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IT’S NOT *JUST* SUNDAY SCHOOL: YOUNG CHILDREN, RACE/ETHNICITY, AND GENDER IN THREE HOMOGENEOUS PROTESTANT SUNDAY SCHOOLS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
Henry James Zonio
Lexington, Kentucky
Director: Dr. Edward W. Morris, Professor of Sociology
Lexington, Kentucky
2020

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

IT'S NOT *JUST* SUNDAY SCHOOL: YOUNG CHILDREN, RACE/ETHNICITY, AND GENDER IN THREE HOMOGENEOUS PROTESTANT SUNDAY SHOOLS

Current sociological approaches to examining the lives of children approach children as active agents and participants in their socialization. Further, children are considered experts witnesses and interpreters of their own experiences. In the cases of race and gender socialization, interpretive reproduction has been used as a framework to examine how children construct and act on meanings of race and gender. While these interpretive studies illuminate how children interpret and reproduce meanings of race and gender, they do not explicate how children appropriate meanings from their cultural milieu. Consequently, these studies do not consider ways the larger culture enables and constrains children's constructions of race and gender within their peer cultures. This dissertation explores the sources of material and symbolic culture that children use in their interactions about race and gender.

To explore this process, I conducted a 15-month ethnographic study of early elementary Sunday school classrooms at three homogeneous churches: predominantly white, predominantly Latinx, and predominantly African American. In addition to field notes, I conducted group interviews of children from the churches as well as a qualitative content analysis of the Sunday school curricula from the churches with a focus on the presence (or lack thereof) of racial and gendered themes. The primary question of this study asks the extent to which larger culture, by way of religious educational curricular materials, simultaneously enables and constrains children's interpretive and interactional constructions of race and gender.

The findings in this study lead to three conclusions regarding the influence of the material and symbolic culture embedded in Sunday school curricula on children's negotiations of race and gender in the Sunday school spaces they inhabit. The first conclusion is that Sunday school was constructed as a place to learn about the Bible and God, to the exclusion of all else. The second conclusion is that there was a null curriculum surrounding issues of race and gender in the Sunday school materials, which created an ideological vacuum that was filled by the dominant cultural ideologies of race and gender the children and Sunday school teachers brought with them to the Sunday school spaces. The third conclusion from this study is that the combination of an uncritical emphasis on teaching only the Bible with a null curriculum on race and gender, led to the construction and reproduction of a white patriarchal Christian imagination.

KEYWORDS: Childhood, Race/Ethnic Socialization, Gender Socialization, Religious Education, Christian Imagination

Henry James Zonio

(Name of Student)

09/14/2020

Date

IT'S NOT *JUST* SUNDAY SCHOOL: YOUNG CHILDREN, RACE/ETHNICITY, AND GENDER IN THREE HOMOGENEOUS PROTESTANT SUNDAY SHOOLS

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Dedicated to Erin, Jeremiah, Elia, Anneliese, and Maxson

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This dissertation is the culmination of a ten-year journey that began with a conversation my wife and I had while I was still on the pastoral staff at Redwood Park Church in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Months later, we were packing up our family and moving to the San Francisco Bay Area marking the beginning of a whirlwind of transitions for our entire family that entailed multiple housing moves within California and Kentucky, familial role changes, job changes, tight budgets, and a lot of faith. I would not have been able to get to this point had it not been for the support of countless friends, family, colleagues, and mentors. Some of those people have been tracking this journey since the beginning, and many more have joined me along the way. While I will not be able to mention every person who has supported me along this journey, know that every word of encouragement, card, text, celebratory emoji, and social media post "like" motivated and encouraged me to keep going, especially during the low times when I questioned whether or not I would get to this point.

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Graduate school is a grueling and demanding process that can quickly become isolating and soul crushing. I am fortunate that I did not have to endure it alone. I am immensely thankful for the best cohort anyone could have. We studied together, wrote together, complained together, and cried together. I don't think I would have been able to survive graduate school without you all. I'll never forget our summer-long study session for comps as we charted theorist after theorist on the sociology conference room walls or the "writing sessions" in our offices where we probably got more talking and eating done than we did writing. Myles, thank you for always being an encouraging voice along the way. Maggie, thank you for never letting me get too hard on myself when I felt overwhelmed and reminding me that I should not have to apologize for putting my family before my class obligations. Chenghui, thank you for bringing humor into our group and for the many ways you helped me feel like I belonged. Julie, thank you for being our cohort mom and making sure I never short-changed myself by not letting me downplay my accomplishments. Katie, thank you for allowing me to keep you from getting "real work" done whether it be grading, dissertation writing camp, or Zoom working sessions and also for being someone to geek out about over the newest Marvel movie or season of Umbrella Academy. You all are amazing people, and my life is better for having you in it.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

When I picked up my daughter from the church preschool room, the teacher informed me that my daughter and her friend told another child that she could not play with them. When the teacher asked my daughter about it, she answered, “Her skin is too dark.” I was shocked. Where had she learned to discriminate against other people based on the darkness of one’s skin color? Furthermore, how could the daughter of a racially mixed father with coffee-brown skin exclude another child based on dark skin color? These questions about race and my subsequent questions over the following weeks and months belied my underlying assumption that young children were egocentric and incapable of understanding complex concepts like race, ethnicity, and skin color. As I began to have conversations with other parents and teachers, I discovered that I was not the only adult who believed that young children are developmentally incapable of understanding social relationships, especially when it comes to race, race categories, and the meanings attached to those categories (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

As I learned about the social construction of race, I began to wonder about my unquestioned assumptions about biological notions of gender and gendered expectations. Was it true that my young son’s interest to turn everything into a gun or sword a sign that boys were naturally more physical and aggressive? If that were the case, why was he scared to climb the jungle gym at the park? Did my daughter’s obsession with being fashionable at the three-years-old originate in her two X chromosomes? Could all my friends who had children and I be wrong about our assumptions regarding children and gender? Was gender more a function of nurture than it was nature? These questions followed me to graduate school and, ultimately, influenced the direction of the research that led to this study and the subsequent findings that constitute this dissertation.

Entrenched theories in cognitive and social development continue to reinforce the belief that children progress along linear developmental stages whereby they progress from rudimentary egocentric cognitive and social processes to being able to navigate complex and abstract concepts and social interactions. In other words, popular cognitive and social development theories focus on childhood as a stage on the way to adulthood. While these theories inform our understanding of cognitive development, they offer an incomplete view of children's social development and privilege adult ways of knowing the world. A new sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2004) flips cognitive theories on their heads by privileging children's ways of knowing the world. Contrasted with the view that children are mere learners of culture, current theories in the sociology of childhood maintain that children's agency extends to the interpretation and creation of culture especially when children interact in environments not surveilled by sanctioning adults (Corsaro, 2004; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

While there is a growing body of child-centered research, a review of the literature uncovers a small number of studies utilizing an interpretive approach to children's conceptions of race and gender. Since this study examines processes of children's socialization into race and gender, I draw from both bodies of literature to inform my methodological and analytical approaches. From the race socialization literature, I draw heavily from Moore (2001, 2003, 2002) and Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001, 1996) whom employ an interpretive approach to how children negotiate and enact racial identities and themes within their peer groups. I also draw from Lewis (2003) whose study examines schools as race making institutions in the way racialized ideologies are implicitly reinforced and reproduced through the everyday interactions between school administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

From the gender socialization literature, Thorne's *Gender Play* (1993) remains the standard for using an interpretive approach to explore how children create their understandings of gender within their peer groups. There have been other child-centered, interpretive studies (Boyle et al., 2003; V. A. Moore, 2001), but they have only confirmed Thorne's initial findings. I will discuss these studies in detail in the literature review.

While these studies illuminate children's agentic participation in race and gender socialization as well as the implicit ways in which educational institutions symbolically contribute to children's understandings of race gender by way of sanctions doled out to behaviors linked to children's social locations, they do not explore how children appropriate the culture of socializing institutions and use that as part of their interactive and interpretive processes in peer groups. Rather, current interpretive studies assume that children "take the language and concepts of the larger society and experiment with them in their own interactions with other children and adult caregivers" (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001:181) and do not examine the extent to which children's interactions about race and gender are shaped and influenced by "larger society." Moreover, there is no explication of the form "language and concepts of the larger society" take.

To that end, this study explores the sources of material and symbolic culture that children use in their interactions about race and gender. Further, this study explicates how children appropriate those cultural artifacts from the larger culture and use those artifacts in their interpretive reproductions of race and gender categories and meanings attached to those categories. Specifically, this study explores the extent to which larger culture, by way of religious educational curricular materials, simultaneously enables and constrains children's interpretive and interactional constructions of race and gender.

To explore these questions, I chose a socializing institution to localize and ground this qualitative study. I used religious institutions as the site for my research. Specifically, I focused on three homogeneous churches as the cases for the study. Sociological studies have shown that religion is a significant factor in one's views on popular social issues such as race relations, gender inequality, crime, women's rights, and gay rights (Gallagher, 2004; Hoffmann & Bartkowski, 2008; Hunter, 1991; McConkey, 2001; Sherkat, 2000; J. N. Thomas & Olson, 2012). Further, the 2004 U.S. Census Bureau Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) states that 68% of children six to eleven years old attended some sort of religious service, social event, or education program at least once a month.

In Chapter 3, I detail the specifics of my methodology in collecting and analyzing data. I also describe each of the church sites and data sources in detail. There were three phases in this study. The first phase consisted of a qualitative content analysis of the Sunday school curricula used at the churches in the study The purpose of this phase was to identify the normalizing messages about race and gender embedded in the curricula that served as the cultural elements children drew from to use in their interpretive reproductions of race and gender.

In addition to the curricular analysis, the second phase of this study consisted of ethnographic field work at each of the church sites. I conducted participant observations primarily of the early elementary Sunday schools at the churches. I also attended, at least, one adult worship services.

The third phase of this study was focus group interviews with children from participating churches to more specifically elicit children's interactions around their understandings of race and gender and how they creatively used aspects of institutional material culture to construct meanings of race and gender while simultaneously being constrained by the normalizing messages about race and gender embedded within the very same material culture.

In Chapter 4, I begin with a brief history of the origins of Sunday school and Sunday school curricula. Next, I discuss my findings from the content analysis of the Sunday school curricula used at the churches in this study. Specifically, there are two major findings from the curricular analysis: 1) Race and gender issues are relegated to the null curricula for the sake of focusing on learning Bible knowledge and Bible skills; and 2) the curricula passively constructs and perpetuates a white patriarchal Christian imagination through symbolic isolation of patriarchal stories, white imagery, and the silence of race.

In Chapter 5, I focus on how gender is constructed and presented within the Sunday school spaces. I found the Sunday schools to be active sites for explicit and implicit negotiations of gender. The ways in which gender showed up in the Sunday school spaces was shaped by each church's theological stance on women in leadership, culturally dominant gender ideologies, the patriarchal Christian imagination embedded in the material and symbolic culture of the curricula, and the racial composition of the church (in the case of First Baptist Church).

In Chapter 6, I focus on how race is constructed and presented within the Sunday school spaces. I found that race showed up in more implicit ways than gender. The ways in which race was navigated at each of the churches was primarily influenced by each church's racial composition and that race's relationship to whiteness. A secondary influence was the salience of racial identity to religious identity.

In Chapter 7, I present my findings from the group interviews with children at each of the churches. I utilized visual techniques including drawing and photo elicitation in order to facilitate conversations with the children around race and gender. What I found was that children's gendered and racialized interactions with religious imagery were mediated by three factors: 1) dominant societal race and gender ideologies, 2) the cultural milieu of the churches they attend (i.e. racial composition, theological stances on gender, denominational affiliation, etc.), and 3) the material and symbolic culture embedded in Sunday school curricula.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I bring together the extant literatures in children's race and gender socialization from developmental psychology, social psychology and interpretive sociology, as well as literature from the sociology of religion on race and gender in U.S. Christian churches. These literatures provide the intellectual background for this study. Further, I provide the theoretical frameworks that guided the research in this study.

Developmental Approaches to Children's Racial and Gendered Socialization

Most of the literature I encountered on children's racial and gendered socialization follows a dominant view of children as learners (Thorne, 1993). As a result, several studies on race socialization (Aboud, 1977; Goodman, 1964; Katz, 1976) and gender socialization (Chodorow, 1978; Coltrane & Adams, 2008) propose age-dependent stage models that are similar to Piaget's (Piaget, 1932) theories of cognitive development. These models assume that young children are unable to conceptualize race and gender beyond simple categories of similarities based on shared physical characteristics like skin color. As children get older, they progress through the cognitive stages of development gaining more complex and nuanced understandings. I will explore the developmental theories of race and gender socialization in turn.

Developmental Theories of Race Socialization

Vaughan (1987) suggests that developmental understandings of racial socialization can be grouped into two approaches: an individual psychological approach and a social psychological approach. I will describe each approach separately below.

Individual Psychological Approaches. Individual psychological approaches to racial socialization recognize two different components to racial awareness: cognitive and affective. By a cognitive component, I mean that early studies of children and race exhibited that children “actively process information, including information about people and interpersonal relationships” (Vaughan, 1987, p. 74). This contrasts with behaviorism, which would attribute racial awareness to an essential primal fear of people who were different (Klineberg, 1940). By an affective component, I mean that individual psychological approaches recognize that children express preferences based on how they feel about racial categories (Horowitz, 1940).

Individual psychological approaches measured children’s cognitive awareness of racial differences in two ways. One method was to have children either choose a doll that looked like them or color a picture of a person so that picture looked like the child (Clark & Clark, 1940). This method focused on children’s self-awareness of race, and different cognitive stages of racial awareness were assigned based on how many children responded at each age level. Another method was to have children sort pictures of people into piles of similar ethnicity (Vaughan, 1963). This method focused on children’s cognitive ability to recognize race and ethnicity as a salient characteristic for grouping individuals. Like the previous method, children were shown to progressively become aware of racial and ethnic differences as they grew older. While cognitive measures exhibited children’s abilities to categorize people based on race, they did not account for why some children chose to self-identify as a race other than their own.

In addition to cognitive measures, individual psychological approaches have considered children’s affective responses to racial categories. Clark and Clark (1940) found that several Black children identified as white. When probed about their choices, those children exhibited a preference for white skin color. Other studies similarly found that both white and Black children preferred to be white (Vaughan, 1987). Overall, what these studies found was that in racial self-identification, young children's positive feelings towards a racial category matched the category they identified with. While individual psychological approaches to understanding children's racial socialization reveal that there are cognitive and affective components to a child's understanding of race, these approaches do not examine where racial preferences originate or why they change as children grow older.

Social Psychological Approaches. While individual psychological approaches to understanding racial socialization focus on personal identity, a social psychological approach combines personal identity with social identity. Social psychological approaches recognize "[t]he likelihood that the child will construct social categories in an idiosyncratic way is reduced by the existing categories and intergroup relations already structured and recognized by the community" (Vaughan, 1987). In other words, social psychological approaches consider the effect of social structure on individual race socialization. According to Vaughn (1987), the social identity encapsulates this effect. The social identity is formed as a child interacts with racial categories set by the larger social structure. Those categories and the relationships between those categories ("intergroup relations") provide the child with a framework to learn about and understand race and the meanings attached to racial categories. A social psychological understanding of racial socialization offers an explanation for variation in how children's conceptions of race and racial categories change in relation to age, context, and history by considering the larger social structure and its effect on personal identity.

For example, Barron (2007) studied how young children's ethnic identity was shaped by the interactions they had within various communities of practice, specifically home and preschool. For the Pakistani children attending English speaking preschools in the U.K. in Barron's study, racial and ethnic identity became a function of practices and performances embedded within specific communities of practice they were a part of. At home, the children were enmeshed in a cultural context where Pakistani ethnic norms were dominant, while at school, they were part of an "other" culture outside the British norm. In a different study, Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006) showed that race socialization messages amongst African Americans were dependent on the historical epoch parents grew up in. The messages that children received who grew up in the era before Brown vs. the Board of Education differed from those received by children who grew up during the Civil Rights Movement protests differed from those received by children who grew up immediately after the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

While developmental models recognize children as social actors, they are adult-centric in their approaches to testing and theorizing about racial socialization. Developmental approaches focus on individual children and do not consider the creative and interpretive interactions that children have with each other outside of adult surveillance. Further, developmental approaches compare children to an adult ideal.

> "The development of identity and attitudes is conceived of as proceeding from rudimentary forms of identity and attitudes to fully developed adult forms… Consequently, a child's response to ethnic groups may meet some, but not all, of the criteria required by the definition of the adult form. The development of identity and attitudes can be traced as children gradually acquire the adult criteria." (Aboud, 1977, p. 32)

Developmental Theories of Gender Socialization

In the case of gender socialization, Coltrane and Adams (2008) identify three theoretical streams: social development, psychoanalytical, and cognitive development. Below, I will discuss each of these streams.

Social Development. Mead (1934) describes child socialization as a linear series of stages in the formation of self. The three stages are: imitation, play, and game. The imitation stage consists of a child's initial attempts at communication by way of imitating sounds that elicit responses from parents and other significant others. It is in this stage that children develop the symbols and symbolic gestures that make up language. The play stage is when children "play at" (p. 150) various social roles such as a parent, teacher, doctor, or police officer. Mead describes this as taking on the role of other people. It is not until the game stage when children become aware of the interdependence of roles. In other words, children at the game stage internalize the expectations of multiple roles in relation to their own identities. Those expectations are referred to as the generalized other. In Mead's words, "The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called the 'generalized other.' The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community" (p. 154).

Following Mead's theory of social development, children begin learning about gender from birth. Since the dominant ideology is that boys and girls are different, then people treat boys and girls differently (Coltrane & Adams, 2008). As children progress from the imitation stage to the play stage, they learn the proper ways to interact with their significant others as boys and as girls. Children then take on the culturally situated masculine and feminine roles (Bem, 1993; Cahill, 1989; Kane, 2006) that correspond to their sex category (Parsons, 1951). As children move from the play stage into the game stage, they internalize the gendered roles and accompanying expectations from the generalized other. In other words, children learn the roles associated with their sex category and take on gendered identities through a linear social development process that is age dependent. Children become gendered cultural natives (Bem, 1993).

Psychoanalytical Theory of Gender. While social development theories focused on external social forces influencing children's socialization into gender, a psychoanalytical approach to gender socialization focuses on internal psychic processes. Drawing from Freud's theories on child development, Chodorow theorizes about gender by looking at how differential parenting roles and children's evolving relationships to their parents (especially the mother) reproduce femininity and masculinity in children. Chodorow argues that both boys and girls develop strong attachments to their mothers in infancy. As daughters grow, there is no urgent need for her to detach or separate her identity from her mother's. Rather, daughters emulate their mothers and are more able to connect with themselves and others on an emotional level as a result of not having to distance themselves from their mothers at an early age (Chodorow, 1978). Alternatively, boys learn they are different from their mothers and must detach themselves sexually and emotionally from their mothers. Moreover, boys emotionally detach from themselves as a way to bury and deny any attraction they had towards their mothers. Chodorow (1976) argues that this distancing contributes to boys' devaluing of women and all that is associated with femininity. In this way, a domineering and emotionally distant masculinity is reproduced amongst boys.

Cognitive Theory of Gender. Like psychoanalytical approaches to gender, a cognitive theory of gender focuses on individual internal processes. Rather than focusing on psychic processes, a cognitive theory of gender socialization centers around children's cognitive abilities to construct their understandings of the world. Piaget's (1932) linear stages of cognitive development dominate this theoretical stream of gender socialization. Following this paradigm, as children are cognitively and developmentally able, they take in parts of the world they can comprehend and construct their understandings of the world. Therefore, at some point in their development, children perceive a gendered order to the world and adjust their understandings and actions to fit the gendered order.

While developmental models recognize children as social actors, they are adult-centric in their approaches to testing and theorizing about gender socialization. Developmental approaches focus on individual children and do not consider the creative and interpretive interactions that children have with each other outside of adult surveillance. Further, developmental approaches compare children to an adult ideal (Corsaro, 2004).

New Sociology of Childhood

Since 1980, the sociology of children and childhood has grown (Jans, 2004; Shanahan, 2007; Thomas, 2007). Children are no longer considered mere learners of adult culture but active agents who interpret culture and reproduce their understanding of culture through their interactions with each other as well as through their interactions with adults (Corsaro, 2003, 2004; Corsaro & Eder, 1990). This is what Corsaro (2003, 2004) called *interpretive reproduction*. Corsaro (2003) conducted an ethnographic study of preschoolers and how they formed peer groups. One of Corsaro's key findings was that children, rather than simply appropriating aspects of the adult world into their everyday interactions with each other, strived for independence from adults and cooperated to share that independence with each other. Similarly, Thorne (1993) noted in her study of how elementary children construct gender, that children maintained covert worlds with their own symbols and interactions outside of the purview of their teachers. Each of those studies suggested that children have agency from a young age with the capability to independently engage in their social worlds. If children have agency, then it follows that when it comes to sociological research, the idea that children are not "mature enough" or developmentally able to be expert witnesses to their own experiences (Blanchet-Cohen & Rainbow, 2006; L. R. de Castro, 2012) is false. This realization has led to a growing body of child-centered research highlighting children's social locations.

Interpretive Approach to Children's Formation of Racial Identities

Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) offer an eye-opening study on how children construct their understanding of race and how they negotiate race as part of their initial peer cultures. Their 11-month long ethnographic research within a diverse urban preschool focusing on how children learn about race when not being surveilled by adults, revealed that children as young as 3-years old have very complex and nuanced understanding of race and use those understandings as inclusive and exclusive strategies amongst their peers (p. 180). Moreover, Van Ausdale and Feagin found that young children can understand the hierarchical nature of race relations, perceiving whiteness at the top of racial stratification within the United States (pp. 192-193).

Similar to Van Ausdale and Feagin, Moore's (2001) research with children in day camps shows how children use adult culture regarding race, gender, and age to shape their own racialized understandings of gender and age. In Moore's words, "Age, gender, and race are not merely obvious identities but are emergent and interdependent processes. Kids, then, create peer cultures with variably hierarchical cliques using inclusive and exclusionary dynamics that hold each other accountable to these emergent racialized conceptions of gender and age" (p. 855). Not only did Moore show how children maintain racialized hierarchies, but her work at both day camps revealed how children reproduced cultural norms that place whiteness at the top of the hierarchy.

While Van Ausdale and Feagin and Moore focus on children's peer interactions to co-construct racial rules and meanings, Lewis (2003) examined the hidden racial curriculum in elementary schools taught through teachers' interactions with students. One of the main findings in Lewis' research was that teachers and administrators unknowingly participated in practices that downplayed the racialized experiences of children on the playground (p. 21). Additionally, Lewis notes that many of the behaviors exhibited by middle and upper class (mostly white) students in the classroom resulted in those children receiving more attention than working class (mostly non-white) students. Lewis claims that theses interactions reproduce racist structures within the United States as well as "racial disparities in life outcomes" (p. 188) because of racially differentiated educational experiences. Lewis' work points to the effect race has as a structural force on how children exercise agency in interpreting, challenging, reinforcing, and reproducing understandings of race and race categories.

Interpretive Approach to Children's Formation of Gender Identities

Thorne (1993) provides a child-centered collaborative framework for understanding children's socialization in gender. Rather than framing socialization as individual learning experiences measured against “normal” adult behavior (Corsaro, 2004), Thorne imbedded herself within the world of fourth and fifth graders at an elementary school to capture how children negotiate gender identity through various types of group play. One of the processes that Thorne describes is children’s gendered borderwork. In other words, children devised ways to separate the boys from the girls. They did this through chase and kiss games, cootie rituals, and teasing boys and girls who enjoyed playing together (Thorne, 1993). Thorne also documents how boys asserted their dominance over girls in the playground by interrupting girls’ games and claiming larger spaces on the school grounds for their own games. While Thorne does acknowledge that children engaged in cross-gendered play, the norm was for children to reinforce and reproduce gendered differences through their play. Moore (2001) observed similar group dynamics amongst children in day camp whereby children intersected gender, race, and age in complex ways to create a fluid hierarchy that shifted depending on the make-up of the groups interacting with each other.

Race in the U.S. Christian Church

As the first person to sociologically study religion and whiteness’ influence on religion in the United States, DuBois (1920) declared that white Christianity was “a miserable failure” (p. 36) due to its complicity in slavery and the perpetuation of racial segregation and violence. A few decades later, Martin Luther King, Jr. popularized the statement that eleven o’clock on Sunday morning was the most segregated hour in America, which was uttered in 1952 by Helen Kenyon to the Women’s Society of Riverside Church in New York (“Worship Hour Found Time of Segregation,” 1952). Emerson and Smith (2001) open their study of white and Black Protestant congregations in the United States with King’s declaration. Their study combined data from a nationwide survey of 2000 people and 200 in-person interviews, revealing that a majority of self-identified evangelical whites were more likely to attribute individualistic explanations for economic inequalities. The explanations were meritocratic in nature such as a lack of intellectual ability or needing to pull oneself out of poverty. Whereas, a majority of self-identified evangelical African Americans attributed structural explanations for economic inequalities such as lack of access to quality education and discrimination. Emerson and Smith point to various factors that contributed to these disparate views of racial inequalities in the church including a centuries-long racist history of the white church, homogeneous congregations, and colorblind ideologies.

In addition to the existence of a racial divide within the U.S. Christian church, Bracey and Moore (2017) argue that Christian churches are white institutional spaces that reproduce white privilege and power through explicit and implicit practices to exclude people of color from positions of power and influence. Further, Bracey and Moore, show that white churches employ what they call race tests “to control people of color so that only those people of color who will not challenge the white racial organization of the space will remain in the space” (p. 289). In this way race tests police the racial boundaries of historically white churches and range from suggesting to a Black visitor that they should meet one of the other Black parishioner at a church to being redirected from volunteering in one area of the church to another because the other area would be a “better fit.”

Another study (Cobb et al., 2015) that compares the racial attitudes of parishioners at multiracial churches with predominantly white, Hispanic, and African

American churches reinforces the grim picture of a racially divided church in the U.S. Using similar measures employed by Emerson and Smith (2001), the study found that multiracial churches (churches where no one racial category comprises over 80% of a church's population) were no different than white congregations in ascribing individual explanations to economic inequalities. Hispanic churches, on the other hand, were more likely to use both structural and individual explanations for inequalities than white churches suggesting that Hispanics acknowledge structural inequalities while still believing they can achieve success. Further, the study found that African Americans attending multiracial churches were more likely than whites (in general) and African Americans attending African American churches to attribute inequalities to individualistic factors. While this study contests the notion that racial attitudes in Christian churches are directly linked to one's racial/ethnic group, it does not critically analyze the cultural influences embedded within the various churches and the extent to which those cultural influences shape discourse around race. This research aims to address this gap in the religious literature on race.

Gender in the U.S. Christian Church

The Bible is an assemblage of various texts that were written in times steeped in deeply patriarchal societies, therefore the Bible reflects the patriarchy of those times. As a result, the Bible and Christian religion have had a storied history regarding how gender roles and expectations have been interpreted and implemented throughout history. Specifically, in the United States, a majority of Protestants maintain a benevolent patriarchal understanding of female subordination to male leadership (Bartkowski, 1997;

Bartkowski & Hempel, 2009; Hoffmann & Bartkowski, 2008; Sherkat, 2000) even though a majority of the population subscribes to more egalitarian views.

These patriarchal views have been buttressed by a history of the masculinization of U.S. Christianity. One example from the late 19th and early 20th centuries was the Muscular Christianity movement, which originated in England and made its way to the U.S. (Kimmel, 2011). The movement arose out of the uncertainties of World War I, economic depression, woman's suffrage, and the temperance movement. It was a symbolic way to reclaim a lost sense of masculinity in the larger American landscape. One of the more notable proponents of Muscular Christianity was an evangelist named Billy Sunday who described Jesus as "the greatest scrapper that ever lived" (p. 129) and described drunkenness as not masculine.

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, a number of women in churches began to question the logic of allowing women to serve in various areas of the church except in teaching and preaching positions (Gallagher, 2004). This was the initial spark of an evangelical feminism that sought to open opportunities for women to take on substantive leadership positions in the evangelical church. This was followed by a reaction in conservative circles stating that egalitarianism was a rejection of Biblical authority. This was followed by the formation of two evangelical organizations: the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood on the side of strict complementarianism and Christians for Biblical Equality on the side of egalitarianism. These organizations are still in existence.

As demonstrated above, the ways in which gender has been constructed in the church are varied. Indeed, there are multiple schools of Christian theology from feminist, womanist, mujerista, and queer standpoints that challenge hegemonic readings and interpretations of Biblical notions of gender (and more). What's missing in the literature on gender and the U.S. Christian church is ways in which the church contributes to children's gender socialization and how children negotiate gender within their church contexts. This research will contribute to that gap in the literature.

A Structural Symbolic Interactionist Framing of Interpretive Reproduction

Corsaro (2003) describes interpretive reproduction as children's active constructions of culture within their own peer groups, separate from adult culture. The premise is that children inhabit two worlds: their own child world and the world of adults. Stated differently, children interact with their peers outside of the purview of adults as well as interact with adults. Interpretive reproduction theory recognizes children as creative agents who co-construct their understandings of the social world within their peer groups—they create peer cultures. Rather than children simply receiving cultural artifacts from all-knowing adults and linearly building their understanding of the social world, interpretive reproduction recognizes that children interact with other children to construct meanings and, most importantly, that much of these interactions occur outside the purview of adults. In contrast to the individualistic orientation of constructivist theories of socialization like those of Mead and Piaget, interpretive reproduction theories state that children appropriate adult cultural artifacts and interpret the meanings of those artifacts in their interactions with each other. During those interactions, children play with their interpretations of the social world by creatively refining, adapting, reinforcing, and challenging the meanings attached to those cultural artifacts. In so doing, they create peer cultures that they reproduce within their own child worlds as well as in adult worlds.

In this way children contribute to changes in the larger culture. The relationship between child culture and adult culture is reciprocal.

Interpretive reproduction assumes a measure of parity between adult cultures and child cultures. In so doing, I fear that strictly interpretive approaches to the social psychology of children trivialize the coercive and constraining forces of societal structures that shape ideologies contributing to varying social inequalities. To be certain, children do not simply absorb information; children still draw from adult culture for their interactions with each other. This means that children's peer cultures do not arise *ex nihilo.* Rather, children's peer groups encounter elements of "larger culture" embedded within the material and symbolic cultures of socializing institutions. Consequently, children progressively create and adapt peer cultures utilizing cultural elements they appropriate from their ongoing interactions with socializing institutions. In so doing, children's peer cultures are ever evolving as children bring cultural artifacts from one social field into the other fields they inhabit and interact in. Corsaro gives scant attention to the substance and origins of the cultural artifacts that children presumably draw from for their interpretive reproductions. Further, Corsaro does not discuss how the cultural elements children have access to constrain their collaborative constructions of peer culture.

I argue that interpretive reproduction, on its own, is an inadequate theoretical framework for understanding how structural inequalities are reproduced within children's peer cultures. This is because interpretive reproduction has a singular focus on children's negotiations within their peer groups to create a peer culture. Other than a nod to the "larger culture" from which children glean cultural artifacts they bring into their peer groups, interpretive reproduction doesn't examine the sources of cultural knowledge that children draw from. Furthermore, interpretive reproduction does not explain how children incorporate new cultural knowledge into their collaborative constructions of peer culture.

It is here that I contend that structural symbolic interactionism (Stryker, 2003) offers a more robust theoretical framework for exploring and understanding how children actively negotiate their understandings of race and gender within the context of the social institutions they participate in (e.g., family, school, church, etc.). Stryker introduces the notion that, rather than self and society existing in an equally dialectic relationship, societal structure maintains a slightly more causal priority over self. The argument is that the self emerges and interacts within a social structure. While individuals, indeed, have agency and shape social structure, society is more pervasive than individuals. Therefore, social structure imposes a certain level of constraint on the degree to which social actors can interact and how much their shared interactions and negotiations effect the structure of society. Applying Stryker's structural adaptations of traditional symbolic interactionism to interpretive reproduction seem to offer fertile ground for theorizing on children's peer negotiations of the symbols attached to race and gender and the meanings behind those symbols. While children are not passive receptors of culture, neither are they idyllic creators of culture immune to the influence of the social structures they inhabit. Approaching this research through a frame of structural symbolic interactionism acknowledges the influence of racial and gendered social structures on children's interactions as well as children's agency in negotiating meanings and use of symbols surrounding race and gender.

For reasons I argue in Chapter 4, I maintain a major source of material and symbolic culture comes in the form of Sunday school curricula. I extend Wortham's (2003) work from public education to religious education and similarly argue that Sunday school curricula also provides young children with cultural resources they can use in their collaborative constructions of peer culture. I further argue that the culture embedded in these curricula serve as structural constraints on children's peer culture formation—specifically around race and gender. In other words, cultural elements from Sunday school curricula simultaneously enable and constrain children's constructions of race and gender. Consequently, inequalities are reproduced and transmitted by way of subversive, normalizing messages embedded in the curricula. Moreover, these normalizing messages are mediated by cultural messages from the dominant culture as well as the cultural milieu of the churches the children attend.

Research Questions

In this study, I address the following research questions:

- What messages about race and gender are embedded in the Sunday school curricula at the three churches in this study?
- To what extent are Sunday school spaces racialized and gendered spaces?
- In what ways does Sunday school curricula influence the ways race and gender are constructed, contested, and reproduce in the Sunday school spaces?
- To what extent do material and symbolic culture embedded in Sunday school curricula influence how children negotiate race and gender in the context of religious themes in Sunday school classrooms?

CHAPTER 3. METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

To explore children's constructions of race and gender and their appropriations of material culture for those constructions, I utilized a multiple qualitative approach for this study. One reason for multiple qualitative methods was to triangulate my results providing validity and reliability for the study. To that end, there were three parts to this study: 15 months of ethnographic field work primarily in early elementary Sunday school classrooms at three homogeneously racial Protestant churches (white, African American, and Latinx) in the East South Central region of the United States, content analysis of Sunday school curricular materials from those three churches, and in-depth group interviews of children from those churches. For the remainder of this chapter, I describe the methodology for this study. Then, I explicate the methods and data sources for each part of the study: participant observation field work, curricular analysis, and in-depth group interviews with children at the research sites. I end with a brief note on including children as active participants in the research process. In order to maintain anonymity of the research sites and research participants, I have changed the names of the churches and people involved in this study.

Methodological Approaches

Since I am interested in how material and symbolic culture informs and constrains children's interactional constructions of meanings of race, I approach this research from a symbolic interactionist perspective. Rather than deducing social processes from afar, I rely on children as expert witnesses of their empirical world. As such, I intermittently adopt the use of "kids" when referring to children, even though "kids" is more colloquial, since this is how they refer to themselves.

I observed the empirical world of children in the context of the churches they attended. Religious institutions are a key site for social interaction (Lenski, 1961; White, 1968). White's (1968) analysis of religious influence states that religion is a group phenomenon whereby community members interact with each other to shape normative expectations for behavior. White further argues that church members enforce group norms through interactions with each other (25). Bearing in mind that 46% of those in the United States attend religious services at least once a month (General Social Survey, 2010), it would follow that religion has a significant impact on individuals' secular behavior. Additionally, according to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey, 51% of the adult U.S. population self-identify as Protestant. More specifically, according to the 2004 SIPP, 65% of children attend at least one religious event once a month. Considering these details, I argue that Protestant churches are a salient site to explore children's constructions of social norms such as race and gender.

Ethnographic Field Work

The first source of data I focus on in this dissertation comes from 15 months of field work as a participant observer at three homogeneous churches (Table 3.1). Initially, I had planned on spending only 9 months at each site, but after writing memos and analyzing my field notes along the way, I found that I needed to extend my time at the sites in order to generate enough data to reach saturation and provide thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the interactional processes of constructing meanings of race and gender within the Sunday school classrooms I visited. Since the primary focus of this research was to uncover the qualitative influence institutional material culture has on young children's race and gender socialization processes, I used purposive criteria to choose three homogeneous churches: predominantly white, predominantly African American, and predominantly Latinx. I also chose churches from denominations that differ in their views on gendered roles and hierarchy: one of the churches (First Baptist Church) subscribed to a complementarian view of men and women, and two of the churches (All Saints Christian Church and Blessings Church) subscribed to an egalitarian view of men and women. Further, all three churches were located in a city within the East South-Central area of the U.S., which is demographically similar to the U.S. as a whole except for a lower percentage of those who identified as Hispanic or Latinx on the 2018 American Community Survey. As per my IRB protocol, I collected letters of consent from each of the churches allowing me to conduct field work for the purposes of this study (see Appendix A for an example of the consent letter). Since I was primarily present in the children's areas at the churches, I also obtained the required background checks at each church for someone in their children's ministry areas. For the remainder of this section, I describe each of the churches included in this study and the process I used to collect and analyze field notes from these research sites.

All Saints Christian Church (Predominantly White)

All Saints Christian Church is part of the United Methodist Church (UMC) denomination. The church began in 1976 and moved from its original location to where it is now in 1979. The church had five different worship services that met at various times on Sundays. Three of the services were English-speaking and predominantly white, one of the services was for Swahili-speakers, and the other service was billed as a "Multicultural Service" that contained scripture readings in various languages from different African countries like Kenya, Bhutan, Congo, and more. The non-English speaking congregations were mostly autonomous congregations that were functionally treated as outside groups that used the church's space. The scope of my study did not include these congregations, focusing only on the English-speaking services. Of the three English-speaking services, only the latter two services (9:30 and 11:00 a.m.) had programming for children, and those programs ran concurrently with the adult worship services. During the first service with children's programming, the children attended an age-segregated Sunday school. During the second service with children's programming, the children attended a children's church that included children from Kindergarten to 5th grade. I explain the difference between these two programs later in this section.

The church staff consisted of five pastors: Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor, Pastor of the Multicultural Community, Pastor of Swahili Ministries, and Pastor of Encouragement. All the pastors except for the Executive Pastor were men. There were also eight other paid staff (four men and four women) who were not ordained ministers ranging from administrative assistants to music director to children's ministry director. The church had 1800 members with an average of 425 people who attended the three English-speaking services on any given Sunday. Specifically, in the children's ministry areas (birth through 5th grade), there were 65 children with an average weekly attendance of 40 children. There were about 10 total children in the early elementary group.

The church building was multi-story consisting of sanctuary, a multipurpose gymnasium with attached small kitchen area, various office spaces, and multipurpose classroom spaces that were used for various programming throughout the week. The church was located off one of the major highways and on one of the main streets in town across the street from apartments and near a few medical offices. The church's name was clearly situated on the front of the church along with the cross and flame UMC logo. The main entrance had a covered drive-through area for drop off/pick up, which several people took advantage of on Sunday mornings, especially when it was raining. The entrance doors were double glass doors, which opened into a foyer that is a little larger in width than the entrance doors and extended about 50 feet into the church ending at a T at the end of hallway. To the right was a receptionist counter where someone was seated to answer questions on Sundays as well as during the week when the church was open for staff hours and various weekday programs such as a "Mothers' Day Out" nursery care program. Signage at the end of the foyer stated that the church gym was to the right, and the sanctuary and children's ministry areas were to the left.

Since I spent most of my time in the children's ministry, I only went to the gymnasium on one occasion as I was exploring the church; it was a large multipurpose room with rubberized flooring and enough space for full-court basketball. A couple of hundred feet to the left of the foyer, was another smaller foyer space that fed into the sanctuary on the left and children's ministry areas on the right. There was a children's ministry reception desk immediately outside the children's ministry areas, which could be separated from the rest of the church by way of two heavy duty wooden doors. These two doors remained locked after children's programming started for the sake of security and could only be opened via an RFID card that only authorized staff and volunteers carried. During every one of my visits, I found the children's ministry reception desk staffed by volunteers to answer questions about the children's ministry. The children's ministry reception desk volunteers were also supposed to supervise the children's ministry entrance to keep unauthorized people from entering the children's ministry areas. My experience, though, was that I was not questioned or stopped by anyone at the children's ministry reception desk during my first few visits to the church on a weekend even though I walked in by myself and was a bit lost.

To the right of the children's ministry entrance was the children' s ministry director's office. The early childhood and nursery areas were located immediately beyond the wooden double doors. I did not spend time in these classrooms because my focus was on the elementary-aged classrooms. To the left at the beginning of this hallway was a stairwell that led upstairs to the Sunday School classrooms and a larger multipurpose room that was used for children's church as well as for their midweek teen ministry programs and Sunday afternoon Swahili-speaking service. The walls in the nursery hallway and elementary Sunday school hallway had murals on them. The nursery hallway was painted with the story of David and Goliath, and the elementary hallway was painted with the story of Moses parting the Red Sea. Once upstairs, the elementary Sunday school classrooms were to the left. To right, there was a set of double doors that led to a hallway and to the large multipurpose classroom where there was children's church during the second service with children's programming.

Immediately on the left side of the elementary Sunday school hallway, there were boys' and girls' restrooms, which were decorated with an African safari theme including black and white pictures of animals one might see on a safari. There were five classrooms in the hallway, and each classroom was a station used for Sunday school. All Saints Christian Church used a rotational model for Sunday school, that followed a curriculum called *Spark Rotation* from Sparkhouse (2020), which published various religious educational materials. I provide a more detailed description of the publisher and curriculum later in this chapter in the section on the curricular analysis piece of data. In brief, each month during Sunday school, the curriculum focused on one Bible story or theme. The lesson was then taught in different ways each week in a different station: snacks, drama, games, music, and science experiments. There were three age-segregated Sunday school groups: early elementary (K-1st grade), elementary (2nd-3rd grades), and upper elementary (4th-5th grades). Each group rotated through the stations visiting one station per week. When the kids came to Sunday school, they entered the activity room, which had some sports related decorations. There were some heavy nylon strips hanging on the right at the entrance that had nametags for the kids. The children wore those nametags during Sunday school. They took them off at the end of Sunday school and hung them back up on the nylon ribbons. At the end of Sunday school, some of the kids were picked up to return home, and some of them stayed for the children's church time during the second worship service that had children's ministry programming.

When it was time for children's church, the children who did not get picked up after Sunday school walked over to the large multipurpose room where the children's church met. When the children entered the children's church room, they pulled their name slip from a plastic holder that was hanging on the wall in the back of the children's church room, and they deposited their name slip into a basket on the check-in table at the back of the room. The upper elementary children were responsible for taking attendance via the name slips and wrote children's names on an adhesive nametag including a color that corresponded to the small group the kids joined near the end of children's church. The children's ministry room was set up with a stage at the front. There were two entrances to the children's ministry room, which were in the back of the room. There were two sections of chairs set up in auditorium style seating with one center aisle that was in front of the stage. Behind as well as to the left of the audience seating were round tables with chairs and single-colored tablecloths. These tables were used for free-game time before the children's church service started and for small group discussions at the end of children's church. To the right of the audience in the back, there as an audio/visual technical booth with sound board, computer, and shelf with music and videos. There was also an LED projector that projected to a screen that was just to the left of the audience seating next to the stage.

At the beginning of children's church, the children were encouraged to engage in free play, which included playing various board games, puzzles, LEGOs, other building blocks, or stacking plastic cups. The kids retrieved what they wanted to play with from a shelf in the far back left corner of the children's church room and then returned the activities when they were done. When the children's ministry director called for the children to clean up, all the children and leaders helped return the various activities to their respective shelves. Then the children and leaders found seats in the seating area for the duration of the children's church service. During the children's church service, the children followed an order of service (liturgy) that ended with a small group time. When it was small group time, the small group leaders found a round table to sit at. The kids were dismissed to tables based on the colored number on their nametags. The leaders had a question sheet that they read through for their small group time. The small group time ended with a prayer, and the kids went back to the seating area for a wrap up time and to wait for parents to pick them up.

