in comparison to their male counterparts (England et al. 1988; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). Similar processes have also been observed in educational and occupational tracking in clergy hiring and distributions (Nesbitt 1993; Sullins 2000).

Considerable evidence also suggests the seminary context generates mechanisms that contribute to some of the barriers described in this article. While I do not explore this step in these analyses,⁵ a brief overview of previous research can help to further develop the stage model presented in this article. Most clergy hires are seminary graduates, admittance to which frequently requires the support of a potential seminarian's local congregation or denominational leadership (Finlay 2003). Present enrollments show that women compose a higher proportion of seminary students (approximately 30 percent nationally, and greater than 50 percent in some denominations) than their representation among clergy positions would suggest (Chaves 1997; Sullins 2000). Despite these comparisons, present literature shows that women seminary graduates are less likely than men to obtain jobs on graduation (Sullins 2000). This work also finds, consistent with occupational literature, that women have comparatively higher education than men in similar positions. Furthermore, Finlay (2003) discusses the steering that sometimes takes place in these settings discouraging women from pursuing top positions.

This pattern from seminaries can lead to a trend that closely mimics employment patterns in the for-profit sector, in which women who do gain

entry into ministry positions are more likely than their male counterparts to end up in lower-status positions (e.g., family life or children's pastors). It should be pointed out that many denominations have systems wherein congregations that hire seminary graduates do so not only from among those who were previously rank-and-file members of their congregation and sometimes are even forced to look entirely outside their own members. While for-profit firms also sometimes similarly draw on external searches, this break in the path for moving up through an organization may be more pronounced in the religious context than in other settings.

A vast literature shows the exclusion of women from organizations' top positions, with most attention focusing on unequal employment opportunities. The glass ceiling hypothesis suggests that within occupational environments there are invisible barriers that prevent women and racial/ethnic minority groups from rising to an organization's highest positions (Morrison et al. 1987; Reskin and Roos 1990). Some researchers have suggested a lack of empirical evidence for such a claim (Powell and Butterfield 1994); however, most employment sectors (Reskin 1993; Reskin and Roos 1990) and the clergy in particular (Sullins 2000; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998) seem to support such a claim.

The final model in my analysis therefore examines the congregational configurations that include barriers that keep women from rising to the highest leadership position within a congregation, namely, head clergy. This model is developed similarly to a previous paper that shows the differences in U.S. congregations that have women head clergy as compared to those that do not (Konieczny and Chaves 2000). Their primary finding is that women are frequently only appointed to leadership positions as a last resort, when other options are not available to the congregation. They find that women are more likely to be located in resource-poor congregations that lack the necessary resources to attract male leadership (e.g., number of leaders, financial resources, etc.). While the final level of leadership I investigate here is based partially on the same theoretical frame as their paper, I add a measure of strictness to capture the potentially symbolic role of conservatism in organizational barriers to women's congregational leadership.

Chaves (1997) suggests that while conservatism has been related to a number of important factors in the study of religious organizations (e.g., growth—Kelley [1972] 1986; strength—Iannaccone 1994), perhaps a congregation's refusal to ordain women plays a different role. He suggests that congregational barriers to women's leadership could serve to project a level of conservatism that may or may not actually coincide with the conservatism in a congregation. In other words, with the perceived benefits of conservatism,

congregations may incorporate this particular proscription as an especially salient marker of conservatism regardless of where they stand on other similar markers (such as beliefs about homosexuality, inerrancy, etc.). The "strictness breeds strength" model (Iannaccone 1994) suggests that conservatism is an absolute congregational value. In this case, such a conceptualization of "genuine conservatism" would suggest that the most conservative congregations would be the least likely to have women in leadership. Conversely, if it serves as merely a symbolic marker of conservatism, it will not necessarily be coupled with other similar markers. In fact, if congregations are capable of projecting a sufficient level of conservatism, prohibiting women from top leadership positions may be irrelevant. Similarly, the prohibition of women from leadership positions may afford a congregation the ability to relax other conservative markers within the congregation and still gain the perceived conservative benefit. Consistent with Chaves's suggestion that this may be a particularly salient symbolic marker, I examine the following possibility:

Hypothesis 5: Within conservative/evangelical congregations, higher levels of conservatism should correspond to an increased likelihood of finding women serving as head clergy.

