HER PREACHING BODY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF AGENCY, MEANING AND PROCLAMATION IN CONTEMPORARY FEMALE PREACHERS

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INTRODUCTION: QUESTIONS ABOUT BODIES

When I was growing up, my family attended a large United Methodist Church located in the downtown section of Orlando, Florida. The sanctuary was a broad, rectangular shaped room, with high ceilings and a white marbled altar. The front stained glass windows stretched from ceiling to floor behind the altar and created a second mosaic of colors across the white walls whenever the bright Florida sunshine poured through them. For a young girl just sensing her own call to ministry, it was a room of beauty, a hallowed space of silence, music and, of course, sermons.

The preachers who strode up the stairs into the high pulpit stood in a long line of distinguished men, all of whom had received a plumb appointment and many of whom would go on to become bishops. Their preaching was solid if not soaring. I would try to listen, but often found myself watching the long arm of my father's watch get closer and closer – and sometimes even past – twelve noon. One Sunday, though, a visiting evangelist, already well known within the church growth movement of the 1980s, preached the morning's message. For reasons now lost to memory, I attended all three of the morning worship services. By the time he started his sermon at the last service, a message I suspect he had preached many times over, I had ceased listening to the words. Instead, I watched his body. He didn't move dramatically. Nor did he shout or scream. It appeared, though, that he was alive to his body. As he gave voice to well-rehearsed words, he attended to his body also. It was as if he had asked – and already answered - questions about whether a slight vocal inflection here might compel the listener to lean closer, whether this hand gesture there might drive home his words and how to strike a

balance between a posture fully posed and fully at ease. Fascinated by the interworkings of his embodied speech, I wondered what he was experiencing as the preacher. Is there a point when – for whatever combination of reasons – a preacher forgets about the words and thinks only about the body?

To think about the body as one preaches was a thought-provoking suggestion for Rev. Laura Martin. When she experienced a call to ministry at a young age, she first wondered how to present the profession to a family of educators and politicians. “When I was around twelve,” she recalled, “I was part of a youth program in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.” She went with friends to an event and learned she was expected to spend the night in order to attend church the next morning. Not anticipating an overnight stay, Rev Martin had not packed any clothes. “The girls said, ‘don’t worry, we will let you wear our clothes,’” Rev. Martin continued. “I am five foot nine inches and they were five feet at that. So the jacket was short. The skirt was short. Everything was tight.” When the next morning’s preacher invited “young people who know they have been called by God” down to the altar at the end of his sermon, she said “I sat in my chair and said ‘No way, God. Look at me. I’m not going up there.” Rev. Martin concluded, “And God said ‘forget about you. I want your heart and your voice.’ So I got up.” In this occasion, Rev. Martin’s response to the call of the day required a forgetting of her body, or at least of its clothed appearance. That forgetfulness of the body would remain an integral part of her call to preach for years to come. If there are times to remember the body, are there other occasions that require letting go of it?

The dilemmas around remembering or forgetting the body, using or setting aside the body can weave their way through a preacher’s narratives as she recognizes the link

between her embodiment and her sermon. When I was a seminary student the supervising minister at the church where I interned urged me to integrate an illustration surrounding my deafness in one ear into an early sermon, insisting that the congregation needed to be informed about my limited hearing on my right side. I disagreed with his position, but when faced with needing to pass my field education requirement I grudgingly complied. The sermon that arose out of those conversations stands as my most engaged and engaging sermon during divinity school. The body's inter-involvement in a sermon, as the instrument through which every preacher interprets life, text and God may form a sermon in unanticipated or even unseen ways.

As the occasion of dilemmas and opportunities, the body brings a host of questions. Sometimes the questions are particular to one's physicality, such as those about a preacher's hearing loss or concerns about her height. Sometimes the questions arise from cultural situated-ness, including the expectations of a denomination or a specific congregation. A preacher may debate about preaching in or out of the pulpit, as well as with or without notes. And sometimes the questions surrounding the body appear connected to gender. Female preachers know how devastating it can be to hear "What a pretty dress you have on!" at the end of sermon long labored and lovingly performed. When preparing to officiate at a wedding, Rev. Rebecca Harris deliberately downplays her hairstyle, jewelry and makeup. She said, "I don't want to show up the bride." During my doctoral coursework, I noticed the differences between my preaching as well as other female students and our male colleagues. These differences were not universal, and sometimes the variations were elements so slight I could not fully pinpoint them. Most notable were those occasions when I watched some male preachers utilize more

movements, vocal changes and visibly energetic styles. They appeared more physically at ease – and more physically active - than their female contemporaries. These observations raised questions about how the preacher engages bodily in preaching, as well as how preachers and listeners have come to conceive of a fully embodied sermon. How might gender inform and form the preacher's capacities for embodiment?

Throughout Christian history, the preaching body has most often been male. While women have been preaching since Mary ran from the empty tomb, the history of their preaching has been discontinuous, sometimes hidden, and filled with the struggle of bearing a female body in the pulpit.[1] For centuries church tradition argued that the female body was unfit for sacred space. Cultural messages in other eras argued that a woman's voice did not belong in the public sphere.[2] When women transgressed the boundaries and preached, they received criticism for behaving in unbecoming ways, provoking impure thoughts in male listeners, looking out of place in the pulpit and have smaller bodies and softer, higher voices that could not be heard. While female preachers appear in almost every era of Christianity, it is only in the last three decades that women have occupied

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[1] For histories of female preaching see: Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998). Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998). Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice Through the Ages* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004). Beverly M. Kienzie and Pamela J. Walker, eds. *Women Preachers and Prophets through two millennia of Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998).

[2] For illustrations of how female preachers navigated these cultural codes, see Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007) and Beverly Ann Zink Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman's Rights and Religious Convictions in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

pulpits of well-established denominations in large numbers and with the full authority of ordination.

Just as many of the barriers female preachers historically encountered focused upon their bodies, the continuing dilemmas and decisions female preachers face – concerning identity, authority, and the best use of their preaching skills – play themselves out in their bodies. Women ask themselves questions about dress, wondering if a power suit will grant them authority or cause them to present a too fashionable appearance. They ponder the best way to preach in a small country church with a tiny pulpit that confines their body, or, alternatively, in a pulpit space too large for their bodies and forcing them to use a step stool to be seen. They question how to handle complaints that their voices cannot be heard and wonder about the hidden meanings within such feedback. Or they question what to do when the church's preaching schedule does not match the schedule of their breast-feeding baby. They then wonder how to handle their encounter with the cries of someone else's screaming infant, cries that cause their full breasts to leak. These questions are bodily ones. They are a preacher's questions.

My initial experiences and observations led me to ponder the physical inhibitions seeming to accompany female preachers. In her essay, "Throwing Like A Girl," Iris Young names the ways in which girls grow up to be women who are physically handicapped, not utilizing the full range of their body's capabilities or inhabiting the world with the same degree of ease as their male counterparts.[3] She cites a study conducted during the 1960s by Erwin Straus in which girls did not make full use of

[3] Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality" in *On Female Body Experience*: *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27-45.

lateral space in the act of throwing a ball. Concentrating on the forward movement of their arms, girls did not shift their weight, move their legs or twist their hips. Young builds upon this study to argue that women "do not put their whole bodies into engagement in a physical task with the same ease and naturalness as men."[4] In surveying a very small slice of male and female preachers, I wondered if a female hesitancy, derived from a host of social messages and experiences, extends to the female in the pulpit. Young concludes that, just as women feel constrained in their bodies, women also can experience their surrounding space as constricted space.[5] As I thought about the female preaching students who stayed rooted in the pulpit alongside with the male students who easily left it, I wondered if women feel constrained while preaching. Perhaps the bodily uncertainty and timidity that Young first named twenty years ago still endures.[6]

The central problem underlining this initial bodily analysis is apparent to anyone who has studied the history of female preaching. For much of Christian history, women have been barred, discouraged and heavily scrutinized for preaching.[7] For much of that same history, women have preached. The history of women's persistence to preach, despite enormous institutional, social, theological and even physical barriers, speaks not of hesitancy, uncertainty and timidity but of courage, boldness and risk. Much of that courage, boldness and risk revolved around their bodies. Arguments against female preaching were based in biology. Women could not preach because they were female.

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[4] Young, 33.
[5] Young, 33.
[6] Young, 34.
[7] An excellent overview of the bodily courage accompanying female preaching historically can be found in Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1998).

When they placed their female bodies in unauthorized spaces, women endured constant attention, criticism and outright ridicule directed towards their bodies. Countless women have recorded long periods of bodily distress when resisting a call to preach and even when actually preaching.[8] To label female preachers as bodily inhibited does not account for these stories. An analysis of the female preacher's body which is based solely in notions of constraint fails to incorporate the multiple instances and manners in which women preached in, with and through their bodies despite intense pressure not to do so.

In her study of contemporary female preachers, Roxanne Mountford traces the gendered history of preaching manuals and the gendered construction of sacred spaces such that women's bodies were neither welcomed nor anticipated in pulpits. She studies three modern day preachers in depth, arguing that two of them, feeling uneasy in the pulpit's proper space, made a tactical move to preach from the sanctuary floor. They decided to "quit the pulpit" in order to bring their bodies and best preaching practices out into the floor.[9] While Mountford's portrait of gendered space is invaluable, her very focused conclusion that women may wrestle power from the pulpit to the floor stands in uneasy, inconclusive tension with observations of women who preach within or from beyond the pulpit. Rev. Emily Thompson preaches from the pulpit. She explained, "I stay in the pulpit primarily because I am a manuscript preacher. I chose words very specifically and I don't want to lose them." She then added her history as the first female

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[8] Elaine Lawless has documented women's accounts of physical distress when discerning a call to preach and while preaching. Elaine Lawless, *God's Peculiar People: Women's Voices and Folk Tradition in a Pentecostal Church* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998) and Elaine Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries of Wholeness through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993).
[9] Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2003).

preacher at a historic Baptist church, her struggles with parishioners' comments about her clothes and her appreciation for her preaching gown's capacity to cover her body. "I believe my body is an incredible tool," she said, "And I don't want to lose my words or that power." The choice to stay in the pulpit may arise from a female hesitancy in the body, a hesitancy made more pronounced in a setting in which all eyes are on the preacher. But the pulpit is also an empowering and embodying space, a site given sacred authority for preaching. In contrast to Rev. Thompson, Rev. Harris consciously chooses not to preach from the pulpit. But her decision rests not in "quitting the pulpit" but in getting closer to the listeners. In the first sermon she gave at a new church she explained her preaching from the center of the chancel. "The model of preaching that we get up in this tower and proclaim this word to you people down there …doesn't model the kind of pastor I want to be," she said. "There is something holy about preaching but in my embodied word theology, the word is not just embodied in me. It is in you. It is in all of us. So if I'm standing up here separate from you, it just doesn't work." Furthermore, she added, "I like to get really close to people. I feel like it is more effective." Like most groups, female preachers across time, location, age, denomination, and experience will choose from a host of different bodily tactics when they preach. Their decisions are based on multiple factors, which can intersect and even compete. An analysis of the female preaching body needs not only to expand beyond a constraint based argument, it also needs to possess enough porous flexibility to encompass ever-shifting factors and the ever evolving, infinite uses of bodily power.

My experiences as a preacher and an observer of other preachers prompted a desire to broaden my questions about the preacher's body to a larger field of preachers.

How do other female preachers think about and experience their bodies while they preach? Fourteen contemporary preachers, all of who live and work in the greater Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area, weighed in on this question, reflecting on a host of decisions they made concerning their bodies as they prepared to and did preach.[10] Although a small selection, this eclectic group of preachers ranged in age from twenty-six to almost seventy and came from multiple theological traditions. The majority of women were ordained United Methodist ministers, representing my own tradition. The group also contained an American Baptist, a Unitarian Universalist and a Presbyterian. Joining these Christian ministers were two rabbis serving in a Reformed Jewish congregation. The theological traditions of the study are limited to a particular brand of liberal, mainline Protestantism and a similar thread within Judaism. Neither "high" liturgical traditions like the Episcopal church nor "low" liturgical traditions such as Pentecostalism were represented in the interviews. While other aspects of pastoral ministry did emerge during the interviews, the study maintained a focus upon the preacher in pulpit or on the platform. The racial configuration of the group included African-American and Caucasian women. Issues surrounding race and ethnicity were factored into the analysis, especially in those instances when the interviewee raised racial considerations. Such analysis is offered, though, with an acknowledgment that the depth and breadth needed for the fullest analysis may elude the scope of this project and the researcher, who is a white woman.

[10] These interviews were conducted during 2009-2010 in the Baltimore-Washington, DC area. The names of all interviewees are being held in confidence by mutual agreement. Each preacher was assigned a pseudonym to be used throughout this dissertation. Direct quotations from interviews are preserved in this dissertation and descriptions of a preacher come from direct observations. For more detailed information about this study, see Appendix A.

All of the participants recounted decisions about clothing, hair and make-up when getting ready to preach and explained their approach to gestures, voices, and movements while preaching. Listening to their words and observing them as they preached, I was particularly interested in how they made their decisions, the subsequent meaning that arose out of each decision and how the meaning intersected with their body's behavior. In what ways did the body contribute to preaching? How was the body a powerful tool and when did it feel like a hindrance? Did the "femaleness" of their body, broadly construed as any trait associated with what is socially assigned to the feminine, play a prominent role in their decision and meaning making processes?[11] Arguing that we cannot understand any preacher without seeing her body nor fully account for her preaching without grasping the role the body plays in the performance, I contend that we cannot delve into the wide range of possible meanings attached to being a female and a preacher without paying close attention to the choices women make in relation to their bodies. In the process of making choices, women make meaning, in the making of meaning, women construct their identity, and specifically their identity as preachers.

Questions of identity, agency and meaning lend themselves to philosophy. The philosophical field of phenomenology begins from our basic experience of the world. It believes that meaning may be uncovered not as a thing in and of itself, but as that which flows out of and back into lived existence. In his seminal work *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty grounds perception, the basis of existence, in the body, naming the body as the mode through which we understand ourselves as

[11] Throughout this dissertation, I will employ the terms "masculine" and "feminine" to represent the traits, behaviors and associations typically marked by convention to the gender distinctions made between male and female bodies.

"perceiving subjects in a perceived world."[12] The body is the vehicle for existence, or what he terms being-in-the-world.[13] To have a body is "to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify with certain projects and be continually committed to them."[14] Trying to bridge the dichotomies entrenched in body and soul, subject and object; Merleau-Ponty describes the body as "always near me, always there for me, never really in front of me," but that which "is with me."[15] The body is me or "rather I am it."[16] Whenever one preaches, the preacher is her body, just as her body is with her in every activity. While one can sense one's own body - feel its pace, rhythm and vocal attempts - one cannot observe her body as one might observe an object from the outside. That external perspective is assigned to the listener, a body observing another body.

The only way we grasp our bodies, Merleau-Ponty asserts, is through living in and with them. He writes, "I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it."[17] This body, he suggests, continually "rises towards the world."[18] The body can never be reduced to its physicality or, alternately, subsumed by

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[12] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Rhoutledge, 1945), 83.
[13] Merleau-Ponty, 90-93.
[14] Merleau-Ponty, 94.
[15] Merleau-Ponty, 108.
[16] Merleau-Ponty, 173.
[17] Merleau-Ponty, 230. Merleau-Ponty's full quote states, "Whether it is a question of another's body or my own, I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time, my body is as it were a 'natural' subject, a provisional sketch of my total being." In this, he foreshadows the lived body theory that is to come.
[18] Merleau-Ponty, 87.

its psyche.[19] It is always and everywhere a being-in-the-world. As it is thrust into the world, the body becomes an ambiguous yet unified collection of lived experiences, and ultimately, "a nexus of living meanings."[20] When the preacher stands up to preach, she brings a collection of past experiences, memories of other uses of the body as well as former messages about how to use the body. All of these are carried as present, living meanings concerning her body. She might think "I am too tall" or "I am too short" for this pulpit. She might worry if others can hear her voice or truly sense her excitement. Whatever her "nexus of living meanings," they are distinct from the preacher before her and the preacher coming after her. Each is a living body; whose presence and movements have meaning and always participate in proclamation.

By being a collection of lived experiences, the body can provides new insights into what is means to be a being in the world. It is not that the body possesses knowledge separate from the mind. Rather, it is that the mind is part of the body, and by tracing all that inhabits and is inseparable from the body, we may move closer to a meaningful core at the heart of existence.[21] Merleau-Ponty points us towards relearning to feel our body, and finding "underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it by virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body."[22] Whatever discoveries are made about living in our bodies are provisional discoveries, a partial glimpse into a total being that will never be fully apprehended.[23] But just as we can misconstrue the body of any preacher, bypassing

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[19] Merleau-Ponty, 101-102.
[20] Merleau-Ponty, 170, 175.
[21] Merleau-Ponty, 212.
[22] Merleau-Ponty, 239.
[23] Merleau-Ponty, 230.

unintentionally its unarticulated knowledge, there is something more to be known about how we are our bodies, each of us, and how different meanings arise amongst us in the course of bodily life. As Merleau-Ponty concludes "we merge into this body which is better informed than we are about the world, and about the motives we have and the means at our disposal for synthesizing it."[24] We comprehend the world by living in it, we can only live in the world as a body, and thus the body as a mode of inquiry provides essential clues into ourselves and our world.

What follows is a study of female preachers in their bodies, an exploration of contemporary female preachers' decisions about their bodies. In one sense, it is another study about female preachers. It seeks to add to the collection of scholarship a new line of inquiry, balancing historical perspectives with contemporary experiences, complementing theological motifs with practical, ethnographic research. It asks "What does it mean to be a body thrust into the world, a body that is a female and whose project is preaching?" From a different angle, this is a study concerned with how agency – the freedom and constraint that comes with choice – is worked out by those who have taken up a professional not long their own. Merleau-Ponty, among others, argues that the freedom to make choices happens because we are bound to embodied existence. Believing "there is no freedom without a field," he states, "I am free, not in spite of…these motivations, but by means of them. For…this certain significance of nature and history which I am, does not limit my access to the world, but …is my means of entering into communication with it."[25] We can only choose because we have something to choose from, a particular setting and set of circumstances. We often define ourselves by the choices that we make, and so

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[24] Merleau-Ponty, 277.
[25] Merleau-Ponty, 529.

any study of agency is by necessity a study of the evolving self. How do those who identify themselves as female preachers understand who they are, what they do and why they do it? But ultimately, this is a study about bodies, or more precisely, embodied life. This is not a study about the body as opposed to the mind or the body as mere or mute materiality. It risks the long association of the female with the body by delving into the bodily choices of female preachers. It looks at female preachers not because any one of us can be reduced to being "just a body" but because the contentiousness accompanying the female preaching body makes for a more accessible exploration. It argues that just as we are our bodies in every facet of life, we are our bodies when we preach. We preach in and through, with and as bodies and thus every aspect of what we think about our bodies, every decision we ponder about our bodies and every way we bring our bodies into the preaching space is bound up with the essence to be uncovered about preaching, even if that essence only can be partially uncovered.

Merleau-Ponty compares the body to a work of art.[26] Like every work of art, the body is a being "in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact."[27] Similar words can be uttered about preaching. Preaching is a work of art. And like every work of art, the sermon is the expression indistinguishable from the body preaching the sermon. Because "existence realizes itself in the body," to study the body of the preacher is to study the being of the preacher, the person in her entirety.[28] It is also to study preaching. Utilizing a small

[26] Merleau-Ponty, 174.
[27] Merleau-Ponty, 175.
[28] Merleau-Ponty, 193. When talking about the body in relation to the process of signification in speech, Merleau-Ponty writes, "If we therefore say that the body expresses existence at every moment, this is in the sense in which a word expresses

section of female preachers but delving deeply into their embodied lives as preachers, this study will endeavor to achieve the same sort of goals Merleau-Ponty articulates for phenomenology: the painstaking work of essential exploration, which can only be done with attentiveness and wonder, a demand for awareness and the will to size the meaning of the world, recognizing that that meaning is always coming into being.[29]

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thought. …recognize a primary process of signification in which the thing expressed does not exist apart from the expression….In this way, the body expresses total existence, not because it is an external accompaniment to that existence, but because existence realizes itself in the body."

[29] Merleau-Ponty, xxiv.

CHAPTER ONE

LIVING AS A BODY: THEORIES OF EMBODIMENT

The Reverend Rebecca Harris learned the hard way that it matters what shoes one wears to worship.[30] Leading a Tenebrae service during Holy Week, she had to step across the altar space to extinguish a candle and the square, wooden heels of her black pumps clanked loudly upon the slate floor. Within the dark, spacious, exceedingly silent sanctuary the congregation heard a reading from Jesus' passion, the quiet of a deliberate moment for reflection, and then the clop, clop, clop of her shoes as she walked from chair to altar. The sound reverberated across the silence, disrupting the somber scene and making Rev. Harris increasingly self-conscious about her body's necessary but now distracting movements.

At thirty-six Rev. Harris is the first female and youngest preacher ever appointed to a historic United Methodist church located just across the Washington, DC city line in suburban Maryland. Charged with the task of reviving a now struggling congregation, she inherited an enormous, once glorious, white-marbled sanctuary, complete with front stained glass windows that stretched from ceiling to floor and an elevated pulpit with a tiny staircase and enclosed canopy. A life-long athlete who had studied drama in college, Rev. Harris approached her new church with a healthy confidence in her preaching. She was accustomed to receiving overwhelmingly positive responses to her sermons. She'd

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[30] Interview with Female Preacher, December 16, 2009. The names of all interviewees are being held in confidence by mutual agreement. For more information about this qualitative study, see the Appendix A.

preached long enough to experiment, preaching with and without a manuscript, as well as in and out of the pulpit. She had spent some months concentrating on word choice in her sermons and others emphasizing her body's movement while preaching. She once moved up and down a ladder while she preached. On another occasion, she illustrated the dance of the Holy Spirit by doing a *grand jeté* down the center aisle. Most Sundays, she made confident and self-conscious choices about how best to use her body in her preaching.

The ease with which Rev. Harris drew from and incorporated her body in her preaching did not mean that she didn't think about her physical appearance each Sunday morning. Wearing an alb most Sundays, she typically dresses in layers that afford her a business-causal appearance before and after worship while also insuring comfort beneath her alb during worship. Earrings stay small so as not to interfere with her microphone headpiece. And notwithstanding her Holy Week experience, she carefully chooses her shoes not simply for comfort, steadiness and noise potential, but also as the one piece of her appearance that might mark her femininity. "I want shoes that say I am a woman," she stated, "because I am a female preacher. I don't wear stiletto heels, of course, but I don't wear my Dansko clogs, either." On one occasion when she led worship without an alb, she found her thoughts wandering to her appearance. Is this skirt too short? Is this sweater too low? Would someone else see these patterned tights as fishnet ones, as my husband did this morning? A proven, confident preacher, she did not escape the bodily considerations and concerns that confront most females in the pulpit. As she said, "I want to be fashionable, but not too fashionable. Nobody wants a fashion forward minister."

All of these bodily considerations haunted her the Christmas Eve when she stood in the pulpit preaching about Christ's birth knowing that she had started to miscarry. Newly pregnant and having carried an instinctual sense that something wasn't quite right from the very beginning, Rev. Harris crafted images of babies, mangers and God's coming in human flesh while her body shed a pregnancy. Suspended between incarnation and miscarriage, it was one of the few times, she noted, that she shut out her body's messages, disconnecting the words of her sermon from the events within her own flesh.

The Preaching Body

Whether self-conscious about her body's necessary movements, basking in a successful dance step, worried about a proper presentation or painfully setting aside her body's loss, Rev. Harris always was in and with her body while preaching. Her body was not one aspect of her preaching, but the vehicle through which she preached. Using Merleau-Ponty's language, she was her body, her body was her and her embodied self served as the day's preacher. The body has always been central to preaching. Before a preacher opens his or her mouth, appearance, dress, facial expressions, and movements have begun already the proclamation. Preaching manuals historically emphasized the preacher's posture, gestures, and vocal traits as tools for effective communication and indicators of character.[31] A straight back, strong hand movements, and an easily heard

[31] For a broad overview of gestures in preaching, see O. C. Edwards Jr., "The Explosion of Preaching in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries" and "The Dawn of Modernity (A) and (B)" in *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 210-238, 391-463 and Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2007), chapter five. For a more focused analysis of

voice, which utilized a variety of tones, paces, and volumes radiates confidence and reaches listeners. A body tall enough and broad enough to fill an enclosed pulpit gives the visual assurance of preacherly authority. From these foundations, an individual's choice of dress, liturgical emphasis, hairstyle, and facial expressions all work together to create a particular preaching body. Amid these choices, some facets of the body always remain beyond a preacher's choice. Every preacher works within a given height, an inherited set of vocal traits, and the size and shape of their hands. And preachers have preached through bodily distresses ranging from chemotherapy to miscarriage.

Preaching is a bodily act. We don't preach without our bodies. Our bodies contribute to our preaching through our presentation, gestures and appearance. Our best preaching emerges when the whole of ourselves participate. Like Rev. Harris' reference to explicitly feminine shoes, many women in this study articulated a desire to be received as preachers and as *female* preachers, a nod to how one's embodied life - whether male or female – inevitably forms one's preaching. Through the scenarios of our preaching lives, we work out what it means to be a to live as bodies and to preach as bodies as well. As Jana Childers states, "...without bodies, preaching is not worth talking about.[32]

From its inception, feminist theory has held the female body as central to any understanding of the dilemmas, burdens, choices, and potential contained within women's lives. While challenging cultural messages that would make biology into

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rhetorical space, gender, and character, see Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003). For an application of the historic teachings about the body in preaching see Gwyn Walters, "The Body in the Pulpit" in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), 445-462.

[32] Jana Childers, "The Preacher's Body," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27 no. 3 [2006]: 224.

destiny, feminist scholarship builds upon the belief that the body is integral to the self, and a place in which individual, social, institutional, or political knowledge is revealed.[33] Scholarship incorporates the distinction made between sex, as the biological characteristics accompanying male and female bodies, and gender, those roles, attributes and behaviors assigned within a culture as linked to masculinity and femininity. As feminist theory has evolved, exactly how knowledge is gleaned in the body as well as how women share and diverge in lived experiences remains a topic for precise, honest exploration. To begin a study of the complex female preaching body, this chapter will trace the development of feminist theoretical approaches to the body. Three distinct yet interrelated approaches to the body have been especially important in feminist theory. Essentialist theories argue that all women are connected through an irreducible, pure feminine essence, which originates in either shared biology or a set of common experiences. Social constructivist theories see talk of essences as both descriptively inadequate and politically limiting. They respond to these problems with an emphasis on culture's essential role in the body's formation and the plurality of forms a woman's body might take. Judith Butler delves deeply into constructivist approaches in a manner that creates a bridge into a new theoretical approach known as the lived body theory. This more recent collection of theories loosely seek to combine the insights of constructionist approaches with a renewed appreciation for the body's basic corporeality and an emphasis on the potential within each individual's agency. Each of these approaches -and the dialogue prompted between them - continue to shape how we understand, analyze and speak about the female preacher's body. In the end, the lived body approach provides the

[33] Arthur Frank, "Bringing Bodies Back In: A Decade in Review," *Theory, Culture and Society* 7 [1990]: 131-162.

strongest set of tools by which to grasp how female preachers make decisions about their bodies and their preaching through a confluence of social influences, their body's particular physicality and their own unique array of possible choices – as well as the power of the Word.

The Universal Feminine: Essentialist Approaches

As women began to preach in greater numbers during the last quarter of the twentieth century, a host of homiletical scholarship emerged that delved into female preaching. Some works unearthed an era of female preachers previously hidden. Other works followed the long battles towards women's ordination, analyzing the theological, ecclesial, historical, and practical elements constitutive of those battles.[34] Still others shined a light upon an emerging set of qualities that appeared unique to female preaching.[35] All of this scholarship built upon a belief that there was something unique about being a female preacher. In this way, these forays into female preaching evidenced the influence of the earliest strand of feminist thought, now understood as an essentialist approach to studying the female body.

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[34] Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Women's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth Century Women (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).* Mary Linnie Hudson, "Shall women preach? Or the question answered: the ministry of Louisa M. Woosley in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1887-1942." PhD. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1992. Lucy Lind Hogan. "The Overthrow of the Monopoly of the Pulpit: A Longitudinal Case Study of the Cultural Conversation Advocating the Preaching and Ordination of Women in American Methodism, 1859-1924." PhD. diss., University of Maryland College Park, 1995. Elizabeth Muir, "Petticoats in the Pulpit: Early Nineteenth Century Methodist Preachers in Upper Canada." PhD. diss., McGill University, 1989.

[35] Christine Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989).

Essentialism draws its name from a belief in essences, those unchanging, preexisting, inherent qualities that make something what it is.[36] Working to reclaim and re-signify the female body, feminist essentialist approaches first expose how the normative body is a male body. Scholars then seek to describe the unique attributes of the female body, beginning with the shared female anatomy. Thus, such a classic text as *Our Bodies, Ourselves* revels in the particular beauty of the female body and its subsequent shaping of the female self. A second essentialist thread establishes a set of core traits associated with the feminine, naming such traits as a behavioral tendency towards nurturing or a moral schema based on relational life. Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* serves as landmark example of this scholarship, as she argues towards a female ethic of care.[37] Believing in essences lying at the core of the self, these theorists strive to discover the female in her most pure, universal, and unchanging form.[38] They look to uncover that core in a number of different places ranging from shared anatomy, a common psyche or a typically relational approach to the world. Through historical surveys, contemporary observations and contextual analysis, they seek that core element

[36] Diane Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2. Fuss writes, "essentialism is classically defined as a belief in true essences – that which is most irreducible, unchanging and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing." See also Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). Jones names essentialism as "any view of women's nature that makes universal claims about women based on characteristics considered to be an inherent part of being female." *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 26.
[37] Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
[38] Diane Fuss notes how in feminist theory essentialism articulates itself through a belief in "a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside of the social." *Essentially Speaking*, 2.

that makes a woman a woman, regardless of time, history, geography, culture or situation.

While homiletical scholarship has produced collections of female preachers' sermons and histories dedicated to female preachers, it has most fully reflected essentialism through attempts to enumerate a set of traits related to the feminine visible in female preachers. Carol Noren's *The Woman in the Pulpit* begins with the assertion that "The Sunday morning service is different when a woman preaches."[39] Noren then develops from her own research a series of behaviors female preachers frequently utilize, naming a broad use of conditional clauses, exegetical frameworks that privilege the hidden, suppressed or under-privileged biblical characters, self-disclosing, personal illustrations, and bodily postures communicating femininity, hesitancy, or motherliness. While Noren's work acknowledges the potentials and the dangers of these assumed traits, other scholars celebrate the unique gifts female preachers bring in definitions of preaching, inclusive styles of language and more relational models of authority.[40] All of these works are heavily influenced by Gilligan's argument that women tend to communicate in patterns that attend to relationships and ultimately increase intimacy.

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[39] Carol M. Noren, *The Woman in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 9.

[40] Catherine A. Ziel, "Mother tongue/father tongue: Gender-linked differences in language use and their influence on the perceived authority of the preacher" PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1991. Tracy Lee Hartman, "Feminist norms in preaching: fact or fiction? A Contextual Study of the Preaching of Baptist Women" PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2001. Nora Tisdale, "Women's Ways of Communicating: A New Blessing for Preaching" in *Women, Gender and Christian Community*, ed. E. Jane Dempsey Douglass (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 104-116. Eunjoo Mary Kim, "Conversational Learning: A Feminist Pedagogy for Teaching Preaching," in *Theology and Religion* 5 no. 3 [2002], 169-177. The feminist theorists undergirding this scholarship include Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice*, Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1990), and Mary Field Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

Staying largely within the framework of relationality, these scholars argue that it is different when a woman preaches – and different in certain reliable, predictable ways.

The belief in an unchanging female essence can lead theorists to assert the existence of a distinctly female "voice," and the potentiality for a purely feminine language.[41] Several feminist homiletical scholars emphasize that uniquely female voice, which exists beneath layers of social silencing.[42] Describing a recovery process of coming back into voice, these scholars focus upon women who experienced a call to preach while simultaneously realizing they had lost their ability to articulate freely their experiences, thoughts, and assertions. They conclude with a proposal for the processes by which women can reclaim their speech.[43] Other scholars take a different perspective, exploring how gender-related communication differences affect preaching styles or how female preaching has been called things like testimonial preaching or exhortation in order to distinguish it from the preaching of ordained men.[44]

Embedded within discussions of a woman's distinct characteristics, experiences, or voice is the presumption of the female body as one possible starting place in linking women to one another. Because essentialism strays quickly from women's actual, diverse

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[41] Fuss, 2. An example within feminist theory is Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa," in *The Signs Reader: Women, Gender and Scholarship*, ed. Elizabeth Abel and Emily Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 279-97. Within feminist Christian theology, see Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).
[42] Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).
[43] Articulating a loss of female voice not unique to feminist preaching scholarship. See Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994) and Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
[44] Carol M. Noren, *The Woman in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 9. Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching As Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

physicality, the theory is not truly rooted in the body. It offers little space for the role of race or ethnicity in an individual's experience or self-knowledge. But essential does bring the female body back into the conversation. And this is a starting point for female preachers, who bring into the pulpit a female, and thus not male, body. A female preacher's body bears some collection of curves, breasts, hair, adornment and the presumed potential to carry another life. Historically, this female body has been, and in some Christian traditions continues to be, barred from the pulpit based on biological traits and psychological tendencies assumed to go along with it. This history of pulpit exclusion shapes the preaching landscape for female preachers in material ways. Women may face physical structures that do not accommodate their female bodies, a short supply of liturgical garb made for their shapes or an unconscious bias against their "feminine" voices. The great power of essentialist theories is the ability to identify some of these modes of exclusion and to begin to address them – often by valorizing the "feminine" category that had formerly been derided. In recent decades, essentialist theories' attention to women's bodies has accomplished important work. Yet because essentialism shifts so quickly into a prescribed set of characteristics, it ultimately resists a deeper level of diverse embodiment. Female bodies encompass all different shapes, sizes, heights, weights, skin colors, hair textures and vocal ranges. By asking women to identify with already formed guidelines about what it means to be a female in the pulpit, essentialism can require any one preacher to discard the particularities of her bodily life. Homiletical essentialism requires female preachers to wade into murky waters containing hidden or half formed beliefs about a core, eternal way of preaching as a woman. Such a position encourages an unsustainable belief that women will bring a unique something – body,

perspective, insight or narrative – to their preaching, derived solely from being a female preacher.

The crux of the essentialist approach lies in the assertion that women are different from men in shared and consistent ways.[45] Through shared anatomy, the capacity to give birth, or a common set of core traits associated with the feminine, essentialist approaches maintain that women experience the world differently, act in the world distinctly and possess knowledge in their bodies that sets them apart. Even as feminists affirm the reclamatory work of the essentialist approach, other scholars criticize it for its minimization of the diversity of women's bodies, experiences, and lives. Women may be different from men, but they are also different from one another. Relying on a false universalism, essentialist approaches minimize the effects of culture, age, race, history, class, and context on every woman's experience and development. For every slight, short, soft-spoken woman there is a tall, deep-throated one. For every woman who gravitates to frilly blouses and pink suits, there is a woman who dons buttoned-down shirts and black slacks. Rev. Harris quickly dismissed wearing stilettos to preach. Rev. Caroline Adams applauded the same heels on a colleague. Every woman experiences her body in its own unique combination of physicality, history, health, and cultural representations. Communal expectations for what it means to be female and for how to best present the female body differ widely across culture, time, and even Christian theology. To name women as different than men is all too often to halt prematurely the

[45] Jones, 24. Jones argues that essentialist Helene Cixous claims "that women, because of their embodied reality, have a fundamentally different way of knowing and being than men."

discernment of difference, never delving beneath the first binary distinction to analyze the diverse complexity existing among all women.

Essentialist approaches further stumble in naively hoping that the process of uncovering a female essence might eradicate gender hierarchy. The reality is that any notion of a pure femininity, in fact, may simply reproduce the hierarchy.[46] To call female preaching distinctly female is to set it apart from male preaching which has not lost its normative, privileged status. To say that female preachers may inhabit their bodies in different ways than normally described in preaching manuals does not dismantle the authority obtained via centuries of homiletical performance and literature. Nor does it affect the expectations, histories or theologies of the congregation in which one might preach. Just as a belief in the universal woman gives way to an appreciation for the diverse contexts of women's lives, a belief in the power of naming female difference gives way to a need for further analysis of culture's role in how bodies are formed, perceived, and experienced. Essentialist approaches begin the conversation around what it means to preach as a woman. It marks the female body as one accompanied by a set of dilemmas, questions, and possibilities linked to its femaleness. Ultimately, though, those very questions necessitate more complex responses.

The Body Not Given But Formed: Constructivist Approaches

Cultural constructivist theories of the body respond to the stumbling blocks named in essentialist approaches with an analytical turn towards culture's profound influence on the body's formation. Rather than proposing that our bodies are the product

[46] Jones, 29-30.

of the passive outworking of an internal essence, these theorists assert that the body is constructed or formed over time in relationship to the social forces in which it is inevitably located.[47] Rather than emphasizing women's universal commonalities and shared life experience, cultural constructivist approaches, by naming the role of history, gender, race, and context in the body's formation, presentation, and reception, open the space for diversity across women's bodies. These forays into culture further create space for the critical analysis of culture's role in structures of gender hierarchy.

