Article

Christian University Students' Attitudes to Gender: Constructing Everyday Theologies in a Post-Feminist Climate

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Abstract: This article explores how religion shapes approaches to gender amongst university students in the United Kingdom, focusing on how attitudes about gender interact with their Christian identities. Drawing from 68 semi-structured interviews conducted at five universities, the article identifies three main approaches Christian students adopt when asked how faith affects their views on gender: the individualized approach, the egalitarian approach and the conservative approach. The article outlines the permutations of these approaches, showing their points of similarity and difference, and argues that feminism, biological essentialism and notions of reasonableness or "cultural common sense" feature in all three, being integral to the gender discourse of "post-feminist" UK society. The article argues that religion functions as a resource in Christian students' gender attitudes, alongside other resources such as friends or family, and is deployed to justify both egalitarianism and gender conservatism. Christian students are constructing "everyday theologies" that integrate religious resources with other social resources, generating divergent egalitarian and conservative interpretations, mirroring patterns in "post-feminist" UK society more generally.

1. Introduction

How do Christian students approach issues of gender equality? What impact does their faith have on their attitudes to gender, and how do assumptions about gender interact with Christian identities within the lives of students? This article is the first to explore how religion shapes attitudes to gender amongst university students in the United Kingdom. This question is important in the context of discussions about equality of access and participation in universities for students of diverse backgrounds, and of debates about freedom of speech on campus, where attitudes to religion and gender are contested. It also contributes to the wider literature on how gender is constructed by religious communities and individuals—a field which shows through qualitative studies that while religion is often used to justify conservative gender ideas and practices (studies on Christian communities that show this include Ammerman 1987, Bendroth 1993 and Wolkomir 2004), it can also be interpreted in a progressive or egalitarian way (Cochran 2005; Fedele 2013; Utriainen 2016), or in a manner that synthesizes egalitarian and conservative notions (Gallagher 2003; Aune 2006; Nyhagen 2018).

Studies of how gender is negotiated by evangelical Christians in the USA illustrate how the public discourse of evangelical authors and leaders is interpreted by churchgoers in complex, sometimes contradictory ways. As Brasher (1998, p. 133) found when studying two American evangelical

churches, "While the patterns of congregational life and the texts in congregational bookstores set out clear, stringent ideals of gender and family life, the actual behaviors of real believers ... present a much messier picture." Bartkowski's study shows that while a lot of evangelical marriage-advice literature promotes gender essentialism and the notion that gender differences are significant and innate, "evangelical discourse concerning the essence of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality is fragmented" (Bartkowski 2001, p. 93). Another set of evangelical authors promote gender similarity or egalitarianism (the "biblical feminists" also discussed by Cochran 2005), or adopt what Bartkowski calls a "moderate essentialist" position that "encourages spouses to complement their gender-specific predilections with desirable cross-gender traits" (p. 93). Additionally, church pastors and individual married couples often tone down or deviate from whichever evangelical view they hold most closely to. Many of the church's women who espouse essentialism "appropriate—quite selectively—messages from evangelical discourses of gender difference and sameness and, while holding to essentialism, they dance artfully with the notion of gender difference" (Bartkowski 2001, p. 106). This is similar to the women Griffith studied, who believed in the doctrine of women's submission, but interpreted it in several ways: submission to God, submission to their husband as leader, and submission to their husband alongside "retaining some room for private critique of his behavior" (Griffith 1997, p. 185). They also interpreted it as "containment": "a submission more of word than of deed that celebrates the power to influence—or, in less flattering terms, manipulate—one's husband to one's own ends" (p. 185). Likewise, Bartkowski found that egalitarian couples' "seemingly egalitarian marriages are laden with internal points of contradiction. Couples who tout the merits of mutual submission simultaneously conform to and deviate from biblical feminist defenses of marital egalitarianism" (Bartkowski 2001, p. 129). Pragmatism is involved in negotiating gender in the contemporary world where dual incomes are often necessary; as Gallagher and Smith (1999) show, some evangelicals hold to "symbolic traditionalism" alongside "pragmatic egalitarianism". Gallagher (2003) observed evangelicals' mix-n-match approach to two gender ideologies: conservative and egalitarian. If, as Gallagher puts it, the theological histories of competing gender ideals can be conceptualized as "cultural tool kits", then "ordinary" evangelicals dip into them according to need. Evangelicals "encounter ideas of partnership, headship, and authority not as a choice between 'either-or' but as a matter of balancing 'both-and'" (Gallagher 2003, pp. 179–80).

Focusing on university students, this article fills a gap in this gender and religion literature, which rarely considers young adults, and in qualitative literature on university students, which has explored religion and gender as separate issues but rarely brought them together.

Neither gender equality nor religious equality have been achieved in British universities. Although more females than males attend university, female, working-class and ethnic minority students and graduates suffer poorer outcomes (Leathwood and Read 2009; Reay et al. 2005) despite the increasing "post-feminist" view amongst students that structural inequalities are no longer significant and students are autonomous "individuals" (Francis et al. 2014). Phipps and Smith (2012) found that 1 in 4 (of 2058) female students had been subjected to unwanted sexual behavior at university. If universities are places of structurally unequal gendered *practices*, they are also places where discriminatory *attitudes* exist, as Phipps and Young's (2015) study of student "lad culture" revealed. Where religion is concerned, Weller et al. (2011, pp. 76–78) revealed that while only 6% of students overall felt discriminated against or harassed because of their religion, the proportions were higher among Jewish (27%), Sikh (17%) and Muslim (14%) students (see also NUS 2012).

In universities in the USA, sexual and gender conservatism is associated with religion, with religious students more likely than the non-religious to have conservative attitudes to gender and sexuality. But "religion" is a broad umbrella. Protestants, and specifically conservative evangelical Protestants (Brimeyer and Smith 2012; Bryant 2006), hold more conservative attitudes, and males are more conservative than female students (Maltby et al. 2010). It is likely that Christian students will follow the UK population's pattern of greater gender conservatism amongst those who believe in God and regularly attend a place of worship (McAndrew 2010), but that they will hold more egalitarian

attitudes than older generations (Park et al. 2004, pp. 51–61), and females will express more egalitarian attitudes than males (Burn et al. 2000).

As most existing studies are American and quantitative, qualitative research that sheds light on how gender attitudes of religious young people are formed is needed. The study we present draws inspiration from two previous studies, Ramji (2007) and Page and Yip (2017). Ramji's interviews with 20 young Muslims revealed that "religion is mobilized as a power resource in the construction of the gender identity of young British Asian Muslim men and women" (Ramji 2007, p. 1185), because achieving a religiously sanctioned gender identity is the route to other forms of capital (for instance, social approval). This operates differently for men and women. She argues that each group "mobilizes" their religion in different ways to bolster their status—for men, their status in the Muslim community, and for women, an expanded role in employment and higher education, which, they argued, *was* properly Islamic.