Blessings Church (Predominantly Latinx)

Blessings Church was a Latinx church that was part of the UMC denomination. By Latinx, I followed the U.S. Census Bureau's description of the "Latino" classification as people who are "Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (census.gov). Further, I used Latinx as a classification because the pastor at Blessings Church identified the church as "a Spanish-speaking Latino [*sic*] church." I opted for Latinx, rather that Latino or Latina, because of the term's disruptive and political nature in highlighting the multitude of usually marginalized gender and sexual identities who would otherwise be assigned under the classification of Latino/a (Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018). While Latinx is an ethno-racial category that includes multiple racial groups that have shared historical-cultural legacies linked to colonization and mestizaje (Comas-Díaz, 2001; Gracia, 1999) rather than a distinct racial group like White or African American, Protestant Latinx churches in the United States share characteristics that mark them as Latinx churches (Calvillo & Bailey, 2015; Cobb et al., 2015). As such, I refer to Blessings Church as ethno-racially homogeneous, while I refer to the other two churches as racially homogeneous.

Blessings Church was started in 2005, and it was located on the southwest side of town in a strip mall. There were a variety of stores and restaurants in the strip mall such as a Dollar Tree, a Western clothing store, and a Dollar General. There also seemed to be another Latinx church just a few storefronts down from Blessing Church, but during my site visits to Blessings Church, the other church was not open. There was a taco truck and shaved ice booth in the parking lot across from where the church was located. The church met on Sunday evenings with only one service at 7 p.m. There were age-graded Sunday school classes for children that met concurrently with the adult worship service: nursery, pre-school, early elementary, and elementary.

The church staff consisted of a female Senior Pastor and a female administrative assistant. The church had 350 members with an average weekly attendance of 275. Specifically, in the children's ministry areas (birth through 5th grade), there were 70 children with an average weekly attendance of 50 children. There were about 20 total children in the early elementary group.

When I pulled into the parking lot, I noticed there were greeters and parking lot attendants at the front of the church entrance, which used to be a store entrance. The greeters were adolescent and adult Latinx males. The parking attendants were wearing orange traffic vests. Most of the adults were dressed in "nicer" clothes, and the adolescents were also nicely dressed but not as "formal" as the adults. I was greeted in Spanish as I entered the building and shook hands with the person at the door. I answered in Spanish, but I was greatly aware of my lack of comfort with speaking Spanish since it had been a long time since I had interacted with anyone in Spanish. At each of my visits to Blessings Church, I found that anyone who had not already met me assumed I was Latinx and could speak Spanish based on my skin coloring and facial features.

Upon entering the building, it felt busy and a bit cramped. There was a small foyer, and immediately to the right, there was a hallway with a couple of offices. Just past the entrance foyer was a narrow hallway that led to the back of the church building. On the right side of the hallway was the sanctuary. There were two entrances to the sanctuary on either side of the hallway and entered the back of the sanctuary. There was a stage at the front of the sanctuary that spanned the entire width of the sanctuary. The sanctuary was oriented so that it was wider than it was deep. In the middle of the stage wall, there was the UMC cross and fire logo with the addition of a globe in the background. The chairs were set up in four sections so there was a middle aisle and an aisle on either side of the two middle sections of chairs. There was an audio/visual technical booth in the back of the sanctuary with a large LED clock that let the people on stage know what time it was.

There were three classrooms on the left side of the hallway, on the opposite side of the sanctuary entrances. Each classroom had two entrances. Beginning at the room nearest the church entrance: the first classroom was for elementary kids; the next one was the early elementary classroom; and the third one was for smaller kids and the nursery. There were bathrooms down that hallway to the right. The first one was for “kids” and the other one next to it was for smaller kids and their leaders. To the left was a kitchen area and adult bathrooms. During the service, there was usually a person in that hallway to help with children going to the bathroom. The children’s bathrooms were not gendered. The adult ones were.

On the first day of my site visits, I met the children’s ministry director. She spoke only Spanish, so she had her teenage son translate. The purpose of the meeting was for introductions as well as for me to clarify that I would only be observing the class and doing no teaching. Further, I let her know that I would be working with the early elementary Sunday school teacher to schedule group interviews with the children. Following that brief meeting, I met the Sunday school teacher who was in charge. She was white and primarily English-speaking; she was married to a Latinx man, and they attended Blessings Church together. When I inquired about the curriculum that the church used, the Sunday school teacher let me know that they had opted to not use a purchased curriculum, so the Sunday school teacher put together her own lessons by searching for materials over the internet to use for various Bible stories that she planned on teaching.

When I inquired about the length of the service, the Sunday school teacher let me know that the church officially met between 7:00 and 8:30 p.m. but the services regularly went past that time. During my site visits, over half of the services extended beyond 8:30 p.m. The Sunday school teacher also let me know that some of the kids showed up at 6:30 because their parents came early to set up and get ready for the service. That meant some of the kids could be there up to 3 hours depending on when the church service ended and when the children showed up to church.

At Blessings Church, the children were in the Sunday school classroom for the entire time they were at the church. The early elementary Sunday school classroom was set up with three rectangular tables in a U shape. The chairs were the kinds of chairs you would find in an office setting with fabric padding and arm rests. The chairs were also heavy and not easy to move around. The children were sometimes stuck when the chairs were pulled up all the way to the tables. Many times, this resulted in the children crawling under the tables to get out of their chairs. Responsibility for teaching the early elementary Sunday school class was set up so that teachers took turns teaching from week to week so that no one had to teach the class two or more Sundays in a row. Of the 11 times I observed the early elementary Sunday school class, seven of the times were taught by the English-speaking teacher and four of the times were supervised by different Latinx women. The reason I distinguish teaching and supervision is because the English-speaking teacher was the only teacher I observed who taught any kind of lesson. The other teachers simply cared for the kids as if the Sunday school time was only for the sake of childcare rather than religious education.

The early elementary Sunday school class always began with free play regardless of who was teaching the class. Children's caregivers would have to sign in their children when they dropped the children off in the class. Then, the children either colored a coloring sheet or played various imaginative games in groups around the room. At about 7:10 p.m., church volunteers would come into the classroom and serve a small meal for the children. This was done because the children were at church late, and some of them had not eaten prior to coming to church. The meals varied from pizza to cereal to sandwiches to pasta. If the class was being supervised by one of the Latinx teachers, the children would continue with an extended play time after the meal until their parents picked them up at the end of the church service. If the class was taught by the English-speaking Sunday school teacher, the children would sing a couple of songs after finishing their meal. The songs would be followed with a Bible lesson, a craft, and then a closing prayer. If the church service was not over by the time the lesson was over, the Sunday school teacher would lead the children in a game, more songs, and/or more coloring sheets. When the parents picked up their children, they had to sign them out in the same binder where they signed them in to the class.

First Baptist Church (Predominantly African American)

First Baptist Church was the largest African American church in the city and was part of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) denomination. The church began in 1895 when two churches decided to merge, and it has been at its current site since 2003. The church had three services, and the first service (8:00 a.m.) had no children's programming. During the 9:30 a.m. service, there were age-graded Sunday school classes, and during the 11:00 a.m. service, there was a children's church service for children in Kindergarten through 5th grade. For the last two site visits, the church changed to have only two services (8:00 and 10:30 a.m.) with a Sunday school time (9:25 a.m.) between the services. There still was no children's programming during the first service and a children's church service during the last worship service time.

The church had four ordained pastors on staff consisting of the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor of Discipleship, Worship Pastor, and Youth and Young Adults Pastor. Since First Baptist is part of the SBC, only men could be ordained as pastors. In addition to the pastoral staff, there were six other staff members such as the Children's Ministry Leader, Church Administrator, and Administrative Assistant. Three of the non-ordained staff were women and three were men. The church website also listed the current chair of deacons, who was male, and the current chair of trustees, who was female. The official church membership consisted of about 2200 people, and on any given Sunday the average attendance was 800 people. Of those numbers, there were 600 children (birth through 5th grade) who were listed as members of the church, and there was an average of about 80 children who attended Sunday school and children's church on any given Sunday. There were an average of 15 children who were a part of the early elementary Sunday school class during my times visiting First Baptist Church.

The church was in the north part of town, which had a population that was predominantly African American. First Baptist was hard to miss as it was a large building, and it was next door to one of the city's library branches. The building was bilevel with the sanctuary and some classrooms situated on the main/upper level. There was a fellowship hall, industrial kitchen, offices, and gymnasium (with full-court basketball, weight room, and indoor track) on the lower level. During the week, the doors to all the entrances were locked for security reasons. For example, when I arrived to meet with the senior pastor in order to talk about the possibility of including First Baptist in my research, I had to buzz in and give the receptionist a specific reason for visiting the church before they unlocked the door. When I entered the building, I had to sign in at the desk noting the time I arrived, where I was going, and whom I was meeting with. I later found out that this was the normative procedure for all non-staff people who came to the church during the week. In addition to programs that met on Sundays, the church had a variety of programs and meetings throughout the week, and the gym facilities were regularly used by some of the church community members.

When I pulled into the parking lot on the first Sunday I visited the church, there were signs directing traffic in a certain direction so that traffic flow was clear, especially during service transitions. Furthermore, there were male parking lot attendants helping direct people to open parking spots. The parking lot was situated as an arc that began at the sanctuary main entrance and looped toward the back of the church property. When I entered the church, there was a sizeable foyer that led straight into the sanctuary. I was greeted by female greeters in the entrance way. In the foyer, to the right, there were tables with information for different ministries and programs. Also, on the right was a hallway that led to the children's and youth ministry areas of the church as well as bathrooms and stairs and elevator that led to the church's lower level. Halfway down that hallway, the entrance to the children's ministry hall was to the right. Just past the entrance to the children’s ministry area, there were two computer stations set up for children’s caregivers to check in children for Sunday school and children’s church. The youth area was further down that hallway. Along the walls in the hallway leading to the children’s and youth ministry areas, there were bulletin boards highlighting various ministries and programs. Notably, there was a large 4’ x 10’ poster of historical African American figures entitled “Architects of America” along one of the walls in the hallway between the children’s ministry area and youth ministry area.

The children’s ministry hall was decorated and painted with two different themes. The first half of the children’s ministry hall was painted with cartoon-like animals in a Noah and the Ark theme but with a cruise ship twist. Each of the rooms were named after animals and had a mural of the corresponding animals inside the classroom. For example, the room for the early elementary Sunday school classroom was the “Camel” room, and there was a large mural of two cartoon-like camels painted on one of the classroom walls. The farther, second half of the children’s ministry hall was painted and decorated with a cartoon-like medieval castle theme. There were suits of armor and banners painted on the walls. Each of the four rooms in this section was named with a different male Old Testament Bible story characters: Joseph, David, Elijah, and Daniel. Like the animal themed rooms, these rooms had a mural depicting a part of the characters’ stories. For example, in the David room there was a mural of a cartoon-like young David smiling and holding a sling standing next to a collapsed Goliath.

In order to drop off a child in the children’s ministry, their caregiver had to check them in at one of the computer terminal check-in stations that were just outside the hallway and receive a printed out nametag sticker for the child as well as a pick-up slip that the parent or guardian had to use in order to pick up their child. Posted at the entrance to the children's ministry hallway was a sign stating that only people dropping off kids and other approved volunteers/church staff were allowed to be in the children's ministry hallway. Every Sunday when I visited First Baptist, there was a someone from the security and safety volunteer team (usually male) stationed at the entrance. On my first Sunday, I did not notice the sign and entered the children's ministry hallway looking for the children's ministry director. I was immediately stopped by a member of the security and safety team wondering if I needed help. At the time, I did not know such a team existed, and there was no uniform or nametag indicating that this person was part of that team. I told him that I was looking for the children's ministry director and identified myself as a graduate student conducting research at the church. He took me to the classroom where the children's ministry director was with the other Sunday school volunteers.

Immediately prior to the beginning of the Sunday school time, all the Sunday school teachers and the children's ministry director met for prayer. That first Sunday I was there and escorted to the room they were in, they were getting ready to pray as a group. They asked if anyone had any prayer requests prior to praying. The prayers were accompanied with a number of "Amen"s, "Yes, Jesus"s, and "Mmhmm"s. Most everyone was referred to as "Sister" or "Brother." I was "Brother Henry."

For the Sunday school time, I observed the early elementary Sunday school class. There was one teacher for the class who was there every week. Sometimes she had a female assistant teacher who would help with various tasks like passing out papers, writing on the whiteboard, and classroom management. Typically, the Sunday school class would begin with children playing quietly with foam blocks, putting a puzzle together, or reading one of the books from the bookshelf. When it came time for the lesson to begin, the Sunday school teacher would have the children sit on the rug while she read the Bible story lesson from the curriculum they used. Following that, the preschool class would join the class, and they would watch the Bible story video lesson together. Once the video was over, the preschool children would return to their classroom, and the early elementary children would work on a take-home worksheet as well as a craft until it was time for caregivers to pick up their children. The caregivers had to show the pick-up slip they received upon check-in in order to pick up their children. There were some children who would stay for the children's church time that ran concurrently with the last worship service.

The children's church met in a corner of the fellowship hall, which was the floor immediately below the children's ministry hallway. The children from Sunday school who would be attending children's church either took the elevator that was at the entrance to the children's ministry hallway down to the fellowship hall or the stairway that was at the far end of the children's ministry hallway. The fellowship hall was a large open area with long rows of tables set up with chairs. At one end of the fellowship hall there was an industrial kitchen with a large coffee carafe set up each of the Sundays I visited the church. At the other end of the fellowship hall, there were chairs set up in rows facing a makeshift stage made from a couple of choir risers. A portable LED projector was set up so that videos and images could be projected on the wall behind the children's church stage. There usually was a teen male assistant who was responsible for the audio/visual technical aspects of the children's church, and he was situated off to the side of the children’s church chairs in a large storage closet with the door open. Children’s church would begin with a snack at one of the fellowship hall tables, which included items such as milk, chocolate milk, rice crispy treats, or cereal bars. After the snack, the children would proceed to the children’s church seating area where the leaders would begin the children’s church service with a couple of songs. After the singing, the leaders would follow the children’s church curriculum, which corresponded with the Sunday school curriculum. This would include reading the Bible story from the Bible, praying, watching a Bible story video, and playing a game to reinforce the lesson. At the end of children’s church, caregivers would come down to the fellowship hall to pick up their children.

During my time at First Baptist Church, the children’s ministry used two different sets of religious education curricula. Both curricula had modules for age-graded Sunday school settings and a multi-age children’s church setting. Both curricula were also produced by the same publishing company, Lifeway Christian Resources, which is the publishing arm of the SBC denomination. For the first three Sundays I was at First Baptist, they were using *The Gospel Project* Sunday school and children’s ministry resources. I found out that all the Sunday school classes in children’s, youth, and adult ministries were using The Gospel Project. This meant that everyone on Sunday school was focusing on the same Bible story each week. After those three Sundays, the children’s and youth ministries switched to using the *Bible Studies for Life* curriculum. This curriculum also had Sunday school and children’s church materials. I discuss and analyze the curriculum later in Chapter 6.

Participant Observation and Field Notes

At each of the church sites, I conducted field work as a participant observer in the early elementary Sunday school classrooms and children's churches over a 15-month period. Originally, I had planned on visiting the churches over a period of 9 months, but I had not collected enough data to provide thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of what was going on at each of the sites. Due to unforeseen circumstances such as personal illness, changes in church schedules, absent Sunday school teachers, or special church programming, I was not able to visit each of the children's ministry areas every month. For example, on more than one occasion, I would arrive at Blessings church to find that the scheduled Sunday school teacher had not shown up. One of those times half way into my observation period, the parents thought I was the substitute teacher, signed their children in, and left their children in the classroom; it was not until 15 minutes later that the children's ministry director "drafted" one of the other children's ministry volunteers from another class to take over for me. Over the course of those 15 months, I visited the early elementary Sunday school class at All Saints 14 times, the children's church at All Saints 13 times, the early elementary Sunday school class at Blessings 12 times, the early elementary Sunday school class at First Baptist 12 times, and the children's church at First Baptist 8 times. This was a total of 77.5 hours of site observations.

Originally, I had planned on taking on a "least adult role" (Mandell, 1991), whereby I would have no authority over the children and defer to the other adult leaders/teacher, participating alongside the children in the children's ministry areas I was in. After meeting with gatekeepers at each of the churches and considering that I would be visiting the churches about once a week, I settled on taking on more of a modified version of the “friend role” that Fine (1987) describes in his research into boys’ preadolescent culture. Modifying that “friend role” meant that I was assigned roles at the churches which typically carry with them some authority. In all the areas I was in, I took on the role of an assistant, which meant I did not do any teaching, but I did assist with handing out materials, playing games, and helping set up and clean up the classroom spaces. I was still able to maintain a semblance of the “friend” role, though, because I was a new volunteer with very little authority in relationship to the other leaders and I only showed up once a month, at most. I was a novelty to most of the children, and they interacted with me in more friend-like ways than they did with the other leaders. For example, I encountered one of the children outside of the church setting while at the mall. The child called out, “Hey! Henry!” rather loudly and turned to his mother saying, “That’s the guy who hangs out sometimes in Sunday school.” Further, when I talked with the children, I introduced myself as someone who was still in school, just like they were. In this way, I was not a “typical” adult and inhabited a quasi-friend space when it came to the children I encountered at the churches.

In addition to considering my role in relation to the children I interacted with at each of the research sites, I had to account for my relationship to the overall scope of this research as an insider who grew up in Protestant churches attending Sunday school as well as formerly being clergy overseeing children’s religious education at various Protestant churches for 12 years. Some of the critiques of “insider research” include the objectivity and validity of findings and conclusions (see Anderson & Herr, 1999). These arguments stem from a positivistic assumption and standard of objectivity on the part of researchers and that objectivity is compromised when one is intimately connected with the subjects of their research. In other words, valid research can only be obtained via the role of an outside observer. Feminist methodologies challenge the notion of objectivity in research, instead contending that all research is shaped by researchers' subjectivities that can only be mitigated through reflexivity and awareness of one's positionality to the subjects of research (Reinharz, 1992). Some of the further benefits of insider research include the ability to gain access to research sites and "insider information," an understanding of processes and argot particular to the group or institution studied (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), and being able to quickly establish rapport when working with youth (Hodkinson, 2005).

Consequently, I come to this research as someone who identifies as a Protestant Christian and has grown up in church. For twelve years prior to entering graduate school, I was clergy in various Protestant churches overseeing the religious education of children. Additionally, I continue to write, speak and consult on topics and issues ranging from religious educational pedagogy to issues of addressing diversity in religious education settings. As such, I know what it is like to interact with children in Sunday school settings. I also have extensive knowledge of processes and procedures for running religious programming for children in most Protestant settings. These experiences and knowledge allowed me to easily gain entre to churches as research sites, especially in children's ministry areas. In addition to reputational trust as a former director of children's religious education, I was able to unobtrusively enter in the Sunday school areas and easily establish rapport with church volunteers, parents, and children in the classes. My experiences and knowledge also allowed me to quickly take note of processes of interactions between adults, children, curricula, and other aspects of the

Sunday school environments. In order to mitigate assumptions and potential biases as an insider, I used multiple qualitative methods (content/visual analysis, participant observations, in-depth group interviews, participant-generated drawings, and photo elicitation) to triangulate findings and conclusions.

During my site visits, I carried a small notebook with me and jotted down brief field notes during times that I was not actively engaged with the kids in an activity or taking care of any tasks a leader assigned to me. I took note of children's interactions with each other, interactions between children and adults, and the environmental aspects of each church especially regarding race and gender. After each site visit, I expanded on my brief field notes while in the parking lot or later that day at home to include more details. Within a week of each site visit, I typed up my handwritten notes and composed analytical memos of emerging themes and connections that arose from the data. At the end of my site visits, I had compiled 70 single-spaced pages of field notes and memos.

Content Analysis of Curriculum

Since I am interested in how children appropriate material culture in their interactions with each other, especially surrounding constructions of race and gender, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of Sunday school curricula that was used at the three churches in this study (Table 3.3). Two of the churches (All Saints Christian Church and First Baptist Church) used curricula purchased from varying religious publishing houses, and one of the churches (Blessings Church) came up with their own scope and sequence of Bible lessons and pulled various online and material resources to teach those lessons. I briefly describe each of the curricula used at the churches followed by the methodology used to analyze the curricula.

All Saints Christian Church used separate curricula for the Sunday School and children's church times. For Sunday school, they used a curriculum called *Spark Rotation* that is published by Sparkhouse. Sparkhouse is one of the publishing houses that is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and publishes religious educational curricula for the entire life course (Sparkhouse, 2020). *Spark Rotation* uses a rotational Sunday school model whereby leaders teach one Bible story over the course of a predetermined amount of time. At All Saints Christian Church, they spent one month on each Bible story. The Bible story was presented through the lens of varying workshop activity stations. While *Spark Rotation* provides eight different station options, All Saints Christian Church only utilized the snack, drama, games, music, and science stations, and each month used only three to four of the stations. The curriculum consisted of a single leader guide with instructions for each of the stations as well as any materials that needed to be printed out for children in the groups. The children's ministry director at All Saints Christian Church printed out and sent the station-specific guides to the station leaders each month, and the station leaders were responsible for preparing each lesson and gathering all materials for their lessons. Each Sunday, the age-graded groups spent the entire Sunday school time in one of the stations with their group leader. Over the course of a month, the groups spent time at four stations learning the same Bible story in four different ways.

For children's church, All Saints Christian Church used lesson modules from an online children's ministry resource called Children's Ministry Deals (http://www.childrens-ministry-deals.com). Children's Ministry Deals offers various types of resources from curricula to media that churches can use in their children's ministry areas. There is very little information on the Children's Ministry Deals website about who writes the materials or the denominational affiliations of the organization. Regarding their curriculum contributors, the website FAQ vaguely states, "We have a creative team of grown-up kids, professional writers, editors, graphic designers who all make up the Children's Ministry Deals curriculum production team" (Accessed 01/08/2020). All Saints used the children's church curricula that was presented topically for varying time periods and was not limited to a specific scope and sequence. The topical units included leader guides, discussion guides for small group leaders, as well as digital media that could be used for digital slide presentations. At All Saints Christian Church, the children's ministry director customized the lessons and slides to include aspects of their own liturgy, including elements such as reciting the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. Some of the topical units that were used during my time at All Saints Christian Church were: learning some of the book of Proverbs using a ninja theme; what it means to follow Jesus using the Despicable Me movies as a theme; and what God has to teach about emotions using emoticons as a theme.

At Blessings Church, the early elementary Sunday school lead teacher was solely responsible for the Bible lessons that were covered. She did not follow a formal scope and sequence for the lessons that were chosen. When I asked her about her decision process, she said that it varied: at the beginning of the year, she did a series of lessons on the creation of the world and some of the patriarchs listed in Genesis and Exodus; leading up to Easter, she covered stories of Jesus leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection; during the Christmas season, she focused on stories leading up to Jesus' birth; and at one time she decided to cover some Bible stories of women in the Bible. The early elementary Sunday school teacher relied on a mixture of free online resources and various Bible story books to put together the lessons, which included coloring sheets, a focal Bible verse, a Bible lesson, songs, and usually a craft. The online resources included sites like *Teach Us the Bible* (http://www.teachusthebible.com), *Ministry to Children* (http://ministry-to-children.com), and *Bible Fun for Kids* (http://biblefunforkids.com). The physical resources were in the form of small children's Bible story books that were purchased from dollar discount stores, Half Price Books, or eBay.

At First Baptist Church, there were two curricula used during my time there. For the first two Sundays I visited, they were completing their use of a curriculum called *The Gospel Project*, which was published by Lifeway Christian Resources. Lifeway was a part of the SBC. *The Gospel Project* contained curricula for both Sunday school and for children's church settings, and First Baptist used both modules. *The Gospel Project* had a 3-year scope and sequence that chronologically covered the events of the entire Bible with the purpose of presenting them through the lens of the meta-narrative of Jesus as savior of the world while covering Christian doctrines deemed significant by the SBC (The Gospel Project, 2020). The curricular materials included leaders' guides, student worksheets, posters, lesson videos, and parent take-home sheets.

For the remainder of my time at First Baptist Church, they used another curriculum published by Lifeway, which was called *Bible Studies for Life*. Like *The Gospel Project*, *Bible Studies for Life* included curriculum for Sunday school as well as for children's church, and First Baptist used both. *Bible Studies for Life* was a date-dependent curriculum that focused on cognitive and spiritual stages of life (Bible Studies for Life, 2020). Lifeway called the principles used to guide the curriculum development *Levels of Biblical Learning*. "*Levels of Biblical Learning* covers 10 biblical concept areas—God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Bible, Salvation, Creation, Church, People, Family, Community & World—that children and students can learn as they study God's Word" (Lifeway Christian Resources, 2020). While Lifeway's website did not say so, the levels seemed to be based on Fowler's (1995) stages of faith development. The curricular materials included leaders' guides, student worksheets, posters, lesson videos, and parent take-home sheets.

In order to analyze the curricular material, I gathered as much of the curriculum I could that was used during my time at the three church sites in the form of extra coloring sheets, worksheets, etc. I took pictures of the various posters and visual aspects of the curriculum that was used at the church. In the case of the formal curricula used at All Saints Christian Church and First Baptist, I obtained copies of the various printed material from the churches and scanned them as PDF files for ease of access and analysis. For the curricular materials used at Blessings Church, I downloaded the materials the early elementary Sunday school teacher used from the various websites she used to my computer. I also obtained copies of the Bible lesson videos used at First Baptist to analyze.

Group Interviews

The final source of data for this study was group interviews with children at the three churches I visited. Interviewing children in groups combines the advantages of in-depth interviews with participant observation. Consequently, prior research has found that children are more at ease to participate and collaboratively construct meaning around the interview questions (Montell, 1999; Peek and Fothergill, 2009). Additionally, group interviews place interviewees as experts of the topics discussed (Reinharz, 1992). Drawing from Peek and Fothergill (2009) regarding optimal numbers of groups and participants in each group, I arranged to conduct two focus group interviews at each of the research sites with five children in each group. By aiming to keep the group size to a maximum of five children, I was be able to maximize discussion while maintaining order and keeping within the allotted time set aside for the interview, which was one hour (Peek and Fothergill, 2009). In the end, I had a total of six group interviews with two groups from each church (Table 3.3). There were a total of 21 children who participated in the group interviews. At All Saints Christian Church, one group consisted of four children: one white female (6 years old), one white male (6 years old), and two white males (7 years old). The other group from All Saints consisted of three children: one white female (6 years old) and two white females (7 years old). At Blessings Church, one group consisted of four children: two Latinx females (5 years old), one Latinx female (6 years old), and one Latinx male (6 years old). The other group from Blessings Church consisted of two children: one Latinx female (5 years old) and one Latinx male (5 years old). At First Baptist Church, one group consisted of four children: one African American female (5 years old), two African American females (7 years old), and one African American male (5 years old). The other group from First Baptist Church consisted of four children: one African American female (5 years old), one African American female (7 years old), one African American male (6 years old), and one African American male (7 years old).

Since this study focuses on young children's constructions of race and gender within the context of the Sunday school classes they attended, I used a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling to recruit children to participate in the group interviews. After obtaining IRB approval for this study, I created flyers that the children's ministry leaders at each of the churches could give to parents of children in the early elementary Sunday school classes with information about this study with a Qualtirics online link for parents to complete for more information on the group interviews. In addition to the flyers, I asked the children's ministry directors to place posters about this study with contact information in the children's ministry areas as well as include information about this study and the group interviews in their normal email communications with parents. I was able to recruit the children involved in the group interviews at All Saints Christian Church using these initial methods. I did not hear from any parents through the Qualtrics link at the other two churches. I was able to recruit children for the group interviews at Blessings Church and First Baptist Church by directly speaking with parents or guardians at the churches while they were checking in their children in for the early elementary Sunday school classes. For all the children involved, their parents or guardians read through and completed informed consent forms (see Appendix B for example of informed consent form) that gave permission for their children to participate in the group interviews.

The group interviews were conducted at each of the churches to set the children at ease by providing an environment the children were already familiar with. At All Saints Christian Church and First Baptist Church, I was able to use an empty Sunday school classroom for the group interviews. For those group interviews, there was an adult children's ministry volunteer present for the duration of the interviews. Since there were no available empty rooms at Blessings Church during the time of the interviews, I conducted the group interviews in one corner of the early elementary Sunday school classroom while the rest of the Sunday school class continued. All the group interviews were recorded via audio recorder, and I transcribed the interviews within a week of the interviews. All recordings and transcripts were securely stored in password protected files on my computer, and I was the only person with access to those files. In the end, the transcripts were a total of 146 pages for the six group interviews.

At the beginning of the group interviews, I obtained verbal assent from all the children involved and recorded their assent on a form (see Appendix C for an example of the verbal assent form). I also gave the children the opportunity to choose a pseudonym that I would use for the reporting of this study. For those children who did not or could not come up with a pseudonym, I obtained their permission to assign a pseudonym for them. Those pseudonyms are the ones used in this dissertation report. Further, I invited the children to ask any clarifying questions they might have had about the interview process and let them know that they could opt out of answering any of my questions or end their participation in the interview at any time during the interview process. All the children chose to remain involved for the entire group interviews. Throughout this part of the study, I took the position of an ignorant learner approaching children as experts of their own experiences and conceptions. (See Appendix D for the interview schedule.)

Visual Methods in Group Interviews with Children

In addition to open-ended interview questions, I asked children to draw a picture of their favorite Bible story or a picture of what they thought God or Jesus looked like.

Drawing allows children to artistically articulate what they may have trouble verbally articulating (Coles, 1990; Ridgely, 2011; Zonio, 2017). Following Ridgely's (2011) suggestion on analyzing children's drawings, especially about religious themes, I invited children to interpret their pictures for me in order to mitigate my assumed interpretations of the drawings. I did this by asking the children to tell me about their pictures and then followed their cues to probe deeper especially when it came to themes about race and gender. For example, if children told me they were drawing a picture of Jesus, I asked them what color skin they thought Jesus had.

Another visual method that I used as part of the focus group interviews was photo elicitation in order to allow children to interpret material symbolic culture and identity (Harper, 2002) around various racial/ethnic interpretations of Jesus as well as metaphors used to describe God. I used Google Images to search for illustrations and pictures I used in this portion of the group interviews. I used search terms such as "Black Jesus," "Indigenous American Jesus," and "Asian Jesus" to obtain the pictures I ultimately used. In the end, I used 6 pictures of the Nativity or the Holy Family: white, Asian-Indian, Indigenous American, Korean, and African American (Table 3.4). While these pictures differed racially, they also differed in other ways (i.e. stylistically, setting, medium). While I tried to mitigate these extraneous differences by asking children the ways they would change the picture if they so pleased as well as probing for racial indicators like skin color, eye color, and hair type, these differences could have affected the children to respond in ways that were not connected to racial representations. In keeping with a qualitative approach to this study, I quote children's interactions with the racialized imagery so that the validity of the children’s reactions can be further evaluated by those reading this study.

For images relating to masculine and feminine metaphors for God, I compiled a list of metaphors used in the Bible and used Google Images to search for images that corresponded to the metaphors (Table 3.5). The feminine metaphors (and accompanying pictures) were: a nursing mother, a woman looking for a lost coin, a midwife, a woman giving birth, a female potter, a hen protecting her chicks, a seamstress, a woman baker, a mother bear protecting her cubs, a mother holding her child, a mother eagle caring for her young, and a lamb. The masculine metaphors (and accompanying pictures) were: a farmer/sower, a carpenter, a lion, a knight/warrior, a king, and a shepherd.

For the first two group interviews, I showed the children pictures via a computer screen and found it difficult to keep the children engaged in exploring the pictures. For the remainder of the group interviews, I printed the pictures out and laminated them so the children could freely explore the pictures and respond to them in a more tactile manner. As the children looked at the pictures, I asked the children to tell me about the pictures and what the pictures were depicting. One key question that I asked the children about the various racial/ethnic representations of Jesus and the Nativity was, “If you could change anything in the picture [you are looking at], what would you change?” For the set of metaphor pictures, I asked the children which of the pictures were good representations or descriptions for God. I would, then, probe for the children to give me their reasons for their choices. This elicitation technique allowed for children to interact with the pictures as well as each other as they drew from the cultural resources they had about race and gender to construct their understandings of who God and Jesus were and their relationships to God and Jesus.

Data Analysis

I employed a modified grounded theory approach to the data generated over the course of this study: field notes and memos, the text and images in the Sunday school curricula from the three churches, and transcripts from the group interviews. This approach allows categories to arise from the data (Charmaz, 2006) thus mitigating my biases due to my prior involvement as children's pastor and as a child who grew up in church. Following the analytical strategies of grounded theory, I began with initial coding. Initial coding entails objectively describing all the data with brief descriptions of action.

For the field notes and memos, I began by reading through my field notes and memos with a focus on actions and interactions related to race and gender. I took note of initial themes and wrote analytical memos to keep track of those themes and connections between different parts of the data. For the curricular materials, I focused on racial and gendered themes, paying special attention to ways those themes were oversimplified, ignored, overlooked, or erased. For the group interview transcripts, I focused on children's explanations, reactions, and interactions regarding race and gender with special attention to the times when children were able and unable to articulate their thoughts about religion, race, and gender.

Further, I employed a constant comparative analytic to compare emerging codes (within each set of data) with previous and new data making note of differences and similarities across the data. I followed initial coding with focused coding. In the focused coding phase, I grouped larger chunks of data based on the initial codes into codes that made the "most analytical sense" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). As similar codes emerged, I placed them into common categories that explicate recurring social processes.

Additionally, I wrote analytical memos to document decisions in the coding process as well to begin drawing connections between codes. In this way, I built my analysis of how Sunday school curricula explicitly and implicitly communicated categories and accompanying meanings of race and gender. For example, one of the themes I discuss in Chapter 4 is about how the Bible lessons focused on individual spiritual transformation. As I was coding through the last set of curriculum, I began to notice that the lessons from the Bible stories that the curricula wanted Sunday school teacher to relay to children focused on individualistic goals like learning to be thankful, trusting God to take care of them, becoming "saved" so they could go to heaven, etc. As a result of these emerging codes, I wrote the following analytical memo:

> As I was coding through the lesson on Palm Sunday from the *Bible Studies for Life* curriculum (used at First Baptist Church), I noticed that the lesson emphasized personal spiritual change rather than material and subversive structural change that was implicit in Jesus' king-like entrance to Jerusalem. This reminded me of the sermon in the Beatitudes that I attended at Blessing Church. The pastor focused on individual spiritual changes. I must go back and code for these messages in the curricula and see if this is a significant theme across the curricula at all three churches. (Excerpt from my analytical memos)

Consistent with a comparative analytic, I returned to the previous curricula and began coding for times the curricula emphasized spiritual change. In the focused coding phase, the theme of the Bible as a source of individual spiritual transformation arose as a significant theme that contributed to the ways in which race and gender were oversimplified and ignored in the curricula.

Further Considerations in Analyzing Visual Images in Curricula

A significant part of the curricula included illustrations, pictures, coloring sheets, and other visual images. Drawing from Grady (2007), I approached the visual images included in the curricula as textual data. In addition to thematic coding accompanied by constant comparative analysis to establish broader conceptual codes regarding the implicit and explicit messages surrounding race and gender, I coded the visual images for the actions and setting that were depicted as well as for the normalizing messages regarding the structure of church and how one should conduct their everyday lives.

I also coded the images for race by utilizing various phenotypical markers to place people into three broad categories: white, African American, and other people of color. While racial categories are products of social construction rather than fixed categories based on essentialized characteristics, people are assigned to racial categories based on various physical features that have been deemed significant such as skin color and/or hair type. For the category of white, I focused on people who approximated those of European descent with lighter skin tones (peach/pink-ish/very light tan), straight to loosely curly hair, round to slightly oval eyes, and narrower nasal passages. For the category of African American, I focused on people with coffee-colored to darker brown skin tones, dark colored hair, thick and tightly curly (in its natural form) hair, and flatter noses. For people who did not really fit in either the white or African American categories, I coded as other people of color. Generally, this meant people with coffee-and-cream to dark tan skin tones and light brown to darkly colored hair.

Including Children as Active Participants in Research

Including children as research participants is not without its challenges (Blanchet-Cohen & Rainbow, 2006; Mannion & I’anson, 2004; N. Thomas, 2007). When efforts are made for children to participate, it becomes apparent relatively quickly that most adults do not implicitly know how to work with children (Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow, 2006; Mannion and I’anson, 2004). While the purpose of child-centered research is to recognize children having agency, their needs and resources differ from those of adults and accommodations need to be made for children’s participation to be meaningful and respectful (Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow, 2006). Unfortunately, children have little social capital (Thomas, 2007), so their needs are marginalized or overlooked because the workload on adults needed to accommodate children increases (Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow, 2006). Related to this issue of accommodating children is the reality that children come with gatekeepers. Parents, guardians, teachers, and other gatekeepers need to be accommodated, sometimes more so, in addition to the children (Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow, 2006; Cheney, 2011; Corsaro, 2004).

Another challenge in children’s participation surrounds the concern of disappointing the children that one works with. This disappointment manifests itself when children’s participation makes no real difference in the outcome of projects or situations they are involved in (Thomas, 2007). Additionally, children face disappointment when adults are not able to follow through with what is promised to children (Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow, 2006; Mannion and I’anson, 2004). One of the consequences of these challenges is that adults choose to act “in the best interests” of children to minimize the challenges. Unfortunately, the motivation for this kind of action is more based in the belief that children are not “mature enough” or developmentally able to meaningfully participate (Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow, 2006; de Castro, 2012).

Considering the challenges outlined above, one must ask if the whole exercise of including children as active participants in research is worth it? What is gained by making the effort for children to engage in meaningful participation? Why should adults bother with including children in decision processes that could very well be completed more efficiently and less costly without them? Shanahan (2007) stated, “An understanding of childhood as a fundamental category of sociological analysis reconceives adulthood, intergenerational processes, age grading, and gender. Such an understanding would fundamentally revise the way we study foundational sociological concepts…” (p. 424). By placing children central to research projects is to critically examine and expand our understanding of the social world and the relations of power within our social structures. In order to overcome the challenge of overlooking children in sociological research, Thorne (1987) argues that the view of children as incomplete beings in the process of learning what it means to be an adult needs to be counteracted. Put differently, children should be seen and heard, and their ways of knowing and seeing need to be incorporated into our methods and analyses. Children don’t just absorb and appropriate knowledge, they are producers of knowledge. When children are viewed as legitimate actors in society, researchers can explore how children’s actions affect the social world as well as what issues children contend with in their peer groups and in larger social structures.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of churches in study

Church Name	Denomination	Predominant Race	Complementarian/ Egalitarian	Average Weekly Attendance
All Saints Christian Church	United Methodist Church	White	Egalitarian	425
Blessings Church	United Methodist Church	Latinx	Egalitarian	275
First Baptist Church	Southern Baptist Convention	African American	Complementarian	800

Table 3.2 Curricula used at each church

Church	Sunday School	Children's Church
All Saints Christian Church	Sparkhouse Rotation	Children's Ministry Deals
Blessings Church	Various Resources	N/A
First Baptist Church	Gospel Project and Bible Studies for Life	Gospel Project and Bible Studies for Life

Table 3.3 Group interview participant characteristics

Church		Child Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Race
All Saints Christian Church					
	Group 1	Acorn	6	M	White
		Brian	7	M	White
		Kent	7	M	White
		Willa	6	F	White
	Group 2	Kitty	7	F	White
		Lucky	6	F	White
		Maria	7	F	White
Blessings Church					
	Group3	Amy	5	F	Latinx
		Eva	5	F	Latinx
		Jax	6	M	Latinx
		Veronica	6	F	Latinx
	Group 4	Gecko	5	M	Latinx
		Justina	5	M	Latinx

Table 3.3 Group interview participant characteristics (cont.)

First Baptist Church				
Group 5	Caleb	5	M	African American
	Emily	7	F	African American
	Lily	7	F	African American
	Marcala	5	F	African American
Group 6	Danisa	5	F	African American
	Jacob	6	M	African American
	Olivia	7	F	African American
	Telia	7	M	African American

Table 3.4 Descriptions of racialized Nativity images used in group interviews

Race	Image Description
African American	African American Expressions greeting card image of the Nativity. Artist Unknown.
Korean	*The Birth of Jesus* by Woonbo Kim Ki-chang.
White	*The Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerrit van Honthorst.
Indigenous American (Pueblo)	*The Holy Family* by Father John Giuliani
Indigenous American (Hopi)	*Hopi Virgin Mother and Child II* by Father John Giuliani.
Indian	The Holy Family (Indian painting). Artist unknown.

Table 3.5 Descriptions of masculine and feminine metaphor images for God taken from the Bible

Masculine	Feminine
Shepherd	Elderly woman with a lamp looking for a lost coin
King sitting on a throne	Midwife assisting with a birth
Carpenter	Woman giving birth with no men in the picture
Knight	Woman giving birth with male birthing coach
Elderly farmer sowing a field	Mother eagle with eagle chicks
Father and child	Mother and child
Lion	Lamb
	Seamstress
	Woman baker
	Woman potter
	Mother bear and cubs

CHAPTER 4. THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULA

In this chapter, I focus on my analysis of the curricula used at the churches in this study. Two of the churches (All Saints Christian Church and First Baptist Church) used all-encompassing published curricula, and Blessings Church used a variety of curricular materials gathered from Bible story books and Sunday school lesson websites. Table 3.3 lists the curriculum sources at each of the churches, and they are described in detail in Chapter 3.

While the churches each used different curricula from different publishing sources, they were all similar enough in content and themes that arose from the analysis that I discuss the curricula altogether rather than separately. I do point out differences in the curricula when they are salient to the ways those differences may have influenced how race and/or gender were constructed in the classroom space. In the sections below, I show how the Sunday school curricula provided epistemologically problematic structures where race and gender were minimized to make room for an emphasis on Bible knowledge and religious instruction. In other words, gender and race became part of the null curriculum, thus constraining and diverting discourse away from issues of race and gender. The null curriculum is the corpus of information that is not taught in an educational setting (Eisner, 1994). This implicitly communicated that religion and the Bible had nothing substantial to say about race, gender, or issues connected to those aspects of identity and society. This, in turn, allowed for dominant ideologies surrounding gender and race to uncritically seep into the Sunday school classroom where those ideologies were reinforced and reproduced. What Eisner (1994) stated about the null curriculum at secular schools can also be applied to Sunday schools:

> […] schools have consequences not only by virtue of what they do teach, but also by virtue of what they neglect to teach. What students cannot consider, what they don't know, processes they are unable to use, have consequences for the kinds of lives they lead. (p. 88)

This is further complicated by the reality that churches are largely volunteer-dependent organizations, which means that most, if not all, of the Sunday school teachers at any given church are unpaid parishioners with little to no formal classroom and/or religious training. This was the case at all three churches in this study except for All Saints Christian Church where the paid children's ministry director on staff, who had an M.A. in education, led the children's church portion of their Sunday morning programming. The lessons she led were still drawn from and dependent on published curricula. All the churches relied on the material resources provided to them in the form of written curricula. This meant that what was taught during the Sunday school and children's church times rarely deviated from what was prescribed in the curricula. Even in those times where Sunday school teachers customized lessons, they relied on curricular materials from other publishers or online Sunday school curriculum websites, which was the norm for the early elementary Sunday school teacher at Blessings Church. I give examples of this in Chapters 5 and 6. Moreover, current Sunday school curricula is modeled after modern educational curricula (Burgess, 2000), which is dominated by a technical instrumental rationality whereby curricular materials are highly prescriptive in order to reach standardized outcomes (Eisner, 1994). If the curriculum did not mention a topic or issue in the teaching script, then the Sunday school teachers did not address it. In those times children brought up topics or issues that were not scripted, the Sunday school teachers either redirected the children back to the topics included in the material curricula or glossed over them. (There are examples of what this looked like in Chapters 5 and 6.)

For the remainder of this chapter, I offer a brief history of the origins of Sunday school and the development of Sunday school curricula. Then, I discuss the underlying structure and emphases that explicitly and implicitly shaped the limits of discourse in the classroom. In the final two sections of this chapter, I discuss the ways the curricula constructed race and gender, mostly through implicit means.