Drawing upon Simone de Beauvior's statement "women are made not born," constructivist approaches affirm that life is inextricably social and bodies are inescapably socialized.[48] Every body comes into being amid a culture, whose values, customs, history, and habits shape the body's development.[49] These contingent, variable social forces play a primary role in assigning meaning to body types, physical presentation and bodily behaviors. Certain bodies in certain cultures are affirmed as stronger, more attractive, or more believable. Certain behaviors, styles of dress, or manners of interacting are deemed acceptable, while others are labeled unacceptable. Since bodies can never lie outside of culture, ideas surrounding a women's pure essence or the qualities inherent to being female now are understood as reflections of a particular

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[47] Jones, 32. Jones writes, "Feminist constructivism can be defined as a theory that focuses on the social, cultural, and linguistic sources of our views of women and women's nature. …use of the term makes the general point that supposed eternal verities of women's nature are historically and culturally variant and, consequently, that gender is "formed" rather than "given."

[48] Jones, 32.

[49] Jones, 33. Drawing upon the work of Kathryn Tanner, she defines culture as "…the entire system of symbols, languages, beliefs, actions, and attitudes within which persons live and learn to organize and make sense of their world and actions."

culture's images and expectations of femininity. Thus, "bodies are not only physical phenomena, but also surfaces of inscription, loci of control and transmitters of culture."[50]

As surfaces of inscription, bodies bear the marks of culture. One strand of constructivist theories focuses upon the ways in which culture becomes written upon bodies.[51] Viewing the body as chock full of cultural clues, these scholars explore the links between how a body is crafted or presented and the culture in which the body lives. They aim to grasp how the body exhibits through its mannerisms, habits, actions, and interactions the ethos of a particular culture. Their work encourages an analysis of the female preacher's body as a cultural text.

Within contemporary American culture, women's bodies are the site of expectations about physical beauty, professionally appropriate personas, pregnancy, motherhood, and more. Mass media's onslaught of images conveys these cultural messages, presenting through multiple mediums the perfectly acceptable, idealized body, whether it is working out, working, or bearing a child. In her work *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo aptly describes how through a complex institutionalized system of values and practices women come to believe that they are nothing unless they are slender, muscular, bulgeless and sagless.[52] Female preachers are not immune to such intense

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[50] Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter, eds. *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2001), 2.
[51] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 165. Bordo quotes Mary Douglas, who says that the body functions as "a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body."
[52] Bordo, 187-202. Bordo draws her conclusions concerning bodily perfection from her study of late twentieth century America. She notes, though that in early centuries a softer and heavier female body was perceived as beautiful, in part for its symbolic

idealized images of femininity, articulating their desire to be viewed as physically appealing and employing behaviors such as coloring their gray hair, wearing make up, jewelry, nail polish or stylish shoes. Preachers also carry the weight of historical connections between physical beauty and moral character, many of which are radically coded. Nineteenth century white female preachers often matched their bodily presentations with prevailing images of the "virtuous woman" in order to establish their preaching authority. Contemporary female preachers enter a modern, professional context as well as a theological one. They may find themselves conforming to expectations for skirt suits or more formal Sunday attire. Or they may find themselves gravitating towards a subdued appearance that includes hair drawn away from the face and minimal jewelry. Layered within American culture is the ethos of a particular church tradition or a specific congregation. While Rev. Harris proudly described the red, shiny, open-toed, well-heeled shoes she wore for Pentecost, Rev. Adams' eyes shone with tears as she spoke about the Sunday in which her red, flat, ballet shoes created a stir in the congregation as a symbol of the promiscuous woman who could desecrate a sacred space. As a multi-layered and diverse cultural text, the female preaching body and the reactions it receives provide a lens through which to grasp the complex culture the female preacher inhabits.

As a "loc[us] of control and transmitter of culture," female bodies ultimately do more than bear the marks of culture. Other constructivist theories go beyond viewing the body as a site of inscription to suggest that culture shapes the body in its materiality, at the level of the flesh. Culture is literally "made body" by its influence into structures of meaning, models of behavior, patterns of interpersonal interaction, and systems of

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representation of female reproductive capabilities. In other cultures, a larger body also can be welcomed as a sign of financial wealth or the abundance of resources.

governance.[53] Culture determines what a body can or cannot do, and makes possible certain bodies while rendering other bodies impossible.[54] The constructed body then reproduces the culture responsible for her production. Through bodily practices, habits, and models of relationship, the body maintains the culture in which she exists.

Culture was "made body" in preaching by the long historical tradition in which the only acceptable forms of preaching occurred in male bodies. Female preaching bodies were deemed not possible. The contemporary female preachers of this study inherit those centuries of exclusion, which is often embodied now in experiences of intense scrutiny towards their female preaching selves. One preacher who described herself as always battling her weight narrated the pressure to "trim down" to a more acceptable size. Women who were nursing infants while also preaching spoke about their heightened self-consciousness concerning the size of their breasts, as well as the congregation's attention to their now shrinking bodies. Women acknowledged finding comfort in wearing an alb or preaching gown, which produced a more androgynous appearance. A church's architecture, which culture manifests in the material, may invite or discourage a preacher. Rabbi Monica Levin's necessary step stool left her pondering visibility. For Ms. Melissa Clark, the auditorium in which she preached kept her alert to her body's conspicuous visibility. Those female preachers with tall, broad bodies and those possessing deeper voices reported being recipients of greater authority in preaching. One such preacher often heard how regal or majestic she appeared in the pulpit.

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[53] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, 165.
[54] This stance asserts that historical, social and cultural factors "actively produce the body as a body of a determinate type." Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminis*m (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), x.

Insights into the ways in which culture creates bodies further promote a broad analysis of gender hierarchy. Feminist scholarship reveals that women historically have occupied a secondary status in society. Scholars' analyses of the cultural structures that perpetuate such inequality begin with the insight that women have been linked with the body in its most brute, base form.[55] While men are assigned the higher category of rational thought, women are kept close to the unthinking, instinctual, craving body. This categorization supports arguments surrounding the unfitness of the female body for preaching. Combining the brute body image with other cultural insights around a woman's lesser social status, constructivist approaches respond to essentialist assertions about an autonomous female voice with assertions about the role of culture in denying females a social space to speak.

The social constructivist framework affirms that any study of the body must account for the intimate linkage between a particular body and its social location. It asks scholars to explore the ways bodies are always embedded within a network of social relations, to acknowledge the diversity of bodies made possible by diverse cultural contexts, and to examine the multiple ways in which culture manifests on the body. Affirming the deeply social nature of life, constructivist theories add a new layer of analysis and a diversity of perspectives to explorations of the female body. What might have appeared as a "natural" fact of existence is revealed as a cultural construct by this

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[55] Bordo, 160. See also Elizabeth Spelmen, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

set of theorists, who present a view of the body as constantly being formed amid relationships with other bodies and a vast, varying social network.[56]

Cultural constructivist approaches, though, encounter several stumbling blocks. As theorists grow more and more sophisticated in analyzing culture's influence upon the body, the sphere of culture's influence is cast wider and wider. Theorists risk veering into cultural determinism, in which the body is entirely formed by external forces beyond her control.[57] But bodies do not always conform to cultural structures, any more than they conform to essentialist ideals. And women report, and seem to display, some experience of agency in bodily decisions. To use a theoretical model that denies in advance the possibility of this agency can obscure the agency that in fact takes place. It can also make it harder to work to expand what agency might be present. Lastly, cultural constructivists acknowledge that their theoretical work has moved far away from actual bodies.[58] As ever-expanding theories become increasingly abstract, scholars name the need to balance the theory with accounts of the body in its messy, material existence.

These issues limit constructivist insights into the female preaching body. Female preachers, like women in other spheres of society, have historically demonstrated

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[56] R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 7. Griffith writes, "As countless scholars influenced by feminist, postcolonial, and other subaltern theories have long noted, bodies are not "natural" in any simple sense but are made, through extensive cultural work, to seem that way: that is, they are "naturalized."

[57] Lynda Birke, *Feminism and the Biological Body* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 34. Jones, 41.

[58] Vita Fortunati, Annamaria Lemarra, and Eleonora Federici, eds, *The Controversial Women's Body* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2003), 76. Vita states that Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler have noted the "need for feminism to come to terms with the materiality of the female body." Birke also states that with the recent focus on Foucault and the social forces that discipline the body, "the body disappears as a material entity." Birke, 137.

tremendous transgressions to cultural expectations. Some women who felt called to preach chose to take their bodies into sacred spaces officially barred to their presence. At times, their physical appearance and behaviors evidenced culturally taboo ways of being female. At other points, female preachers utilized culturally sanctioned ways of being female to push the boundaries of their preaching behavior. Contemporary preachers continue to display a wide range of relationships to prevailing standards of idealized femininity. Some female preachers embrace such explicitly female markers as ruffled blouses, high-heeled shoes, or pastel suits. Others display greater comfort with behaviors that are less explicitly feminine. Culture plays a role in the body's form, performance, and reception, but it is by no means the only player affecting the female preaching body. A tradition born in the breaking of cultural and theological sanctions may not be best illuminated by an approach to the body so closely bound to culture.

Bridging Constructivist Positions through the Performing Body: Judith Butler

One prominent constructionist scholar, Judith Butler, brings a perspective to constructionist approaches that addresses some of the theory's weaknesses in a way that broadens the study of the body. Focusing upon the processes by which individuals form a sense of gender, Butler argues for a theory of performativity.[59] Through a "set of repeated acts…that congeal over time" to appear natural, the embodied self performs a process of coming into being.[60] These repeated acts flow from the social structures that have organized overarching and expected behaviors for male and female bodies. Suggesting

[59] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
[60] Butler, 33, 192.

that embodied selves are formed by the acts they commit, she writes, "bodily habitus constitutes a tacit form of performativity, a citational chain lived and believed at the level of the body."[61] Through reflexively performing the surrounding cultural structures, the body "rewrites itself through acts, gestures, and enactments."[62]

While Butler's work hones in upon the development of gender identity, her language of performance, those actions that a body does with countless repetition and over time performs unconsciously, reorients scholars to a close reading of the specific, physical behaviors, habits, and features of a body by drawing together the agency each person demonstrates with the intimate influence of culture upon those very choices. Studying the performances of a female preacher's body, one can more clearly observe the cultural and theological dictates that shape preaching, the cultural and theological messages that form an idealized image of femininity and the Christian female preacher, and also the particular, fleshly ways in which these messages write themselves onto the female preaching body.

Butler's evocative phrase for performance as "repeated stylizations of the flesh" illuminates this process.[63] Every preacher's body exhibits a variety of bodily habits, from the squaring of the shoulders to the clearing of the throat, from the flip of the hair to the grasping of the pulpit. Some preachers firmly plant themselves with feet shoulder-width apart. Others twist an ankle behind one foot. All of these fleshly stylizations work in concert with each other to perform a sermon. Just as preachers rely upon reoccurring theological motifs or sermonic themes, preachers exhibit habits within the body.

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[61] Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (*New York: Routledge, 1997), 115

[62] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 185.

[63] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 191.

Preaching itself is a repetition of actions, a stylization of the flesh that acquires its own cultural and theological message. Any understanding of the female preacher includes a study of these stylizations of the flesh.

Although bodies perform out of the structures that produce them, Butler acknowledges there will be unauthorized uses of bodily performances.[64] Embodied selves will tailor more generalized movements to suit their own particularity, or will violate cultural expectations to perform actions in unsanctioned ways. With this acknowledgement Butler moves beyond any strict sense of cultural determinism to make space for individual agency in a theory of the body. Her schema of authorized and unauthorized performances mirrors the reality of earlier female preachers, whose bodies certainly performed unauthorized performances amid systems that forbade their presence, but who nevertheless discovered avenues to have their preaching heard. Over time, these unauthorized performances create space for newly authorized behaviors, and eventually for new cultural structures. Women's exhortations in their home parlors, over centuries, transformed into institutionally legitimated female preachers in the pulpit or on the stage. Contemporary female preachers, in turn, experiment with various embodiments of femininity through everything from clothing choices to word selections to intonations of the voice. These performances create another shift in the established parameters around preaching bodies.

Butler's contributions to the study of the body include her clearer articulation of the relationship between agency and embodiment. She further acknowledges the

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[64] Butler takes seriously the disciplining effects of social forces, but her theory does not negate the power of agency. She argues that identity and agency do not dissolve "when they are regarded as the embedding effects of cultural forces." Vicki Kirby, *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (London: Continuum International, 2006), 44.

"insistent reality of bodies" as the site at which individuals perform authorized and authorized performances, and where one navigates the specificity of their flesh. [65] Her understanding of a body's performance recognizes the ongoing impact of what a body does – what she calls a body's "doing" as opposed to its "being" - in the ongoing development of the self. Focusing upon the body's ongoing performance, she introduces a sense of the body's incompleteness. Bodily life is constantly shifting, always moving in relationship to itself and other bodies, always under development, and thus always moving towards but not attaining completeness. [66]

While Butler is most often characterized as a pure cultural constructivist, the complexity of her work does not lend to easy classification.[67] Her theory of performativity has generated much subsequent scholarship, and a new attention to agency and corporeality. At the same time, Butler can share the constructionist tendency towards abstraction from the very material realities to which she would call our attention. Often focusing upon the power of language, her scholarship veers away from a close reading of actual, particular bodies, even while naming the body as something that "exceeds the speech it occasions."[68] Nevertheless, the depth of her inquiry highlights the growing

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[65] Kirby, 66.

[66] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33-34**.** Butler argues for a concept of gender as "a complexity whose totality is permanently differed."

[67] My own opinion is that Butler acknowledges the importance of flesh, but tends towards the power of language to constitute the self. She lifts up the power of agential choice, but by and large the performative acts she describes are culturally inscribes ones.

[68]Saba Mahmood, "Agency, Performativity, and The Feminist Subject" in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville, eds (New York: Columbia University Press 2006), 202-203. Mahmood is quoting Butler, *Excitable Speech*. In a way that illuminates the gap between Butler's more constructionist position with a lived body one, Butler devotes significant attention to linguistitfication. She argues that there is no natural foundation of the body that precedes language, and by extension culture. Vicki Kirby notes how Butler denies that "the body is simply linguistic stuff"

edges within studying embodied life. In this sense, she serves as a key transitional scholar who helps give birth to a new approach to studying the body. Building from her insights, and drawing upon the work of essentialist and other constructivist approaches, a third approach to studying the body emerges, which seeks to integrate the culture's continual influence, the role of agency and the specifics of fleshly life together as mutually acting and interacting elements of an individual's bodily life.

My Body As It Is Lived By Me: Lived Body Approaches

While essentialist approaches help bring the female body back into focus, they stumble in their strong emphasis upon female commonalities. While constructivist approaches offer an appreciation for culture's influence upon the body's formation, they are weakened by a sense of cultural determinacy that named the social as the main arbitrator of what a body can do or be. Butler's notion of performativity adds another layer of fleshy analysis, yet it stumbles with an emphasis on linguisticality over flesh. The contributions and weaknesses of each of these approaches ultimately leads to the recognition that the fullest study of the body must account for a body's specific physicality, its cultural situation and its internal agency. The lived body approach combines these three elements into a theoretical framework that seeks to explore the embodied, experiencing person grounded in everyday life.

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while at the same time insisting that "the body bears language all the time." Butler goes on to assert that we can't access extra-linguistic reality because its "facticity is produced in language." Thus, "the task is not to deny or presume to exclude this materiality but to analyse the 'process of materialization'…." Kirby, 65-67. See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech.*

Claiming "the primacy of the lived body in our everyday experience," the lived body approach, also known as "the communicative body" or "the body in situation," builds on the insights of phenomenology to explore how individuals experience in and through their bodies a life that is inescapably social and inextricably material.[69] A still emerging, hybrid approach to studying the body, this approach views the body, physicality, cultural influence, and an individual's exercise of choice as three interwoven, constantly interacting, and shifting aspects of the self. This approach argues for the study of "bodies" in their specificity over "the body" in theory.[70] Seeking to stay as close as possible to the body's materiality, or its flesh, the lived body approach argues that bodies are not only diverse, but also constantly shifting in their choices and formations. Bodies can even display paradoxical characteristics as a person wrestles with the balance of physicality, culture, and agency. In exploring the weight of Christian tradition and history, the impact of cultural messages concerning female bodies, and the paths by which women dare to preach, the lived body approach provides a strong set of analytical tools through which to understand the choices female preachers face and the decisions that they make in relation to their preaching bodies.

[69] Gail Weiss, ed. *Intertwinings: Interdisciplinary Encounters with Merleau-Ponty* (Albany: State Univesity of New York Press, 2008), 1.
[70] Grosz, 19.

Philosophical Foundations: Maurice Merleau-Ponty

The philosophical foundations supporting a lived body approach emerged from the scholarship of Frenchman Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[71] Working through a phenomenological account of perception, Merleau-Ponty diverged from the prevailing philosophical wisdom of his time to assert that the body, and not the mind, was the ground of all existence and the foundation of perception.[72] He states, "I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body."[73] Rather than perception originating with cognition, perception begins with the body's lived experience in the world. Merleau-Ponty categorizes such lived experience as the body's *motility*, or its experience of being "thrown into the world." Out of motility, the body realizes its subjectivity as a "being-in-the-world."[74] All subsequent perceptions – about one's body and surrounding reality – are constituted by the concrete structures and capacities of the body, as it inhabits the world into which it has been thrust. To have a body, writes Merleau-Ponty, is "to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them."[75] Thus, the body is the condition and context through which a person relates.[76]

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[71] For two excellent surveys of Merleau-Ponty's contributions to the lived body theory see Rosalyn Diprose and Jack Reynolds, eds, *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts* (Stocksfield, UK: Acumen, 2008) and Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*.
[72] Merleau-Ponty asserts "the essence of consciousness…will consist in rediscovering my actual presence to myself." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xvii and 94.
[73] Merleau-Ponty, 94.
[74]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 90.
[75] Merleau-Ponty, 93.
[76] Grosz, 86. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes how knowledge is bodily. "It is not enough for him to be a psyche in order to know this," writes Merleau-Ponty, "this knowledge, like other knowledge, is acquired only through our relations with other people." 110.

Having named the body's centrality, Merleau-Ponty further explores how meaning is created in embodied life. Seeing the body as "both an object for others and a subject for myself," Merleau-Ponty asserts that an exploration of lived experience provides a window into what he terms the body's "meaningful core," a core comprised of our location in a specific material and inter-human world."[77] This core is only partially uncovered through the ambiguity accompanying "being-in-the-world." To exist in the world, bodies develop complex corporeal schemata, a series of fields relating to possible actions or movements in which the body "knows" how to perform and which conversely structure the body.[78] Defined as "a compendium of our bodily experience," the corporeal schema creates a unified world in which the embodied self operates in practical relationship with other objects and with some degree of awareness of its embodied motions. [79] Through our various corporeal schemata we gain a working knowledge of how to relate in the world. A key component in this structure is Merleau-Ponty's union of body and mind, in which he names the mind as "consciousness as it is incarnated."[80]

[77] Merleau-Ponty, 194. This meaningful core is a union of essence and existence, with essence comprised of a network biological and physiological functions and existence pertaining to the always-social experience. 170. Merleau-Ponty further delves into the phenomena of a phantom limb, in which a person remains aware of a now amputated arm or leg. He describes the phenomenon as "what it is in use which refused mutilation and disablement is an I committed to a certain physical and inter-human world." 93-94.
[78] Merleau-Ponty, 113-115.
[79] Merleau-Ponty, 100-104. He writes, "Thus it is by giving up part of his spontaneity, by becoming involved in the world through stable organs and pre-established circuits that man can acquire the mental and practical space which will theoretically free him…. It is an inner necessity for the most integrated existence to provide itself with an habitual body." The body's performance is enacted at every moment and "those actions in which I habitually engage incorporate their instruments into themselves and make them play a part in the original structure of my own body."
[80] Grosz, 86. Merleau-Ponty defines consciousness as "being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body." 159.

Thus, reality becomes lived reality, derived from the body's unfolding involvement in the world.

Merleau-Ponty provides three insights that form the foundations for a lived body theory. First, he conceives of experience, while privileged in consciousness, as always embodied. Reflections about lived experience are grounded in our physicality. He states "existence realizes itself in the body;" it is "a perpetual incarnation."[81] Our bodies experience the world, our minds participate in and process those experiences, and these body and mind interactions occur in tandem with each other. This perspective directly challenges any sense of pure consciousness, or even an essentialist idea that bodies arrive with an inherent, ahistorical sense of being. Next, embodied living amid a coherent corporeal schema results in the acquisition of bodily habitations. Here, the body's repetitive tasks leave "traces" upon the body, such that a body knows how to act in certain familiar situations, in the same way one's body can retain the knowledge of riding a bike.[82] As in Butler's account of stylizations of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty describes bodies acquiring deep, often unconscious enfleshed proficiencies. And finally, the processes involved in habitations solidify the embodied subject's grasp towards meaning.[83] Merleau-Ponty locates meaning as arising amid the embodied subject's interactions with other objects, included other embodied subjects. We are not born with preset meanings attached to our bodies nor do the meanings developed about our

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[81] Merleau-Ponty, 192.
[82] Jean Grimshaw, "Working out with Merleau-Ponty" in *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*, eds. Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw (New York: Cassell, 1999), 112.
[83] Merleau-Ponty, 176-7. "To learn to see colors is to acquire a certain style of seeing, a new use of one's own body: it is to enrich and recast the body schema. [In this way} our body is not an object for an "I think," it is an grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium."

existence derive solely from a culture's already established structure of meaning. Meaning is made in the individual's encounter with its situations.[84]

The lived body theory grows out of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical assertions. The term "lived body" draws from his definitions of the body as "my-body-as-it-is-lived by me" or the body as "being-to-the-world."[85] While he acknowledges the attention the mind has received in philosophical circles, Merleau-Ponty privileges the embodied experiences of a particular body and brings the mind back into the body's fold. Everything begins with the body. Like lived body theorists in general, Merleau-Ponty moves far beyond any discussions about essences, pure consciousness, or any given sense of being. Instead he and subsequent theorists ground their work in an unfolding, incarnated sense of being that is embodied life. An essence is not an idea uncovered pre-existing at a person's core, "an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse," but that which is "a fact for us" arising with our experience of the world.[86] Building upon his assertions, subsequent theorists turn towards the lived body as the ground of existence and the ambiguous setting for all communication, in order to explore the multiple meaning-making processes that happen across diverse, complex, and ever incomplete

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[84] Rosalyn Diprose, "A Guide to Merleau-Ponty's Key Concepts" in *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts,* 32-33.
[85] Grosz, 86.
[86] Merleau-Ponty, xvi-xvii. While the same term as employed by essentialist theorists, Merleau-Ponty articulates a nuanced understanding of essences. He states, "looking for the world's essence is not looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse; it is looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization." xvii. This 'fact for us' starts with each person's experience of the world. "Essence is here not the end, but a means [by which we grasp] our effective involvement in the world."

living bodies, which interact with other diverse, complex and ever incomplete living bodies.[87]

Merleau-Ponty's account of bodily existence deepens the reflective work possible within preaching. His work provides rich embodied foundations – some tenets about the body – for preaching. Preaching rests upon the embodied self, becoming one manifestation of the unity of mind and body and the harmony of intentionality and place occurring through enfleshed actions. Attending to the physicality of one's preaching body entails everything from the sound of the preacher's voice to his or her stance behind or in front of the pulpit to the style of the preacher's gestures. It also encompasses the significance of incarnate existence, asking questions about how preaching is a perpetual incarnation and the meaning contained within the living presence of the preacher. Jana Childers asserts "for the gospel to have life in any particular time and place, the kerygma must emerge from deep within the preacher."[88] Embodied life is "the condition and the context" for the preacher to "dig deep" within the well of her embodied self, thereby shaping all preaching occasions. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's approach provides insight into the processes by which one learns how to perform. Termed "traces" by the philosopher, these habitations are a key piece of any body's functioning sense of self and world. In a corresponding manner, habitations are an integral part of preaching, even if the preacher cannot fully articulate how she acquired expertise in cadence, rhythm, or gestures. Merleau-Ponty's careful attention to the learning process occurring in and through embodiment is especially key for female preachers, who navigate complex and

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[87] Merleau-Ponty, 193.
[88] Childers, 224.

conflicting corporeal schemata concerning how, when, and to what effect their preaching bodies can perform.

The Body as Process, Experience and Choice: Lived Body Approaches

Remaining true to Merleau-Ponty's foundational thoughts, lived body approaches view embodied life as a constant becoming born of three intersecting threads. An individual's particular physicality, specific cultural context, and unique exercise of agency all work in tandem, and even can compete with each other to shape the self. Aiming to gain close access to the embodied, experiencing individual, lived body scholars affirm the importance of each piece of the body's puzzle, striving to remain especially close to the manifestations of culture and agency that occur in the flesh. Mirroring the body's diverse process of becoming, these scholars offer several different definitions of the lived body approach. Tamsin Wilton conceives of the body as "an event " continuously coming to be amid the back and forth of the material and the social.[89] Elizabeth Grosz imagines the body as a mobius strip, in which mind and body continually bend back into each other.[90] This model, deeply influenced by Merleau-Ponty, enables the body to be understood as "open materiality," a fleshy presence within which certain tendencies and potentials emerge out of the interacting factors of physicality, society, and agency.[91]

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[89] Tamsin Wilson, "Temporality, Materiality: Towards a Body in Time" in *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*, ed. Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw (New York: Cassell, 1999), 59. Wilton conceives of the body as "an event situated in time and continuously subject to the con-constitutive dialectic of the organic and the social."
[90] Grosz, xii. The mobius strip is "the inverted three-dimensional figure eight," which twists, turns and inverts such that one side becomes another.
[91] Grosz, 191.

One particular lived body theorist merits a more prolonged discussion. Iris Marion Young names the lived body theory as "a unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is the body-in-situation."[92] Although shaped by physicality and sociocultural context, the embodied self lives "in situation," a space unique to that one body as a product of the individual's facticity and freedom. Facticity describes "the material facts of a person's body and its relation to a given environment."[93] It includes an individual's distinctive physical attributes, skills and tendencies, as well as the larger givens of one's social environment. But lived experience cannot be understood solely through facticity. Instead, the facts of the body evolve in relationship to the body's freedom, as one chooses how to respond to the physical, social, and interpersonal realities of their daily life. Thus, while "…the lived body recognizes that a person's subjectivity is conditioned by sociocultural facts and the behavior and expectations of others in ways that she has not chosen… the theory…says that each person takes up and acts in relation to those unchosen facts in her own way."[94]

A female preacher experiences herself as a body in situation. She navigates the facts of her physicality as her preaching style is shaped by her height, weight, vocal capacities, and perceived sense of feminine beauty. She is shaped by the social factors of her congregation, tradition and larger culture. She makes decisions in relation to those facts, some of which are conscious decision born from an awareness of her given

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[92] Iris Marion Young "Lived Body versus Gender: Reflections on Social Structure and Subjectivity" in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16. See also Toril Moi's "What Is a Woman?" in *What Is a Woman and Other Essay*s (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[93] Young, 16.
[94] Young, 18.

situation. She experiences other behaviors as more reflexive ones, apparent only as unthinking actions whose roots come to light when something causes her to analyze her behavior. Even then, she may not fully unearth the links between the givens of her body, her culture and her choices. And those choices may or may not correspond to another preacher's choices faced with a similar set of facts. One female preacher may choose to carefully mount a step stool behind the pulpit, in order make more of her physical body visible from behind the pulpit. Another preacher, similar in height, may choose to step outside the pulpit and preach from the sanctuary floor. One preacher may respond to her conceptions of the female body by donning explicit cultural markers of femininity, whether it is make-up, jewelry, a dramatic hairstyle, or high-heeled shoes. Another may choose to downplay any cultural feminine markers and put on a white alb. While some of these decisions may be consciously thought through before preaching, many of these choices appear to happen reflexively. Insight will emerge afterwards as a person reflects upon her choices, but a full understanding of her agency will prove elusive.

Every female preacher encounters the fact that she engages in a practice reserved for male bodies for much of Christian history. And while few female preachers would choose to step into a space in which their bodies receive scrutiny, suspicion, and inhospitality, the ways in which women respond to these unchosen facts are endless. Delving into the complexity behind all these choices, the lived body approach provides a workable set of tools to study the multi-layered diversity of female preaching embodiment. In this study, the lived body approach will allow the researcher to look at fourteen female preachers as utterly unique individuals, whose individual choices bear deep continuity with cultural messages about masculinity and femininity, as well as with

theological discussions about preaching. The women's choices also make the most sense in relation to their physicality and thus the study aims to stay very close to actual bodies that have 'been thrust' into actual contexts, believing that meaning is uncovered by observing female preachers as "beings-in-the-world." In so doing, it enables the theoretical dimension often missing from body conversations: a space to speak in practical turns about constraint and freedom, boundaries and breeches. The lived body approach offers an avenue to stay in a body's particular situation in order to ponder about bodily meaning and mystery. Diverse aspects of embodiment participate in any pondering of meaning and mystery, including an evolving understanding of gender, race and the particularities of bodily life. Each of these conceptions will be examined as they emerge in the participants' experiences. All will be explored as the lived body approach would define them; as fluid, incomplete categories of meaning and identity.

Particularities of the Flesh: Habitation and Agency

The lived body theory has developed substantially from its philosophical roots in Merleau-Ponty's work. Within this study of female preachers, however, his contributions around embodied habitations prove particularly helpful. *Habitations* are those acquired traits of the flesh that hint at culture, physicality, and individual practice. Habitations reveal an individual's daily, embodied experiences, hinting towards the meaning and mystery of lived body. Habitations then can illuminate the intricate avenues through which an individual makes choices concerning how to use, develop, constrain, or empower her body. Explorations of habitations lead towards discussions of agency. As scholars continue to ponder agency, the depth, complexity, and even mystery of

embodied life invites greater elaboration. There is still much to be learned a person's capacity to navigate her facticity and freedom. There remains much mystery around how a person arrives at her unique expressions of the self.

Fleshy Habitations: "What the Body Knows"

Merleau-Ponty argues that bodily traces, those lingering memories in the body of its own motility, become, through time and repetition, ingrained practices. Having acquired a set of skilled movements, the body can act with a working, informed proficiency in its own given context or schema. Habitations, then, are those fleshly proficiencies through which the body evidences its relational capacity in the world.[95] Through habitations, an embodied self comes to possess a world and then endows that world with significance.[96]

Merleau-Ponty utilizes habitations within his over-arching quest towards essences, which he understands not as unchanging givens but as "cores of primary meanings."[97] In this sense, he names the way in which the body acquires knowledge. A habit is not a given. A habit is learned, signifying that the body learns through its own actions and carries that knowledge at the level of its flesh. This fleshly knowledge becomes "what the body knows," a phrase signifying the knowledge an individual carries in the flesh and may or may not be fully accessible through verbal speech. Those who

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[95] Merleau-Ponty, 159-160.

[96] Merleau-Ponty, 169. He describes how a body will "endow the instantaneous expressions of spontaneity with 'a little renewable action and independent existence.' Habit is merely a form of this fundamental power. We say that the body has understood and habit has been cultivated when it has absorbed a new meaning, and assimilated a fresh core of significance." Later he states the "pattern of my bodily behavior endows the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others." 225.

[97] Merleau-Ponty, xvii-xviii.

study the body have argued consistently that there is knowledge known in the body. Discerning "what the body knows" and how the body acquires such privileged knowledge remains a key element of any study of the body.[98]

In a corresponding manner, habitations are significant in understanding the ways in which preachers come to know – in their bodies - how they preach. Preaching involves habituating actions, as traces of the body's preaching experiences are refined through time and repetition into solid, continuous, familiar behaviors. Preachers also bring into the pulpit an import of other habitations: those learned bodily traces arising from a preacher's history, body type, context, and choices. Preaching informs the flesh, the flesh informs its own preaching, and through a long process of practice the body gains its own preaching style. Depending upon the style, a body may proclaim the gospel beyond its spoken words and it may detract from the verbal attempts at proclamation.

The body of a female preacher carries its own knowledge. That knowledge may arise in vague discomfort at standing in a space long denied to one's particular form of embodiment. It may surface through juggling social disciplines concerning diet, makeup and dress as well as the complicated legacy of Christian distinctions between body and

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[98]Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1984), 4. Turner asserts, "bodies provide a different set of knowledge. We know with our bodies, and if there is any truth, it is the truth of the body." Early feminist theorists spoke at length about "women's ways of knowing," which often connected to their bodies. Mary Field Belenky, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). For an entirely different perspective on the body's knowledge in relation to disease, see Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). What remains contested is what exactly the body knows. Essentialist ideas center upon women's shared knowledge. Constructionist approaches point to the ways in which a woman's body will know a culture's representation of the female. A lived body perspective leaves open any firm conclusions about what the body might know, suggesting that specific, particular knowledge specific emerges in the fleshly tasks of everyday life.

spirit. Bodily knowledge can come through the experience of feeling your body speak good news in a stylization that is welcomed, gestures that work, or a voice that reaches the rafters and knows it is being heard. Female preachers can bring into the pulpit habitations encompassing a variety of bodily schemata that relate to their roles as wives/partners or mothers, or to images of women as asexual virgins or lascivious temptresses. What the body knows weaves itself into the preacher's proclamation, becoming integral to how the flesh speaks. By exploring the female preacher's habitations, the scholar can delve into the rich pool of knowledge brought by the flesh and move closer to what the body knows beyond speech. [99]

How a Body Chooses: The Intricacies of Agency

The habitations of the flesh and the knowledge they provide influence another vital element of any study of embodied life: the individual's exercise of her agency. Agency, the potential for action, empowerment and choice, appears, in varying degrees, within all body theories. By making agency one of its three main components, the lived body theory provides a wide window into the complexity contained within the choices we make. Agency emerges at the intersection of facticity and freedom, illustrating how our choices can be far more bound than we imagine while also possessing far greater

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[99] Judith Butler remains firm that the gap between body and speech is healed through language. She suggests that as one tries to speak about that which is in excess of speech, one "renders discursive what is extra or nondiscursive." Butler, 184**.** Other theorists, including Grosz and Mahmood name the limits of Butler's reliance upon a system of signification. Mahmood asks "how do we develop a vocabulary for thinking conceptually about forms of corporeality that, while efficacious in behavior, do not lend themselves easily to representation, elucidation, and a logic of signs and symbols?" She suggests that a "theory of linguistic signification does not quite apprehend the power that corporeality commands…." Mahmood, 203.

possibility than we can foresee. Recognizing that embodied life is inherently social, Butler argues that agency emerges when a person chooses to endorse a system of meaning that exerts influence upon her as well as when she resists against it.[100] Like habitations, the choices made by an embodied self are not easily understood.

The process of exploring agency requires an analysis of the factors influencing a particular choice, the process by which a person makes the decision and the impact resulting from the subsequent choice. Just as the staying power of a habitation evolves over time, the choices we have made shape the choices we will make and what it feels like to live as a body within the boundaries of our choices. Like habitations, agency is intrinsically embodied. Thus, exploring the how, why and to what effect accompanying every choice moves the scholar closer to Merleau-Ponty's core of meaning within embodied existence.[101] Such a core of meaning can never reduced to simple cause and effect dynamics, nor it is ever fully uncovered. Even when it appears the self chooses in freedom, a set of confinements work to restrict the choice.[102] Such confinements establish the possibility of choice, even as they are altered by the decisions the self embraces. Furthermore, the choices that we make can surprise us, illuminating the elusive ambiguity

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[100] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*: *Theories of Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1997). Butler's main thesis is that the subject comes into being when the forces which first exerted external control upon a person are assumed internally, giving birth to the psyche itself. She asks, "What does it mean, then that the subject, defended by some as a presupposition of agency, is also understood to be an effect of subjection?" Butler, 11.

[101] Merleau-Ponty, xviii –xix. Merleau-Ponty is very clear that this 'meaningful core" holds deep knowledge without being a universalizing truth. He writes, "To see the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth. The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have not doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible."

[102] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 13.

that is part and parcel of embodied life. To explore agency risks rendering the landscape more confusing.[103] To ignore agency risks halting the exploration on the surface.

Agency denotes an individual's capacity for action, her movement towards the world. Fully intertwined within the historical and social structures that affect an individual's set of choices, agency is most often linked to the impetus for change. Although individuals make choices daily concerning how to dress, care for their physical health and move amongst the world, agency most vividly presents itself, as Butler asserts, in "unauthorized uses" of our bodies. As transgressions of the cultural and theological messages of their day, some female preachers choose to place their bodies in prohibited spaced and to speak publicly when they had been ordered to remain silent. But agency's hidden work often lies in behaviors that conform. In accordance with the cultural and theological messages of their day, some female preachers choose to adopt socially acceptable styles of dress and to exhort from their living rooms rather than to preach from the pulpit. Because agency is exercised by particular bodies amid the social structures in which those bodies develop, agency occurs in relation with other bodies, with larger, systemic forces, and with a person's own values, expectations, and structures of living.[104] Through her study of Muslim women within the contemporary Egyptian mosque movement, Saba Mahmood asserts that agency should not serve as a trope for "resistance" but as a complex marker for the multiple ways persons determine and enact

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[103] Butler, *The Psychic life of Power*, 13-15. Butler articulates how structures of power bring the subject into being, continue to exert constraining influence on the subject, and changed by the subject into different forms of power. She names this the ambivalency at the heart of agency.