DATA AND METHOD

In this article, I use data from the first nationally representative sample of U.S. congregations, the NCS (Chaves 1998). The NCS is a national probability sample of congregations generated through hypernetwork sampling (McPherson 1982; Spaeth and O'Rourke 1996). Respondents to the 1998 General Social Survey (Davis and Smith 1998) who reported attending religious services provided name and contact information for their congregation. Using these data, an 80 percent response rate resulted in a sample of 1,186 Christian congregations from whom data were collected by General Social Survey interviewers. They gathered information for each congregation from one key informant, 77 percent of whom were pastors or equivalent (Chaves et al. 1999). The NCS includes weight variables of which, for the analyses for this article, I use the congregational weight, therefore representing the number of congregations, rather than the number of participants in congregations, with specified characteristics (Chaves 1998).⁶

Each of the models I present in this article represents one stage in the leadership process described above. Figure 1 displays the increasing barriers to

women's participation that is evident in NCS congregations the further one progresses through each of those stages. I first model the barriers that keep women from contributing to positions of general congregational leadership. Within NCS data, on average, 27 percent of all congregation members are reported to serve in some form of leadership. This model uses ordinary least squares regression analysis of the gendered proportion of the general congregational leadership, which is measured as "[those] chairing a committee, serving as an officer, teaching a class, or other leadership roles" (Chaves 1998, 70), where 1 indicates all of those leaders in a congregation are women and 0 that all are men. As mentioned previously, on average, women actually hold more leadership positions than men at this level, suggesting that these barriers are only present in congregations that are the most opposed to women's holding leadership positions.

The next two models below are logistic regressions predicting whether women hold specific leadership positions in those congregations, each coded with women leaders as 1 and men as 0. For women speaking in weekend services, the dependent variable is coded as the presence (= 1) of women's leadership for either of two separate conditions, each based on the previous weekend's services: (1) if there was only one speaker, if that speaker was a woman; and (2) if there were multiple speakers, if any of those speakers were women—otherwise it is coded as zero.⁷ This measure has two important difficulties that I will revisit below in the discussion. First, in effect, this is a sample of weekend services and not of general congregational policies. While this could therefore overrepresent (or underrepresent) this particular barrier in the congregations, there is no reason to suspect that the sampling of services would systematically alter the representation of women among speakers in any direction or be systematically linked to any of the predictor variables. Second, this measure includes all speakers in the previous services and not merely those who deliver a sermon—for example, it is possible to include people who shared announcements, gave a reading, or shared personal testimony. While the differences in such forms of communication in the service may be differentially associated with leadership capacity, and the delivering of a sermon may be the most relevant to theoretical argument as it exists to date in the literature, I do not attempt to analyze this difference here. The final model in this article explores the congregational configurations in which women rise to the highest congregational leadership positions—simply coded as the dichotomous gender of the congregation's head clergy.⁸

While longitudinal data would best serve to explore the process of leaders rising through the leadership ranks in congregations, this multitiered

TABLE 1: Female Proportion of Congregational Leadership by Dependent Variables

	<i>Women Speaker(s) in Main Service</i>		
	Yes	No	
Women head clergy			Total
Yes	0.607 (0.171) <i>n</i> = 42	0.567 (0.103) <i>n</i> = 5	47
No	0.552 ^a (0.132) <i>n</i> = 545	0.509 (0.148) <i>n</i> = 311	856
Total	587	316	

NOTE: Numbers presented are mean proportions, with standard deviations in parentheses, including category-specific cross-tabs.