Sunday School: A Brief History

In 1780, Robert Raikes began the first "Sunday School" in Gloucester, England. This was not the type of Sunday school that is more common today where children learn Bible stories, moral lessons, and are socialized into the religious norms of their church. Although dated, George Herbert Betts (1924) offers a brief sketch of Sunday school's origins as well as the social conditions that shaped and transformed Sunday school from a philanthropic effort whose aim was educating poor children to a formalized part of churches for the sole purpose of religious education. I draw from Betts in this section to briefly discuss how Sunday school began and the genesis of published Sunday school curricula.

Raikes witnessed high levels of illiteracy and poverty in and around Gloucester, which he attributed as one of the significant factors in high rates of delinquency leading to imprisonment. This was during a time before compulsory public education and the existence of community parks, youth sports leagues, and other avenues where children could play and socialize (Zelizer, 1994). This was also a time prior to child labor laws, so many children—especially those in the lower classes—worked many hours in deplorable conditions at factories. It was in this atmosphere that Raikes decided to educate lower class children in areas of decency, literacy, and morality as a means to decrease the incidence of delinquency and imprisonment later in life. Since Sunday was the only day of the week that many children did not work, this was when Raikes began to host a "Sunday school" as a humanitarian effort to teach children to read. In addition to education, Raikes provided clean clothing to the children. Raikes' Sunday school did not explicitly teach religion; literacy was the goal. What little children learned about religion was a result of using the Bible as one of their reading texts, which was only done because civilized people read the Bible from time to time.

Soon after Sunday schools made their way to the United States, the first Sunday school society was formed in 1791 in order to combine and standardize efforts to educate children. It was at this time that the Bible became the primary source for teaching reading and the first movement towards Sunday school taking on religious teaching as well as literacy. Concurrently, secular schooling was becoming more secularized and regulated by the state (Betts, 1924). As secular education became more specialized and moved from the home to institutionalized forms of education, religious education became more specialized and institutionalized as part of the church, giving rise to explicitly religious Sunday school curriculum. As Sunday schools became more specifically religious and mediated by religious expertise, they relied on the theories and practices shaping public schools for their own development (p. 33).

In 1827, there was a concentrated effort amongst religious Sunday school societies to develop age-graded curricula so that children could learn religious material in developmentally appropriate ways. This prompted an effort to universally standardize Sunday school curriculum in 1830, soon to be followed by denominational publishers developing their own curricula that focused and emphasized their denominational distinctives (Betts, 1924). Other than minor pedagogical changes in response to educational and developmental theories over the past couple of centuries, little has substantively changed in Sunday school curricular content (Burgess, 2000; Wykcoff, 1961). This means that the formative stages of Sunday school curricular development were ontologically steeped in a white patriarchal Christian imagination that was undergirded by the ideologies of the pre-Civil War United States. Unfortunately, what I found was that Sunday school lessons at the churches in this study and the Bible knowledge therein were presented as deontological precepts that were of the utmost importance to one's Christian life and subsequent afterlife. By categorizing those precepts taught by the Sunday school curricula as deontological, I mean that the precepts were presented as objective, universal moral practices that derive their goodness and authority from an external deity.

It's Just Sunday School

As I coded the Sunday school curricula from the three churches in the study, one of the major themes that arose from all three as the predominant manifest message was the primacy of teaching children the Bible and corresponding religious knowledge with the intent of socializing children into religious life that extended into adulthood. This meant that most of the activities and discussions prescribed by the curricula focused on the material details of Bible stories as well as other bits of information like learning the books of the Bible and the names of Jesus' disciples. Latently, this pressing emphasis on teaching children Bible was that the curricula frequently took a deontological approach to Bible stories and lessons, removing all sense of inconsistency and incongruity that existed in the stories. Although the emphasis was on teaching Bible knowledge, I found that many of the lessons focused application of that knowledge on individualistic spiritual/moral transformation and change with an emphasis on going to heaven.

Emphasis on Bible Knowledge

In the curricula from all three churches there was an overwhelming emphasis on teaching the material details of Bible stories and lessons. Further, there was an urgency tacked onto this emphasis by equating learning Bible stories and lessons with an encounter and/or life-changing experience with God. "Help kids learn at their level! Interact with the Bible in every lesson to help kids navigate the story and begin to compare what they learn to their own life" (Sparkhouse, 2020). In this brief statement on the Sparkhouse website, the claim was that Bible stories could easily be adapted to help children apply the Bible to their lives. *Bible Studies for Life: Kids* made no less of a grand claim:

> From babies to preteens, we design studies around the way kids learn best. This ensures every kid in your church has a *transformative*, age-appropriate *encounter with God's Word* so that you can invest your energy where it's needed most: your kids! (Bible Studies for Life, 2020, emphases mine)

Not only does this curriculum promise transformation and an encounter with God, it also implicitly makes the uncritical claim that little preparation is needed because all a Sunday school teacher must do is follow the scripted lessons for this transformation and encounter to happen. Although, Blessings Church did not use an all-inclusive curriculum written by one publisher, the fact that one only needs to focus on transferring Bible knowledge to children in order for their lives to be spiritually enriched reinforced the idea that Bible knowledge, on its own, brings about some sort of life transformation.

Another way that curricula attempted to emphasize learning Bible knowledge was in how lessons were taught. The primary focus of the lessons was on the material details in Bible stories, which meant that much of the Sunday school class time was spent making sure the children could recount the details of Bible stories. The lessons that the curricula were trying to derive from the Bible stories for the children were tacked on at the end of the Bible stories with little to no discussion. For example, in the *Spark Rotation* curriculum that focused on the story of Moses when he was a baby (Exodus 2:1-10), the one activity that immediately followed the reading of the story from the *Spark Story Bible* was called *Mixed-Up Moses.*

> **Let's see how well we remember the story. Who are the different people who took care of Baby Moses?** *(Mother, Miriam, Pharaoh's daughter, God)* **Let's play a game called Mixed-Up Moses.**
>
> Divide the group into teams of 3-4 kids. Match up the older and younger kids so the teams are well-balanced. **Each team will get a set of cards with phrases and pictures from the story. Lay the cards out on the floor and put them in the correct story order. Then, as a team, retell the story in your own words using the cards.**
>
> Give each kid on a team one or two Baby Moses Story Cards. If some teams are really struggling, let them use their Spark Story Bibles. Play until all the teams have retold the story.
>
> Following the game, discuss these questions.
> - **Was it hard to get the story in the correct order?**
> - **Was there a part of the story that you really liked?**
>
> **God took care of the Baby Moses and God takes care of us too. He loves us so much!** (Excerpt from lesson about Moses in *Spark Rotation* curriculum)

The activity focused on the children remembering the order of events in the story and retelling the story by putting cartoon pictures from the story in the correct order. The material details of the story were so important that the curricula wanted the children to recall the story from memory, but the Sunday school teacher was instructed to let the children use the story Bible if the children were still having trouble. After all the children completed the activity, the follow-up questions were focused on the activity rather than on the lesson the curricula wanted the children to learn—God takes care of us. That lesson point was thrown in at the end of the activity as a deontological precept with no discussion of what it meant to be taken care of by God, why Moses was taken care of by God (the Jewish people were enslaved by Egypt and the pharaoh had ordered all Jewish male babies to be drowned upon their births), and what did it mean if any of the children did not feel like God was taking care of them because they were experiencing difficult personal situations. The underlying assumption that was implicitly communicated by the curriculum was that there exists a singular, universal standpoint from which Bible knowledge should be communicated and could be understood.

The uncritical urgency around teaching children Bible knowledge communicated to the children and the Sunday school teachers that the Bible was important and had something to say about how one should live. An unintended consequence of uncritically elevating Bible knowledge was that the Bible (and God) had nothing of substantive value to say about issues and topics that were left out and not addressed by the curricular scripts—those issues and topics that were part of the null curriculum like race and gender. In Chapter 6, I give an example of how an uncritical urgency to teach children Bible stories coupled with a null race curriculum provided an avenue for a white Christian imagination to permeate the predominantly the African American Sunday school classroom at First Baptist Church.

The Bible as a Source of Deontological Precepts

Not only did the Sunday school curricula uncritically emphasize the primacy of Bible knowledge and facts, the curricula treated the Bible as a deontological text, therefore minimizing or erasing any complexities or nuanced inconsistencies inherent in some of the Bible stories. One example was in a lesson focusing on being thankful for one's family that was taught during one of my site visits at All Saints Christian Church:

> **INTRO**
> Last week we started our series on saying thank you and having an attitude of gratitude with someone we all can agree we're thankful for–our friends. If you have good friends who are always there, like David and Jonathan in the Bible, you've got a special person who deserves all the thanks you can give them. Even if you don't have that close friend in your life yet, there are still people in your life you can count on just as much. In fact, before you were even born, some of those people were chosen for you by God himself. I'm talking about the people you live with, eat with, work with, play with, and yes, probably fight with every day–your family! Friends become special people by choice; we choose who we hang out with based on things that we share in common. For most kids, however, your family isn't something you choose. It was chosen for you by God, who knew you before you were even born, and God knows what he's doing when he gives us the parents and siblings we have. That's hard to believe sometimes when we fight with our siblings or butt heads with our parents. But in the end, we need to remember that our families are a gift from God. Moms and Dads are there to care for you, provide for your needs, and teach you to follow Christ. And your brothers and sisters are in the same boat as you. They're struggling to grow up and become their own person the same as you! Today's scripture is about Joseph – a guy who had every reason to turn his back on his family. What's more, he had the perfect chance to get revenge for something horrible they had done to him – selling him into slavery. Instead, Joseph remembered that God gave him his family, and he used his power to save them!
>
> **Read Genesis 45**
>
> **MAIN POINT**
> If anyone in the Bible had a reason to turn his back on family for good, it was Joseph. His brothers had sold him into slavery when he was still a little boy, dooming him to a life of not only slavery, but prison! But God was looking out for Joseph, and when the time was right, he rose to become the number two man in all of Egypt, saving the nation from a terrible famine. I don't know how many people today would be as forgiving as Joseph was. After all, his brothers were the reason he was separated from his father and the home he knew as a boy. But Joseph put his hurts behind him. He saved his brothers because they were family, fulfilling God's ultimate plan for his life, and giving all of them a reason to be thankful for family!
>
> **DRIVE IT HOME**
> As you grow older and move on in life, you're going to discover that friendships can come and go. People change, people move away, and when they do, they find new friendships to replace the old. The one thing that will never change is family.

> You will never have another father and mother. You may add more siblings by birth, adoption or marriage, but you will never stop being siblings with the ones you have. These are special people with whom you have and will share a lot of memories. They are people we can be thankful for! I want to challenge you all to look for ways to be thankful for your families this week. (Excerpt from lesson about being thankful for family from children's church lesson at All Saints Christian Church)

The above lesson emphasized the point that children be thankful for their families just like Joseph was thankful for his family despite the problems he had with his brothers. There is no recognition or discussion that "the problems" Joseph had with his brothers was that they attacked him, threatened to kill him, sold him into slavery, and then told their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Further, there was no recognition that some of the children listening to the Bible lesson might have come from abusive or neglectful home situations. Statements like "God knows what he's doing when he gives us the parents and siblings we have," "we need to remember that our families are a gift from God," "Moms and Dads are there to care for you, provide for your needs, and teach you to follow Christ," and "[Family] are people we can be thankful for" falsely assumed that all families (even "Christian" ones) were healthy. Further, those statements marginalized children who came from traumatic family situations. The curriculum glossed over the gruesome details of Joseph's story and ignored children's potentially difficult personal stories to relay a simplistic precept about being thankful for family. Additionally, the curriculum carried with it an implicit definition of family that was restricted to "Moms and Dads," which ignored children who came from alternative family structures (e.g., single parent, foster, non-heterosexual, etc.).

Another example of curriculum treating the Bible deontologically was the story of Samson (Judges 13-16) told at Blessings Church from a book entitled "Bible Readers" that the early elementary Sunday school teacher bought from a discount store.

> Samson was blessed with great strength. Strong like a superhero, he had won many battles. He had also made war against the Philistines. Because of this, the Philistines wanted to hurt Samson.
>
> Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. "You're so strong," she said. "Tell me of your strength." He did not know that she worked for the Philistines. Delilah had been promised money for Samson's secret.
>
> Finally, Samson told Delilah the secret. "It's my hair," he said. "God makes me strong because I don't cut my hair. If I were ever to cut it, I would lose all my strength." Right away, Delilah ran to tell the Philistines.
>
> While Samson slept, a man cut his hair. Delilah was paid well. She got many pounds of silver for telling Samson's secret. And Samson did lose his strength. He would wake up chained in a prison cell.
>
> One day, the Philistines decided to take Samson out of prison. They were having a feast. They wanted Samson to entertain them. They did not know that while Samson was in jail, his hair and strength had grown.
>
> The Philistines made fun of Samson. "Give me strength one more time," Samson prayed. "Show them you are God." Samson pushed hard against two pillars. The building collapsed on the Philistines. ("The Story of Samson," 2018)

Samson was painted as a hero, while the actual story was that he had supernatural strength but lost his strength as a result of breaking various Jewish moral and ritual laws. He ended up being captured and blinded by the Philistines. As he was paraded in front of the Philistines, he asked God to give him strength so he could collapse a building in order to kill everyone there, which is what happened. While aspects of this was included in the story above, the illicit and gruesome details are left out. Rather, Samson's story was oversimplified and became a deontological story about the importance of listening and following God. That was how Georgia, the Sunday school teacher, taught the story because that was what was in the curriculum. Further, Georgia printed out a sheet for the children to color entitled, "The Heroes of the Bible," from an online Sunday school lesson resource site featuring a cartoon-like Samson collapsing the building at the end of his story.

While the curricula at all three churches emphasized Biblical literacy, most of the complexities and inconsistencies in the stories were overlooked for the sake of distilling out precepts and rules that children could easily learn. There was no critical examination of the stories and how they related to the complex realities that actually surrounded the children's lives. This deontological approach made it easier to stick to a prescribed scope and sequence where children learned chosen Bible facts and the accompanying life lessons. This mirrors how standardized testing has substituted critical thinking with prescriptive learning objectives meant to simplify and control what and how teachers cover content in the classroom (Apple, 1995, 2004; Eisner, 1994). In an effort to make sure children were learning accepted Christian orthodoxy, religious curriculum publishers and writers tautologically presented Bible knowledge as discreet and uncritical nuggets of precepts and propositions that should remain unquestioned because they came from the Bible. By doing this, the written curriculum became the arbiter of what should be taught in Sunday school, how it should be taught, and how it should be interpreted and applied to one's life.

Individual Spiritual Transformation is More Important

In all three churches, the predominant curricular theme and purpose for learning Bible knowledge was for individual spiritual transformation. What do I mean by "individual spiritual transformation?" First, the assumption was that Bible knowledge had the capacity to generate change in one's thought patterns, belief systems, and world view. Moreover, this all-encompassing transformation was predicated on the transmission of "correct" Bible knowledge, thus the need for age-graded, written curriculum that was deliberately scripted so that volunteer Sunday school teachers need only follow the lesson step-by-step. Publishers made claims like, “From babies to preteens, disciple your kids step-by-step as they grow in God’s Word” (Bible Studies for Life, 2020), and then followed up with detailed plans for what Bible stories should be covered and the life applications that should be drawn from those Bible stories. Curriculum publishers further assured children’s ministry directors and Sunday school teachers that they had included all that was needed for children to experience life transformation.

> Age-appropriate. Kids’ developmental levels and interests guide the design of every resource… Bible focused. Bible stories and themes are integrated in every resource at every age level. (Sparkhouse, 2020)

Second, the type of transformation that was emphasized in the curricula was “spiritual.” This means that the focus was on interior, intangible changes. Most of the time this type of spiritual transformation was linked to the Christian notion of “salvation.” Put simply, Christianity believes that humanity exists in a basal state of rebellion against God. The result of this, is that humans are relationally disconnected from God and can only be “saved” from this state by submitting oneself to following God. Since the Bible is believed to be the one sacred text that reveals God to humanity, then learning Bible knowledge becomes the primary way to know what it means to follow God and be “saved.” Multiple times, lessons at the three churches in this study emphasized the need for children to be saved. One example of this was in a lesson about thanking God for the earth and heaven during the children’s church time at All Saints Christian Church:

> The Bible tells us that God sent Jesus to be our Savior. God knew we could never pay the price for the sins we have committed, so he sent Jesus to pay that price for us. Jesus rose from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. If we believe in Jesus, we will not only enjoy his blessings on Earth; we will enjoy eternal life in Heaven. If you are here today and you have already accepted Jesus, you never have a reason to give in to worry […]

> If you have never accepted Jesus, and you want to or have questions, please talk to one of us or your parents today. We want to pray with you and help you invite Jesus into your heart. God loves you, he's given you this life to live and he wants to give you so much more. Jesus wants to make a place for you in Heaven, and he wants to walk with you day by day in this world. (Lesson excerpt on thanking God for earth and heaven from the children's church time at All Saints Christian Church)

The focus from this part of the lesson was that "salvation" was for the purpose of going to heaven. Here and in the rest of the curriculum for this lesson, there was no linkage of "salvation" to changes in one's life that would result in making the Earth a better place or in how one's "salvation" could lead to an increased or enhanced desire to work towards justice for the marginalized. Salvation was an individualistic transformation.

Last, the type of transformation that permeates the curricula from the churches in this study was highly individualistic. As described above, the notion of being "saved" was personal, focusing on one's ability to go to heaven. While the predominant message from the curricula at the three churches in this study was that Bible knowledge was for the purpose of individual spiritual transformation, that is not to say that the curricula did not communicate the implications of that transformation on how one should treat the people around them. Those messages, though, were limited to interpersonal interactions and focused on generalized platitudes like "being kind to others" or "loving people who are different than you are." One example, which I discuss in detail later in this chapter, was a lesson that utilized the story of "The Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37). Taken in historical and cultural context, Jesus used the story of the Good Samaritan to capitalize on racial tensions between the Jews and Samaritans and point out the hypocrisy amongst the religious leaders of the time by casting the outsider (the Samaritan) as the hero of the story and someone to be emulated. In the aforementioned lesson, the Bible story lost the social justice message and focused on being kind to people who needed help. The unintended consequence of this curricular focus on individual spiritual transformation was that it erased the possibility of using Bible lessons and the Sunday school space to discuss social structural issues of justice like gendered and racialized inequalities.

The curricula used at the three churches in this study constructed the Sunday school classroom as a place and time where children learned about the Bible, Bible stories, and how to apply the Bible to their lives. This was done by reiterating the importance of learning Bible knowledge through leader materials as well as in focusing on teaching children the material details of Bible stories. Further, the Bible was presented as a source of deontological precepts that focused on individual spiritual transformation. These emphases obscured the implicit and null curricula surrounding race and gender categories and their accompanying meanings. In other words, the curricula presented the Bible to young children as silent on race and gender. In the final two sections of this chapter, I expose the ways in which the manifest silence around race and gender in Sunday school curricula obscured how whiteness and masculinity are normalized, contributing to a white patriarchal Christian imagination.

Uncovering Race in the Curricula

Drawing from my experiences growing up in church and subsequently working in various capacities in the religious education of children within churches, I was expecting to see very little in the Sunday school curricula that specifically dealt with race and/or skin color and issues of inequality and injustice connected to race. What I did find in the curricula were complex mixtures of implicit messages about race and a null racial curriculum characterized by the erasure of racial themes from Bible stories. These messages were communicated textually as well as visually through pictures and illustrations. Moreover, the curricula communicated to the Sunday school teachers through the leaders' guides just as much as they did to the children through the teaching scripts and activities. In the sections that follow, I consider the themes surrounding race that arose from the visual illustrations and pictures separately from those themes that emerge in the written curriculum.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

A picture is a versatile communication medium that utilizes visual symbols to implicitly and explicitly communicate ideas, feelings, norms, information, and so much more. When it comes to passing on stories to children, pictures provide an interpretive bridge by way of visual symbolic representations that feed into a child's understanding of what is considered normal. Analysis of the pictures and illustrations included within the curricula that were a part of this study revealed two dominant themes: predominantly white pictorial depictions of Bible stories and visual tokenism as a form of diversity.

Predominantly White Bible Characters. The curricula at all three churches in this study predominantly used white people to portray the characters in Bible stories. By "white," I specifically mean people who approximate people of European descent with lighter skin tones (peach/pink-ish), straight to loosely curly hair, and more narrow nasal passages. These pictures were not only passively used as background illustrations that were secondary to the verbal telling of the stories. Many times, these white representations of Bible characters were actively used as part of the story telling. For example, at First Baptist Church, the early elementary Sunday school teacher (Claire) would hold up the Bible story picture provided by the curriculum as she told the Bible story and use it as a strategy to keep children's attention. Further, there was a video entitled “Imogene Imagines” that told the Bible story using a format reminiscent of young children’s educational television programming. Imogene, the host, was a young African American woman, yet the Bible story pictures used to illustrate the Bible story were the same pictures the Sunday school teacher used with white people as the Bible characters. One exemplar of this was when the lesson was about four people who brought their friend to Jesus so Jesus could heal the friend (Mark 2:1-12).

> Claire showed the kids the Bible story picture (“old-timey” white characters) and counted the friends, “1… 2… 3…?” The kids all replied “4!” Then, she asked the kids who they saw in the picture. The kids identified Jesus in the picture, who was also white…
>
> At this time, the preschool class came in to watch the video Bible lesson segment produced by the curriculum publisher to go along with the Sunday school lessons. The segment was called *Imogene Imagines* and featured an African American woman as the host. One of the phrases that was repeated throughout the segment was, “Our biggest friend is Jesus.” This was after Imogene told the story of the four friends lowering their sick friend down to Jesus (all of them white.) The video segment ended with a singsong saying Imogene had for the week: “We can ask Jesus for help.”
>
> At one point while Claire was reviewing the story for the kids, one girl piped up, “I want to Jesus someday!” [*sic*]. Claire pointed to the Jesus in the Bible story picture and asked, “Is that Jesus?” The kids all replied, “Yes.” (Memo excerpt from field notes at First Baptist Church)

In the example above, Claire (at the behest of the directions in the curriculum) and the host in the Bible lesson video repeatedly referenced the Bible story picture, which featured all white people, reinforcing white people and whiteness as the normative racial category around the story of these four friends bringing their sick friend to Jesus. Further, when one of the children was excited about wanting to see Jesus because he was “our biggest friend” and someone who could help us, Claire held up the Bible story picture and pointed to the white representation of Jesus and said, “Me, too!” The only Bible story picture from the curriculum used at First Baptist Church that included a person of color as one of the story characters was in the story of Philip (one of Jesus' disciples) meeting an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), where the Ethiopian was clearly a Black male with dark brown skin, a flatter nose, and tight close-cropped curly hair. Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, was still represented by a white male.

While most of the illustrations and images of Bible stories at the three churches in this study were primarily made up of white characters, the *Spark Rotation* curriculum used at All Saints Christian Church utilized the *Spark Story Bible* (2009), which featured people of color in the Bible story illustrations. These illustrations were highly stylized cartoon characters used to represent people who lived in the Middle East, which means the illustrations approximated people of Arab descent with coffee-and-cream colored to dark tan skin, brown to dark brown hair, and brown eyes. The *Spark Story Bible* was primarily used during the Sunday school time. While the inclusion of the *Spark Story Bible* could be a step in the direction of increasing diverse representation, it was a passive form of inclusion that did not actively challenge or call into question the hegemony of white characters in other Bible story illustrations. This was evident by the use of predominantly white representations of Jesus and other Bible story characters used at other times at All Saints Christian Church.

One example of this, was an initiative to encourage children and families to stay connected with All Saints Christian Church during the summer months. The initiative was called *Flat Jesus* and entailed all families receiving a laminated cutout of a cartoon-like representation of Jesus (Figure 4.1). As seen in the figure, Jesus was white. Directions for what to do with Flat Jesus were printed on the back of the laminated figure:

> Where Will Jesus Go?
>
> Summertime is coming, the weather's getting hot!
> You might be gone some Sundays-And we will miss you a lot!
>
> We're giving you "Flat Jesus" to take with you today,
> And on all of your adventures, at home and far away.
>
> As you travel, far and near, take Him along with you.
> Share His love and kindness, in everything you do.
>
> And now we ask a favor, if you wouldn't mind,
> Send us pictures of your travels, and all the fun "Flat Jesus" can find!
>
> Hold "Flat Jesus" in your pictures, and hold Him in your heart!
> Have the greatest summer ever! Ready? Set……..START!!! (Poem on back of Flat Jesus illustration)

The objective was for children and families to take pictures of Flat Jesus over the summer and send the pictures to the children's ministry director so the pictures could be posted on the All Saints Christian Church children's ministry social media page. There was also a map in the children's ministry area at church where pins were placed to indicate the various places Flat Jesus traveled to over the summer. This activity uncritically reinforced the idea that Jesus was white and contributed to what Bonilla-Silva (2012) refers to as a religious racial grammar normalizing a white Christian imagination. The following summer, the children's ministry at All Saints Christian Church had a similar activity but replaced Flat Jesus with Bendy Jesus (Figure 4.2), which was still white.

Even in the case of Blessings Church where curriculum was cobbled together from various sources, the Bible story characters were predominantly white. Whether the materials used were gathered from online Sunday school websites, story books purchased from a discount store, or visuals found via a Google Images search, the illustrations used featured white characters. Although the Georgia was not averse to using materials with illustrations that featured people of color, she was limited to the materials she could easily find and purchase since she was a volunteer with limited free time to prepare Sunday school lessons on her own. Further, there was little motivation to intentionally look for diverse materials since there was an uncritical emphasis that Sunday school was simply about teaching children Bible knowledge.

Visual Tokenism. While the curricula used at the three churches in this study predominantly featured white representations of Bible story characters, that is not to say that people of color were excluded from all illustrations and pictures in the curricular materials. The *Bible Studies for Life: Kids* curriculum, which was used at First Baptist Church included people of color in their Bible story lesson videos (as mentioned above in the *Imogene Imagine* videos) as well as on the take-home materials. Additionally, people of color were featured on promotional materials on the publisher's website as well as on the covers of leaders' guides and DVD case covers. In all but a handful of the pictures throughout the different aspects of the curriculum (take-home sheets, videos, promotional materials, posters, and story books), there were no mixed racial groups. In other words, if there was more than one person in a picture, almost always the other people in the picture were from the same racial group. As a result of the disconnect between the whiteness of the Bible story visuals and the cultivated diversity in other areas of the curriculum, the use of people of color seemed to be more of a form of visual tokenism rather than an intentional effort to racially diversify the curriculum. In the words of the children's ministry director at First Baptist Church when I asked her thoughts on diversity in the curriculum, "The diversity is just part of the marketing strategy."

The curricula used at the other two churches did not explicitly have visual materials other than those used for illustrating the Bible stories. One exception was in the parent information sheets that were produced at All Saints Christian Church by the children's ministry director to let parents know about the lessons taught in Sunday school and children's church as well as inform parents of upcoming church events. The children's ministry director told me that she tried to use pictures with racial diversity in them as a result of the research I was conducting and my site visits. "Ever since we talked about your research and you started coming, I've tried to be more intentional about using more diverse pictures. I just never really though too much about it before and didn't pay attention to the pictures I was using."

Written and Spoken Word

Although there were attempts at diverse racial representation in some of the visual illustrations and pictures in some of the curricula as well as in some of the supplementary materials used by the churches, none of the written lessons during my time at the churches in this study focused race or racial diversity. This does not mean that race was not a part of the curricula. Borrowing from theories of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, 2013) and the concept of white habitus (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2007), I searched for instances where race and racial issues could have been addressed but were ignored or glossed over. With this new perspective, I also took notice of the many times various social indicators of identity such as socioeconomic status, ability status, and age were mentioned while racial identity was ignored.

Color-blind Lessons. As I began reading through the lessons in curricula used at the churches in this study, I found no lessons that had explicit references to race or racial differences. There were many lessons on kindness, the importance of following God, Christian practices, morals, and many of the Christian narratives. While race/ethnicity/nationality was sometimes mentioned (i.e., Jews, Samaritans, Philistines, Greek, etc.), the curricula did not include the significance of those racial differences in lessons taught to the children. In the seldom times racial differences and their significance is mentioned, it is mentioned in the materials meant solely for the leaders and not for the children.

One example of this happening was in a lesson featuring the story of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37):

> Today's Bible story is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. A man is robbed and beaten and left half dead on the side of the road. After all this time, it still seems like we are not any closer to loving our neighbors when we see them than these original listeners. The question remains: Do I love my neighbors as I love myself?
>
> The Jews considered their neighbors to be Jews like themselves and maybe some of those who had converted to Judaism. Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders who should have known better, excluded tax collectors and sinners from the temple and would not accept their offerings. Jesus challenged their attitudes and actions when he accepted sinners and shared the truth of God's love and mercy.
>
> After Jesus answered a lawyer's question with a parable about a good Samaritan: A priests who had served God at the temple saw the hurt man and moved as far away from him as he could. Next, a Levite, a helper in the temple, did the same thing. The third passerby was a Samaritan, who stopped and helped the man. The verses tell us nothing about the hurt man. He could have been a Jew or a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans were extremely prejudiced against each other, but here Jesus emphasizes the deliberate actions of a Samaritan over two Jewish religious leaders who were content to leave the man to die.
>
> What can you do to make a difference in today's culture of division, prejudice, and hatred? What does God need to do in your life in order for you to grow in spiritual maturity to see others as Jesus does, as creations of God and your neighbors?
>
> Few children today remember *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and his musical question, "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" But in light of the late minister's question and, more importantly, God's Word and our living Lord's instructions, how can you lead your kids to grow in godliness and live out the proclamation, "I will be your neighbor"? (Excerpt from "Leader Bible Study" portion of *Bible Studies for Life: Kids* lesson on The Good Samaritan)

This blurb was written as part of a reflection piece that Sunday school teachers would read as they prepared for teaching the lesson. This particular reflection focused on the idea of loving one's neighbor as oneself and pointed out that the audience listening to Jesus' story would have considered their own racial/ethnic/religious group as the "neighbor" that is supposed to be loved. The reflection further pointed out the racial tensions between the Jews and Samaritans, yet Jesus used the Samaritan, rather than Jewish leaders, as the example of being a neighbor. Then, the reflection challenged the Sunday school teacher to examine their own prejudices, linking "spiritual maturity" to overcoming one's prejudices. The Sunday school teacher was left with a challenge to help children do likewise. While this "Leader Bible Study" explicitly dealt with issues related to racism and bigotry, even going so far as to challenge the Sunday school teacher to examine their own prejudices and help children to do likewise, the scripted lesson presented to the children erased all vestiges of racism and prejudice from the Bible lesson. Instead the focus was on doing things to be more like Jesus.

The curriculum instructed the Sunday school teacher to tell the Bible story, but all references to racial tension or prejudice were left out. Then, the Sunday school teacher was supposed to show the children the Bible story picture, which featured white characters depicting the Samaritan and the beat up individual, and asked questions that focused on the material details of the story: "What did the Samaritan do when he saw the hurt man? (*He bandaged the man's wounds, took him to an inn, paid for his care.)"* Following the review questions, the curriculum included a scripted discussion that was supposed to help Sunday school teachers tell children how to apply the Bible lesson to their lives.

> - Talk about the things the good Samaritan did that were kind.
> - Lead kids to name situations in their lives where they could show kindness to someone who is having a hard time.
> - Offer suggestions such as when a new boy or girl comes to school, when kids are laughing at a child who looks different than them, or when a friend’s dad loses his job. (Excerpt from teaching script portion of *Bible Studies for Life: Kids* lesson on The Good Samaritan)

The focus of the application portion of the lesson included none of the examples or challenges related to racism and prejudice that were part of the reflection piece written for the Sunday school teacher. The scripted lesson focused on the Samaritan being kind and the need for children to “show kindness to someone who is having a hard time.” The closest the scripted lesson came to describe racial difference was in the abstract suggestion to show kindness “when kids are laughing at a child who looks different than them.” The opportunity to teach children that the Bible, God, and Jesus had something to say about race and prejudice was erased from the teaching script and relegated to the null curriculum. While one could argue that the Sunday school teacher could still include those aspects of racism and prejudice that were included in the leader reflection piece, my argument in this chapter as well as findings in Chapters 5 and 6 is that Sunday school teachers deferred to the scripts provided for them in the curricula. Therefore, if the curricula did not script it, then it was not essential to the Bible lesson and not addressed.

Color-blind Identities. The curriculum from the three churches in this study did not ignore identities. Social indicators such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, and ability status were explicitly mentioned in multiple lessons as well as in the leader materials. Two of the curricula even produced additional materials to help Sunday school teachers understand how to be aware of and sensitive to children with special needs and differing ability statuses. Additionally, many lessons encouraged children to notice, appreciate, and help people with limited ability statues, those who are hurt, and people who are economically disadvantaged. The one category that was largely ignored was race—it became part of the null curriculum. One example of ignoring race in the lessons was in the Bible story of Philip meeting the Ethiopian eunuch that was mentioned above. The lesson only passively acknowledged the Ethiopian's skin color by using a Black male to visually represent the Ethiopian; the lesson focused on how God wants people to tell everyone about Jesus. Another example of ignoring racial differences was in a lesson recounting the story of Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, meeting with and subsequently baptizing Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18), which was controversial at the time because many of the first church leaders believed that you had to be of Jewish descent in order to be baptized; anyone who was not from Jewish descent was referred to as a Gentile—an ethnic and racial outsider who could only have limited access to God.

Summarizing My Findings of Race in the Curricula

Throughout my analysis of the curricula from the churches in this study, identity was frequently talked about and illustrated throughout all the curricula regardless of where the curricula came from. The one identity factor that was conspicuously left out, and thereby part of the null curriculum, was race. In the rare times race and racial themes were brought up, those themes were quickly swept aside to be replaced with other indicators of identity. According to Omi and Winant (2014), race is a master category within the United States that influences all other identities. "Corporeality continues to determine popular understandings of race and thus to shape both white supremacy and colorblind hegemony in the United States today" (p.249). By diverting attention away from race and focusing on other identity indicators (e.g. age, gender, ability status), the curricula masked the hegemonic forces at work to reproduce and reinforce dominant white racial structures and white habitus.

Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2007) state that white habitus “creates and conditions [whites’] views, cognitions, and even sense of beauty and, more importantly, creates a sense of racial solidarity (‘we whites’)” (p. 340). Furthermore, white habitus is primarily a result of white isolation and segregation from blacks or other minorities. I argue that the Sunday school curricula from the three churches in this study provided a symbolic isolation of whites from people of color through the homogeneous use of white characters in the Bible stories and a silence of race and racial issues in the lessons. “The social psychology produced by the white habitus leads to the creation of a positive self-view and a negative other-view. The more distant the group in question is from the white ‘norm,’ other things being equal, the more negative whites will view the group” (p. 341). This symbolic isolation contributed to varying levels of a white Christian imagination at each of the churches in this study.

Uncovering Gender in the Curricula

In this section, I pivot from race and explore how the curricula from the three churches in this study dealt with gender. Like issues of race, messages about gender were part of the implicit and null curricula. In contrast to race where whiteness was reinforced through the symbolic isolation of whites through predominantly white imagery and silence of racial issues, gender showed up through the predominance of male-dominated Bible stories, the implied relationships of women to men (especially in those few stories used that featured women as the “main” character), as well as in the gendered roles that women were relegated to in the stories. The curricula’s uncritically passive engagement with gender also allowed for hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity to influence how children participated in lesson-based activities. These contributed to the reproduction of a patriarchal Christian imagination.

Predominance of Male-centric Bible Stories and Lessons

The curricula at all three churches in this study predominantly featured men as the main characters of the Bible stories. Table 4.1 shows the breakdown of lessons during my site visits that featured male main characters and female main characters as well lessons that I categorized as "gender neutral" because the lessons were focused on a precept or a proverb rather than on a character. Of the 58 classroom visits I conducted as part of this study, approximately 70% of the lessons featured male Bible story characters. Only five of the classroom visits featured women as the main character in the Bible lesson! In four of those lessons, the women were quickly recast as supporting characters to men in the story, which is a theme I subsequently address in the section that follows. To be certain, a vast majority of the Bible, itself, features men and the actions of men throughout. In addition, the various manuscripts that make up the biblical canon were written in and compiled by patriarchal communities of practice. This is not to say that the Bible does not address issues surrounding gender in ways that challenge patriarchal systems. Feminist and womanist theologies contend that in spite of the Bible's patriarchal roots, it contains views and attitudes about gender that challenge the patriarchal status quo; the issue is one's hermeneutic (Grant, 2016; McCant, 1999). Further, which Bible lessons are presented, how they are presented, and the language used to present them in religious curricula are determined by the communities of practice that oversee the production and use of religious curricula (Cross, 2003; McCant, 1999). Not only do communities of religious practice determine how the Bible is interpreted, but Bible translations, themselves, are shaped by communities of interpretation that influence how gender is portrayed and gendered roles are normalized in the Biblical texts (Perry, 2019).

Since male-centric stories are overrepresented in the Bible, then it becomes even more crucial to focus on women's stories in the Bible, perspectives of women in the Bible, and feminist and womanist perspectives of stories in the Bible. While there are churches that are intentionally patriarchal and would balk at the idea of feminist and womanist inspired Bible stories taught in Sunday school, I found that the leaders and Sunday school teachers at the three churches in this study all agreed that women were underrepresented in the Bible stories featured by the curricula and that those stories downplayed the agency of the women, relegating them to the role of supporting characters for the men in the stories. Even at First Baptist Church, which was a predominantly African American church that was part of a denomination that does not ordain women, one of the Sunday school teachers at a teachers' meeting stated, "We talk about strong Black women and have all these women teaching Sunday school and leading all over the place, but we're not allowed to be pastors."

Of the 58 classroom I visited for this study, seven of the class times featured Bible lessons that I categorized as "gender neutral." In these lessons, the focus was on a proverb or precept (i.e., using Psalm 138 to help children learn to be thankful for all that God has given them) or the main character was not gender specific (i.e., using Jesus' parable from Matthew 6:24-34, which features birds and flowers as the characters). Even in these gender-neutral lessons, the curriculum would use an example that was male-centric, or the author's gender as male was emphasized. For example, in the lesson that featured birds and flowers, the main point was to help children learn to thank God for giving them what they needed just like God took care of the flowers and the birds. The lesson was part of an 8-week series on prayer using emojis to illustrate times we should pray. In this lesson, the emoji was the "cool emoji," which was the yellow smiling face with sunglasses on.

> There's one emoji who truly looks like he doesn't have a care in the world. He's the guy who never lets anything bother him. He's cool. He's chill. He doesn't worry about a thing because he has nothing to worry about. I'm talking about the guy with the cool, dark sunglasses.
>
> The Cool Glasses Emoji is the guy who says, "It's cool, man, everything's good." Cool Face doesn't worry, he doesn't get mad, he doesn't shed a tear. He's a guy who has everything he needs. He's a guy who is truly blessed. (Lesson excerpt about being thankful from children's church lesson at All Saints Christian Church)

Throughout the introduction to the lesson, the written curriculum gendered the emoji as male. In this series, all the emojis were gendered as male. By choosing to gender a genderless emoji in a lesson that was gender neutral, the curriculum reinforced male as the normative category for Bible lessons (McCant, 1999) and contributed to a patriarchal Christian imagination.

Upstaging Women in Bible Stories Featuring Women

In the curricula used at the three churches in this study, there were a scant number of Bible stories that featured women as the main characters. Specifically, there were only five classes that I visited where a woman was the main character of the Bible story. In all but one of those instances, the roles of the women in the Bible story became secondary to the roles of the men who were also part of those stories.

Of the three churches, only Blessings Church had a series of lessons specifically focused on women in the Bible. The reason Blessings Church had this series was because they did not purchase an all-inclusive curriculum that had a scope and sequence to follow; the early elementary Sunday school teacher (Georgia) decided she wanted to have a series on women in the Bible and went about collecting materials from various Bible storybooks and online Sunday school resource websites. One of the lessons in the series was about a woman named Rebekah from Genesis 24. The irony about this lesson was that this Bible story was more about Rebekah meeting the qualifications as an ideal wife for Isaac, who was the son of Abraham—the first Jewish patriarch. The following are excerpts from the curricula Georgia found online:

- Abraham wanted to get a good wife for his son, Isaac.
- Back then parents would help choose the bride for their son.

- While he was on his way there the servant began to worry about how he would know the right girl to choose as a bride for Isaac.
    - How would you pick a bride for someone else? (Wait for a few answers – prettiest, smartest, nicest, richest?)
    - How was the servant going to do it?
    - Which one would he pick?
    - Well... let’s wait and see...

- Finally, the servant arrived at the place where Abraham’s family lived.
- He and the 10 camels stopped at the well nearby.
- It was the time of day that the young girls came to the well to get water for their families.
- And now the servant did something really smart!
- He PRAYED!
- He asked God for a special sign/ something that would happen so that he would know which girl to pick for Isaac’s bride.
- The servant prayed because he knew that God cares about all the Big and Little things in our lives.
- He knew that God cared about who Isaac had for a wife (and that He had the right girl picked out!)
- The trick was finding her!
- The servant asked God for this sign: He asked that the girl God wanted for Isaac would give him a drink of water, and that THEN she would offer to water ALL of his camels too!

- A girl named Rebekah came to the well. She came to get water
- The servant asked her for a drink of water.

- She gave him a drink and THEN... she offered to draw water for all of his camels to have a drink as well.
- Wow! That was the sign, wasn't it?
- The servant watched as Rebekah went back and forth to the well, drawing all of the water that the camels would drink.
- How many camels were there? (Ten!) Ten, hot, thirsty camels!
- Do you know how much a camel can drink? Guess! Let's see who gets the closest. (The answer is 20-40 gallons each!)
- Twenty gallons each! Ten camels... at twenty gallons each...that's like a million gallons!
- Actually it's just 200 gallons. But that is a LOT of water! Especially when you are drawing it up out of the well for the camels to drink.
- The servant sat and watched. When the camels had had all of the water they would drink, the servant knew this was the girl!
- The servant praised God! He was happy because God had given him the sign he had asked for.
- Now he knew Rebekah was the girl God wanted for Isaac. (Lesson excerpt about Rebekah from online Sunday school resource site and used at Blessings Church)

In a lesson that was supposed to be about Rebekah, there was very little in this lesson about who Rebekah was and what she did independent of being a potential wife for Isaac. Children were even invited to imagine themselves as part of this patriarchal cultural practice where women did not have a voice in the matter of being chosen as a wife by asking the children, "How would you pick a bride for someone else?" This question uncritically normalized women as potential brides without agency. It did not consider the unintended consequences of reinforcing patriarchal messages that women's highest aspirations should be "marriageable material." Not only did the curriculum limit women's roles to those of wife or potential wife, it suggested that a godly wife was one that worked hard to obey and serve men just like Rebekah did when she drew over 200 gallons of water for Abraham's servant's camels.

While not all the lessons with women as main characters pivoted in such blatantly problematic ways and yielded the thrust of the stories to men, the women were still relegated to supporting roles. For example, the story of Ruth, which also happens to be the name of the book of the Bible with her story, was taught at both All Saints Christian Church (using *Spark Rotation*) and at First Baptist Church (using *20 Bible Stories Every Child Should Know*). In the lesson at All Saints Christian Church, Ruth not only was upstaged by a man named Boaz (whom she ended up marrying), but her role in her own story was downgraded to that of someone sent by God to care for her mother-in-law.

> **Today's story is about some people who had to care for each other [**…]
>
> [The curriculum instructs the Sunday school teacher to have the children read from the *Spark Story Bible.*]
>
> **Who went to Naomi's home to live with her?** *(Ruth)* **What problem did Ruth and Naomi have?** *(They were hungry.)* **Who let Ruth take the leftover grain?** *(Boaz)* **God gave people to Ruth and Naomi to help care for them, just like God gives us people who care!** (Lesson excerpt about Ruth from *Spark Rotation* used at All Saints Christian Church)

Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, are depicted as helpless women in need of rescue, and God sends that help in the form of a man—Boaz. At First Baptist Church, Ruth is described as someone who is kind because she took care of her mother-in-law, and as a reward for her kindness, God took care of her by arranging circumstances that led to Boaz marrying her. These interpretations of the story of Ruth were presented deontologically as if these were apparent and indisputable interpretations, thus constructing women as weak and in need of help from men. There are other interpretations, though, that interpret the story of Ruth as countercultural to the patriarchy of the time. Rather than helpless widows in need of rescuing, Ruth and Naomi were strong women who broke with the social expectations and religious traditions of the time and who refused to live subordinated to a patriarchy that condemned widows to poverty and reliance on men (James, 2011). The Sunday school curricula chose to cast Ruth's story as one of despair and helplessness.