[104] Kirke, 152. Kirke argues for "…an understanding of agency that emerges out of the engagement of the organism with its surroundings; it is an agency in relation, not an essential property of the individual."

their potentiality.[105] Mahmood names agency as “a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create,” suggesting that “agentive capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms, but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms.”[106]

Female preachers inhabit a historically subordinate space, and they continue to work amid a vast network of norms concerning the female body, the expectations of preachers, a society’s images of the single woman, wife, mother or grandmother, and the specific tenets of a particular theological tradition or church denomination. On one hand, female preachers have exercised tremendous structure-altering agency through preaching across history and in ways that altered cultural norms about female preachers. But alongside such dramatic actions, female preachers also have enacted their agency through conforming to social norms or theological expectations about what it means to be female. Contemporary female preachers can experience both welcome and inhospitality in the pulpit, can feel at times empowered in their embodiments and at others times deeply uneasy in their embodied presence, and often bring to the pulpit their roles as daughters, wives, partners, sisters and/or mothers to effective and less than effective results. As one studies these preachers conceiving of agency as the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms stays closer to female fleshly life. It also provides a richer analysis of the meanings contained within a female preacher’s decisions and behaviors.[107]

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[105] Mahmood, 180.
[106] Mahmood, 180, 186.
[107] Mahmood, 186.

The Body on Preaching Day: Choices and the Meaning Underneath

When Rev. Rebecca Harris steps up to preach, she inhabits a body of medium height and weight, with curly blonde hair that sits right above her shoulders and a voice that with drama coaching is comfortable in its range and variations. She chooses to preach from the sanctuary floor, both in reaction to the high authority symbolized by an evaluated pulpit and her desire to shift the church's formal culture to a slightly more informal atmosphere. Within a sanctuary she calls "cavernous," she uses a body that has run half marathons and given birth to two children to preach without notes and often with props in a style she hopes is artful and personally engaging to her congregation. By Sunday morning, she has already made some choices about her body: minimum adornment, trendy shoes, layered clothes, white alb and stole. But the movement of worship, the messages of her body, and her interactions with church members all may shift the final form of her preaching that day.

Saba Mahmood argues, "The meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity."[108] Within every preaching moment, particular conceptions of the preacher, what it means to preach, what kind of authority a preacher has, and the expectations around a preaching body all are at work. When women preach, other concepts join the existing ones, including prevailing notions about femininity, fashion, the expected shape of female bodies, and the social positions of age, marital status, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and parenthood. Any exploration of the ways female preachers acquire a set of habitations, exercise their agency, and

[108] Mahmood, 186.

understand the meaning behind their choices includes an analysis of the "concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity."

How does one distinguish between being fashionable and being fashion-forward, and what types of bodily presentations create what types of perceptions about a preacher? If a preacher combines the androgyny of a white alb with a distinctly feminine set of shoes, what does she experience about her body and her preaching, and what does the congregation perceive? How is our bodily life altered by physical factors and events beyond our control, whether it is the shape of our bodies or a miscarriage? Every female preacher encounters, as Iris Young aptly states, a complex set of facticity and freedom. Each preacher takes up those chosen and unchosen facts in her own way. While there may be an almost infinite range of choices and meanings behind those choices, the process by which female preachers arrive at decisions concerning their bodies provides a rich window into the modes of being, responsibility and effectiveness at work in preaching.

In the pages that follow, the choices, and meanings embedded in those choices made by contemporary female preachers will be explored in greater detail. These explorations will continually inquire about the habitations of the flesh demonstrated by a particular preacher, as well as how the preacher exercised her own particular mode of agency. One end goal lies in illuminating in more detail the multiple modes of being at work for all preachers. Another, more ultimate goal lies in connecting our bodily life to the Word made flesh. If preaching ushers in the transforming Word of God, then our habitations and our choices can also be signs of God's Word. If preaching is about

bodies, then it matters when a female body preaches. But exactly how it matters, why it matters, and to what affect is still to be fully understood.

The place to begin, though, is with Mahmood's insight that agency is enacted in both the ways women resist norms and the ways they inhabit them. For centuries, female preachers were either barred from or discouraged from preaching. Yet history bears witness to a remarkable line of female preachers. Their bodily choices in preaching demonstrate both resistance to and habitation within social norms. Grasping in greater detail their diverse choices – to inhabit and to resist cultural norms concerning their bodies, their social roles, and their preaching – becomes the first step into an exploration of the female preaching body. The habitations and agential choices accompanying female preachers, while diverse and multi-layered, have a history. Any understanding of the habitations and choices of contemporary female preachers entails grasping the long line of choices from which today's preachers emerge. It is to this history we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO

A BODILY HISTORY OF FEMALE PREACHING

Deborah Lewis worked as a prominent Washington lawyer and executive for much of her professional life. By the middle of the nineteen nineties, she had chaired a federal agency, litigated cases in front of the United States Court of Appeals and become the President of a nationally recognized consulting firm. She was a smart, accomplished, African-American businesswoman who hoped for a future judgeship. But amid a series of unanticipated life crises, she found herself returning to church after decades of absence. She gradually became immersed in the community's life through committee work and then bible study. Despite some initial reservations she eventually discerned a call to ministry. Currently in her fifth year as the pastor of a suburban congregation, the now Rev. Lewis tells people "God had a robe in mind, but it obviously wasn't a judicial robe."[109]

The choices Rev. Lewis makes about her robed, preaching body reflected a host of habitations accompanying her gender, her African-American community and her former profession. Within Merleau-Ponty's framework, habitations are those patterns of behavior that, through countless repetitions, become integrated into the body's structure and serve as the means by which the embodied self creates a coherent world.[110] Arising

[109] Interview with Female Preacher, February 23, 2010. Names are kept in confidence by mutual agreement. For more information about this study, see Appendix A.
[110] Merleau-Ponty, 225. He writes, "…those actions in which I habitually engage incorporate their instruments into themselves and make them play a part in the original structure of my own body." Merleau-Ponty, 104.

from our social situatedness, habitations possess with rich, multi-faceted meanings about how a person inhabits and "endows the world with significance."[111] Rev. Lewis' embodied life draws from several distinct contexts, each providing a template through which she organized and interpreted her behaviors. The decisions she makes about her preaching body – from clothing and vocal patterns to posture and gestures – can be understood as habitations, actions that illumine the "nexus of living meanings" associated with the female preacher.[112]

Initially trained as a lawyer, Rev. Lewis' role as a litigator clearly influences her physical presentation. The best sermon, from her perspective, is akin to well-honed closing remarks in which the lawyer's appearance aided the argument. Naming her style as conservative, she described her standard attire as a black or navy pants suit, low heeled or flat shoes, a subdued make-up "face," and a simple ensemble of earrings, wedding band and watch. Most lawyers dress in an understated way, she elaborated, because "you want the jury to focus on your personality and not on what you are wearing." She further views this established attire as a necessary adherence to the code of professional dress. She said, "people have to buy you in order to buy your case." Subdued attire carries an accompanying benefit of minimizing her femaleness. When she worked as one of the first African-American women in a male-dominated legal field, Rev. Lewis avoided an overtly feminine appearance. Her suits were dark, her shoes were flat and her attire was devoid of frills, flounces or dangling jewelry. This approach formed during her years as an attorney is now continued in her ministry. She wears a white robe over the same pants

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[111] Merleau-Ponty, 225.
[112] Merleau-Ponty, 175.

suits, the same shoes and the set of jewelry. When asked to explain her choices, she named it all as part of her uniform and a means by which she gains credibility.

When she began preaching regularly, Rev. Lewis crafted her preaching performances from her past experiences in the Black Church. Raised in a Baptist congregation in the South Bronx, she is well versed in the expectations for rhythm, imagery and movement within her context. "The African American tradition is more embodied," she said. "It is head movements. It is snapping my fingers." She once watched a mentor jump off the top pulpit step while quoting Art Kelly's "I believe I can fly." Knowing congregations responded to such demonstrativeness, she was pleased the Sunday she overheard a parishioner comment after her sermon, "the preacher can dance." She moves freely into the sanctuary floor during a sermon and explained, "people are looking for your ability to get out and talk with folks." She also aims "for at least some level of verbal rhythmic responsiveness," often organizing sermons around repetitive phrases. A recent post-presidential election sermon was structured around a reoccurring "yes we can, now we must" verse. The practices of the African American Christian community, like that of the lawyerly environment of past years, help form her embodiments. Her "stylizations of the flesh" mirror the stylization of other preachers' flesh, as she observes, tries on and makes her own the preaching patterns of this tradition.

At the same time, Rev. Lewis does far more than simply mimic the stock expectations of either the legal profession or the African American congregation. She learned the lawyer's rule of credible dress but she doesn't always adhere to its muted manifestations. After becoming the head of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, she abandoned navy suits for brightly colored ones, mainly because of her televised

appearances to discuss toy buying during the Christmas season. Most of her preaching mentors have been men, but Rev. Lewis asserted that she never felt compelled to mirror their voices. “I don’t feel like I have to sound like anyone,” she reiterated. While she affirmed the physical movements intertwined with African American preaching, she contradicted such activity with the assertion that “you can be deeply embodied and not move.” And she remains critical of the unreflective use of certain stylistic devices. “I grew up in an old Baptist church,” she reflected. “A guy could get up there and say, ‘Mary had a little lamb,’ and the congregation would say ‘yes, Lord.’ There would be no content.” True preaching, she insisted, required greater substance. While Rev. Lewis’ bodily habitations emerge out of social contexts that helped shape her choices, she exercises her agency to shift the communal habitations and thereby create more individualized, personal fleshed stylizations. Sometimes she conforms to the inherited habits. Sometimes she resists them. Most often, she adapts the habitations over time to more fully match the needs of her body or her understanding of the task at hand. This diversity of her decisions – and the freedom to make a choice - is central to her identity. When asked to explain the reasoning behind any particular choice, Rev. Lewis consistently replied, “I’m very comfortable in my own skin. I am just me.” How she arrived at “being me,” though, involved a complex historical legacy of habitations.

A History of Habits

However Rev. Lewis articulated her choices about attire or movement, her decisions are not made outside of her history. They are born within her context, emerging from the cultures in which she was situated. Her chosen professions shape her sense of

possible dress choices. Her racial group forms her understanding of her body's potential for expression. Her gender makes her mindful of the messages she wants – and does not want - to convey about her embodied self. None of these social categories exists independently. Each is a product of a vast multitude of individual choices across time, as persons interact within several different social spheres simultaneously. Every social category's set of habitations develops out of those choices, providing the multi-layered conditioning of the body integral to a functioning self.

All habitations have a history. They evolve within a community's embodied existence, as the individuals' actions to link thought and behavior become so deeply ingrained in the social web of operations that the actions appear almost magical.[113] Whenever an individual attempts to explain her behavior, the meanings she attaches to an action display how our movements are always intervolved within larger, older systems of meaning. Rev. Lewis' dual explanations about her clothing decisions represent multiple meaning making systems at work. "You want people to forget about your clothes and concentrate on your arguments," she asserted. Later she suggested she wore the very same attire because "people have to buy you in order to buy your arguments." These two explanations present slightly paradoxical perspectives on the body's role in her presentations. Her embodied presence is supposed both to fade from attention and to reinforce her words. Interpreting her explanations requires an exploration into the history surrounding her specific tasks, behaviors and contexts.

Thus, to understand the meanings that dwell within the embodied choices of contemporary female preachers, we must first explore how those habitations have formed

[113] Merleau-Ponty, 108. "The relationships between my decisions and my body are, in movement, magical ones."

through history. Every female preacher has faced questions about how to clothe her body, how to speak in ways that garnished acceptance by her listeners and how to move in ways that were authorized for the preacher. Knowing that audiences had to "buy them" in order to "buy" their preaching, female preachers in all eras of Christian history have calculated what types of embodied presentations might strengthen their legitimization. In surveying a diverse group of preachers across different eras of preaching, histories of habitations emerge. These historical female preaching habitations were crafted over time and through experimentation to enhance the authority of the female preacher, who experienced her body as an integral to her preaching and also a hurdle to be overcome in order to preach.

Merleau-Ponty defines a habitation as those repetitive tasks necessary to any embodied individual's involvement in her environment. Habitations are performed countless times in the process of becoming ingrained practices that leave "traces" upon the body, eventually enabling an individual's living mastery within her world.[114] Through her habits, the embodied person acts in certain ways in certain situations. Her behaviors are continuously refined through her evolving attempts to integrate her environment in relationally meaningful ways. Analyzing the habits of the body offers a glimpse into that "core of meanings" Merleau-Ponty asserts is present in every person by virtue of the fact that "we are our body."[115] For the preacher, the embodied habitations attached to preaching are acquired through repeated practices of preaching. These habitations always happen amid larger, cultural conversations about the nature and definition of preaching as well as the meanings associated with male and female bodies. The fleshly proficiencies

[114] Jean Grimshaw, "Working out with Merleau-Ponty" in *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*, ed. Jane Arthus and Jean Grimshaw (New York: Caseel, 1999), 112.
[115] Merleau-Ponty, 173, 194.

female preachers gained across other historical time periods proclaim something about the significance and the setbacks associated with the female preaching body.

This chapter will narrate a bodily history of female preaching by analyzing four bundles of habitations used by women to heal the gap between a contentious female body and an acceptable preacher. These four types are chosen for their representative power, as umbrella categories representing either a similar approach adopted by multiple women in one historical era or as a common approach utilized by numerous women across several different historical eras. Each bundle of habitations can also be linked to at least one well-known female preacher, whose preaching expanded the forms of preaching and whose practices were subsequently adopted, in some form, by other preachers. Since habitations are meaning-making movements, their histories are worth understanding in their own right. Because the history of our habits extends into the present, these habitational histories illuminate something of the habitations still shaping the context – including opportunities, limits, authorizations, questions, and more - for female preachers today.

The Challenges in Discovering the Historical Female Body

In recent decades, scholars have uncovered a rich but not continuous tradition of female preaching. We now know of Mary Magdalene's title as "the apostle to the apostles" and thus her evangelical ministry in the early church.[116] Our understanding of preaching has been widened to include the religious writings of medieval women mystics like Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen, whose contributions continue to impact

[116] Katherine Ludwig Jansen, "Maria Magdalena: Apostolorum Apostola" in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Los Angeles: University of California, 1998), 57 – 96.

Christian theology. We have a wealth of stories about the preaching ministries of eighteenth and nineteenth century women, especially from the Holiness and Pentecostal movements, which demonstrate the growing momentum of female preaching despite suppressive efforts by church leaders. Even more information exists about the twentieth-century struggles towards women's ordination, including larger collections of women's sermons over the past two centuries. Thus, we know that women did preach in almost every era of Christian history. From the traces of their manuscripts we glean something of their sermons. From the entries of their journals as well as other historical records we learn of the challenges accompanying female preachers who attempted to preach in eras that discouraged or barred such preaching. We know that the trajectories of female preaching are long, deep and wide, even as our reconstructions of these histories struggle against the gaps between preachers, the silencing of women and the outright erasure of their stories.[117]

Yet we have only begun to build a physical history of the female preacher.[118] One hurdle lies in the process of historical retrieval. Certain things – like sermon manuscripts and journal entries – can be discovered and analyzed. Other information – like a preacher's experience of her body or a congregation's impression about a preacher's gestures, postures and voice – are more difficult to retrieve. It is hard to gain insight into the embodied decisions of female preachers from historical documents beyond the occasional comment and the still-life picture. It is almost impossible to know with

[117] Catherine Brekus articulates well the practice of erasure in the histories of female preaching. See Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 4-10, 15-16.
[118] Two notable expectations to this claim arise in the rich descriptive and analytical windows to the female preaching body found in Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, pages 88-113 and Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2005).

certainty how a female preacher conceived of or sought to utilize her own body. For all that scholars have unearthed about the tremendous legacy of female preaching, we are still exploring the choices women made about their bodies and the implications of those choices for themselves, their congregations and their preaching.

A second hurdle in exploring the physicality of the female preacher comes from the theological concepts attached to women's bodies. From the beginning of Christianity, the female body has been a site of intense scrutiny and ongoing suspicion. Biblical admonishments required women to be silent in church.[119] Women were formally excluded from preaching at an early juncture in the church's development. Through the centuries, religious authorities sought close control over female bodies, often tagging them with tropes associated with archetypal saint, best represented in Mary the mother of Jesus, or with an archetypal sinner, often symbolized by Mary Magdalene, who, on the basis of little evidence, was given a promiscuous past.[120] The female who sought to preach was named out of place, inferior, unclean or beautifully but dangerously alluring.[121] More than one bishop in the Middle Ages argued that a woman should not preach because "her appearance would provoke lascivious thoughts."[122] John Cotton, the seventeenth century New England Puritan, suggested, "a woman who was allowed to

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[119] Two often quoted Biblical passages are I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:11-12.
[120] Brekus, 41.
[121] Elaine Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Shaping Ministries Through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993), 226.
[122] Carolyn Muessig, "Prophecy and Song: Teaching and Preaching by Medieval Women" in *Women Preachers and Prophets of Two Millennia of Christianity*, 154 and Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice through the Ages* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 53.

speak or testify in the church might soon prove a seducer."[123] These seductive suspicions existed alongside paradoxical suggestions that women who preached were somehow less female. President-to-be James Garfield confessed that there was "something about a women speaking in public that unsexes her" in his mind.[124] The women who preached, therefore, risked the skeptical gazes of observers searching for her alluring powers, her questionable manifestations of femininity or her misrepresentation of the gospel. Bearing a host of semiotic and symbolic meanings, the female preaching body was a controversial body, over-studied amid anxiety about its potential danger and under-studied for its powerful agency. The task of overcoming the female body's controversy has proven difficult, rendering it arduous to explore female preaching embodiment in more neutral or nuanced ways.

A History Narrated through Habitations

The female preacher of centuries past recognized the controversy accompanying her embodiment. Occasionally, she attempted to diffuse the suspicion by offering alternate interpretations of the glaring differences between her body and a male preaching body. In these instances, preachers hoped to cast bodily barriers into bodily assets. A preacher riddled with physical ailments, often triggered by the societal distress surrounding her preaching, may respond to the preaching manual's mandate to look "healthy with radiant color" with theological reversals, claiming that it was precisely

[123] Brekus, 30.
[124] Elizabeth Gillan Muir, *Petticoats in the Pulpit: The Story of Early 19th Century Methodist Preachers in Upper Canada* (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1991), 98.

through physical "weakness and fatigue" that "God grabbed their attention."[125] Aware that her shorter height necessitated a step stool at the pulpit, another preacher proclaimed "I'm a little but powerful handmaiden of the Lord." [126] But words alone cannot heal the discomfort generated by and within female preachers. Such verbal messages only went so far. Instead female preachers developed habitations aimed at crafting new spaces for their speech. Recognizing the resistance to their preaching, female preachers, through trial and error, experimented with their physicality in efforts to gain access to the pulpit.

Looking across the history of female preaching, four broad sets of habitations coalesce as avenues through which women sought to claim authority and increase legitimacy as preachers. These habitations vary within different historical, cultural and theological settings, as well as by the nuances of particular situations and personalities. But they all formed within a common sense that the female preacher was less than fully welcomed. The first bundle of habitations depict women who responded to the messages of being unfit for the pulpit by attempting to transcend their bodies while they preached. Distinguishing spiritual authority from fleshly life, *transcending women* emphasized the gift of the Holy Spirit and minimized the role of the body in preaching. A second bundle of habitations depict the female preacher who answered the historical barriers placed upon her preaching by adopting signs of maleness into her embodiment. These *women who act like men* chose to emulate the attributes ascribed to their male colleagues in their

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[125] The advice for robust preaching performances comes from Gwyn Walters, "The Body in the Pulpit" in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*. Samuel T. Logan, Jr., ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company), 447. For further exploration of the translation of phsycial hurdles into robust theological messages see Elaine Lawless, *Handmaidens of the Lord* (Philadelpia: Univeristy of Pennysvania, 1988) and Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims.*
[126] Lawless, *Handmaidens of the Lord*, xviii-xix.

dress, voice or movement. A third set of habitations cluster around women who closely linked dress, voice and movements to cultural images of the impeccably moral woman. These *virtuous women* typically exemplified sacrificial, loving wives and mothers but included any females who projected irreproachable femininity. A final habitational group represents women who relied upon behaviors that violated socially accepted boundaries surrounding being female, often in ways their listeners found sexually provocative. These *transgressing women* broke the rules about how women might look or act while they preach – and created a new set of rules, a new habitation, in the process. Taken as a whole group, the women who transcend, the women who act like men, the virtuous women and the women who transgress depict some distinctive habits accompanying female preaching, the diverse stylizations of the flesh possible within their proclamation.

Each bundle of habitations represents a particular approach to embodied life. With only four broad sets, they cannot encapsulate all the bodily possibilities available to female preachers. Instead they serve as tools constructed specifically for the purpose of analyzing how women use their bodies, with full knowledge that many other sets of habitations are possible. No one actual performance will fit any one theoretical approach. Nor will any one woman be a precise combination of characteristics from multiple models. Instead every woman will exceed the habitations, even while finding herself conformed and conforming to certain aspects of some of them. Hence, the habitations serve as vehicles to illumine the complex social performances happening within preaching bodies. The bundles further reveal the chasms existing between theoretical constructs and the always enfleshed preacher, between the established sets of habitations

and the still evolving ones. It is in the space between the gaps that we learn about our shared existence as embodied preachers.

At the same time, these bundles of habits are not crafted arbitrarily. They grow out of a close historical analysis of actual preaching women across time and situation. They are rooted in social situations, cultural messages and particular lives. Each set provides greater insight into a time period, community of women or theological perspective. Telling their history can illumine the combination of habitations at work within contemporary preachers, who are still being formed by social and historical realities and are still re-tooling their embodied practices for new configurations of preaching.

Not the Body but the Spirit: Habits of Transcendence

When reading a wide selection of call narratives by female preachers, three common themes surface among the variety of individual experiences. The women's stories start with an inwardly felt, often barely noticeable, inclination to preach.[127] Women initially resist this nascent call emphatically enough to refuse preaching for many years and often suffer prolonged periods of physical distress. Eventually, though, women record how the Holy Spirit entered their struggle, overwhelmed their objections and propelled them to preach. As they described their experiences, the Spirit invaded their embodied existence and superseded their fleshly life. The gift of the Spirit becomes their authority to preach. The same Spirit provides a rationale for minimizing their female

[127] While the works of Brekus and Kienzle and Walker touch upon the elements of these narratives, the life of Rebecca Jackson provides another close reading. See *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress* ed. Jean McMahon Humez (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1981).

bodies. Filled with the Spirit, these transcending preachers root the reasoning for their preaching far away from their physicality, stressing that their flesh faded away as the Spirit took root.

Two historical streams of thought supported the habits of transcendence: theological tenets promoting the separation of flesh and spirit and cultural messages denigrating the female body. Early Christian tradition distinguished the spirit from the flesh, associating the flesh with bound, earthly existence and the spirit with the realms of heaven and holiness. Preaching was authorized by the Spirit who resided in the soul. Theologians who supported the Spirit's capacity to transform persons into preachers often argued that gender was attached only to the flesh.[128] Such a theological position held special importance to women, who were well versed in culturally messages that linked female bodies to the brute or base flesh and characterized it as unclean, inferior, sexually alluring or somehow unworthy of the pulpit.[129] By emphasizing the Spirit's authorizing power, which often came through ecstatic or mystical experiences, women circumvented the bodily barriers to their preaching. They neutralized the fear of female sexuality by stressing the Spirit's purifying process, which rendered the body an empty vessel stripped of its fleshly desires. Such spiritual purity differed from the purity derived from cultural roles associated with being a wife or mother that will appear in subsequent models. Here, the body was minimized by virtue of the Spirit's capacity to eradicate all matters of dangerous flesh. As inspired mouthpieces for God, these female preachers

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[128] Karen King, "Prophetic Power and Women's Authority: The Case of the Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)" in *Women Preachers and Prophets through two millennia of Christianity,* 25.
[129] Brekus, 52-3.

verbally disregarded the body's role in preaching, characterizing their physicality as simply unimportant and un-involved in the proclamation.

Flesh-denying, spirit-emphasizing practices were evident in the medieval church, as female mystics engaged in a variety of physical disciplines such as fasting, sexual abstinence and cutting off their hair.[130] In this era, the church lifted up religious leaders like Rose Viterbo, whose public preaching during the thirteenth century was credited to a "purity of mind and body" born of the chastening presence of the Spirit.[131] Similar practices were evidenced in the post-Reformation movements that included female preachers. As one of the earliest traditions to support female preachers, Quakers affirmed the belief that the Spirit granted women the capacity to transcend gender. Responding to this theological position, female Quaker preachers dressed in simple, unadorned gowns that communicated plainness, moderate or "the stripping away of …carnal indulgence."[132] Their clothing consisted of either dark or white gowns with hair tucked under a cap. The same attire assumed different meaning in later eras, but it originated as a method by which to present a gender-neutral presence. By decreasing the body's noticeability, as well as its distinctive female features, these women signaled that the Spirit served as the sole instigator and author of their preaching.

One example of the transcending habitations emerged in the figure of Jemima Wilkinson. An itinerant preacher during the Revolutionary War period, Wilkinson's

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130 Several historians note this trend. See Carol Lee Flinders, *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993) and Anne Brenon, "The Voice of the Good Woman: An Essay on the Pastoral and Sacerdotal Role of Women in the Cathar Church" in *Women Preachers and Prophets through two millennia of Christianity*, 114-133.
131 Carolyn Muessig, 148-149.
132 Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the colonies and Abroad, 1700-1775* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 41.

preaching ministry in the New England and Mid-Atlantic areas began with her miraculous experience of the Spirit choosing to dwell in her body. Following a weeklong, severe illness, she awoke to claim that female self had died and been resurrected as the Public Universal Friend.[133] Naming her resurrected body as a "tabernacle" for God, Wilkinson asserted that she was no longer a woman but a spirit divinely inspired to preach. She referred to herself as Public Universal Friend, or simply Friend, for the rest of her life and insisted her followers not use any pronouns, male or female, in writings about her. She advocated celibacy, claiming the desires of the flesh were absent from her re-born spirit. She kept her body veiled behind flowing clerical gowns that "fastened at the neck and hid all but her hands, feet, and face."[134] Enjoying much prominence as a preacher, Jemima Wilkinson symbolized how life in the Spirit enabled the preaching of one (gender-less) woman.

Wilkinson's assertion of an embodied self overwhelmed by God is replicated, in more moderate forms, by every preacher who claims divine authority behind her speech and who perceives her female body as, at some level, at "extra" in her preaching. Rev. Lewis interprets her well-covering, plain, dark attire as choices designed to deflect attention away from her physicality. Rev. Erin Robinson seeks to dress in a manner that "allows everyone to forget that I am a female." Rev. Laura Martin exemplifies a high degree of transcendence, characterizing her preaching as times of "God using me" and asserting "my body is the last thing I'm thinking about." In each instance, the preacher's embodiment aims to encourage congregations and themselves to forget their embodied female forms.

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[133] Brekus, 80-97.
[134] Brekus, 87.

The inclinations towards the habitations of transcendence may emerge from the circulating doubts associated with a female preacher's capabilities and appear, even temporarily, successful. It is hard to dispute claims of divine authority. But habitations that dismiss a person's essential embodiment will prove more difficult to sustain, and more costly to a preacher's embodied life. Divorced from the "body that is me" preachers may lose the "nexus of living meanings" arising from a lived body. Her efforts to focus upon the Spirit rendered Wilkinson's body almost devoid of its particularity and publicly discredited from any preaching involvement. Furthermore, female preachers, past and present, who attempt transcendence indirectly affirm the body's ever-involvement in preaching. They enact transcendence through very careful attention to the body's dress, posture, adornments and movements. From Jemima Wilkinson's long gown to Rev. Lewis's dark suits, women who present a Spirit-infused body, in effect, employ the body in the service of its own (apparent) disappearance.

The body is always with the preacher; the preacher's body is always preaching. The female preachers across history who stressed the transcending power of the Spirit also contended with the solid reality of their flesh. It is worth noticing how many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female preachers who claimed the Spirit compelled them to preach also reported prolonged periods of bodily distress ranging from nightmares, tremors, paralysis to de-habilitating illness.[135] Similar accounts of physical suffering can be found in the narratives of medieval women mystics. These material manifestations bear remarkable resemblance to cultural features of femininity found in different historical eras. In her studies of contemporary female preachers, Pentecostal

[135] Muir, 58. Brekus, 87, 165, 184. Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women,* xvii, 29 and 93.

Elaine Lawless notes the multiple instances of backaches, headaches, overwhelming weariness and chronic pain.[136] Whatever habits of transcendence endure, the body remains present – in significant, speech-altering ways - during preaching.

Although Jemima Wilkinson never wavered from her assertion that her female self had been replaced by a genderless spirit, most historical descriptions remarked upon the maleness of her appearance. Her long, loose cloaks mimicked the clothes of male clergy. She strengthened this connection by knotting a man's handkerchief at her neck and styling her hair in the looser, more flowing fashions associated with the masculine style.[137] Her use of man-like costumes corresponds to Butler's analysis of contemporary practices of drag or cross-dressing.[138] By playing with her performance of her gender, Wilkinson calls into question the permanence – or giveness – of her female status, a habitation replicated by other female preachers across history. In this way, Jemima Wilkinson relied upon more than one set of habitations to craft her space to preach. Insisting she preached as a spirit, she also drew heavily from a second bundle of habits, molding her body to look like a man.

The Male-Like Woman: Female Bodies in Masculine Forms

In the middle to late Middle Ages, iconography appeared in Western European churches naming Mary Magdalene as the apostle to the apostles, illustrating her proclamation to the disciples of Christ's resurrection and her subsequent missionary

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[136] Lawless, *Handmaidens of the Lord*, xvii, 29.
[137] Brekus, 87.
[138] Butler, Gender Trouble, 186-7.

activity to preach the gospel.[139] Although every picture was unique, all of the icons granted this first apostle a new level of authority. Her body appeared comparable to male preachers. In some, she stood adorned in preaching robes rather than traditional female attire. In many, she bore the golden aureola, or triple crown, reserved for early church preachers. In another, she spoke from the pulpit.[140] But like icons of Catherine of Alexandria and Rose of Viterbo from roughly the same time period, it was the depiction of her gestures that most gave her as a preacher of the church. All three female figures were drawn employing the standard hand gestures of preachers: right hand raised and index finger pointed upward while the left hand, palm open, extended outward at waist level.[141] While Mary's emerging authority as a preacher drew strength from multiple sources, including sermons and historical writings; the devotional pictures re-imagining this first female preacher granted her male-like qualities. She entered the preaching space reserved for men with the symbols associated with male preachers.

Given their history of exclusion, it seems natural that many females would garner recognition by emulating male preachers. Stepping into a male-dominated arena, many female preachers had almost no other way to visualize their preaching and much encouragement to revere masculine traits. [142] They recognized how to strengthen their presence by molding their bodies to comply with masculine images. In addition, the already discussed tradition of distinguishing between spirit and flesh, coupled with theological arguments that gender was inscribed only in the flesh, led to conclusions that

[139] Jansen, 67.
[140] Jansen, 72-3.
[141] Roberto Rusconi, "Women's Sermons at the End of the Middle Ages: Texts from the Blessed ad Images of the Saints" in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, 173 and 191.
[142] Brekus, 52-53.

women who were inspired by the Spirit had entered a soulful, sexless realm.[143] One medieval sect even went so far as to claim that holy women become males in the afterlife.[144] Although used in support of support of transcending habitations, the idea that women could abandon their femininity extended into an operative plasticity of gender for anyone called by the Spirit to preach. Not able to fully transcend her body, a woman stepped away from her gender to re-represent herself as male.

Hoping to cast their bodies as more familiar to congregations accustomed to maleness, female preachers attempted to match the pitch and tonal qualities of deeper voices. They most likely studied the body habitations of male preachers, hoping to mimic some standard gestures, postures or movements. The most easily accessible avenue for a female preacher to represent herself as male came in her choice of clothing. History witnesses to the host of women who copied male dress in order to gain access to professions previously barred to them.[145] By donning the standard, long, flowing gowns, they mimicked male patterns. Such tactics continue into modern times, as female preachers utilize clothing associated with men, including preaching albs, academic robes and even their own versions of the 1980s power suit. Women also shifted their mannerisms or relational styles. As previously noted, Jemima Wilkinson combined her conceptual arguments about becoming Public Universal Friend with a decidedly male demeanor. Her strong authoritarian leadership prompted critics to accuse her of acting

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[143] King, 25.
[144] Anne Brenon, "The Voice of the Good Woman: An Essay on the Pastoral and Sacerdotal Role of Women in the Cathar Church" in *Women Preachers and Prophets*, 119-120.
[145] Brekus, 87-88. She writes, "clothing has functioned as one of the primary means of representing sexual difference and perpetuating sexual inequality. It is not surprising then, that women who have wanted to increase their status have appropriated the most visible signs of men's power: their pants, vests, shirts and even clerical robes.

like a man.[146] Similar chargers were directed towards Jarena Lee, a nineteenth century evangelist who had to address claims that she was "a man dressed in female clothes."[147] These attempts to bend or confuse the listener about the preacher's femininity can be understood through Butler's insights about the performative and cultural dimensions of gender. Long before modern day theorists illuminated how gender is created by social expectations, historical female preachers played with their physical presentations in a way that troubled their gender identity. They did so by exhibiting the same minimizing of overtly feminine traits as seen in transcending tactics but towards a different end. Rather than arguing their bodies were absent or irrelevant to their preaching, they insisted their preaching embodiments could and did fulfill what Wallace Best calls the template of "manliness" – often measured by physical robustness – used to judge both male and female preachers.[148]

One prominent female preacher who played with the masculinity of her preaching role was Elder Lucy Smith, a hugely popular female preacher in Chicago during the first half of the twentieth century. Known for both her worship leadership and her administrative skill, Smith established All Nations Pentecostal Church and subsequent multi-church Conference. Her "down-home" speech and emotionally exuberant worship resonated among the multitude of southern African Americans who flooded the city during the Great Migration.[149] Ministering during an historical era in which women preachers were gaining prominence, Smith encountered the common charge that female

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[146] Brekus, 87-8.
[147] Brekus, 179. Wallace D Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2005),, 162.
[148] Best, 155.
[149] Best, 151, 171, 181.

preachers “were usurping positions that rightfully belonged to men.”[150] One element of such “masculinist conception[s] of ministry and the discourse of “masculine” and “feminine” so intrinsic to it,” asserts Best, was the attention placed upon “black women preachers’ bodies;” attention that “invited speculation about their sexuality.”[151] Smith’s embodied response to her electrifying new urban environment came in portraying a “complicated” sexuality and actions that “consciously perform[ed] “mannishness.””[152]

Elder Smith displayed “mannishness” through a paradoxical blending of male and female roles. Smith was often seen “embracing motherliness while rejecting conventional domesticity.”[153] Smith was called “Mother” in multiple contexts, with observers naming her “mother-image to the drifting black masses.”[154] Her official title, though, was “Overseer” of the church, a term with masculine implications, and she repeatedly insisted God had called her out of the kitchen and into the pulpit.[155] Smith was included in several general descriptions of the multiple Chicago female preachers, descriptions that included words like “plain,” “homely” and “somewhat mannish, overweight and hoarse.”[156] Knowing that public attention honed in on their physical appearance, African American female preachers in the early twentieth century, Best asserts, typically worked to deflect away such attention. Elder Smith’s imposing physical presence made such deflection much more difficult.[157] Dark skinned and quite tall, Smith weighed, before an illness,

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[150] Best, 154.
[151] Best, 155.
[152] Best, 156.
[153] Best, 156.
[154] Best, 160.
[155] Best, 161.
[156] Best, 155.
[157] Best, 159.

over three hundred pounds.[158] Surviving photographs show her standing behind a pulpit dressed in a long, white dress with wide collar. Her only jewelry was a beloved gold pocket watch hanging around her neck from a simple black cord. Her hair was kept short, straight and close to her head. While never renouncing her femininity, Elder Smith kept her femaleness essentially off-stage. She erased illustrations of an active sexuality by leaving her husband at home. She dressed without adornments. She answered critics who asserted "preaching is a calling for a man" by operating as a compelling worship leader and church administrator. She presided over "loud, demonstrative services" and her weekly faith-healing services "became a staple of black Chicago's nightlife."[159] Building a successful church from the ground up, she pastored with the efficiency, confidence and competency previously associated with male pastor-preachers.[160]

The habitations around preaching like a man might more accurately be phrased as the preacher who is neither fully male nor fully female. When analyzing Smith's appearance, Wallace Best notes, "Christian, black women preachers aimed to detract attention from their bodies, sex and sexuality not by denying their gender but by rendering themselves ambiguous."[161] Living in contexts in when gender, race and culture all intersected, African American female preachers "complicated the notion of femaleness."[162] Elder Smith drew from her physical robustness, vocal strength and commanding presence to utilize forms of authority traditionally associated with male preachers. She also wore the white dresses seen on many female preachers and nurtured a

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[158] Best, 150-1.
[159] Best, 150,152.
[160] Best, 150.
[161] Best, 156.
[162] Best, 156.