a. I also computed these cross-tabbed means excluding Roman Catholic congregations. The primary change this produces is a reduction in the number of congregations without a female head clergy. The only proportion that changes substantially from those presented in Table 1 is the female leadership proportion for congregations without a female head clergy and with female speakers in the most recent service, which declines to 0.527 (standard deviation = 0.136).

analysis strategy gives a broad-scale picture of how those gendered barriers differ across the stages. Table 1 presents the three-way cross-tabulation of the three modeled dependent variables. It is only through analyzing each of these models that we see the funneling process that increases the barriers as one moves up the ladder of congregational leadership. Furthermore, the overrepresentation of women among participants and general leadership combined with the similar figures for speaking and gender differences in seminary representation—roughly 2:1 ratio of men to women (Sullins 2000)—and their virtual absence from pastoral leadership (15 percent in census data or 9 percent of Protestant congregations in NCS data; see Table 2) suggests a queue-like process at the top leadership levels.

Because of acceptable skip patterns in the data, such as congregations that have no head clergy (*n* = 35), or had no speakers in the previous weekend's services (*n* = 29), the number of cases varied across these models. I also exclude from the models cases where the gender of the head clergy is not specified (*n* = 36) and those with missing data on one or more of the predictor variables.⁹ Furthermore, as mentioned above, the final model excludes Roman Catholic congregations (*n* = 248). Table 2 summarizes the

TABLE 2: Variable Operationalizations, Means, and Standard Deviations

	<i>Operationalization</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Dependent variable			
Woman head clergy ^a	Dichotomous	0.094	0.285
Women speakers ^b	Any women speakers in weekend services	0.518	0.490
Proportion women in leadership	Proportion of congregational leaders who are women	0.560	0.364
Congregational characteristics			
Conservative/evangelical Protestant ^c	Dichotomous	0.565	0.490
Roman Catholic ^c	Dichotomous	0.064	0.242
Black Protestant ^c	Dichotomous	0.058	0.231
Mainline Protestant ^c	Dichotomous	0.272	0.440
Strictness index	Nine item index standardized to range (0-1) ^d	0.303	0.259
Inerrancy	Does the congregation consider the Bible to be the literal and inerrant word of God?	0.774	0.413
Leaders	Number of leaders serving in the congregation	34.64	59.51
Total staff	The total number of full-time or part-time staff in the congregation	3.50	6.69
Congregational size	Number of regularly participating adults	114.35	258.43
Congregational age	Years since founding (in 1998)	72.45	53.83
Proportion women	Proportion of the congregation who are women	0.598	0.145
Contextual characteristics ^e			
Rural ^e	Dichotomous	0.454	0.492
Suburban ^e	Dichotomous	0.136	0.339

(continued)

TABLE 2 (continued)

	<i>Operationalization</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Urban ^e	Dichotomous	0.410	0.486
Poor area ^e	Dichotomous—Are at least 30 percent of the people in the congregation's census tract below the official poverty level?	0.116	0.316

NOTE: All dichotomous variables are coded as presence (= 1) or absence (= 0).

a. Excludes Roman Catholic congregations ($n = 248$), those with no head clergy ($n = 35$), and those that did not identify the gender of the head clergy ($n = 36$).

b. Excludes those congregations ($n = 29$) that had no speakers in the previous weekend's services.

c. In the multivariate models, mainline Protestant is the reference category. These definitions are based on Steensland et al. (2000).

d. This index sums the presence or absence, each of any congregational rules about dancing, diet, who people date or become romantically involved with, the cohabitation of unmarried adults, homosexual behavior, how much money people give to the congregation, or the sorts of groups outside the congregation people are allowed to join, and the prohibition of smoking or alcohol use.

e. These are defined by variables linked to census information at the census tract level, where the congregation's meeting place is located.

operationalization of each of the hypotheses described above and presents descriptive statistics for each of the variables used for the cases included in the models.