While most of the Bible lessons that featured women as the main characters eventually relegated women to a supporting role, one of the lessons that had a Bible story with a woman as a lead character simply left the woman out of the lesson. The lesson included two of Jesus' parables that were told in succession: one about a shepherd looking for a lost sheep and one about a woman looking for a lost coin (Luke 15:1-10).

> **Today's parables are about being lost. A parable is a little story that shows us what God is like. Have you ever gotten lost? Where were you? How did you feel when you were lost? How did you "get found"? How did you feel then?** *Pause for answers to each question…*
>
> [The curriculum then instructs the Sunday school teacher to read the story from the *Spark Story Bible*.]
>
> […] **How does the sheep look about being found on page 375?** *(happy)* **How does the shepherd look about finding the sheep?** *(relieved)*
>
> **This parable teaches us that God loves us and needs us! Like the happy shepherd that we see on page 375**[of the *Spark Story Bible*]**, God is delighted by our faith. Without us, God would be missing something very important.** (Excerpt from lesson about The Lost Sheep and The Lost Coin from *Spark Rotation*)

Even though the Sunday school teacher was instructed to read both parables from the *Spark Story Bible*, the parable of the woman who lost a coin was inconspicuously left out of the lesson. Only the shepherd, who represented God, was talked about. What is left out of the curriculum is that the woman in Jesus' parable, who looked for her lost coin, also represented God. "'God is like this shepherd *and this woman*, you know,' Jesus said. 'God would never stop looking for someone who was lost'" (Arthur, 2009, p. 377, emphasis mine). Rather than including a woman as a metaphor for God in the lesson taught to the children, the curriculum writers opted to simply ignore what was written in their own story Bible about the woman representing God and focused on the male shepherd representing God. By only representing God using masculine and male metaphors, the curriculum reinforced a patriarchal Christian imagination whereby all that is feminine was something altogether separate from God.

Bible Lessons Focused on "Traditional" Gender Roles

In all 54 of the classroom visits that had a Bible lesson, men and women in the featured Bible stories predominantly performed traditional gender roles. Moses was a strong leader who defied the Egyptian Pharaoh and freed the Jewish people from slavery. David was the young man who killed Goliath with a sling and some stones and became the second king of Israel. Solomon, the third king of Israel, was the wisest man in the entire region and was responsible for building the first permanent Jewish temple in Israel. Daniel, an Old Testament prophet, defied the king's orders and was thrown into a lion pit as punishment only to miraculously survive the night. Peter and John (Jesus' disciples) and Paul (an early church missionary) were travelers and preachers who healed people and were imprisoned for preaching. These are just a few of the traditionally masculine roles that were emphasized by the curricula at all three churches. By emphasizing these qualities, the curricula implicitly communicated that a "Biblical masculinity" (see Bartkowski, 2001; Bartkowski & Hempel, 2009; Harper, 2012) equated to leadership, domination, strength, fearlessness, and risk-taking. While Jesus was also described as caring and nurturing, most of the time his roles as God's son, miracle worker, and savior of the world were emphasized in curricula.

The scant number of women featured in the Bible lessons were cast as secondary to the men. Most of the women's primary identities were those of a wives and mothers.

As already noted in the above section, the major theme of Rebekah's story was that she was "good wife material." Further, Ruth and Naomi were helpless widows at the mercy of Boaz's benevolence. Even in the parable of the lost coin, the woman was cast as a homemaker cleaning her home, and this metaphor for God was too feminine to include as part of the lesson.

As I looked through other lessons from the curricula that were taught when I was not visiting the churches, I found that men and women inhabiting traditional gender roles was normative. This is not to say that the Bible does not challenge gender norms and hierarchies through various liberating texts (Grant, 2016; McCant, 1999). One such text is in a letter that the early church missionary Paul wrote, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, New Revised Standard Version). This verse is one of many in the Bible that challenges the normative categories that existed at the time they were written as well as for today (McCant, 1999). This suggests that the curricula used at the three churches in this study reproduced a patriarchal Christian imagination and constrained how Sunday school teachers and children constructed normative gender roles and expectations. The curricula also constrained how Sunday school teachers and children could understand the ways the Bible constructs gender.

My analysis of the curricula found that some of the lessons went so far as to ignore, recast, or erase Bible stories that could be considered liberating, specifically when it came to gendered roles and expectations. For example, the story of Deborah (Judges 4-5) is about a female leader in Israel before Israel was a monarchy. The Bible describes her as a prophet and oracle (someone who heard from God and shared those messages with the people). She was also a respected and charismatic leader who successfully rallied and led an army made up of 10,000 tribal volunteers against a trained army that was more technologically advanced. In other words, Deborah defied traditional feminine roles, taking on more traditionally masculine roles. When her story is recounted in the *Spark Story Bible*, her role as a warrior and military commander is erased.

> Barak said, "I'll do this, but I need your help!" Deborah, who was as brave as she was wise, agreed to go. She knew that God would be with her every step along the way. Barak and Deborah took 10,000 men to Mount Tabor. There was an awful battle! Yelling and fighting went on—the noise was loud and terrible! But God was always with Deborah and the Israelites, protecting them and keeping them safe. It was a hard fight, but finally Barak and the Israelites won! (p. 108-109)

The story began with the tribe's military leader deferring to Deborah as the more competent and charismatic leader who could rally their army against a more experienced and better resourced force. The Bible story book even credited Deborah for being "brave" and "wise." By the third line, Deborah had already been relegated to a secondary character (mentioned after Barak, who pleaded for Deborah to lead the army) leading the army. When the story Bible mentioned God providing protection and safety, only Deborah is mentioned by name, leaving Barak conspicuously out until the end when it was "Barak and the Israelites" who ended up winning the battle. Barak, rather than Deborah, is credited with the victory. The author of the *Spark Story Bible* reframed Deborah's story in a way that discursively diminished the liberative aspects of Deborah's story.

Not only did the story Bible erase Deborah's active role in leading an army into a successful campaign, but the illustrations that accompanied the story reinforced the idea that Deborah had a more passive role during the battle. The battle illustration was located at the bottom of a two-page spread with the people drawn in a highly stylistic cartoon-like manner. Three quarters of the illustration depicted the Jewish army made up of all men with scruffy beards carrying swords and shields. All the soldiers had fierce expressions with some drawn as if they were screaming a war cry. Towards the rear of the Jewish army on the left side of the illustration, was a drawing of Deborah flanked by the male Jewish soldiers. Deborah is wearing a head scarf that reminded me of what someone playing the part of Mary (Jesus' mother) would have worn in a Nativity play. Rather than carrying a weapon, Deborah was drawn clasping her hands together as if she did not know what to do with them, and she had a blank expression on her face. This illustration was a far cry from the brave military commander who inspired 10,000 men to go up against a superior army.

Summarizing My Findings of Gender in the Curricula

The curricula used at the three churches in this study all constructed gender in ways that reinforced patriarchal hierarchies. None of the formally published curricula used at All Saints Christian Church and First Baptist Church had units specifically for and/or intentionally dedicated to women's stories in the Bible. During the times I visited those churches, All Saints Christian Church had two lessons with women as the main character, and First Baptist only had one lesson with a woman as the main character. The one woman that was common to the curricula at both churches was Ruth, who also happens to have a book of the Bible named after her. It would be more difficult to overlook her story. The other lesson featuring a woman was the parable of the lost coin, which I described above. In all those lessons, the women were either displaced from the center of their stories or erased from the lesson taught to the children. Even in the case of Blessings Church where the early elementary Sunday school teacher created her own unit on women in the Bible, the women (like Rebekah described above) were featured in traditionally feminine roles such as mothers, caregivers, and wives.

These examples, coupled with an overrepresentation of male-centric Bible stories, served to reinforce structural gender ideologies that constrained how gender could be constructed by the Sunday school teachers and children at the churches in this study. While feminist scholars point out that the Bible contains many “liberating texts,” many of those texts are obscured by the persistence of androcentric language used in Biblical translations and subsequent church-related documents (McCant, 1999). It is in this gendered milieu that Sunday school curricula were developed, distributed, and disseminated. Risman (1998) refers to this type of gendered structural influence:

> Even if individuals are capable of change and wish to eradicate male dominance from their personal lives, the influence of gendered institutions and interactional contexts persists. These contexts are organized by gender stratification at the institutional level, which includes the distribution of material resources organized by gender, the ways by which formal organizations and institutions themselves are gendered, and gendered ideological discourse. (p. 30)

In other words, hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity were baked into the curricula only to be uncritically, and many times unwittingly, reproduced in Sunday school classrooms.

Conclusion

Over the course of my analysis of the written Sunday school materials used at the three churches in this study, I found that race and gender were relegated to the implicit and null curricula. This meant that issues of race and gender, especially those issues related to structural inequalities and injustices, were either ignored or erased from the Sunday school lesson materials. As a result, the Sunday school curricula inadvertently communicated that God and the Bible have very little to say about race and gender.

I argue that this silence and erasure of race and gender from the material and symbolic culture of the Sunday school curricula created an ideological vacuum that was filled by a white patriarchal Christian imaginary. This imaginary emerged out of the implicit normalization of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity within the Sunday school curriculum. Whiteness was normalized through permeation of white characters in the visual images and illustrations throughout the curricula coupled with a silence on the salience of race to the biblical and religious themes. Hegemonic masculinity was reinforced through the predominance of Bible stories that featured men over women as well as the hegemonic ways those men in the Bible were characterized.

In addition to implicitly constructing and reproducing a white patriarchal Christian imaginary, the curricula used at the churches in this study obscured this imaginary by emphasizing the need for children to learn Bible information and the skills needed to navigate the Bible. That Bible information was cultivated and deontologically distilled to life lessons and precepts children were expected to internalize and follow. Further the curricula focused on the Bible as a source of individual spiritual transformation. Consequently, the Sunday school was presented as simply a place to learn about God and Jesus and how to get to heaven.

In the subsequent chapters, I discuss the extent to which the Sunday school curricula enables and constrains how race and gender were negotiated in the classroom space as well how the children constructed the relationships between race, gender, and their understandings of God, Jesus, and the Bible.

Table 4.1 Breakdown of lessons by church and gender of main character

	Male	Female	Gender Neutral	No Lesson
All Saints Christian Church				
Sunday School	12	2	0	---
Children's Church	9	0	4	---
Blessings Church				
Sunday School	5	2	1	4
First Baptist Church				
Sunday School	10	1	1	---
Children's Church	6	0	1	---
Total	42	5	7	4

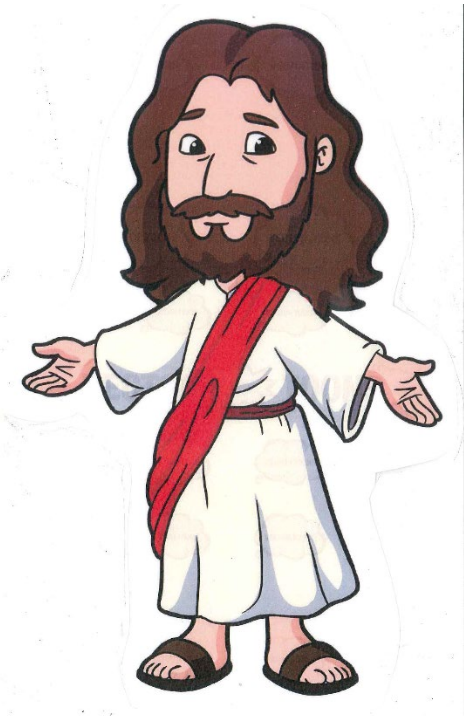

Figure 4.1 Image of Flat Jesus used at All Saints Church

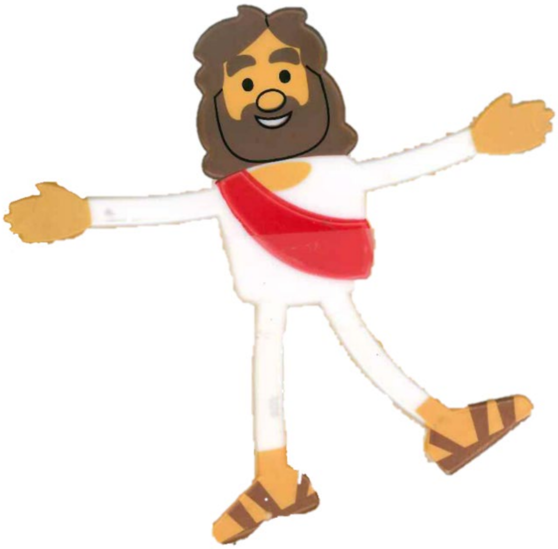

Figure 4.2 Image of Bendy Jesus used at All Saints Church

CHAPTER 5. GENDER IN THREE SUNDAY SCHOOLS

In Chapter 4, I examined the history of Sunday school curricular production as well as explicated themes and messages about race and gender that were implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) embedded in the early elementary Sunday school curricula used at the three churches in this study. As a result of this analysis, I found that the Sunday school curricula implicitly and passively constructed and reproduced a white patriarchal Christian imagination. This imagination is a syncretism of Christian religious beliefs and culturally dominant race and gender ideologies. Since Sunday school classrooms are heavily dependent on written curricula for reasons stated in Chapter 4, I argue that the material and symbolic culture of Sunday school curricula enables and constrains the extent to which children and adults construct, challenge, and reproduce race and gender ideologies in the context of a religious space like Sunday school.

In this chapter, I focus on how gender is negotiated and understood in the Sunday school spaces at each of the churches I visited for this study. I focus on race in Chapter 6. One of the major factors that shaped discourse around gender was each church's theological stance on women in pastoral leadership but in ways that were not always predictable. The first two sections will focus on the churches that were egalitarian (All Saints Christian Church and Blessings Church), and the final section will focus on the church that was complementarian (First Baptist Church).

All Saints Christian Church

All Saints Christian Church was part of the UMC, which is an egalitarian denomination. By categorizing the UMC as egalitarian, I mean that the denomination allows for both men and women to be ordained as pastors within churches and as bishops within the larger denominational organization. Some of the beliefs that encompass egalitarian Christian theologies are that men and women are supposed to mutually submit to each other (Ephesians 5:21) and that in God's view there is no real difference between men and women (Galatians 3:28). While the UMC has ordained women since its founding in 1968, the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, authorized the first woman preacher in 1787 (United Methodist Church, 2019). At the time I visited All Saints Christian Church, there was one ordained female pastor whose title was Executive Pastor. An Executive Pastor usually assists the Senior Pastor and is responsible for managing the functional aspects of the church such as ministry departments, facilities, and budgets. In addition to her leadership responsibilities, the Executive Pastor at All Saints Christian Church regularly preached during weekend church services. Within this cultural milieu, I expected to find the children's Sunday school spaces a site where children and Sunday school teachers interacted in ways that challenged dominant ideologies surrounding gendered norms and expectations. What I found, though, was a lack of intentional discourse that challenged dominant gender ideologies. This lack of discourse was the result of a null curriculum surrounding gender in the lesson materials used by the Sunday school teachers. In the absence of alternative religious ideologies about gender, most of the adults and children uncritically and unwittingly drew from culturally dominant patriarchal ideologies as they negotiated gendered roles and expectations within the children's Sunday school space.

For the remainder of this section, I elaborate on four themes that arose from my ethnographic field notes at All Saints Christian Church. First, I discuss how children's ministry involvement was gendered at All Saints Christian Church. Second, I describe how adult volunteers and children perpetuated and contested gendered stereotypes in the Sunday school classroom. Third, I describe how children and teachers drew from gender stereotypes to negotiate culturally gendered norms in the context of classroom activities. Finally, I describe how children used gender to group themselves as well as how adult volunteers relied on gender segregation as a classroom management strategy. I end with a section on how Sunday school leaders administered discipline in gender-specific ways.

Gendered Involvement in Children's Ministry at All Saints Christian Church

In the larger church context of All Saints Christian Church, there did not seem to be an obvious gendered division of ministry. Congregants were encouraged to get involved in areas of the church that fit their skills, interests, and dispositions. The only areas where gender was a qualifier was in "Men's Ministry" and "Women's Ministry." These were ministries that held events catered to specific gender audiences. All other areas of involvement were open to everyone regardless of gender.

Despite having no gender requirement for involvement, an overwhelming majority of the children's ministry volunteers I encountered at All Saints Christian Church on my site visits were female. From the children's ministry information desk to the nursery volunteers to Sunday school leaders, almost all the people involved in children's ministry were women. During the first service, there were only two times I attended when one of the Sunday school station group leaders was male. There were also some male small group leaders in the children's church during the second service. Unlike the Sunday school station leaders who prepared teaching and activity materials as the primary teacher in a classroom, children's church small group leaders only had to show up a few minutes before the second service began, supervise children, and lead a small group discussion lasting about 7-10 minutes at the end of children's church. There were usually more female children's church volunteers than male volunteers. On three of the 15 site visits, I was the only male small group leader during the children's church time.

One Sunday exemplified the implicitly gendered nature of the children's ministry at All Saints Christian Church. On this Sunday, there were more male children's church volunteers than female volunteers (two men and one woman). When Karen, the children's ministry director, realized this, she exclaimed, "It's the Dads Sunday!" Realizing she had not recognized the female leaders, the children's ministry director quickly added, "…the Dads and Janet." Although all the other Sundays I visited was dominated by female children's church volunteers, the children's ministry director never made a similar exclamation declaring any of those Sundays as "The Moms Sunday." By choosing to make a big deal of having a majority of male leaders on that one Sunday, the children's ministry leader implicitly reinforced the larger cultural gender ideological role of women as nurturers and teachers of younger children. Further, this type of recognition of men's nominal involvement in female dominated areas is akin to Williams' (1992) description of the glass escalator whereby some men in female dominated professions more often experienced advantages over their female counterparts such as accolades and promotions.

The children's church at All Saints Christian Church also had opportunities for children to volunteer and contribute to the children's church programming. Some of the roles included working as an audio/visual technician at the sound board and computer, helping get children checked in for children's church, and collecting the offering during children's church. Just like other areas in the church, these jobs were not restricted by gender. While the adults working in children's ministry areas were predominantly women, there were equal numbers of boys and girls who worked in the areas children were able to volunteer. Moreover, boys and girls frequently worked together in those various areas.

When probed about why more men were not involved in Sunday school or children's church, Karen stated that she had tried various ways to recruit men to volunteer in the children's ministry. She lamented that she was working against larger socio-historical trends and cultural stereotypes that did not encourage men to work with children because working with children falls under the domain of women. This sentiment is consistent with the experiences I had in my former role as a children's pastor. Most of the Sunday school teachers I supervised were female. Over the course of 12 years as a children's pastor, I remember only working with a few male volunteers in children's ministry, and of those volunteers only a handful of them were Sunday school teachers.

In her research on child care work, Murray (1996, 2000) cites examples from a day care where the male child care worker was repeatedly treated with suspicion, which led to restricted access to working with children and reifying men as potential predators. Murray argued that these and other types of gendered processes create and reinforce structural barriers for men to enter and remain in childcare work. This suggests that even in an egalitarian organization like All Saints Christian Church, external societal structures regarding the gendered nature of working with children negatively influenced men's willingness to volunteer in the children's ministry. Moreover, I argue that the lack of an intentional religious counter-hegemonic narrative, which normalized men as caregivers and nurturers at All Saints Christian Church, created a gender ideology vacuum that was filled by culturally dominant gender ideologies.

Messages About Gendered Stereotypes

In addition to gendered ideologies influencing who volunteered in children's ministry at All Saints Christian Church, there were many instances where dominant gendered stereotypes and norms were reproduced and contested in the Sunday school space but in ways that were incidental to the official Sunday school lessons. For the remainder of this section, I discuss some of those stereotypes and how they were reproduced and contested in the classroom settings.

One of the ways that gender stereotypes entered the classroom settings at All Saints Christian Church was through how boys/men and girls/women were portrayed through music and storytelling. One example of this was in a music video that was played at the beginning of children's church for over half my site visits. The video was played in the background as part of the ambience, but it was a catchy tune that couched gendered stereotypes in a song about motion and fun.

> One of the songs on the DVD is called "The Moving Song" by a music group called The Lads. The Lads is made up of two men from Australia who write and produce music and videos for children's ministry in Christian churches. The video begins in an aerobics class made up of all women and one man. As the class begins, the women have no trouble keeping up with the aerobics instructor, while the man acts uncoordinated and awkward. Within seconds, the class is taken over by the Lads who are dressed in camo and muscle shirts. They begin singing the lyrics to "The Moving Song" and leading the group in choreographed dance moves. The one man who was in the aerobics class prior to the Lads showing up became "cool" and picked up the choreography for the Moving Song almost immediately. The women in the class were resistant, at first, to the Lads interrupting their class, but they soon joined in except for the aerobics instructor. The aerobics instructor would get caught up in "fun" and then go back to being "serious" and irked that her class was taken over by "fun." This reinforces the rhetoric that I frequently run into in children's ministry Facebook groups that anecdotally say boys are bored by singing songs in church and that there need to

> be more active-oriented songs with fun movement to engage boys. These are the same anecdotes I encountered 20 years ago when I was a children's pastor in conversations with other people who led children's ministries and in children's ministry books and articles I read.
>
> At one point in the music video, the Lads sing, "And the boys sit down/'Cause we're the boys/Then the boys stand up/Girls' turn!/Girls sit down/Yeah, we're the girls/The girls stand up…" Not only did this reinforce the idea of a gender binary where boys and girls are the opposites of each other, but the Lads sing "Yeah, we're the girls!" in cartoon-like "girly" voices while "'Cause we're the boys" is sung without any voice modifications. Further, one of the men in the background strikes a pose reminiscent of a body builder during the boys' stanzas. This is a seemingly innocuous song that is fun, but it gets played repeatedly, reinforcing the gendered stereotypes depicted in the video. (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

These types of boy and girl voice characterizations were used at other times during my site visits. On a few Sundays, a husband and wife duo would lead the kids in singing various songs. At times, they would encourage boys to sing in their "strong, deep voices" and girls to sing in their "sweetest voices." The song leaders would adjust their pitches lower and higher, respectively. Another example of using voice characterizations was when the children's ministry director (Karen) would teach the kids the memory verse for the week. After repeating the verse with the children a few times, Karen would have the children say the verse in various ways such as really fast, really slow, like a robot, loud, whispering, etc. At times, she had the children say the verse in a girl voice, which was in a cartoon-like soprano with eyebrows lifted and straight-backed posture. She would follow with the kids saying the verse in a "tough" voice, which was a deep baritone with eyebrows furrowed, back hunched over, and frowning.

On its own, varying vocal pitch to match those of boys/men or girls/women could simply be a theatrical technique to engage children's attentions. When coupled with exaggerated masculinized or feminized actions, these gendered vocal performances took on greater significance by strengthening and normalizing culturally dominant gendered stereotypes that children and adults bring with them from other social fields they inhabit into these religious spaces.

Another way vocal pitch was used in stereotypical ways was through storytelling. On the Sunday at the beginning of spring break week for the kids, attendance was low, so Karen chose to read from a storybook rather than teach a “normal” lesson. The book was entitled *You Are Special* by Max Lucado. The story is an allegory about one’s intrinsic value as a result of being created and loved by God. The story is set in a fictional town made up of wooden people and a woodcarver named Eli. The wooden people are meant to represent human beings, and Eli is meant to represent God. At one point in the story, one of the wooden people, Punchinello, who feels useless, is encouraged to visit Eli. While visiting Eli, Punchinello is reminded that he is special because Eli made him. While reading the story, Karen used what she described to the children as a “deep, strong voice [for Eli] because I imagine God would have a strong voice like that” (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church). Not only did Karen implicitly draw from the dominant gendered cultural stereotype that strong men have deep voices, but she attached that stereotype to the image of God. This reinforced a patriarchal Christian imaginary by drawing on the cultural stereotype of the Christian God as a strong, rugged man (Bartkowski, 2001; Harper, 2012; Kimmel, 2011).

In addition to songs and storytelling, gender stereotyping showed up amid activities and lessons in the Sunday school classroom. As an example, I extensively quote from my memos:

> After reading, Barbara, the Bible story station leader, asked the kids, “Which of the commandments is hard to follow for you? Why?” There were various answers. Some of the kids answered, “The last one.” Or “The first one.” Martin

> (second grade boy) said, “Loving my brother.” Evelyn, the early elementary group leader responded, “Yeah, I was waiting for one of the boys to say that.”
>
> During the interaction time, Barbara deliberately used the kids’ names. When it was time for the snack, Barbara referred to the kids as “Friends” rather than “Boys and Girls.”
>
> For the snack, there were 10 food items: 5 sweet and 5 savory. They also had dips: canned spray cheese and melted chocolate. The point was to see how the foods and dips got along together because the 10 Commandments were about getting along with God and other people. The food items were: bread, pretzel chips, tortilla chips, carrots, angel food cake, strawberries, and grapes. The savory items were passed out first with the canned spray cheese. The sweet was passed out with the melted chocolate. The kids could pass on any items they did not want.
>
> As the canned spray cheese was being passed around, the first few kids declined. When it came to Kent (second grade boy), he said yes to the cheese. Evelyn exclaimed, “Way to be a man! Taking the cheese… You da man!” She then gave him a fist bump. (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

Throughout this scene in the Sunday school classroom, the two leaders were unintentionally contesting the importance of gender in this classroom space. Barbara, the Bible story station leader, tried establishing a gender-neutral setting in the classroom by addressing the children as “Friends” or using their names. Barbara’s approach to gender contested dominant ideologies that reinforce an essentialized gender binary. On the other hand, Evelyn, the early elementary group leader who was responsible for managing group behavior as well as attendance, addressed the children as “Boys and Girls” and reinforced a traditional gender binary. Further, Evelyn drew from larger cultural gender ideologies and reinforced gendered stereotypes by rewarding children for embodying those stereotypes. She affirmed Martin (“one of the boys”) for stating that he had trouble loving his brother, and later on she praised Kent for being “da man” to take a risk in trying an unfamiliar food.

In this instance, the Sunday school classroom was a religious site where opposing gender ideologies faced off. Since egalitarian ideology (and theology) that would contest dominant gender ideologies was part of the null curriculum in Sunday school materials and lessons, the dominant ideologies that were uncritically and implicitly espoused and reinforced by Evelyn prevailed. According to Risman (1998), although there may be contestation of patriarchal gendered norms at the interactional level, the structural nature of patriarchy stunts movement towards more egalitarian views of gender.

These gendered stereotypes are not necessarily essential to religion. They are part of larger ideologies regarding masculinity and femininity where masculinity is tough and strong and fun, whereas femininity is delicate, boring, and must make way for masculinity (Connell, 2005; Garner and Grazian, 2016). These stereotypes were not part of the explicit, material Biblical curriculum at All Saints Christian Church, which I address in Chapter 4. Since All Saints Christian Church subscribed to an egalitarian understanding of the roles of men and women, there should be basis to contest larger cultural gender stereotypes, but gender was not an explicit part of the Sunday school lessons or discussions. Rather, meanings of gender were part of the hidden and null curricula. This created an ideological vacuum in the Sunday school space that was filled by larger cultural gender stereotypes and reinforced a patriarchal Christian imagination. In turn, this imagination was reinforced, contested, and transformed through interactions in the Sunday school classroom by kids and adults via gendered norms, gendered behaviors, and gendered segregation (Gansen, 2019).

Negotiating Gendered Norms at All Saints Christian Church. In her study at preschools, Gansen noted that young children were socialized into gendered norms via the implicit and explicit ways preschool teachers emphasized the importance of gendered differences and treated children in gendered ways. Similarly, adults and children at All Saints Christian Church spontaneously invoked gendered norms such as those applied to colors, activities, toys, etc. in the context of interactions with each other in the Sunday classroom. Most of these instances were instigated by adults interacting with kids rather than primarily invoked by kids.

One example of a child reinforcing gender norms came in the form of crayon color choice. At times, the Sunday school station leader completed all the learning activities outlined in the Sunday school curriculum before it was time for Sunday school to end. This meant that there was time between Sunday school and children's church that needed to be filled with some sort of activity before the children were either picked up by their parents or headed to the area for children's church. One popular activity was the word guessing game, "Hangman." The game was played on the whiteboard in whatever classroom the group was in that Sunday, and the children took turns at the board filling in the spaces for the letters. On this Sunday, Martin was the first child to be up at the board.

> The two dry erase markers available were red and pink. The group leader offered Martin the pink one. He took a step back and avoided it saying, "I'm not comfortable with pink." The group leader then offered Martin the red one, "Here's red." "I'm not comfortable with red. I'm more comfortable with green or blue." The group leader answered, "You'll have to be comfortable with red." (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

This was one of the few times I observed children initiating an interaction around gendered norms. Not only did Martin reject using the pink colored marker, he physically moved away from the maker as if being near it would somehow contaminate him. He was not even "comfortable with red" because it was too close to pink, which is "normally" a girl color. While these types of interactions were rare at All Saints Christian Church, I observed many similar instances of children enacting these types of gendered norms at Blessings Church, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Most of the interactions I observed that included gendered norms at All Saints Christian Church were instigated by adults. An example of this was an illustrative story one of the Sunday school station leaders told in connection with the Biblical account of Joseph's brothers faking Joseph's death and selling him into slavery (Genesis 37). The Sunday school station leader (Frank) was one of two male Sunday school station leaders I observed during my site visits. The story he told was about how a girl was bullied at school.

> Frank began telling a story to coincide with Joseph telling his older brothers a dream he had that he would rule over them some day and the resentment his brothers had for him. The story was about a girl who was the teacher's pet. One day the student received a bike from the teacher as a prize for winning a class contest. One of the boys in the Sunday school class asked, "What color is the bike? Purple and pink?" Frank answered, "Purple and pink with high handlebars and a flag on it and basket." He went on to say that the other kids in school were jealous about the girl getting a bike. Some mean kids locked her in a locker. Frank mentioned a mean kid in the story who was responsible for locking the girl in the locker. The mean kid was a boy, and when Frank imitated the mean boy's voice, he lowered his voice even lower than it already was. (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

Although the Bible lesson was about a boy named Joseph, Frank chose to cast the teacher's pet in his story as a girl. Frank had an opportunity to challenge gendered norms when one of the children in Sunday school asked if the bike was purple or pink. Instead, Frank drew from his own well of cultural resources and described a bicycle that conformed to feminine gender norms including the color purple, handlebar tassels, and basket. In so doing, Frank reinforced culturally dominant gender norms within a religious setting and further strengthening the patriarchal Christian imaginary. In my observations at All Saints Christian Church, this type of uncontested reinforcement was not inevitable.

There were times adults contested gender norms. More often, though, in the absence of explicit egalitarian messages written into the Sunday school curriculum, adults uncritically fell back on patriarchal gender ideologies to inform their gender-based interactions within the Sunday school space. An exemplar of this occurred during a lesson while at the snack station. Throughout the Sunday school time, the snack station leader (Renee) deliberately addressed the children by name or using gender neutral terms when speaking to them as a group. For example, as she was gathering the materials for the snack, she asked, "Do we have any *friends* with allergies?" (emphasis mine) This created a class atmosphere where gender was decentered from teacher-child interactions. Evelyn, the early elementary group leader, who was also in the room, did not share Renee's gender-neutral approach to interacting with the children. As the children were assisting with preparing the snack, the children spontaneously began talking about their favorite colors.

> The children began an exchange about their favorite colors while they were taking turns mixing the pudding for the snack activity. One of the boys (Vance) mentioned that he liked purple. Vance quickly qualified his response by saying that purple reminded him of things that were scary or sad or things in nightmares. Evelyn warily said that purple made her think of unicorns and My Little Pony. She went on to joke that My Little Pony might give boys nightmares. Another boy at the table agreed, "My Little Pony does give me nightmares!" Vance, who had mentioned an affinity for purple, seemed to be relieved for not enduring anymore scrutiny about his favorite color of choice. (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

In the above exchange, there was an opportunity for the adult leaders to contest norms surrounding what colors are considered masculine and feminine. Since Renee had already discursively de-centered gender in how she addressed the children, the leaders could have affirmed the boy's choice of purple as a favorite color regardless of whether it was "scary" or "sad." Had the Sunday school curricula included lessons that connected religious beliefs to egalitarian ideologies of gender, the Sunday school teachers would have had material and symbolic religious culture to draw from in order to contest patriarchal gendered norms. In this absence of a countercultural religious gender ideology, Evelyn drew from her own understanding of gender and reinforced culturally dominant gendered norms by feminizing Vance's choice. In what seemed to be an attempt to undo this, Evelyn backtracked her comment by trying to masculinize purple and placed My Little Pony in the category of nightmares. Another boy affirmed Evelyn's attempt and solidified purple as a color that could be masculine. Rather than de-gendering colors, the above interactions solidified gendered color categories and reassigned purple to the masculine side. Similar interactions occurred at All Saints Christian Church for the duration of my time there. While these interactions fit with similar examples from other gender socialization research in educational contexts (Gansen, 2019; Thorne, 1993), they further show another avenue where a lack of Sunday school curricula that intentionally and critically counters culturally dominant gender ideologies contributes to a patriarchal Christian imagination.

Gender-specific Grouping and Segregating in Sunday School. Another way adults and children drew from gendered stereotypes at All Saints Christian Church was through gendered segregation. By gendered segregation, I mean the symbolic and physical separation of people by sex/gender. Just like with gendered norms, this was enacted as adults interacted with children and as children interacted with each other. Some of the segregation was implicit and some of it explicit. When done implicitly, there seemed to be a lack of cultural resources adults and teachers had at the church to avoid or discourage gendered segregation.

An example of this implicit form of segregation was during free play time between Sunday school and children's church. There were several activities for children to take part in: board games, LEGOs, cup stacking, drawing, etc. During these times, the boys usually played with other boys and girls played with other girls. There were a few exceptions, but these instances of cross-gendered play usually happened in side-by-side play. In other words, boys and girls would play alongside each other rather than with each other. During my site visits, I observed very few instances of spontaneous cross play that required boys and girls to play with each other (e.g., a board game or some sort of imaginative cooperative play). Boys' LEGO creations would interact with other boys' creations, but boys' and girls' LEGO creations did not interact with each other. If there were boys and girls playing by stacking cups, they did not work cooperatively. Rather the boys would move to one side of the play area and girls to the other. The only time boys and girls interacted while stacking cups was when they would try to steal cups from each other's stacked cups. At no time during the free play time did any adult leaders actively encourage cross play between boys and girls. This was similar to phenomena Thorne (1993) noticed in her study as children played in the school playground—the boys and girls usually played separately from each other and only transgressed each other's spaces when boys would "invade" girls' spaces in order to disrupt girls' play.

Another form of implicit segregation was in how kids spontaneously seated themselves. When given the choice, boys usually sat with other boys and girls sat with other girls. Many times, I would walk into a Sunday school classroom to find all the boys at one table and all the girls at another table. If there was only one table (or the children were told to sit at one table), then the boys usually sat on one side of the table while the girls sat on the other side. In children's church, the seats were set up in rows, so boys and girls would frequently be seated on separate rows. If they were sitting in the same row, there would be at least one chair separating the boys from the girls. In most instances, the only time boys and girls sat next to each other was if an adult leader placed them next to each other. Based on my observations, leaders primarily did this for the sake of classroom management rather than to deliberately disrupt the children's tendency to self-segregate by gender.

One example of note was when Martin and his sister showed up late for Sunday school. At the time they arrived, Martin was the only boy in the group.

> Martin and [his sister] showed up late, so the kids there were already reading the story of Jesus' crucifixion. Martin tried sitting at the second table by himself. Barbara, the Sunday school station leader told him to sit at the table with everyone else, so he seated himself at the end of the table far away from the girls. When the story switched to that of the empty tomb after Jesus' resurrection, Barbara tried to partner Martin up with Lucky (first grade girl) so he could read along, but he didn't want to move. He stated, "I wanted to sit next to one of my friends, but none of them are here." This could be that there were no other boys in the class. I don't remember Martin saying or doing something like that the previous times I had observed the class. I did notice that he did not say anything about not wanting to sit next to a girl, which is what moving to another seat would entail. At this point, Martin was the only boy in the class. When Philip (first grade boy) showed up, Martin motioned for Philip to sit next to him. (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

Rather than explicitly stating that he did not want to sit next to a girl, Martin engaged in passive techniques to distance himself from the girls by attempting to sit at a different table and then positioning himself as far away from the girls as possible when he was told to sit at the same table as everyone else. While Barbara tried to have Martin sit next to one of the girls, she was doing this for the sake of keeping class momentum moving forward and following the lesson rather than to disrupt Martin's self-imposed gendered segregation. While it seemed that adults did not directly challenge some of the children’s ideas regarding segregating by gender, I did observe several times when children would challenge each other. One example of this was when I was leading a small group at the end of the children’s church time.

> I was a small group leader, and one of the activities was for kids to pair up and discuss a question. My group consisted of five boys and one girl. There were two sets of boys that paired up, so that left a girl (Macy) and boy (Chad) that needed to pair up. Chad wanted to pair up with me. He said it was because, “You can die from cooties.” Macy told him cooties do not exist and moved to sit next to him. (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

Although All Saints Christian Church maintained an egalitarian stance regarding gender roles, Chad found it acceptable to use the language of disease and contamination to avoid working with a girl. In the absence of cultural resources to draw from in the church or in the Sunday school curriculum regarding gender, the children and I drew from gendered ideologies we brought with us into the Sunday school space.

Explicit forms of gendered segregation were commonly used by Sunday school teachers as a form of classroom management. An example of this was during a weekly children’s church game called *Bible Drills*. This game emphasized the need for children to learn Bible skills such as finding scripture references by turning the skill into a race. A scripture reference would be shown on the screen, and children would race to be the first one to find it in the Bible. Since many of the children did not bring their own Bibles, there was a shelf on one side of the children’s church room with Bibles on it. The children’s ministry director (Karen) would dismiss the children by sex/gender to get a Bible.

> For the Bible drills, Karen dismissed [the children] by sex to get Bibles. “If you are a girl and need a Bible, you may go get one now.” “If you are a boy and need a Bible, you may go get one now.” Today, a couple of the boys started to go get a Bible when Karen called for the girls to do so, and she said, “I didn’t call boys.” (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

In Chapter 4, one of the themes that arose from my analysis of the Sunday school curricula was the emphasis on learning Bible skills so one could easily navigate the Bible and learn from it. In this instance, the emphasis on making sure children had Bibles to participate in the "Bible Drills" overshadowed how Karen weekly linked the importance of gender categories with learning the books of the Bible. Previous studies have shown that these types of gendered strategies to communicate with students or to maintain classroom order serve to eventually reify gender categories and accompanying gender expectations (Bigler and Liben, 2007; Gansen, 2019; Thorne, 1993). Not only did the children's ministry director weekly reinforce a distinct separation of boys from girls by dismissing them separately, she also unintentionally policed gender boundaries by calling out the boys for trying to get a Bible before they were called. While this finding may not be novel in itself, its occurrence in the context of Sunday school sacralizes gender essentialism and reinforces the patriarchal Christian imagination.

Gender-specific Disciplinary Practices. One last way gendered stereotypes showed up at All Saints Christian Church was in how gender and discipline intertwined with each other. This manifested primarily in two ways: boys were more often disciplined harsher than the girls and children's bodies were differentially disciplined based on gendered clothing.

During my site visits, I observed many instances where boys were reprimanded while girls were not. That is not to say that girls were never reprimanded; individual girls were reminded to "sit still," "follow directions," "raise your hand before speaking," and more, but I never observed girls reprimanded as a group. On the other hand, boys were individually disciplined and disciplined as a group, even when other girls were misbehaving.

> Evelyn, seeing that the kids were not immediately paying attention to the station leader loudly exclaimed, “Boys! Girls!... Girls, thank you… Boys, you have too much energy. Energy is good, but not now.” Kent and Jordan (first grade boys) had been paying attention. Jacqueline (first grade girl) was not paying attention. (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

In the above interaction, the early elementary group leader (Evelyn) drew from cultural stereotypes that boys are loud and rambunctious to group all the boys together and reprimand them as a group for having “too much energy” even though two of the five boys in the classroom that day were paying attention. The girls, on the other hand were grouped together as examples of what it meant to behave properly although one of them was being just as disruptive as the remaining three boys. At another time, one of the Sunday school station leaders routinely excluded boys from taking a turn reading from the day’s lesson from the story Bible because they had not volunteered to read when she asked for volunteers and were “not paying attention to everyone else” who had read. She did continue to allow one of the girls who was also being talkative to read. The girl was even praised, “That was good reading.” Alternatively, the Sunday school station leader asked the boys, “Are you guys doing good? The way you are acting leads me to think you are sick.” Boys were routinely targeted as perpetuating inappropriate behaviors in church, while girls were highlighted as examples of good behavior. “See how good the girls are doing?”

Another form of gendered discipline was indirect and was linked to the clothing the children wore. This led to different ways of policing the children’s bodies. Girls who wore dresses could not freely move because of the threat of being immodest and showing underwear.

> The girls with dresses were told they had to keep their legs down so they would not show their underwear or panties. The female early elementary group leader (Diane) was sitting next to a couple of girls and kept fixing their skirts/dresses so that they were not hiked up. In doing so, Diane also kept the girls from moving around too much or sitting on the chairs in non-normative ways. Diane's reprimands were in reference to modesty and sitting properly in order to keep clothing covering appropriate spots. For example, "You need to sit ladylike so that your dress doesn't go up." "Make sure your skirt stays down." (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

In another example, the kids were supposed to make a list of things they were thankful for. The Sunday school station leader (Jason) suggested that the children use their chairs as a substitute for a table (there was no table in the room). He mentioned that some of the girls would need to sit still and ladylike because they were wearing dresses. The boys, on the other hand, could move more freely without the fear of being immodest, so they did. Since Jason could not use modesty as a sanction for sitting still, the boys were disciplined more harshly and told to stop misbehaving, being silly, squirmy, etc. Ironically, girls were used as examples of sitting still even though the girls were "forced" to sit still at the threat of being immodest. This type of body disciplining is similar to what Martin (1998) described in her study of how preschoolers are gendered by way of differential disciplining children's bodies due to assumptions of gendered abilities as well as the types of gendered clothing children wore. The difference between Martin's study and the type of discipline I observed at All Saints Christian Church was the added dimension of morality linked to children's behaviors. Girls were admonished to be modest, and boys were charged with being disrespectful. In so doing, gendered expectations were not only normalized, but they were sacralized.

Blessings Church

Like All Saints Christian Church, Blessings Church was an egalitarian church and was part of the UMC denomination. Further, the lead pastor at Blessings Church was a woman, and she preached regularly. While Blessings Church had no qualms about women in leadership, the church still held conservative views on social issues like marriage and sexuality. Further, there also seemed to be a strong need to establish Jesus/God as not just male but also masculine. This was made clear when I visited one of the adult worship services.