"motherliness" persona within her congregation. Appearing neither entirely male nor entirely female, she performed "mannishness" in a selective way, picking and choosing from a multitude of masculine and feminine traits as they best served her purposes. We cannot know how Elder Smith experienced this duality of performed personas. It may be that her use of male-like traits fit well with her self-understanding. It could also be that her success as a preacher who "preached like a man" encouraged her instrumental uses of her body in that direction, even as the uses grated against her own sensibility. Mixing female and male forms, receiving both praise and denigration, Smith lived amid contradictory habitations.

The habitations surrounding women who utilize male attributes weave a steady trail through the history of female preaching. Such practices remain a viable resource for women entering into a space more frequently inhabited by men. Rev. Lewis chose to wear a pants suit – and not a skirt – each Sunday morning. She kept her hair quite short, closely cut to her head. Possessing a deeper voice in the lower octaves, Rev. Lewis was called "The Voice" in a former congregation, a title that referenced her speaking strength and her enhanced authority by virtue of a more male-like voice. Like Elder Smith, Rev. Lewis is an African-American preacher serving an African-American congregation. While the habitations of maleness may be more readily available to certain African-American women, they also may be thrust upon them, especially in a racist culture that links many manifestations of femininity to white women.

Although adopting a more masculine persona can serve an individual preacher or work well within a particular situation, these habitations possess real limitations. Elder Lucy Smith never escaped questions about her gender or the true basis of her pastoral

authority. Looking “like a man” left the problem of preaching as a female both solved and unsolved. While all contemporary preachers have greater freedom in adopting male and female characteristics, and wider options in how to express the complexity inherent in gendered life, a bundle of habitations that requires a person to relinquish an aspect of her identity truncate the fullest exploration of embodied existence. An aspect of Elder Smith’s paradoxical presentations surely rested in her efforts to navigate the “cultural and social inscriptions” placed upon her body, reminding us that the truncating of embodiment can come from cultural rather than personal motivations.[163] But even the women who adopted more masculine associated behaviors or appearances were recognized as female. For all the claims of being a male dressed in female clothes, Jarena Lee is counted among the mighty witnesses of female preachers. So are Jemima Wilkinson and Elder Lucy Smith.

The Virtuous Women: The Body Beyond Reproach

In the first two sets of habitations, female preachers sought avenues by which to deflect the attention directed towards their bodies. In contrast, the final two bundles of habitations, although vastly different in scope, shifted away from minimizing the body and towards affirming a preacher’s enfleshment. Rather than choosing to emulate male characteristics or attempting to transcend embodied existence, women making use of these final habitations found ways to preach within their femaleness. The third set of habitations relied upon cultural notions of the virtuous woman; while in the fourth

[163] Best, 150.

habitation female preachers experimented with behaviors that violated culturally acceptable female forms and behaviors.

The conceptual basis for a woman's authority to preach underwent dramatic shifts during the nineteenth century. Until this point, female preachers had justified their public ministries through the authorities outside or beyond them, authorities such as the Holy Spirit or the borrowed legitimacy of male preachers. But nineteenth century female preachers faced a changing notion of womanhood. Rather than being cast as the more base, brute or immoral gender, women increasingly were viewed as the most praiseworthy sex, whose moral superiority granted them the authority to preach.[164] Bodily purity, once attained only through habits of transcendence, now became closely associated with the female's embodied life. Linking outward behavior to one's inner character, the properly presented and impeccably behaved woman served as a cultural model.[165] Once preaching despite their femininity, women now began to preach because of it.[166]

The virtuous woman habitations presented a *female* preacher, who embodied the new social conceptions of womanhood through her attire, mannerisms and demeanor. These embodiments were reserved almost exclusively for upper- and middle-class, often educated, white women. They were modestly dressed, spoke in a voice like the one described as "pure, unstudied eloquence" and employed the refined movements linked

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[164] Brekus, 119-120. See also O. C. Edwards, Jr.'s account of female preaching during the Holiness Movement, *A History of Preaching*, 567-571.
[165] For analysis of women's embodiment of this particular cultural model, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University, 1982).
[166] Brekus, 160.

with women of high social standing.[167] Virtuous women moved gracefully and avoided socially dubious actions like dancing or clapping. The Quaker style of simple, unadorned gowns had grown into the standard clothes for female evangelical preachers, to which some women might add small adornments. A piece of lace, a ruffle or a bonnet might accompany the plain dress, introducing a more feminine look. Most significantly, the cultural conventions that governed clothing and behavior explicitly connected the virtuous woman to her familial roles as a wife and mother. Female preachers utilized titles like "Mother" or "Sister" even as they extended their preaching scope from the insular family into more public contexts.[168] Often they preached – whether or not they termed it preaching – from their homes, symbolizing the domestic origins of their spiritual leadership. These shifts can be documented not only in female preachers, but also in the women involved in a variety of nineteenth century reform movements, including abolition, temperance and suffrage. Through attire, mannerisms and adherence to proper boundaries, this woman embodied her virtue, securing a spiritual authority and thereby gained acceptance as a preacher.

One rich embodiment of the virtuous habitations comes in the preaching ministry of Catherine Booth. For thirty years, from 1860 to 1890, Booth preached throughout the world as part of the husband-wife team that founded the international Christian movement known as the Salvation Army. Born into a British Methodist household and married to a Methodist preacher, Booth matured amid the Holiness movement of the late nineteenth century. With deep inclinations towards social reform and spiritual

[167] Lawson, 238.
[168] Brekus, 105. Brekus focuses upon Ann Lee. Another example would come with Sister Aimee Semple McPherson.

sanctification, her preaching regularly touched upon the need for modesty and piety in word and deed. Booth combined her passionate moral vision with a host of examples about her life as a wife and mother of eight children. She wore the Evangelical preacher's typical dark, simple gown with a white ruffle at the neck and a bonnet on her head. Even when arguing her potentially controversial belief in women's natural right to preach, she delivered her words in a body described as becomingly attired, graceful in form and pleasing in manners.[169]

Because a collection of her writings have been historically preserved, existing alongside written observations of her preaching, scholars know Booth experienced a divine summons to preach as an adult. Struggling to justify her call, she eventually publicly dissented from the prevailing belief that female preaching was an exceptional activity made possible only by the Holy Spirit. She argued instead for a biblical mandate of gender equality, insisting that women, like men, possess an innate ability to preach. The Galatians text she referenced, "In Christ there is neither male nor female," could support transcending habits, but Booth utilized it to argue that Christ dwells in both men and women. "It is wrong," she wrote, "to thereby assume that woman is not *by nature* fitted to preach."[170] A women existing in and as her female body was equipped to preach. After preaching for her ill husband one evening, Booth commented that there is nothing either "unnatural or immodest in a Christian woman, becomingly attired, appearing on a platform or in a pulpit."[171] The female who can preach, then, must preach in a certain way. Early in her preaching ministry, a local newspaper published an

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[169] Roger J. Green, *Catherine Booth: A Biography of the Cofounder of The Salvation Army* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 126, 191.
[170] Green, 118. emphasis mine.
[171] Green, 126, 136.

illustration of the preacher Booth dressed in her husband's clothes.[172] While Booth lamented the portrayal, her own bodily presentation responded to its underlying concerns. She dressed explicitly as the middle-class, educated, refined woman she was. Her entire presentation was as an irreproachable woman. The same virtuousness that marked her as woman facilitated her preaching.

Amid this impeccable performance, Booth also authorized the formation of the Hallelujah Lads and Lasses, an extension arm of the Salvation Army aimed to enlist young men and women for an evangelistic street ministry. This sub-group practiced an enthusiastic and at times outrageous style of worship through hymns set to show tunes and dramatic presentations complete with costumes, instruments and much dancing.[173] One well-known Hallelujah Lass, Happy Ezra, earned a reputation for preaching in dress styles her listeners found provocative, with her long hair flowing and a fiddle in her hand.[174] While they eventually received their own uniforms, the Lads and Lasses consistently pushed the boundaries of acceptability. Going where no one else would go, they embraced commercial entertainment, associated with prostitutes and often were accused of uncleanliness or immorality.[175] By inverting socially unacceptable images into Gospel messages and exemplifying anything but virtuous behaviors, they embodied all that Booth herself did not.

Even with her work to create the Hallelujah Lads and Lasses, Catherine Booth endures as a symbol of the virtuous female preacher. Demonstrating a bundle of

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[172] Green, 127-8.
[173] Pamela J. Walker, "A Chaste and Fervid Eloquence: Catherine Booth and the Ministry of Women in the Salvation Army" in *Women Preachers and Prophets*, 297.
[174] Walker, 297.
[175] Walker, 298.

habitations through which women preach as women, she illumines the strengths and constraints embedded in culturally sanctioned embodiments of femininity. Virtuous habitations inevitably limited other expressions of femininity. Women did utilize the habits of virtue to speak out upon controversial topics, best evidenced in the nineteenth century preachers who turned preaching ministries into political campaigns. But their embodied selves maintained the physical attributes of decorum.[176] This preacher was never the single woman who was sexually available or the dancing, shouting, fiery preacher. Contemporary female preachers experience the legacy of these virtuous habitations. While they may not receive such strong admonishments about how to be female – although such admonishments do happen – women wrestle with a legacy of acceptable and unacceptable forms in the pulpit. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rev. Harris once worried if her skirt was too short or her stockings too risqué. Rev. Emily Thompson wondered how to process the frequent comments she received from visitors to worship, who said, "you don't look like a minister" and "you are a good looking woman." Many of these female preachers added stories to their sermons arising from their lived experiences as wives and mothers in hopes of increasing listeners' trust. Their on-going concerns to satisfy the expectations associated with virtuous habitations foreshadow the continuing suspicions surrounding being a *female* preacher. In adhering to social conventions, these preachers acknowledge an alternate path: transgressing the boundaries as they preach.

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[176] Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Women's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

The Transgressors: Breaching the Boundaries

The fourth and final set of habitations emerged precisely from the long-standing suspicions linked to the female preaching body. While the virtuous female preacher crafted her space by adhering to conventional models of being female, transgressing preachers carved out preaching opportunities through outrageous or exaggerated behaviors. They preached in unexpected, often provocative spaces or with wild abandonment involving dramatic physical movements. Relying upon the ways female preaching has been characterized as an act beyond the acceptable limits throughout history, they took strength from defying rather than conforming to social norms about how a female preacher should dress, speak or act. Their controversial behaviors often invoked the fears associated with female preaching and especially the danger of female sexuality.

Drawing from both the Medieval and Reformation eras, a composite image emerged of the transgressing preacher. She spoke on the streets, shouted at her detractors and embraced rather than feared the labels of harlot or heretic.[177] At times she preached in scanty clothing, in clothing associated with the bed or even in no clothes at all to bring attention to her message.[178] These scandalous tactics most readily appeared at the beginning of a new historical era, often through the female members of emergent religious sects. Women preachers among the Waldensians reportedly hurled insults at bishops who tried to contain their preaching and boasted of their freedom within their

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[177] Walker, 296-7.

[178] See Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "The Prostitute-Preacher: Patterns of Polemic against Medieval Waldensians Women Preachers," 99-113 and Anne Brenon, "The Voice of the Good Women" An Essay on the Pastoral and Sacerdoctal Role of Women in the Cathar Church, 114-132 in *Women Preachers and Prophets*. See also O.C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 561-3.

missionary activity.[179] Amongst eighteenth and nineteenth century evangelists, female preachers were known for being contentious as well as for shouting, jumping, groaning or weeping as they spoke.[180] The behaviors of the Hallelujah Lasses can be understood as transgressive habitations, as these women wore revealing attire, used boisterous music and spoke in open, public spaces at unexpected times.

Whenever a woman's public behavior was scrutinized, her sexuality also became suspect. Preachers within this cluster of habitations were viewed less as wives or mothers and more negatively as sexual beings, available women and potential lovers. The bishops subduing the Waldensian preachers concluded that the women were prostitutes, and other female preachers were derided as strange women or witches.[181] The Hallelujah Lasses were denounced through a "particularly sexualized form of abuse and ridicule."[182] Even when the preacher's transgressions were far removed from sexually alluring behaviors, she risked being judged – and found wanting - through the lens of her sexuality. A few preachers encouraged attention to their physical attractiveness or sexual allure. Specifically highlighting their sexually available status, such preachers aimed to subvert the fears about a female body and turn her embodied, sexualized presence into a preaching asset. This type of transgressing preacher hoped to crack open age-old dichotomies of saint and sinner, virginally pure and alluringly seductive to be both expressly female and explicitly female.

The habits of transgression drew attention towards the body acting in unauthorized ways. Such habitations were able, over time, to change the guiding images

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[179] Kienzle, 99-100.
[180] Brekus, 55.
[181] Kienzle, 101. Brekus, 97.
[182] Kienzle, 99 and Walker, 297.

of a woman's proper place, voice, appearance or behavior. Enduring much scorn, transgressing women also received much attention and in this sense, their efforts widened the space of all female preachers. In this sense, transgressing actions appear to be exercises of agency, instances in which women freely chose how they presented and used their bodies. As they shouted and danced, walked the streets and wore fewer clothes, they broke through cultural rules about how a woman must present herself. But a closer analysis reveals a more complicated scenario. As Brekus rightly points out, "women used their bodies to act out the emotions that could not – or would not – be put into words."[183] Modern day Pentecostal female preachers exhibit similar movements of dancing, crying, shouting and clapping. Yet they do so in congregations that do not allow them to preach from the pulpit's proper space.[184] The preacher that twirls, cries, shouts and dances may be as bound by restrictive habitations as the virtuous preacher. Since habitations solidify over time, transgressive behaviors also lose their outrageousness, as the listening communities grow accustomed to a preacher's repeated provocations. The woman who continues to employ the same actions may become restrained in her established role as the transgressing preacher.

Aimee Semple McPherson offers a rich portrait of a transgressing preacher. Raised in a Salvation Army household, McPherson's career began as a traveling evangelist in the early twentieth century. Photographs of McPherson taken in 1918 show a stately woman, with a plain face and dark hair pulled back and up upon her head. She wore the traditional Pentecostal attire of a long, white dress with a wide collar,

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[183] Brekus, 47.
[184] Elaine Lawless, "Introducing the Issue of Blood: Reinstating Women into the Tradition" in *Women Preachers and Prophets*, 3.

accompanied only by a black cape draped across her shoulders. While she remained true to a conservative, evangelical tradition in the content of her preaching, she experimented throughout her preaching years with her embodiment, using preaching styles that broke boundaries and rewrote preaching rules. Undergoing a dramatic transformation, the preacher who first appeared akin to Catherine Booth gradually came to look more like a sexy Hollywood star.

Having initially displayed habitations of the virtuous woman, McPherson altered her habits as she built a Los Angeles-based preaching ministry. Viewing preaching as a performance on a dramatic stage, she adopted the city's entertainment methods by adding costumes, props and music to create full scaled, multi-sensory spectacles.[185] In her "illustrated sermons," McPherson donned costumes herself, appearing as a country milkmaid in "The Story of My Life" and as a police officer in "Arrested for Speeding."[186] Breaking from widely held expectations about proper female preaching, her costumes were fun, trendy and made her body's attire another prop in the sermon. Her embodied self included a magnetic personality, which led many listeners to comment on her powerful charisma.[187] Experimenting with preaching forms, she transgressed old boundaries set for preachers and for females, brought attention to her physical presence and often made a virtue of her femaleness.

In fact, her femaleness was a large part of her preaching presentation. Known as "Sister Aimee," McPherson was the divorced mother of two children. She tackled sexually explicit Biblical passages, cast herself as the Bride of Christ, and once preached

[185] Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2007), 71-2.
[186] Sutton, 75, 86.
[187] Sutton, 55.

a sermon entitled “Be My Valentine.”[188] Her critics labeled the same preaching magnetism adored by fans a hypnotic sexual charisma.[189] As her ministry grew, her body also changed. Once a dark-haired, plump, plain-clothed woman noted for being “physically nondescript,” McPherson lost weight, lightened the color and shortened the style of her hair and wore fashion-conscious clothes.[190] She willingly posed for a photograph in a white evening gown. Through preaching topics and the physical characteristics, McPherson presented herself as a sexually appealing – and sexually available – female preacher. As in the tactics of the virtuous woman, she relied upon her embodied persona as a preaching tool. But unlike the preacher who projected a purified version of wife and mother, McPherson placed her sexuality in plain view. Her appeal as an object of sexual desire became a trademark of her preaching.

The lines between McPherson’s femaleness, sexuality, body and preaching were not necessarily clear-cut. Her habitations revealed the contradictions of her various approaches to embodiment. While McPherson did break barriers in how preachers could preach, she was not the first preacher to manipulate cultural or sexual tropes for her own ends. Furthermore, her decisions about her physique, dress and body techniques reflected a complex intertwining of herself and her culture. McPherson’s radical change in appearance can be viewed as a growing comfort in expressing her sexuality or as a compulsive conforming to changing notions of female beauty or both. She pushed the boundaries of acceptability in female preaching just as she symbolized adherence to new standards of womanhood. Similar complications existed in her choices around costumes.

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[188] Sutton, 15, 55-58.
[189] Sutton, 55.
[190] Sutton, 127, 158-160.

To don a policeman's uniform may be to mimic Hollywood, to act like a man or to bring a wider range of her body into the pulpit. Her sense of the dramatic – and her explicit use of her body - served to both empower her preaching and confine her identity. Just as generations of preachers before her used their bodies to express what they could not speak aloud, McPherson's preaching body hinted at larger cultural, theological and homiletical conversations. Her habitations, then, brought to the forefront the ways the embodied preacher responds to and recreates her world, in which every behavior has rich layers of agential meaning.

Today's female preacher inhabits a preaching landscape in which a variety of forms of femininity are accepted. The habits of transgressive femininity are not only less explosive but even routinized. Contemporary female preachers do put on costumes and use their bodies as props. Rev. Lewis began one sermon seated behind the church's law pew, impersonating the blind beggar calling out to Christ. She loved her performance, as did her congregation. The Rev. Sarah Lockhart, a young associate minister, was asked to wear a cheerleading uniform for the children's message one Sunday, a request with which she uncomfortably compiled. With the witness of former transgressing preachers as a foundation, female preachers encounter their own debatable boundaries, which can both encourage women to experiment and provide markers of their discomfort.

The habitations surrounding transgressions do create opportunities for more forthright conversations around expressing female sexuality while preaching. Living in an era of increased sexual dialogue and multiple forms of sexuality, female preachers encounter complicated choices about whether and how to be "sexual" in the pulpit. Decisions as wearing high heeled shoes, kicking one's shoes off before one preaches,

wearing dangling jewelry or styling one's hair in a loose and flowing fashion can fall into this 'sexualized' category. Rabbi Julie Kahn intentionally wears her hair long down her back, keeps her fingernails painted in a fashionable hue and selects form fitting fashionable clothes. She remarked upon her desire to be herself when she preaches, an identity that includes her single, available status. Rev. Thompson, in the midst of a divorce, struggles with whether to bring into the pulpit the more revealing clothes she had begun to embrace outside the pulpit. Although we cannot know how congregations received either presentation, their common efforts towards a fuller embodiment of themselves involved some transgression – and are salutatory. The criteria of any habitation may lie in its capacity to foster an enlivened preaching presence.

What to do with Historical Habitations: Cultivating Intentionality

Questions about embodiment and empowerment lurk within all four habitations, as the transcenders, the transgressors, the women who modeled feminine virtue and the women who acted like men all strove to craft a space to preach with a female body. Each habitation represents a different approach to presenting one's female embodiment and a different mode for accessing a bodily power to preach. While transcending women relied upon understandings of the Holy Spirit's power to authorize their preaching, the transgressing women played with the boundaries of social convention to find power in breaking the rules. While the virtuous women drew strength and a set of bodily behaviors from a culturally sanctioned image of the female body, women who modeled male forms drew from those bodies already legitimized to preach. To read the history of female preaching as a bodily history is to take seriously the choices women made about their

bodies as they preached across history, to acknowledge the limits of those choices, which emerge most often through society's reaction to them, and to understand preaching as a deeply embodied practice.

On one hand, a history of female preachers' habitations provides greater tools for grasping the multiple ways women have navigated the role of their bodies as they have preached. It tells us something of how their habits evolved, and in their actions we can recognize our own. Thinking about women who attempted to escape their femaleness, contemporary preachers examine their own complex relationship to being female and preacher. Thinking about the various embodiments of virtue prompts considerations around how society still shapes our conceptions of being a "real woman." Lying at the center of all these choices is the enduring legacy of the female body's controversial presence in the pulpit. In this sense, all four sets of habitations "flesh out" discomfort with female bodies in the pulpit.[191] They demonstrate how women experienced and adapted to the larger conversations about preaching and women's bodies. Discomfort with (and of) female preachers' bodies continues, evidenced in women who suggest they have to leave their bodies to preach, view their bodies as a distraction to preaching or name how they can feel "naked in the pulpit." Others also notice this discomfort. In his introductory remarks to Lee McGee's *Wrestling with the Patriarchs*, Thomas Troeger remarks upon the difficulty he has witnessed among female students getting into the pulpit, as well as the high degree of intensity and complexity embedded within those struggles for women.[192]

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[191] I am indebted to Rowan Williams for the term "fleshed out."
[192] Thomas H. Troeger in *Wrestling with the Patriarchs*, Lee McGee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 9.

Seeing the complexity of these habitations inoculates one against evaluative assertions about how the preacher should best use her body. Transgressing social conventions about female forms is not necessarily a more powerful mode of communication than preaching as a virtuous woman, even while it may have resulted in greater publicity. It might not even, in the final analysis, be more truly resistant to dominant norms. A woman who stresses the power of the Holy Spirit while minimizing her body may discover that she is preaching from a more male-like approach, or with more bodily presence, than she first believed. There is no one grand overarching habitation for female preaching. Nor, by any means, do these four bundles of habitations provide a complete account of the possible preaching habits. Furthermore, no one preacher fits exclusively into one set of habitations. As already noted, Jemima Wilkinson named herself the Universal Public Friend while making use of male forms. Catherine Booth adhered to virtuous practices, but her support of the Hallelujah Lasses and her assertion that women possess the natural abilities to preach hinted towards a more nuanced evaluation of femaleness in preaching. Elder Lucy Smith combined a variety of forms with particular insight and power, drawing from styles of dress representing virtuous women while downplaying other aspects of her femininity, relying upon male-associated traits while heading a female-majority church. All of the preachers named in this historical overview evidenced a complex relationship to their embodied preaching practices. No one individual matched perfectly any one category. Instead, these four preachers each relied more heavily upon one set of habitations when preaching, while continually reaching into other sets of habitations. Rev. Lewis' embodiments also utilize multiple habitations in paradoxical ways. Her pared down attire, hair and jewelry, her

belief in the body's role to support but not overtake her words and her willingness to experiment with dance coalesce into a performance that shows traces of each habitation. Taken all together, Rev. Lewis extends the models, a reminder that every preaching body is far more than a type.

Perhaps what is most telling, though, is Rev. Lewis' lack of words for grasping the more ultimate meaning-making efforts of her embodied life. While articulating a theology of preaching with ease and having thoughtfully described her reasons behind very deeply embodied preaching choices, she grew quiet when asked about a theology of the body. "This is a good question," she said. If a bodily history of female preaching holds significance beyond a set of interesting descriptions, its significance lies in its power to unearth the breach that lies between embodied existence and one's preaching life.[193] Stepping into a space in which her body carries a host of assumptions, meanings and symbolic power, a female preacher can experience bodily discomfort without much explanatory power about its history or resources to dispel its powerful grip. When our habitations are "magical," as Merleau-Ponty suggests, we don't think about what we are doing and why we are doing it. When we become uneasy in the disjunctions between our movements and our world, we start to examine our habitations and, at times, allow our habits to be retooled. We might copy the preaching habits of colleagues, discovering our adjusted embodied presence receives greater reception even as it feels unfamiliar to us. If we have the time and resources, we might study a variety of preaching embodiments,

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[193] Here I am drawing from Rowan Williams' reflections on why we write histories. Williams suggests that not only is "history a set of stories we tell in order to understand who we are and the world we're now in," but history also is written "to organize the collective memory so that breaches may be mended and identities displayed." Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 1, 5.

comparing other habitations to our own. With habitations shaped by history, contemporary communities and the body's material specificity, a female preacher possesses a host of connections and breaches, some that she may be able to clearly articulate and some that prove more difficult to unpack.

A history of the body's habitations uncovers some of the unnamed assumptions or unreflective behaviors that can accompany female preaching. In so doing, the history provides tools for intentionality.[194] The woman who is aware of her body's place in a long line of history becomes self-conscious about the habits within her preaching. She is better equipped to make choices about her body's presentation and movements, and more able to consider the possible meanings accompanying her choices. Women make daily decisions about their bodies and their preaching. From the preacher who chooses to wear cowboy boots instead of regulation pumps, to the one who debates about saving the big earrings for a different venue, to the one who tries to stop tilting her head in ways that have drawn congregational criticism, a woman's choices can be hastily made, unconsciously arrived at or thoughtfully premeditated. With a sense of the historical streams from which her preaching comes, the female preacher can examine how she inhabits her preaching world. She can reflect on her choices, noting the habits she has inherited and the norms she inhabits. Using these historical yet malleable tactics as tools, she can analyze her every-Sunday decisions, thinking about the meaning of her agency in her efforts to embody the presence of God's word. With this bodily history of female

[194] Ted A. Smith, "A Practical History of Preaching" (unpublished manuscript) "In telling a history of what we take for granted, a generic history lifts up for critical consideration some assumptions we use without thinking about them." 7.

preaching embodiment in place, the present day preachers' embodied choices now take center stage.

CHAPTER THREE

MY CLOTHES TEACH AND PREACH

On Pentecost Sunday morning in a small, wooden A-framed church bursting with people, a woman stood up to preach. The Rev. Dr. Caroline Adams cut an imposing figure. She was in her mid-fifties, tall and broad shouldered, with long arms and expressive hands, Her appearance led one of her parishioners to speak of her "regal presence in the pulpit." On this morning, her choice of clothing reflected the festive spirit of the day. Over a cream colored alb, she wore a red silk chasuble with a dove and flames hand-painted across the front. The color filled the space just as her body did, visually manifesting the fiery passion of Pentecost to an African American United Methodist congregation. Although unique in its bright color, her Pentecost chasuble was only one among many she wore throughout the year. Her congregation had grown to expect the ivory and gold chasuble with intricate trim and tassels at Easter and weddings. Their favored blue one only appeared when Advent returned. Through her Sunday morning worship attire, Rev. Adams led her congregation through the visual richness of the Christian liturgical year, with every vestment playing a role in creating her priestly presence among them.

"What I wear is a big part of the preaching task for me," said Rev. Adams. "I am and have been for a while a pastor of traditional black churches and within that milieu

there is still an expectation that the pastor will look good."[195] She veered away from the black pulpit robe of her predecessors, because the alb is "the more nominative garb for today." Believing it was important that her body's dress reflect her womanhood, she purchases albs specifically tailored for her physical frame. Her chasubles also symbolize what she called the Anglo-Catholic roots of her congregation, an aspect of the Wesleyan heritage sometimes overlooked by observers of the worshiping life of black Methodists. Combining a respect for her congregation's expectations, a desire to acknowledge her femaleness and a clear aim to teach what she termed a "whole new body of symbology" around the Christian liturgical year, Rev. Adams invests time, money, and effort into her Sunday morning wardrobe. She views clothing as artful expression of her personality, a perspective bolstered by her background in fashion. "I am a person who loves color and for me, fashion is… an expression. I would [never] just get up [and] pull down that oatmeal alb out of the closet," she said emphatically. "So my clothes preach. And teach. And for me as a woman and as a woman who loves apparel as art that is an important statement."

Across town in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, the Rev. Erin Robinson wore decidedly different preaching attire. Coming newly ordained to a congregation that eschews robes, she chose not to push her preference for distinctive liturgical garments. Instead, she adopted a relaxed version of the pants suit, wearing white tailored slacks, a white t-shirt and a peach colored, loosely cut jacket with embroidered trim around the collars and sleeves. To this ensemble she added a stole, which she color-coordinated with

[195] Interview with Female Preacher, January 29, 2010. The names of all interviewees are being held in confidence by mutual agreement. For more information about this qualitative study, see the Appendix A.

her clothes or connected to the worship theme of the morning. Her decisions around dress are based upon two criteria: minimizing attention directed towards her appearance while simultaneously projecting a professional look. “I want,” she said, “to dress in a way that takes my appearance off the table. I aim to dress so perfectly appropriately that no one notices what I’m wearing.” While Rev. Adams seeks to dress herself in ways that would teach and preach, Rev. Robinson aims for clothes that would disappear without notice. “I like to dress the way I like to dress,” she continued. “But I try to dress appropriately. My overall philosophy is if I dress perfectly, then the way I look becomes a non-issue.” Despite her different approach, Rev. Robinson also thoughtfully ponders her clothing choices. Like Rev. Adams, her preaching attire is the result of careful deliberation, a thinking through of the body’s role while she preached. Together these woman’s choices, and the reasoning behind them, begin to suggest the wide-ranging role of clothes in a preacher’s embodied life.[196]

Choosing Clothes to Preach

Whether in comments about “What a pretty dress you are wearing” following worship or “That’s a pretty short skirt” while walking the church corridor, female clergy encounter a congregation’s close attention to their clothing choices. Such attention has cultural roots, manifesting society’s relentless scrutinizing of female bodies. The attention is heightened within a religious context, where there is a history around sacred dress and women have been among the ordained for a relatively short time. In a recent

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[196] Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell, eds. *Not Just Any Dress: Narratives of Memory, Body, and Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 261-2. They write, “clothes wear bodies. Dresses express extensions and connections to the body and are themselves a mode of embodiment.”

study of Episcopal clergywomen in the Northeast, Sarah Sentilles notes how "clothing was an issue for every single woman I interviewed."[197] Recognizing clothing's power to communicate and the congregation's close observations of their choices, female preachers routinely ask, "What should I wear?"

Decisions around dress are universal. Every person, male or female, chooses clothes daily. "Dressing is part of our everyday presentation of self, a statement we make consciously or unconsciously as we go about living our lives."[198] Styles of dress communicate everything from our fashion sense to our social class, from our politics to our body's need for freedom of movement.[199] Clothing choices have become extremely personal choices, and no two people dress in exactly the same way. For all their individuality, though, commonly shared cultural factors do impact decisions about dress. Contemporary preachers live in a time of shifting professional dress codes. The rules surrounding what a woman must wear to church – which once included head coverings, white gloves and "Sunday best" dresses – have relaxed in the past decades as sacred spaces have mirrored the growing informality of the wider culture. Women who serve in traditions requiring robes or albs for worship also encounter more options, as companies offer a wider array of garments and many designed especially for females. Balancing social trends, denominational practices and personal preferences, this small group of

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[197] Sarah Sentilles, *A Church of Her Own: What Happens When A Woman Takes the Pulpit* (New York: Harcourt, 2008), 144.
[198] Weber and Mitchell, 261.
[199] Weber and Mitchell, 4. "Although we may not be immediately aware of it, talking about clothes forces us to speak, directly or indirectly, about our bodies, about details of material culture, about context, about commerce and commodification, about social expectations and personal aspirations, about media influence, family relationships, work, play, values, social structure and more."

women made diverse decisions about exactly how to preach and teach through their clothes.

Rev. Adams deliberately chose highly visible vestments, grateful for the liturgical guidance they provided. Rabbi Julie Kahn wore the traditional robe of her congregation, a standard preaching gown made for a male body. Although almost six feet tall, she felt keenly how a "very puffy, bulky and big" robe added weight to her appearance. Rev. Robinson chose business casual attire, with the stated goal of wearing non-distracting dress. Her peach colored, loose jacket and sheer top underneath mimicked the universally accepted workplace uniform – the suit – while introducing some femininity through color and fabric. Rev. Joan Anderson recently began wearing pants when preaching, violating a life-long personal taboo around pants in church. She relished the increased mobility, but found even greater freedom in wearing once forbidden clothes. Clothing choices emerged from the preacher's life, whether the choice represented a congregational custom, a liturgical theology, a practical necessity or a fashion trend. Each clothed body did teach and preach. They taught about the preacher's self-identity and relation to her tradition and about a preacher's particular embodiment of the preaching task.

The women in this study made self-conscious decisions about the clothes worn when preaching. Every choice evoked meaning-laden explanations. This chapter will attempt a lived body analysis of these varied decisions by reflecting on her given physicality, the influence of her surrounding culture, which included her theological tradition, and the spark that enabled her "freedom" of choice amid her "facts."[200] The four historical types of self- presentation in female preachers – the transcenders,

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[200] I am returning to Iris Marion Young's assertion, in *On Female Body Experience*, that agency happens at the intersection of facticity and freedom.

transgressers, virtuous women and women with male like forms - served as a backdrop to the women's decisions, providing a foundation of expectations and impressions for both them and their congregants. Women worked within this set of options, stylizing them towards a certain personality or end. Rev. Robinson's same colored, neutral slacks and shirt resembled a suit, which could be classified as a more 'manly' dress style. The soft flow of her jacket and its pastel color, though, added a womanly dimension. Rev. Adams wore prescribed clerical attire with her own flair. The white, long robe covered her body while the red, over-laid material, rich in details and worship associations, drew attention to her dress. Her choice introduces a new layer of habitations, born of the clothes formally associated with leading worship in some traditions.

The preachers of this study developed clothing habitations from a series of commonly shared, foundational structures. The perspective that "clothes that teach a set of symbology," foreshadowed the theological considerations accompanying worship leaders. The alternative perspective that "clothes should not distract" hinted towards the legacy of female fashion and the guidelines around professional dress. Time and again, the women in this study articulated how dress choices balanced the multiple aims of being the preacher, looking professional, and being female.

Historically female preachers managed being female and preacher through habitations designed to increase the body's acceptability as a preaching body. The ideas of looking virtuous, borrowing male associated articles of clothing, downplaying the body or accentuating it in boundary breaking ways influenced dress decisions of the women in this study. But rather than single personas to be wholly adopted, these habitations wove themselves in and out of these women's decisions. They operated as

single threads that were able to be mixed and matched, drawn from or set aside. They might even serve as well-worn tropes to be pulled out when advantageous, but rarely whole-heartedly adopted in ways documented in other eras. Historical habitations also shifted in response to new clothing choices made possible by the women's ordination movements of the twentieth century. Rev. Adams and Rev. Robinson's choices were two examples of the variety embedded in the clothing decisions represented in this study, a variety expressing the diverse habitations as well as the over-arching norms. Amid all the diversity, clothing decisions were still contained within the well-established norms of looking clerical, professional and female. The women's choices made manifest Saba Mahmood's conception of agency as the multiple ways women inhabit existing structures of subordination.[201] In this context, subordination is best understood as those structures of governance that call subjects into being.[202] These women self-identified themselves as religious professionals who were also female. Agreeing to the expectations embedded in these three roles, they molded their clothing choices into larger social conversations about what constitutes professional dress, what signifies a clergyperson and what marks a person as female. What may appear as seemingly straightforward decisions about what to wear contained deeply meaningful insights about the modes of existence in which preachers live – and try to embody.