Each congregation is classified according to Steensland et al.'s (2000) religious tradition classification, using the categories of evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Black Protestant, or Roman Catholic.¹⁰ For these calculations, the seven traditionally Black denominations identified by Chaves et al. (1999) are included in the Black Protestant category.¹¹ In multivariate models, these are included as a series of dummy variables, with mainline Protestants excluded as the reference category. Each informant was asked if the congregation "consider[s] the Bible to be the literal and inerrant word of God" (Chaves 1998, 40), which is included dichotomously. I measure the gender composition of the congregation as the proportion of the congregation who are women. The approximation of a congregation's available resources and size are included, respectively, as the total number of leaders and staff and the number of regularly attending adults, the latter of which is included as its log transformation to correct for skew in congregational size. The age of the congregation is measured as the number of years since its founding. I also include, based on the Geographic

Information Systems–coded information linked to each congregation (Chaves 1998), dichotomous measures indicating whether the congregation is located in the South, a census tract with high (greater than 30 percent) poverty, and a rural or suburban setting (with urban as the reference category). All dichotomous variables are coded as presence (“yes”) equals 1 and absence (“no”) equals 0. Each of the percentage variables is converted to a proportion resulting in measures ranging from 0 to 1.

Finally, to measure congregational strictness, I construct an index that sums the presence of various rules within a congregation, including any rules about dancing, diet, who people date or become romantically involved with, the cohabitation of unmarried adults, homosexual behavior, how much money people give to the congregation, the sorts of groups outside the congregation people are allowed to join, and prohibitions against smoking or alcohol use. With the presence or absence of each of these summed, this strictness index ranges from 0 to 9 and has a Cronbach’s alpha of .79.

RESULTS

Table 3 presents the unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors for modeling the effect of each of the described independent variables on the proportion of women in congregational leadership teams. These results therefore reflect the organizational characteristics that facilitate women’s congregational leadership at the most general level. The proportion of women in the congregation is the single greatest predictor of the gender composition of congregational leadership. Black Protestant congregations are significantly more likely than mainline congregations to have higher proportions of women on their leadership teams, while evangelical congregations are significantly less likely to do so. The difference between mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic congregations is not significant.¹²

Virtually all other variables in this model function in the directions predicted. Both the inerrancy and strictness terms produce declines in women’s participation in even this most general form of congregational leadership. In terms of available resources, the likelihood of a congregation’s having more women than men as leaders decreases with the size of the congregation. Congregations in the South are significantly less likely to have more women than men in leadership. The significance of each of these findings, however, may be most clearly interpreted in how they are tempered by, or limit the influences of, the rise of women into higher-level leadership positions.

Table 4 presents odds ratios and model summary statistics for the logistic regressions of the second and third multivariate models described

TABLE 3: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Predicting General Congregational Leadership, Proportion Women

	<i>Model 1</i>
Congregational characteristics	
Conservative/evangelical Protestant ^a	-0.013 (0.030)
Roman Catholic ^a	0.058 (0.050)
Black Protestant ^a	0.099* (0.055)
Strictness index	-0.113** (0.047)
Inerrancy	-0.143*** (0.032)
Leaders	0.000 (0.000)
Total staff	0.002 (0.002)
Log number of adults	-0.075*** (0.014)
Congregational age	0.000 (0.000)
Female proportion of congregation	0.487*** (0.079)
Contextual characteristics	
Rural ^b	0.048 (0.029)
Suburban ^b	-0.009 (0.036)
South ^c	-0.075** (0.024)
Poor census tract	0.021 (0.039)
Summary statistics	
Intercept	0.673
S.E.E.	(0.086)
Adjusted R^2	0.112
N	977

NOTE: Numbers presented are unstandardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

a. Mainline Protestant is the reference category. These definitions are based on Steensland et al. (2000).

b. Urban is the reference category. These definitions are based on the census tract level (see Chaves 1998, 74).

c. Non-South is the reference category. See *Statistical Abstracts* (any edition), U.S. Bureau of the Census, for a list of states within regions. Regions 4 through 6 included as South, all others in non-South.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed tests).