> Whilst the men mobilized Islam in their narratives of providers, modesty and relationships to legitimate their current dominance among the British Muslim community, the women used the same themes to challenge conventional understandings of their roles, in order to acquire greater status for themselves. (Ramji 2007, p. 1186)

The notion of religion as something that is mobilized through young people's dynamic exchanges, rather than a static identity marker, raises an important question for our study: Is there a difference in how male and female students mobilize religion? Do Christian males use religious ideas to reinforce their dominance, and do Christian females use religious ideas to carve out for themselves a greater public role?

Page and Yip's survey, interview and video diary research explored how 18 to 25 year olds from a range of religions manage tensions between the discourse of gender equality and the discourse that religion is antithetical to gender equality. More than two thirds of their participants were students and more than half were Christian, making this a useful point of comparison. The authors found that young people were strongly committed to gender equality. Two thirds of their sample of 693 thought that their "religious tradition emphasizes equality of the sexes", while the same proportion believed "religious people are stigmatized in Britain". Interviewees argued that certain religions, particularly Islam, are stigmatized unfairly for being gender unequal when their core principles are gender equal. Desire to defend their religion against stigmatization by outsiders meant they were reluctant to speak publicly about gender inequalities within it, for fear of bolstering outsiders' negative views. They contrasted the essence of the religion, which they said was gender equal, with restrictions placed upon women, which they saw as "cultural". Yet some participants rejected conventional, liberal feminist notions of equality, arguing for "gender complementarity" (the dualistic view that men and women are essentially different and should hold complementary roles) while maintaining that complementarity did not equal inequality. Only a fifth believed religious leaders should be male, and the most conservative were Muslim men, Muslim women and Christian men. Page and Yip conclude that religion is a powerful "resource" employed to make sense of these young people's views of gender, alongside secular gender equality discourses. And yet,

> Tensions were evident as participants attempted to valorize religious and secular scripts in their rationalizations. In their attempts to position themselves as gender-equal subjects where gender equality itself was contentious, the participants engaged with both secular and religious norms that were at times mutually-reinforcing, yet competing at other times. They neither uncritically subjected themselves to, nor completely rejected, religious norms and traditions. Rather, they utilized religion as a "cultural resource" (Beckford 2001)—as opposed to a set of non-negotiable diktats—alongside secular norms in finding an ontological anchor. This leads to outcomes that were negotiated and contingent. (Page and Yip 2017, p. 261)

Ramji and Page and Yip illustrate how religion and gender are caught up in attempts by young people to affirm power and identity. Their qualitative research exposes the complexity of these

relationships, and resists reducing religious factors to matters of gender, or vice versa. In so doing, their work highlights the limitations of studies that position religion and gender as a kind of zero-sum game, as if a satisfactory analysis must place one in a dominant position over the other, hence overlooking the complex ways in which religious and gender identities interact differently within different social contexts. The current article takes up this insight, focusing on how UK-based Christian students orient themselves to gender issues. Choosing the university as our research site allows us to probe how a context known for the celebration of liberal inclusivity colors how religious identities are expressed within its boundaries. The cultural reputation of the university as a haven of diversity and acceptance—while not uncontested—is also complicated by legal obligations introduced by the UK's Equality Act (2010), which presents both gender and religion as "protected characteristics". In exploring how gender and religion interact as markers of identity within student life, we also shed light on how the codified values of the UK's liberal democracy are negotiated within the context of its public educational institutions.

2. Methods

The data for this article are drawn from semi-structured interviews conducted with 68 undergraduate students for a project exploring Christian students' experiences at universities in England.[1] Students were interviewed at five universities representing the main categories of UK universities: long-established, research-led "traditional elite" universities (Durham University); civic or "red brick" institutions established in urban locations around the turn of the twentieth century (University of Leeds); campus universities founded in response to population growth in the 1960s (University of Kent); new or "post-1992" universities, mostly former polytechnic colleges that gained university status after 1992 (University of Derby); and "Cathedrals Group" universities, which originated as training colleges in the nineteenth century founded by the Anglican, Roman Catholic or Methodist churches (University of Chester). The project also included a survey completed by c. 4500 undergraduate students attending one of 13 English universities, approximately half of whom identified as Christian, and while the survey data are not discussed in this article,[2] interview participants were drawn from those who completed the survey at the 5 case study universities. The method of discerning Christian respondents by self-identification was employed in order to identify and examine patterns in how the label "Christian" is self-ascribed, including associated expressions of moral and religious values (see Guest et al. 2013a). This follows a wealth of scholarship that has highlighted a relatively large segment of the UK population claiming some connection with Christianity compared to the much smaller proportion that regularly attend mainstream churches (Davie 2015; Guest et al. 2012). Identifying "Christian students" by the more conventional markers of church attendance, church membership or denominational affiliation would fail to capture the range of meanings now connected to Christianity as a category of identity within the UK context, including ostensibly non-religious, cultural identities. It would also privilege markers that have less significance than they once did (e.g., denominational switching, especially among Protestant students, is common, and reflects a more flexible orientation to church involvement—see Guest et al. 2013a). As a consequence of "casting a wide net", our survey population and interview sample included some self-identifying Christians who attend non-mainstream churches (e.g., LDS churches), although these remained a small minority. Nevertheless, the survey revealed a population that was highly diverse in terms of religious and moral convictions, as well as in terms of religious practice, including almost a third who never attend church and hold a wide range of different understandings about what it means to be a "Christian".

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[1] All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Durham University.

[2] More details of the methods used for the project are available in (Guest et al. 2013a) and (Guest et al. 2013b).

All surveyed students who identified as Christian in response to the survey question "To what religion or spiritual tradition do you currently belong? Please choose the one that fits best"[3] and consented to being interviewed were contacted, and those who were available for interview during our case study visits were interviewed. At the universities of Derby and Chester (both universities catering to a less-privileged student body more likely to be juggling paid work with study), insufficient numbers of students responded to the interview invitation, so further interviewees were recruited via posters on university noticeboards. Interviewees were mostly white and aged 18–22, with 42 identifying as female and 26 as male (fewer male students agreed to be interviewed, which was unsurprising given the greater proportion of female attendees in UK churches). Interviewees were studying a wide range of academic subjects, and they represented a fairly even spread in terms of their year of study. Approximately 20% were international students.

In presenting students' views on only one topic, gender, as part of a longer interview on their experiences as Christian students, and in drawing only on interview data, we cannot present a multi-dimensional understanding of how Christian students negotiate gender in their everyday lives. The data allow only hints as to how the ideas they espouse translate into their behavior—for instance, whether students who say that their Christian faith does not influence their views on gender nevertheless behave in accordance with the ideals of their religious communities, even if they do not accept them as religious ideas, or whether students who espouse gender traditionalism in their ideas about marriage will end up practicing "symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism" (Gallagher and Smith 1999) if they marry. This is a limitation of using only interview data for research. Nevertheless, the interview data provide a snapshot of how Christian students understand gender at a specific point in their life, and these students can be followed up in future to assess how their ideas have developed.