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[201] Saba Mahmood, "Agency, Performativity, and The Feminist Subject" in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St Ville, eds (New York: Columbia University Press 2006), 180.
[202] See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection, (Stanford: Stanford University, 1997), 3-11.*

A Brief History of Clothes

In the late 1980's, the first females were approved for ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. As Kirsi Stjerna writes, "After the long and painful debate on whether women could be ordained into ministry, it was deemed important to introduce this new class of ordained Finnish women in a proper way."[203] The question became 'what would they wear?' The answer arrived in the form of a black suit with tiny gray pinstripes and a white, high-collared shirt. The skirt hung just below the knee and possessed an infinitely elastic waistline. The long, rectangular-shaped jacket fully covered the upper body, from neck to just below the hips. The outfit, Stjerna explains, gave women priests attire that could "simultaneously convey their ordained authority and de-emphasize their sexuality. [The suit did] create an illusion of gender neutrality while allowing a hint, just a hint, of femininity to shine through."[204] One female clergyperson noted how the suit "made one look like a tinman/woman or Joan of Arc, somebody ready for battle."[205]

This almost gender neutral suit, a first attempt at clothes officially associated with ordained women, brought together older elements of female preaching attire with newer clerical associations. The skirt suit utilized the color and form of the male suit. The white, black and gray colors also mimicked standards for men's clerical clothes. The shirt was high collared. The jacket kept the body well covered, and especially hid the potentially provocative breasts, waists and hips. Taken as a whole, the female skirt suit projected a modest presentation akin to the virtuous women. It simultaneously reflected

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[203] Kirsi Stjerna, "What Will They Wear?" in *Seminary Ridge Review 3* no. 2 (Spring 2001): 44.
[204] Stjerna, 44.
[205] Stjerna, 44.

male dress styles and encouraged a minimization of the body that linked the attire to transcending-types of clothes. The comments coming from the preachers who wore the suit revealed their interpretative experience of it. Feeling “ready for battle,” women noted how the suit’s design deceptively covered their bodies. In reality, the form-covering jacket reflected the long history of corporeal concealment within female fashion styles.[206]

The earliest recorded forms of dress in antiquity sought to cover the body.[207] Men and women wore a long, flowing tunic as a loose garment flowing from shoulder to feet. Essentially hiding the body’s form, the tunic established a standard of body concealment for both sexes that prevailed for several centuries.[208] During the Middle Ages, vivid differences developed between male and female dress, differences historians classify as the origins of true fashion.[209] New styles for men followed the body’s outline, accentuating the legs, chest and pelvis. A knight’s plate armor and the later black suit “had a foundation in the structure of the whole physical body, a formal authenticity derived from human corporeal facts.”[210] In contrast, female clothing styles continued to obscure the body, as the enveloping skirt hid everything below the waist.[211] For the next several centuries, female fashion worked to keep “the true structure of the female body

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[206] Ruth P Rubinstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), 119. She observed that the first Episcopal priests in Connecticut were known for wearing “clerical shirts with prim dirndl skirts and Shetland sweaters. Observers suggested the collar signified the priesthood, the skirt affirmed their femaleness and the sweater hid their breasts, denying their sexuality.”
[207] Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994), 47-48.
[208] Hollander, 35.
[209] Hollander, 47.
[210] Hollander, 35, 48.
[211]Hollander, 35-36.

visually confused rather than explained," cementing a practice of female corporeal concealment through clothes.[212]

From the Middle Ages until the twentieth century, the dominant styles of female dress continued covering and distorting the female body. The skirt was established as separate garment worn almost exclusively by women.[213] Hiding half of the body, skirts widened and lengthened the body's visual field, encasing the lower torso, legs and feet within long, billowing or trailing folds. Dressing the upper torso often entailed further concealment through high collared and long sleeved bodices, which appeared on women in many eras, including the seventeenth century evangelical preachers and the first Finnish female priests. When shirts did reveal the chest, neck or arms, they simultaneously reshaped them. The first women who ventured into public positions adopted dress styles that de-emphasized the body's maternal, nurturing or sexual roles. Sixteenth century female monarchs wore dresses that flattened the chest and eliminated the waist, while continuing to cover up the body below the waist.[214] Only in the past century have clothing designs begun to adhere to actual female proportions. During the first four decades of the twentieth century, the body gradually reappeared, in "smooth-fitting tailored jackets and skirts, tailored slacks, deftly shaped dresses, soft sweaters and

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[212]Hollander, 48. Even with some parts of the body highly visible, she asserts that female dress "held to the old insistence on female corporeal concealment, now offered by means of imaginative distraction and illusion." She describes, "a woman's arms and head might be fairly intelligible, but her hair was usually carefully bound up and often covered by headgear…. Her pelvis and legs were always a mystery, her feet a sometime thing, and her bosom a constantly changing theatrical presentation of some kind." Fashion rearranged the body's proportions and avoided much reference to its actual composition.

[213] Hollander, 53.

[214] Rubinstein, 115. She describes a new paradigm of female dress with Isabella of Aragon/Castile, Catherine de Medicis in France and Elizabeth I in England in which the breasts were flattened, the waistline repudiated, the dress form following rather than form-fitting, coming straight down and just touching the floor.

flattering blouses."[215] As the century progressed, the body came more clearly into focus, in conjunction with massive shifts in women's access to education, work outside the home and the right to vote.[216] These clothing transformations gave the female form a visual unity based on realistic body proportions. These styles remain the basic building blocks for contemporary female fashion.[217]

Even with the movements towards actual representation in female fashion, gender distinctions within dress styles remain. Arguing, "truly unisex clothing has never existed," Llewellyn Negrin describes European dress practices for men and women, distinctions created through different colors, fabrics and adornments.[218] The enduring distinctions between male and female clothes originated in competing aims for clothing to either conceal or reveal. While male fashion styles maintained the body's actual physical form, female styles obscured the body. Nowhere was this distinction more apparent than in the two archetypal forms of gendered clothing: pants and skirts.[219] Historically pants followed the form of the body and served as the exclusive attire of men. Women did not wear pants publicly until the middle of the twentieth century and with widespread acceptance until very recent decades. Thus, female fashion forms are still acquiring the 'authenticity derived from human corporeal facts' so deeply ingrained in masculine dress.[220]

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[215] Hollander, 147.
[216] Hollander, 148.
[217] Hollander, 147.
[218] Llewellyn Negrin, *Appearance and Identity: Fashioning the Body in Postmodernity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 161.
[219] Rubinstein, 12.
[220] Hollander, 48. She writes, "The design of male dress has a foundation in the structure of the whole physical body, a formal authenticity derived from human corporeal facts."

The legacy of corporeal concealment, which influenced historical habitations like transcending the body, hiding the body behind a show of virtue, and even male dress styles whose length over the whole body, appears in how the women of this study experienced their clothes. While living in an era of highly revealing styles, several women expressed unease at preaching in clothes that did not fully cover the body. Rev. Shannon Baker inadvertently left her robe at home one Sunday. "I had worn a dress sweater with a high turtleneck collar," she recalled. "It was sleeveless and it was just very uncomfortable all service long." Worried that her arms looked exposed or a bra strap might be peaking out, she said, "it was like being naked in the pulpit." When asked to describe her general guidelines about clothes for preaching, Rev. Erica Williams said, "Because I am a relatively young person, I'm very aware of not having my body be a physical distraction to others, young males, especially [those] in their teenage years in the congregation. I definitely try to make sure nothing is revealing or too tight. I'm particularly conscious of my chest not looking really exposed or busty." While concerned about dressing appropriately for the pulpit, the words these preachers used - naked, exposed, and revealing – hinted at an abiding concern for bodily cover. Being exposed risked not just a bra strap peeking out or a chest looking a little busty but the more dangerous question about the sexuality of their bodies. Recently divorced, Rev. Emily Thompson was out to dinner one evening in the community in which she lives and ministers. "I'm sitting there on a date with this guy. I have this horrible thought that maybe my shirt was too low, maybe too much cleavage is showing," she said. "I didn't feel uncomfortable, but then my immediate thought was 'Am I mis-representing the Gospel?'" Woven through every set of clothing norms – derived from the roles of clergy,

professional, and woman – was the worry of mis-representation. With choices that varied in their coverage, women discerned how their clothed bodies presented them as preachers and approached the question from cultural, personal and theological perspectives.

The dilemma of adhering to the norms remained inherent in all clothing decisions. The specific choices women made, though, were shaped in the contexts of their particular traditions. In broad strokes, women preached either in settings that expected prescribed clerical attire or in settings that assumed women would preach without such garments. Arguing that women both utilized the authority of standard attire and found multiple ways to wear the clothes, this chapter turns first to the experiences of women who wore what is formally defined as clerical dress.

Dressing in Clergy-Prescribed Clothes

The almost Reverend Melissa Clark does not wear a robe for worship. She serves as an intern at a large church with a more informal worship style and a senior pastor who does not support non-ordained seminary students making their own choices about vestments set aside for clergy. But Ms. Clark used to wear an alb as a college student. Reminiscing about that experience and thinking ahead to her ordination, she said, "If I could wear a robe, I would wear a robe. I think a robe would make me feel even more aware of what I am about as a minister of the church. I used to wear albs at Duke when I served communion. And I loved putting on my alb. It made me look at the people differently. It made me really aware of what I was doing. And it is ancient."

In naming her love of ancient attire for worship, Ms. Clark articulated well the shift in perspective experienced by many of the women in this study who wore albs,

robes and cassocks when they preached. Of the twelve women represented here, ten donned garments that distinguished them as clergy and had been set aside by their tradition to be worn during worship. Working within inherited parameters, they expressed their enjoyment of and appreciation for the benefits that accompanied recognizable outfits. They believed these ecclesiastical clothes symbolized their preaching identity, increased their visual presence and minimized their femininity. This group of women didn't leave their attire unaltered, however. They found new ways to inhabit established norms. Following Rev. Adams' perspective that clothes are art, they altered the uniformity of their tradition's prescribed dress to suit their needs or express themselves.

Albs, cassocks, robes and preaching gowns all have a history in Christian worship practices. Their basic form can be traced to the everyday dress of ancient Rome.[221] The early church gravitated towards the "humble tunics of the servant class" for both clergy and laity.[222] The simple, flowing gowns, typically white or flax in color, evolved into attire specifically designated for worship leadership between the fifth and sixth centuries.[223] As worship practices developed, color, ornamental designs and additional, decorative layers were added. Through the centuries other styles of dress also emerged. Cassocks derived from albs, as an additional outer coat that gradually became its own

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[221] Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1984), 11. See also Archimandrite Chrysostomos. *Orthodox Liturgical Dress: An Historical Treatment* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981), 20.

[222] Rubinstein, 90. She elaborates, "The Christian sects that hid in the catacombs in Rome took on the humble tunics of the servant class. These "servants of the Lord" replaced the toga with a symbol of asceticism."

[223] Martin Down, "The Costume of the Clergy" in *Theology* 85 no.707 Spring 1982, 349. Down traces how clergy "held on to the traditional 'civilized' dress" of ancient Rome during the descent into the Dark Ages. This dress became "the distinctive and peculiar robes of the clergy…[and] served to distinguish clergy from the laity throughout the Middle Ages."

dress.[224] The cassocks of ordinary clergy were black, adding a second, solemn color to be associated with clergy. Amid the upheaval of the Protestant Reformation, the Geneva gown or pulpit robe appeared as an alternative to the alb and cassock. The gown was a black, freely flowing robe visually similar to academic or American judicial attire.[225] Five hundred years later, the original *tunica alb* re-emerged during the liturgical renewal movement of the twentieth century, in a form that echoed its earlier style.[226] The alb became the standard garment within the United Methodist tradition, the denomination most heavily represented in this study.

Regardless of their slight differences in style, robes, cassocks and albs share a set of common characteristics. They are simple, typically made in black or white material representative of the purity and humility associated with being a servant set apart for worship leadership.[227] They are "blessed" by the universal church as ecclesial clothing. While most often connected to ordained persons, robes, cassocks and albs are also worn by laypersons participating in worship. The clothes mark the line between secular and sacred, between sanctuary and larger world. Those who wear them move from one space to the other.

The women of this study who serve in settings that expect them to wear ecclesial clothes noticed how cassocks, robes and albs visually signified their roles. "I wear a garment that symbolizes pastoral authority, and symbolizes faith," remarked Rev. Harris. Reflecting on her appreciation for her robes, Rev. Joan Anderson said, "I do like to feel

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[224] Mayo, 40. R.A.S. Macalister. *Ecclesiastical Vestments: Their Development and History* (London: Elliot Stock, 1896), 194.
[225] Macalister, 207.
[226] Mayo, 31.
[227] Mayo, 15-19.

pastoral. I do like to feel like I am clergy." Dressed like no one else in the congregation, preachers wearing vestments are publicly recognizable and personally aware of their role as the preacher. This can be especially valued by persons newly ordained or still in the process of becoming "authorized" preachers. Serving a church while in seminary, Rev. Baker articulated the credibility her alb provided, for herself and her congregation. She reported, "I came into a much older congregation, where there were a lot of men. I'm young and I'm a student. The alb gave me an air of authority. It gave me a presence." Ms. Clark described how the alb "made me really aware of what I was doing." Rev. Baker added, "The alb helps me focus. It really does." By heightening these preachers' visual presence, theological connections and sense of sacred responsibility, albs, robes, and cassocks enable the body to be marked as a preaching body. These women put on the clothes long associated with preaching and then took up preaching.

The clothes one wears are one small but vital aspect of being a body thrust into the world. The body's mode of dress and the manner in which one moves because of her dress shapes how one inhabits the world. This is particularly true when the clothing is recognized and responded to by others. Rabbi Monica Levin wore a robe and kippa for Shabbat services each weekend. She noted how "when I put a kippa on it allows me to be a different person in some ways. It gives credibility to whatever it is we are going to say or do. It is the Mr. Rogers moment of changing [and] that is why I put a kippa on. It marks the moment as different. It allows us to be the figure, Rabbi Monica. It becomes a uniform of sorts." Robes, albs and cassocks function as uniforms, clothes that shape a preacher and her listeners.

A uniform works to "designate membership in a group."[228] The right to wear a uniform is conferred by an outside authority, signifying that the wearer has mastered a certain set of skills and officially been granted membership into a group.[229] Ms. Clark wasn't permitted to wear an alb or robe in her United Methodist congregation, a decision made for her by her fully ordained boss. As a minister in training, Rev. Baker wears an alb but not a stole, an indication of her probationary status. The alb alone boosts her confidence and her congregation's acceptance of her. Uniforms are easily identifiable, as policemen, nurses and airplane pilots all wear the same clothes while they are on the job. Clerical attire provides similar skill conferring and membership granting advantages. Furthermore, the visual impact of a preacher dressed in the clerical clothes could provide some intangible or unexpected benefits. Rev. Harris is her congregation's first lead female minister. Wearing her white alb during her first few weeks, she received numerous comments from congregants that they could not hear her voice. Acting on the advice of a colleague, she switched one Sunday to a black preaching robe. The robe's black color contrasted well with the sanctuary's white walls and marble altar space. It also matched the attire of previous male senior pastors. The complaints about not being able to her voice ceased. In this instance, the right uniform provided an entry into all manners of authority and acceptance.

These preachers also named a uniform's ability to minimize the body, especially its feminine aspects. Uniforms can decrease individuality, as one wears an ensemble seen

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[228] Rubinstein, 86.
[229] Rubinstein, 9, 86.

on many others.[230] The specifics of the body, while not entirely erased, become minor details subordinated beneath standard clothes. In robes, albs and cassocks, the body is well covered under long, loose folds that leave only the head, hands and feet revealed. Preachers named how wearing clothes that hid the contours of their body increased their confidence. "I prefer to wear a robe," said Rev. Harris, "I just feel more comfortable in it because I'm not worried about what I am wearing." These uniform clothes are also clothes historically reserved for males. Putting on these clothes may make women look, if not male-like, at least a little less female. When this group of women discussed wearing such gowns, they routinely employed terms like "de-gendered," "gender neutral" or "androgynous" to describe their appearance. Rev. Baker said, "Once the robe goes on, it is more asexual. I am who I am and I can't take being female out of the equation. But I think the robe neutralizes it a lot." The comfort born of these uniforms might be recognized only when one was forced to preach without them. Accepting a guest preaching invitation, Rev. Thompson learned she was not to wear a robe. "I panicked," she said. "If I could do it again, I would ask to wear my robe." Sarah Sentilles' study of contemporary Episcopal priests reports similar reactions. She concludes "wearing a clerical robe came as a relief to many of the ministers I interviewed. They were literally undercover."[231]

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[230] Rubinstein, 86, 91. The benefit of a clerical uniform extended into the ways in which uniforms can prompt a shift in behavior by the wearer, as individual attributes are minimized for the sake of prescribed group norms and behaviors. "Throughout time authority has been carried by the garment: More complete covering and uniformity conveys more authority. The individual must measure up to the garment, or rather must appear to become the garment. If it is worn constantly, clothing of authority will ultimately be dehumanizing, subsuming the person it contains."

[231] Sentilles, 146.

Whether undercover or simply more at ease, clerical dress functions as an established dress code with accompanying benefits. Robes, albs, preaching gowns and cassocks hide the body beneath folds of material. They symbolize a woman's embodied role in the proclamation of God's word. They strengthen her physical presence by setting apart her body and often making it look taller, bigger and broader. Not surprisingly, the women who preach in these garments responded to the advantages accompanying the dress. They reported their enjoyment of such garments, their increased comfort in them and their appreciation for the garments' gender minimizing effects. Over time the women who follow these clothing norms formed one set of habits around dressing like the preacher.

Within those preacher norms, though, many women discovered ways to interject a particular style. Amid preacher uniformity, they claimed some individuality. Rev. Harris once commented that her preaching outfit of white alb, colored stole and long cross necklace made her "look like the lectern." Yet, she frequently wears a light blue stole adorned with a seaside scene. A gift from her congregation on her first Sunday, the stole's soft color, wavy lines and seashells evoke a more feminine look. Rabbis Levin and Kahn, two of the first female rabbis in their Jewish congregation, choose pink or white beaded kippot rather than the black yamakas worn by their male colleagues. Rev. Anderson, desiring more variety in her preaching attire, consecrated an African dress as a distinctive liturgical garment set aside for worship. She explained, "I wanted something different. I wanted something that was feminine because most of the robes were plain. I didn't want to be too fashionable, but I wanted something that was really feminine. So I was in an African store and they had these dresses. It was a beautiful lavender robe

trimmed in white. I've never worn it outside of [worship]." Color was the central method by which women shifted their overall presentation. Although wearing the expected robes, albs, kippot and stoles, they altered them through additional colors. Their attire stayed close enough to the norms that they looked like preachers. By finding new ways to inhabit inherited, established attire, women both relied upon a basic uniformity while also resisting being entirely uniform in their appearance. They drew strength from adhering to the clothing norms, just as they widened the space within the norm.

One preacher did more than add a few additional elements to the accepted uniform of her tradition. The Rev. Emily Thompson was a Baptist minister, hired as the first female pastor to a historic Baptist congregation located amid the web of Smithsonian museums in downtown Washington, DC. While the standard preaching attire for her denomination was a business suit, Rev. Thompson made a different choice. She said, "I always wear a robe. This was an issue when I came because most Baptist ministers don't wear robes. But they wear uniforms. They wear blue suits. I wear a black, fitted cassock, like what an Episcopalian would wear. I wanted to be funky, and to look different." When asked to say more about her choice, she continued, "The reason [I always robe] is that I wanted that uniform kind of thing. [But] my robe is unusual. My first robe was a big, flowing gown. I was big and I felt it just added a whole other layer. I couldn't find where to buy a cassock, so I got a pattern and my mother in law sewed it for me." When asked to elaborate on the reasoning behind her choice, she said, "I choose it for the uniform. I want to be a clean palate, a blank slate, so that they don't notice me."

Rev. Thompson's preaching clothing choices, and particularly the reasons she gave for her choices illuminate the ambiguity and contradiction contained within any one

clothing decision. On the one hand she sought outfit whose color and shape would discourage attention. On the other hand she sought to create the dissonance achieved by a Baptist preacher dressed in an Anglican cassock. Rev. Thompson spoke primarily about the benefits of a cassock as a uniform, whose dark color and long, covering shape transformed the body into a "clean, blank slate." Her choice may reveal her difficulties with the uniform of her tradition, as a blue suit may have exposed her body more than a fully covering (and not completely form-fitting) cassock. Rev. Thompson articulated a desire to 'be different' as a primary reason for her choice. She consciously broke her tradition's dress code, carving out a niche that was its own attempt at non-distracting clothes. Appearing to resist norms, she may have complied with some standards more than she realized. At the same tine, it was critical to Rev. Thompson that she not adopt the standard suit of her tradition. Regardless of what final image her ensemble projected, Rev. Thompson relishes her freedom to choose. The strength gained from wearing a personally designed outfit serves as a constant resource. She declared, "My robe is like my cape. I put it on and I can fly."

The term uniform wove its way throughout Rev. Thompson's discussion. She chose the black cassock for its uniform appearance, while also affirming that Baptist preachers have their own uniforms. A uniform is both expected attire and attire that decreases a preacher's individualized appearance. The language of uniform was not confined to discussions around clerical garments. Instead, uniform expectations carried over to the next layer of clothing decisions. Women navigated another set of standards as they turned to preaching in spaces that did not require any type of ecclesial robe. Here,

the clothes taken straight from their home closets became the preacher's dress for the day.

A Second Layer: Discerning Professional Dress

Existing alongside the women who wear albs, cassocks and robes were the women who preach without distinctive clerical gowns. Three of the twelve women in this study preach regularly in what might be termed lay attire or street clothes. Several preachers laid aside their robes, albs or cassocks when preaching in certain settings or occasions. And most preachers, knowing that their lay clothes are displayed at least before and after worship, pondered these choices with careful deliberations. They asked such questions as "What are the congregation's expectations around my dress?" "What image do I want to convey?" and "What clothes are most comfortable to me?" As with more liturgically identified clothes, women weighed reigning external norms against stylistic preferences. The clothing norms shifted in these situations, with less attention directed towards achieving the preacher's look through clothes particular to the preacher's role and more focus upon the expectations surrounding women's professional dress. The possibilities of what to wear – as well the potential for distracting dress – expanded. Describing her concern for attire that misrepresented the Gospel, Rev. Thompson said, "If I am the pastor here, [then] I don't want to do [or wear] anything that takes away from their understanding of God."

Yet the "ordinary" clothes of these preachers contains liturgical dimensions. They may not have possessed ecclesial meanings related to a liturgical calendar, color or symbol. Yet, they do theological work as an essential element of the preacher's visual

presentation. Some Christian traditions, as well as some specific congregations, emphasize the equality existing between clergy and laity. That equality extends into the necessity of preachers preaching in "ordinary clothes" to symbolize the continuity between clergy and laity.[232] Rev. Robinson's peach jacket, white shirt and slacks represent her sensitivity to a Unitarian Universalist congregation. She explained, "In my denomination, we have a lot of people who came out of Christianity in a very upset way. So I didn't really push the robe thing. There are some very anti-clerical folks." The three preachers in this study who preach regularly in "lay attire" worked in contexts that promoted such shared commonalities between pulpit and pew. While they might prefer to preach under the cover of a robe, alb or cassock, they chose the clothes that best matched their congregation's desires and practices.

Without a dividing line between clergy and lay dress, these dress deliberations bring to the forefront the influence of cultural dress codes and practices. Rather than wearing a gown that conveys a "whole body of symbology" rooted in Anglo-Catholic worship, these preachers' choices speak symbolically about the understanding of preaching as professional work, the continuing impact of historical preaching habitations and the contemporary negotiations female preachers make with women's fashion trends. The grey suit with a no-frills, zipped jacket, the mix-and-match skirt and jacket, the simple yet fashionable dress and the Ann Taylor pants with a sweater set – all represented within this small group – shape the mood, tone and leadership of worship. Holding in the background the persistent worry that their clothing choices could detract from their

[232] Down, 350. While looking precisely at the Reformation, Down notes "at different times in history clergy lay aside distinctive dress in favor of looking "just like everyone else."

preaching, women analyzed the norms operating in the congregation and they sought to fulfill them. Staying within the comfortable limits of the norms, though, was not always personally comfortable. As they grew at ease with the norms, they also learned how to bend them.

Rabbi Julie Kahn has served the same Jewish synagogue for the past ten years. She is one of two female associate rabbis in a very large, urban congregation. During her first week in her position, she welcomed the congregation's Executive Director into her office. The Director, who was a woman, came with a very specific message. She reminded me, recalled Rabbi Kahn, "that Washington, DC is a very conservative town. She said, 'People wear suits every day, and if you want the possibility of optimal success, dress in a skirt suit every day, for a while, so that [the] congregants won't judge you on what you are wearing but on what you say and do as a rabbi.' Absorbing these frank words, Rabbi Kahn said "And so I did. I wore a skirt suit, heels, stocking, every day, and we're talking Washington summers. I remembering going to a meeting of the Board at someone's farm on a very hot summer Saturday, and thinking 'what am I going to wear to this?'" That day, she compromised with a pair of Capri pants and a sweater set. "Around November," she continued, "I went to the Executive Director and said, 'It is getting cold. I'm doing funerals and my legs are getting cold. Can I wear pants suits now?' She said, 'Of course.' So I wore pants suits every day." For the next several years, Rabbi Kahn maintained the suit standard. "Last year," she said "was the first year where I started wearing slacks and a sweater on days when I don't have a lot going on." Then she added, almost as an afterthought, "Of course, when preaching on the bema I wear skirts. We would never wear pants on the bema."

New to her first role, Rabbi Kahn received forthright guidance from another, professionally experienced woman, aimed at increasing "the possibility of optimal success." She adhered to the advice, wearing the business attire most accepted within a relatively formal city. She presented herself as a professional by maintaining the stated uniform, illustrating how the women encountered a second strong set of clothing requirements when they moved from liturgically prescribed clothes into every-day attire. While Rabbi Kahn relaxed her clothing standards over time as she gained pastoral authority through other avenues, the skirt suit standard reasserted itself on the Sabbath. Although she adopted multiple manifestations of acceptable clothes, Rabbi Kahn's choices remain within one abiding set of norms. The norm was termed by this group of preacher as "professional attire" and was symbolized by the skirt suit in its most conservative form. As Rabbi Kahn summarized, "the skirt suit is your recipe for success."

The classic suit first appeared over two hundred years ago, and its form remains almost unaltered today. [233] Designed for men, the suit outlines the body's form without adhering too closely to it.[234] It clothes the body from neck to ankle, typically in dark colors. Worn throughout the ensuing centuries, the suit has evolved into the "standard costume of civil leadership for the whole world."[235] Accordingly, it is the universally accepted business uniform. A host of semiotic terms are associated with suits, including diplomacy, restraint, detachment and confidence.[236] The suit, as one scholar asserts "indicated that, so attired, the individual will…conduct himself or herself in the expected

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[233] Hollander, 4.
[234] Hollander, 54.
[235] Hollander, 55.
[236] Hollander, 113.

"professional" manner."[237] Over time Rabbi Kahn grew comfortable enough to wear other outfits. The suit remained her fail-safe option. If she wanted to take her appearance off the table or maximize her acceptability as a female rabbi, then she chose a simple, dark suit with a white shirt beneath it.

When women entered the workforce in large numbers during the last decades of the twentieth century, they took up the existing male suit. They gained visibility through clothes historically linked to status and power. Women then adjusted the suit to female bodies and fashion.[238] The "confident adult masculinity" contained in uni-colored pants suits found more feminized expressions in brightly colored, patterned, or multi-colored ensembles or suits with ruffled shirts or flounces in the skirts.[239] The women in this study blended the professionalism aura and male associations accompanying suits with slight feminine touches. "When I think preaching, I think suit," said Ms. Clark. "Since I can't wear an alb, when it is time to preach, I pull out my suit." Ms. Clark once preached in black pants, a white, high-collared shirt and a magenta jacket. As with Rev. Robinson's peach colored jacket with patterned trim, Ms. Clark's more colorful suit ensemble introduced some femininity into established, authoritative dress practices. These two suits were different than those first Finnish suits, comprised of pants and brighter colors. Yet all three suits shared several key traits. They borrowed male associated forms of dress that hid the breasts and the waists but added feminine markers to the dress through color or adorning styles. They kept the normative suit, but changed it small but transformative ways.

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[237] Rubinstein, 86.
[238] Negrin, 159. Negrin further notes that women who wear masculine associated clothes often "enhance their femininity rather than detract from it."
[239] Hollander, 113-114.

When Rabbi Kahn began her rabbinate, she wore suits exclusively. Her wardrobe then expanded to more relaxed forms of dress. Other preachers mirrored this wider range of options, copying her initial "safer" clothing choices and her gradual shift to other types of clothes. This wider range of clothes represents the options available to several preachers in this study. As the third and last preacher to preach regularly without clerical attire, Rev. Erica Williams typically wears dark colored pants and a blouse. Her clothing choice demonstrates the expansion of the suit into a larger, more nebulous category titled "professional dress." These clothes might be suit-like in their colors, lines or simplicity. They were just as likely, though, to introduce more informal or unusual styles. What holds these clothes together is a common designation as clothes appropriate for a preacher's context or personhood. Working in a church situated in an area on the border between rural and suburban spaces, Rev. Williams' shirts and blouses are often more formal than the secretary's jeans and polo shirt. Her choices also reflect her age, as a person who identified herself as a young clergyperson. The suit remains the gold standard choice. But these women chose a wide array of business casual clothes, all acceptable for preaching so long as they remained under the umbrella of professional dress.

Rabbi Monica Levin is the second associate rabbi serving the large, Washington, DC Jewish congregation along with Rabbi Kahn. She also received clothing directions from the congregation's Executive Director and followed the suit standard at the beginning of her tenure. But when she experienced a pregnancy, her changing body forced her into different clothes. Along with suits, she wore maternity dresses, blouses and slacks. By the end of her pregnancy she wore whatever she could fit into, even when preaching on the bema. After her pregnancy, she did not return to the exclusive suit

standard and instead continues to wear a mix of clothes. In speaking about her decisions, she said, “There have been times that I’ve rebelled. The suit is too formal or too distant. The suit is more professional, [but] I like to feel when I come to service that I’m being a part of the family. I also feel like this is my ninth year here. I do wear a dress once in a while. It is not such a big deal. I still look professional.” Perhaps encouraged to rebel by a changing body, Rabbi Levin altered her norm to fit her perceptions of her role. She used her clothes to convey herself as the experienced rabbi who wanted to shift the environment from distant to familial. Now a seasoned rabbi and a mother, she voiced her confidence in pushing the boundaries.

Her willingness to play with the professional standard was mirrored in several women in this study. Rev. Williams noted how she “wore far more suits in the beginning months” before gravitating to her usual shirts and slacks. Having preached for a decade, Rev. Harris now wears business casual clothes almost entirely and quite intentionally. Commenting on her clothing choices, which ranged from sweaters with skirts of various lengths, ruffled blouses and slacks to t-shirts and jeans, she stated bluntly, “I worry [about clothes] a lot less than I used to.” Now, she dresses to “promote a slightly more casual atmosphere in the church.” She elaborated, “When I first came [to this congregation], you could only usher if you wore a suit. It was really formal. It really put me off. Dress is one way of conveying that…it is okay to come in your jeans.” Rev. Harris’ relaxed clothing choices fell at the edges of professional dress. Emerging after years of preaching, her shift was born of comfort, confidence and her own intentional embodiment of a pastoral leadership. She viewed her casual attire as preaching and teaching in the same manner as Rev. Adams’ fiery red Pentecost chasuble.

Although the choices contained within "street clothes" are wider than the choices embedded in distinctive liturgical dress, the motivations and aims of this set of clothing choices do not differ. The women utilized their choices to achieve a level of acceptability in their role. They sought clothing that increased their acceptability or affirmed their identity. Professional clothes helped them embody the preaching role. However, as the preaching or pastoral role became more embodied in them – through experience, congregational approval, and their own lived authority - their clothing choices reflected that shift. Rather than simply dress for a part, they started to use their dress to shape their preaching presence or the atmosphere of worship. Their clothing choices illuminated these self-reflections. Their clothes demonstrated their willingness to follow the rules and to flaunt the rules. The ways in which a woman inhabits the clothing norms surrounding her, then, may convey something how she imagines her multiple roles as preacher-teacher, professional and woman.

The Preacher in Pants

Amid the stories narrated around shifting dress norms, Rabbi Kahn's strict standard of a skirt for preaching days stood out with prominence. Regardless of her clothing choices during the week, she wears a skirt when on the bema. Her colleague Rabbi Levin reiterated this position. She might wear a dress for preaching, but, like Rabbi Kahn, she never wears pants. The skirt for sacred days and spaces, for them and others, operates as an unbending rule. The skirt standard may stem from the historical legacy of female corporeal concealment, the rules concerning women's attire in sanctuaries and the

expectations for formal clothes in worship. The skirt appeared to symbolize – at least for some of the women - the ideal presentation of a woman's body.

The Reverend Joan Anderson also grew up with the skirt only standard. "I'm from the South," she said. "We were taught to wear skirts. When I started [preaching] twenty-five years ago, women didn't wear pants to church." Several years ago, the Rev. Joan Anderson had back surgery during the winter. In the months that followed, her recovering body did not have its normal flexibility. "One [Sunday] morning, I couldn't bend to put on stockings," she remembered, so she felt forced to wear pants to church. On that first occasion, she said, "I was very uncomfortable." But no one noticed, commented upon or criticized her attire. As her recovery continued, she continued to wear pants. Over the weeks, she concluded, "I had to totally transition in terms of my mind because I was accustomed to wearing skirts and stockings. It was a slow transition, but now I love wearing pants." When asked to describe what she loved, Rev. Anderson cited the ease of mobility and the increased comfort she experienced in pants. "I felt liberated," she exclaimed.

Rev. Anderson was not the only preacher to preach regularly in pants. The three preachers who preached without clerical gowns often chose pants. Rev. Deborah Lewis also preferred pants. As with Rev. Anderson, her original discomfort as well as her worry about congregational disapproval soon faded. Rev. Thompson appreciated the covering pants provided. In pants, she said, there is "not the chance of the robe flapping open and exposing my legs." Across this small group of women, pants for preaching appeared as a growing trend. As Rev. Anderson's reaction communicated, it seemed to serve as a liberating trend.

The reasons women named for feeling freer in pants were deceivingly simple. More shoe styles were available with pants. It was easier to move in pants. Pants covered their legs, making them less concerned about unintentionally revealing their bodies. By current clothing standards in the Western world, pants on women are widely acceptable attire. But these women's sense of liberation in wearing pants in worship may derive from wearing once forbidden clothes – clothes historically reserved for men. Particularly in preaching spaces, it could be internally liberating to cast aside the rules about what women can and cannot wear.

Pants, fashion historians noted, provide the body a "formal authenticity derived from corporeal facts." Pants offer an accurate representation of the whole human body, a representation skewed by skirts that obscure and robes that cover. [240] In leaving behind female styles of dress that conceal or distort, women who preach in pants may experience the freedom of wearing clothes that accurately conform to their living bodies. Wearing pants displays not only that women have legs just like men but also that each woman's body has a unique combination of torso, waists, hips and curves. While the skirt standard remains in place for some preachers and the shift to pants in other preachers also has cultural roots, the authenticity that might be discovered through preaching in pants communicates something of the body's potent power. The preacher clothed in a way that best matches herself and her context experiences how she is always in, of and with her body.

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[240] Hollander, 61-2. Hollander argues that articulating female legs was a necessary move in enabling women to move from concealing to revealing dress. She writes "demonstrating women's full humanity was essential; and that meant showing that they had bodies not unlike men's in many particulars. To show that women have ordinary working legs, just like men…was also to show that they have ordinary working muscles and tendons, as well as spleen and livers, lungs and stomachs, and by extension, brains."

To Teach, To Preach and To Potentially Distract

When dissecting the clothing choices of this group of preachers, the choices seem straightforward enough not to warrant sustained attention. Women wear either clerical gowns or other "lay" professional attire. They adhere to social expectations and ecclesial standards. With a few visible exceptions, they make only slight adjustments to uniform clothes, maintaining their choices within the established norms of contemporary preachers. Their choices appear recognizable, predictable and able to be classified without delving too deeply.

Yet embedded within their weekly decisions were a maze of historical, cultural, ecclesial, theological and personal expectations. These women drew from the ways female preachers have dressed in other historical eras, using their patterns as partial yet powerfully evocative models. They relied upon the credibility contained in the standard (male) suit as well as virtuousness contained in well-covering, non-provocative dress. They incorporated dress styles from cultures beyond the church, wearing shorter skirts, pants, or a color that was linked by social convention to their gender. Their decisions were structured by the standards of their preaching tradition. All of these expectations were further shaped by the unique characteristics of an individual body. Attending to all these competing needs, this group of preachers tweaked their clothes. They refashioned ill-fitting or incongruent clothes so that, as Rev. Adams exclaimed, "I don't look like a little girl in her daddy's robe."[241] They incorporated new types of clothes in order to

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[241] Negrin, 160. Rev. Adams may been experiencing the ways the oversized nature of masculine clothes on some female bodies can weaken their presence. He writes, "Dwarfed by such large garments, women were imbued with the appearance of childlike innocence and vulnerability combined with an element of an element of clownishness as the look suggested a small child playing dress-up."

create a different mood, whether it was Rabbi Levin's "we're all family here" dress choice and Rev. Harris' "It's okay to wear what you like" jeans. They maintained the boundaries of expected dress but they thought through exactly how to embody the standards. Flowing through their choices were the concerns about a body's potential to distract and the hopes around a body whose clothed presentation could communicate along with her sermon.

The potent power of clothes to teach is ever-present. When discussing the suits designed for the first Finnish female priests, Stjerna describes their ability to cover the body and minimize its potentially disruptive female attributes. She then concludes, "We had our first foray into being women-theologian-fashion consultants. We first women pastors had our brief career as fashion-model-teaching-theologians. Teaching people new symbols, helping them to associate their understandings …of church with something so very new: women."[242] Clothes did accomplish theological work, as women's choices symbolized how they would take up the role they had been authorized to assume. They used their clothes – through surprising choices like a cassock on a Baptist preacher or controversial choices like pants in the pulpit - to broaden the possibilities of their bodies in preaching spaces. As they used their clothes to shape their preaching, they remained aware of the potential for other, less helpful consequences to their clothes. Rabbi Levin gave voice to these considerations. While narrating her occasional deviating choices, she acknowledged a simultaneous layer of considerations. "I don't want to draw away. I don't want to be distracting," she said. She referenced instructions in the Talmud that detailed nearly impossible standards for the preacher's body. While disagreeing that a

[242] Stjerna, 45.

blemish on the face should keep one from preaching, she affirmed, “How you present yourself is very important.” The Talmud’s discussion tackles, she continued, “those elements of how people receive us. I think there is something to that, to a certain degree.” Her discussion illuminates the continual debate between how to utilize one’s best dress without veering into distraction. The possibilities of teaching through clothes always lives in tension with the potential to distract.