TABLE 4: Logistic Regressions for Women's Congregational Leadership

	<i>Female Speaker(s) in Main Service</i>	<i>Female Head Clergy</i>
Congregational characteristics		
Conservative/evangelical Protestant ^a	0.615**	0.148***
Roman Catholic ^a	2.337*	—
Black Protestant ^a	1.093	0.034**
Strictness index	2.606***	3.090*
Inerrancy	0.386***	0.453**
Leaders	1.001	1.002
Total staff	0.990	0.905
Log number of adults	1.257**	0.750
Congregational age	0.998	0.998
Proportion women in leadership	4.106***	—
Contextual characteristics		
Rural ^b	0.774	0.517*
Suburban ^b	1.629*	0.232**
South ^c	0.747*	0.679
Poor census tract	1.585*	0.943
Summary statistics		
Intercept	-0.615	1.090
-2 log likelihood	1247.995	531.411
Chi-square	133.028 [†]	82.086 [†]
Degrees of freedom	14	12
N	939	693

NOTE: Numbers presented are log-odds ratios. Dashes indicate variables that are not included in the particular model(s) specified, as described in the text.

a. Mainline Protestant is the reference category. These definitions are based on Steensland et al. (2000).

b. Urban is the reference category. These definitions are based on the census tract level (see Chaves 1998, 74).

c. Non-South is the reference category. See *Statistical Abstracts* (any edition), U.S. Bureau of the Census, for a list of states within regions. Regions 4 to 6 included as South, all others in non-South.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed tests). [†] $p < .001$.

above. Model 1 presents the congregational configurations that promote the likelihood of women's speaking in weekend services. Similarly, as predicted, an evangelical congregation is approximately twice as likely as a mainline congregation to oppose women's speaking in services. There also is no support for the largely anecdotal evidence for Black Protestant congregations' increased likelihood to have women preaching as compared to mainline congregations, although the barriers are less for women in Black Protestant congregations than for women in evangelical Protestant congregations (comparison is available on request).

Despite the high importance given to sacramentalism in Roman Catholic congregations (see Wallace 1992),¹³ Roman Catholic congregations are the most likely to include women as speakers in their weekend services. In contrast to previous literature's suggestion, the Roman Catholic congregations that do allow women speakers in their services are significantly larger than those that do not (analysis not shown)—perhaps suggesting, at least for Roman Catholic congregations, that resource theories do not explain congregational patterns in women's filling speaking roles in weekend services. As mentioned previously, all speaking roles, not just preaching, are included in the variable used in model 1 of Table 4 and may contribute to the observed Roman Catholic difference. While these congregations have specific prohibitions against women's ordination, and sometimes against their filling sacramental roles, it is also possible that they are more likely to include more people in the governance of weekend services, and women may be more represented among nonsacramental roles (such as scriptural readings or announcements) in these congregations.¹⁴ Wallace (1992) provides evidence that suggests that the Catholic case is unique in the way it navigates the issue of gender and congregational leadership, a suggestion that appears to be supported in these models.

Not surprisingly, a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible is the strongest positive predictor of barriers, and an increasing proportion of women on the leadership team is the strongest positive predictor of women's speaking in weekend services. For these data, in the determination of who speaks in congregations' weekend services, it does not appear that women are consistently turned to as a last resort. Of the resource variables included in model 1 of Table 4, the size of the congregation and whether a congregation is located in the suburbs or in the South, each contributes significantly to the likelihood of whether women are found as speakers in weekend services, and they function in the opposite direction predicted by the resource theories of hypothesis 2. However, perhaps the variable that most accurately relates to resources available to a congregation, high poverty in the surrounding community, does increase the likelihood of women participating in this form of leadership, as resource theories suggest.