> At one point, [the lead pastor] was talking about Jesus preaching from a mountain on “The Beatitudes” (Matthew 5). She said that sometimes she imagined this scene of Jesus preaching to his followers. She made a point to say that Jesus was not good looking and that the girls were not going after him. She explained that this was because the Bible described Jesus as plain looking; it would have been a distraction if he was good looking. The pastor also made it a point to say that Jesus had to be strong because he was a carpenter and worked hard with his hands. She further described Jesus having a strong voice, like that of a radio announcer so everyone could hear him. (Field Note Memos, Blessings Church)

Unlike the other two church sites I visited for this study, Blessings Church only had one service. During that service, the children were in age-segregated Sunday school classes. During my site visits to Blessings Church, there was no time that the age groups were combined, with two brief exceptions. One time was when the teacher was late, so the preschool and early elementary aged children were combined at the beginning of the church service. When the Sunday school teacher arrived, the classes were separated back to their normal age groups. The other time age groups were combined was when there was an adult leaders’ meeting in the early elementary classroom because there was no other room available. The class went back in when the meeting was over. The adult and children’s spheres were well-delineated. There was little interaction between adults and children. Even in the classroom setting, there was a lot of free time for children to interact with each other outside of the lesson time. During the lesson time, there was little direct interaction with the Sunday school teacher because there was only one teacher for 12-18 early elementary children. As a result, adult-child interactional space was little to nonexistent. This meant that most of the interactions over cultural meanings of gender in the Sunday school classroom happened amongst the children. As such, I observed three places where gender was salient: in gendered labor amongst the adults, gender segregation amongst the children, and how children enacted gender norms and stereotypes amongst each other.

Gendered Labor at Blessings Church

As with All Saints Christian Church, the various positions people could volunteer to be a part of were not gender delineated. This was no surprise since Blessings Church was egalitarian and had a female lead pastor. Both men and women held leadership positions, served as ushers, worked in technical aspects (audio/visual) of the church, and were able to teach/speak from the front of the church. In the adult worship service I attended, women spoke more often and led from the stage than men did. This was consistently the norm based on a cursory review of three months of recorded church services posted on the church's social media page. The only male who spoke from the stage on the evening I attended an adult worship service was the person who led the church band and congregational singing.

Although men and women could be involved in all areas of the church, there were two volunteer areas where either men or women were predominantly involved: parking attendants and Sunday school teachers. Since Blessing church was in a strip mall, there were parking attendants to help church members drop off people at the entrance as well as where to park in the strip mall parking lot. All the parking lot attendants were adult or adolescent males. While women were able to volunteer as parking attendants, I never observed any women performing those duties. The reason for this could be attributed to a combination of the lack of prestige in being a parking attendant with the stereotypical paring of men with cars.

In the case of Sunday school teachers, all of them were women including the children's ministry director. It is not that men were not involved in Sunday school; men were either Sunday school assistants or helped with passing out food during the mealtime. Of the 12 classroom visits I conducted, there was a male assistant present at five of those class times. The assistant did no teaching. Rather, the assistant's responsibilities were to help pass out lesson materials, help kids with specific requests while the Sunday school teacher was teaching, and help clean up the classroom at the end of the Sunday school time. When not engaged in one of those activities, most of the male assistants would sit to the side of the room. Moreover, male assistants had more of a passive role, leaving the teaching and classroom management to the female Sunday school teacher. On some of the other days I observed the Sunday school class, there were teen female helpers who had the same responsibilities as the male assistants. The only difference was that the teen female assistants would sit amongst the kids rather than to the side of the room. Another role men had in the children's ministry areas, was assisting with the preparation and delivery of dinner to the children. Every Sunday the children received dinner since the service began at 7 p.m. and could end anywhere between 8:30 and 9:30 p.m. depending on how long the preacher spoke or if a parent were involved in post-service activities like cleaning or putting audio/visual equipment away.

When it came to working with children at the church, men were in support roles rather than as a primary teacher/planner. While women could take on roles traditionally taken on by men (leadership, tech, etc.), men did not take on roles traditionally taken on by women (children's Sunday school teacher). Just like at All Saints Christian Church, the labor performed by the men and women at Blessings Church was influenced by larger cultural ideologies around gendered roles and expectations where it is acceptable for women to enter masculinized areas of labor, but it is not reciprocally acceptable for men to enter feminized areas of labor (Murray, 1996, 2000). Absent intentional cultural resources at the church that contest these larger cultural ideologies, church attendees unintentionally followed cultural paths of least resistance (Johnson, 2017) set up by the larger cultural ideologies.

Negotiating Gender in the Blessings Church Early Elementary Sunday School Classroom

As I mentioned above, there were minimal adult-child interactions during the church times. The children had their Sunday school, and the adults had their own service in the sanctuary. Even in the classroom, there were few adult-child interactions, so I had little opportunity to see how adults and children negotiated meanings of gender using the gendered ideologies they brought with them from other social fields to Blessings Church. The few examples of adult-child interactions are included below. I observed two dominant ways in which gender meanings were negotiated in the Sunday school classroom. The most prominent was in gender segregation. The other way was through gendered norms. During my site visits, I did not observe explicit or implicit uses of gender-specific discipline as I did at All Saints Christian Church.

Gender-specific grouping and segregation. Similar to All Saints Christian Church, the boys tended to sit with the boys and the girls sat with the girls. The tables were set up in a U-shape in the Sunday school classroom at Blessings Church, and I would typically walk into the classroom to see all the boys sitting at one leg of the U and all the girls sitting at the other leg of the U. Occasionally there would be a boy on the "girls' side" or a girl on the "boys' side", but that was rare. When the children sat on the floor for the Bible story and singing time, the girls usually sat towards the front closest to the teacher, and the boys sat behind the girls. The following exemplifies this gendered self-segregation amongst the children.

> One girl came to the class late. She was wearing a unicorn head band and unicorn sequin shirt. She sat in an empty seat that had been separating the boys' side of the table from the girls' side, and it was next to one of the boys, James. After she sat down, James wanted to move over so he could be a seat away from her. He made a big deal of trying to get the Sunday school teacher's attention by raising his hand and repeatedly calling, "Teacher! Teacher!" Since Georgia, the lead Sunday school teacher, was busy helping another one of the children, Mateo, the male assistant, went over to James. James told Mateo that he wanted to scoot over, but Mateo was reluctant to allow James to move over because it would entail other boys moving over as well. After a brief discussion, Mateo went ahead and scoot some of the boys over to allow for James to move over away from the girl with the unicorn head band. When Georgia asked why the boys were moving, Mateo joked that it was because James was scared of sitting next to girls. Rolling her eyes at Mateo, Georgia told him that James had no problem sitting next to the other girls who were on the other side of him at the beginning of the class. (Field Note Memos, Blessings Church)

When the girl sat next to James, she eliminated the figurative barrier set up by the empty seat that separated the boys from the girls. Rather than challenging James' "fear" of sitting next to girls, Mateo accommodated James and even made light of it as if it was "natural" for boys not to like girls. Further, Georgia dismissed both Mateo's and James' actions as inconsequential to the overall purpose of the Sunday school class, which was learning the Bible lesson (see Chapter 4). Since counteracting gender stereotypes was not a formal part of the curriculum, the children and adults relied on cultural resources gathered from other areas of society regarding gendered stereotypes for their interactions in the Sunday school classroom.

Another way the children reinforced gender divisions was through the games they played. The children in the Sunday school class I observed at Blessings Church had the most “free time” of the three church sites I visited. As the children played, adults only intervened and interacted with children while they played if the children were being “too loud” or engaging in activities that could lead to injury or harm. Extended free play time coupled with limited adult supervision created an environment where children had more autonomy over their activities and interactions. What I observed was that children engaged in two types of gender-segregated play. One was through gender differentiated games or activities, and the other was through what I call parallel play.

One of the ways the children in the early elementary Sunday school class at Blessings Church maintained gender divisions in their free-time activities was through gender differentiated games. This means that the children engaged in play that capitalized on larger cultural gendered stereotypes. For example, the boys frequently played a version of tag they called “Chucky.” The name for the game was taken from a series of horror movies of the same name about a doll named Chucky that came to life and killed people. In the game the boys played, one of them would be “Chucky” and chase the other boys around. Once another boy was tagged (or “stabbed” according to the boys), then the tagged boy would pretend to die and then become the next “Chucky.” When I asked one of the boys why they played “Chucky,” he said it was because it was “scary and fun.”

The girls, on the other hand, would play various versions of “school” or “house” where the dominant girls would be the teacher or parent and the other girls would be their students or children. On one Sunday, some of the girls were playing house and using the toy kitchen that was in the room to make pretend food they would bring to me because I was sitting nearby. When I asked why they were bringing me food, they told me it was because I was their neighbor.

These types of activities drew from larger cultural stereotypes of boys as tough risk-takers and girls as caretakers and nurturers and strengthened the divisions between boys and girls. Since no attempts were made to disrupt these stereotypes by offering alternative cultural resources to draw from, the children drew from the gendered cultural resources they gained elsewhere and reproduced these gendered stereotypes within the interactional space of the Sunday school classroom. In so doing, the children constructed the religious space of the Sunday school classroom as also a gendered space where gender stereotypes and expectations were reified as essential aspects of what it meant to be created by God as a boy and as a girl. Moreover, this reinforced children's conceptions of God as a gendered being and essentially male (see Chapter 7).

Another way children maintained gendered divisions during their free-play time was through parallel play. What I mean by parallel play is that boys and girls would play identical games at the same time but only with others of the same sex. For example, some boys would be playing tag with each other at the same time some of the girls would be playing tag with each other. This would sometimes make for a humorous and chaotic sight because the Sunday school classroom was not large. The boys and girls would be running around and, at times, would run into each other, yet they maintained their separate but parallel games of tag. This type of gendered parallel play happened on a few occasions during my site visits. There was one time where the boys and girls had parallel games of Duck, Duck, Goose happening on opposite sides of the room.

During my site visits to the early elementary Sunday school class at Blessings Church, I observed few instances of cross play, where boys and girls engaged in play with each other. In those times, attempts at cross play by individual children were unsuccessful. One example of this was one of the times Veronica tried to join some of the boys who were playing tag.

> When the kids were done with their food, the boys started to play tag by running around the room. One of the girls, Veronica, tried to insert herself into the boys' play by running around with them and trying to get the attention of the boy who was "it" at the moment. The boys ignored her attempts as she chased around with them. They did not really include her in their play, but she kept trying to insert herself into their game of tag. After a few failed attempts, Veronica went to her chair and sat with her arms crossed and an angry expression on her face. (Field Note Memos, Blessings Church)

Thorne (1993) suggested that boys and girls were more likely to successfully play with each other in smaller informal settings as well as in times when boys and girls did not have to choose other participants. I did not find this to be the case in the Sunday school class context at Blessings Church I was in. What I observed at Blessings Church, was that successful cross play more likely happened in the context of games moderated by the Sunday school teacher.

> The service was going long because of the revival speaker, so Georgia had the kids play "Lion, Lion, Roar" (aka, Duck, Duck, Goose) since the lesson had been about Daniel and the Lion's Den. The kids sat in a circle that had a mixture of boys and girls sitting next to each other. Georgia emphasized that the kids pick someone who had not gone yet when it was their turn to go around the circle. Without much prompting other than that, the kids were not discriminatory in who they picked. In other words, boys didn't just pick boys and girls didn't just pick girls. I was watching to see what would happen as the game went on. The game went on with a mixture of boys and girls picking each other with no intervention from any of the adults in the room. (Field Note Memos, Blessings Church)

Based on my observations of the children up to this point, my previous personal professional experiences working with children, as well as my own gendered expectations, I expected the boys to pick boys and girls to do likewise in the game. I was surprised that the children did not need consistent encouragement to be egalitarian in their choices. When the expectation was set for the children to be egalitarian, their behaviors shifted to allow for cross play between sexes. When left on their own during free-play time, the children followed larger cultural paths of least resistance and gender segregated play.

Reinforcing Gendered Norms at Blessings Church

Another area where gender was salient amongst the children in the early elementary Sunday school class at Blessings Church was in the negotiation of gendered norms. One of the ways this showed up was through the gendering of colors. During my site visits, Georgia enjoyed having the children do crafts, which meant there was a lot of coloring and cutting. When the scissors were put out, many of the children were deliberate in their choice of scissor handle colors. The girls took scissors with pink or purple handles, and the boys went for the blue or green handles. One time, I observed one of the boys gathering all the scissors with blue handles and passing them out to the other boys in the class that day to make sure that all the boys had the “right scissors.” The children acted similarly when it came to choosing which crayon colors they preferred using. Not all the children cared about what color they were “supposed” to use or not. In the example below, two boys had a disagreement over what colored pencil was appropriate for a boy to use.

> After the class was done learning the weekly Bible verse, they had a craft. The craft was for Easter, and they were tracing their hands on yellow construction paper to cut out and represent sunrays. This was difficult for some of the children to do, so I was enlisted to help some of the children with tracing. We were using colored pencils for the hand tracing, and Gecko had chosen a purple pencil to trace his own hand. One of the other boys, James, noticed that Gecko’s pencil was purple and tried to wrestle Gecko’s pencil away. As James was doing this, he exclaimed, “Gecko is not a girl!” When Gecko refused to give up his pencil,

> James tried to inform Gecko, "You can't use a purple pencil. Purple is a girl color." Gecko refused to relinquish his pencil and went back to tracing his hand with the purple pencil. (Field Note Memos, Blessings Church)

Drawing from the larger cultural norm that purple is a "girl color," James felt so strongly about this norm that he forcefully tried to change Gecko's purple pencil for a blue one because Gecko wasn't a girl. At no time during this interaction did Georgia or Mateo intervene. Whether Gecko resisted James because he disagreed with James' assessment about the color purple or simply because he did not like James trying to take the pencil away from him, I cannot say. What I did note, though, was that James had no hesitation in assuming that what he knew about "boys' colors" and "girls' colors" should have been obvious to Gecko as well as everyone else in the room.

In addition to colors, Bible stories and pictures served as prompts to bring up gendered norms during the lesson times I observed. One example of this was during a lesson about Samson (Judges 13-16).

> Georgia had the children sit on the floor in front of the tables for the Bible story. The girls all crowded in front of the group trying to get as close to the teacher as possible. The boys sat towards the back of the group and some even laid down on the ground. The lesson was about Samson. Georgia read the Bible story from picture book, and she stopped after each page to show the kids the pictures. As Georgia was reading the story, the pictures of Samson showed him with long hair. Various kids interrupted the story commenting that Samson must be a girl because of the long hair. Some of the kids even giggled about the idea of a man having long hair. In response, Georgia simply pointed out that Samson had promised God he would not cut his hair, and she continued with the story. (Field Note Memos, Blessings Church)

As with other times when children reinforced gendered norms, they drew from larger cultural ideologies about gender. In this case, long hair was linked to being a woman and femininity. Rather than contesting this norm, Georgia constructed Samson's long hair as an exception to the norm because of Samson's promise to God. In so doing, the teacher inadvertently reinforced the norm that men are supposed to have short hair.

Adults and children at All Saints Christian Church and Blessings Church enacted gender in similar ways in the Sunday school classrooms. One notable difference between the churches was that there were fewer substantive adult-child interactions in the Sunday school classroom at Blessings Church. As a result, the children in the early elementary Sunday school classroom at Blessings Church more often relied on each other's assumptions about gender based on larger cultural ideologies with little input from adults. Put differently, the children came to the early elementary Sunday school classroom having encountered larger cultural gendered ideologies in their interactions within other social fields. In the absence of explicit cultural resources regarding gender in the Sunday school context, the children used the resources they already had access to as they interacted with each other and the material culture within the Sunday school setting. As a result, the Sunday school classrooms at All Saints Christian Church and Blessings Church became sites that reinforced a patriarchal Christian imagination despite both churches subscribing to egalitarian ideologies.

First Baptist Church

First Baptist Church was part of the SBC, which is a Protestant denomination that does not believe women should be ordained pastors and should not hold any "significant" positions of leadership over men in church. By church, this means local churches, denominational institutions, or parachurch organizations. Further, the SBC also believes that in a heterosexual marriage (which is the only type of marriage the SBC recognizes) men are supposed to benevolently lead their families, while women are to "submit [themselves] graciously to the servant leadership of [their] husband[s]" (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000). As such, First Baptist Church was complementarian in its views of leadership. In this context, to be complementarian meant that First Baptist Church believed that God created men and women to have differing roles that are complementary to each other, with men at the top of the leadership hierarchy (for theological support of this ideology, see Southern Baptist Convention, 2000). This meant that all the pastors at First Baptist Church were men, and some sacred rituals of the church that were reserved for pastors (such as preaching, baptism, or communion) could only be performed by men. All these beliefs about the differences between men and women contrasted with the egalitarian stances held by All Saints Christian Church and Blessings Church.

My separate meetings with the senior pastor and children's ministry director (Maya) prior to beginning my site visits clarified this stance at First Baptist Church. When I met with the senior pastor, I mentioned setting up a meeting with the children's *pastor*. The senior pastor interrupted me and gently corrected me that Maya was the children's ministry *director* and not a children's *pastor* because their church did not ordain women as pastors. A similar situation replayed itself when I met with Maya to work out the details of visiting First Baptist Church for this study. I referred to her as the children's *pastor*, and she also was sure to inform me that her title was *director* and not *pastor*. This communicated a significant distinction between the titles of *pastor* and *director* for the leadership and structure at First Baptist Church.

In such an environment, I expected gender definitions and gender roles to be rigidly defined at First Baptist Church. What I found was a complex understanding of gender that was neither monolithic nor universally accepted. In the sections that follow, I detail how the gendered leadership structure of the church interacted with the gender ideologies various people (children and adults) brought with them into the church through the construction of gendered labor, the degree to which children used gender as a way to group themselves, and the novel way in how adults in the children's ministry used gender to manage the classroom and maintain discipline. I will end with a discussion on my findings regarding the significance of gender difference at First Baptist Church.

Gendered Labor at First Baptist Church

First Baptist Church was the largest church of the three churches I visited over the course of my research. It also had the largest number of areas for people to serve in paid or volunteer capacities, from being on staff to helping with the grounds to teaching in Sunday school. Service within the various areas of the church carried such a high value that they even had a dedicated tab on the church website that linked to 28 different areas that people could get involved in. Serving in one of those areas was equated to being involved in the ministry of the church. As stated on the "Get Involved" page of their website, "Spend a few hours at First Baptist Church, and you'll hear a lot of talk about 'ministry.' That's because ministry is about serving others--and that's what we are all about here at First Baptist Church. At First Baptist Church, we believe that every member is a minister."

The statement "every member is a minister," suggested that anyone could be involved in the various areas of the church. Furthermore, none of the 28 areas listed on the website suggested that any of the areas were gender specific; some even stated that children could be involved such as ushering, greeting, and liturgical dance. During my site visits, I did notice that many of the areas of service on Sundays were egalitarian. Like the other two churches, there were a few areas that were implicitly gendered. For example, all the parking attendants were all male, like at Blessings Church.

As with the other two churches in this study, one of the areas where gendered labor was most obvious was in the children's ministry areas. All the Sunday school teachers were female as were all the assistants except for me, Maya's husband who filled in from time to time for missing Sunday school teachers, and Bob who was one of the children's church co-teachers.

Another area of service at the church that was seemingly gendered was the safety and security team whose job it was to keep the youth and children's ministry areas safe during church service times. All the security volunteers I encountered, except for one, were adult males. There was one adult female who served as a security volunteer, but she only filled in when there was not an adult male to do so. Here is an excerpt from my field memos:

> After my second site visit, I realized that the men whom I thought were volunteers in the children's ministry areas were actually part of the safety and security team. In addition to keeping unauthorized people from entering the children's and youth ministry areas, they were responsible for dealing with discipline problems that Sunday school teachers could not (or did not) want to deal with. After talking with the child, the "security" person would return the child to the class. This would last an average of 5-10 minutes. If the child continued to misbehave, the "security" person would notify the child's parent to pick the child up. (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

As with the other churches, when it came to the children's ministry, women were predominantly cast in that nurturing role. First Baptist Church had the added stereotypical role of men as the protector and head disciplinarian. I saw this reproduced with the children during children's church. Before children's church, the children would be served a snack, and every Sunday, it was the older elementary girls that took on the nurturing role and helped serve the snack to the rest of the kids. None of the older elementary boys did this. There was nothing at the church preventing men from being Sunday school teachers or women from being a part of the safety and security team. Rather, it seemed that people brought in the dominant cultural ideologies regarding gendered nurturing and protector roles and enacted them at the church, which was reinforced by the underlying complementarian stance of the church.

There was one area of ministry at First Baptist Church that was explicitly gendered, and that was in who could carry the title of "pastor" and who could represent the official leadership of the church. As part of the Southern Baptist Convention, First Baptist Church could not ordain women as pastors or have women "preachers." Despite this, First Baptist Church did not seem to adhere to a strict form of complementarianism, which would dictate that women could not hold positions of leadership if those positions included leadership over men. At First Baptist Church, there were women in areas of leadership over men like the children's ministry director and the chair of church trustees. The one area of leadership at First Baptist Church that was explicitly for men was the sacred leadership position of "pastor." Even in the case when an officially ordained pastor was not available, only another man could act as a substitute. In the following excerpt from my field note memos, the sacredly gendered pastoral role was passed on to Bob, the children's church co-teacher, rather than Maya on a Sunday when one of the pastors was absent to serve communion to the children:

> During children's church, when it was time for one of the pastors to give children communion, which is a ritual many Christian churches have to commemorate Jesus' death by eating bread and drinking juice or wine, the pastor who usually led communion with the children was absent. Since this church's denomination does not allow for women to be ordained pastors, the job of conducting communion fell to Bob rather than to Maya, the female children's ministry director. In this instance, the gendered hierarchy that only men can represent the final authority of the church elevated Bob, a children's ministry volunteer, to authority over the children's ministry director. (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

Bob was the only male I observed during my site visits that served in a voluntary children's ministry teaching role at First Baptist Church. He consistently deferred to Maya's leadership during my site visits. In this one instance, though, the act of presiding over communion was a sacred task that had to be administered by an adult male if one was present. It did not matter that Maya was the spiritual and organizational leader for the children's ministry, the ideology of a sacred gendered pastoral hierarchy took precedence even though one's gender was not a qualification to serve in other areas of the church.

Although the church, as an organization, was complementarian, this did not mean there was a monolithic adherence to stereotypical understandings of gendered roles outside of what was considered sacred (being a pastor and being a husband/father). I encountered a few adults and children who espoused egalitarian views. For example, at a children's ministry meeting I was invited to after my site visits were completed, some of the women at the meeting expressed their dissatisfaction that women could not "preach from the pulpit." In the example below, I extensively quote from my field notes regarding a set of interactions where Claire, the early elementary Sunday school teacher, contested larger cultural gendered ideologies about what was expected from girls and women.

> On the Sunday after Halloween, the kids all started telling each other and the teacher what costumes they wore. One girl did not want to say what she wore. The boy next to her said, "Princess!" Claire answered with, "Princess? Because she is a girl? She could have been a fireman." Another boy said, "No, she can't be a fireman."
>
> At that point Claire glanced at me wondering if it was a good time to go into talking about how girls can be anything. Claire went on to say, "[Girls] can be a fireman. They can be President. They can be anything they want to be." She continued, "I dressed up as President of the United States." The girl decided to whisper to Claire what her costume was. One of the boys wanted to know what it was and insisted that the girl or Claire tell him. Claire said, "She whispered it to me, so that means she wants it to be a secret. You need to ask her if you want to know. She doesn't have to tell you, though."

> In those quick interactions, Claire contested the idea that girls had to be "girly" things like princesses and couldn't be "manly" things like firemen. She reinforced the idea that girls could be anything they wanted, even the most powerful leadership position of being President of the U.S. Further, Claire contested the norm that girls are obligated to answer others' questions for the sake of "fairness" or "appropriateness." (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

One explanation for these liberative views regarding women in leadership even within a complementarian religious institution is an example of what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as Black women's self-definition (2008). As a result, there was a tension between the sacralized complementarian ideology of the church and an egalitarian ideology born of a collective consciousness of Black women (Collins, 2008).

Gendered Segregation (or the Lack Thereof) Amongst Children at First Baptist Church

Unlike the children at the other two churches, the children at First Baptist Church did not seem to make a big deal of segregating themselves by sex/gender. While the children at All Saints Christian Church and Blessings Church would default to boys sitting with other boys and playing with mostly with other boys and the girls doing likewise, the children at First Baptist Church would engage in more cross play and cross gendered interactions. Further, I observed that cross-gendered friendships were less likely to be negatively sanctioned as they were at the other two churches. For example, after a lesson about four people who dug a hole in a mud and thatch roof in order to lower their sick friend down to Jesus to be healed, the Sunday school teacher asked the children if any of them had good friends like those four friends. Larry raised his hand and mentioned that he had a best friend at school. His best friend was a girl. Based on prior experiences and the reactions I had seen from the children at Blessings Church and All Saints Christian Church, I expected the other children in the class to tease Larry for having a girl best friend. There was no such reaction from the other children in the Sunday school class at First Baptist Church. The Sunday school teacher mentioned how sweet it was for Larry to have such a good friend, and the class proceeded with other kids talking about their best friends.

To be sure, there were some instances of boys and girls not wanting to be near each other. One of the few examples of this was at the end of a Sunday school class. Claire had the children play one last game to fill in for some time before parents arrived to pick up their children.

> For the closing game, Claire had the children stand in a circle and toss a beanbag to someone on the other side of the circle while saying that person's name. Claire wanted the boys to pick a girl to throw the beanbag to and for the girls to pick a boy to throw the beanbag to. She told the kids it was because she wanted them to "learn each other's names." At first, the children acted shy about choosing someone from the "other" sex. Claire's chuckling response was, "It's not hard. I swear it's not hard… I promise you not gonna die. I promise!" (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

Although the children eventually followed the directions, Claire had brought attention to the awkward tension that accompanied the children's reticence to engage with children who did not share their gender. This only served to amplify the differences between boys and girls and reinforced the idea that boys and girls think each other are to be avoided. That being said, this type of gendered interaction between the children at First Baptist Church was a rare occurrence.

Since the children at all three churches were likely exposed to the same types of cultural ideologies regarding gender while interacting with people in other social fields, I expected the children to be just as apt to engage in aversive behaviors towards cross gender relationships. Moreover, I expected gendered tensions to be heightened at First Baptist Church since it was complementarian context and would be more aware of gendered differences (Thorne, 1993). One explanation could be that gender socialization amongst African American children provides more allowance and acceptance for children to have cross-gendered relationships (Hill and Sprague, 1999; Moore, 2003). In this case, the children at First Baptist Church brought their understandings of cross-gendered relationships (as a result of racialized gender socialization) and drew from those cultural resources to enact cross-gendered behaviors in their Sunday school classroom that challenged the underlying ideology of complementarian gender roles and expectations at their church and society at large.

Drawing Gender Lines at First Baptist Church

While the children and teachers at First Baptist Church did not make a big deal of cross gendered relationships, that does not mean gender was not important. Rather, I found that the categorical differences between male and female were more salient at First Baptist Church than at the other two churches. In other words, at First Baptist Church, gender identity (whether one was a boy/man or girl/woman) took on slightly more significance than one’s gender performance. Alternatively, gendered performances and stereotypes seemed to be more important at All Saints Christian Church and at Blessings Church. Put differently, the emphasis at First Baptist Church was on delineating between sex categories, whereas the emphasis at All Saints Christian Church and Blessings Church was on how boys and girls “do gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

One example amongst the children was a conversation I overheard in the early elementary Sunday school classroom where I conducted my observations.

> There was a mural of two camels on one of the walls. One of the camels was spitting. Two boys and a girl were discussing the sex of the camels—whether the camels were boys or girls. The children went back and forth, justifying their choices along the way. At first, one of the boys suggested that the spitting camel

> was a boy because boys spit. The girl followed with her suggestion that there was no way to figure out if the camels were boys or girls because all you could see was their faces. The other boy made his case that the spitting camel had to be a girl because that camel had longer eyelashes and the other camel was a boy because it did not have eyelashes. The other two children stared intently at the camels and nodded their heads in agreement. The girl affirmed the decision by saying, “Yes, the girl camel has longer eyelashes than the boy camel.” (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

As the children were discussing the sex of the camels, they ended up relying on essentialist ideologies of physical characteristics that mark sex and gender. In other words, the emphasis was on the essential physical characteristic that girls had long eyelashes, rather than the cultural norm that girls are more likely to make their eyelashes look long. The physical characteristic of long eyelashes was more salient to identifying the sex category of the camel than the camel’s act of spitting.

I observed this emphasis on sex categories in another way. Frequently, Claire would have the children point out various details in the Bible story pictures. She did this as a pedagogical strategy to keep the children’s attention on the details of the Bible stories (see Chapter 4). One of the details Claire focused on was the number of men and women in the pictures. During my site visits, she frequently asked, “How many men are in the picture?” She and the children would count them. She would follow with, “How many women are in the picture?” She and the children would count them. Initially, I did not grasp the significance this exercise carried in relation to how gender showed up in the early elementary Sunday school class until one Sunday when there was a question of whether one of the people in the Bible story picture was a man or a woman.

> Claire asked, “Can I have someone hold the picture up for me? Jeremy, you raised your hand first. How many people are in the picture? How many men?” One of the children said, “Three!” Claire replied, “Um… How many?” All the children said, “Three.”

> Claire was a bit confused, which confused the children. Claire looked at the picture and wondered aloud about one of the people in the picture. “Is that a man or a woman?” She was about to concede that it could be a woman when a mom who had stayed in the classroom with her child said, “Here give me that.” She looked at the picture and pronounced, “Looks like a man.” Claire answered, “It’s a pretty man… Yup a man.”
>
> Having solved the mystery about the sex of the person in the Bible story picture, Claire turned back to the children and asked, “How many men?” Following her lead, the children answered, “Four.” Claire then asked, “How many women?” The children answered, “One.” (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

Whether the person in the Bible story picture was a man or woman was not essential to the lesson or the Bible story. What I realized in this interaction was that at First Baptist Church it was important for both adults and children to differentiate between men and women even more than it was to differentiate between gendered roles and norms. In other words, what I observed at First Baptist Church was a need to essentialize sex category with gender. This fits with the complementarian stance at First Baptist Church that there are essential differences between men and women, at least when it comes to whether one can be a pastor and be the senior leader in a church. The irony with these types of gender categorizations was that thy were linked to external performative markers like dress, facial hair, and even facial expressions rather than on what the characters in the pictures did. This unintentionally opens the possibility for various expressions of gender identity that the church would not accept as orthodox, such as a transgender individual whose gender identity and presentation is different that their assigned sex category.

Gender and Discipline at First Baptist Church

In the above section about All Saints Christian Church, I described how gender and discipline intertwined in such a way that boys ended up being more harshly disciplined than girls. At First Baptist Church, gender and discipline also intertwined but in a different way. The primary way in which teachers encouraged positive behaviors in children was by encouraging them to be leaders. Many times, children were admonished to be leaders rather than followers. Upper elementary kids were encouraged to be leaders for early elementary kids, and early elementary kids were encouraged to be leaders and examples for pre-school kids. As such, Sunday school teachers linked gender to "good" behavior and leadership in a novel way. Behaving appropriately made girls prettier. "You're too pretty to not be listening." "Look how ladylike Talia is sitting." Boys that behaved were linked with being bigger and/or stronger. "I need you to be a big boy and sit up." "Big boys are leaders." "Let me see your handsome eyes." There was one time when one of the boys in the Sunday school class I observed was consistently misbehaving, and he was sent to talk with one of the "security" men. When the boy returned, the Sunday school teacher asked, "Are you ready to be a big man and participate along with everyone else?" Good behavior and leadership were repeatedly gendered by being linked to being properly masculine and feminine.

This linkage of good behavior and leadership to gender could likely be connected to race, in these instances at First Baptist Church. In an effort to prepare their children for the challenges of racial discrimination, many African American parents attempt to bolster their children's qualifications as productive members in society as well as to prepare them with the cultural capital they need to be successful in society (Vincent et al., 2013). The disciplinary strategies employed by the Sunday school teachers encouraging children to be leaders and tying that to what it means to being truly masculine or feminine could be an extension of African American parenting strategies to guard children against obstacles they will face in a social structure set up for whites to succeed over people of color.

Conclusion

In the absence of an intentionality to contest gendered ideologies from the larger culture, the Sunday school classroom became a site for the contention of gendered categories and associated meanings that adults and children brought with them to the Sunday school space. Rather than a site where certain ideologies around gender were explicitly taught and reinforced, the Sunday school classroom served as a religio-cultural vacuum, in terms of gendered assumptions and ideologies, that was indiscriminately filled by teachers' and children's gendered ideologies from the larger cultural milieu outside of the classroom. Drawing from Risman's (1998) theory on gender as structure, in this instance the Sunday school classroom became a place where dominant ideologies on gendered roles were more often reinforced rather than contested. In other words, when there was an opportunity to uncouple gendered structures from norms, beliefs, and practices, the structural quality of gender influenced classroom interactions in such a way that gendered ideologies were reinforced and adapted rather than contested and transformed.

Not only were gendered ideologies reinforced in these Sunday school contexts, those ideologies were syncretized with each church's religious beliefs and ideologies. I argue that this syncretism endows essentialized gendered norms and expectations with a sacred quality, making them difficult to challenge and critique. Further, this syncretism reinforces, normalizes, and naturalizes a patriarchal Christian imagination.

CHAPTER 6. RACE AT THREE SUNDAY SCHOOLS

In this chapter, I focus on how the Sunday school classrooms in this study were largely uncontested racialized spaces. More specifically, I examine how race seemed to be ignored and/or taken for granted while whiteness was implicitly and uncritically normalized in these Sunday school spaces. In contrast to the explicit ways gender was negotiated in the Sunday school spaces at the three churches in this study, I found that issues of race showed up in more implicit ways. One reason for this could be attributed to the homogeneous nature of each church.

Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2007) coin the term *white habitus*, which they describe as “a racialized uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates whites’ racial taste, perceptions, feelings, emotions, and views on racial matters” (p. 324). In so doing, Bonilla-Silva and Embrick borrow from Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of habitus, which describes the totality of a group’s perceptions, tastes, and ways of being that are normalized through routinization as a way of marking one’s membership in a social class. By extending the concept of *white habitus,* one can imagine that, due to each church’s racial homogeneity, the churches in this study had a shared racial habitus, thus reducing the need for parishioners to actively negotiate meanings of race and their associated social consequences within their own churches. Moreover, I found that the ways in which race showed up in each Sunday school classroom was shaped by each church’s racial makeup, the extent to which their racial identities were salient to their religious identities, and the importance of passing on Biblical and religious knowledge to young children.

In the sections below, I discuss how the children and adults in the Sunday school classes at each of the homogeneous churches negotiate (or avoid negotiating) race and how whiteness permeates these religious spaces. I begin with All Saints Christian Church, which is a predominantly white congregation where race was not explicitly considered salient to one's religious identity. I follow with Blessings Church, which is a predominantly Latinx church where one's race was salient only to one's language and cultural identity. I end with First Baptist Church, which is a predominantly African American Church where racial and religious identity were intertwined.

All Saints Christian Church: Racially Blind Sunday School Classroom

During my time at All Saints Christian Church, the attendance at Sunday school and children's church was predominantly white. At just over 70% of the times I visited the early elementary Sunday school class and over half of the times I visited children's church all the children were white. In the 27 combined classes I attended, just short of 40% of those times included children of color (see Table 6.1). In those times, there were only one or two children of color. Those children of color were usually either one African American boy or two African American girls (sisters). During my second and third visits to the children's church, there was a girl of Asian descent who attended, but I did not see her during my subsequent visits.

In addition to the predominance of white children in the classes I visited, all the children's ministry volunteers and leaders were white except for one of the times during Sunday school. On my second site visit, the early elementary Sunday school group was learning about the Bible story in the snack station. The snack station leader for that month was an Asian-American woman along with her teenage daughter. Other than that time, I was the only adult of color in the children's ministry areas. As such, All Saints Christian Church was permeated by an uncritical white habitus (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2007) that did not recognize the ways in which the Sunday school classroom was a site that reproduced a white Christian imagination through the assumption of shared cultural artifacts, racial tokenism, and the overwhelming representation of religious materials that support a white Christian imagination.

Assumed Shared Cultural Artifacts

While most homogeneous places have an assumption of shared culture, it is more problematic in a predominantly white church because this shared culture is syncretized with religious knowledge and beliefs resulting in the church as a white institutional space where religious norms privilege whites (Bracey & Moore, 2017). Further, invoking shared culture serves as a type of what Bonilla-Silva (2012) refers to as a racial grammar, which "helps reproduce the 'racial order' as just the way things are" (p. 1). This uncritical assumption of shared culture within the context of a white religious space reinforces and normalizes a white Christian imagination. At All Saints Christian Church, I found that children's ministry leaders implicitly reinforced this white Christian imagination by way of calling on shared material and symbolic culture as part of their interactions with the children in the early elementary Sunday school and children's church areas.

For example, during one of my site visits during the Sunday school time, the early elementary group was in the "Exploration Station," which uses science experiments or science facts to illuminate parts of the monthly Bible story. During this particular month, the curriculum used the lifecycle of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly as the science example. Prior to talking about how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, the station leader held up a copy of a picture storybook entitled *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, who is a white, American author. Matter-of-factly, the station leader stated, "*Every*body has read this" (emphasis mine).

Rather than asking the children *if* they had read the book or asking the children about books they may have read featuring caterpillars and/or butterflies, the blanket statement was that everyone was familiar with *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. There was an implicit assumption that if one belongs to this church, then they should have read the book. While *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* is a relatively popular children's picture storybook, the station leader's statement did not consider that there may be children who did not know about the book. This implicitly alienated those children who were not familiar with the story because they were not part of the "everybody" who should have read the book. In contrast, the station leader's statement reinforced a sense of religious belonging and what is normative for those children who were familiar with the book.

Another example of invoking a sense of shared culture at All Saints Christian Church came in the form of normalizing Anglicized forms of singing. A few Sundays leading up to Christmas during the Sunday school time, the children were learning some songs to sing in the adult worship service. There were two songs the children were learning, and one of them was in the form of a lullaby meant to be sung to Baby Jesus. The station leader showed the children a video of the song and then talked through the different verses of the song so that the kids were aware of the words and what they meant.

> The station leader played the melody line and had the kids repeat the melody in parts. She told the kids to be: "My echo." Maria tried to modulate and stylize her voice, and the station leader said, "Let's sing with *pure voice* without anything extra. Who do we sing the lullaby to?"

> The children answered, “A baby.”
>
> The station leader further probed, “What about this lullaby?”
>
> “Baby Jesus.”
>
> “Use your *very purest of voices* to sing this song. Lullabies are simple. They are *pure* and simple.” (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church, emphases mine)

As the station leader was teaching the children the song, Maria attempted to modulate her voice in a stylized way reminiscent of the chest voice, belted style of pop music and rhythm and blues. In an effort to correct Maria (as well as any other children tempted to emulate pop music styles), the station leader instructed the children to use “pure voice” and sing “in our purest voices.” In other words, the station leader wanted the children to focus on using their head voices and singing the notes more plainly, which is commonly characteristic of Anglo-European choral music (Day, 2000). While not explicit, the station leaders’ use of “pure” to denote a certain style of singing (Anglo-European) implies that all other forms are “impure,” wrong, or incorrect. Anecdotally, I see this similarly happen on children’s ministry social media discussion boards when white children’s ministers at predominantly white churches discount rap music as inappropriate to play for children in church even if it is coming from Christian rap artists.

One final example of how assumed shared culture was used to subversively normalize whiteness in the Sunday school classroom at All Saints Christian Church occurred while the children were learning about the story of Ruth in the Old Testament.

> At one point, the leaders and kids were reviewing parts of the story, and Ruth’s sister-in-law’s name, Orpah, came up. The station leader asked, “Does anyone remember the name of Naomi’s other daughter-in-law?” One of the kids said, “Oprah?” The group leader said, “Close… Her name was *Or*pah. It sounds close

> to Oprah… I think [Oprah's] mom messed up the name." As the kids were getting into groups for the station activity, the group leader added, "I think *Or*pah is a prettier name [than Oprah]." (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

While the group leader did not mention Oprah's race as an African American woman, it is notable that the group leader was quick to react and respond negatively towards Oprah's name being mistaken for Orpah. Coupled with research that shows resumes with black-sounding names received 50% less callbacks for interviews than white-sounding names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004) and young students with black-sounding names are more likely to be judged harshly when it comes to disciplinary issues than students with white-sounding names (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015), the group leader's response can be interpreted as one of implicit bias against a name that is unmistakably linked to a famous African American woman. On its own this incident seems innocuous, but this happened in the context of a Bible story being taught in a predominantly white space, reinforcing negative biases against black-sounding names and adding to the white Christian imaginary.

Racial Tokenism

During my time at All Saints Christian Church, there was a peculiar dialectic between racial colorblindness (we are all created by God and therefore there are no real differences between people) and recognition of the need for diverse racial representation in materials used for Sunday school and children's church (God created multiple races/ethnicities and that diversity should be seen). This dialectic resulted in a racial tokenism where diversity was represented through images used in the children's ministry spaces, but diversity was not explicitly recognized or addressed. In other words, racial diversity was recognized for the sake of creating a multicultural ambiance rather than addressing issues of racial tensions and oppression.

One example of this was the children's storybook Bible used during Sunday school at All Saints Christian Church, which was called *Spark Story Bible* (Arthur, 2009). The story bible was created and printed by the same publisher that created the Sunday school curriculum used at All Saints Christian Church, and it included illustrated pictures of Bible characters who were people of color. Further, the pictures and videos used during children's church included people of color. Near the end of my time at All Saints Christian Church, the children's ministry director even told me that she was even more aware of including diverse racial representation in the slides she used during Sunday school. Despite these attempts at diverse representation, racial diversity ended up as no more than a symbol to include in the children's ministry materials.

While attempts, like the above, were made to address the lack of non-white diversity at All Saints Christian Church, what I found was that Sunday school teachers were constrained by the scope of what the curriculum contained. The explicit focus of the lessons was Bible knowledge, but the implicit effect was that teachers overlooked opportunities to connect various Bible stories with current racial issues as a result of a null race curriculum (see Chapter 4). For example, one of the children's church lessons used a story of religious leaders criticizing Jesus for hanging out with people considered to be "sinners" (Matthew 9:9-13) to talk about bullying.

> Karen told the children that the [religious leaders] "bullied" Jesus by criticizing the people Jesus was hanging out with, and Jesus told [the religious leaders] that he came to love people who were considered "outsiders." Karen went on to say, "We are made in God's image. Jesus didn't see differences in people. We are all sinners. God loves us all."

> Karen told the children that we are supposed to follow Jesus' example. "It doesn't matter what other people are like." She went on to list things like physical impairments, hair style, or whether someone was pretty/handsome or not. "We are supposed to love and treat other people with respect. We need to show people the love of Jesus. Love is the only way to end bullying." (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

While Karen talked about various types of bullying as well as the need to love all people, the examples were mostly superficial like hair style and physical attractiveness and steered clear of issues like classism, racism, or other forms of oppression towards marginalized populations as forms of bullying.

Another example of how Sunday school teachers were constrained by curriculum from talking about issues of racial discrimination happened during a lesson about a story when Jesus healed ten people with leprosy, and only one person returned to thank Jesus for being healed (Luke 17:11-19). After letting the children know that leprosy was a skin disease that caused people to be horribly disfigured, the station leader told the children that people with leprosy had to hide and not be with anyone because people thought it was contagious. "[People with leprosy] lived in what was called 'colonies.' The only hope they had was to die. Jesus healed [those ten people], though! Does that teach you to appreciate what you have?" (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church). The lesson continued with a focus on the importance of being thankful to God. While the station leader could have made parallels between the injustice of "leper colonies" to Jim Crow segregation, Indigenous People forced into reservations, internment camps for Japanese-Americans, or immigrant detention facilities on the US-Mexico border and how Jesus confronted the injustice by offering human dignity and healing to people relegated to the outskirts of society, the curriculum limited the application of the Bible story to thankfulness for the good things God does for us. The constraints of a null curriculum on racial issues coupled with Sunday school teachers' dependence on curricula for what is taught in Sunday school created a façade that the Bible and Christianity had little to nothing to say about racial injustices. This mirrors what Mills (1997) describes as an "epistemology of ignorance" (p. 18) whereby whiteness is contingent on white people being ignorant of white privilege and their participation in reproducing ideologies that support white privilege. Sunday school teachers and the children at All Saints Christian Church were more able to maintain this epistemic ignorance because the Sunday school curriculum mediated and supported this ignorance by focusing on teaching children deontological precepts rather than providing physical and symbolic space for critical discourse on how the Bible might be used to confront issues of racial injustices.