Concerns about distracting dress appeared ever-present for many of these preachers. Wearing the ‘wrong’ clothes - whatever wrong might be - risked looking less credible as the preacher. While many women voiced a worry that their clothes might be *distracting*, Rev. Thompson’s blunt question – “Am I wearing something that misrepresents the Gospel?”– articulated the source of the distraction. All clothes were worn by a female body. The attire attached to female bodies was always interacting with the potential volatility surrounding femininity and female sexuality. The preachers who wore cassocks, robes or albs appreciated the gown’s ability to hide the female frame. The preacher who made sure her clothes didn’t “raise questions about who I was trying to portray” was cognizant the allure of too feminine clothes. As the most vocal proponent of non-distracting dress, Rev. Robinson said, “The standard for me as a female preacher is a level of perfection in dress that allows everyone to forget that I am female.” Dress norms were utilized, in part, to minimize the controversy of a female body. In pursuing this aim, the norms also encouraged a forgetting of the preacher’s femaleness. They introduced an irresolvable dilemma between the felt need for forgetfulness and the power inherent in a clothed body that would never entirely disappear.

As Mahmood so aptly asserts, the meaning embedded in choices never can be determined outside of an analysis of "the particular concepts that enabled specific modes of being.[243] Even when women appeared to just be following the rules, they followed the rules in order to gain something: the credibility of their listeners and a secure space from which to preach. However the women related to the clothing norms, the norms themselves evoked a debate between a body brought into the spotlight through its clothes and the body clothed to fade into the background. The deepest concerns lying within these clothing conversations could be framed as the choice between two perspectives. Can my body participate prominently as a female body or does my best preaching depend upon my body getting out of the way? Most women in this study oscillated between the two positions. The debates around their choices demonstrated the enduring dilemmas of a female preaching body. These women needed their bodies to preach. They knew the value of dressing in ways there were ecclesially and professionally acceptable. And their bodies are inescapably female bodies. The negotiation of their femaleness will come more clearly into view in the next layer of dress decisions as women look to add adornments to their attire.

[243] Mahmood, 186.

CHAPTER FOUR

LOOKING LIKE ME: SELF-EXPRESSION THROUGH ACCESSORIES

The Reverend Joan Anderson grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal church, experiencing a call to ministry amid a multitude of male clergy and a strict dress code for preachers. "Growing up…we were taught to wear black and white," she said.[244] A black suit with a white shirt was, and to a large degree still is, the expected attire for clergy. Disliking the look she equated with being "just one of the guys," Rev. Anderson consciously worked to look more feminine. While many of her female colleagues still wore a black suit with a white blouse that was tight around the collar, she chose her suits, dresses, blouses and skirts from a rainbow of soft colors. She added to her ensemble light make up, jewelry and high-heeled shoes. She intentionally styled her hair in what she termed a feminine style, letting it hang a few inches above her shoulders in a layered, flowing cut. When asked why she deviated from the strong dress code of her tradition, she stated, "I don't think God called me to be like men. I believe God called me to be who I am." A part of "'who she is"' was female.

The Reverend Rebecca Harris followed the dress code of her church, wearing a white alb and colored stole each Sunday. But she consciously chose her shoes in response to the clerical robe's androgynous feel. "I like to wear feminine shoes," she said. "I am a woman, that is part of who I am, and God created me this way." Like Rev. Anderson,

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[244] Interview with Female Preacher, May 5, 2010. The names of all interviewees are being held in confidence by mutual agreement. For more information about this qualitative study, see the Appendix A.

Rev. Harris incorporated her female identity into at least one aspect of her physical presentation. Both of their perspectives matched that of Rev. Caroline Adams, whose assertion "It is important to me that the way I dress reflects the fact that I am a woman" guided her clothing decisions. Their voices were joined by the reflections of Rev. Deborah Lewis. Her body's presentation - in dark-colored suits, flat shoes, light makeup and a short hairstyle – was different but her words echoed similar aims for self-expression. "I'm not one of those people who felt called to ministry at twelve years old," she said. "I've watched many different role models and I don't aim for a persona." Most of her mentors have been men. But she continued, "I'm very comfortable in my own skin." Each time she explained her clothes, jewelry, make-up or hair choices, she concluded her remarks by stating, "I'm just me. I'm very much me."

The Inclination Towards Female Presentations

When deciding how to present their bodies for preaching, preachers weighed two simultaneous desires. They sought to look like preachers, making decisions about their basic ensemble based upon the criteria that emphasized theological and professional standards. But alongside a visual identity as the preacher, they held an accompanying desire to look like themselves, typically accomplished by adding personal touches to their attire. Professional or clerical sensibilities had dominated the decisions between robes or suits, cassocks or tailored shirts and slacks. An underlying concern for self-expression had manifested itself in slight alterations to clothing styles. That self-expressive impulse gained momentum as women moved to deliberate about the adorning elements of their

appearance. They made decisions about shoes, make-up, jewelry and hairstyles and wondered how these additions supported their wish "to look like me."

"Looking like me" incorporated, for some preachers, efforts to present themselves as female preachers. They wanted to appear as preachers and they wanted to look like women. Here, the particular choices available to this group were shaped by contemporary culture. In every historical era female preachers have presented themselves, in some fashion, like women. Historically female preachers' clothed and adorned appearance had either cast them into the virtuous women, minimized their femininity in favor of a more masculine persona, or attempted to transcend the dilemmas of embodiment altogether. If a female preacher did dress explicitly as a sexually available woman, she risked creating controversy around her alluring look. Today's female preacher inhabits a more expansive, variable public space, with greater freedom to draw out various elements socially associated with the feminine. Naming her landscape as the third generation of feminism, one preacher reflected that she could "wear makeup and be taken seriously." But the option to incorporate female elements caused considerable conversation amongst clergywomen about what would be the best, most appropriate or most acceptable accessories. As a whole, this small group of preachers cared about what adorned their bodies. They added color to their wardrobes. They frequented reputable beauty salons. They wore jewelry. They experimented with shoes styles. All of these activities served as negotiating maneuvers for women experimenting with how to express themselves in the pulpit.

A lived body approach argues that the self evolves amid an individual's unique resolution of physicality, particular culture and individual choice. An individual's

embodied existence, which contains that ever-shifting core of meanings that comprise a sense of ‘being me,’ is constantly being developed and redeveloped through the culturally influenced, physically structured choices about how to dress, adorn, present and move one’s body. While their understandings of themselves as preachers were formed precisely by this myriad of embodied choices, the question of “being me” or “being a female preacher” crystallized within the decisions of adornment. Women debated what elements to add to their clothes, and learned some of the limits around their choices through the reactions their adornments received. Women linked a choice for a certain type of shoe or a particular hairstyle to her sense of her self, and her desire to bring before her listeners whatever strand of personality that prompted the shoes or the hair choice. Adornment decisions were multi-faceted moments shaping the landscape of what it might mean to “look like me” for the twenty-first century female preacher.

Debates around Self-Expression in the Pulpit

Analyzing these decisions raises questions about how self-expression played out in the pulpit. If you can’t preach without your body, you also can’t preach without a rudimentary articulation of who you are, in the pulpit and beyond it. The claim that “God made me to be a woman and called me to preach as a woman” was a bold, self-identifying claim. It existed at the center at many of these preachers’ narratives and therefore served as a primary shaper of their embodied experiences. The claim also linked a woman’s life across several spheres, suggesting that “looking like me” in the pulpit necessitated some continuity with how a woman looked at home, around her neighborhood or in the office on a weekday afternoon. Adornment elements were used to

create continuity between their living bodies beyond the pulpit and their embodied presence in the pulpit. Aware that they inhabited multiple landscapes, which would vary in their comfort with female bodies, women approached adornment decisions with careful, hopeful expectations for self-expression. The discussions around self-expression did not assume any type of essential self, formed prior to social, lived experience. Instead, the wish for self-expressive pushed towards Merleau-Ponty's notion of a living (and evolving) core of meanings developed within and through embodied, social existence. Finding avenues to create continuity was critical to these women's experience of self-expression. Continuity served as a tangible manifestation of how they might involve facets of their evolving selves into their preaching and how those facets played into their presence as preachers.

Homiletical conversations about the preacher's selfhood, or identity, have typically veered in two directions. Scholars have focused on the identity of being the preacher. Some have argued that the one who is the preacher may be a herald, a witness, a pastor or a prophet.[245] Alternatively, scholars have delved into the character of the preacher, his or her ethos. Ethos developed within ancient rhetoric to signify "the trustworthiness of the speaker," a concept that served as one of many "proofs" to verify a speech.[246] While both concepts played a role in their adornment experiences, these women posed a different question when they pondered how to "look like me." Female preachers tackled issues within expressive materiality each time they translated "God called me to be who I am" into feminine markers. Seeing their physical presentation as a

[245] Thomas G. Long, The Witness of Preaching 2nd ed. (Lousiville: Westminster John Knox, 2005),18-51.
[246] O.C. Edwards. *A History of Preaching*, 12.

vehicle for self-expression, they grappled with how to add to their embodiments as "preacher" other embodiments associated with being a "female" preacher. Their strong instance that "God created me as a woman" spoke to the vitality they gathered from satisfactorily bringing the habits of expression used outside the pulpit into the pulpit.

"Being me" in the pulpit was never an isolated endeavor. A preacher's choices were met and molded by the congregation's expectations and responses. Because congregations could – and did – judge a preacher on her adorning choices, the female preacher's self-expressive actions raised, in slightly different forms, the older questions around ethos. A recent homiletical study of listeners defined ethos as "the role that the listener's perception of the speaker" played in the overall communication of the speech.[247] A preacher's bodily choices for a short haircut, dangling earrings or plain brown loafers could affect the congregation's perception of her as preacher, working to advance or hinder the sermon's reception.[248] In their efforts towards consistency across realms and roles, these preachers encountered a range of congregational reactions. Listeners commented upon a woman's embodiments, linking her physicality – and all that attire and adornment can represent – to their presence as preachers. The scholars studying listeners re-named ethos as something akin to presence, which they defined as "a nebulous and hard to grasp quality which tended to cluster around the perception of the connection of the preacher to God, the demeanor of the preacher… and the perception

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[247] John S. McClure, R. J. Allen, D. P. Andrews, L. S. Bond, D. P. Moseley, G. Ramsey, Jr. *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies*, (St. Louis, Chalice, 2004), 8.
[248] McClure et al, 8.

that the preacher has confidence and authority."[249] While these women didn't use the same language when discussing either their decisions or the congregation's responses– they didn't talk about confidence or moral fiber –, they did sense the dual and at times competing tasks of accurately representing themselves as 'themselves" and fulfilling the listeners' expectations about their "Godly character" or authority to preach.

The group of scholars who name ethos as the listener's perception of the preacher elaborate on the role of identification within preaching. Identification signifies the connections between preacher and listener, specifically born in those moments when the ones in the pews recognized something in the speaker.[250] The preacher's efforts to forge a relationship between pew and pulpit, by evidencing familiarity, know-ability or similarity to those listening, strengthen the message's reception if the identification was successful.[251] Preaching scholar Thomas Long adds theological significance to the pulpit-pew connection, reminding preachers that they always start from within the community of faith, stepping out from the pew into the pulpit.[252] The preacher's physicality serves as one tool for identification. Congregations demonstrated such identification processes at work as they complimented and criticized the preacher's jewelry, shoes or haircut. Responding to those comments, women recognized how adornment decisions functioned as one aspect of their listeners' perception of them. Because many adornments could be classified as feminine elements - culturally approved (or not) ways of being a woman -

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[249] Mary Alice Mulligan, Diane Turner-Sharazz, Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm and Ronald J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons*, (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 56.
[250] McClure et al., 15.
[251] McClure et al., 15. "Listeners respond better and listen more closely to a preacher with whom they have a real or perceived connection."
[252] Long, 2-3.

the dilemmas around this set of decisions linked together the female preacher's embodied self-expressions and her congregation. As preachers shifted their adornments over time, the set of habitations that coalesced around clothes and adornments, while always under construction, came to characterize something of who a woman was as the preacher – what style of presence she embodied – and how the congregation's identification – or lack thereof - affected her preaching.

Three Adornments: Shoes, Hairstyles and Fingernail Polish

Although jewelry and makeup represented common identifying markers, both of these adornments received little attention and a minimalist approach. Perhaps in response to negative connotations surrounding overly painted women, preachers wore little makeup. Choosing jewelry raised practical considerations concerning chunky necklaces poking out under albs or dangling earrings interfering with microphones. Instead, preachers gravitated to considerations about shoes, hairstyles, and even fingernail polish as complicated, thought-provoking decisions. Shoes were the one element of clothing most noticed under robes. Often named as the primary place for self-expression, shoes also were governed by informal yet tenacious criteria about the acceptable shoes for preachers. Hair was an extension of the body, signaling everything from personal preference to ethnicity, from professional demeanor to age. Female preachers worried the most about their hair, and found their hair-styling decisions negotiated their positions with their congregations. To paint one's fingernails, and what color one could paint the nails, emerged as a surprisingly complex decision, as preachers weighed the appropriate colors for the pulpit alongside a desire for attractive, fun or trendy nails. Believing that

self-expression happened through adornment, this chapter will look closely at these three areas of decisions about accessories.

The choices around shoes, hair, and fingernail polish illuminated the bundles of internal and external norms related to but distinct from general clothing norms. While the clothing decisions discussed thus far were linked to established standards, choices of adornment waded into murkier waters filled with ad-hoc rules, anecdotal standards and contradictory advice. The choices connected to accessories were experienced as personalized choices, even as culture and context played a role in a woman's discernment of what kind of preacher she looked like and what kind of preacher she hoped to present. All of those decisions stayed in tension with an abiding belief, as Rev. Anderson so aptly stated, that "God called to be who I am, as a preacher and a female preacher."

Tales about De-regulating Shoes

The Rev. Emily Thompson had a personal rule that she never wore open-toed shoes in the pulpit. "The reason for that," she said, "is that someone told me in my very first church that it was completely inappropriate to wear open-toed shoes in the pulpit." One spring, she purchased a new pair of beige flats, with a little ruffle across the top and open toes. "They were so pretty, this first pair of summer shoes and I wanted to give them a try," she continued. "I wore them on Sunday and I felt extraordinarily uncomfortable the entire time." Rev. Thompson's discomfort was confirmed by the comments of a choir member, who said after worship, "I don't know about those shoes."

Most Sundays, Rev. Thompson wore low-heeled, closed toe black shoes. "I call them preacher's shoes," she commented. She owned several pairs of preacher's shoes,

which varied in style but remained within the neutral colored, heeled but not too highly heeled, foot-covering range of shoes. She and a colleague shopped regularly for such shoes, which had been her standard choice throughout fifteen years of preaching. When asked to explain her standard, Rev. Thompson referred to similar norms in other female colleagues and congregational expectations. She noted the irony of making a choice based on one comment early in her preaching ministry. Her experience wearing light colored sandals only solidified her previous decisions. In an interview soon after that uncomfortable experience, Rev. Thompson said, "It just underscored for me that shoes are part of your uniform. I'm going to just keep a pair of black preacher shoes in the sacristy so that I can wear open toed shoes the rest of the day. But I feel like I have my armor on" when in the pulpit.

Like Rev. Thompson, many women in this study could describe the shoes in their closet they called "preacher shoes," "regulation pumps" or "Sunday shoes." Most relied upon these plain, neutral, low-heeled or flat shoes to anchor their preaching attire. Acclimated to the clothing standards of a professional context, which ranged in these churches from very formal to business casual, women held to the "preacher shoe" standard. Rev. Shannon Baker described her shoes by saying, "I'm very conscious of the shoes I wear because they are the one thing that shows. I wear traditional pumps. Patent leather in the summer and black pumps in the winter. I do wear thin, stiletto, two-inch heels, because that is what I like. They are in good shape. They're clean. They are polished." Preaching without a clerical gown, Ms. Melissa Clark tailored her shoes to her body and her dress. "Because I have CP," she reported, "I can't wear heels. So I always wear flats. I have a black pair, a navy pair and a brown pair. When they wear out, I go get

new ones [exactly the same]." In a very similar fashion, Rev. Deborah Lewis said, "I wear very conservative colors, lots of black and navy blue. I wear flats because I'm not good in heels. To me, it is just part of the uniform." These types of shoes were an extension of the professional uniform, held to the same standards of good grooming and unobtrusive form.[253] They could convey credibility, reliability or authority in ways similar to any established professional attire.[254] Completing the outfit, such shoes often were viewed as an essential part of the preacher's attire, even as they held minimal potential for the preacher's own self-expression.

While some women could talk easily about their preacher shoes, others could speak with equal ease about wearing shoes that deviated from the norm. Rev. Baker slightly shifted her regulation pumps by wearing a thinner, higher heel. As Rev. Harris suggested, shoes were a place where she introduced a more feminine marker to balance the neutrality of her robe. She often wore knee-high boots during the winter months. One Pentecost Sunday, she put on red, open-toed heels and painted her toenails red to match. Rev. Laura Martin wore stripy white sandals with gold accents on a hot July morning, while Rev. Anderson wore black patent sandals with tiny white ribbons on the same day. Each of these choices represented the preacher's tastes, preferences and personalities. In many instances, the shoes did not prompt any congregational reaction. But occasionally some shoes, like Rev. Thompson's little beige flats, caused a stir. Even a passing

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[253] When worn in these styles, shoes appeared to function as an extension of uniform dress. As such they were subject to the same formal code and able to convey distinct "rights and responsibilities." Rubinstein, 9.

[254]Toby Fischer-Mirkin, *Dress Code: Understanding the Hidden Meanings of Women's Clothes* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1995), 212. "Mid-heeled conservative pumps indicate reliability, dignity and refinement."

comment like "I don't know about those shoes" led to self-reflection about how to adorn oneself in the pulpit.

Although using the familiar language of uniform, Rev. Thompson described her preacher shoes as a protective piece of her attire. Her regulation pumps served as armor around more vulnerable embodiments. She experienced more feminine shoes originally chosen for a host of reasons unrelated to preaching – "because they were cute, it was spring and I liked the shoes" – as unwelcome in the pulpit, a harsh reminder of the rejection of the female preaching body in other times and eras. "People comment on my appearance all the time," she said. "But that comment [about the shoes] rubbed me the wrong way because it was a little more critical than most. It just struck me again, people feel like they own you." Experiencing their body as owned by someone else was a familiar refrain within women's narratives, an indicator of the ever-present objective gaze focused on their appearance.[255] Rev. Thompson's encounter with criticism towards her shoe choice illustrated the power of even one negative comment to deflate the sense of "being me" in the pulpit and contrastingly emphasize being controlled by someone else. Her experience was replicated in other women, forced to respond to the moments when "being me" received a less than hospitable reception.

The Reverend Caroline Adams wore red ballet flats to match her red jacket one Sunday. Serving as the associate minister in a large congregation, her red shoes were

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[255] The sense of having her body closely observed and evaluated is well documented. See Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York, Oxford University, 2005), Elaine Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries of Wholeness through life stories and reciprocal ethnography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993) and Sarah Sentilles, *A Church of Her Own: What Happens When a Woman Takes the Pulpit* (New York, Harcourt, 2008). In the context of her study, Sentilles asserts, "women's appearance is scrutinized and is an object of discussion in a way that men's isn't."

visible beneath her robe as she stood beside the senior pastor behind the Communion table. The row of older woman who occupied the back pew did not come forward to receive communion. The next morning, they lodged a complaint about her shoes with the senior pastor. They could not participate in communion they said, because her red shoes had profaned the sacred meal.

Newly ordained and in her first church, Rev. Adams was embarrassed by the complaints and the awkward conversation that resulted between herself and her senior pastor. She was also acutely conscious of the connections made between her female body and the color red. When asked her thoughts about what might have motivated the complaints, she replied, “There is still living among us a generation of women who identify certain objects as scandalous: red shoes, stilettos or pointed toed shoes. These symbols of harlotry have great power for those older women.” At that point in time, Rev. Adams was a divorced single mother with a teenage son. Red shoes on a white altar on a Sunday morning were taken by others to say something about the state of her body, her behavior and her character. “At the time I thought it was just plain silly and bad theology to boot,” she continued. But after fifteen years in the ministry, she also acknowledged the power of such symbolism within a person’s worship experience. “We do transmit our cultural baggage into theological understanding,” she suggested. “In my closet I have three pairs of red flat shoes and two pairs of heeled red boots. I wear them with pride, but I would never wear them in worship.” While she didn’t believe her current congregants would view red shoes as defiling the sacraments, she did suspect they would view her choice as inappropriate for worship.

Although a more extreme example, Rev. Adams' red shoes illustrated the risks accompanying expressive shoes that might be labeled dangerously feminine. The women who refused communion because of the pastor's red shoes enacted an age-old belief that some types of women's adornments were scandalously unfit for the altar. Although she simply had chosen shoes that coordinated with her outfit, Rev. Adams grew to recognize the role of culture in the reception of the female preaching body. Over time, she wore heels in the pulpit, but not red ones. She wore red boots to a church meeting, but not in worship. In this instance, congregational criticism altered –without suspending entirely – the way she made her choices when dressing her body for preaching.

When sharing her "red shoe" story, Rev. Adams referred to a colleague who deliberately wore "high, high heels" for her ordination service. This minister, acting against the advice of others, chose her favorite style of shoes, which could be viewed as extremely feminine or their own sign of harlotry, to signify that she was "being who she truly was on that occasion." While she herself did not make this choice, Rev. Adams held her colleague's actions in high esteem. She responded positively to a self-expressive choice that vividly represented the personality of a particular preacher. Rev. Adams' colleague's story matched the narrative of another preacher in this study, who chose to make her own bold shoe choice for preaching.

The Reverend Erica Williams always has preached in bare feet. Although she enters and exits the pulpit in an exemplary pair of preacher's shoes, she slips them off during the prayer before the sermon. "I'm a very tactile person," she said. "Having my bare feet on the ground reminds me that preaching is holy work, that I'm on holy ground. It literally and figuratively grounds me." Rev. Williams' decision to preach barefoot was

a personal one that made with Biblical stories and theological reasoning in mind. Her congregation soon noticed when she lost two inches between prayer and preaching. In this instance, they reacted positively to her explanation. They understood that, like Moses before the burning bush, Rev. Williams' bare feet symbolized the preacher's and the congregation's entrance into sacred time and space. Her actions prepared her to preach, and hopefully also drew the congregation into the sermon.

Rev. Williams used her feet to do theological work. She explicitly framed taking off her shoes as a preparatory action before the presence of God, while simultaneously casting the action as a way to be her "very tactile" self. Her choice, which was a disrobing action that easily might have symbolized informality or sexuality, was well received by her congregation as the movement into holy ground. The difference between her experience and those of others in this study demonstrated how some deviating shoe choices strengthened the preacher's sense of "being me" and other choices – or congregations - lessened that same sense. It may be that bare feet appeared as less feminine or provocative than feet encased in high heels.[256] Or it may be that Rev. Williams' relationship to her body reframed the situation, as a woman who stated openly "I don't care much about my appearance" and leaned on a kinesiology background to frame her bodily connections. Whatever the reasons, Rev Williams' decision for no shoes grounded her body for preaching. Rather than feeling curtailed in her choices, she

[256] Many theorists might disagree with the idea that bare feet are less provocative that heeled ones. The feet are typically viewed as a sensual part of the body. Fisher-Mirkin, 190. There are many cultural connections between shoes and sex, such as the old woman who lived in a shoe with too many children and the practice of tying shoes to the back of the bridal car at a wedding. Desmond Morris, *The Naked Woman: A Study of the Female Body (*New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 252.

embodied her understanding of preaching in a way that felt true to herself and to her congregation.

Every preacher's shoe choices did theological work. Whether little beige flats, red shoes, fashionable boots, plain black pumps or jeweled summer sandals, the shoes worn by these women were a part of the images they presented for preaching. The shoes enacted the diversity of preaching bodies. The shoes that deviated from standard preacher shoes were often feminine shoes. Having made the choice for more feminine shoes, women interpreted the reception of their shoes as a small but significant referendum on their femaleness. Criticism of the shoes was experienced as criticism of the preacher, and specifically as a woman preacher. Conversely, an affirmation of a shoe– or the choice for no shoes – increased the space for their particular embodiments in the pulpit.

Whatever the shoes, the congregation's reception of them played a pivotal role. Rev. Baker recalled how "a seminary professor told me when you are preaching, people will comment on your shoes. And they did. They did." By commenting upon their shoes, congregations commented upon a preacher's expressions of femininity, on her decision-making skills and ultimately on how effectively (or not) she embodied preaching. Chosen as self-expressive tools, shoes helped a preacher feel like herself in the pulpit and know how her listeners were reading her presence. And whether a congregation's discouraged, embarrassed, affirmed or celebrated a preacher impacted not only subsequent shoe decisions, but a whole range of self-expressive choices. What a preacher felt she could wear in the pulpit could contribute to how much freedom of embodiment she felt in the pulpit.

Like Rev. Adam's red boots, the shoes women debated wearing for preaching were typically ones they wore on days when and in spaces where they did not preach. Merleau-Ponty asserts "the body is the vehicle of being in the world" always "intervolved in a definite environment."[257] These women straddled, like most individuals, several environments – church or synagogue office, sanctuary, home, neighborhood coffee shop, grocery story or expensive restaurant. Not every shoe worn in all those spaces was considered for the pulpit. But the shoes that caused some controversy were ones worn with ease in at other times and places. Shoes represented their femininity, most definitely. In their femininity shoes also represented the multi-faceted, developing self of the preacher, always crafting her presence amongst her listening congregation. Rev. Adams' colleague who wore high, high heels for ordination elaborated on her choice several months later at a public gathering of clergypersons. "I deliberately chose the shoes," she acknowledged, "because I wanted to be me on such an important occasion. But I also wanted the church, by ordaining me in those shoes, to bless all of me." She wanted to be embraced as herself, equipped and authorized for ministry in all the glory of her embodied life. The ways in which listeners and preachers negotiated such an embracement of embodiment came more clearly into view as women turned to the next set of adornment deliberations, deciding how to style their hair.

Hair: Negotiating A Preacher's Identity

Rev. Erin Robinson, a Unitarian Universalist minister serving her first congregation, had always struggled with her hair. Although she aimed to dress in a way

[257] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 94.

that took her appearance "off the table," she found her hair worked against her goal. "As far as hair [goes], I feel like I'm entering into a skill set I don't have. I just wish someone would come in and fix my hair," she said laughing. "I'm not ever really happy with it." Her gray hair was cut in a straight bob that hung just below her chin. Parted to one side, she typically wore it tucked behind her ears when preaching. She often ran her fingers through her hair as she preached, and "unless it is shellacked into place," it became disheveled during the sermon. "There have been times when I have literally thought what have I done to my hair?" she said. "What does it look like right now?"

During her interview process for her current position, Rev. Robinson preached one Sunday at a neutral church, neither her home church nor the congregation to which she was considering a call. After the worship service, a man approached her to say, "A group of us here have been talking and we decided you should know …that your hair is really distracting." Shocked and embarrassed by his comment, she replied, in what she hoped was a joking tone, "I'm sorry if I project the idea that I have any control over my hair at all." She questioned the appropriateness of the man's comment and wondered if a "congregation would ever find a man's hair distracting." Conceding that women in public roles are held to a higher standard of appearance than their male counterparts, she longed for "the equivalent of a hair robe I could put on in the morning and just have it done."

Rev. Robinson's telling comments "I'm never really happy with my hair" and "I wish I had the equivalent of a hair robe" spoke loudly in these women's conversations around hair. Choosing a hairstyle and fielding comments about one's hair were daily dilemmas. "I worry about my hair more than anything else about my appearance," said Rev. Harris, citing her unusually thick, curly hair. Unlike shoes, the choices in hairstyles

were not governed by a prevailing standard or "hair robe" equivalent. No two preachers in this study wore identical or even very similar hairstyles. They made individual decisions about their hair by weighing age, life stage, congregational setting and personal preference. But just like shoes, their choices were never made in isolation. Hairstyles were a constant topic of conversation, as preachers received congregants' unsolicited comments about certain hairstyles or changes in hair. The habits that formed around hair illustrated how attempts at self-expression could become spaces for negotiations between female preachers and their listeners.

John S. McClure employs the phrase "negotiating a hearing" to name the ongoing inter-communication between preacher and listener in which the preacher specifically utilizes language, symbols, images, interpretative methods and cultural cues to make receptive space for the sermon.[258] The preacher's exchanges with parishioners around hair topics illustrated how the preacher's embodied presence participates in her negotiating efforts. Especially for female bodies, gaining a hearing for a sermon may depend upon clothes, shoes and hair that meet local conventions. While shoes showed how explicitly feminine choices contributed to or detracted from the space for these women's embodied preaching, conversations around hair demonstrated how the specific habitations of any one preacher both required and created the space to craft a particular preacher-listener relationship. Every preacher developed her own habitations around her hair. Shoes possessed an equivalent shoe robe into which preachers could retreat as necessary. On the other hand, one could not turn one's unique hair into anything resembling a blank slate. Through trial and error, this group of women searched for the

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[258] John S. McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (Westminster John Knox, 2003), 12.

right hairstyle for themselves and their preaching contexts. Their hair habitations functioned as a powerful tool in negotiating the capacity for self-expression in preaching.

Hair is one of the human body's most versatile raw materials.[259] Standing between nature and culture, we all inherit a particular color, texture, thickness and curl (or lack thereof). We then manipulate these raw materials through coloring, shaping, curling, straightening or decorating.[260] Historically hair also has served as a distinguishing marker between male and female bodies. Women's hair has almost always been worn longer than men's. It has been closely linked to evaluations of feminine beauty, symbolizing anything from attractiveness to sexual seduction.[261] For centuries, married Christian and Jewish woman were expected to keep their hair long, but wear it bound and covered.[262] In more recent centuries, fashionable hair has meant everything from elaborate, expensive hairstyles reserved for women of leisure during the Renaissance to the short "bob" of the liberated 1920's woman, from the layered shag of the 70s to the power cuts of the 80s. [263] With no single hairstyle currently dominating women's fashion, these contemporary preachers chose from a range of options. They based their decisions upon the given qualities of their hair and body, their cultural, social

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[259] Karen Stevenson, "Hairy Business: Organizing the Gendered Self" in *Contested Bodies*, ed. Ruth Holliday and John Hassard (London: Routledge, 2001), 137.
[260] Stevenson, 137.
[261] Rose Weitz, *Rapunzel's Daughters: What Women's Hair Tells Us About Women's Lives* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), xv. See also Holliday and Hassard, *Contested Bodies*, 139-140. Long hair has symbolized "femininity, fantasy, sensuality and sex." Fisher-Mirkin, 225.
[262] Weitz, 4. Biblical injunctions, of course, required women to cover their hair for worship.
[263] Weitz, 5-19, 120. Holliday and Hassard, 140.

or religious locations and their individual preferences. Knowing hair's close link to gender, they made choices that, like some personalized shoes, evoked the self.[264]

Rev. Thompson experienced herself as an oddity within American Baptist culture. She was one of the few female senior pastors of a Baptist congregation. She wore a black cassock to preach, knowing full well that most of her colleagues preach without robes. Alongside her multiple pairs of eccentric eyeglasses, Rev. Thompson consciously styled her hair in what she called a "funky" style. Her short, asymmetrical cut received regular, enthusiastic compliments. Her hair was often the first aspect of her appearance that others noticed. "People talk about my hair all the time," she elaborated. "Every day someone says something to me about my hair. I think it is because I don't look like a pastor." In fact, Rev. Thompson viewed her hair as "one of the ways I have to express myself. It is very important to me to not be a typical Baptist minister. It starts for me is in how I look. I always joke with my hairdresser that I can't look like Laura Bush. I just cannot."

Rev. Thompson's hairstyle decisions were based on her desire for a distinctive look, which differed from what she defined as traditional haircuts for women in public roles. She developed her own hair habits based on her context as a female pastor in a largely male denomination. Indicative of her personality, her hairstyle helped carve out space for her preaching, a space built upon her unique practices rather than her conformity to "Laura Bush" kind of hair. Hair was one significant element in a carefully constructed funky appearance, completed by "eccentric" glasses and bold, trendy clothes.

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[264] Hair is especially linked to bodies and identities. Weitz observes that, "growing directly out of our bodies, our hair often seems magically emblematic of our selves." Weitz, xiv.

"I refer to myself as a freak show," she said, "because I am in Baptist life. I stick out. I look different." By turning freak into funk, she used her hair to create space for a female Baptist preacher. "This morning I had to say a prayer at the Faith and Politics Institute breakfast," she said. "I said the prayer, sat down and the woman at my table said 'Will you look at all these old Jesuits around here? Looking at them and looking at you makes me think, the times are changing.'" Paradoxically, the style that expressly sought "not to look like a pastor" became precisely the hairstyle of a successful preacher.

The habits of hair have varied widely by ethnic and racial groups. Second only to skin, hair serves as a racial signifier.[265] Within the African American community, hairstyles, and the meanings invested in them, emerge from the history of slavery in America, as well as the practices within African and free African American cultures. Often measured against the white ideal of long, straight, blond hair, African American females made decisions about styling their hair keenly aware that their choices could be interpreted as self-expressive or as an indication of white American culture's suppressive influence.[266] Calling hair "more than the proverbial crowning glory," Rev. Caroline Adams affirmed how straight hair can be interpreted as a way to mimic white society. Contemporary African American women name hair as an available means through which to express pride as well as to exercise power and choice.[267] African American women

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[265] Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 8. Banks draws from Kobena Mercer's *Black Hair/Style Politics* (1990) and notes that even "the curl of their hair was used to justify the subordination of Africans."
[266] Weitz, 9. Historically straighter hair was viewed as a whiter feature. During slave times, those with tighter curls worked in the fields while those with straighter hair worked in the house.
[267] Weitz, 9, 18. Weitz noted that during hair was "one of the few means available to black slaves for expressing pride and identity." Banks, 69. Through her research

spend about three times as much as white women on hair products. Their choices reveal complex identity politics amid very personal decisions about what styles best suit them.[268] Two African American preachers from this study, relatively close in age and serving similar types of congregations, spoke about their decisions to "go natural" with their hair, as a means by which they expressed their evolving comfort with "being me." The reactions of their congregations, in turn, illuminated the unfolding dialogue occurring between pulpit and pew.

The Rev. Deborah Lewis kept her hair cut very short and close to her head in a style born of necessity. "I used to wear my hair long, although I've never worn it long preaching," she said. "I wore a bob when I was at the commission. I wore short but straight hair for a little while. This [pointing to her current hair] is really the result of menopause. The sweats were so bad that the hair was suffering. So I just went natural." The style suited her smaller frame, and presented her as the former lawyer that she was. More importantly, her hairstyle spoke of a confidence with her embodied self. In earlier life stages, Rev. Lewis had worn her hair long, utilizing straighteners to maintain its style. While menopause had prompted her to go natural, she found the style suited her physical body and her mindset. "I'm pretty much me," she repeated in various ways throughout our interview, suggesting that she had nothing to hide and that her embodiment decisions aligned with her personal desires. Choosing to wear her hair closely cropped and with its natural curl, Rev. Lewis communicated to her congregation her peace with herself and

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interviews, Banks concluded that contemporary African American women view the choice to wear their hair any way they want as a sign of empowerment in the face of societal, cultural and familial opposition.

[268] Banks, 148. Banks concludes from her research that the hairstyle choices of African American women are "a medium to understand complex identity politics that intersect along the lines of race, gender, class, sexuality, power and beauty."

her ease in relating to them as herself. Reflecting on her efforts towards honest self-expression, Rev. Lewis reported, “I thought I was well-received.”

The Rev. Caroline Adams had reached a similar place of comfort in her skin, body and hair, although with a very different hairstyle. “Styling my hair is not a priority for me,” she said. “I am gifted with long, thick wonderful hair and I do nothing with it, to the disappointment of everyone from my mother to female colleagues. Many years ago I made a decision to stop putting chemical “perms” or “relaxers” in my hair. For years I wore it in its naturally kinky-curly state but I kept it long.” Currently, she applied a little heat on her hair in order to lessen the curliness in hopes of managing time-consuming tangles. She typically kept it “pulled back in a comb or headband because it’s easier.” Occasionally, she put it into a bun and recently she had started adding some curls for worship. Understanding the importance of hair for African American women, she sought to display her hair’s beauty while also not altering it profoundly. Her congregants did not always agree with her style. “Through the years I have had several [church] members offer to pay for me to get my hair “fixed,”” she reported. She consistently resisted such suggestions, maintaining her long, thick hair.

Although very different in appearance, Rev. Adams wore her hair in a natural style for many of the same reasons as Rev. Lewis. She was familiar with the “reams written about the significance of hair among American Black women.” Like Rev. Lewis, she had utilized straightening and weaving techniques in previous life stages. But having reached middle age and achieved a measure of professional success, she desired a hairstyle that conveyed her comfort with her body, her identity as an African-American woman and her role as pastor-preacher. Amid criticism and offers for help, she chose a

hairstyle that defied some cultural norms she disagreed with and stayed faithful to herself. Both Rev. Lewis and Rev. Adams communicated a comfortable confidence through their hair that rippled down their preacher-listener relationships. Especially for Rev. Adams, a natural hairstyle began multi-layered conversations with listeners about racial and identity politics, as well as their expectations for the female pastor's hair. Even when faced with congregants' alternate opinions, they maintained their own styling choices. They liked their hair, as well as the habits associated with hair in its natural state and they spoke openly to those reasons. Through their hair choices, which contributed to their overall bodily presence, they continued negotiating the conceptual and relational space existing between preachers and listeners.