These interview data represent students' talk about gender, meaning that this article looks primarily at gender beliefs, ideas and discourse, not gender practices. Sociologists of gender agree that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon (de Beauvoir 1953; Stoller 1968; Oakley 1972), related to social meanings and practices a culture gives to "biological" sex or, as Connell (2002, p. 10) puts it, to "the reproductive arena". But they differ on whether gender is primarily constituted by a society's economic structure or patriarchal power relations (e.g., Rubin 1975; Walby 1989; Connell 2002—as with Marxist feminist or materialist approaches) or primarily constituted through meanings circulating through culture (often connected to a post-structuralist approach emphasizing the primacy of language in determining social identities and relations). Both approaches have their merits, but we draw more concertedly on the second, treating gender as expressed or constructed through ideas or discourses and therefore focusing on the construction of gender and gender relations within conversation. Following scholars who analyze gender in terms of identities performed and created through speech and social interaction (Garfinkel 1967; Kessler and McKenna 1978; Goffman 1979; West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1990), we approach the research interview as a social situation in which students are constructing gender through expressing, rehearsing, performing and negotiating with the gender constructions prevalent within their social environments. The interview situation is a site for the construction of gender, as Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003, p. 55) argue with reference to how male participants "do gender" during research interviews. It is also a site for the negotiation of competing and contested understandings of gender norms, and emerging patterns reveal a great deal about how Christian students navigate the perceived correspondences and tensions between notions of gender identity derived from their faith or faith community, on the one hand, and those dominant within the wider campus and/or society on the other.

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3   This was followed by the names of the six world religions claiming most adherents in the UK, in alphabetical order, preceded by "none", with an "other" option accompanied by "please write in".

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and coded using the qualitative data analysis software package QSR NVivo, with themes coded and sub-coded in accordance with the principal research questions of the overall project. These questions focused on the mutual interaction between the university experience (conceived of as social as well as academic) and the expression of Christian identity among students. Alongside sexuality, gender roles constitute the topic that highlights most accusations of dissonance between Christians and the wider university community, especially when the focus of attention is on evangelical groups on campus (Bramadat 2000; Ekklesia 2006; Guest et al. 2013a). Focusing part of our analysis on understandings of gender roles and identities allows us to test this perception and examine the patterns of discursive negotiation undertaken by Christian students as they make sense of how their faith relates to wider cultural values and assumptions. Interview transcripts were coded according to emerging patterns in the ways students reflected on the relationship between their Christian identity and attitude to gender roles. Sensitizing concepts—e.g., "equality", "difference" and "feminism" (Bowen 2006)—were used as a means of identifying relevant passages, and an inductive thematic analysis revealed four major perspectives: those who articulated how faith had fostered a conservative or traditionalist perspective on gender (emphasizing complementarity of the sexes); those who articulated how faith had fostered a more egalitarian perspective on gender; those who articulated how a faith perspective had fostered a sense of conflict or compromise between traditionalist and egalitarian positions; and those who saw no relationship between their faith and their perspective on gender, attributing the latter to other influences. Sub-nodes were then accorded as a means of marking differential patterns within each of these perspectives, and comparisons were also drawn across our five case study universities in order to identify any difference variations campus culture might contribute to. This latter stage of the analysis also highlighted patterns in how the wider university experience was conceived and how it was understood as reinforcing or challenging perspectives on gender held by the students we interviewed.

3. Interview Findings: How Faith Influences Attitudes to Gender[4]

In the interviews, 68 students were asked how their faith shapes their attitudes to gender, feminism, sexuality and marriage. Responses fell into three main groups. The largest (30 students) said their faith had little or no influence on their attitudes, emphasizing their own individual agency or influences other than religion; we refer to this as the individualized approach. The next two groups were of equal size—16 believed that their faith led them to an egalitarian approach, while 16 students said Christianity led them to what we call a "conservative" approach. The views of a fourth, much smaller group, just six students, revealed a tension between conservatism and egalitarianism.[5] Notwithstanding debates within religious communities about these terms, we use "conservative" to denote gender attitudes which are sometimes labelled traditionalist, complementarian or hierarchicalist, and which are distinguished by the view that genders should be differentiated in role and/or status (for instance, the view that wives should submit to husbands or women should not be church leaders. "Egalitarian" denotes positions sometimes labelled progressive or feminist, notably the view that all roles in church, society and family should be open to all genders. The next section outlines the three dominant approaches Christian students took, showing that these

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[4] Survey findings revealed strong support for gender equality: 80.3% agreed or strongly agreed that women should have the same opportunities as men to contribute to church leadership, while only 8.8% disagreed (the rest were unsure). The statement "Men are more naturally equipped to be leaders in society" revealed a stronger gender difference and less egalitarian attitudes, wherein 64.2% of Christian students disagreed (half of them strongly) with the statement. Males were more likely than females to agree or strongly agree with the statement (32.7% compared to 17.4%). See (Guest et al. 2013a) for discussion of the survey results.

[5] This group is not discussed in this article because of its relatively small size, and because the dynamics and tensions evident in the students' three main approaches, which will be discussed, were also present among this group.

approaches include ideas that overlap or appear to contradict each other. This is analyzed further in Section 4.

3.1. The Individualized Approach: "Faith Has Little Influence on My Approach to Gender"

The largest group said faith had little or no influence on their attitudes to gender. Quite a few of said that their influences came from elsewhere, namely their family, wider society or the church. This division between "faith" and "church" was implicit in our question, "How does *your faith* influence your attitudes?" and used as a more inclusive alternative to "church", for those who did not attend church, or to "religion", for those who identified themselves as Christians but not as religious (see Guest et al. 2013a). Moreover, some students saw church attendance as part of their faith expression, while others contrasted "faith" with "church". The rest did not identify a specific influence, but presented their personal viewpoint as uppermost—it was their own views, feelings or experiences that guided their attitudes to gender. The views expressed by many students in this group shared similarities with those of the students who took egalitarian and conservative approaches (outlined in the next two sections), but they were distinguished by the degree to which they claimed their ideas were their own personal views and not shaped by their faith. As we discuss elsewhere (Guest forthcoming), building on Clydesdale (2007), this sort of approach illustrates a form of compartmentalization, a separating out of "faith" as unconnected to certain topics, views on which are viewed as independent of faith concerns.

The external authorities of family, society and church (often contrasted with faith) shaped the students' views in both egalitarian and conservative directions. For instance, two students talked about how having female family members in church leadership roles had taught them that women and men are equally equipped for church leadership. Alice[6] (Durham) said:

> I was having this discussion last night at my boyfriend's house, . . . he was like, "But it says in [the New Testament book of] Timothy that they shouldn't have authority, so . . . I'm ok with them preaching, but I don't know if they should be, like, in charge of the church." And I'm like, "Well my Godmother's a Minister, so I'm going to have to disagree there." Because I just think that's context. I really don't think that there's any reason women should do anything less than men. I mean I'm extremely biased; I'm female and my mum's a local preacher. I find it really strange to think anyone thinks different.

For Martha (Chester), societal views favoring gender equality overrode Bible passages that, literally interpreted, expressed the opposite:

> I can remember thinking [about] a passage in one of Paul's letters and coming down to my mum afterwards and saying, "Oh he's saying how women should obey their husband and they're considered less [than] . . . men", and that quite upset me—I really strongly disagreed with that and she was just saying, "Well, you've got to think of the time it was written in and that was the social view, so it can't be applied today."