Model 2 of Table 3 shows those factors that predict a congregation's having a woman as head clergy. As expected, a congregation being from an evangelical tradition is a strongly negative predictor, and Black Protestant congregations are even less likely to have a woman head clergy.¹⁵ Previous work suggests that the Black Protestant congregations that are more likely to have women clergy are those in traditionally white denominations (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990) or those that have no denominational affiliation at all (Konieczny and Chaves 2000), not those in traditionally Black denominations.

This holds relatively consistent in NCS data, in that as compared to the denominations with which they are affiliated, predominantly Black congregations not in traditionally Black denominations have approximately the same representation of women clergy, while the same congregations have substantially more women head clergy than do those from traditionally Black denominations.

One of the primary goals of this article is to address the potential role that symbolic conservatism plays in constructing the barriers keeping women out of top religious leadership positions. Model 2 in Table 3 shows that even beyond any approximations of conservatism/liberalism that remain in the evangelical/mainline distinction, congregations that are more strict are more likely to have women head clergy. This finding is consistent with Chaves's notion that congregations' refusal to allow women into the head clergy position serves largely to provide "symbolic" conservatism. It appears that congregations are not adhering strictly to conservative ideals but may simply seek to project an image that is sufficiently conservative. It is unclear whether the intended audience for this projection is their own congregants or other religious organizations. Either way, congregations with sufficient levels of conservatism through other markers appear to consider the gender of their clergy as less salient than those that are comparatively less conservative. Furthermore, this observation even holds true within conservative congregations alone (available from author on request, $p < .05$). Figure 2 displays this difference, showing the mean strictness index for congregations by tradition and gender of head clergy, where evangelical congregations with female head clergy being among the strictest congregations.¹⁶ In other words, while previous researchers have shown that increasing conservatism promotes congregational strength or growth (Iannaccone 1994; Kelley [1972] 1986), in the case of barriers opposing women's congregational leadership, this form of conservatism may merely be a display and not reflective of "actual" conservatism.

There are two findings in model 2 that are particularly surprising. First, suburban congregations are less likely than rural or urban congregations to have a woman head clergy. Previous research has suggested that rural congregations may be the most likely to have women as clergy, because of limited resources, but these data appear to show no significant differences between rural and urban congregations. While this at first may appear to support the resource arguments of hypothesis 2, which suggest that congregations turn to women to fill head clergy positions as a matter of last resort (as suburban congregations are likely to have more resources than urban or rural congregations), combining this with the second surprising finding—that those congregations in poorer census tracts are not any more likely to have a woman head clergy—forces some rethinking of

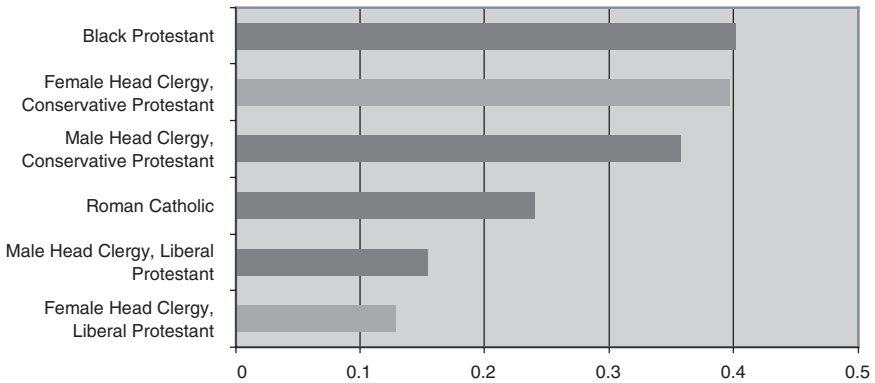


Figure 2: Strictness, by Tradition and Gender of Head Clergy

NOTE: There are not enough Black Protestant or Roman Catholic congregations in this sample with female head clergy to make meaningful comparisons on strictness, so each of those is included in this figure as only one category.