Hairstyle choices served a topic of on-going congregational conversation for several other preachers in this study. Rabbi Julie Kahn is a long time associate rabbi within a large Washington, DC Jewish congregation. She has adopted a variety of hair lengths and colors during her ministry. In the early years, her straight hair fell around her shoulders and was highlighted to a medium blond color. It matched her status as a young, single, recently ordained rabbi. One year she decided to grow her hair out for Locks of Love, an organization that uses donated hair to create wigs for cancer patients. As her hair grew farther and farther down her back, congregational members commented, "Rabbi, your hair is getting really long." The criticism inherent in the comment would be altered by her reply, "yes, I'm growing it to cut it off for a wig. I need ten inches to cut and ten inches to keep." More recently, Rabbi Kahn shifted her hair color from blond to very dark brown. "Anytime I change the color, a million people notice," she said. "Seventh grade girls will say, 'Oh, Rabbi, you've changed your hair. We love it!'" Not

minding the comments in the least, Rabbi Kahn interpreted the comments as mirroring teenage girls' discussions in other settings. She elaborated, "this is what they like to comment on with each other, so it gives them a point of access with me." Over time, her choices prompted hairstyle discussions, which built a whole set of relationships. Now working specifically with the school connected to her synagogue, Rabbi Kahn referred to these hair conversations as insightful moments in her professional self-understanding. The changing habits of her hair negotiated a hearing for younger voices not often heard at the synagogue and yet-to-be developed aspects of herself.

Although sometimes wearied by intrusively opinionated comments, Rabbi Kahn affirmed the expressiveness accompanying all hair. With hair down her back, Rabbi Kahn admitted that some "people [in my congregation] would prefer me to have shorter hair." She kept her hair long because she was "happy with the way it is" and thought the length best fit her body type. She enjoyed changing her hair color, finding it a fun outlet to "be herself." Like other women in this study, her hair revealed aspects of her personhood to which listeners then responded. She continued, "I think people who comment on hair, it is their way of connecting to us. I feel people don't know how to approach us or connect to us, so they pick something that is obvious like hair and comment on it, because that is what they would do in their social settings with their girl friends." The hairstyle, which may have been chosen to maintain continuity between embodiments outside the pulpit and embodiments brought into the pulpit, also prompted a continuity between the preacher and the listener. An easily identifiable trait of the body became a means of access to a physically unfamiliar rabbi. A light-hearted exchange about a haircut or new hair color created the opening for further, more significant conversations. A seemingly

surface conversation might be a testing ground for the woman occupying the rabbi's role, as both preacher and listener played with what a preacher might look like and, by extension, who a preacher might be.

In a process similar to Rabbi Kahn, Rev. Laura Martin's varying hairstyles narrated her unfolding relationship with new listening partners. Serving as the first woman in a historic, urban but struggling African American, United Methodist church, Rev. Martin fielded questions about her age, experience and skills from the moment she was appointed to the congregation. She is a woman in her thirties, the mother of two preschool age children and wife of a widely traveled praise and worship leader. Preferring a clothing style she called "elegant, simple and stylish," she has worn her straight, shoulder length hair in three main styles. When placed in a ponytail, her hair prompted concerns about her age. "When it is up in a ponytail, people think I am young," she said. The comments decreased but did not dissolve entirely when Rev. Martin pulled back her hair into a bun. So she started wearing it down, parted in the middle and falling straight to her shoulders. This style garnered the fewest comments, the least amount of critiques and, over time, emerged as the style most likely to be well received by her congregation.[269] Rev. Martin's varying hair habits evolved into a specific habitation, which meet her self-expressive needs and calmed her congregation's anxiety. The process of experimentations with several hairstyles mimicked a hesitant congregation trying out the new minister. Doubts about her character or competence formed into questions about

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[269] Weitz, 113. "In the 1996 *New Women's Dress for Success*, the book's best selling author, John Molloy said, 'To succeed in the business world…women should wear their hair shoulder length or shorter, manageable, but not so short as to look masculine.' They also must avoid styles that are 'too cute, too sexy, too young, too sever, too dated, or too disheveled.'"

her gender and youthfulness. Questions about her youthfulness or gender, in turn, were transformed into criticism about youthful or excessively feminine hair. This ongoing dialogue was congregationally specific, as the style Rev. Martin adopted prompted criticism about age, gender and single status when worn by Rabbi Kahn.

The different interpretations of Rev. Martin's and Rabbi Kahn's similar styles demonstrated how the variables of body type, personal preference and congregational setting, along with culture, race and age, result in distinct negotiations between the specific preachers and specific congregations. Every preacher adopted her own hairstyle. Every congregation had their own reactions to the preacher's hair habitations. The ensuing hair negotiations created a meeting place of hopes and expectations. Conversations about hair were rarely just about hair. They were about authority, character and confidence. They could also be about race, money and class. Hair conversations encompassed a preacher's wishes to choose her own hairstyle and her efforts towards a preaching presence, as well as how the congregation's interpreted and identified with her presence. The "right" hairstyle could connect preacher and listener, just as the "wrong" one could spark disconnection between pulpit and pew. Since this study explored the preacher's viewpoint, the role of hair in a woman's evolving preaching self – a process distinct from yet always formed in conjunction with her listening congregation – was most easily identifiable.

Rabbi Monica Levin had worn her thick, straight black hair in a medium length bob for many years. It was a simple, tidy style she considered appropriate for her facial features and shorter height. Like Rev. Martin, she had occasionally pulled it back in a ponytail, only to receive questioning comments about looking "a little casual today" from

others in the service. Generally she wore her hair down, parted in the middle and tucked behind her ears. During her first years at the temple, one lay member of her annual review team consistently recommended that she needed a haircut. "It didn't matter if I had just gotten a haircut," Rabbi Levin reflected. "She thought I needed a haircut." The reviewer herself had very short hair and Rabbi Levin noticed that hair factored into virtually every conversation they had.[270] As Rabbi Levin gained a history with her congregation, her reaction to the comments shifted. "Finally I realized it might not work for her, but she is only one person," she said. "I wasn't going to go out and spend however much money she expected me to spend to get a nice little hair makeover. I liked my hair just fine."

The narratives of these women trace a process of experimenting with hair preferences while navigating listeners' perceptions. They settled upon styles that matched their desires while also being very conscious of the expectations of their congregations. This bodily decision was one aspect of the negotiations that accompanied their preaching. Hair, lacking a reigning standard and posed at the intersection of nature and nurture, was uniquely personal. From Rev. Harris' thick, tight blond curls to Rev. Martin's sleek straightened black hair, from Rev. Lewis' closely cropped head to Rev. Robinson's fly-away gray bob, hair symbolized how hair could never been separated from the preacher's presentation. As congregations noticed and commented upon the female preacher's hair, a preacher learned something about her needs for self-expression. She might say, "I have no control over my hair" and also be comfortable with however it looks. She might claim,

[270] Short hair was associated with disciple, self-control, efficiency and assertiveness. One of the professional advantages linked to shorter hair was a minimizing of sexuality. Other researchers connected short hair to efficiency, assertiveness and leadership. Weitz, 114, 120 and Morris, 17.

"I am content to go natural" or "I like my hair just fine." These habits of the hair, congregational conversations and preacher's subsequent reactions illustrated how the preacher's presence was always under negotiation, especially by the preacher herself. Ideally, women wanted a hairstyle that was comfortable, consistent with how they perceived themselves and well received (or unnoticed) by their congregation. As in other adorning decisions, they sought a style that "looked like me."

Within McClure's terminology, the ability to "negotiate a hearing" rests largely upon the preacher's translation skills. It depends upon the preacher's ability to correctly interpret the needs and language of the congregation, as well as the cultural and interpretative lens in which listeners operate.[271] Negotiating the body's space relied upon very similar abilities. Preachers had to know their congregations' cultures in order to interpret the comments they received. They had to know their own choices, and why they formed –or conformed – to the hairstyles that they did. They had to grasp how they were presenting their bodies and how their presentations were being received. They needed to be prepared to defend hair decisions and to live with unsolicited criticism. They also adjusted their hairstyles, particularly in cases where a particular style could provide them greater acceptance. Hair conversations were not just about hair, but they also were about hair. Symbolic of "our evolving selves," hair did mark a preacher's particular embodied presence in the pulpit. While still under negotiation, hairstyles could proclaim I can be me and I can be your preacher.

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[271] McClure, 34-26. McClure develops the idea more fully in *Otherwise Preaching: A postmodern ethic of homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001).

Fingernails: Testing the Boundaries around Expressing Female Beauty

A close-knit group of ministerial colleagues gathered once a month for lunch. All women ministers serving in the Washington, DC and surrounding areas, they have met regularly for almost ten years. Sitting down at the table, Rabbi Kahn had fingernails painted in a trendy, deep purple color. "That is an awfully dark color," commented another clergywoman. "You wouldn't wear that color to preach, would you?" "Why not?" replied Rabbi Kahn. "Plenty of the moms in my congregation wear this color. Why wouldn't I have the same nail color as them?" A small but intense debate ensues over the meal. Most of these women paint their fingernails and toenails. They agreed that fingernail nail color was different than toenail color. A preacher can wear bright or unusual colors on their toes without drawing much attention. Fingers were far more visible. Can one wear dark purple, dusty blue or even black on the hands while preaching? The group became divided between those who regularly wore these colors in the pulpit, those who tended towards the more customary reds and pinks and those who stuck to neutral nails. All of them agreed that their hands were an important part of their preaching, a potential asset or distraction. As one clergywoman commented, "What are the limits of color? I don't want people to be distracted, but beautiful hands seem so important."[272]

A preacher's hands are an integral part of her preaching. Cared-for nails evidence attention to the body, communicated most often through regular pedicures and manicures. Rev. Adams spoke for many when reporting on her monthly pedicure. "For me, it is self-

[272] Mandy (psued.), comment on "Your Preachin' and Pastorin' Paws," Beauty Tips for Ministers Blog, comment posted on November 5, 2007, http://beautytipsforministers.com/index.php?s=fingernails (accessed July 23, 2010).

care," she said. "Not only do I get my feet pampered but that massage chair! And in warm weather, well-tended feet are a must for women." Like hairstyles, nail care could serve as an entrée into preacher-listener connections. Rabbi Levin recalled the multiple conversations she had with parishioners who noticed her manicure. Rabbi Kahn agreed. "When I preach at different life cycle events," she said, "it creates a weird access point, for a teenage girl to see that her female rabbi has the same nail color as her." Congregations also noticed when nails were not well maintained. "I had a parishioner once tell me how worried she was about my stress level," said Rev. Harris. "And then she pointed to my ripped cuticles." Rev. Victoria Weinstein, in her blog for female preachers, asserts the same position. "Nothing says I'm a nervous wreck quite so instantly and so visibly as chewed nails and cuticles."[273] Keeping their nails clean, trimmed and polished, these preachers affirmed the advantage of beautiful hands.

Opinions differed widely, though, about what colors made for beautiful preaching hands. When a question was posed on her blog, Rev. Weinstein offered two guidelines; either light colors for a clean, bare look or classic, elegant reds. She especially cautioned against the "Goth-y dark purples and blues" so that a preacher did not "resemble Vampira in any way."[274] Some preachers shared her view. Rev. Martin limited her polish to earthy tones, wanting to "remain as neutral as possible." "I wear very traditional colors; pinks and reds," said Rev. Baker. "I simply don't like blues, greens and blacks. I am a

[273] Victoria Weinstein, "Your Preachin' and Pastorin' Paws," Beauty Tips for Ministers Blog, comment posted on November 5, 2007, http://beautytipsforministers.com/index.php?s=fingernails (accessed July 23, 2010).
[274] Victoria Weinstein, "Your Preachin' and Pastorin' Paws," Beauty Tips for Ministers Blog, comment posted on November 5, 2007, http://beautytipsforministers.com/index.php?s=fingernails (accessed July 23, 2010).

traditional kind of gal." Rev. Adams chose colors that were outliers in the 'classic' spectrum, veering towards deep red tones like cinnamon that she never removed before preaching. "Black people expect women, including pastors, to have lovely hair and nails. It's in the culture," she elaborated. Two preachers embraced precisely those Goth-y purple, blue, and black tones that others cautioned against wearing. "Yeah, I have had black on my nails [on the bema]," said Rabbi Kahn. She recalled, "Once I was getting my nails done next to a woman who worked for a Catholic school. I was getting black and she really liked it. But she said, 'I can't because I work at a Catholic school.' And I said, 'I'll let you know, I am a rabbi and I preach with black nails.'" Rev. Thompson also had preached with black fingernails. "I use my fingernails to express whatever mood I am in," she said, noting that she debated with her manicurist, who knew her profession, as to whether she should bring such colors into the pulpit.

Whether they wore neutral, classic or more risqué colors, women expressed genuine affinity for their choice. Regardless of the color, personal preference guided most decisions. Women chose the color of their nails, and explained their choices as ones that resonated with being "a traditional kind of gal," just like all the other moms or a person who appreciated lovely nails. They brought these individual choices into their preaching as a way of representing other aspects of their lives in their preaching presentations, attributing such choices as ways to "be oneself" in the pulpit.

Occasionally to "be oneself" necessitated choices that defied reigning or conventional expectations surrounding a preacher's body. Rev. Thompson's and Rabbi Kahn's dark colored nails were perceived by some colleagues and congregants as inappropriate for preaching. One Sunday, Rev. Thompson preached with her nails painted

black. A listener criticized the color. Rev. Thompson reacted in protest. “I thought to myself, ‘I can do whatever I want,’” she recalled during her interview. She intentionally chose to wear black nail polish in the pulpit on subsequent Sundays. Her nail color demonstrated her determination towards self-expression. Her resistance to congregational censor was replicated in a minister named Eve, whose blue toenail polish received similar chastisement.[275] Increasingly aware of how such criticisms contributed to feeling constrained in ministry, Eve applied for a position at a new church and intentionally wore blue nail polish to the formal interview. “When one of the interviewees said, ‘I love your nail polish,’” said Eve, “I knew I was home.”[276]

As they offered their stories, women represented fingernail polish as an unexpectedly strong method of self-expression. Nail polish is a decidedly feminine choice, as men don’t usually paint their nails. Presenting them in their femaleness, a woman’s nails painted in the color of her choice created consistency between a preacher’s choices in and beyond the pulpit. Such a mark of their “me-ness” was strained by unsought criticism but then solidified by the preachers who held to their preferred black, blue and purple hues. Transgressing the usual expectations around a preacher’s appearance, these colors seemed indicative of resistant individuality, as voiced by Rev. Thompson’s assertion that “no one can tell me what to do.” When encountering imposed limits upon their self-expressions, these preachers persevered towards that vital continuity between their embodiments in home, neighborhood or play and their embodiments.

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[275] Sentilles, 158.
[276] Sentilles, 159.

Historically, female preachers whose physical presentations transgressed conventional patterns of femininity were understood as relying upon their provocative sexuality to heighten their presence. While the connecting line between fashionably painted nails and a sexualized persona is not universally clear, painted nails can convey an alluring edge. The language used in discouraging such nails confirms a fear of the allure, as seen in words around too dark or too risky. The debate surrounding fingernails reveals how adornment deliberations are dialogues about female beauty. The term adornment means to enhance one's appearance through additional elements that beautify. "How beautiful can I be in the pulpit?" is one way to state the question. "How sexy can I be in the pulpit?" might be another. Some of these women articulated a need for beautiful hands, as seen in Rev. Adams' reference to "lovely hands" and Rev. Baker's emphasis on colors she found attractive. But it appeared more significant that their hands represented themselves, maintaining that space "to be me" created through manifesting consistency between the self-expressive desires of one's embodied self outside the pulpit and in it. Adornments beautified the preacher's appearance by crafting a method of self-expression, whether that expression was conventionally feminine or not. "I knew I was home" was Eve's way of stating this consistency. "I chose my accessories because I believe God called me to be who I am" was Rev. Anderson's way.

Can I Be Me: Continuity In and Out of the Pulpit

The female preacher's decisions around adornment were decisions about how to embody their evolving selves. Through the process of choosing a hairstyle, shoe or fingernail color, a woman pondered how to express herself in the pulpit, and give voice to

their desires to "look like the woman God created her to be." Their choices were born out of and constantly forming the nexus of living meanings existing at the core of the self. The preacher's initial adornments spurred ongoing conversations between preachers and listeners, providing a context in which a preacher negotiated her preaching presence. Preachers chose adornments that helped them feel like themselves, which meant achieving a level of comfortable self-expression. They also chose adornments that made them appear as female preachers, which meant venturing into choices that risked negative reactions and occasionally editing out some of their more boundary crossing adornments. All of these approaches illuminated how the ever-evolving self exists within concrete, material and thoughtfully pondered decisions. Women might joke about the attention directed towards small decisions like shoes, but they expressed how such elements were crucial to their preaching. They might shrug off a listener who labels their hair "distracting," but the words will echo in the ears when they consider their composite appearance. Adornment decisions, by conveying something of who the preacher is, illustrate the ways in which the depth of embodied life is brought into the sermon.

Listening closely to these stories, one can hear a common thread of seeking congruence between adornments worn with ease outside the pulpit and the adornments acceptable for preaching. Women wanted to wear the shoes they liked, adopt a hairstyle of their choosing or keep the fingernail polish painted on Monday on their nails for the weekend. The power behind their adornments lay in an adornment's capacity to represent the continuity of self in and out of the pulpit. Rabbi Levin articulated her experience of this need by answering a question about her best vision of herself in the pulpit. She said,

> I think by being a real person that people can relate to, whether it is a wife or mother or as a woman now in her early forties. I've become much more aware of being a real person and how people relate to that by trying to be consistent both on and off the bema. That is something that is really important to me – that what I speak about is how I live. It is really important to me to be consistent with the messages I give both on and off the bema. And how I present myself.

In their best use, choices of shoes, hairstyles and fingernail polish assisted in the building of consistency. They gave material expression to a preacher's capacity to "be a real person" while preaching.

The formal way homiletical scholarship speaks about a preacher's effective capacity to merge the multiple worlds she inhabits into a "real" preaching presence is with the term sincerity. Sincerity defines the correspondence between a woman's thoughts, preferences and personality and how she represents herself as a preacher.[277] A sincere preacher was a truthful preacher, who is "consistent in how she speaks and how she lives."[278] The greater the consistency, the more sincere or more truthful the preacher.

While sincerity can and has been orchestrated, listeners watch a preacher for evidence of her sincerity.[279] Historically, sincerity has been judged through an analysis of delivery, a topic to be covered in the next chapter. For the women of this study issues around sincerity also linked to the consistency of their adornments across the multiple

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[277] Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007), 189-191.
[278] Smith, 188-189.
[279]For an excellent description of orchestrating sincerity see "The Measure of the Self" in Smith, *The New Measures*.

spheres they inhabited. The way the body was dressed and adorned, though, was influenced by culture and most especially the social construction of gender. Simply put, it was challenging, at times, for female preachers to create totally consistent self-presentations in and out of the pulpit. They encountered the social rules around expressions of femininity. They faced differing expectations within congregations about acceptable, inviting or authoritative bodily presentations. Their bodies were a range of types and sizes, some of which matched their congregation's visions of a preacher and some of which deviated from them. When listeners questioned a preacher's adornments by criticizing little red flats or black fingernails, the listeners' question extended into concerns for the preacher's authority and character. Yet if the choice for little flats and black nails were the means by which the preacher felt she had most harmonized her various modes of embodiment, then she may wonder how she could embody sincerity at all. A preacher's presence does build upon nebulous qualities that convey seriousness and sincerity from preacher to listener. These qualities are not just harder to define, but also more elusive to achieve for the preacher whose bodily existence requires translation in the pulpit.

Listeners are not the only ones who hope for sincere preachers who can be themselves. This small group of women also strived towards such authoritative congruence. While understanding that their presence was built upon more than the body's dress and adornments, they knew the necessity of the body's comfortable presentation in the pulpit when preaching. Merleau-Ponty agues, "we are in the world through our body…. by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world we shall also

rediscover ourself."[280] Adornment decisions taught women an element of who they were and wanted to be as preachers. With preaching selves still developing, they moved from adornment decisions to considerations of their voice and movement while preaching. Here they discovered a similar set of dilemmas around authority, sincerity and natural congruence.

[280] Merleau-Ponty, 236.

CHAPTER FIVE

TALKING WITH HER HANDS: THE NATURAL PERFORMANCE AND THE FEMALE PREACHER

On a bright spring Sunday morning, Ms. Melissa Clark preached her final sermon as a ministerial intern.[281] It was Commitment Sunday for the congregation, and she'd titled her sermon "Taking the Next Faithful Step." She dressed in her customary mix-and-match pants suit, added only a watch and a wedding ring, and stepped out onto the church's auditorium-like stage with a music stand for her manuscript. A former lawyer, she spoke with a clear, strong voice that registered in the middle to low ranges. She varied its volume, speed and tone throughout a conversationally styled sermon. Whenever she shifted into an illustrative story, she moved out from behind the music stand and stood closer to the congregation, allowing her partially seen body to be fully visible in front of them. Throughout her sermon she also used gestures, visibly depicting her daughter walking into church and a boat rocking in the center of the sanctuary. Her hands became particularly active when she sought to emphasize a point or signal a transition in the sermon. She began the sermon with her hands clasped together in front of her body at the waist. When she came to an important point, she spread them out and open towards the congregation. Whenever she wanted to reiterate her point, she brought her hands slightly towards her body, turned the palms to face one another and moved them up and down. The soon to be Reverend Clark preached with her hands, allowing their movement and placement to provide clues about the content of her words, the

[281] Direct Observation of a Female Preacher, May 16, 2010.The names of all interviewees are being held in confidence by mutual agreement. For more information about this qualitative study, see the Appendix A.

internal structure of her sermon and, most importantly, her relationship to her speech and the listening congregation.

Historically, a preacher's use of her voice and body has been gathered under the category of the "delivery" of the sermon. In ancient rhetoric, delivery designated "an art of gestures and vocal modulations that the orator typically composed along with the content of the speech."[282] Extremely important to the overall effect of a sermon, the ideal delivery did not just compliment the sermon's word but preached along with them. In recent decades, language about delivery has broadened into discussions about performance.[283] Often borrowing insights from theater, scholars assert that a sermon truly becomes a sermon when it is given life through voice and movement. The body contributes to the sermon, from the first creative inklings sparked by studying scripture to the final Amen in the pulpit. Like delivery, performance encompasses "both the verbal shape and the physical embodiment" necessary by the preacher to bring a sermon into its fullest expression.[284]

Having made decisions about how to dress and adorn their bodies, the women of this study moved to considerations around utilizing their bodies while they preached. Their deliberations reflected the growing emphasis on embodied performance in

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[282] Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Space*s (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2005), 5-6.

[283] Most scholars mark the shift from predominately delivery language to more performance center language to the 1980's shifts towards narrative preaching. However, delivery is still used often, as a way to talk about a preacher's use of her voice and body. Delivery and performance occupy over-lapping arenas, as performance can encompass delivery but can also include any aspect of the preacher's bodily life in relationship to a sermon.

[284] Marguerite Shuster, "The Truth and Truthfulness: Theological Reflections on Preaching and Performance" in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 24.

homiletical conversations. Acknowledging that she thought about her voice and her gestures prior to and while she preached, Rev. Rebecca Harris said, “preaching is an act of drama. How I use my body, my hands and my voice, that matters.” Rev. Emily Thompson added, “I think the body is an incredible tool. There are times when I feel like I am using it really effectively in terms of gestures or facial expressions or my voice. It is so much more than words on the page. It is like performing.” Mirroring current homiletical trends, these two women introduced the dramatic into their words about preaching, hinting towards the body’s instrumental capabilities. Alongside this potential they also mirrored the counter-point to performance talk: a hesitation to fully equate preaching with performance. Other preachers expressed a similar ambiguity. “I call preaching a melody,” said Rev. Shannon Baker. “The word performance isn’t the right word, but I don’t know one that is better.” Rabbi Monica Levin said, “To a certain degree, I feel like when I’m up there [on the bema] I have to act. And I’m not necessarily comfortable with acting. I mean acting beyond who I am.” The word performance risked misappropriation; straddling the line between a preacher’s desire to involve her body’s voice and movement in the sermon and her concern that “acting” might misrepresent the self.

Preaching As Performance and the Seeds of “Natural”

In his article “Performance Turns in Homiletics,” Richard F. Ward cites ethnographic theorists who “define preaching as a genre of “cultural performance” whereby the deeply held values of communities of faith are reconstituted through ritual

enactment."[285] Preaching *does* perform a culture. Ms. Clark's physical presence on a multi-purpose room stage blended the expectations for informality and personal connection with a professional demeanor. Her business casual clothes, her reasonable, measured tones and her moderately sized gestures all stayed in the character of her mainline Methodist tradition for the early twenty-first century. She began her sermon with a light-hearted joke, organized its central message around a personal illustration and ended with an altar call-like challenge. Her physical presence also signaled, in subtle ways, that she was being herself as she preached. Her body appeared relaxed. Her voice stayed in the "normal" ranges and did not sound as if she had assumed a new tone especially for preaching. She didn't move much across the stage, preferring to stay rooted in one area. Yet her body was not totally still, as hand movements dotted the sermon. In all these ways, she looked *natural.*

Looking natural is not a new expectation for the preacher. In his *Lectures to my Students*, nineteenth century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon advises, "our last rule is one that sums up all the others; be natural in your action."[286] At the end of the twentieth century, Charles Bartow suggests "all that we do, from toe tip to hairline, ought to appear natural."[287] The call to be "natural" has appeared and disappeared within formal preaching manuals. Edwards argues that the ideal of "sincerity and plain-speaking" on the part of the preacher was operative during the era of apostolic preaching, although

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[285] Richard F. Ward. "Performance Turns in Homiletics," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 30, no. 2 (1996), http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=340(accessed October 10, 2011).

[286] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1834-1892. *Lectures to my Students* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 318.

[287] Charles L. Bartow, *God's Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 94.

intermixed with a "kind of eloquence and even elegance."[288] An ethos interspersed at different points throughout the history of Christian preaching, the belief that natural is critical to the preacher's performance has emerged with particular power in recent decades.

The nuances of natural have shifted through the centuries. The earliest centuries of Christian preaching developed in concert with Greek and Roman rhetoric, providing an enduring marriage of forms and an accompanying formality to public speaking. Spurgeon's delivery advice was accompanied by a series of illustrations depicting staged poses to be utilized by preachers. While he offered the disclaimer that these positions might appear "a little forced," he concluded the postures are "natural, striking and instructive."[289] Centuries later, Bartow focused upon the preacher's capacity to express thoughts and feelings through the body's position, actions and voice. Intentionally not offering set poses or gestures, Bartow maintained the expectation of natural while leaving the question of exactly what the natural preacher looks like largely unanswered. An emphasis on natural feeling and an ease of expression became the dominant guide. These lens, though, do not provide for material particularities across bodies or for different cultural meanings ascribed to certain bodies. Nor did they acknowledge recent theorists who demonstrate how acts formed by culture and repeated over time come to appear natural even as their origins are not natural.

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[288] O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 341 The full quotation occurring amid his review of Catholic preaching during the counter-reformation. Edwards quotes Hilary Dansey Smith, *Preaching in the Spanish Golden Age: A Study of Some Preachers in the Reign of Philip II*, which reads "On one hand, the apostolic ideal leads to the conclusion that sincerity and plain-speaking are the only acceptable forms of Christian preaching…. On the other hand, if one looks back to the Fathers one finds quite another kind of eloquence, and even elegance."
[289] Spurgeon, 320.

While the term natural did not appear often in their interviews, these women's experiences of the voice and body while preaching enveloped the salient themes related to appearing natural in the pulpit. In line with Rev. Harris' words "preaching is an act of drama," others named the body's potential in preaching. Rev. Baker said, "I think of my body as a vehicle. It is employing everything I have to get the message across." Simultaneously, she noted that once she started preaching, "I ignore my body." The paradox of employing and ignoring the body showed up frequently in discerning how to preach naturally. It became the land between recognizing that "in preaching, you do have to act" and a distrust of "acting beyond who I am." Other women admitted their struggles in using the body. Rev. Erin Robinson said, "I'm trying to be more comfortable with gestures and moving. Early in my nervous days I was much more wooden vocally and physically." Although affirming the body's integral place within the sermon, she wasn't quite sure how to lose her rigidity in the pulpit. As she pondered the right ways to embody the sermon, her materiality – the physical stuff of height, weight, vocal sounds and habits of bodily movement - played a significant role in how she looked natural while preaching.

This chapter will explore performance in two broad strokes: voice and gestures. It affirms that preaching is performance, even while agreeing with Mountford's contention that we have inherited a sense of performance as a powerful system in which just the right gesture – or vocal inflection- at just the right time will miraculously crown the sermon without adequately analyzing the forces foster this system.[290] It attempts to put flesh on the ways that a group of women experienced their preaching performances,

[290] Mountford, 8.

experiences that depict how the material specifics of any individual body get played out in every performance. It also draws upon Butler's definition of performativity, examining how an individual's movements and actions structure future performances and social conceptions of natural actions. While recognizing the diversity inherent in twelve different preaching bodies, the chapter inquires about the role of gender in the construction of the natural ideal. At first glance, it appears that these women don't perform sermons with the same confident ease of male preachers. But such an assertion would be a premature and superficial conclusion. A more faithful analysis would uncover the ways women responded to reigning forms of natural that are both a product of history and deeply gendered in form. In some situations, women countered the call to "preach naturally" with deliberate uses of their bodies, including the use of theatrical skills and props.

On other occasions women redirected inquiries about their preaching performances to talk about how they used their hands. When asked about gestures, several women replied, "I don't think about gestures. I just talk a lot with my hands." The hands, of course, are used in many gestures. Yet women introduced the phrase as a counter-action distinct from gestures. As the same phrase reoccurred across multiple interviews, it appeared women were articulating, in an indirect way, their difficulties in adhering to the "natural" forms of preaching. These preachers revealed their ambivalence about natural performances - and their agency to perform - as they switched the conversation from gestures, a defined category with specific expectations, to more informal, even "natural" instances of "talking with the hands." Whether they employed intentional drama or insisted they unconsciously used their hands, these female preachers

found avenues to respond to a "natural" preaching performance that could feel decidedly unnatural for them.

The Rise of Performance in Homiletics

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, homiletics took a turn towards considerations of embodiment, or at it is more widely known, performance.[291] Up until this point, discussions about voice, body and movement were organized under the category of delivery. Like the term that would follow it, delivery was concerned with "the preacher's act of bringing thought to expression."[292] The delivery of the sermon encompassed all of a preacher's decisions about the shape and sound of her voice, the movement of her body and the signs crafted by her hands. While the term delivery has not disappeared, in recent decades scholars have increasingly shifted to the language of performance, wanting to emphasize the centrality of what happens when the words composed in study are proclaimed in the sanctuary.

Jana Childers links the rise of performance considerations to the emergence of narrative preaching.[293] As teachers of preachers encouraged the use of story and image, argued for the necessity of a "plot" and insisted that sermons *do* something, these same scholars increasingly delve into the toolboxes of theater and performance theory. Richard Schechner's landmark study *Performance Theory* solidifies the notion that every aspect

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[291] See Jana Childers. *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) Ronald J. Allen. *Preaching: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abington, 2002), 107. The shift towards embodiment and performance parallels the rise of narrative preaching, a projectory Childers nicely delineates.

[292] Charles Bartow, "The Delivery of Sermons" in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*. ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 100-101.

[293] Childers, 42-43.

of life is a meaningful drama, while Victor Turner's ritual studies contributes the corresponding idea that the very acts that comprise human existence are performances.[294] To be human is to unceasingly perform. Homiletical scholars build upon these foundations to describe how preachers enact a sermon, suggesting that effective preaching requires the preacher's full involvement and emphasizing ways to involve their physicality. From their perspective, older conceptions of delivery presented voice and movement as considerations addressed after the sermon manuscript was completed and sometimes only in the immediacy of preaching. A deep performance, they suggest, enlisted the preacher's voice and body from the initial forays into the scripture all the way through its spoken presentation. Alla Bozarth-Campbell uses the literal meaning of performance as "form coming through" to emphasize how a sermon "achieves completion when it is "enfleshed" by means of the voice and body of the speaker."[295] Referring to P. T. Forsyth's conception of preaching as an act and suggesting sermons aim to move listeners, Jana Childers crafts a homiletic focused on performed words, those "enlivened, embodied words that preach."[296]

The turn to performance also generated theological reflection about the meanings inherent within a sermon enfleshed by the preacher. Sermons require embodiment, asserts

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[294] Richard F. Ward. "Performance Turns in Homiletics," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 30, no. 2 (1996), http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=340(accessed October 10, 2011).
See also Richard Schechner, *Performance Theor*y (New York: Routledge, 2003) and Victor Witter Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995).
[295] Alla Bozarth-Campbell, *The Word's Body: An Incarnational Aesthetic of Communication* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama, 1979).
[296] Childers, 35.

Bartow, for "to be fully known, they must be performed."[297] Such enfleshment was necessary, Childers asserts, because it represents the ways "the preacher gives his or her body and voice to the text for the purpose of bringing it to life in a particular context."[298] Scholars further link enfleshment to God's speech-act in the Incarnation. Alyce M. McKenzie notes how "God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ is a performative event."[299] Bartow defines the sermon simply as God's human speech. His organizing idea is borrowed by many other scholars, lifted up for its capacity to combine preaching as the manifestation of God's presence with the human body as the instrument for proclamation.[300] "To perform the sermon," assert Childers and Clayton J. Schmit, "is to admit that God still uses a human person to proclaim God's message."[301]

The preachers of this study found their own words to articulate how they perform sermons. Using terms like tool, vehicle or vessel, they imagined the body's potential power. "If we are created in the image of God," said Rabbi Levin, "then our bodies are part of how we get closer to God. The way we use that body brings us closer to God. I definitely see the body as a vessel, God's instruments to do God's will in the world." Building upon similar ideas, Rev. Harris expressed, "in preaching you are an embodied word. And so there is a performance aspect to it. It is not a performance, but you are exposed, you are vulnerable and you are doing something profound. In our tradition, you

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[297] Bartow, "The Delivery of Sermons," 99.
[298] Childers, 49.
[299] Alyce M. McKenzie, "At the Intersection of Actio Divina and Homo Performans: Embodiment and Evocation" in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, 55.
[300] Charles L. Bartow, *God's Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 111. See also Alyce M. McKenzie, "At the Intersection of Actio Divina and Homo Performans."
[301] Childers and Schmit, ed., *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life,* 15.

are proclaiming the Word of God." For both women, the body could be classified as God's human speech. Treading such sacred space brought accompanying risks in feeling exposed or vulnerable. While every performance has its risks, the risk of vulnerable exposure especially accompanied bodies newer to the pulpit and less represented in the historical depictions of preaching.

Despite the theological foundations around enfleshing God's speech, widespread suspicion exists around any correlations drawn between preaching and performance. Like others in this study, Rev. Harris emphasized the performative aspects of preaching while deliberately not equating preaching to performance. Marguerite Shuster notes how many preachers "have a powerful and negative visceral reaction against construing proclamation of God's Word as a sort of 'performance.'"[302] Carrying connotations of deceptive artifice, performance has been "narrowly associated with theatrical imagery."[303] In her attempts to reframe performance, Childers argues that the preacher trained to communicate through her body draws upon the real self in purposeful rather than deceptive ways.[304] From this perspective, a performed sermon is an honest offering of the self, refined through effective techniques and ultimately providing a "degree of authenticity or sincerity that belies our stereotypic ideas about acting."[305] While Childers views intentionality as the positive force that enables the preacher to be a vehicle for God's spirit, Schuster describes the more common perspective that performance is an

[302] Shuster, 19.
[303] Shuster, 19.
[304] Childers, 47-49.
[305] Childers, 51. Childers calls this an "honest performance." A performance, whether it is onstage or in the pulpit, is honest or truthful when the interpreter is making careful use of experience."

artificial stance that leads the preacher away from God.[306] To call a sermon "just a performance" implies the preacher relied upon fictious means to convey her message or offers a good show without a message. Rabbi Levin straddled the contradictory space between these two poles. As previously noted, she recognized that an intentional use of the dramatic would strengthen her preacher. To some degree, "you have to act." Yet she remained wary of any techniques that might entail speaking or moving in ways that felt inconsistent to her. [307] Observing the preaching of her male colleagues, she named them as "more dynamic or more energetic" and able to "deliver a different kind of sermon." Attempting to preach that different kind of sermon, though, risked transgressing into the realm of "acting beyond who I am." Without practices that felt natural to her, Rabbi Levin's well-articulated belief that "the body is a vessel for God's word" could not materialize into preaching that felt authentic and effective.