In both examples, traditionalist interpretations of Bible verses were brought into dialogue with society and personal experience, and rejected.

However, family and church influenced other students' views in a conservative direction. Victoria (Derby) was raised in and attended a Christadelphian church. Women did not occupy leadership roles and this did not bother her. Asked if she was aware of conflicts around that issue, she replied: "No, everyone is happy with their roles . . . because the majority of people have been brought up within the Christadelphian family so that's just how it's always been. You have had no reason to challenge it." Judy, another Derby student, was part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

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6　　All names are pseudonyms.

(Mormons), where women are not permitted to be priests. While she struggled to reconcile her positive experience of having gay friends with the church's prioritization of heterosexual families, she liked what she saw as the church's positive attitude to women's employment. There was little sense of her own faith influencing her views; the influence was from her church, and she inwardly contested this predominantly where homosexuality was concerned, as her own views did not match the church's. Contrary to what we might expect of a member of a sectarian tradition, Judy affirmed her own agency as an autonomous individual as primary, even while maintaining her membership of a church whose professed teachings were at odds with her own values. Here, we see how the experience of living away from home affords opportunities for parallel identities to be maintained.

While families, churches and society did influence the students, the most common response amongst students taking an individualized approach was that their views on gender were their own personal views and not influenced by external factors. Here, the words "I think", "I personally feel" and "personally" dominated.

Gordon (Durham) responded simply: "I'm pretty liberal on most of them [the issues listed] really", before going on to say he preferred the term "equality" to "feminism". Adrian (Leeds) prioritized individual choice and happiness:

> We [Adrian and his friends] had this conversation as well. Like homosexuality and if they should be allowed to marry and then feminism and stuff . . . Me personally, I would say everyone should do what they think will make them happy.

This apparent individualism was not exactly ideological, more of a general acceptance that others may do as they wish as long as they do not encroach upon others' choices. It often accompanied phrases like "I don't have a problem with X", or "it doesn't bother me if Y". For instance, Grace (Leeds) complained about having to fill in equality monitoring surveys at university and criticized feminism for sometimes being "extreme":

> I'm applying to be the school rep for the department and there's a questionnaire in the back of the rep application that asks me what my sexuality is, and I'm like, "Why do you need to know this?" . . . I think people make too much of a big deal about things like that. They're so worried that they're not being equal to people that they're almost being unequal to the people who aren't gay and I'm like . . . I don't really care. I would say it's not an issue for me if someone is gay, if they're not married . . . I don't care. I'm not like evangelistic in that way . . . it doesn't bother me.

The comment "Everyone should do what they think will make them happy" (Adrian, above), the support for others' personal choices and the lack of commitment to any particular view brings to mind the findings of Smith and Denton (2005) and Savage et al. (2006), writing about the USA and UK respectively. Both sets of scholars studied young people's attitudes to religion and spirituality and noted that they prioritized happiness above all. Savage et al. (2006) refer to the "happy midi-narrative" of young people, the idea that young people of "Generation Y" see happiness, attainable through relationships with family and friends, as their goal, without any felt need for a religious metanarrative. Smith and Denton (2005, p. 163) identify "moralistic therapeutic deism", a tenet of which is that "central to living a good and happy life is being a good, moral person". These responses are individualized and as such are typical in post-industrial societies (Bauman 2001), as noted by sociologists who point out that in today's "risk society" (Beck 1992), where old patterns of employment and gender markers have broken down, creating a self-fashioned, reflective "life of one's own" is an expectation of the late modern subject (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). American sociologists of religion Robert Bellah et al. (1985) similarly noted an increased focus in late modernity on individuals' fashioning and interpreting religion in a "pick-and-mix" fashion, naming it after one of their research participants who used the term "sheilaism" for her own religious approach. While others have suggested that religion limits individualization because it emphasizes the collective and mutual

(e.g., economic) obligations (Smart and Shipman 2004), religion is also shaped by the globalizing, neoliberal forces to which individualization is tied (Beck 2010), and this seems to be the case here.

The notion of feminism having "gone too far", as exemplified by Grace, recurred in several responses. Tori (Leeds), who prioritized her own viewpoint rather than citing other influences, said she was a feminist, but distinguished herself from more radical feminists, such as those in the university feminist society:

> I'm a feminist; I'm not going to deny that, but not a feminist in that I think that women need to be better than men . . . I don't think as women we need to say, "Oh because we were oppressed, therefore we need to oppress the men", and I think that's why I'm not part of the Feminist Society here, because it's just men-bashing . . . I'm a feminist in that I feel . . . that women need to be as equal as men and that you shouldn't be looked down on, and I learnt that I'm a strong woman and I would never, ever dream of like saying, "Oh well I'll just get a rich husband and I'll just stay at home", but that's because my mother never stayed at home. But I think there should be that choice there as well. One of my best friends studies at Cambridge, and all she wants to do really is bring up a family . . . she feels sometimes that she's criticized by society for wanting to do that. I think there should be the choice there.

Tori's response is interesting—she perceives herself as rejecting the extremes of feminist theology and secular radical feminism on one side, and an unchosen (middle-class) gender traditionalism on the other hand. The desire to moderate between different viewpoints and present a middle-range view recurred throughout the interviews. This position on feminism can be characterized as a form of "post-feminism", in other words, of the simultaneous support for feminist ideas alongside a nostalgia for the modern (non-feminist) gender order. This is a common position amongst young women in the early twenty-first century UK, who tend to reject feminist identity for themselves, while nevertheless taking on some of feminism's ideas (Aronson 2003; Scharff 2012). In Tori's view, this post-feminist view of gender appears to function as a kind of "cultural common sense", a middle-way between two unreasonable extremes.

Two other, at times contrasting, forms of cultural common sense appeared in the responses of these students: biological essentialism and egalitarianism. Essentialism is, according to Rahman and Jackson (2010, pp. 16–17), "any form of thinking that characterizes or explains aspects of human behavior and identity as part of human 'essence': a biological and/or psychologically irreducible quality of the individual that is immutable and *pre*-social". In the case of gender, essentialists believe gender differences are a straightforward result of biology rather than social constructs based upon societal norms. Its opposite we refer to as egalitarianism, the notion that everyone should be treated as equal and should not be held back by gender stereotypes. Biological essentialism and egalitarianism function as forms of cultural common sense for Christian students. Neither form is dominant, nor are they mutually exclusive—biological essentialism is often merged with egalitarian or feminist understandings, again presenting a moderate view between either extreme. This resonates with Francis et al. (2014), who analyzed 64 UK undergraduate students' talk about the gendered experience of higher education. These students rejected the notion that gender had an impact on their experiences at university—apparently presuming a capacity to rise above gender difference—yet often described certain subjects as more suited to males or females, or described academic staff in gendered terms (male professors as heroic, for instance).

Sally (Chester) was a biological essentialist. She argues that men should initiate dating relationships and protect women because of "scientific" differences:

> Men and women are equal. I do not think that one is more important or higher than others. But I don't think that saying things like the guy should protect the woman rather than the woman protecting the man—I don't think of that as sexist because men and women are different. Scientifically, men are normally stronger than women and that's just the way it is. And women are normally more emotional, and I don't think that it's sexist to say that . . .