The unintended consequences of uncritical racial tokenism at All Saints Christian Church not only led to the silencing of discussing racial injustices, but it also led to the reinforcement of people of color as "other" and in need of pity and charity. For example, the children's ministry at All Saints Christian Church sponsored two children through Compassion International, which is a Christian "child-advocacy ministry pairing compassionate people with children living in extreme poverty to release the children from spiritual, economic, social, and physical poverty" (Compassion International, 2020) that was founded in 1952. According to the Compassion International website, they focused on sponsoring children who come from parts of the world that are predominantly populated by people of color (countries in Africa, Asia, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America). The two children that the All Saints Christian Church children's ministry sponsored were a boy from Peru and a girl from Indonesia. Every Sunday during children's church, there was an offering collected from the children at All Saints

Christian Church that went towards sponsoring these two children. When the offering was collected, their pictures were projected on the screen in the children's church area. Karen, the children's ministry director, reminded the children at All Saints Christian Church that the two children they sponsor were "in need" and poor and that the change/money the children at All Saints Christian Church gave would help those two children. On one of the Sundays I visited, Karen told the children that there would be a prize if they reached the monthly giving goal to pay for their sponsorships. While not explicit, the continued featuring of children of color as "in need" and from countries outside the U.S. coupled with the uncritical racial tokenism at All Saints Christian Church reinforced the otherness of children of color. Further, by individualizing poverty in the form of these two children, poverty became emphasized as an individualized problem rather than a structural feature of society.

Reinforcing a White Christian Imagination in the Sunday School Space

In Chapter 4, I specifically discussed how race and gender were represented and constructed in the material curricula used at the churches in this study. In the case of race, the curricula used at all three churches reinforced what I referred to as a white Christian imagination by featuring predominantly white people as the main characters of Bible stories. In the times people of color were used in Bible stories, they were more often used to portray antagonists and/or people in need of "salvation" such as in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:28-40). Similarly, a white Christian imagination was reinforced in the Sunday school and children's church areas at All Saints Christian Church through the use of white depictions of Jesus as material culture outside of the material curriculum used for lessons as well as the use of white characters in supplemental materials used for lessons that depict God and other characters from the Bible.

One example of this, which I refer to in Chapter 4, was connected to a summer activity the children's ministry director presented to the children as a way for families to stay connected with the church as they went on vacation or participated in other summer activities that prevented them from going to church.

> Sometime between my last site visit and this one, the children's ministry director started a summer activity called "Flat Jesus." Flat Jesus was a white cartoon-like representation of Jesus printed out on cardstock, laminated, and cut out. The idea was to use Flat Jesus as a reminder that "Jesus is with us wherever we are/go during the summer." [The children] were supposed to take a picture with Flat Jesus wherever they were over the summer, email or text [the picture] to the children's ministry director, and it would be posted on the children's ministry Facebook page. In addition to the photos, there would also be a map in next to the children's ministry check-in desk that would have pins indicating where Flat Jesus traveled. When I arrived in the early elementary Sunday school class, they were talking about Flat Jesus and where they could take Flat Jesus. There was some banter about Jesus getting lost or left somewhere. (Field Note Memos, All Saints Christian Church)

The following summer, the children's ministry director replaced Flat Jesus with Bendy Jesus, which was also white (see Figure 4.2 and 4.3). The uncritical use of these white Jesus characters reinforced a white Christian imagination where whiteness signaled belonging and connection to one's church. Flat Jesus and Bendy Jesus also signaled that whiteness, in the form of a white Jesus, "is with us wherever we are."

Another example of reinforcing a white Christian imagination in the children's ministry space was the use of white Bible story characters in murals painted on walls. All Saints Christian Church had murals of the stories of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Moses parting the Red Sea, and David and Goliath (Figure 6.1); all the characters were white. Not only did these murals mark the children's ministry spaces at All Saints

Christian Church as white spaces, but they normalized whiteness as the frame from which the Bible is supposed to be understood. In Chapter 7, I describe how this white Christian imagination influences how children's understanding of God are racialized at All Saints Christian Church.

Summary of Findings at All Saints Christian Church

Over the course of my time at All Saints Christian Church, race was never a salient aspect of one's religious beliefs. Indeed, race was rarely talked about except as a categorical term to describe people, groups, or gatherings. For example, the All Saints Christian Church website stated that they had 4 different worship services on Sunday mornings: traditional, contemporary, Swahili, and multi-cultural. While the two latter services were qualified by language (Swahili) and ethnic identity (multi-cultural), there were no racial or ethnic markers for the former service times—they were simply "traditional" and "contemporary." What was assumed, implicitly ignored, and unrecognized was that the first two services were predominantly white, English-speaking services. Rather than being colorblind, All Saints Christian Church seemed to only be blind (or ignorant) to the fact that they had normalized "white" as the default racial category (Mills, 1997).

It was this racial unawareness that categorized how race was negotiated in the Sunday school spaces at All Saints Christian Church. As such, the church uncritically reinforced and reproduced a white Christian imagination. This was done through the normalization of white religious imagery and an ethnocentricity linked to various cultural artifacts like books, pictures, names, and more. Further, the novel use of people of color as symbols of diversity (i.e. pictures, language- and ethnic-based worship services) as well as the inadvertent linkage of people of color with poverty (i.e. Compassion International child sponsorship) contributed to the symbolic isolation of the Sunday school space as a predominantly white space. In so doing, these created a space where it would be difficult to work against dominant ideologies of race.

Blessings Church: Separation of Sunday School and Race/Ethnicity

Blessings Church was predominantly Latinx and Spanish speaking. Of the 12 times I visited the church, ten of those times all the children in the early elementary Sunday school were Latinx. During the other two times, there was one boy who presented as African American based on darker tan skin color and thick, tightly curly hair (he could have been Afro-Latinx, but I was not able to make that determination). All the other children I classified as Latinx. I made this determination primarily on the basis that the children primarily spoke Spanish with each other as well as with their caregivers; English was secondarily used with each other and non-Spanish speaking individuals such as the lead early elementary Sunday school teacher (Georgia) and me. Skin color (tan to dark tan) as well as hair color (brown to black) were secondary characteristics I used to classify the children as Latinx. Additionally, other than Georgia and me, all the children's ministry adult and teen volunteers were Latinx.

Primary spoken language and phenotype were some of the major things that set Blessing Church apart from the other two churches. Rather than the normalization of whiteness through an uncritical white habitus like at All Saints Christian Church, the children and adults were aware of their own racial and ethnic identities as different from being white, but race and ethnicity were constructed as apart from Biblical knowledge. To be clear, being Latinx culturally shaped the different elements of the church (music choice, preaching style, expressiveness), but the Bible and God were ethno-racially silent or neutral. In other words, Blessings Church was aware of ethnic and racial differences, but they only connected those differences to the church's worship style and form. In this section, I describe how Blessings Church was an interstitial ethno-racial racial space that highlighted the tension of being Latinx while living in a predominantly English-speaking and white U.S. context. I then discuss how issues of race and ethnicity are erased or ignored at Blessings Church by keeping racial, ethnic, and religious issues separate from each other. I end with describing how whiteness permeates the Sunday school classroom.

Blessings Church as an Interstitial Ethno-Racial Space

Over the course of my time at Blessings Church, I found it to be an interstitial ethno-racial space. In architecture, interstitial spaces are located between "normal" floors of buildings are regularly rearranged (i.e., hospitals and laboratories). The purpose of architectural interstitial spaces is to provide an out-of-the-way place for complicated mechanical systems to allow for the normal functionality of buildings the course of their use. Extending the idea of architectural interstitial spaces into the social world, I posit that there are interstitial ethno-racial spaces where subordinate ethno-racial groups can tentatively hold on to their racial and/or ethnic identities while navigating spaces where dominant groups maintain power. These interstitial ethno-racial spaces can either be delineated by physical boundaries as well as symbolic ones.

Subordinate groups navigate interstitial ethno-racial spaces by utilizing norms, symbols, and culture of the dominant group. While Blessings Church was predominantly Latinx and Spanish-speaking, it was a Protestant Church that was part of a larger English-speaking and predominantly white Christian denomination (United Methodist Church).

Although there were variations on worship style and form, Blessings Church still followed many of the norms, symbols, and culture that would be typical of white Christian churches. As a result, I found there was an underlying, low-level tension at Blessings Church similar to that experienced by Simmel's stranger (1950), whereby the church was not made up of outsiders or wanderers but marginalized residents.

One example of Blessings Church being an interstitial ethno-racial space was in how various people responded to my presence there. As someone from a racially mixed background (Filipino and Portuguese), my skin coloring and facial features are similar to many people who identify as Latinx, and many people have assumed that I speak Spanish due to how I phenotypically present. Consistent with my past experiences, the adults and children I met on my first few visits to Blessings Church assumed a shared racial/ethnic connection and greeted me in Spanish. Once they realized I did not speak Spanish well and was not Latinx, they immediately deferred to me and switched to English or found someone to translate for them rather than expecting me to either stumble my way through Spanish or find my own interpreter. Although I intentionally attempted to speak in Spanish, even the senior pastor and the children's ministry director deferred to English or a translator when they spoke with me as the church was only an interstitial ethno-racial racial space that existed as part the larger English speaking and white U.S. culture.

Another example of Blessings Church as an interstitial ethno-racial racial space was that many of their adult worship services were bilingual. In the adult service I attended, the music lyrics were all in Spanish, but when there were speakers, a Latinx woman interpreted what was said into English. After looking at the recorded services they posted on their social media site, I found that most of the services were bilingual.

Georgia later told me that the services were bilingual because a handful of the people who attended Blessings Church were English-speaking people married to Latinx partners.

Blessings Church was an interstitial ethno-racial racial space for Latinx people who lived in the U.S., were Christians, and who needed a church and church style that fit their ethnic culture. As such, the religiosity at Blessings Church was not a source of critical racial or ethnic thought. Rather, religion unintentionally served as a source of culture Blessings Church could draw from in order to be an interstitial ethno-racial racial space that connected with the larger white culture. Racial and ethnic tension was visible, but it was taken for granted and not seen as religiously problematic, other than in manifest issues like language difference. More specifically, it meant that race and ethnicity were separate, yet incidental, parts of religion rather than intertwined with religion for those at Blessings Church.

Race and Religion as Separate Spheres

Like All Saints Christian Church, race was not brought up in any of the lessons during my site visits to Blessings Church. There were lessons on the events surrounding Christmas and Easter, the importance of praying to God, obeying God's commands, as well as a number of Bible stories featuring prominent characters such as Samson and Daniel (in the lion's den), yet there were no lessons on how to approach conflicts connected to racial injustices. As a predominantly Latinx and Spanish-speaking church, the children and adults were not able to get away from racial and ethnic differences in relation to the larger context of the U.S., yet there was no discourse in the Sunday school of what the Bible or God had to say about living with racial or ethnic differences. The lesson emphases in the early elementary Sunday school class I visited were simply about teaching the children Bible stories and Bible knowledge. Outside of the lesson times, the Sunday school was a space where the children interacted with each other via a shared Latinx culture. This led to a separation between ethno-racial issues and religious knowledge, which I also found reinforced in the adult worship service.

During one of the adult worship services I attended, the senior pastor used a portion of an expository sermon by Jesus that is commonly known as "The Sermon on the Mount." The section of the sermon that the senior pastor used as her source text was subtitled "The Beatitudes" (Matthew 5). The Beatitudes are a list of statements regarding people who should consider themselves blessed by God. For example, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6, New International Version). There are two predominant ways The Beatitudes have been interpreted: one school of thought understands these statements as metaphors Jesus used to describe God blessing people in differing spiritual states (i.e. *spiritual* hunger rather than *physical* hunger), while another school of thought understands these statements as Jesus using actual descriptions of people's physical situations to describe God's inclusivity of people on the margins of society (Willard, 1998). In the adult service I attended, the senior pastor (Gloria) approached The Beatitudes from the former school of thought.

> Gloria read the fourth verse, which says "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (New International Version). By way of the interpreter, Gloria used the following illustration to explain that section of The Beatitudes:
>
> "Praise God I'm a citizen. I have documents that let me travel from the U.S. and then back again. I can travel freely, but I was not able to travel and see my mom before she died." Gloria went on to mention that some people who attend Blessings Church may not have "documents." "They are not able to travel freely, and this is a hardship and difficult. They can't visit their loved ones at home." She was trying to empathize by saying that, like those without "documents," she was

> not able to travel freely to see her mom. “But in those times, God is there to comfort us… even when we lose loved ones…” (Field Note Memos, Blessings Church)

While Gloria introduced the issue of immigrants in her own congregation who might not have “documents” and may be subject to deportation as a result of entering and living the United States without proper permission and documentation, she ignored the controversies surrounding immigration laws and how those laws might contribute to one’s cause for mourning. Rather she reduced all the racial and ethnic conflict surrounding immigration issues linked to Latinx people entering the U.S. and the threat of deportation to hardship, difficulty, and sadness that could only be remedied by God’s ethereal comfort.

These are examples of how race, ethnicity, and religion were constructed as separate spheres of life at Blessings Church. This created a sense that race and ethnicity were not salient religious issues and that the religious space at Blessings Church was racially and ethnically neutral. More specifically, the interstitial ethno-racial racial space created by Blessings Church combined with a null racial curriculum (when it came to learning about the Bible and God) led to the Sunday school space being uncritically filled with white religious imagery and symbols.

Whiteness Permeated the Sunday School Space

Up to this point, I have used examples from my observations at Blessings Church to paint the church as an interstitial ethno-racial racial space where Latinx people were able to practice their religious beliefs with others with a shared ethnic background. At the same time, I have also shown that Blessings Church was a place where race, ethnicity, and religion inhabited separate spheres of society. Put differently, religion was silent regarding ethno-racial issues and tensions, therefore religion at Blessings Church was constructed as racially/ethnically colorblind or neutral. As a result of this uncritical assumption regarding the (non-)relationship between race, ethnicity, and religion, a white Christian imaginary was normalized in the early elementary Sunday school classroom by way of a white, English-speaking lead Sunday school teacher (Georgia) and the use of white religious imagery.

One of the first things Gloria, the senior pastor at Blessings Church, told me about the early elementary Sunday school class when I initially met with her to talk about my research was that the lead teacher in the class was "Anglo" (white) and English-speaking. The senior pastor went on to tell me that having an English speaking teacher was not a problem because all the children in the class knew how to speak English; she even commented that it would be easier for me to understand what was happening in the class since I am not a native Spanish speaker with limited fluency. There was an underlying assumption that Bible knowledge and Bible stories were the same whether they were in English or Spanish and whether they were taught by a Latinx person or a white person. There was little, if any, critical thought as to ways race and ethnicity might shape how the Bible is interpreted and how Sunday school curricula is developed.

When I asked Georgia, the early elementary Sunday school teacher, what she used for curriculum, she said that the children's ministry had used a curriculum called *Vida Nueva,* which was published by Gospel Publishing House (Gospel Publishing House, 2020). *Vida Nueva* was simply a Spanish translation of the flagship Sunday school curriculum produced by Gospel Publishing House called *Radiant Life*. Georgia said she would just use *Radiant Life* while the Spanish-speaking Sunday school teachers would use *Vida Nueva* since the material content was the same. At the time I was visiting Blessings Church, they were in transition with their curriculum, so Georgia was coming up with her own lessons by relying on a combination of her own knowledge of Bible stories and materials she either purchased or found online. I discuss the content of those materials in detail in Chapter 3.

All the materials, such as Bible story books, Georgia used contained predominantly white characters, especially the Bible characters. In addition to the lesson materials, there were pictures of Jesus represented as a white man on the walls (Figure 6.2) and on the classroom signs (Figure 6.3). These illustrations and materials created a space where Jesus was uncritically white, and the Bible story characters were uncritically white. There were no non-white representations of Jesus or Bible characters. In Chapter 8, I discuss how the children I interviewed at Blessings Church actively used these white representations of Jesus as references for their understandings of Jesus, thus reproducing a white Christian imaginary.

Another way that whiteness permeates the early elementary Sunday school class was that Georgia was the only leader who taught Bible lessons for that class. Since the Sunday school time ran concurrently with the adult worship service, the teachers were scheduled so that they were in the classroom with the children, at most, every other Sunday. This allowed for Sunday school teachers to attend the adult worship service semi-regularly. This resulted in there being a Spanish-speaking, Latinx teacher in 30% of the early elementary Sunday school classes I visited at Blessings Church. Georgia, who was white and English-speaking, was in the classroom the remainder of the times I visited, and she was the only consistent teacher in that classroom. There was a different teacher each of the times there was a Latinx teacher when I visited. Georgia was the only teacher (even after finding other teachers to rotate) who taught any Bible lessons. She was also the only one creating the lessons using various external sources. On the Sundays there was a Latinx teacher in the classroom when I visited, there was no Bible lesson, except for one time when a Sunday school teacher from one of the other age groups filled in for the person who was originally scheduled. Rather, the Latinx teachers simply supervised the children, and the Sunday school class was little more than childcare with some coloring and singing thrown in. The early elementary Sunday school class was the only one with a white, English-speaking teacher. The other age groups had all Latinx Sunday school teachers, and all those teachers taught Bible lessons. Yet, in the early elementary Sunday school class, Biblical content was mediated only by Georgia, while the Latinx teachers did not teach any Bible lessons. This meant that a white Christian imaginary was not only reinforced through the uncritical use of curriculum written by a predominantly white publishing company, it was also reinforced by the content only being presented by a white, English-speaking person.

Summary of Findings at Blessings Church

Over the course of my time at Blessings Church, I found it to be an interstitial ethno-racial racial space where language and Latinx culture permeated only the stylistic elements of the church such as music type and preaching style. This is similar to a Presbyterian church in Hurtig's (2000) study of Spanish speaking churches' roles in constructing ethnicity. She focused on the differences between a Spanish speaking Catholic church and a Spanish speaking evangelical Protestant church. For the Protestant church, she noted that as a way of creating belonging for the parishioners, the church simultaneously negated individual national identities and affirmed the formation of a "U.S. Hispanic Christian identity" by emphasizing Bible learning and belonging within the church family. The implications of this for Blessings Church is that race, ethnicity, and religion were constructed as concurrent, yet separate spheres of life. As a result, ethnic and racial issues were not explicitly addressed in the early elementary Sunday school class. Indeed, race and ethnicity were not seen as salient to Biblical knowledge and Biblical literacy. The underlying assumption of this approach to race/ethnicity and religious belonging was that the Bible is racially and ethnically neutral. This null curriculum on race/ethnicity created a cultural vacuum that led to the uncritical permeation of a white Christian imaginary by way of white Biblical imagery.

First Baptist Church: Constrained Salience of Race in Sunday School

During my time at First Baptist, only African American children attended the early elementary Sunday school classes. In children's church, five of the eight times I visited were attended by only African American children. During the other three times, the only person who was not African American was one white girl (Table 6.3). When I visited the adult worship service, everyone on the stage was African American other than one white woman who was part of the choir. Moreover, during all my site visits, all the children's ministry leaders and volunteers were African American. I was the only exception, and this was accentuated by one of the Sunday school teachers at a children's ministry volunteer meeting I attended once when she referred to me as "a white person" when asking my thoughts on racial diversity in the curriculum. While in my lifetime I have been assumed to be Latinx, Asian, or Pacific Islander, this was the first time I had ever been referred to as racially white. It would seem that since I did not obviously fit into one of the common racial categories, I was placed in the default category of white.

First Baptist Church was a predominantly African American church with 125 years of history, which means that it had a deeply embedded identity as an historic Black church. Unlike either of the other two churches in this study, racial identity and religious identity were intertwined. In other words, race both shaped and was shaped by one's religious beliefs and practices. While race was a salient part of religion at First Baptist, what I found in the Sunday school classroom was a racial salience that was constrained by the combined forces of an urgency to teach children Biblical literacy and the curriculum that mediated the transfer of Biblical knowledge. In this section I describe how First Baptist included a sense of racial heritage as part of its religious identity. Then, I describe how African American identity and culture showed up as an integral part of the church's life. I end with showing how racial discourse was constrained in the Sunday school and children's church areas by curricular materials with primarily white Biblical imagery along with the high priority to teach children Biblical knowledge.

Racialized Religious Heritage

Unlike the other two churches in this study, race was a salient part of First Baptist Church beyond worship style. Although, according to the church's website, the church strived for an "an atmosphere that invites people from every generation, ethnicity, and background to worship God" (accessed 1/27/2020), African American history and identity was an integral part of the church. One way First Baptist communicated the importance of its African American heritage was by way of a large poster that took up most of a section of a wall that was in a frequently travelled hallway between the children's and youth ministry areas of the church. This poster was entitled *Architects of America* and featured a mixture of 64 historical and contemporary African Americans with influential roles in U.S. history. In addition to their names, each picture contained a brief biography of the person featured. Some of the people on the poster included: W.E.B DuBois, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Jackie Robinson, Angela Davis, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice. The presence of this poster within the church building reinforced the religious space at First Baptist as also a racialized space where one's racial history was salient to one's religious beliefs and identity.

In addition to material cultural artifacts pointing to African American history, some of the Sunday school leaders wove in aspects of a religious racial heritage into the Bible lessons. For example, one of the lessons in children's church was about when King Solomon (King David's—the David who killed Goliath—son) built Israel's first permanent temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5-8). The lesson connected the building of the temple to the importance of going to church.

> During the lesson time, Bob asked the children if they knew how churches were formed. He went on to talk about how "lots of Black churches started in homes because we couldn't be in big buildings like the one we have now. Our church started a long time ago when two different small church groups all came together." Bob wanted to make sure that the children knew African American churches didn't start off like other churches in America. "Black churches were different than other churches in how they started." (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

In the above example, Bob took the opportunity during a lesson about the first temple being built in Jerusalem and the importance of going to church to distinguish the history of African American churches from the history of other churches in America because of racial segregation and oppression. While Bob did not explicitly mention racial oppression, there was a sense of a shared understanding with the children that Bob was referring to the racist chasm between whites and African Americans when he said, "*we* couldn't be in big buildings like the one we have now" (emphasis mine) and "Black churches were different than other churches." This type of racial socialization is common amongst African American families (McAdoo, 2002; Suizzo et al., 2008) in order to prepare their children for the racism they are bound to encounter in society. By socializing children into the racialized heritage of the church, the leaders at First Baptist communicated to children an integration between racial and religious identity.

Intertwined Religious and Racial Identity

At First Baptist, I did not find it possible to separate the church's religious identity from its parishioners' identities as African Americans. This was in contrast to Blessings Church where being Latinx was salient to the religious identity of the church when it came to what language was spoken and the cultural "flavor" of the worship services; there was no sense of a distinct Latinx Christian identity where being Latinx was essentially tied to one's understanding of Christianity and theology (see Gutierrez, 2012 for a description of Latin American liberation theology). At First Baptist Church, religious identity and racial identity were inextricably intertwined. This phenomenon is consistent with many African American churches and is further marked by distinctive stylistic forms.

> In the performance of its religious services, the African-American [*sic*] church celebrates the faith of Black people and sustains the traditions of the culture by giving voice to faith through the performance of certain cultural roles that are imbued with "style" and which are reflected in the everyday, secular lives of African-Americans. As an element of performance, style is essential in manifesting cultural difference; it is the singular, Black way of being that clearly distinguishes African-American religiosity from White religiosity. (Weaver, 1991, p. 56)

During my time at First Baptist Church, I witnessed these types of stylistic differences that mark African American churches apart from white churches such as the dynamism of a call-and-response atmosphere where the congregation and speakers spontaneously make proclamations with the expectation of response verbally (e.g. “Amen” or “Preach it!”) or through action (e.g. clapping, hand waving, or standing).

In addition to the “performance” aspects that mark African American spirituality, I found that First Baptist Church, as an institution and as individual parishioners, expressed concerns that were salient to the African American population. For example, during a site visit on a Sunday in February, I noticed that most of the congregation was wearing the color red. According to the Western Christian liturgical calendar, wearing red has been traditionally associated with Pentecost Sunday, which is seven weeks after Easter Sunday. Since February is before Easter, I was confused about the reason most everyone I saw was wearing red. Later, I found out that the church had declared that Sunday as “Wear Red Sunday” and told parishioners to “Put on your red and join us at one of our worship experiences as we partner in the movement against heart disease in women” (First Baptist Church website). This church-wide event, held on a Sunday, was in conjunction with the American Heart Association’s *Go Red for Women,* which happens on the first Friday every February to raise awareness about heart disease and stroke in women (American Heart Association, 2020). Since heart disease is the leading cause of death in African American women, yet African American women are ill-informed about this (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019), this issue was salient to the African American population, at large. For First Baptist Church to officially recognize this event and link it to their Sunday worship service, they had intentionally connected religion with a secular issue that was conspicuously salient to African American women and communicated that one's religion and one's racial identity were intertwined.

Another example of this union between racial identity and religious identity was in the issues the Sunday school teachers prayed about prior to the Sunday school time. Every Sunday, the Sunday school teachers met 5 minutes before Sunday school began to pray for the Sunday morning as well as to pray for anything the teachers brought up. One particular prayer request stood out to me on a Sunday in June prior to the end of school.

> The teachers were already praying when I arrived. One teacher prayed for families over the summer and for parents who had to work. She also prayed for finances over the summer with kids being home and for the parents to be able to find a safe place for their kids to be and be taken care of over the summer. The prayer was accompanied by a chorus of "Amen"s and "Mhmm"s from the other teachers. There was a sense among the Sunday school teachers of awareness of real financial hardships that many families in their church face. (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

First Baptist was located in a part of town that was predominantly African American and lower income. The reality that a disproportionate percentage of the African American population lived at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum shaped the prayers and ministries at First Baptist Church. In other words, their religious convictions were tied to racially linked economic realities. Not only did parishioners pray about these issues, the church had specific official ministries to help parishioners who could not afford healthcare and to connect parishioners with local social justice initiatives that addressed such as racial inequities in the local public schools. During my time at First Baptist Church, they also held workshops to help formerly incarcerated individuals regain their voting rights. Racial identity and social realities linked to race were intertwined with one's religious identity at First Baptist. Amid this, though, a white Christian imaginary still made its way into the Sunday school space by way of material culture in the form of primarily white Biblical imagery and by way of a high priority on teaching children Biblical literacy.

White Jesus in a Black Sunday School

When I met with the senior pastor at First Baptist to introduce myself and talk about including the church in this research study, I asked about the church's denominational affiliation. He told me that First Baptist was part of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and that the children's Sunday school used curriculum from LifeWay, which is the publishing arm of the SBC. Knowing that the SBC was a predominantly white denomination and that LifeWay curriculum was predominantly white (Zonio, 2020), I lifted my eyebrows in surprise. The senior pastor acknowledged that the curriculum was problematically white, but he stated that this was the denominational curriculum and that it was "Biblically sound." He also mentioned that LifeWay was working on another curriculum that was targeted for African American congregations and that the church would be switching to it. Two years after this conversation, LifeWay had only produced the adult Sunday school version of *YOU,* which "intentionally focuses on urban and multicultural believers" (Lifeway Christian Resources, 2019). When I spoke with Maya, the children's ministry director, she expressed the same sentiments as the senior pastor regarding the curriculum. She did further comment that while there was diversity in the photos of "real" people on the packaging and take-home materials, it was diversity for the sake of marketing because the Bible story picture were still predominantly white.

In Chapter 4, I specifically write about racial representation in the Sunday school curricula and how whiteness is normalized in the curricula used at the churches in this study, so I will not repeat that in this section. Instead, I focus on examples of other sources of material culture in the Sunday school classroom that perpetuate a white Christian imaginary. One example was a Christmas nativity craft that the early elementary Sunday school class worked on (Figure 6.4). The craft consisted of white cardstock, nativity-themed stickers, and fun foam cut out in the shape of a picture frame. The kids put the stickers on the cardstock to create a nativity scene, which would then be framed by the fun foam. All the Bible characters (e.g., baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, etc.) were white except for one of the "Wise Men," who were traditionally considered foreign pagans who traveled to visit Jesus. After the children were finished with the craft, Claire helped the children learn a Bible verse.

> The [Bible] verse for the lesson was "Good news! Jesus was born." As Claire was helping them read the verse from the whiteboard, she sounded out each word to help the early readers figure the words out. When she got to "born," she said "b… b… b…" One of the boys yelled, "Black! Jesus was Black!" Claire paused for a beat as if she was wondering whether to respond to the exclamation. She decided to stick to the lesson plan, ignored the comment, and helped the children sound out the word "born." (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

While the curricular and craft materials featured white depictions of baby Jesus as well as Mary, Joseph, and others in the nativity story, one of the children in the class introduced the idea of Jesus being Black by jumping to the conclusion that the "B" sound was in reference to the word "Black." Considering race and religion were intertwined at First Baptist Church, it would have been apropos for Claire to address the idea of Jesus being Black as well as pointing out that the illustration of Jesus in the Bible story as well as in the stickers was white. Yet, the curriculum-driven nature of the Sunday school classroom and the desire to teach the children Biblical literacy constrained any discussion about the problematic nature of an over representation of Jesus as white in the curricular materials.

Another example of the desire for Biblical literacy leading to the permeation of a white Christian imaginary into the Sunday school classroom at First Baptist Church was when Claire decided to make sure that the children in her class learned about some of the more common stories in the Bible.

> When the class was getting ready to start, Claire was looking for something for the class. She thought she was going to have to go to her car, so she handed me a book and told me to read one of the stories from it. The book was *20 Bible Stories Every Child Should Know,* distributed by Standard Publishing. The entire book featured predominantly white Bible story characters.
>
> Claire found what she was looking for and had the kids all sit on the carpet so she could read the Bible story. She asked the kids if they knew why they were reading stories from the book. None of the kids knew, so she reminded them. "I asked you a while ago to draw a picture of your favorite Bible story, and a lot of you did not know any! So that is why we are reading Bible stories from this book. So that you can learn some of the main Bible stories." She, then, proceeded to read the Bible story while showing the kids the pictures in the book. As she always did, she repeated portions of the Bible story in order to reinforce and help children remember the details of the story. (Field Note Memos, First Baptist Church)

Like the previous example, Claire was concerned that the children in her class were not able to spontaneously recall a Bible story with ease. As a result, she brought in extracurricular material to supplement the Bible lessons. Rather than using a book that features people of color its Biblical imagery, like the *Children of Color Storybook Bible*, which is distributed by Urban Spirit! Publishing (an African American owned company), she used a book that featured white Biblical images. This implicitly reinforced the normalization of a white Christian imaginary in the Bible.

The predominance of a white Christian imaginary embedded in the material and symbolic cultural artifacts used in the Sunday school classroom served as a constraint on how Sunday school teachers at First Baptist Church could relate racial issues to the Bible lessons they were teaching. The volunteers relied on curriculum to help them teach the Bible lessons, and the Bible lessons did not intertwine racial issues with religion.

Summary of Findings from First Baptist Church

While race was salient to religion at First Baptist, this racial saliency was constrained by the curriculum-driven nature of children's Sunday school as well as by the desire to make sure children learned Biblical literacy. When I brought up some of these issues in a children's ministry volunteer meeting after completing my site visits at First Baptist Church, the children's ministry director was aware of the tensions caused by having white depictions of Bible story characters as well as the curricular restraints that limit discussion that connect racial justice with Bible lessons. The Sunday school teachers, though, thought there was more diversity in the curriculum than there really was. Some of the teachers had not even realized that all the Bible story characters were depicted as white people. While my findings show that race is deeply salient to First Baptist Church, the desire to teach children "sound Biblical knowledge" had led to the dependency on curriculum and other materials that subversively normalized a white Christian imaginary.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed how race showed up at each of the churches in this study. My findings suggest that the extent to which dominant racial ideologies were reinforced and/or contested was dependent on two factors. One of those factors was the predominant racial composition of each church. This is consistent with previous research showing how church members' explanations of wage gaps between whites and African Americans is linked to the church's racial composition. Predominantly white churches were more likely than predominantly African American churches to invoke individual factors such as laziness and lack of motivation as explanations for the wage gap (Emerson & Smith, 2001). Another study that used similar measures and included multi-ethnic and Hispanic churches, found that both types of churches were not significantly different than predominantly white churches in their explanations of the wage gap (Cobb et al., 2015). While significant, these studies focused on the discursive tactics church members used to justify their understandings of income inequalities as related to race. Little attention was given to the mechanisms that contribute to the racialization of religious beliefs.

The other factor that influenced how race showed up in the churches that are a part of this study was the Sunday school curricula. In Chapter 4, I discuss how Sunday school curricula normalizes a white Christian imaginary. These curricula influenced the extent to which each of the churches was able to address racial issues by ignoring and/or erasing race. Put differently, race was part of the null curriculum rather than being included in the explicit written curriculum at each church.

Table 6.1 Number of Site Visits to All Saints Christian Church by Class Type and Racial Makeup

	Only White Children	Multiple Races	Total
Early Elementary Sunday School	10	4	14
Children's Church	7	6	13
Total	17	10	27

Table 6.2 Number of Site Visits to Blessings Church by Racial Makeup

	Only Latinx Children	Multiple Races	Total
Early Elementary Sunday School	10	2	12

Table 6.3 Number of Site Visits to First Baptist Church by Class Type and Racial Makeup

	Only African American Children	Multiple Races	Total
Early Elementary Sunday School	12	0	12
Children's Church	5	3	8
Total	17	3	27

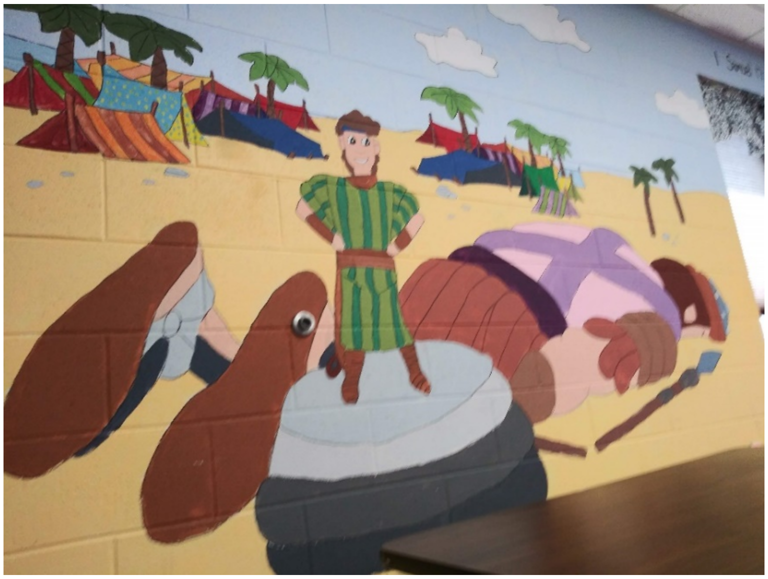

Figure 6.1 Mural of David and Goliath at All Saints Christian Church

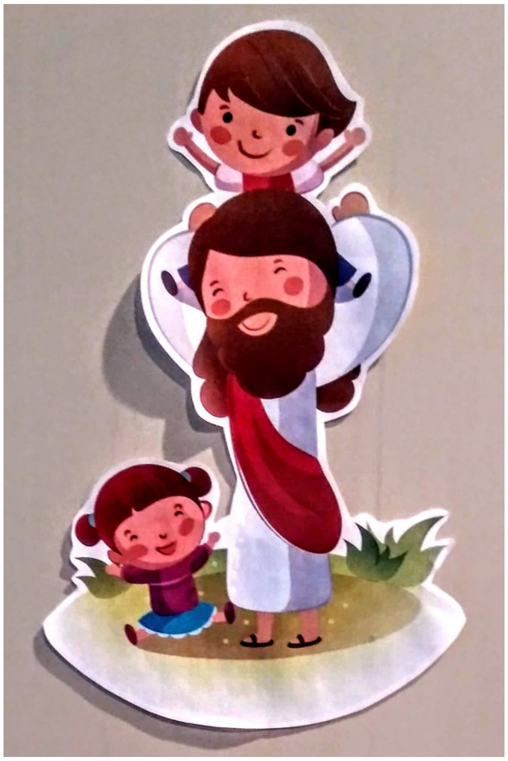

Figure 6.2 Picture of Jesus with children on the wall at Blessings Church

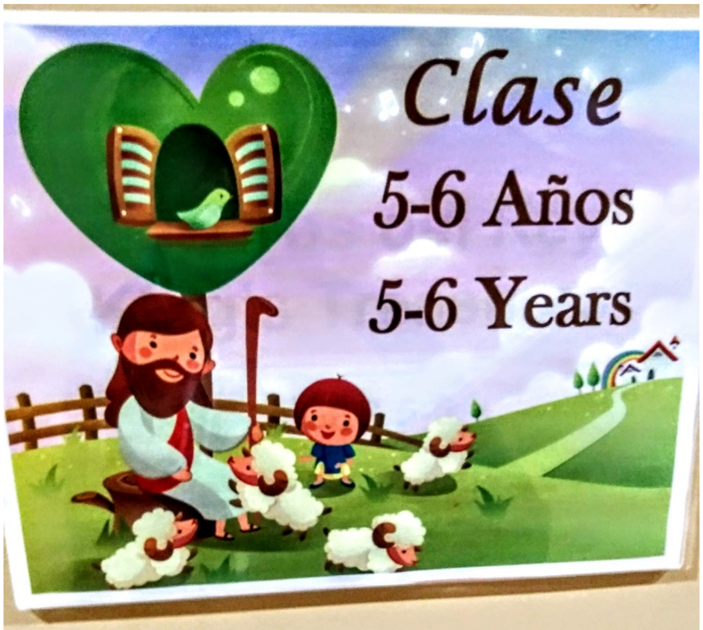
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Figure 6.3 Sunday school classroom sign at Blessings Church

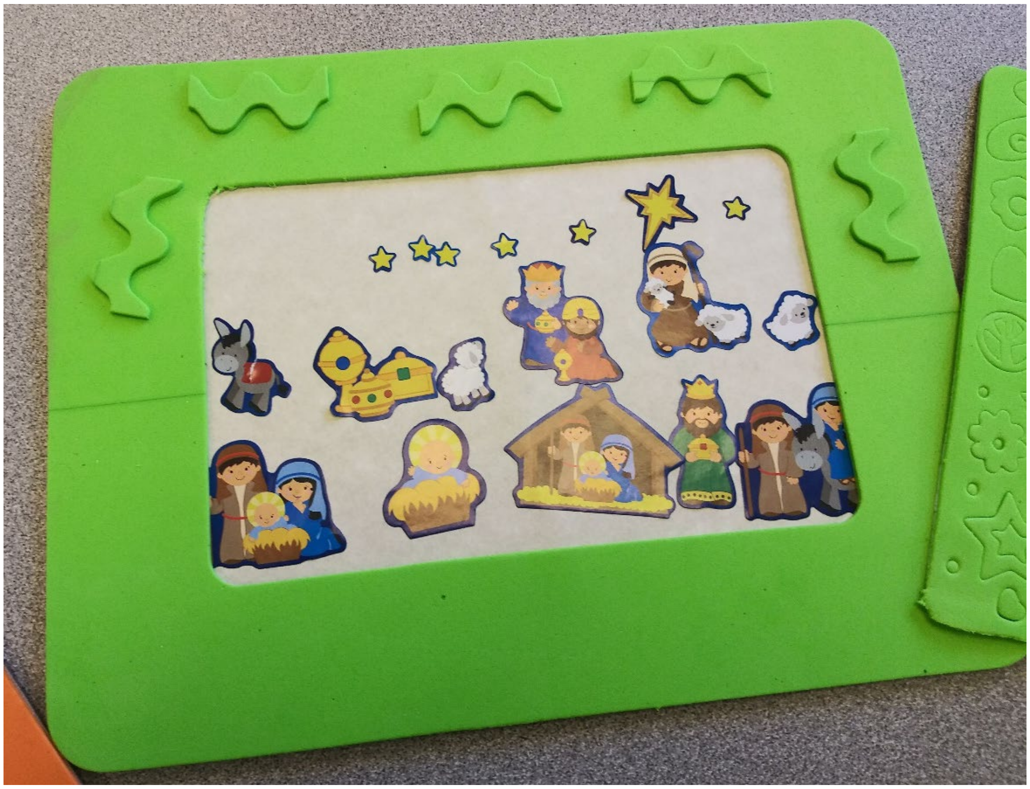

Figure 6.4 Nativity craft at First Baptist Church

CHAPTER 7. GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN FROM THE SUNDAY SCHOOLS

In this chapter, I focus on my analysis of the data gathered in group interviews with children at the three churches in this study. I conducted a total of six interviews: two group interviews from each church. The groups were made up of between two to four children and were mostly mixed-sex groups; one of the groups interviewed at All Saints Christian Church consisted of three girls. In Chapter 3, I discuss the groups as well as the methodology I employed with the group interviews in further detail. What I found in the group interviews was that many of the children from all three churches relied on and referenced material culture, especially in their interactions around racialized religious imagery. Moreover, I found that the extent to which Sunday school curricula enabled and constrained children's interactions over race, gender, and religion was mediated by each church's social location.

In the sections that follow, I begin with a brief discussion of my rationale for including group interviews as part of this research project. Then, I discuss the major themes that arose from the group interviews as well as the ways those themes took shape at each of the churches in this study. Throughout those sections, I focus on how children are enabled and constrained by the implicit and null curricula embedded in the material culture of the written Sunday school curricula as well as the symbolic and normative cultural milieu they are a part of. I end this chapter with a summary discussion of my findings.

Rationale for Including Group Interviews

Ethnographies focused on young children's constructions of race and gender (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; V. A. Moore, 2002; Thorne, 1993; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001) have shown the surprising and unexpected ways children negotiate racialized and gendered meanings of space and relationships. For example, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) wrote about how parents and teachers of the children at the preschool they studied were taken aback at the ways in which children used concepts of race to categorize themselves and others along racialized hierarchies when she presented her findings to them. Specifically, in times when children exhibited racialized behavior that led to exclusions from group activities or other negative actions, parents and teachers expressed their surprise by saying that the children had not learned the racialized behavior from the school or from home.

> Carla, a three-year-old child, is preparing herself for resting time. She picks up her cot and starts to move it to the other side of the classroom. A teacher asked what she is doing. "I need to move this," explains Carla. "Why?" asks the teacher. "Because I can't sleep next to a [n-word]," Carla says, pointing to Nicole, a four-year-old Black child on a cot nearby. "[N-word]s are stinky. I can't sleep next to one." Stunned, the teacher, who is white, tells Carla to move her cot back and not to use "hurting words." Carla looks amused but complies.
>
> Later after the children awakened and went to the playground, the center's white director reports to [Van Ausdale] that he has called Carla's parents for a meeting about the incident: "If you want to attend I would really like to have you there… I want you to know that Carla did not learn that here!" At the meeting both parents—the father is white, and the mother is half-white and half-Asian—were baffled when told of the incident. The father remarked, "Well, she certainly did not learn that sort of crap from us!" The teacher immediately insisted that Carla did not learn such words at the center. Carla's father offered this explanation: "I'll bet she got that from Teresa. Her dad is… a real redneck." (p. 1)

Further, in the Acknowledgements section of the book, Van Ausdale even expressed her own shock at many of the interactions she observed and analyzed. "Watching little children indulge in hateful rhetoric was the hardest thing [I] had ever done, and there were many occasions when [I] wanted nothing more than to leave the field to cry" (p. vii).

Other than a cursory acknowledgement that the children bring in artifacts from the “larger society” (p. 181), Van Ausdale and Feagin do not offer examples of how children incorporate artifacts from the “larger society” in their racialized interactions. In other words, they place a higher priority on the interactions themselves rather than the epistemological and ontological milieu that influences these interactions. This was a similar sentiment in the other studies cited above.