the resource explanations. Research to date does not have a way to explain this difference, and at this point, any explanations that I offer would merely be speculation. Future researchers may want to look specifically at the seemingly especially staunch barriers to women's reaching the highest positions of congregational leadership in suburban settings as a unique case. One potentially helpful direction for this work may draw on the possibility that suburban residents reflect more political conservatism than those from elsewhere, which may translate to religious contexts.¹⁷

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

One of the aims of this article has been to contribute to understanding the relationship between gender and religious organizational leadership. The gender-occupational literature and the sociology of religion on this topic have developed largely independently of one another. Furthermore, the sociological analyses that have examined the religious organizational context specifically have done so with small or single denominational samples. This is one of the first attempts to see, within a nationally representative sample of congregations, how prevalent the various barriers are that have been described previously in these disparate works. In addition, previous literature generally focuses only on one particular aspect of congregational leadership at a time.

In this article, I show how the stages of progression in congregational leadership produce increased barriers to women's leadership with each additional step up through the organization. The way this progression generates a queue-like process in the religious organizational setting cannot be seen in investigations of any of these individual levels of leadership alone. At the same time, the cross-sectional nature of the NCS limits how readily the processual nature of the argument offered here can be investigated. Future data-collection efforts that address religious leadership should incorporate more thorough information about other congregational leadership positions (e.g., associate pastors, children's pastors, etc.) or more explicitly differentiated questions on what sorts of leadership tasks the mentioned leaders fulfill (e.g., what type of speaking roles, etc.), in addition to the ideal of longitudinal data.

Other gender-occupational literature suggests an alternative explanation that may account for the differences observed in this context. With the religious context being a largely female-dominated organizational type (in numbers of participants, and general leadership—see above), there may be a “glass escalator” that advances men to the top positions in the organization as a means of generating organizational legitimacy (Williams 1992).¹⁸ This perspective also suggests that these organizations could rapidly advance men to top leadership positions as a means to make the organization more readily accessible and attractive to men, which may be especially salient given the present gender skew in religious participation rates. The way this or other individual-level pathways contribute to the observed barriers is unavailable for study using these data. Future research should incorporate organizational and individual-level data to track the progression of individual leaders through the organizational ranks.

While this article shows that the organizational barriers keeping women out of the top positions of occupational settings are present within religious organizations, it also demonstrates the substantial difference in the nature of those barriers in the religious context. First, adopting the “stained glass ceiling” label points to the fact that the support for the barrier in this setting largely relies explicitly on religious ideology. Oddly, however, in the role ideology was shown to play, an additional level of loose-coupling became clear in the religious setting: While religious organizations draw on religious ideology to justify barriers to women's leadership, the arguments they offer are predominantly focused on leadership in the form of speaking in worship services.

Second, the occupational literature often describes the barrier in those contexts as a glass ceiling to denote its invisibility. The adoption of the “stained glass ceiling” moniker appears to contribute substantially more than simply the religious nature of this barrier. In the models developed here, it actually

appears to be the case that congregations, rather than keeping this barrier hidden, may actually attempt to draw attention to it, much as staining a window renders it a point of focus. There are probably not too many organizational forms that actively seek to project gender discrimination within their leadership qualifications, although future research may want to extend the work in this article to investigate other settings in which this may take place (e.g., the military). This may also suggest the importance of looking at non-Christian religious organizations to see if they include a similar projection. Future data-collection efforts could explicitly target a more diverse population of religious organizational types. Finally, one of the implicit questions addressed in this article is how religious organizations may overcome the discrepancy that exists wherein more women than men participate in religious organizations, yet women are vastly underrepresented among the leaders of those organizations. I have two primary suggestions that stem from the work presented here. First, while many denominations have eliminated formal barriers to women's congregational leadership, not all have. The nonrelationship between women's leadership and many of the factors potentially most salient to those organizations (e.g., size) may provide encouragement for more religious organizations to adopt more equitable policies. Furthermore, the loose-coupling that exists between formal positions and actual practices may be particularly informed by what appears to be some congregations' actively projecting gender barriers within their organizations. Ozorak's (1996) work, which describes the legitimating stories women construct to support the gendered differentials observed in religious settings, suggests that if these barriers are to be overcome, any efforts to more concretely link formal policies to observed outcomes may first have to reconstruct the differential values placed on leadership and gender in these religious contexts.