> I think that the people that go around who are really strong feminists and say "Oh, no, who says that they're stronger and who says that they should protect?" I think it's naïve. Because I just think we need to accept that we are different, but that our differences are actually important and that we're still equal in that.

Audrey (Durham) referred to men's greater suitability for "physical tasks", making men better at certain jobs:

> I believe that we were all made in the image of God, so therefore we're all equal; but . . . I don't think that means that we have the same skill set . . . Like men, for example, are really much better suited usually to physical tasks—like they're much stronger, they're much faster; so, to me, it is a bit silly to . . . make a woman do that job. If she wants to do that job and she can do it, then fair enough; but like there's some jobs and some roles that are much better, like, done by one sex or another . . . I think we're losing a bit of that in today's society where we've gone for equal rights; but actually what we've ended up with is women trying to be more like men, and men becoming more and more feminine . . . I think it's started to kind of meld . . . rather than actually really celebrating what we have that's different between the sexes; and celebrating the fact that we are equal, but we are different.

For both students, gender difference was not about inequality but complementarity, or difference of role but not of worth.

Gloria (Kent) demonstrates a contrasting view, a form of cultural common sense that sees conservatism as ridiculous and equality as logical and reflective of the innate equality of human beings:

> To me, my faith is about everyone being equal but then it's been in the news in recent years about a big ding dong about women becoming ordained. I just found it the most ridiculous argument. No one can argue that a woman can't do the job of a man . . . We're not talking about something that specifically requires male genitalia or anything like this . . . We're talking about a job, about leading people in their faith and how can you possibly not do that as a woman? I just think that's absurd because that goes against our faith. How can you have a faith about love and respect and then completely sideline fifty per cent of the population?

Brandon (Chester) appreciated the need for feminism to counter society's male domination, yet felt feminists had had to "make a disproportionate amount of noise" and that in doing so, they had alienated some, especially sensitive men. Similarly, while Jill (Chester) saw feminism as correct, she perceived it as having "gotten a bit over the top".

> I think feminism has definitely changed. When it first began, I'm all for that because that's just equal rights and part of human rights and voting. But now it's gotten a bit over the top . . . and men are basically sometimes by those really righteous feminists just being persecuted. And I think on the scales, women are now quite high up so it's quite bad because it went from persecuting against females to persecuting against males. There needs to be more of a middle ground.

These two views, biological essentialism and egalitarianism, might appear to contradict one another, yet they constitute part of the same phenomenon of post-feminism, the fusion of egalitarian and conservative viewpoints typically found in contemporary post-industrial societies, which strives for moderation rather than the extremes of either conservatism or feminism. As Sally and Audrey's examples show, discourses of biological essentialism often comprise elements of egalitarianism (Sally's insistence that differences still remain in a relationship of equality: "We're still equal in that"), and as Jill and Brandon show, it is possible to support egalitarianism in general while still criticizing feminism as being too extreme. Appearing to be moderate and reasonable is important to these students.

3.2. The Egalitarian Approach: "Faith Makes My Approach to Gender More Egalitarian"

Among the group who said their faith had led them to an egalitarian approach to gender, there were some variations, with a minority offering a theologically developed response. Most simply stated that Christianity supports equality between men and women, and that their faith made them "open-minded" (Casey, Chester) and supportive of the right to choose how they live their life. Faith here is presented as endorsing or legitimizing individualism. For George (Kent),

> Going to church I was kind of brought up to accept people and this is possibly my mum and dad's interpretation of Christian faith, just accept people as they are and don't be too judgmental and I was always taught that that would be God's role not mine.

Edward (Chester) acknowledged that gender egalitarianism in society may have been an influence, alongside faith:

> Christianity itself is about equality between peoples, both women and men, and no matter where you're from the message is the same, so it's a good thing. So in that respect, it probably does have an influence but at the same time, you could say that society's influenced me in that way as well because society is pushing gender equality. So if I was born forty years ago, it might not have been taught the same.

Dave's (Leeds) support for gender equality preceded his adoption of Christian faith, and becoming a Christian did not dampen his egalitarianism. Like the first group, for whom faith was seen as having little or no impact on attitudes, Dave lauded gender equality as "sensible" and "logical", a form of cultural common sense:

> Even before I was a Christian I had quite strong views on [how] everyone should have equal opportunities, and now I'm still believing the same. It should be all about equal opportunities for people and women having the same opportunities as men . . . It's one of those things where as part of my faith I think yeah, there should be equal opportunities, God made us equal, but also because it's just sensible. It's just logical.

The notion that God made women and men equal and "in God's image" appeared in several responses. For Ruth (Chester):

> I don't think about that much, but yes, my faith influences gender in the sense that I look—as a female I look at males and females equally and, you know, it sounds very, like, Christian but they're created in the image of God . . . I wouldn't say I'm a feminist . . . I think it's because I'm not really bothered about the whole gender thing . . . I wouldn't take a module in feminist theology or anything like that, and I think if you are feminist, you know, you've got a reason to do that obviously, something behind that, maybe you've been oppressed by a man or something . . . But, personally, I'm not really for feminism but that's not really from my faith, that's just generally.

Support for gender equality contrasted with a rejection of "feminism" in several cases. Kristina (Kent) supported feminist principles but dismissed the "militant" feminism she had encountered at university. Kristina, a Protestant, contrasted Protestantism with Catholicism, arguing that "Contrary to Catholic belief, in Protestantism, women are equal to men, so I honestly think women and men can do whatever they want, as long as they have a choice."

> Interviewer: Would you call yourself a feminist?

> Kristina: Yes, but not [one of] the militant ones . . . at university, it's more in the sense that it's not about equality, it's more about women are better and men are all horrible. I don't believe in that and I don't believe every woman has to make a career. I think women should have the choice, just as men do in theory, and I don't think one is better than the other.

Her desire to occupy the moderate middle ground is evident; she disavows militancy, whether of the religious or feminist kind. Sylvie's (Kent) response was similar—men and women should have equal opportunity to serve as leaders in the church because "if we're equal and we're all made in the image of God and God lives in all of us, so why can it only be men put at the top?" Yet Sylvie is not a feminist: "I wouldn't go to the extremes that some feminists I happen to have come across at uni do." Feminism is something that students encounter in their studies and among their peers, but it is generally not a resource that they *say* they draw from. Conversely, it is more often a resource they distance themselves from.

Rejecting a "narrow" feminist view, Sylvie explains that she believes that there are differences between men and women that make them more likely to excel at different activities. This view, while not clearly essentialist, and accompanied by hedging ("to some extent, I don't know"), bears some resemblance to views encountered in Group 1 via the notion that men are better at manual work and women are more caring. An emerging pattern here relates to subtle rhetorical strategies apparently intended to convey reasonableness. Many of the students we spoke to were keen to demonstrate their capacity to appreciate both sides of an argument and not be viewed as positioning themselves at unqualified extremes in a conservative or permissive direction. It is difficult to demonstrate conclusively whether this was a function of wider cultural values, academic capital nurtured at university or a complex combination of both. What is clear is a dominant urge to appear moderate and cautious in a way that informs expressions of Christian identity.