Research conducted on cultural artifacts produced for children reveal that there is limited representation and discussion of racial and gender diversity in material like written curricula, books, art, and media (Brown & Brown, 2010; Bryan, 2012; Crisp et al., 2016; Cross, 2003; Li-Vollmer, 2002; Myers, 2012; Zonio, 2020) For example, Meyers (2012) shows how non-hegemonic representations of masculinity in four popular children’s television programs served to reinforce the dominance of hegemonic forms of masculinity. While these shows featured non-hegemonic male characters, they were regularly ridiculed for exhibiting behaviors that fell outside of traditionally masculine behavior. Additionally, other characters and cultural expectations surrounding heterosexuality policed the limits to which male characters were able to transgress hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity was still the desired standard and measuring stick for masculine success. In another example from a study I conducted evaluating racial messages in Sunday school curricula from 8 religious education publishers, I found that only one lesson (out of the 169 analyzed) focused on race as a lesson theme. Further, all but one of the publishers incorporated people of color in the Bible Story illustrations. I argued that a lack of racial diversity and accurate racial representation was a form of symbolic white racial isolation within the curricula that normalized whiteness in the Sunday school curricula (Zonio, 2020).

One of the goals of this study is to find the extent to which material culture influences how children negotiate race and gender in the context of religious themes in Sunday school classrooms. More specifically, how do children reproduce, contest, and transform what I've identified as a white patriarchal Christian imagination within the context of their Sunday school classrooms as a result of the material culture embedded in the Sunday school curricula? To explore these questions, I needed the ability to guide and focus children's interactions around topics of race, gender, and religion. Relying on ethnographic observations in the Sunday school classrooms and on analysis of Sunday school curricula did not provide the interactions to generate the additional data that I needed. Thus, I turned to group interviews to generate valid data needed to explore some of my research questions.

Group interviews allow for a hybrid of "natural" interactions and in-depth interviews (Blumer, 1986, p. 41). For this study, I was able to focus and direct children's interactions around specific topics using a variety of modalities (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of my group interview methods). Specifically, I was able to capture data in the form of discussions and interactions where children intersected religious and spiritual concepts and imagery with their conceptions of race and gender. I accomplished this by presenting children with varied religious visual imagery (See Table 3.4 and Table 3.5) in order to elicit interactions around race and gender. Specifically, I focused discussion around how the pictures represented who they thought God or Jesus was. I offered them the opportunity to talk about changes they would make to the pictures, if they were so inclined, so that the pictures would be better representations of their conceptions of God. Further, I prompted children to draw pictures related to God, the Bible, or their churches. I used that time to ask questions regarding what they thought Jesus or God looked like. I probed for physical attributes like skin, hair, and eye color as well as sex. I also asked children their thoughts about how God would want us to treat other people. (For a sample interview schedule, see Appendix D.)

As I analyzed the interview transcripts, I focused on children's explanations, reactions, and interactions regarding race and gender. Since we all rely on cultural resources to communicate and negotiate meanings (Mead, 1934; Stryker, 2003) within specific settings (Goffman, 1959), I paid special attention to the times when children were able and unable to articulate their thoughts about religion, race, and gender. By situating the children's responses (and non-responses) within the cultural milieu of their churches, Sunday school classrooms, and Sunday school curricula, I was able to observe the ways children at each of the churches negotiated, reproduced, and contested the white patriarchal Christian imagination.

Church as a Benign Space

One of the first questions I asked the children during the group interviews was, "What is your favorite part of going to church?" Initially, I had consigned the children's answers to the banality of preliminary interview questions meant to prime participants for more substantive questions. While the above question was intended to "break the ice" and build initial rapport, the children's answers gained greater significance considering my findings and analysis of the Sunday school curricula from the three churches in this study.

In Chapter 4, I discussed how the Sunday school curricula used at the three churches in this study discursively shaped the Sunday school space into a place where children primarily learned Bible and theological knowledge with the hopes that children would remain adherents into adulthood. Further, Bible stories and knowledge were presented as deontological precepts that guided how one conducted their life outside of the church. These precepts were usually vague and focused on individualistic spiritual transformation rather than pointed towards systematic social structural changes to alleviate social injustices. In other words, the curricula constructed Sunday school as simply a place one came to uncritically learn about God and the Bible. This was further reproduced by the Sunday school teachers who were dependent on how the curricula scripted Bible lessons and learning activities. As a result, the Sunday school spaces utilized social scripts and settings (Goffman, 1959) that coincided with those used in secular educational contexts.

The children from all three churches reproduced and reinforced the notion that Sunday school was a place to learn religious knowledge.

> Lucky: I like to go to church because I like to learn about Jesus and God. (6, female, white, All Saints Christian Church, Group 2)
>
> Jacob: It's about Jesus… I know… And about God and the Bible stories. (6, male, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 6)
>
> Emily: 'Cause I get to learn more about Jesus. (7, female, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 5)
>
> Justina: I like reading Bible. (5, female, Latinx, Blessings Church, Group 4)

Children from each of the churches used similar language regarding learning when talking about their favorite parts of Sunday school. Further, the type of learning was centered specifically around religious knowledge. One child even communicated his understanding of Sunday school as a space that was mainly concerned with learning in a negative manner.

> [The children were drawing pictures of their favorite Bible stories when I (HZ) began asking them questions about church.]
>
> HZ: Like, what's your favorite part about church?
>
> [Children continue coloring for 12 seconds.]
>
> Brian: [matter-of-factly] Glad we don't have to do this for church homework. (7, male, white, All Saints Christian Church, Group 1)
>
> HZ: [laugh]
>
> Acorn: Is this is church work? I would have no… I would… I, uh… I wouldn't know what to do. I still don't know… I don't know what to do next… (6, male, white, All Saints Christian Church, Group 1)
>
> Brian: [interrupting Acorn] Yeah, this is church work.

Brian had connected learning with the Sunday school space in such a way that he even incorporated his negative feelings towards homework that he would have received from his elementary school with the learning activity worksheets the children sometimes completed in Sunday school.

While it is possible for children to learn about the Bible, God, and other aspects of religious culture in other contexts, when asked about their favorite part of Sunday school, most indicated learning about God, Jesus, and the Bible was the primal reason for Sunday school. One could argue that the children were simply giving answers that they believed adults in charge wanted to hear rather than sharing their candid thoughts. These statements from the children at all three churches were consistent with what I found in a previous study on how children constructed their relationships with the churches they attended (Zonio, 2014). The children in that study similarly identified church as a place one goes to learn about God; some of the children in that study even drew pictures of

Sunday school classrooms and Bibles when they were asked to draw their favorite parts of church.

Not all the children who participated in the focus groups for this study identified learning about God, Jesus, and the Bible as their favorite parts of going to church. After one of the children stated that learning about Jesus was her favorite part of going to Sunday school, some of the other children in the group expressed their excitement about getting candy at church, which was the common reward teachers used to motivate children to pay attention and participate in Sunday school.

> Marcala: Guess why… guess why… I like candy! (5, female, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 5)
>
> HZ: You like candy?
>
> Marcala: Yeah.
>
> Caleb: No, I want to eat a whole candy. (5, male, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 5)
>
> HZ: You get candy at church?
>
> Marcala: Yeah, I get candy at church.
>
> HZ: [mock surprise] You get candy at church?!?
>
> Lily: Yeah, we do. (7, female, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 5)
>
> HZ: Oh, wow.
>
> Caleb: I want… I want the whole candy and eat it!

Soon after the above interchange, Lily noted that church also gave her something to do on a Sunday other than being on her computer.

> Lily: Uh, my favorite thing about church is, um, it gives me something to do in the day.
>
> HZ: Mmmhm…

Lily: Instead of just being at home and using my computer.

Lily ended her statement with an eye roll as if she was recalling an admonition from one of her caregivers in response to her computer use at home. The implication was that it would be better for her to be at church learning about the Bible rather than at home playing with her computer.

In all the above instances, the children explicitly and implicitly constructed Sunday school as a benign place to learn religious knowledge. Since the Sunday school classrooms in this study were overwhelmingly driven by written curricula, this meant that the curricula maintained an epistemic privilege regarding what parts of the Bible were taught, how they were taught, and the social standpoint from which the Bible was interpreted. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I discuss how the children who participated in the group interviews for this study, syncretized material and symbolic culture (in the form of a white patriarchal Christian imagination) from the written curricula at their churches, Protestant religious culture, and dominant cultural ideologies surrounding race and gender in novel ways that were further mediated by their cultural milieus.

Racialized Religious Imagery

One of my objectives in conducting focus groups as part of this study was to more directly elicit responses from the children at the churches I visited around issues of race. To that end, I used religious imagery as the catalyst for those responses. I chose six images depicting Nativity scenes or the Holy Family (See Table 3.4 for a list of the images.) There was one image each with white, East Asian, African American, and Indian racial representations. There were also two pictures that included images representative of Indigenous Americans. When I introduced the pictures to the children, some of the possible questions I asked them were:

- What do you think this picture is about?
- If you were to change anything in this picture, what would it be? Why?
- Which picture(s) do you think are the best way to represent Jesus, Mary, and Joseph? (I adjusted this question to fit what was in the picture.)

In this section, I present the data and analysis from my group interviews with the children at each of the churches. I first discuss the themes that arose at All Saints Christian Church. Next, I focus on how children negotiated the racialization of religious imagery at Blessings Church. I end with my findings from First Baptist Church, where racial identity was strongly salient to one's religious identity shaped children's negotiations of racialized religious imagery.

All Saints Christian Church

Borrowing from the world of music, dissonance happens when a combination of notes lack harmony. Harmony, or consonance, occurs when notes are combined in ways that have been constructed as "normal" for particular contexts. Therefore, when one experiences musical dissonance, there is a sense of unease and, in extreme cases, revulsion until the dissonance is resolved and there is consonance between the played notes. As I coded through the transcripts from the group interviews at All Saints Christian Church, I sensed various levels of consonance and dissonance from the children over the different representations of religious imagery I presented to them. What I found was the children had immediate consonance with white representations of religious imagery. In contrast, many of the children in the groups I interviewed communicated varying levels of dissonance when confronted with non-white representations of religious imagery, which they attempted resolving in different ways.

White as Normal. One of the themes that arose from the group interview data at All Saints Christian Church was a sense of whiteness as the normative category for religious imagery. One way I observed this in one of the group interviews happened while the children were drawing pictures of what they thought God or Jesus looked like.

Acorn: Wait, what color is Jesus?

HZ: What color do you think he is?

Acorn: Tan or brown?

HZ: Tan or brown?

Acorn: Yeah

HZ: Why do you think he's tan or brown?

Acorn: [shrugs shoulders] MmmMmm… I have tan skin.

Brian: No, you don't.

Acorn: Just look at my skin, Brian. Yes. It's tan.

Brian: I don't think you know the meaning of tan.

In the above exchange, I was surprised by Acorn's answer that Jesus had "tan or brown" skin. I had not expected a white child to envision Jesus as a person of color. When I probed further, Acorn clarified that he was using his own skin color as a reference for what he thought Jesus' skin color was. At that point, Brian jumped in to correct Acorn's usage of tan to describe Acorn's skin color. Brian even went so far as to question Acorn's knowledge of "the meaning of tan." Acorn was using his own skin color as normative, and although he labeled himself as tan in color, Brian was quick to implicitly point out that Acorn (and Brian) were white. For Brian and Acorn, it was normative for Jesus to have the same skin color as they did.

Another example of the children seeing white as the normative category was when I showed another group of children a copy of the painting entitled *The Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerrit van Honthorst, the children in one of the groups was quick to identify the subjects of the painting.

1. HZ: [Showing a white representation of a Nativity scene] What do you think this might be a picture of from the Bible?

2. Kitty: [Raising her hand and waving it so I could see] I know. I know. I know. I know. (7, female, white, All Saints Christian Church, Group 2)

3. Maria: Whe… When Jesus is born. (7, female, white, All Saints Christian Church, Group 2)

4. HZ: When Jesus was born?

5. Kitty: I knew it!

6. HZ: You knew that? Where's Jesus?

7. Kitty: Wait, do we have to raise our hands?

8. Maria: In the cri… In the crib.

9. HZ: [In response to Kitty's question] No, that's OK, you don't have to.

10. Kitty: OK

11. Maria: In the crib of hay.

12. HZ: So, how about you, Lucky? What else, like… Who else is in there? So, Jesus is in the crib, there.

13. Kitty: Mary… [at same time as Lucky]

14. Lucky: Mary's in there. (6, female, white, All Saints Christian Church, Group 2)

15. HZ: You see Mary in there?

16. Kitty: Yes! [at same time as Lucky]

17. Lucky: Yes.

18. HZ: How do you know that's Mary?

19. Maria: You see… Mary… Right there. [pointing to Mary in the picture emphasizing "right there"]

20. Kitty: 'Cause.

21. Maria: 'Cause.

22. Lucky: 'Cause she's around the baby. She's… pretty much the closest to the baby

Throughout the above interchange, the children quickly answered my questions with little hesitations. Immediately after I held up the picture, Kitty excitedly shot up her hand to make sure that I knew that she knew what the picture was about (turn 2). The other children in the group also contributed to the discussion by excitedly reinforcing each other's answers as they identified the various characters in the painting (turns 6-17). For the group, the white representation of the Nativity scene was the normative representation, and any questions challenging that status were met with astonishment that anyone would think differently. At one point, I asked the children to clarify their answer by asking them how they were able to identify Mary, Jesus' mother (turn 18). Maria responded to my question about Mary in a way that suggested we should have a shared understanding of what Mary normally looked like, which was the white version of Mary she pointed to in the picture (turn 19). Further, Lucky reinforced the group's sense of shared understanding by pointing out that Mary was the one who was "pretty much the closest to the baby [Jesus]."

In both interchanges, the children co-constructed and reinforced the religious space as a white space. I found that one factor contributing to this normalization of white Bible story characters at All Saints Christian Church was that children drew from other religious artifacts that were part of the material culture embedded in Sunday school curricula. Absent explicit imagery and other material or symbolic culture challenging whiteness as the status quo in religious spaces, the children relied on dominant ideologies of whiteness as well as the dominant religious imagery to enable and constrain the limits of their Christian imagination.

Whiteness as Part of the Material Culture Children Draw From. There is an overwhelming body of empirical literature, some of which I've already referenced in Chapter 2, that shows how young children are capable of noticing racial difference as well as racial hierarchies. Unfortunately, most of this research narrowly focuses on how children negotiate racial meanings within specific social contexts and states that children draw their conceptions of race from other aspects of culture without exploring the extent of these external cultural factors. Further, this approach is dismissive of the reality that social structures are ontologically influenced by dominant racial ideologies (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009; Feagin, 2013; W. L. Moore, 2007) that are upheld by the implicit and null curricula (Eisner, 1994). What I found in the group interviews at All Saints Christian Church was that one source of cultural artifacts children drew from to construct their understandings of race was the material and symbolic nature embedded in Sunday school curricula.

One example of this happened in the second group interview I conducted at All Saints Christian Church. I showed the children an image of a Nativity scene that featured African American representations of Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus that was taken from a Christmas greeting card created by African American Expressions.

1. HZ: Alright, let me see if I can find another picture, here… How 'bout this?

2. Kitty: Mary holding the baby.

3. HZ: Mary holding the baby?

4. Maria: That was if Jesus was Black.

5. HZ: That was if Jesus was Black? So, Jesus isn’t Black?

6. Kitty: No.

7. Maria: I think he’s not [end on upswing like a question].

8. HZ: [3 second pause] What do you think…

9. Maria: He might be white.

10. HZ: He might be white? Why do think Jesus would be white?

11. Kitty: Because I think his parents were white…

12. Maria: Because there’s a…

13. HZ: Do you think they were white, too?

14. Maria: ‘Cause there’s a… ‘Cause there’s a picture of someone… someone that drew Jesus on my fridge…

15. HZ: MmHmm

16. Maria: …and he’s white. That picture.

While the Kitty was quickly able to identify Mary and baby Jesus (turn 2) based on other markers like Mary being dressed in the stereotypical blue robe and head covering and the baby being in a manger, Maria was quick to qualify that the picture was only correct “if Jesus was Black” (turn 4). This led to a discussion on whether Jesus was white. While Maria seemed open to considering that Jesus might not be white by stating that Jesus *might* be white (turn 9), Kitty added that Jesus parents were probably white (turn 11). Rather than the conversation speculating further on whether or not Jesus was white, the interchange concluded with Maria drawing on the cultural artifacts available to her and cited a piece of material culture in the form of a picture of a white Jesus on her refrigerator at home (turns 12-16) as evidence to support the groups construction of Jesus as white.

Later, in the group interview, I showed the group a picture of a white representation of Jesus and asked the children if they would change anything in the picture to make it a better picture of Jesus. Maria said, “No.” When I probed further, Maria stated, “‘Cause that’s the picture… ‘Cause that’s the picture on my fridge.” Since Maria had already invoked the material culture of a white Jesus on her fridge, she was able to more quickly reference it later to support her construction of Jesus as white.

Whiteness as the Resolution to Racial Dissonance in Religious Imagery. Over the course of the group interviews at All Saints Christian Church, all the children expressed varying levels of dissonance when confronted with non-white representations of religious imagery, especially those linked to God or Jesus. The children either were unable or unwilling to identify the source of their unease with non-white religious imagery.

HZ: Alright, so this is another picture… another painting of someone trying to paint Jesus.

Kitty: Uh, I would change his skin color… I would change his skin color and put… and put blonde hair on him.

HZ: MmHm

Kitty: …and change his clothes.

HZ: So… why would you put blonde hair on Jesus and make his skin lighter?

Kitty: Because.

HZ: Because?

Kitty:	Because I don’t even know why, but that… I think Jesus would look like that.
HZ:	You think Jesus would look like that? Have you seen pictures like this of Jesus before?
Kitty:	No
HZ:	Like ones with darker…
Kitty:	No

Up to this point, Kitty had suggested that pictures with darker skin tones should be lighter. When I decided to probe further, Kitty was dismissive of her reasons, stating, “I don’t even know why” followed with a vague rationale. Based on the cultural resources available to her, all she had to lean on was a feeling of dissonance that could only be resolved by reconstructing Jesus as white.

For some of the children, this resolution was a prolonged process of suggesting minor changes over several pictures to resolve their sense of racial dissonance in the non-white religious imagery. One example of this was how Lucky interacted with a series of pictures that featured non-white representations of Jesus and the Nativity. While the other children were explicitly suggesting changes to skin color for most of the pictures, Lucky was initially reticent to mention skin color as something to be changed. Rather she focused on superficial changes in the background and progressively suggested more pointed changes for subsequent images. When I asked her about changes in a Nativity scene featuring African American representations of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, Lucky suggested, “I would, like, move that tree and put some more plants and flowers over there and then, like some candles near both of them.” Later, for a picture featuring an East Asian representation of Mary and Jesus, Lucky suggested changes to their clothing and moving the setting to a barn with Jesus in a manger. Following that image, I introduced an image of the Holy Family with Indigenous Americans representing Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Lucky stated, “I would, like, give them different clothes [ended on a high note as if a question] … and then I would give them, like, blonde hair [ended on a high note as if a question].” A couple of images later, I showed the children an African American representation of Jesus. Lucky suggested, “I would, like, change [Jesus’ hair] to, like, kinda curly hair, like, blonde hair and change the skin color to white.” When I showed the children a white representation of Jesus following the previous picture, Lucky stated, “I think I like it ‘cause he has light skin color.” Over the course of 13 pages of the interview transcript, Lucky progressively went from not being able (or possibly not being comfortable) to resolve her sense of racial dissonance in the religious imagery to identifying white skin color as the resolution to what needed to be changed in the non-white religious imagery. This progression of events suggests that the influence of the white Christian imaginary embedded in and reproduced by Sunday school curricula constrains the way children constructed their understandings of race in religious settings. Further, the influence of the white Christian imaginary was enhanced by the white racial frame of a predominantly white church where issues of race are relegated to the null curriculum.

Blessings Church

As described in Chapter 3, conducting group interviews at Blessings Church was a challenge. There were no empty classrooms available for me to use, so I sat in a back corner of the Sunday school with the children who participated in the group interviews while the rest of the class was going on. Even with that challenge, I observed that many of the children in the group interviews had mixed responses to the non-white representations of religious imagery I showed them. For example, one of the children in Group 3 was quick to say that the people in the African American representation of the Nativity should have “peach” skin rather than brown skin. In contrast, the children in Group 4 did not see a need to change the same picture, both saying that it was a “good picture.” Despite children’s seemingly contradictory responses to non-white representations of religious imagery, the children still deferred to and referenced material cultural representations of God and Jesus that were present in the illustrations included in the written curriculum as well as illustrations posted as decorations around the room. As discussed in Chapter 4, the curricula reinforced a white Christian imagination.

Surrounded by Whiteness. In Chapter 5, one of my observations about Blessings Church was that it was an interstitial ethno-racial racial space dominated by people who were Latinx and spoke Spanish but still deferred to whiteness as the dominant racial ideology. Specifically, in the Sunday school classroom, this meant that the children were surrounded by white representations of religious imagery that were part of predominantly white curricula written by white people. There were even white representations of Jesus playing with white children posted on one of the walls in the classroom. These pictures served as references for the children when I asked them about what Jesus looked like.

HZ: So, what color skin do you think Jesus had?

Gecko: Uh… Mmmm… (5, male, Latinx, Blessings Church, Group 4)

HZ: Huh?

Gecko: Clear skin.

HZ:	Clear skin? So…
Gecko:	Brown skin, I mean.
HZ:	Did he have brown skin?
Gecko:	That color [pointing to picture of a white Jesus playing with white children].
HZ:	Oh, the color that's up there?
Gecko:	Yeah. The one… This color. [Holds up a peach colored crayon.]
HZ:	Oh, OK.
Gecko:	This color. [Hands me the peach colored crayon for me to take a closer look.]

When I first asked Gecko about Jesus' skin color, he said "clear" and then quickly changed his answer to "brown" realizing that "clear" was not really a color. When I probed further, Gecko pointed to the picture up on the wall to clarify what he meant by "brown." All but one of the children in both group interviews referenced the pictures of Jesus on the wall at least one time during the interviews. Gecko took a further innovative step in communicating what color he meant by finding a crayon matching the color used in the white illustration of Jesus, which ended up being a peach-colored crayon. Based on this chain of interactions, I assume that Gecko probably meant to say that Jesus had *white* skin instead of "clear skin." Since "clear" didn't make sense, he used his own skin color as a reference but revised his answer to match the material culture in the room, which was a white illustration of Jesus who had a peachy skin tone. The material culture within the room acted as a corrective to Gecko's construction of Jesus' skin color and constrained his imagination of Jesus to one that corresponded with a white Christian imagination.

Children Participating in the Normalization of Whiteness. As actors in an interstitial ethno-racial racial space and surrounded by material culture reinforcing a white Christian imaginary, the children who participated in the group interviews at Blessings Church progressively became more active in normalizing whiteness in the non-white representations of religious imagery I presented. In Group 3, one of the first non-white representations of religious imagery I showed them was *The Holy Family* by Father John Giuliani, which is an Indigenous American representation of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus lacking most of the typical markers (e.g. Mary's blue and white robes with hair covering, Joseph's robes, a manger, etc.) found in similar paintings.

HZ: So, do you think this is a good picture of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus?

Jax: No. (6, male, Latinx, Blessings Church, Group 3)

HZ: No? Why not, Jax?

Jax: Because the boy look [*sic*] different.

HZ: The boy looks different? How does he look different?... What would you change?

Jax: The face.

HZ: So, Jax… Hey, Eva… Would you change this picture of Jesus and his mom and dad?

Eva: [nods head] (5, female, Latinx, Blessings Church, Group 3)

HZ: How would you change it? What would you change in the picture?

Jax: His face

HZ: …you said his face, but how would you change it?

Jax: Uh… Peach. The peach.

HZ: Like a peach color?

Jax: Yeah

HZ: So… it's… you think it's too dark?

Jax: Yeah.

When asked about the picture's validity portraying the Holy Family, Jax was quick to say, "No." As I probed further about changes he would make to the picture in order to improve it, Jax pointed to how different the boy looked in the picture. When pressed further, Jax suggested that the boy's face needed to be changed. After some back-and-forth, Jax stated that he would have changed the skin color from brown to peach, which matched the skin color of the pictures of Jesus on the wall. While it took a few lines, Jax eventually stated that the Jesus in the painting needed "peach" skin because he thought that Jesus' skin color was too dark. The next picture I showed the group was another Indigenous American representation entitled *Hopi Virgin Mother and Child II* by Father John Giuliani. When I asked about what the children would change in the picture, Jax immediately pointed out that the skin color should be peach. When I followed with the African American Expressions picture of Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus, Amy immediately expressed that the people needed peach-colored skin. Over the course of three different pictures, the children, influenced by the white Christian imaginary embedded in the Sunday School curricula, normalized whiteness as the standard for religious imagery.

White as Normal. Because of Sunday School curricula where whiteness is normative, the children in the focus group interviews at Blessings Church reinforced white representations of religious imagery as normal. For example, a few seconds after the above interaction I had with Gecko regarding the pictures of Jesus on the walls, I further probed the group about the white illustration of Jesus on the wall.

HZ: [pointing to the white illustration of Jesus on the wall] You think that's a good picture of Jesus?

Justina: What? (5, female, Latinx, Blessings Church, Group 4)

HZ: Would you change that?

Gecko: No

HZ: …at all?

Gecko: No

HZ: To make it more like what you think Jesus looks like?

Justina: Uh… No!

Both Gecko and Justina were adamant that the picture of a white Jesus on the wall was what should be considered normal. The material culture provided by the curriculum became the standard by which to judge what should be considered normal.

Another example of whiteness being normative amongst the children in the group interviews at Blessings Church was when I showed Group 3 *The Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerrit van Honthorst, which featured white representations of Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus.

1. HZ: So, here's another picture… This is also someone who drew a picture of…
2. Amy: [pointing to Mary in the picture] She's Mary because… she's Mary (5, female, Latinx, Blessings Church, Group 3)
3. HZ: So, that's Mary…
4. Amy: She's Mary.
5. HZ: …and Joseph…
6. Veronica: [pointing to Joseph in the picture] Joseph… (6, female, Latinx, Blessings Church, Group 3)
7. HZ: …and baby Jesus.

8. Amy: She's Mary.

9. HZ: OK, would you change this picture at all?

10. Veronica: Yeah.

11. HZ: What would you change in this picture?

12. Veronica: I don't know.

13. Amy: [pointing to Mary and then to Joseph in the picture] She have white and he have a white [*sic*]…

14. HZ: Oh… Hey, Jax… Jax, what would you change in this picture?

15. Jax: Nothing.

16. HZ: Nothing? You think this is a good picture of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus?

17. Amy: Yeah… [pointing to the baby] He's Jesus… [pointing to Joseph] Joseph…

In this exchange, the children treated this white representation of a Nativity scene as normative. Respectively, Amy and Veronica were matter of fact in identifying Mary (turn 2) and Joseph (turn 6) in the picture. Amy qualified her identification of Mary by simply saying, "because… she's Mary." The underlying assumption is that there should be no question that the white woman looking lovingly at the baby in the picture was Mary, Jesus' mother. Further, when Veronica was at a loss for what to change in the picture (turn 9-12), Amy was quick to jump in and point out that there was nothing that needed to be changed because both Mary and Joseph had white skin (turn 13). At the end, Jax reaffirmed for the group that the picture was normative and did not need to be changed. Eisner (1994) makes the case that educational curricula (explicit, hidden, and null) epistemologically set the stage for what should be taught in schools. Since Sunday school curricula is modeled after secular educational material, this means that the white

Christian imagination becomes the epistemological standpoint to evaluate what is religiously normative.

First Baptist Church

In Chapter 5, I discuss how race was a salient part of religious identity at First Baptist Church. Specifically, one's identity as an African American was tied to one's identity as a Christian. While the Sunday school curricula used in the early elementary Sunday school classroom I observed communicated a white Christian imagination, the cultural milieu of the church was steeped in African American Christianity from the racially homogeneous congregants to the distinctly African American style of church to the large poster featuring prominent African Americans responsible for building various aspects of the United States. As a result of this expanded source of cultural resources to draw from, I found that the children who participated in the group interviews at First Baptist Church negotiated racial representations of religious imagery in novel ways that I had not anticipated.

Jesus Has Brown Skin. One of the themes that arose from my analysis of the group interview transcripts was that most of the children in the group interviews expressed a preference for non-white representations of religious imagery. For example, when I asked the children in Group 5 to identify which of the pictures I had showed them best represented Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus, all the children chose the African American Expressions image of the Holy Family.

HZ:	Why do you think this is the best picture of Jesus and his family? [indicating African American Expressions picture of Holy Family]
Emily:	Because he has his mom, his dad, and… (7, female, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 5)

HZ: So, why do you…

Lily: You can see! It's a whole family. (7, female, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 5)

HZ: You can see it's a whole… Well, there's a whole family in the other pictures. See, that's a whole family… [holding up an Indian representation of the Holy Family]

Emily: But you can't even see his face…

HZ: But this other one is a whole family, too. [holding up Woonbo Kim Ki-chang's *The Birth of Jesus*]

Emily: Yeah, but…

HZ: And this one has a whole family in there. [holding up Gerrit van Honthorst's *The Adoration of the Shepherds*]

Emily: Yeah, but…

HZ: This has a whole family in it.

Emily: But you can't see his face…

HZ: You can see his face, there. [pointing to baby Jesus in the manger]

Emily: That's only eyes, nose…

HZ: And his face is right here!

Emily: That don't look like Jesus to me.

For both Emily and Lily, the African American Expressions version of the Holy Family was normative. Initially, Emily invoked the image of a family to support her choice of this picture being the best representation. Lily supported and reinforced Emily's statement by saying, "You can see!" Emily's statement suggested that it should be obvious to anyone that the African American representation of the Holy Family was the normative image for the Holy Family. When I playfully challenged the girls' assumption, Emily rejected all the other images, ending with her declarative, "That don't look like

Jesus to me." Later in the interview, Marcala (5, female, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 5), one of the other girls in the group exclaimed, "I love that one!" in response to the African American Expressions image.

Unlike Blessings Church, the children in the group interviews at First Baptist Church did not completely conform to the white Christian imaginary, at least when it came to religious imagery even though the only pictures of Jesus used in the Sunday school areas were the white representations provided by the curriculum they used. The cultural resources available to the children in order to negotiate race and religion extended beyond the Sunday school curriculum to include the cultural milieu of a distinctly African American church. The children were able to envision and accept versions of Jesus that had brown skin as long as those images also had other markers such as clothing type, halos, barns, Mary wearing a robe, etc. In addition to the African American Expressions image of the Holy Family, I showed the children an Indian representation of the Holy Family.

> HZ: Alright, but what about that? [indicating the Indian representation of the Holy Family]
>
> Lily: Oh! I wouldn't change anything.
>
> Emily: Uh, yeah, that looks fine.
>
> HZ: You wouldn't change anything on that?
>
> Marcala: That looks fine.

Throughout the above interchange, the children reinforced each other's' assessments that the Indian version of the Holy Family was "fine." This contrasted with Emily's and Lily's indictments of Gerrit van Honthorst's *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, which features all white people.

Emily: I would change them!

Lily: Look, [Mary] doesn't look real… realistic

Although, all the other religious imagery could have been considered unrealistic, Emily and Lily were not content with the white representations in van Honthorst's painting. This contrasted with the dominant sentiments from the children who participated in the group interviews at All Saints Christian Church and Blessings Church.

Recognition of White Imagery as Normative. While the children who participated in the group interviews at First Baptist Church expressed a preference for non-white representations of people in religious imagery, the children still identified white, or light-skinned, representations as culturally normative. What I mean is that when I asked the children which of the images were the "best picture of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus," five of the eight kids from both group interviews identified either *The Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerrit van Honthorst or *The Birth of Jesus* by Woonbo Kim Ki-chang. Van Honthorst's painting features white people, and Ki-chang's painting features light-skinned Korean people who would pass as white in skin color. While five out of eight children do not constitute a generalizable statistic, it does suggest that the children at First Baptist Church are still constrained, to an extent, by the white Christian imagination embedded in the Sunday school curriculum they use. The predominance of white Bible story characters in all the curricular materials normalized whiteness in the Sunday school space even though that space is homogeneously African American. While most of the children indicated a preference for non-white Bible characters, many were still constrained by the material culture of the Sunday school curricula to concede that the white or light-skinned representations of religious imagery were the "best picture[s]."

This phenomenon parallels what DuBois (1903) describes when he talks about double consciousness:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

By extending DuBois' concept of double consciousness, this could suggest a type of religio-racial double consciousness whereby the children recognize the salience of racial identity to their religious identities yet are aware of the dominance of whiteness in U.S. Christianity.

Constrained Christian Imagination. While the children who participated in the group interviews at First Baptist Church preferred non-white representations of religious imagery, there was an exception to this. The children were unsure of how to characterize the Indigenous American renderings of religious imagery by Father John Giuliani I had showed them. One of those images was *The Holy Family,* which is an iconographic image of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus (as a young boy). According to Giuliani the people in his icon were representative of people from one of the indigenous Pueblo Nations who originally inhabited the southwest part of the United States. The image is devoid of what one would traditionally see in paintings or illustrations of the Holy Family like a barn, blue robe/head covering for Mary, robes for Joseph, etc. The only cultural marker that indicates the icon as one of the Holy Family is the presence of golden halos surrounding Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.

Above, I quoted an interchange between Emily, Lily, and me regarding their choice of the African American Expressions image of an African American Holy Family.

At the end of a playful interaction I had with Emily, I showed her a picture of *The Holy Family* by Father John Giuliani. Emily simply stated, “That don’t look like Jesus to me.”

HZ: [pointing to Giuliani’s painting] Why doesn’t this look like Jesus to you?

Emily: Because… look! Why would he look like this? [pointing to Giuliani’s painting] And look like this picture… This one… [pointing to African American Expressions picture] It’s the same people… How can it be the same people?

Lily: It’s different pictures…

HZ: Well, which one… Which one… Why do you think this one [pointing to African American Expressions picture] is a better picture than this one [pointing to Giuliani’s painting] of Jesus and his mom and dad?

Emily: [pointing to African American Expressions picture] Because he’s a baby on this one, and that’s a… [pointing to Giuliani’s painting]

HZ: Well, he’s just older in that one. [pointing to Giuliani’s painting]

Emily: OK, but… but… why he look like this? [*sic*]

HZ: That’s what you’re supposed to tell me [smiling]… So why not this picture? [pointing to van Honthorst’s painting]

Emily: Because…

HZ: Or this picture? [pointing to Ki-chang’s painting]

Emily: Because all these… have…

Lily: [pointing to African American Expressions picture] This shows, like, the real story cause it’s in a barn…

HZ: This one’s in a barn, too. [pointing to van Honthorst’s painting] And so is this one, too. [pointing to Ki-chang’s painting]

Lily: But it… Oh… He’s right…

HZ: [chuckle]

Lily: But this [pointing to Giuliani’s painting] is different than the story.

This interchange is rich with negotiations surrounding image preferences, normative images, and the extent to which imagery can deviate from what is considered within the bounds of acceptable religious imagery. At the outset, Emily uses the African American Expressions picture as her template for comparing Giuliani's painting with what is within the realm of "normal" for religious imagery. Lily reinforces Emily's claim that Giuliani's painting is simply too different to be considered a legitimate picture of the Holy Family. Both girls had an overwhelming sense of unease about Giuliani's picture as one representing Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. When I sensed that the children were at a loss of words to discuss Giuliani's painting, I moved on to some of the other pictures I had with me. While I was able to establish some shared material markers from those pictures with the African American Expressions picture as evidenced by Lily saying, "Oh… He's right." Lily ended this interaction by bringing our attention back to Giuliani's painting and pointed out that it was so different from what she was used to because it was "different than *the story*" (emphasis mine). By appealing to "the story," Lily assumed that we (the children and I) were drawing from the same set of visual markers that indicated an image of the Holy Family. Emily and Lily mentioned a couple of those markers: Jesus being a baby and the presence of a barn. Previously in this chapter, I mentioned some other markers: Mary wearing a blue robe and headdress, a manger, a star, Joseph wearing robes, halos, etc. These are all markers that are common in various paintings of the Holy Family. Giuliani's painting was devoid of all those visual markers except for halos. Absent most of the common cultural markers, the children experienced a sense of dissonance that was similar to the dissonance I observed in the children at All Saints Christian Church when they encountered non-white representations of religious imagery.

This suggests that even though the children at First Baptist Church were able to envision Jesus and other Bible characters as people of color, they were still constrained by dominant imagery embedded in the material culture of Sunday school curricula, which limited their ability to imagine the Holy Family in ethno-racial contexts devoid of those visual markers.

Gendered Metaphors for God

In addition to observing and analyzing how children racialize their interactions with religious imagery, I was interested in how children constructed their understandings of gender and gendered roles within religious contexts, specifically in the Sunday school setting. Initially, I had planned to elicit the children's interactions with gender and religion by asking the children questions about the masculine and feminine metaphors used in the Bible as they drew pictures of what they thought God and/or Jesus looked like. I also planned on eliciting gendered responses from the Nativity and Holy Family pictures described above. I followed this protocol with the two focus group interviews at All Saints Christian Church. When I initially coded the transcripts from those interviews, I found that I was spending too much time trying to elicit responses about gender and religion from the children, and I was reaching the limits of their attention spans. In other words, I ended up spending too much time trying to corral the children and losing their focus at the end of the interview times. Further, I was not eliciting meaningful deviant responses from any of the children in the first two group interviews (Silverman, 2010).

In accordance with modified grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), I revisited my approach to collecting further data and decided to follow the same protocol I had for eliciting responses around race. To accomplish this, I printed out pictorial representations of masculine and feminine metaphors from the Bible that are used to describe God. (See Table 3.5 for a list of the pictures.) In addition to the metaphor pictures, I also paid attention to when children negotiated gender norms when interacting with the Nativity or Holy Family pictures. As a result of this change, my analysis of the group interviews conducted at All Saints Christian Church do not include photo elicitation data from the gendered metaphor pictures.

For the remainder of the chapter, I focus on presenting the data and analysis from each of the churches showing how children gendered their understandings of God and Jesus as they drew from cultural resources they had gathered from dominant ideologies of gender, from the social fields they interacted with outside of their churches, and from their churches' cultural milieu. I begin with the group interviews from All Saints Christian Church and follow with Blessing Church. I end with how children at First Baptist Church contravened some of what I had expected to find amongst the children's negotiations of gendered views of God and/or Jesus. The one consistent finding from the group interviews across all three churches was that children seemed to draw their assumptions about gender from dominant ideologies of gender in the larger culture as well as from their churches' cultural milieus. This was not surprising since the Sunday school curricula reflected, rather than contested, the dominant ideologies in the larger culture around gender and gender roles.

All Saints Church

As I coded the group interviews at All Saints Christian Church, there were two themes that arose from the data regarding gender and religion. The first theme was the reliance on current external gender markers (i.e. clothing and hair) to clarify the categorizations of people as either male or female. The other theme was normalizing God as male and masculine. I discuss each of these, in turn, below.

Relying on External Gender Markers to Categorize People. When I asked the children in the group interviews at All Saints Christian Church to draw a picture of God or Jesus, one of the girls (Kitty) in Group 2 chose to draw a picture of one of her favorite Bible stories instead. The story that she drew was the time that Jesus and his family took a pilgrimage from their hometown to the Temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was a young boy (Luke 2:41-52). Part of the story is that on the way back to their hometown after visiting Jerusalem, Jesus' parents realize that he was not with their caravan and was probably still in Jerusalem. This is the part of the story that Kitty focused on for her drawing (Figure 7.1)

Kitty:	Um, and the… and they were scared… because they don't know where he is.
HZ:	Yeah…
Kitty:	Uh, uh…
HZ:	…that is very scary…
Kitty:	…and, see they have… their mouth are open…
HZ:	Oh, they're open, there… yeah… So, what do they do next?
Kitty:	No, they're… they're walking back.
HZ:	Oh, they're walking back… OK.
Kitty:	I'm making… I'm not that good at drawing people… So, I'm just making them a shirt. She has a dress. She has a dress on. Look!

Leading up to the above interchange, Kitty had gone into much detail about how Jesus' parents must have been worried. As shown in Figure 7.1, Kitty even included their possible thoughts as they returned to Jerusalem to look for Jesus: "He could be scared" and “He could be hurt.” At the end of this discussion, Kitty decided to add a dress to Mary in order to be able to distinguish Mary from Joseph. Further, Kitty found the need to make sure I knew that Mary was wearing a dress. Consequently, Kitty did not seem to have the need to inform me that Joseph was wearing pants.

A similar scene played out later in the group interview when I showed the children Father John Giuliani’s painting *Hopi Virgin Mother and Child II*. The painting is an icon of Mary and Jesus as a child represented by people from the Hopi tribe.

1. HZ: What do you think they were trying to paint in that picture, there?
2. Kitty: Jesus… Jesus…
3. HZ: Jesus… and you know who that… the person was supposed to be?
4. Kitty: Mary?
5. Maria: Mary or Joseph.
6. HZ: That’s supposed to be… Which one do you think, Maria?
7. Maria: Mary.
8. HZ: Mary? Why did you think it might be Joseph?
9. Kitty: Because of the hat.
10. HZ: Because of the hat?
11. Kitty: Eve… Eve… Even though girls can wear a hat. Also because of the kinds of clothes the person is wearing because Mary would probably wear, like, a dress.
12. HZ: You think she’d wear a dress?
13. Kitty: Yes.
14. HZ: How ‘bout you Lucky?

15. Lucky: I would change it……’cause I would take away the hat and, like, the scarf thing around Jesus and… I would like to… the shoes and the… and I would give Mary a dress.

While the children easily identified Jesus in Giuliani’s icon, they had a sense of unease about the adult character being Mary because she did not carry external gender markers that made sense for the children. Although Kitty hesitantly identified the adult as Mary (turn 4), she quickly jumped in with an explanation that the adult in the painting was Joseph when I asked Maria why she offered the possibility of the adult being Joseph. Kitty followed with a self-identified failed attempt at using a hat as a masculine gender marker and landed on Giuliani’s Mary lacking a dress (turns 8-11) stating, “Mary would probably wear, like, a dress.” Lucky reinforced Kitty’s statements about the hat and lack of a dress, further solidifying dominant ideologies regarding contemporary gender norms surrounding clothing.

These instances, on their own, may seem like innocuous and banal observations. What makes these interactions significant is that the children were imposing contemporary notions of gendered dress to people who lived 2,000 years ago and in a cultural and geographic context set in the Middle East. Women at that time and in that culture did not wear dresses, as we know them; they wore outfits that would be more reminiscent of robes. Men also wore robes rather than pants. Taken along with my findings in Chapter 4 and 6, which show that neither the curricula nor the Sunday school space at All Saints Christian Church offered counter-hegemonic views of gender and gender roles, the children’s use of contemporary gender markers to make characters fit acceptable notions of gendered appearances suggests an epistemological standpoint consistent with a patriarchal Christian imagination.

Normalizing a Masculine God. The second theme that arose from my analysis of the group interview data from All Saints Christian Church was the normalization of God as male and masculine. One of the consequences of a patriarchal Christian imagination is that it constrained the ways in which children were able to construct their understanding of God. One example of this was when I showed the children in Group 1 a painting entitled *Prince of Peace* by Akiane Kramarik. This painting of Jesus featured a rugged-looking white man with short brown hair, thick eyebrows, thick beard, and blue-green eyes.

HZ: Who do you think that's a picture of?

Acorn: God.

Brian: God!

HZ: God? Alright, why do you think that looks like God? What does God look like?

Acorn: That!

HZ: Kent… or Willa… Do you think that's a picture of God?

Willa: [shakes head] (6, female, white, All Saints Christian Church, Group 1)

HZ: No? Who do you think that might be a picture of?

Willa: [shrugs shoulders]

HZ: You don't know?

Kent: I think that's, um, the Holy Spirit. (7, male, white, All Saints Christian Church, Group 1)

HZ: The Holy Spirit? Why… Why do you think that's the Holy Spirit, Kent?

Kent: Because, um… the Holy Spirit has a new robe…

HZ: Mmhmm… So, do you think the Holy Spirit's a boy or a girl.

Kent: A boy.