NOTES

1. This gender breakdown is consistent across all racial categories reported in census data (with no racial categories differing from the cumulative value by more than 1.5 percent).

2. While this figure is significantly different from the number of women holding clergy positions in U.S. Census data reported above (14.3 percent; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001), it should be noted that census figures include all women clergy (whether head pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, etc.).

3. While gender representation among leadership is likely an important topic of study for many religious organizations, this article focuses exclusively on Christian congregations for two primary reasons. First, the models developed to date have been built largely from samples of Christian denominations, and it is

uncertain how these models would translate into other religious traditions. Second, there are only 45 non-Christian congregations and 5 congregations with no identifiable tradition in the data used for this article. Because of the sampling methods used to gather these data (see below), other religious organizations are simply not sufficiently represented in these data to allow meaningful analysis of whether they fit the models developed. As such, these data cannot evaluate whether the first issue raised above is accurate, and I therefore leave such investigation for later researchers with data more suited for such analyses.

4. This and all subsequent Biblical references refer to the New American Standard translation.

5. Individual-level mechanisms such as education would be better investigated using other data. I did attempt to include approximations of these effects in preliminary models, but results were not significant. There are substantial missing data on these factors and—for the relatively few congregations with data—there is limited variation.

6. Using this weight corrects for the known rate at which larger congregations are overrepresented in the unweighted sample.

7. I also attempted these models separately for those congregations where only one person spoke in the service as a likely proxy for delivering a sermon. These results appeared to be approximately the same for bivariate reproductions, although multivariate analysis did not allow the inclusion of all theorized variables due to limited cases ($n = 161$).

8. Some previous research has suggested that women fill a “surrogate” pastoral role in congregations where male leadership is preferred but no men are available (Brasher 1998; Wallace 1992). The head clergy variable in these data does allow some interpretation on the part of the respondent and may include some of these surrogates among the leaders described by this variable. Unfortunately, in these data, there is no way to systematically investigate the differences between such congregations and those with formal head clergy.

9. Removal of these cases does not significantly alter the composition of the sample.

10. I would like to thank Kevin Dougherty and Jenny Trinitapoli for providing the syntax for coding this variable.

11. While some researchers (Trinitapoli 2005) have also included among this category those congregations that have large proportions of Black congregation members, the gender and clergy literature suggest that for the topic addressed here, such an approach may conflate two different concepts, something I revisit in the discussion of the results.

12. The difference between Roman Catholic and Black Protestant and evangelical congregations (not shown) are significant and not significant, respectively.

13. Sacramentalism here refers to the Roman Catholic belief in the symbolic role of the priest in representing Christ in the administering of the sacraments, particularly of communion, which is a central role of the person presiding in weekend services. The belief includes the importance of the physical representation of Christ by

the priest. Simply stated, since Jesus was male, some Catholics suggest that women cannot fulfill this role.

14. While these data do not allow differentiation of what role the speakers in weekend services played, this suggestion does appear to be supported by analysis of the number of speakers by congregation. For Protestant congregations, 16 percent of congregations only had one speaker, while only 9 percent of Roman Catholic congregations did. Furthermore, on average, Roman Catholic congregations also have slightly more speakers in their weekend services (mean = 4.1) than do Protestant congregations (mean = 3.6).

15. The difference between Black Protestant and conservative white Protestant congregations (not shown) also shows significantly fewer women head clergy within Black Protestant congregations.

16. Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out that this may be capturing the unique coupling of conservatism with female leadership that exists in some Pentecostal denominations. While the Steensland et al. (2000) classification does not address this possibility directly, future research should consider this possibility.

17. I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for making this suggestion.

18. I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for making this suggestion.

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