A small number within this group drew on the Bible and academic theology. Lisa (Chester) legitimated female church leaders on the grounds that in the Old Testament, Deborah is appointed one of Israel's judges, and the New Testament shows women serving as deacons. She reflected theologically on her father's church and the example of women starting churches in Brazil and concluded that, while men and women might have different strengths as leaders, roles should not be governed by assumptions about gender:

> My step-uncle [who trained for ministry in a conservative Baptist church] . . . once made a list of all the roles in church from cleaner to leader and drew a line where women stopped. And I thought for me that was really ridiculous, I couldn't find any biblical evidence for that at all. I get quite passionate about it and I think that in the Bible, there's women deacons and there's Deborah who was a judge and I think it's totally fine for women to be in leadership. And I think if God calls me to any role in the church, I'm not going to be like, "Oh, sorry God, I'm not allowed to do that, do you remember? You made me a woman." . . . I think that women should be ready to lead just the same as men should be ready to lead a Sunday School or all the other roles that men traditionally don't do in the church. I think through time as well, that belief and that doctrine in the church has been not consistent because it's been fine for women to go and plant churches in Brazil and lead thousands of people to Jesus but you're not allowed to do it in Britain. For me, that's quite racist as well . . . . I think that you need both sexes in ministry, not just women and I think that generally women are better pastors and men are better visionaries . . . but I think there's always exceptions.

Here again we see an urge towards affirming both sides of the argument, voiced as a qualified support for a kind of gender complementarianism, even after a thoroughgoing liberal position has apparently been expressed. This was also the only example of the Old Testament being cited in support of gender equality. Two students commented on the book of Leviticus, which has been used to condemn homosexuality, saying more widely that the Old Testament was written thousands of years ago and was not designed to be obeyed literally, and that Jesus' words should take precedence. As Jessica (Durham) put it, "I just think it's more about the spirit than the letter of the law." Loving God and others is what Jesus called for, she asserted:

> Jesus only gave us two commandments. He said, love your neighbor as yourself and love God. That pretty much covers everything. If you think about it, with the 10 commandments and things, every single one of them can be covered in that.

Jessica explained that as Jesus stood up for outcasts, she felt that he would stand up for transgender people today. She had always supported gender equality, and having a feminist mother had shaped that:

> I guess I've always had a sort of innate feeling about prejudice and things. My mum was quite a staunch feminist and she went to medical school at a time when they had a quota on women. Telling me about what life was like then for minorities and for women. It was shocking. People don't realize how recent in history that is . . . To hear about this I think, well I need to take up the fight for the current thing which is currently LGBT rights. I'm not transgender myself, but they deserve rights too and I ought to campaign for that, that kind of thing. Jesus would always try and stand up for minorities . . . The story of the good Samaritan, that was a minority race that the Jews hated at the time, things like that. He was always on the side of the underdog and minorities who were apparently discriminated against for no real reason.

Her egalitarianism was shaped by the influences of a feminist mother, an "innate feeling about prejudice" and Jesus's inspiration.

Alicia (Derby) talked in less detail about the Bible, but articulated a similar view, emphasizing the importance of relativizing Christian teaching to its historical context:

> I think that a lot of stuff that is quoted in order to promote inequality in the Bible ignores the basic tenets of Jesus' teachings which is the last word of God from the son of God and therefore should be given precedence over something written in Leviticus years and years and years ago . . . I find a lot of Christianity quite hypocritical because we do pick and choose . . . . I don't think that because Jesus didn't have female disciples that means we can't have female vicars. I think [it] means that 2000 years ago female disciples wouldn't have been much use because no one would listen to them. Also, 2000 years ago we had slavery, the Romans had a big empire and lots of other things, like they used to put people to death for crimes. We don't do any of those things anymore. I think that Jesus never at any point said that women were less than men. Therefore I think that to use that as an excuse to promote inequality is wrong. The same with sexuality.

A couple of students acknowledged that some Christians use the New Testament to denounce gender equality, citing the letters of St. Paul. But, echoing Alicia, Graham (Derby) argued that they were written in a specific context and should not be used to exclude women from leadership. The most theologically developed argument for equality in church leadership came from Hugh, a Chester theology student who said he was "on board with [feminism] in many ways". Hugh argued that different "ecclesiologies" (doctrines of the church) could be discerned in different New Testament books, and that this suggested that church life could be ordered flexibly and differ from church to church, in ways that best fitted the context. In other words, if female leaders suited a context, this could be theologically justified.

3.3. The Conservative Approach: "Faith Makes My Approach to Gender More Conservative"

The third group of students said their faith led to a conservative approach to gender. The majority of these students were located at Durham and Derby universities; whether this is significant is unclear, but both cities are home to a large number of evangelical churches, so this may be a factor. The students who took a conservative approach were generally conservative either about marriage and family *or* church leadership, but rarely both. Only two students, one Mormon and one evangelical,

believed that only men should lead churches *and* that husbands should assume a position of headship within marriage.

John (Durham) saw the nuclear family as a reflection of the wider Christian family, and so considered it logical that male leadership should extend to both, and while he did not pinpoint any Bible verses, he said that "it's more than just the commands that the Bible gives that inform my opinion about that. I think it's also the whole way you can see it played out in the various narratives and stories and also in God's character":

> My views are that men and women, they are equal in status but not in role. And so where I see society trying to equalize men and women in terms of role as well . . . it annoys me somewhat. But I can't really get angry because I don't think many people will have read the Bible and believe what I believe so . . .

> Interviewer: So what are those different roles?

> John: I think it's a kind of a tension that I believe that the, you know, that man is a leader, but that doesn't make him greater than the woman if you know what I mean? So in a kind of an ideal Christian setting, you've got your small family which is you and your immediate family and you've got your big family which is church family. And I suppose I believe in both settings . . . the man is there to lead and the woman is there to really bring a lot of support and help because, you know, the man obviously can't do it by himself and—so I think that's kind of a very broad statement of role which I think will probably, you know, get a lot of people a bit angry.

Also affirming a traditionalist complementarianism, Maya (Derby) initially did not hold this view but has come to accept what her church teaches. She explained that her church strongly encourages women to marry and sees their role as caring for children.

Students advocating gender traditionalism in marriage and family talked either about God requiring men to be the "head" in their marriage, and women to submit to their husband, or about women taking more home-focused roles and men more employment-focused. Like earlier examples, this was sometimes justified via biological essentialism. For Faith (Derby), the Christian faith and "science" necessitated heterosexuality and different gender roles:

> I think naturally women should concentrate more on the house . . . It's just looking at the way we're built as well as women, and how men are built, it just kind of shows itself where you're meant to be. But that's not to say if you're both working five days a week, you're cooking every day, it would be nice also for your husband to be mindful and maybe help with the dishes, helping each other out. I guess it's all about balancing.