Acorn and Brian immediately identified Karmarick's painting as a picture of God. When I probed for reasons they thought the picture was one of God, Acorn's response suggested that it should be obvious that God would look like the person in the painting, which was a rugged, white male. When I asked Kent and Willa about their thoughts regarding the painting, Willa was not sure that it represented God and was unsure about who it might be a painting of, or she could have been unwilling to share what she thought. Regardless, Kent jumped in to steer the conversation about the painting back to it being God. Specifically, Kent contended that the picture was a painting of the Holy Spirit. When I probed for clarification on what sex of the Holy Spirit was, he confirmed that he believed the Holy Spirit to be a boy.

Although, the Bible does refer to God as male, I discuss in Chapter 4 some of the theological viewpoints which argue that God is not gendered, and that God as essentially male is more a construct of patriarchy rather than an immutable characteristic of God. Further, the Bible uses masculine and feminine metaphors to describe God (see Table 3.5). Yet, as shown in Chapter 4, the Sunday school curricula used at all three churches implicitly reinforced a patriarchal Christian imagination and did not offer more egalitarian views of gender and gender roles. Consequently, throughout this interchange, the boys' imaginations were captured by Kamarick's painting of a rugged, white man. Drawing from the cultural resources available to them, they identified, without hesitation, the picture as one that represented who God was.

Blessings Church

In Chapter 6, I discussed how gender was enacted and reinforced in the Sunday school classroom at Blessings Church. Although Blessings Church was egalitarian in its theology consistent with the United Methodist Church, I found that there was still a strong reinforcement of popular notions of masculinity and femininity. Moreover, I found that the children reinforced a gender binary through policing gendered norms as well as self-segregating by sex/gender. In the group interviews, I found that children syncretized dominant ideologies of gender with their understandings of God and the ways in which one could conceive of God. As I coded through the group interview transcripts from Blessings Church there were two themes that arose from the data. The first theme was the pervasiveness of a strict gender binary whereby God could only be represented by men and masculine metaphors. The second theme was the devaluation of the mothering role.

Reinforcing God's Place in the Gender Binary. As part of the group interviews with the children at Blessings Church, I printed out pictures based on various masculine and feminine metaphors for God that can be found in the Bible. There were a total of 19 pictures: twelve of them were feminine metaphors and/or included female images and seven of them were masculine metaphors and/or included male images (See Table 3.5). As I showed the various pictures to the children, I asked them if they thought each picture was a good representation of who God is or if they thought that God could be the person or animal in the picture. When it came to the masculine images, the children emphatically stated that five of the seven images could definitely represent God. For example, when I showed the children a picture of a drawing of a cartoon-like cosmic king sitting on a throne in space above the earth, most of the children were quick to say that it represented God.

HZ: How about this? You think that’s a good representation of who God is?

Justina: Ohh!

Gecko: That one!

Justina: Yeah, that one’s good.

HZ: Why do you think that one’s…

Gecko: God and the whole earth.

HZ: Oh, cause he’s over the earth and stuff?

Gecko: Yeah.

HZ: Do you think God’s a boy or a girl?

Justina: Boy.

HZ: Why do you think God’s a boy?

Gecko: Because, uh, that picture… [points to Jesus pic on cabinet]

HZ: Uh huh

Gecko: He looks like a boy.

Not only do Gecko and Justina affirm that this picture of a king represents God, but Gecko appeals to the material culture of a picture of Jesus on the wall in order to substantiate his reasoning. This is the same picture that Gecko referenced when it came to his constructions of race and religious imagery, which I described earlier in this chapter. Another example of firmly placing God in the male/masculine category was when I showed the children a painting of a carpenter sawing a piece of wood.

HZ: How about this picture?

Justina: Jesus!

Gecko: Yes, yes, yes… Jesus… yes.

HZ: Why do you think that's Jesus?

Gecko: Because he looks like it on there [points to picture of Jesus on cabinet].

Similar to the reactions to the picture of the cosmic king, Justina and Gecko enthusiastically agreed that the image of a male/masculine carpenter character could represent Jesus. Also, Gecko, once again, drew from the material culture available to him in order to support his understanding of God as male.

When it came to the feminine pictures, most of the children were either uneasy about them representing God, or they rejected the idea that those pictures could represent God. An example of this was when I showed the children in Group 1 a picture of an older woman working at a potters' wheel.

HZ: Alright, so how about this picture… of the lady…

Kids: [chuckling at the suggestion that a woman could represent God or Jesus]

HZ: …making a pot?

Jax/Veronica: [chuckling] No.

HZ: Why not?

Veronica: Because…

HZ: Because why?

Amy: A Granny!

HZ: A granny? You think that represents God or Jesus?

Veronica: No

HZ: No? Why not?

Veronica: Because she’s old… she’s old.

Jax: [laughter]

Veronica: It’s a girl!

HZ: So, Jax, why do you think that doesn’t represent God or Jesus?

Jax: Because is a granny…

HZ: Because it’s a granny?... Alright…

Jax: Grannies are old…

When I introduced the possibility of God being represented by a woman, the children thought I was joking around with them. As I probed further, the children were unable to conceive of God being represented by a woman as evidenced by their insistence that the picture was of a “granny.” Veronica even took added measure to make sure I knew what being a granny meant: “It’s a girl!” While the Bible has many feminine metaphors for God and Jesus (e.g., a seamstress, a woman looking for a coin, a hen gathering her chicks, etc.), there was a null curriculum surrounding gender and gender norms (see Chapter 4). I argue that this null curriculum left the children with a lack of cultural resources they could draw from to envision God as apart from gender. This null curriculum created an ideological vacuum that was filled by dominant ideologies supporting a patriarchal Christian imagination.

Devaluing the Mother Role. As a consequence of the inability to envision God using feminine imagery and metaphors, the children inadvertently participated in the devaluation of the mothering role. There were two notable examples of this in the group interviews. One example was when I showed the children in Group 3 a picture of a woman giving birth and asked them if it represented God or Jesus.

HZ: Let’s look at this picture here. Does this represent God or Jesus?

Kids: [emphatically] Noooo!

HZ: Why not?

Jax: Because this doesn’t have… because that one don’t go with God.

Veronica: … a have baby [*sic*]

HZ: Because she’s having a baby?

Eva: Yeah.

Amy: Yeah.

HZ: So that doesn’t represent God or Jesus?

Kids: [emphatically] Noooo!

HZ: Why not?

Veronica: Because she have baby [*sic*]. She cannot be Jesus.

The children were unanimous and emphatic in their agreement that Jesus could not be represented by a woman giving birth even though this is a metaphor used in the Bible to describe God (e.g., Isaiah 42:14). Jax was visibly bothered by the suggestion that Jesus could be represented by a woman having a baby, and he met that unease by strongly expressing that a woman giving birth “don’t go with God.” The rest of the children agreed with Jax’s sentiment, and Veronica declaratively ended the discussion by restating that the woman in the picture was having a baby and could not be Jesus.

Another notable example of the children devaluing mothering was when I showed the children a picture of a woman breastfeeding.

HZ: How about a mother feeding her baby? Could that be like God.

Justina: Ewww. No, no, no, no

Gecko: No, no, no

HZ: No? Why not?

Justina: Cause that… that's nasty.

HZ: Feeding a baby is nasty?

Gecko: She's a put her on her…

HZ: But that's how babies eat. So, you don't think God is like a mom giving… feeding her baby?

Kids: [emphatically shaking their heads]

It was inconceivable in this interchange for the children to consider God being represented by a mom breastfeeding her child even though God is compared to a nursing mother in the Bible (Isaiah 49:15). Moreover, the children expressed disgust and embarrassment at the image and thought of a nursing mother. Gecko was even unable to use one of the many words for "breast" to describe what was happening in the picture.

In both examples above, the children's negative reactions towards mothering and linking God with a mothering role were consistent with the ways hegemonic masculinity reinforces a gendered hierarchy "which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Lacking in religious cultural resources that offer counter hegemonic views of gender, the children were left to draw from dominant ideologies of gender and reproduce the patriarchal Christian imagination within their peer groups.

First Baptist Church

In Chapter 6, I noted some differences in how gender was negotiated in the early elementary Sunday school classroom at First Baptist Church compared to the other churches in this study. Although First Baptist Church was theologically complementarian, it still allowed for women in various areas of leadership at the church. The only area I noticed that was closed to women was clergy ordination and all the responsibilities that came with that. Something else I noted was that the many of the children engaged in cross-gendered play, and there was less of an aversion to cross-gendered friendships than at the other two churches. I suggested this could be that African American children are socialized into gendered norms that allow for more acceptance of cross-gendered relationships (Moore, 2003). While there seemed to be some level of fluidity in gendered performance at First Baptist Church, I did find that gender identity (linked to sex category) was regularly reinforced and policed. This was the cultural milieu the children who participated in the group interviews at First Baptist were immersed in.

As I coded the transcripts from the group interviews at First Baptist Church, there was one major theme that arose from the data. The theme was that there was flexibility in attributing feminized roles to God.

God Can Take on Feminized Gender Roles. As I showed the children who participated in the group interviews at First Baptist the various pictures of masculine and feminine metaphors for God that came from the Bible, there was little dissent when it came to connecting God with masculine imagery (e.g., a cosmic king, a knight, a male shepherd, a male carpenter, a lion, etc.) The two instances when a child did not think a male image was a good representation for God happened as a result of the images not resembling other images of God or Jesus that were hanging on the wall or part of the décor.

In the case of the feminine metaphors, the children in both groups were open to the possibility that God could be represented by feminine metaphors and/or figures. After rejecting a couple of the feminine metaphor pictures, the children were receptive to God being represented by feminine images. For example, when I showed the children in Group 5 a picture of a mother bear with her cubs (Hosea 13:8), Marcala and Caleb stated that the picture could only represent God if it was a "dad bear" because "a mama bear couldn't be God." Emily and Lily disagreed and said that the mama bear could be a representation of God because "she protects the cubs and takes care of the cubs [like God does for us]." Emily and Lily contextualized what they knew about God as someone who protects and cares for them and applied that to the metaphor of a mama bear.

An example from Group 6 was when I showed the children a picture of a seamstress (Nehemiah 9:21).

HZ: OK, how about this? A seamstress. Someone who's sewing.

Danisa: What's that? What's a sewing? (5, female, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 6)

HZ: On a sewing machine…

Jacob: Wrong… wrong… wrong…

HZ: Making clothes.

Olivia: Ewww (7, female, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 6)

HZ: Do you think that's a good representation of God?

Olivia: No! Ugh.

HZ: Someone who makes clothes?

Telia: No. (7, male, African American, First Baptist Church, Group 6)

HZ: Danisa, you keep nodding your head saying yes. Why do you think yes?

Danisa: Because people might not have stuff and then they can go to… there to get stuff 'cause there might be no other stores in other places.

While everyone else in the group had rejected the image of a seamstress as a representation of God, Danisa kept insisting the opposite by way of nodding her head for the duration of the above conversation. In the end, Danisa contextualized God as someone who provides what people need like clothing.

This type of negotiation was repeated with subsequent pictures of feminine metaphors for God in both groups. Each time, the reasons for accepting feminine images as representative of God surrounded care, protection, and provision. One reason for this openness by the children to allow God to take on femininized roles and metaphors may be the influence of Black Liberation Theology and its emphasis on the contextualization of scripture to one's immediate circumstances, especially for those who are poor and marginalized (Cone, 2010). This would suggest that the religio-cultural milieu of an African American church may offer an epistemological standpoint that children can draw from and use in their constructions of gender and religion, which is possibly subversive to the patriarchal Christian imagination.

Conclusion

Throughout all the group interviews I conducted at the three churches in this study, I encountered evidence of a white patriarchal Christian imagination that the children drew from as they encountered racialized and gendered imagery that was religiously motivated. Whether it be the normalization of whiteness in images of the Holy Family or the uncritical acceptance of masculine metaphors and imagery to represent God, the children at all three churches drew from dominant ideologies surrounding race and gender in their interactions with the images, me, and each other. Each group's interactions where also influenced by each churches' racial makeup, religio-cultural milieu, and theological standpoints.

What I found was that the children who participated in the group interviews at All Saints Christian Church reinforced and reproduced a white patriarchal Christian imagination. This was, in part, a result of All Saints Christian Church being a predominantly white church that materially and symbolically had a null curriculum about what God and the Bible have to say about issues of race and gender. As a result, children relied on cultural resources from dominant culture and other social fields they interact with.

What I found with the children who participated in the group interviews at Blessings Church was similar to All Saints Christian Church. Although Blessings Church was a predominantly Latinx church with an egalitarian theological standpoint, it was surrounded by whiteness and heavily influenced by hegemonic masculinity. As such, the children normalized whiteness in the religious imagery I presented to them. Additionally, the children normalized God as male and masculine while devaluing the mothering metaphors of God that come from the Bible. Like All Saints Christian Church, there was a null religious curriculum regarding race and gender, so the children relied on cultural resources outside of the church as they constructed their understandings of race and gender within the group interviews.

What I found with the children who participated in the group interviews at First Baptist Church was qualitatively different from All Saints Christian Church and Blessings Church. Unlike the other two churches in this study, First Baptist Church was a predominantly African American Church, and in Chapter 5, I discussed the salience of racial identity to religion. This meant that First Baptist Church had an intentionally different religio-cultural milieu that contrasted with the white patriarchal Christian imagination embedded in the Sunday school curriculum they used for children. As such, the children were able to draw from both sets of cultural resources as they constructed their understandings of race, gender, and religion in the group interviews. Although the curriculum had a null religious curriculum regarding race and gender, the church had an explicit curriculum about race and religion that filled that void.

These findings add to previous work explicating how children negotiate meanings of race (Moore, 2002, 2003a; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001) and gender (Boyle et al., 2003; Thorne, 1993) amongst each. Further, these findings expand on the ways children are influenced by institutional structures and practices that implicitly reproduce and reinforce dominant ideologies of race (Lewis, 2003) and gender (Bigler & Liben, 2007; Pascoe, 2011; Thorne, 1993). While these previous studies acknowledge children's agency and creativity in "playing" with meanings of race and gender in various contexts as well as the realities of an racialized and gendered implicit curriculum, there are scant studies that examine the extent to which children interactions are enabled and constrained by the institutional spaces they interact in as well as by the guiding documents (i.e.

written curriculum) that mediate these spaces. My findings in this chapter suggest that children's interactions around race and gender (at least in a religious context) are mediated by three different cultural milieus: 1) dominant societal race and gender ideologies, 2) the cultural milieu of the churches they attend (i.e. racial composition, theological stances on gender, denominational affiliation, etc.), and 3) the material and symbolic culture embedded in Sunday school curricula.

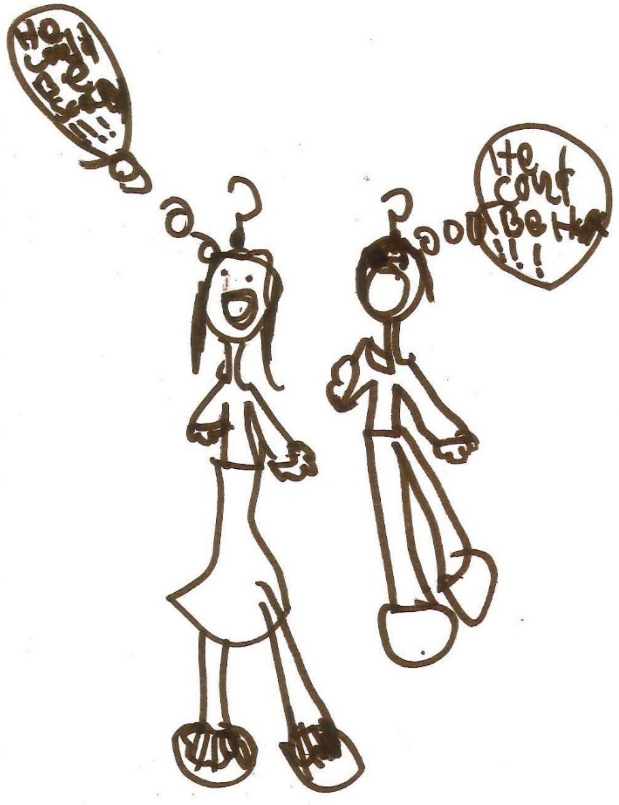
He cont Be He!!!

Figure 7.1 Kitty’s drawing of a worried Mary and Joseph looking for Jesus as a boy

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSIONS

I began this dissertation with a personal experience that led me to pursue the questions and subsequent research study to address those questions. I was interested in exploring the sources of material and symbolic culture that children use in their interactions about race and gender. That interest led to this study exploring the extent to which larger culture, by way of religious educational curricular materials, simultaneously enables and constrains children's interpretive and interactional constructions of race and gender.

Since I began this project, the research contained in this dissertation has taken on even greater social significance. Following eight years of the first African American President of the United States, the 2016 U.S. election produced a president with a history of misogyny and who continues to stir up racial conflict from suggesting that some white supremacists protesting the removal of a Confederate monument in Charlottesville were "very fine people" (Gray, 2017) to advocating for a physical wall on the U.S.-Mexico border and deporting "bad hombres" (*Trump Raises Eyebrows With "Bad Hombres" Line*, n.d.) to his insistence in calling the novel coronavirus (2019-n-CoV) responsible for the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic the "Chinese Virus" (Rogers et al., 2020). Given that 80% of those who self-identify as white evangelicals voted for Trump in 2016 according to CNN exit polls and that 80% of white evangelicals who attend church at least once a month approve of Trump's performance as president according to a 2017 Pew Research study (Smith, 2017), one has to question the ways in which racist and sexist ideologies have become entrenched in churches.

As someone who identifies as Christian and has worked in churches developing and directing the religious education of children, this research is personally and professionally salient. Indeed, this study extends beyond personal significance. According to the 2014 Pew Research Religious Landscape Study, seven out of ten people identify as “Christian” in the United States; one quarter of people in the U.S. identify as belonging to an evangelical denomination. Further, in describing efforts of white evangelicals to deal with issues of racism in and out of the church, Emerson and Smith (2001) state:

> Despite devoting considerable time and energy to solving the problem of racial division, white evangelicalism likely does more to perpetuate the racialized society than to reduce it…
>
> Most white evangelicals, directed by their cultural tools, fail to recognize the institutionalization of racialization—in economic, political, educational, social, and religious systems. They therefore often think and act as if these problems do not exist. (p. 170)

I would argue that similar points about evangelicals could be made regarding gendered issues. In light of this information, the research outlined in the previous chapters takes on greater significance within churches and in larger society.

The findings in my research lead to some vital conclusions regarding the influence of the material and symbolic culture embedded in Sunday school curricula on children’s negotiations of race and gender in the Sunday school spaces they inhabit. First, Sunday school has been constructed as a place to learn about the Bible and God, to the exclusion of all else. In the words of the stereotypical response I get from some people when I tell them about my research, “It’s *just* Sunday School! It’s just about learning what’s in the Bible.” In Chapter 4, I discussed how the curricula was set up in a way that emphasized learning Bible knowledge by focusing on the material facts of the Bible stories. This led to the Bible being treated as a source of deontological precepts that had ignored the nuanced and complex realities of the Bible stories as well as silencing the Bible when it came to issues of race and gender. In Chapter 5 and 6, I presented findings that showed how Sunday school teachers were constrained by a dependence and duty to follow the curricula. This prevented Sunday school teachers from taking advantage of spontaneous opportunities to contest dominant ideologies of race and gender. To be sure, the emphasis on teaching Bible knowledge obscured the implicit and explicit ways dominant ideologies were reproduced in the Sunday school space. In Chapter 7, I discussed how children were at a loss of religious culture that spoke to issues of race and gender to draw from as they considered intersections between race, gender, and understandings of God.

The second conclusion from my research is that there was a null curriculum surrounding issues of race and gender in the Sunday school materials the churches in my study depended on. In Chapter 4, I presented findings where discussions about racial discrimination were presented in the preparatory materials for Sunday school teachers, only to erase those discussions in the teaching scripts (e.g., the story of the Good Samaritan). In Chapter 5 and 6, I discussed how the null curriculum created an ideological vacuum that was filled with the aspects of the dominant cultural ideologies of race and gender that the children and Sunday school teachers brought with them to the Sunday school spaces. In Chapter 7, I discussed how, in the absence of religious messages that counter dominant ideologies, children syncretized race and gender ideologies from other social fields with their conceptions of who God was.

The third conclusion from my research is that the combination of an uncritical emphasis on only teaching the Bible and a null curriculum on race and gender, led to the construction and reproduction of a white patriarchal Christian imagination. In Chapter 4, I presented findings that revealed a vast majority of the material culture (e.g., Bible story pictures, illustrations, videos, etc.) of the Sunday school curricula contained images of white people. Further, the curricula was the product of a *white habitus* that assumed a shared source of material and symbolic culture. In the case of gender, an overwhelming number of Bible stories featured male Bible characters. In the few instances women were featured, they were either de-centralized or the significance of their actions were trivialized. In Chapters 5 and 6, I discussed the ways in which whiteness and hegemonic masculinity were normalized in the interactions between children and Sunday school teachers whether it be about racializing music types or reinforcing culturally dominant gendered norms. In Chapter 7, I presented findings that showed how most of the children preferred images of God that were white and masculine. Indeed, some of the children, when given the opportunity, suggested changes to religious imagery that normalized whiteness and masculinity.

Contributions to the Discipline

In addition to the findings and conclusions in this study, my research contributes to larger bodies of literature in the sociologies of religion and education, social psychology, and critical race and gender. My research also contributes to ethnographic methodologies.

Literatures in the sociology of education have largely ignored religious education, understandably relegating religious education to the sociology of religion and religious studies. Likewise, those in the sociology of religion have overlooked the critical work on curricular development (Apple, 2004; Eisner, 1994) and how curriculum influences classroom climate and students' identity development (Wortham, 2005). Although the development of religious educational materials parallel the development of public school curriculum (Betts, 1924), there is little, if any, crossover between the two bodies of literature. I maintain that this delineation between studies in secular education and religious education arises from a false dichotomy between religious education and secular education. Moreover, religious education falls under the "sacred" and secular education falls under the "profane." My findings indicated that while churches and curricula constructed Sunday school as simply a time to learn about the Bible, Sunday school material also communicated ideologies and assumptions about race and gender via the implicit and null curricula. These findings expand studies of religious education beyond studies that explore how children learn about religion to how children learn about seemingly "secular" issues like race and gender. My findings also provide some empirical evidence of null curriculum by comparing the messages in Sunday school leaders' material and the teaching scripts. For example, issues of racial tensions and prejudice were discussed in the leader's guide for teaching the story of the Good Samaritan, but the teaching scripts exchanged those racial tensions for simply being kind to people in need (see Flinders et al., 1986 for a discussion on the problematics of measuring a null curriculum).

Another area that this research contributes to is the social psychological literature, specifically the literatures that focus on race and gender socialization. My findings indicate that religious institutions are powerfully significant sites where children are not only socialized into religious beliefs and norms but into social inequalities like racism and sexism. Further, I found that when countercultural ideologies of race and gender were syncretized with religious ideologies those resultant ideologies became noteworthy sources of cultural resources children drew from to contest dominant ideologies of race and gender. An example of this was at First Baptist church in how the children normalized religious imagery featuring people of color even though the material cultural resources in the curriculum featured white representations of Bible characters. This research suggests that religio-cultural influences should be considered as mediating factors in children's socialization into secular beliefs and attitudes as well as in identity development.

A third contribution of this research is in the areas of critical studies of race and gender. This study adds to critical studies of race conducted in religious institutions (Bracey & Moore, 2017; Cobb et al., 2015; Emerson & Smith, 2001) as well as to critical studies of gender in religious institutions (Bartkowski, 1997, 2001; Gallagher, 2004; Hoffmann & Bartkowski, 2008) by focusing on the role of religious educational materials in maintaining epistemological standpoints that reproduce and perpetuate dominant ideologies of race and gender. One of the conclusions of this research was that the Sunday school curricula constructed a white patriarchal Christian imaginary that subversively normalized whiteness and hegemonic masculinity in the Sunday school spaces. Consequently, this study expands critical research into race and gender to include interrogating religious education materials to uncover the ways that racial and gendered dominance are embedded in the material and symbolic culture of those materials.

A final contribution of this research is a methodological one, specifically to methodologies of child-centered qualitative research. Recently, Corsaro (2020) called for researchers who study the lives of children to conduct more longitudinal comparative ethnographies in order to more fully capture the ways in which children actively participate in their socialization through nonlinear means. While I agree with this call, I argue that Corsaro is heavily relying on a single methodological approach rather than looking to incorporate multiple qualitative methods as a means to triangulate data and provide a greater sense of validity and reliability to one's data and subsequent analysis. Although, multiple qualitative methods are not novel, I needed an innovative way to generate data surrounding specific questions in addition to the ethnographic data I collected. I accomplished this by incorporating group interview with children from the churches in this study and using visual methods such as children's drawings and photo elicitation in the course of those interviews to see how children constructed meanings of race and gender around religious imagery. By combining ethnographic field methods with group interview methods, I was able to capture data from the best of both qualitative worlds: spontaneous naturalistic data over a protracted period of time as well as focused qualitative data in a simulated interactional environment. This novel methodological approach allowed me to draw connections between what I observed during the ethnographic site visits and the group interviews, which better informed the analysis of my findings and subsequent conclusions from the study.

Recommendations for Churches and Religious Education Publishers

I consider this study to be a work of critical and public sociology. As such, I offer recommendations for churches and religious education publishers that are interested in creating interactional environments and resources that more critically engage issues of race and gender within Christian churches. These recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions in this study. These recommendations are also informed by the feedback and conversations I've had with scholars and practitioners in response to my various presentations on this research. I write to each audience, in turn, beginning with churches.

Recommendations for Churches

First, Churches need to be aware that Sunday school is not just a site for religious socialization and the transfer of religious knowledge to children. The Sunday school space is an active site where children are socialized into racial and gendered inequalities by way of their interactions with each other, Sunday school teachers, the material culture of the Sunday school space, ideologies embedded in the Sunday school materials, and the religio-cultural ideologies of their churches. Second, churches need to be aware of the null curriculum surrounding race and gender. To ignore the presence of a null curriculum creates an ideological vacuum that will be filled up with the dominant ideologies that children and Sunday school teachers bring with them to the Sunday school space. In turn, those dominant ideologies will be syncretized with religious ideologies and take on the status of sacred ideologies. Third, Sunday school teachers should look for and take advantage of connections that can be made between the Bible lessons and issues of race and gender. These connections do not require theological or sociological expertise. Many times, these connections are hinted at through the leaders' materials. For example, the curricula analyzed in this study and curricula in another study I conducted (Zonio, 2020) included the story of the Good Samaritan. In most of the leaders' materials, the curricula highlights the racial tensions between Samaritans and Jewish people and how Jesus usurped those prejudices by casting the Samaritan as the hero in the story and example of what it means to be a neighbor. The lesson scripts erase the racial dimensions of the lesson and, instead, focus on the importance of being nice to people and helping those in need. In this example, it would be rather simple to include the dimensions of racial prejudice and highlight how Jesus challenged those prejudices when teaching the lesson to the children.

Recommendations for Religious Education Publishers

Publishers interested in addressing the deficiencies in Sunday school curricula presented in this study will need to invest a substantial amount of time, resources, and money to critically examine the multiple aspects of their curricula. First, they need to include perspectives from marginalized voices throughout the course of this examination (see de la Torre, 2002). This includes, but is not limited to, hiring men and women of color as editors, writers, and illustrators who will have significant input into each stage of the (re)development of curricula. Second, publishers need to develop mechanisms for evidence-based evaluations of curricula to ensure that they contain material and symbolic culture that explicitly contests culturally dominant ideologies of race and gender.

Limitations of this Study

As with all research studies, there are limitations to this study. I note these possible limitations in this section.

First, this study was a qualitative study of three specific cases, which presents challenges for the findings in this study to be readily generalized. This does not mean that my findings cannot be contextualized. Rigorous qualitative research seeks to describe social processes that constitute larger social phenomena (Silverman, 2010). To the extent possible, I attempted to establish the reliability of my findings by linking them to established theories as well as to larger quantitative studies with findings related to this study. I also attempted to establish validity of my findings by adhering to a constant comparative analytic whereby I compared emerging themes during my analysis with previous themes, noting differences and similarities across the data by way of keeping analytical memos. In this process, I was able to incorporate new themes as well as refine themes that had already emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Another possible limitation of this study was the limited number of group interviews conducted at each of the churches in this study. Ideally, there should have been more group interviews to ensure that there was a saturation of themes from the data. A larger number of group interviews would also make certain that marginalized and minority viewpoints were not obscured by dominant voices in the extant groups included in this study. In order to mitigate these issues, I analyzed and interpreted the group interviews in light of the interactions recorded in the field notes I collected over the course of 15-months as a participant observer at the three churches in this study.

Directions for Future Research

The findings and conclusions included in this study open avenues of future research. One of those avenues of research would be to conduct similar qualitative studies with other types of Christian churches (i.e. progressive, mainline, multiracial). A purpose of such studies would be to explore any differences in the types of curriculum that these churches use, how they utilize those curricula, and the extent to which children's negotiations of race and gender are influenced by the religio-cultural milieu of those churches as well as the material and symbolic culture embedded in the curricula they use. This would expand an understanding of the ways churches serve as sites for children's socialization into secular behaviors and attitudes, especially around race and gender.

Another area of study would be to explore the ways children learn about race and gender in other religious traditions by way of the religious educational materials and other methods of religious socialization specific to those religions.

A third avenue of research would be to conduct a larger scale mixed methods study investigating the links between children's attitudes of race and gender to varying measurements of religion, religiosity, and spirituality. This study could include a survey questionnaire collecting various measurements of race and gender attitudes as well as measurements of religion, religiosity, and spirituality coupled with in-depth qualitative individual and/or group interviews. This study would expand an understanding of the significance of specific church practices and beliefs on children's socialization into race and gender. Further a study like this would be more generalizable.

A last avenue of research would be to explore the transnational effects of U.S. Christianity on global issues of race and gender. Churches, religious publishers, and missionary organization regularly export U.S. produced curriculum to various parts of the world. For example, anecdotally a colleague of mine spent his sabbatical in Singapore and texted me a picture of Singaporean children singing a song at a church event. The church had projected a video with lyrics for the song, and the animated version of Jesus in the video was white. Since he was familiar with this research study, he captioned the text with, "White Jesus is even in Singapore!"

In Closing

This research paints a grim picture of the influence of Sunday school curriculum on children's race and gender socialization in the Sunday school space. While I offer my suggestions to churches and religious education publishers above, I did find a glimmer of hope in how race and gender was negotiated at First Baptist Church. As an historically African American church, racial identity and religious identity were inextricably intertwined. This meant that, in addition to the influence of the material and symbolic culture embedded in the Sunday school materials and the influence of the dominant cultural ideologies of race and gender, children were also influenced by the religio-cultural milieu of their African American church. Consequently, some of the religio-cultural ideologies contested the other two cultural influences that enabled and constrained how children negotiated issues of race and gender. For example, there was the influence of a strong African American racial identity supported by a distinct worship style, material culture in the form of posters highlighting contributions of African Americans in society, and the varied emphases of addressing social issues the disproportionately disadvantage African Americans. This identity was reinforced in the context of the religious space of the church the children attended. Therefore, when it came time for children to interact with religious imagery, the children from First Baptist church were the most open to accepting people of color representing Bible characters like Mary, Joseph, and Jesus (the Holy Family). Truly, they preferred the religious images with people of color over those with white people, even though the Sunday school curricula used at First Baptist uses Bible story illustrations that feature white people. This suggests that the presence of counter cultural ideologies offer children cultural resources they can draw from to more creatively contest, transform, and reproduce their understandings of race and gender.

APPENDIX A. SAMPLE CHURCH LETTER OF CONSENT

[Date]

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter confirms that Henry Zonio, a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Kentucky, has permission to conduct the research study entitled “Protestant Sunday School Curriculum and How Young Children Learn About Race and Gender” at [Name of Church].

Henry will be observing the children’s ministry during the regular weekend worship times as well as during various special events between [date] and [date]. Henry will adhere to the church’s child risk management policies.

Henry will also be working with the children’s ministry staff to identify and contact parents or guardians of children who are eligible to participate in the study. The children will be between five and seven years of age and regular attendees of [Name of Church]. Up to five children will participate in each focus group interview on the church premises on a date between [date] and January [date]. The group interview will be approximately one and one-half hours long and consist of open-ended questions the children can interact with each other on and answer. Informed consent from parents and informed assent from children will be obtained in order for the children to participate in the group interview.

We understand that neither [Name of Church] nor the study participants will receive compensation for participation in this study. We also understand that [Name of Church] and the participants will not incur any costs as part of the study.

Sincerely,

[Signature and Printed Name(s) of authorized church representative(s) and Title(s) of those signing]

APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Parental Consent to Participate in a Research Study

KEY INFORMATION FOR PROTESTANT SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND HOW YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT RACE AND GENDER:

Your child or ward is being invited to take part in a research study about how children learn about race and gender in the context of Protestant church Sunday school settings.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE, PROCEDURES, AND DURATION OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn the way Sunday school curriculum influences how children learn about race and gender. Your child or ward will be asked to participate in a group interview made up of their peers from the church you attend. The interviews will take place onsite at the church you attend. Your child or ward's participation in this study will last one hour. An authorized church staff member who is not affiliated with this study will be present during the interviews along with the primary investigator. Parents are welcome to be present during the interviews.

WHAT ARE REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?

While there is no anticipated direct benefit to you or your child or ward, we hope the results of this study will help us better understand the affect curriculum has on how children learn about race and gender. We also hope that this research serves to better inform curriculum writers and developers on how to approach presentations of race and gender. For a complete description of benefits, refer to the Detailed Consent.

WHAT ARE REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE NOT TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?

You or your child or ward may choose not to volunteer for a number of reasons including (but not limited to) scheduling conflicts, a child's hesitancy to participate in an interview setting, or a preference to not participate in research studies. For a complete description of risks, refer to the Detailed Consent/Appendix.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If your child or ward decides to take part in the study, it should be because your child or ward really wants to volunteer. You or your child or ward will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if they choose not to volunteer.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, OR CONCERNS?

The person in charge of this study is Henry Zonio of the University of Kentucky, Department of Sociology. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study his/her contact information is: henry.zonio@uky.edu.

If you have any questions, suggestions, or concerns about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact staff in the University of Kentucky (UK) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Monday-Friday at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428.

DETAILED CONSENT:
ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU WOULD NOT QUALIFY FOR THIS STUDY?

In the event you provide consent for your child or ward to participate in the study but your child or ward does not assent to participating in the study, then your child or ward would not qualify for this study. Further, if you do not provide consent for the audio of the interview to be recorded or your child does not assent to being recorded, then your child would not qualify for this study.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research interviews will be conducted onsite at the church you attend. You and your child or ward will need to come one time during the study. The group interview will last an hour. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is limited to the one hour for the group interview.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

Your child or ward will be asked to participate in a group interview made up of about five children from the church you attend. An authorized church staff member who is not affiliated with this study will be present during the interviews along with the primary investigator. Parents are welcome to be present during the interviews. At the beginning of the group interview, the interviewer will go over the child assent form and obtain verbal confirmation from your child that they want to participate in the interview. The children in the group will be given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have about the study, the group interview, or anything else they may have questions about prior to beginning the group interview. Each child will be given the opportunity to withdraw from the study prior to beginning the interview, in case they have changed their mind about participating. The children will also be informed that they can choose to end their participation in the interview at any time during the interview process.

At the outset of the interview, the children will each be given an opportunity to choose a different name for themselves (pseudonym) that is different from their own that can be used in any publications or presentations of this study. This pseudonym will be used for the duration of the recorded portion of the group interview, so that your child or ward's identity is kept private on these recordings. Only those directly involved with this research study will have access to your child or ward's actual name. Your child or ward will be asked open-ended questions about their church related experiences. Your child or ward will also be asked to draw about their church related experiences.

The audio of the group interview will be recorded and transcribed for analytical purposes. (For information on how these will be stored and protected, see: WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?)

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no anticipated risks to your or your child or ward from participating in this study.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no anticipated direct benefit to you or your child or ward from participating in this study other than the extent to which you or your child or ward value contributing your knowledge and expertise to research.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no anticipated costs associated with taking part in this study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

When we write about or share the results from the study, we will write about the combined information. We will keep your name, your child or ward's name, and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. All recordings, transcripts, or other materials from the group interviews will be digitally stored and password protected by the principal investigator. Any hardcopies of transcripts or other materials will have all identifying information removed from them and stored in a secure place by the Principal Investigator.

You should know that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to share your information with authorities if you or your child or ward reports information about a child being abused or if you or your child or ward poses a danger to yourself or someone else. Officials of the University of Kentucky may look at or copy pertinent portions of records that identify you.

CAN YOU CHOOSE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY EARLY?

You or your child or ward can choose to leave the study at any time. You or your child or ward will not be treated differently if you or your child or ward decide to stop taking part in the study.

If you or your child or ward choose to leave the study early, data collected until that point will remain in the study database and may not be removed.

The investigators conducting the study may need to remove your child or ward from the study. This may occur for a number of reasons. You may be removed from the study if you or your child or ward are not able to follow the directions or they find that your child or ward's participation in the study is more risk than benefit to them.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You or your child or ward will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHAT IF NEW INFORMATION IS LEARNED DURING THE STUDY THAT MIGHT AFFECT YOUR DECISION TO PARTICIPATE?

You will be informed if the investigators learn new information that could change your mind or your child or ward's about staying in the study.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

The Primary Investigator for this study is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Kentucky in the Sociology Department. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Edward Morris.

FUTURE USE OF YOUR INFORMATION:

Your or your child or ward's information collected for this study will NOT be used or shared for future research studies, even if we remove the identifiable information like name or date of birth.

INFORMED CONSENT SIGNATURE PAGE

You are a participant or are authorized to act on behalf of the participant. This consent includes the following:

- Key Information Page
- Detailed Consent

You will receive a copy of this consent form after it has been signed.

____ ______________________

Signature of research subject's legal representative Date
(If there are two parents/guardians legally responsible
for the care and custody of the child, then both must sign)

____

Printed name of child research subject

____

Printed name(s) of research subject's legal representative

Representative(s) relationship to subject:

____

____

Printed name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent Date

____

Signature of Principal Investigator or Sub/Co-Investigator

APPENDIX C. CHILD ASSENT FORM

Henry Zonio will go over this with each child.

You are invited to be in a research project being done by a student from the University of Kentucky named Henry. You are invited because Henry wants kids to tell him about what they do and learn at church.

If you want to be in the study, you'll hang out at church with some other kids around your age from church and tell Henry about what you learn at church. You don't have to answer any of the questions you don't want to. You will only do this one time, and it will take an hour. You will not be asked to do anything dangerous.

You will not get any money for helping out with this project, but you will be helping Henry and other grown-ups learn about some of the things you talk about at church.

Your parents have already given permission for you to help out with this project. When Henry writes his report using the stuff you talk about during this time, he will not be using your real name. Before we get started, you will get to choose a name that is different than yours that will be used in Henry's report. Henry will be recording what you all talk about to help him remember what everyone says during this time. If you do not want to be recorded, you will not be able to be a part of this study.

If something makes you feel bad while we are talking in the group, please tell Henry. If there are questions you don't want to answer, that is OK. If you want to leave before we are done talking, just let Henry know.

If you ever have any questions about Henry's project, your parents know how to get a hold of him so he can answer those questions for you.

Helping out with this project is up to you, and no one will be mad if you don't want to be a part of this project or even if you change your mind later.

If you want to help out with this project, let Henry know and he will write your name below.

____

Name of Person Verbally Agreeing to be in the Study

____ ________

Name of [Authorized] Person Obtaining Verbal Assent Date

APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Tell me about your church.

How often do you come?

What is your favorite part about church? Least favorite?

What do you learn at church?

Tell me your favorite Bible story. (At this point, I will ask children to draw me a picture of a Bible story or a picture of Jesus. I will encourage them to put in as many details. What did the people look like: hair color, eye color, skin color? What were the people were doing?)

- During this time, I will allow the children to lead the discussion as well as allow other children to join in the discussions. In addition to getting at meanings of identity of the characters in the Bible stories, I am wanting to simulate interactions between the children as they interpret, reinforce, and transform understandings of the identities of the Bible characters.

What do we learn from these Bible stories? (Most of the curricula connect Bible stories to how children should act towards God and each other.)

What do the Bible stories you learn in church tell you about how we are supposed to treat people who are different than us? (Probe for class, gender, and race. For example: "What have you learned about how to treat people who are poor/rich?" "How does God want us to treat people who look different than you do? Have skin that is darker/lighter than yours? Speak a different language?" "What does the Bible say about how we should treat boys/girls?")

For the last portion of the focus group interviews, I will introduce pictures that will contain Bible characters that are of a different race than the ones depicted by the curricula used at the churches. Some of these pictures will also feature Bible characters that do not fit into stereotypical gendered norms of appearance and/or role. The impetus of this is to elicit responses from the children about the racial and gendered differences between the pictures they are used to seeing and the ones that are different. I will probe for children to tell me about the Bible stories being depicted. I will ask them about which pictures tell the story better and why.

- Can you tell me what this picture is about?
- If you could change the picture, what would you change?
- Which of these pictures do you like better? Why?
- Which of these pictures do the best job of telling Bible stories? Why?

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Educational Institutions Attended and Degrees Already Awarded

2014	Master of Arts, Sociology, San Jose State University. Thesis: "Having Fun About Jesus:" Children's Constructions of Their Relationships to Church.
1997	Bachelor of Arts, Asbury College (summa cum laude). Major: Chemistry-Biology (Pre-Medical); Minor: Spanish.

Professional Positions Held

2015-2018	Graduate Instructor (solo), Department of Sociology, University of Kentucky
2014-2015	Adjunct Instructor, Department of Sociology, University of Kentucky Adjunct Instructor, Department of Anthropology, Sociology, and Social Work, Eastern Kentucky University Adjunct Instructor, Department of Social Sciences and History, Asbury University
2011-2013	Assistant Director, Elementary Children's Ministry, Menlo Church, Menlo Park, CA
2005-2010	Children's Pastor, Redwood Park Church, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada
2000-2005	Children's Pastor, Kings Circle Assembly of God, Corvallis, OR

Scholastic and Professional Honors

2019-2020	University of Kentucky Presidential Fellowship ($20000 stipend in addition to tuition scholarship and health plan enrollment for Fall 2019/Spring 2020).
2019	University of Kentucky College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Competitive Graduate Fellowship ($10000 stipend in addition to tuition scholarship and health plan enrollment for Spring 2019).
2019	University of Kentucky Sociology Department Beers Summer Fellowship ($1000 award).

2019	University of Kentucky College of Arts & Sciences Outstanding TA Award ($500 award).
2019	American Sociological Association Section on Religion Student Travel Award ($250 award).
2018	Stonehouse/May Research Scholarship Award granted to a graduate student at the Children's Spirituality Summit for scholarly excellence in children's spirituality research ($1000 award).
2015-2018	University of Kentucky Graduate School Lyman T. Johnson Academic Year Fellowship ($7500 annually).
2015	Nominee, Eastern Kentucky University Critical Thinking Teacher of the Year Award.
2013	San Jose State University Paul McKay Chandler Memorial Scholarship for receiving the highest grade on the sociology graduate research methods comprehensive exam ($750 award).

Professional Publications:

Zonio, Henry. 2020. "Normalizing White Spirituality in Children's Sunday School Curricula." In Bridging Theory and Practice in Children's Spirituality, edited by Mimi Larson and Robert Keeley. Nashville, TN: Zondervan Publishing.

Zonio, Henry. 2017. "'Is That a Mom and Dad Church?' Children's Constructions of Meaning Through Focus Group Interviews." Pp. 251-276 in Researching Children and Youth: Methodological Issues, Strategies, and Innovations (Sociological Studies of Children and Youth, Volume 22), edited by Ingrid E. Castro, Melissa Swauger, and Brent Harger. England: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.