Karen (Durham) invoked the story of Adam and Eve to support her belief that men should lead and protect their wives, arguing that Eve's origin in Adam's rib reflects her role in supporting him and his in looking after her. The anatomical account becomes a metaphor for a deeply complementarian social model of gender relations.

Andrew (Durham) talked articulately about the way his view on gender had been informed by his geography degree, in which social constructions of gender were interrogated, and by his theological understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity:

> I'm conscious of wanting to relate to [my wife] as someone who is an equal so I very much love when we can do things together, when we're enjoying things together, working together, you know there's a terrific sense of togetherness that comes from that kind of view of equality. But then I also feel conscious of consciously adopting a particular role because of the way that it images [sic] something about the relationship between the persons of the Trinity . . . The man is supposed to love the woman as Christ loves the church, and be willing to lay himself down for her.

Students' conservative approaches were framed within a "different but equal" understanding—they were quick to say that men and women are "equal" despite them needing to take different roles. Assertions of gender traditionalism were cloaked in egalitarian language, perhaps because students thought such views might be seen as socially unacceptable and that this may be a strategy to convey reasonableness and negotiate a middle ground. This was also the case in the responses of students who believed that marital "roles" did not need to be gendered, but thought that only men should lead churches.

The majority of interviewees were Protestants, so they talked about whether or not women could be ministers or pastors, citing the Bible or Protestant teachings as authoritative sources. Adam (Derby) said that he was aware that in "biblical times", as well as today, there was variation in women's roles in society, but that biblical teaching was clear—church leadership should be male:

> When it comes to the church, it's pretty clear that the Bible teaches that leadership in the church is male, whether you're talking about a teaching, preaching role or whether it's like a minister or an elder.

Ruby (Kent), a Protestant, began by saying that both faith and her political studies influenced her "a lot". "I think there is an obvious difference between men and women and I don't think men and women are equal and I don't think they should be", she said, but criticized discrimination against women in the workplace, stating that women can be good mothers and have good careers and should not be criticized. "But", she said, "I don't think that women should be Bishops." Asked why, she replied:

> Because God, Jesus chose all his disciples as men, because they were who were listened to at the time and I think that men are still listened to today, more than women and I think that God, Jesus had other roles for women. Like his mother and all the women that were around him, were really important to him and had important roles, but they weren't his teachers and I think that at a high level, whether we like it or not, men are listened to more than women and I think that if that's the most successful way, why should we change it?

Ruby is here affirming a dual argument grounded both in cultural reality—as she sees it—and Biblical teaching; in fact, she implies the former offers a plausibility structure for the latter, effectively denying any tension between the two. Using a similar argument, Catholic Chloe (Kent) discussed women's entry into roles as nuns or priests, attributing her view that women should not be priests to "2000 years of church history". For her, religious history was also a source of authority:

> Interviewer: What if someone said, "Hey we believe that you should go forward and be a leader in the church?"

> Chloe: Well it depends what do they mean? Like become a nun or become a priest? Because a nun I could accept, but not a priest.

> Interviewer: How come?

> Chloe: Because I don't think you can ignore 2000 years of church history. Like there's never been women priests before really, it's like married priests I can accept, because in the early churches, priests used to have to be married, or so I think I read that anyway somewhere.

It is interesting that the students take conservative positions either about marriage or about church, but rarely both. Why might this be? It might be that students uphold either male-only leadership or male-led marriage as symbolic boundaries signifying their Christianity. It seems also that an effective strategy for projecting reasonableness and moderation is to affirm one and not both.

4. Discussion

While students' discussions of how their faith informs gender can be characterized as individualized, egalitarian or conservative, there are commonalities and overlaps in these approaches. Some students who took an individualized approach and saw themselves as uninfluenced by others' views nevertheless talked in ways that revealed the influence of family, friends or churches. Some students who took a mainly egalitarian approach modified this by rejecting feminism as too militant or extreme. Some students who took a predominantly conservative approach advocated male-only church leadership, but egalitarian approaches to marriage. The way these Christian students selected simultaneously from egalitarian and conservative discourses, or what Gallagher (2003, p. 179) calls "cultural toolkits", mirrored what Bartkowski (2001) and Gallagher (2003) observed among American evangelicals. But there is one clear difference—the students often drew from societal discourses of gender that are not ostensibly religious (even if they might have a religious history). For these students, biological essentialism and feminism were not necessarily rooted in Christianity, but were forms of what we call cultural common sense: Christian students regarded whatever idea they held (for example, that women should be the primary care giver or that women should have equal opportunities to excel in the workplace, or a mixture of both) as being logical, sensible or self-evident, without reference to religious ideas. Moreover, if discourses of gender in the post-industrial UK can be described as a "post-feminist" blend of older/traditional and newer/egalitarian ideals of gender (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Stacey 1987), Christian students' views were typical of those found in wider UK society, with different students tending towards more egalitarian, more conservative or more individualized approaches. But how does Christianity function for these students?

Religion—in this case Christianity—emerged as a resource drawn upon by Christian students in constructing their attitudes towards gender. However, it was not always dominant, and was subject to particular configurations that drew in references to culture and society as complex sources of legitimation. Conceiving religion as resource (rather than as practice or doctrine, for example) is a strand of theorizing associated with scholars of social movements. Beckford (1999, p. 23) argues that religion within economically advanced western cultures has shifted from being "a taken-for-granted institution to a contested resource". Religion, Beckford (2001) argues, functions like other social movements in that it is supported by a minority out of personal choice; there is no religious (or other) monopoly and it remains in tension with wider society. Just as feminism is a social movement whose ideas some people draw from, so people take on ideas associated with religion in the process of forming their own perspectives. Developing Beckford's argument, Lyon argues that analyses of religion should not focus simply on secularization, looking for "ever diminishing dried up pools of religiosity", but should examine "religion as a cultural resource, and discover the ways in which it is expressed, utilized, and forged, even in its interactions with [wider society]" (Lyon 2000, p. 33). Lyon (2000, pp. 34–35) argues that

> questions must be asked about the relocation of the religious and the restructuring of those patterns [of secularization] within postmodernizing situations. How exactly are fragments of belief re-woven into the lives of those for whom religious choice is central, and who seek the faith-means of coming to terms with contemporary realities?

Beckford and Lyon's assessments of religion as resource are useful in understanding the cultural context of contemporary Britain that Christian students inhabit—a context characterized by a rise of religious individualism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). Nowhere is this clearer than in religious manifestations of gender, family and/or sexuality. Gone are the gender patterns of male breadwinner and female sacrificial housewife that the British churches endorsed and relied upon until the 1970s (Brown 2001), when the feminist and sexual liberation movements offered new opportunities. In their place are a range of attitudes and practices amongst contemporary Christians that go beyond Woodhead's (2005) tripartite classification of modern women (church-attending home-centered, spiritual jugglers and secular careerists) to encompass diverse family formations

including single-person households and what Wilcox (2002) calls "religious individualism" amongst LGBTQ people. In contemporary Britain, religion remains a resource for attitudes and practices of gender, but it is one resource among others, including family, friends, educational environments and discourses circulating in media and wider culture, such as biological essentialism, and the constellation of assumptions referred to as "post-feminism". The latter is the amalgamation of older/traditional and newer/egalitarian ideals of gender that exist in post-industrial societies (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Stacey 1987), and is an important influence on Christian students. This echoes Aune's (2006) findings about the similarity between British evangelicals' marriage practices and those of wider "post-feminist" society. In this sense, Christian students' orientations to gender mirror the complexity found within broader British society.

As illustrated in the preceding sections, religion is mobilized by Christian students as a resource to defend ideas that are both egalitarian/feminist or conservative/traditional, revealing how resources labelled as Christian may be mobilized to support apparently opposing positions. In such cases, religion is not collapsed into perspectives on gender—Christian propriety is subjected to dialogue with biological essentialism (for conservatives) and with values linked to "society" (for egalitarians)—but the prevailing assumption grounding both is that faith is primary and gives rise to particular perspectives on the gender issue. Our first section illustrated a different pattern, one that retained a separation between religion and attitudes towards gender as dimensions of identity, assuming no direct relationship between the two. For these students (those affirming what we are calling an "individualized approach"), it was individual agency that was primary, rather than faith, driven by an apparent desire to maintain a sense of autonomy. Such perspectives on gender are not, of course, forged in a vacuum, and reflect a negotiation with ideas associated with external reference points—family and the church in particular. But while the less hesitant, more univocal perspectives of the students within the conservative and egalitarian groups appeared to be motivated by a quest for theological legitimacy, this group affirmed more open-ended perspectives that appeared motivated by a quest to appear moderate or reasonable. The key contrast in this analysis is not between the conservatives and the egalitarians, but between perspectives affirming a stronger integration of religion and gender (characterized by a desire for legitimacy), and those affirming a greater separation of religion and gender (characterized by a desire to appear reasonable).

These findings are in accord with Page and Yip's (2017, p. 261) observations that young people in their UK study used both religion and secular gender equality discourses as "cultural resources" to make sense of their views about gender. Like the Christian students we interviewed, they did this in a "negotiated" manner, bringing religious and societal gender discourse into conversation with each other.

Dawne Moon's (2004) concept of "everyday theologies" is a helpful way of understanding the dynamics at work among these students. Moon studied the way two congregations in the United States dealt with the issue of homosexuality, arguing that members interpreted the Bible in different ways, using theological approaches they selected themselves and that reflected their own experiences as individuals. Similarly, what the students we interviewed are doing with and saying about gender represents "everyday theologies" (i.e., strategies for making sense of their lives as religious young people). Moon (2004, p. 62) writes:

> Everyday theologies are not simply the outcome of extreme individualism, but rather are how individuals, as parts of communities and societies, come to make sense of their world and its sacred aspects. These theologies are formed in communities and can help people to experience religion as truthful and transcendent rather than as hollow human tradition . . . Although sociologists of religion tend to focus on how beliefs are altered by massive social structural changes [authors' note: here we might refer to changes in gender roles], it is clear that people experience these changes in their everyday lives and must interpret them.

Christian students' views on gender and the Bible can be called "everyday theologies". They negotiate with biblical material, even if sometimes by ignoring it or failing to try to understand it, and they work

out how in their own individual, family and church contexts they might see their lives as connected to their religious identity

Moreover, for Christian students, religion is a resource for both egalitarianism and gender conservatism in equal measure. Students were equally as likely to say their faith influenced them in an egalitarian way as in a conservative way. This finding challenges the popular conception of religion simply being a source of conservatism and traditionalism. As well as illustrating examples of both, the data also reveal how conservatism and egalitarianism are often held concurrently as elements within a complex negotiation of the relationship between religion and gender. In other words, religion—in this case Christianity—is not simply a source of conservatism, but is a resource deployed variously in the strategies Christian students use to navigate the distinctive challenges of higher education.

As noted above, achieving moderation—a version of the "post-feminist" status quo with religious inflections—seemed to be a priority for these students. Students wished to present their approaches as occupying a logical middle way between the extremes of religious conservatism and feminism, and this was generally the case whichever side of the conservative-egalitarian spectrum their view was closest to. Their approach seems to be conformist rather than rebellious—they refer to their parents positively, as role models, rather than in contrast to themselves. This chimes with some of the literature on the values of Generation Y or millennials, emphasizing continuity with family rather than a determined individualism (Howe and Strauss 2003; Smith and Denton 2005, pp. 191, 120; cf. Voas and Crockett 2005, p. 19)

Differences in men and women's responses are also worth noting.[7] Ramji's (2007) finding that young Muslim men were using their faith to exert their dominance was not in evidence here. Rather, female students were somewhat more likely than males to say their faith had influenced them in a gender-conservative direction, and male students were somewhat more likely than women to say their faith influenced them in an egalitarian direction. Why? It may be that the female students felt more need to adhere to conservative teachings in order to demonstrate their religious commitment, as Hoffman and Bartkowski (2008) propose. Their analysis of two large American data sets (n = 21,871) finds women in conservative Protestant churches, especially frequent attendees, more likely to support biblical literalism (an approach that favors excluding women from leadership on the basis of a literal reading of certain Bible verses) than their male counterparts. Hoffman and Bartkowski (2008, p. 1251) suggest that "because conservative Protestant women do not generally have access to key resources within their denomination (namely, positions of legitimate authority), the schema of biblical literalism becomes a defining means of demonstrating their religious commitment". It is possible that this is occurring amongst our interviewees—these students were articulating gender traditionalist views to demonstrate religious devotion. Our interviewees were more religiously committed than our wider survey sample, and thus were more likely to be embedded in conservative Protestant churches or in student Christian groups where women were not permitted to be church leaders, or where women's leadership was contested.

Whether and why female Christian students might hold more conservative views than males is an issue warranting future exploration. The relationship between students' gender attitudes, as expressed in the interview, and their gender practices, as expressed in their home, university, work and church lives, also warrant examination through participant observation. More in-depth, immersive research, specifically on constructions and performances of gender among Christian students is still lacking, especially within the UK context.

In conclusion, "religion" may be best conceived of as a resource within the construction of Christian students' attitudes towards gender, but one that functions in complex and sometimes unpredictable ways. It is a resource that is drawn upon in clarifying and justifying both egalitarianism

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7   There were also some minor differences between the responses in the five universities, but as this was a small sample we should not draw conclusions from them.

and gender conservatism, and as such reflects the configuration of Christianity as a diverse repository of ideas. The destabilization of Christianity as a category of identity (Guest et al. 2013a) here gives rise not to a tendency towards religious eclecticism, but a casting of Christian identity within distinctive patterns of enculturation (cf. Guest and Aune 2017). Christian students construct "everyday theologies" that integrate religious resources with other social resources, resulting in varied egalitarian and conservative interpretations, much as occurs in "post-feminist" UK society more widely. Theirs is a religiously-inflected version of the post-feminist status quo. As with observations about post-feminism, there is a presumption of moving beyond the constrictive categories of the past to a new mode of self-governance, and yet self-driven patterns of identity affirmation nevertheless align with patterns in attitudes towards gender roles that are observable in broader British society.

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