Woven throughout performance discussions are expectations for the preacher to preach naturally. Fostered by the distrust of acting, performance models of preaching stress that the preacher should not only be at ease with her body, but also display a congruence of performance and words that makes her preaching wholly sincere. While the descriptions of what counts as natural vary, the high value placed on naturalness has not varied. In fact, the advice to be natural in preaching is so deeply embedded in performance theory that the development of the ideal of natural deserves more detailed attention.

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[306] Other theorists name this same dynamic. Childers states, "Many preachers use the word "performance" as a way of designating inauthentic preaching, the very kind they themselves are trying to avoid." Childers, 48.

[307] For practical tips to communicating "authentically" in preaching and worship see Charles L. Rice, *The Embodied Word: Preaching As Art and Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

So What is "Natural?"

The term natural appears often in contemporary writings about performance in preaching. The natural preacher exhibits a harmony between her thoughts and feelings and the aims of the sermon. Her performance is a seamless composition of voice, message and movement. Ronald J. Allen argues that "preachers should move their hands, arms, and the rest of their bodies in ways that enhance the content of the sermon and that are consistent with their personality."[308] Elizabeth Achtemeier imagines that "when the preacher's implied assumptions, language and physical behaviors are consistent," the sermon communicates a commitment to the message."[309] Todd Farley draws upon John Wesley's preaching directive that the hands and the face should "appear to be the mere, natural result, both of the things you speak, and of the affection that moves you to speak them" to reaffirm "that gestures made while preaching should be so married with the words as to be true and sincere, and so as not to appear contrived or "affected."[310] Thus, the natural preacher will display a cultivated yet unconscious correspondence between feelings and voice, between thoughts and movements. She will hear from her listeners phrases such as "the inside does actually match the outside," there is "integrity in the art"[311] and "the preacher was truly herself."[312] From a lived body perspective, such questions minimize the influence of materiality and culture in an individual's choices and

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[308] Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching: An Essential Guide*, 111. Charles Bartow reiterates the point, saying, "the body should respond to what is thought and felt so that there may be congruence between the inner form and outer form of the experience being shared." Bartow, "Delivery of Sermons," 100.
[309] Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Oral Communication and Preaching" in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching,* 353.
[310] Todd Farley**, "**The Use of the Body in the Performance of Proclamation" in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, 118-119.
[311] Shuster, 28.
[312] Allen, 108.

also the evolving nature of identity. A preacher can be "truly herself" with vastly different manifestations.

While the quality of naturalness can feel like a timeless value for preaching, it has emerged in the course of history. The earliest preaching forms developed from the practices of ancient rhetoric, in which delivery was named as one of five necessary stages in speech. Since rhetoric was a public act, delivery straddled the boundaries between a type of universalized art form and a personalized style. As preaching developed along with the growth of Christian church, the value of a preacher's natural style was emphasized occasionally. Written during the thirteenth century, Waley's *ars praedicandi* advised that gestures should be used in moderation and that the sermon be familiar enough for the preacher to "easily find language in which to express the gospel naturally and forcefully."[313] In the eighteenth century, John Wesley advocated for preachers to avoid "anything either awkward or affected in gesture, phrase or pronunciation."[314] Existing alongside these admonishments, though, were other preaching practices that encouraged assuming a distinct preaching voice and studied mannerisms. The templates Spurgeon offered at the end of *Lectures to My Students* were taken directly from Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia*, a nineteenth century publication on rhetorical delivery. Austin expressed disbelief at the idea that preachers would simply know how to move and provided a series of detailed foot stances and hand gestures.[315] Noah Webster and Joseph

[313] O. C. Edwards, 223.
[314] O. C. Edwards, 446.
[315] Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia; or, a treatise on rhetorical delivery*. ed. Mary Margaret Robb and Lester Thomssen, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1966).

Dana had promoted similar prescribed performances previously.[316] Any debate between staged mannerisms and a natural preaching style would be swept away in the nineteenth century, as a bundle of preaching practices arose that elevated the art of natural – and its essential role in preaching – to new heights. The new measure revivals, which swept through America in the 1820s, 30s and 40s, brought to the forefront the expressive, emotive and natural preacher. Best exemplified by new measures preacher Charles Grandison Finney, the natural preacher was here to stay.

Exploring the new measures practices through a rich analysis of Finney and his surrounding world, Ted A. Smith argues that the measure of natural – which he places within a larger framework termed sincerity – emerged within the rapidly changing landscape of the young American democracy.[317] The first decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by increasing geographical mobility and a resultant social mobility.[318] As more and more people traveled away from their established, often closed networks of town and home, they encountered more and more people who they did not know. These migrations happened alongside a newly created delineation between public and private spheres.[319] While the private sphere evoked the domestic and religious realms, the public sphere represented the areas of commerce and politics and necessitated, particularly for those in positions of leadership, the capacity to speak in

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[316] Joseph Dana, A New American *Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1792. Noah Webster, *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking* (Philadelphia: Young and M'Culloch, 1787).
[317] Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007).
[318] Smith, 186-7.
[319] Smith, 188.

universal, impersonal ways.[320] Since the public and private previously had been unified, a distinct public sphere created anxiety about one's ability to falsely represent oneself in public while behaving differently in private.[321] The growing experiences of mingling amongst strangers in public spaces intensified the concerns about the "public representations of persons," leading to an "urgency to questions about the gap between public presentations and private reality."[322] How does one judge a person one has never before encountered? The answer, asserts Smith, came through measuring his sincerity.[323]

The capacity to create a public self, by definition, assumed one could maintain a private self, a way of talking and acting seen only in the confines of home or church. The prevailing understanding held that it was in this private sphere that one was truly oneself. As Smith rightly articulates, individuals held "deep faith in the primacy, naturalness of the self associated with those spaces and relationships they counted as private."[324] The way to judge the truthfulness of the public self came through a measurement of the preacher's sincerity, which was defined as the harmony of public and private selves.[325] "Questions of sincerity followed every public figure," noted Smith, "but they hounded ministers with special intensity."[326] Preaching in an era of diminishing public authority, the sincerity of the minister was increasingly tantamount.

Born in 1792 in Connecticut, Finney matured into a preacher amidst these swirling anxieties and expectations about private selves and public lives. He answered the

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[320] Smith, 187.
[321] Smith, 189.
[322] Smith, 188.
[323] Smith, 188-192.
[324] Smith, 189.
[325] Smith, 188.
[326] Smith, 188.

concerns about a preacher's character through his "practices of public sincerity."[327] Recognizing that to display sincerity "required enabling audiences to compare the public and private persona," he sought ways of "noticeably stepping out from behind a public role…and making visible a distinct, private self."[328] He spoke in an extemporaneously, conversational style, the speech of the home. He was emotionally expressive, able to preach with tears rolling down his face. He took pains to mirror the plain talk of ordinary men, emphasizing his commonality to the masses even as his stardom skyrocketed. He perfected practices like eye contact, gestures and personal recounts of one's life story as convincing ways to connect the preacher's private self to the congregation.[329] Finney "manifested those private qualities in a fully public persona," crafting universal techniques of sincerity that have been replicated by countless preachers.[330]

For Finney, sincerity was built upon exhibiting in public what was normally allocated for the private. In particular, he embodied sincerity through an emotive public performance of what he signaled – implicitly or explicitly – were his inner life, internal thoughts, deepest feelings and unconscious movements. This conception of sincerity rested upon the belief that the private world was "a world of the natural, unconscious, immediate" and therefore "the realm of truth and authenticity."[331] Capable of communicating that immediacy through noticeable actions, Finney brought to "his

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[327] Smith, 189. The goal of these practices was to make real the private, natural self. Believing that "the man is what he was in private," the practices of public sincerity were build on "a whole world of oppositions: public selves were representations, but private selves were real, public selves were self-conscious fabrications but private selves were natural beings, the public speech of oratory was suspect, but the private speech of conversation was trustworthy…."
[328] Smith, 193.
[329] Smith, 212.
[330] Smith, 190.
[331] Smith, 215.

preaching the trustworthiness of the speech of a natural, true self."[332] In fact, "Finney stressed the need for every aspect of preaching to be natural, by which he meant that it should be free from self-consciousness."[333] Smith writes, "The good preacher felt the right feeling and then spoke and moved in whatever ways came naturally. Deep natural feeling, not study, provided the right tone. It also provided the right gesture."[334] Over time, Finney skillfully evoked in himself and his listeners the feelings he aimed for through his words. He utilized his feelings as instruments for sermonic aims, demonstrating "how right feeling could be widely mediated for mass exchange."[335] In the end, "the private self…became a malleable measure."[336]

With such a transformative, dramatic and public history, naturalness endures as an ingrained expectation for preachers, linked together oratory skills and character. Instructions emphasizing how preachers should concentrate upon the sermon and trust that the right voice and gestures would emerge naturally have appeared in preaching manuals of every post-Finney era. In his 19th century *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, John Broadus taught that delivery emerged from the "one possessed with the subject, completely in sympathy with it and fully alive to its importance."[337] In the same century, Ireland's Archbishop Richard Whately set forth "the practical rule" that preachers should "not only to pay no studied attention to the Voice, but studiously …dwell as intently as possible on the Sense; trusting to nature to suggest spontaneously

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[332] Smith, 190.
[333] Smith, 190.
[334] Smith, 190.
[335] Smith, 209.
[336] Smith, 212.
[337] Mountford, 66 She cites John Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1898)

the proper emphases and tones."[338] To be natural is to correlate a preacher's immediate feelings with her capacity to embody those feelings. The term natural appears frequently in contemporary reflections of preaching performance, and sermon evaluations typically inquire about the apparent ease of the preacher. Did the preacher seem like herself? Did her voice and movements display her passion for her subject? Was she sincere? Ahistorical portrayals of the natural are limited in their inability to explore how a preacher like Finney developed his natural displays – and how his hearers received them. His natural habits were acquired, themselves malleable actions able to be masterfully tweaked for maximum effect. And his natural habits fit the standards of the times for what counted as natural. The seemingly natural performance is not only a learned performance acquired in a certain time and place, but formed on and through a specific type of preaching body.

Despite the enormous attention given to naturalness in preaching, scholarship remains extremely vague about what is natural and for whom. Although possessing their own combination of physical attributes, Finney, Whately, Wesley and Spurgeon were all men with bodies whose heights surpassed the pulpit or stood tall upon the stage, with voices spanning the deeper registers and often known for the power of their projection and with habits of bodily gestures formed within a gendered culture. Every piece of their body reflected, in some fashion, the patterns of maleness particular to their era. If Finney demonstrated that naturalness could be manufactured, then what constitutes the natural is also conditioned by the bodies engaged in the preaching.

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[338]O.C. Edwards, 600-601. See Richard Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric* 1846 (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1991).

The gendered nature of naturalness becomes clearer as one explores the masculine images embedded in preaching manuals. While Mountford correctly points out how "the arts of preaching inscribe this masculine tradition…most often through a smooth surface of universal advice," there are other times when the messages are hard to miss.[339] "Let the physical condition be as vigorous as possible," writes Broadus, praising a "forceful voice with penetrating power."[340] Speaking with greater frankness, Spurgeon suggests avoiding "the method of enunciation said to be very ladylike [or] delicate. Speak out boldly and command attention at the outset by your manly tones."[341] The masculine natural is formed by male preaching bodies and then reinforced by implicitly and explicitly masculine language. As Butler's work evidences, masculinity is performed and established by such performances, a significant point in illuminating the ever-present gap between idealized performances and the imperfect imitations. Female preachers cannot bridge the gap between the ideally embodied preacher and her own performances. Yet they contend with the legacy of such masculine naturalness, which presents itself when their bodies appear dwarfed in pulpits built for larger physiques, their voices sound different than their male colleagues and their mannerisms are equally dissonant in some distinct yet hard-to-articulate ways. Since evaluative questions like "was the preacher herself?" lead into inquiries about sincerity, the naturalness of the preacher becomes an evaluation of enormous significance.

The ideal of naturalness remains a goal to be achieved and a set of qualities difficult to impart for these contemporary preachers. When Rev. Robinson struggled with

[339] Mountford, 2.
[340] Broadus, 482, 484-5.
[341] Spurgeon, 116, 121.

a voice that feels hardier to vary, Bartow's description of the ideal voice as "supple, exhibiting suitable variety…so that what is felt by the preacher may be sounded as clearly as possible" sounds beautiful but provides no tools to unpack her discomfort or strengthen her voice.[342] When Rev. Thompson named how "the times when I've been worried that people are looking at me" lessen her sense of power in her body, the idea that Ronald Allen evaluates preaching by "the degree to which the preacher was truly herself" may heighten her anxiety and self-consciousness rather than decrease it.[343] When Rev. Harris noted how "in preaching you are an embodied word," she acknowledged how her congregation watches the ease of her body's movements. In their watchfulness, she knows, they are evaluating her effectiveness but also her character.

Evaluations of naturalness are shaped by its history in the field of preaching, the cultural practices that form all voices and the gendered character of past preaching models. Through the centuries, thousands of preachers adhered to the same patterns of behavior such that certain fleshly habitations became the authorizing standard for preachers. As women waded into preaching, they encountered expectations based on preaching bodies other than their own. They were asked to preach naturally, yet the standards for what counted as natural preaching did not always feel natural to them. Judith Butler rightly points out how individuals respond to culturally conditioned patterns by both adhering to the established "natural" set of movements and by acting in unauthorized ways. Analyzing how they encountered and responded to the criteria of natural demonstrates not only that naturalness is acquired but also that naturalness can be altered.

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[342] Bartow, 100.
[343] Allen, 108.

The Voice of the Preacher: Physicality and the Evolving Self

The Rabbi Monica Levin has served as an associate rabbi in a large Washington DC congregation for more than ten years. The granddaughter of a rabbi, she grew up listening to his powerful preaching voice. "My grandfather was a 'preacher's preacher,'" she said. "He would get up and preach these forty-five minute sermons, which never felt long to me. He delivered a message that was not fire and brimstone, but was forceful and dynamic." Experiencing a call to the rabbinate as a young adult, she was acutely aware how physically different she was from her grandfather and other rabbinical models. She is a short, petite woman, who first saw a woman preach after enrolling in seminary. And she has a soft voice. Even after more than a decade in ministry, she remains self-conscious about the quality of her voice. "I am a good writer," said Rabbi Levin. "I write all my sermons out. I am an editor down to the wire. But the delivery side of things has often been my challenge." Rabbi Levin does not doubt her call to ministry or her content of her sermons. She consistently receives praise for her sermons. Instead, she conceives of her challenges as bodily ones. "I wasn't a loud person," she reflected. "I've never had acting or vocal training. I have had to journey to being comfortable with my voice sounding different than the models that I had."

In their book, *Saved from Silence*, Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson argue that female preachers struggle to "come to voice" in their preaching.[344] Viewing voice as a metaphor for agency, they suggest that larger cultural and religious forces can coalesce to suppress a woman's ability to speak. While unique in its breadth and depth, *Saved from Silence* names what other homiletical scholars have also noticed, a

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[344] Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1999).

particularly intense and complex struggle in female preachers to gain confidence in their preaching voices.[345] As women ventured into seminaries and pulpits, the issues of finding and reclaiming their power to speak deserved sustained attention. But Rabbi Levin's experience told a slightly different story. Although traversing a similar journey towards preaching confidence, the discomfort she encountered with her voice was not related to issues surrounding her identity, sermonic content or call. Rather, she struggled to adjust her expectations about what constitutes a "preacher's voice" and then to learn how to best employ her own voice. Her hurdles focused on the physicality of her voice, so different in pitch, tone and volume than the preaching models most familiar to her. "Coming to voice" for Rabbi Levin was not about gaining confidence in the content of her speech. It was about gaining confidence in the material characteristics of her voice and a skill set to best utilize the voice she had been given. A necessary addition to the discussions surrounding the female preacher "coming to voice" involves an in-depth analysis of the physical attributes of the voice.

Rabbi Levin's experience illuminates the deep physicality of the human voice. One of the body's most powerful instruments, the voice develops from infancy onward, shaped by the other voices heard and the cultural expectations linked to gender, class and ethnicity.[346] While social factors continually influence the sound of the voice, the body plays a crucial role. We literally "speak with our bodies," as the lips, mouth, and larynx

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[345] Thomas Troeger remarked upon the difficulty he has witnessed among female students getting in the pulpit to preach, as well as the high degree of intensity and complexity embedded within those struggles for women. Thomas H. Troeger in *Wrestling with the Patriarchs*. Lee McGee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 9.

[346] Anne Karpf, *The Human Voice: How this Extraordinary Instrument reveals essential clues about who we are* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 4.

are aided by the torso and back to create sound.[347] The body's influence on the voice is so great that even a sprained ankle can affect the quality of our speech.[348] Inseparable from any other aspect of embodied life, the voice works in tandem with one's body size, shape, and features to create a composite presentation.

Rabbi Levin's quieter voice matches her shorter, smaller frame. Her less than imposing visual presence contributes to her vocal anxieties. Having attended a predominately male seminary, she noted, "I was never held back or made to think as a woman that I don't have a voice. For me it was always more of a physical issue." Having preached regularly for more than a decade, she still occasionally worries about her voice. "I tend to be a soft-spoken person, so the projection of my voice, which I know how to do but I always feel is a harder element for me. I grew up with a male voice in my head and I don't have a male voice. I don't question when I'm writing something…but I do question how the sermons are received [in comparison to] my male colleagues." These days, Rabbi Levin longs to have had greater vocal training. "There wasn't enough time spent working on my voice and on how to use my voice and body in my delivery," she said. She feels a "confidence in the product" that is her sermon but she often wonders how her speech could be stronger. "People comment on my voice all the time," she reported. "People say, 'you have a beautiful voice.' And sometimes they say, 'you were a little too soft, I couldn't hear you.'"

Preachers have long recognized how critical the voice is to their task. Early preaching manuals described the ideal preaching voice as one that was easily heard,

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[347] Karpf, 23.
[348] Karpf, 23.

clearly understood, and encompassing a wide range of tones, rates and volumes.[349] The preaching voice was a resonant voice, full of projection, pronunciation, animation and variety. The voice captivated the listener to keep listening. Contemporary reflections on the voice in preaching echo similar sentiments. With some nonverbal clues hidden behind a robe or pulpit, a preacher depends heavily upon her speech.[350] The voice guides the sermon; cluing the listener into its overall mood, transitions and climatic moments, as well as the preacher's emotional connection to the sermon.[351] Christine Parton asserts, "The voice is the vehicle for the message. Without a dynamic, natural voice, it is difficult to obtain and maintain the attention of the listener."[352]

The dilemma for Rabbi Levin, though, arose when her natural voice differed so dramatically from the formidable impressions of her grandfather's preaching voice. Raised in his synagogue and spending countless hours listening to him, she held onto his voice as the standard by which her own would be measured – and for what counted as natural. In this sense, her journey matched the process of many other female speakers. The first female voices to venture into the public arena were subject to criticism,

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[349] Edwards, 12-14, 223. Edwards writes the "preacher should speak neither too loudly or too softly, nor should his voice go up and down in a singsong way." He continues his advice by admonishing against speaking so fast as to become unintelligible and encouraging a familiarity with the text that allows the preacher to "express the gospel naturally and forcefully," 223.

[350] Childers, *Performing the Word,* Page 58.

[351] Charles L. Bartow, *The Preaching Moment: A Guide to Sermon Delivery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 69-72. Bartow also links the voice to the preacher's presence in the sermon. He writes, "the voice should be supple, exhibiting suitable variety in quality, rate, pitch and volume, so that what is felt by the preacher may be sounded as clearly as possible." Bartow, Delivery of Sermons, 100.

[352] Christine E. Parton, "Voice" in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 495.

ridiculed as being too high, too "feminine" or too shrill.[353] While rarely receiving such pointed judgments, the women of this study encountered more subtle criticisms that reflected the reigning male standard. Rabbi Levin heard "your voice is too soft" and others heard "we can't hear you." Such comments may be directed to the volume or intelligibility of the voice. They may also serve as indirect statements about the congregation's readiness to receive a female preacher. Managing a variety of reactions of her voice, including her own internal ones, women also discerned how and in what ways their voice might be identified as a female voice.

The Reverend Caroline Adams speaks with a rich, resonant, and slightly deeper voice. Possessing a relaxed self-assurance in the pulpit, she appeared to vary her pitch, rate, tone and volume with ease. At the same time, she intentionally veered away from some of the traditional practices associated with African American preaching. While she does employ "black preaching cadence and stuff," she said, "I'm careful about it because I don't want people to think I'm trying to sound like a black male preacher." She credited her childhood church's multiple preaching staff for insuring she "didn't grow up thinking there was only one right way to preach." She also cherished the growing societal space for vocal diversity. "I am so glad that I came along at a time when I knew that I didn't need to sound like Martin Luther King, Jr.," she continued. "And I don't. I have my own voice. It is a woman's voice. It is a strong voice, but it is a woman's voice."

When invited to elaborate on "a woman's voice," Rev. Adams faltered in providing a more detailed description. Like the term natural within preaching

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[353] Karpf, 158. The first female voices on public broadcasting were reported as "irritating to listeners for their rapid speech, over-emphasis of unimportant words or by "trying to impress listeners by talking beautifully."

conversations, the belief in “a woman’s voice” persisted throughout her narrative as a tenacious yet elusive term. While clearly important to her preaching identity, the meaningful details behind the title remained unspoken. To preach with “a woman’s voice” might have indicated a straightforward connection between her strong voice and her embodied female self, but just as easily it may have signified a set of characteristics embedded within her voice that marked it as female. While Rabbi Levin closely tied the femaleness of her voice to its physical traits, Rev. Adams’ phrase “a woman’s voice” waded into more ambiguous territory. She entered into the vast, paradoxical terrain inhabited by debates about the preacher’s voice and the female preacher, coming to voice and learning to preach. The debate was narrated within this small group of preachers aiming to find their best preaching voice.

The question of preaching with “a women’s voice” was posed to other preachers in subsequent interviews. Several women delved into the topic. Their collective responses steered away from a belief in an essential woman’s voice and instead revealed diffuse perspectives of how femaleness might influence a preacher’s speech. Rev. Williams said, “I haven’t ever really thought much about my preaching as having a “woman’s voice.” I think in all preaching your tone, volume, pacing are important. But all voices are all so different that I don’t think there’s much that could be universally categorized about all women’s voices or all men’s voices.” Ms. Clark agreed. She commented, “I don’t think of my voice particularly as a woman’s voice. I think of it as MY voice. It is akin to the voice I hear in my head when I read. The only extent to which my own particular voice is female has to do with truth-telling about my own life as a wife and mother, the sort of things that elicit nods and amens from other women in the congregation.” For Ms. Clark,

the female dimension of her voice emerged in her subject matter, as her speech reflecting the events of her life. Her voice was simply her voice, the voice as close and natural to her as what she hears in her head. Rev. Erin Robinson also distinguished between "a woman's physical voice" and "her female perspective as a preacher." She said, "I don't think my physical voice as a woman is either helpful or hurtful to my preaching, although I would agree that it is especially important for women to own their authority in the pulpit or else it would be assumed that they don't [have pulpit authority]." Adding a layer of analysis to her colleagues' responses, Rev. Robinson linked the voice to authority in a small ascent to the fact that some voices – and types of voices – have more authority than others. Then she continued, "With regard to preaching from the perspective of a woman, I think it's helpful to have that perspective or voice from the pulpit. I preach very much from my own life experiences and so my female-ness comes through – particularly my mothering." In these last two scenarios, women conceived of the female dimension of the voice as coming from their lived experiences, a way of speaking born, in part, of one's gendered life. Distancing themselves from a belief in a universally shared female voice, they emphasized the power inherent in their *own* voices. Before she termed her voice a woman's voice, Rev. Adams first stated, "I have my own voice."

The concept of a woman's voice dominated theoretical discussions for several decades, appearing in communication studies, gender analysis, feminist theory and preaching. Various homiletical studies have proposed a loose set of characteristics that typify the female preacher's communication style while other studies blend those

qualities with the process of coming to speech.[354] Each reiteration that women speak in a distinctive way brought forth greater awareness that the reigning models for preaching voices were shaded by the maleness of the speakers. But a voice strongly identified with feminine qualities, whether by its sound, style or the content of the speech, provides only a limited alternative. Both Rabbi Levin's higher, softer, gentler voice and Rev. Adams' louder, firmer and deeper one are the voices of female preachers. Each preacher adjusted to her own voice, developing an understanding of what preaching with her voice entailed. At different times, each acknowledged the femaleness of her voice. It may be that language around "preaching with a woman's voice" appears in those moments when preachers acutely felt the need to distinguish their preaching presence from male models. And it may be that the motif of a woman's voice becomes exceptionally salient when life events – like the birth of a child or becoming the first female head pastor of a church - make the preacher acutely cognizant of her gender. The crucial criteria for these women came in whether or not they felt comfortable and confident about their voice. Rev. Williams said, "I wouldn't say that I'm really glad that I have a woman's voice to preach with. I would simply say, I'm really glad God has called me to preach."

Depictions of the natural preaching voice in current homiletical scholarship suggest that every person is born with a unique and potent voice, which simply requires unleashing through training, experience and growing confidence. While it is true that the supple voice with suitable variety may draw listeners into the sermon and it is true that

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[354] In addition to *Saved from Silence*, see Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), Catherine Agnes Ziel, "Mother tongue/father tongue: Gender-linked differences in language use and their influence on the perceived authority of the preacher" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1991).

understanding the self as a vehicle for expression may reduce some of the inhibitions about using the voice's full range, it is not true that "voice production should be a natural and effortless task."[355] Too often, discussions of the natural voice rest upon a hidden essentialism, a trust in the voice as part the expression of a person's unchanging core. Instead, every preacher's voice is formed over time as the preacher's given physical traits interact with wider culture amid the particular settings and choices of her life. The voice evolves as the preacher preaches. One learns one's natural preaching voice as one experiences herself speaking, makes choices about how to speak and reflects on the meaning of her voice as she preaches. A preacher's voice is formed through her decisions about when, how and what to speak, how her voice is received by her congregation, how she interprets the reaction and her subsequent vocal decisions. The women preachers I talked unlearned some inherited vocal styles that were ineffective or inappropriate for their preaching voices. They were finding their voices, a critical task in developing as preachers, but the discovery was not an uncovering of what was already there as much as a shaping of what could be.

Gestures: The Trouble with Natural and Intentional Theater

Explorations around the preacher's voice reveal how the notion of a natural voice represents both the gendered influence of male preaching models as well as the mistaken

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[355] Parton, "Voice" in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 495. Bartow describes the optimal preaching voice as "supple, exhibiting suitable variety in quality, rate, pitch and volume so that what is felt by the preacher may be sounded as clearly as possible." Bartow, "Delivery of Sermons," 100. Jana Childers encourages an understanding of the self as a vehicle or instrument. Believing actors value the human body as a instrument of expression, she asserts, "it is out of this sense of respect that they cultivate body awareness and let down some of the inhibitions about the body that most people carry." Childers, *Performing the Word*, 115.

assumption that the voice is given rather than learned. A similar landscape emerges when the topic turns to gestures. Inheriting a well-developed structure for understanding gestures, the women of this study encountered both gestures formed through a male body and the expectations that the preacher move with natural ease. At first glance, it appeared gestures were a more arduous task than employing the voice. While certainly using some gestures, these women didn't, upon observation, seem to use many gestures or memorable, effective gestures. When asked to describe their gestures, most answered in short, sparse words. Iris Young's assertion that women are often constricted in their bodily movements resurfaced in analyzing gestures, as women did not make use of a full range of gestures, did not always move confidentially or make use of their whole bodies. Observations of bodily constriction, though, were inescapably filtered through presumptions formed within the existing system of gestures, which defined what constitutes a gesture. What appeared as hesitation or dis-ease with gestures may be attributed to women's experience of some gestures as unnatural or to lingering discomfort with their bodies in the pulpit. But the "unnaturalness" of these preachers' gestures should also be interpreted as the result of their making use of *different* gestures. Their efforts help reframe the very criteria of natural.

Broadly defined, a gesture is any movement of any part of the body that conveys a preacher's thought or emotion in order to reinforce oral expression.[356] Like the voice, gestures are bodily, operating as extensions of one's thoughts and formed within the bounds of one's given physicality. These preachers typically reserved the term gesture to name those specific movements that emphasized or illustrated a sermonic point. They

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commented upon descriptive gestures, remembering when they traced the outline of the earth while speaking of God's all-encompassing love or touched their palms with their fingertips to symbolize Jesus' crucifixion wounds. They also used emphatic gestures, punctuating their speech with hands lifted to the heavens or feet stomping the floor.[357] Gestures meant a certain thing to these preachers, most often depicted as those occasional moments when they added something to their verbal speech.

Hovering behind these concrete discussions of gestures exists a wealth of scholarly advice about gestures. Building upon Finney's legacy, performance theories argue that gestures will flow naturally from the preacher's embodied awareness of her homiletical intent and her private thoughts and feelings. They argue for gestures that honestly represent the preacher's engagement with the sermon, while balancing being neither entirely absent nor excessively present. Hence, the best gestures are the most natural ones and they will emerge almost organically while preaching. This natural emphasis is counter-balanced by those performance scholars who acknowledge the body's need for training. The natural tendencies for some bodies may be for excessive movement. Although not objecting to a natural approach, they added a necessary step in honing the skills to purposefully employ movement.

This two-pronged perspective on gestures contains several pitfalls for female preachers. The natural emphasis falters in providing specific details about the look of gestures. A preacher told to just move naturally may wonder what she should do, especially if the most natural movement is to stand still. Such natural advice also neglects

[357] Richard F. Ward cites Don Wardlaw as delineating between emphatic gestures that make a point and descriptive gestures that make a picture. Ward, *Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching* (St. Loius: Chalice, 2001), 36. See also Deane A. Kemper, *Effective Preaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 127.

the continual power of the male body as the ideal preacher's body. In the absence of concrete alternative images, the staged poses of past preaching eras effectively remain in place as reigning models. Furthermore, the emphasis on intentional gestures fails to fully account for the ways a planned use of the body might sound foreign or daunting to someone culturally trained to minimize her body.[358] The idea that intentionality can be cultivated with relative ease also reflects the masculine bias embedded in performance. Just as the preacher's voice is learned, the capacity to craft effective gestures is an acquired skill. Developing the skill – and precisely what gestural skills are developed – is born of the same interplay of materiality, culture and choice as any lived experience.

When asked about their gestures, women reported that they didn't think too much about their body's movements prior to or while preaching. They described a largely unthinking approach to their body's actions. "I don't practice my delivery," said Rev. Williams. "I probably ought to, but I don't." Rev. Williams could not describe any gestures she had used, although she did mention her longings to move away from a manuscript in order to be more relaxed in her presentation. Ms. Clark suggested that she occasionally thought about her gestures, but when asked for an example she recalled a time she modulated her voice. "I don't feel embodied when I preach," she reflected. "I don't even feel like I have legs." Existing on almost the opposite end of the continuum, Rev. Laura Martin juxtaposed her bodily unawareness with a body that was often moving and acting. "I am not so aware of my body [while preaching]," said she, remembering

[358] Farley, 121. He writes, "the movements and gestures made during a sermon should be full of meaning and purpose, directly related to the sermon itself, not to the comfort of the speaker." Also, O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching,* 223. Edwards summarizes that gestures should be used in moderation so that the preacher is neither "an immobile statue nor does his bodily movement suggest that he is in a duel with someone."

how others would approach her after worship to comment on a gesture. “My reaction,” she said, would be “really, I kicked my leg in the air? Really?” An unthinking approach to the body, then, did not promote a particular relationship between preacher and her body or produce a particular style of gesture. Instead, asking preachers to move naturally encouraged them not to think about their bodies. This unconscious approach to the body’s performance, while theoretically close to natural conceptions of preaching, enabled one preacher’s gestures, reinforced another preacher’s lack of attention to gestures and had little to offer a third who felt she preached without legs.

Other preachers attempted a more proactive approach. Amid efforts to preplan their gestures or use them self-consciously, they faced similar confusion around employing the body and often worried their movements detracted from their preaching. Rev. Thompson said, “I think about gestures and voice. I map out the sermon with my voice [but] I struggle with gestures because sometimes I’m unaware of what I’m doing.” Her most natural gesture, reported to her by her associate minister, was to interlace her fingers together when she came to an important point. Her colleague, distracted by the gesture, had begun to count the number of times the fingertips went together in the course of a sermon. Chronicling her development as a preacher, Rev. Robinson initially focused on writing her manuscript and found she had no time left for considerations of her body. “Now,” she said, “I’m trying to be more comfortable with gestures, although I’m not really clear what I’m doing. I can tell I’m moving more, but I’m not sure what I am doing.” Rev. Adams, whose preaching is dotted with many gestures, recognized the unconsciousness mingled within an intentional approach. “I do work on my gestures and have little notes to myself in there [the manuscript]. I am not so conscious of it when

preaching," she said. Having watched videotapes of her sermons, she added, "I could use a little restraint because my arms are flying all over the place. Some of it can look very distracting and out of control." Even with more sustained attention, the direction to be natural left them directionless. They sensed the need to move more, but weren't sure how to move effectively and often were left vaguely aware that their bodies' movements felt distracting.

Alongside stories about the capacity of their gestures to cause hesitation, confusion or distraction, two women offered an alternative narrative. As they continued to describe their use of their bodies while preaching, the definition of a gesture expanded and the diverse ways they did move slowly became apparent. These bodily employments did not fall easily into the classical definition of a gesture, either as bounded actions that lent descriptive or emphatic support or as movements that simply flowing naturally from the preacher's immediate self. Instead women detailed planned actions that would be classified best under the category of drama. When asked about her gestures, Rev. Harris described a practice of staging her sermons. Born of her years in the theater, she typically imaged the sanctuary floor from which she preached as a stage, in which different points reflected different purposes within her sermon and different ways of relating to her congregation. She elaborated, "I try to think about when do I need to back up because this is a teaching moment and I'm doing the exegesis of the scripture and I'm talking to everyone." In this section of the sermon, she preached from right below the chancel steps, where she had broad views of the whole congregation. As she moved deeper into the sermon, she often moved down into the aisles. She continued, "And at what point do I really want to get in there with the congregation. I come down closer to you because this

is the life application part of the sermon. This is the message I want you to take home with you." Although Rev. Harris was not using the term gesture in its conventional definition, her body was its own gesture as she positioned herself in the sanctuary in order to enhance her sermon.

Rev. Harris' practice of staging her sermons shifted the conversation around gestures away from a close adherence to natural. She widened the ways women considered using their bodies, while calling into question the value of natural as the prime indicator of a preacher's sincere involvement in her sermon. Using her theater skills authentically, she problematized the notion of natural. Rather than following the culturally imposed set of natural gestures, she used maneuvers explicitly linked to the theater with the same type of unconscious ease. Like Butler's revealing analysis of the way the notion of gender is troubled by unauthorized performances, Rev. Harris' choices illustrate how every type of preaching gesture is a constructed action. Rev. Adams also brought this dilemma between natural and unnatural gestures into stark relief. As she continued to describe her gestures, Rev. Adams said, "I am a woman preacher, a black one and a Southern one. I'm also a mother. I don't mind stopping and shaking my finger and putting my hand on my hip. A man can't get away with that. A black woman preacher can do that. She can just stop and put her hand on her hip and say, 'Oh come on, folks.' And it is intentional theater because they know what I'm indicating in that moment."

In all fourteen interviews represented in this ethnographic study, Rev. Adam's example was the single illustration offered of a specific gesture by any preacher. Clearly a single action used to emphasize her point, the hand on the hip broke open the

distinctions between natural and unnatural movements. It was a self-consciously dramatic action, false in the sense of being borrowed as a cultural character exaggeration and yet utterly true in its use for homiletical effect. The emphasis upon a preacher's natural performance developed among public concerns about deception. A preacher whose actions were contrived might be engaging in inauthentic or hypocritical preaching. In this instance, Rev. Adams relied upon a contrived gesture not to deceive but to convey a message she believes with great sincerity. Not only was she acting, but she knew she was acting and her listeners know it as well. Such a performance is intentional artifice. But the artifice is not arbitrary. Rev. Adams identifies herself as a black, Southern female preacher, and she used a gesture that has deep roots and expressive power in her context. However planed the gesture, it is used sincerely. Rev. Adams put her body to use for the sake of bringing the sermon to completion. In doing so, she blurred the line between natural and unnatural gestures, revealing the limitations of defining natural as a single, precise style and of relying upon natural as the sole indicator of sincerity. Like Rev. Harris, Rev. Adams' decision exposes how natural is a cultural creation; a performance repeated over time to appear natural and for some preachers, may even come to feel natural. The naturalness, though, is largely restricted to the embodied selves who have taken up the necessary set of repetitive actions with ease and complicity.

Natural, in its present conception, is limited. It is a compilation of movements tailored to certain bodies, which slowly became ingrained over years of habitual practices as preachers passed down gestures one to another. Absent a deep analysis of natural as a constructed category, it is too simplistic to instruct preachers to move naturally. Such advice minimizes the historical, cultural and gender influences that have resulted in some

bodies being more readily acceptable as natural bodies than others. It minimizes the contributions of the lived body approach, in which embodiment is always developing. With a deep analysis of natural, the ability of any embodied preacher to move in an entirely natural way also becomes doubtful. The use of artifice reminds preachers and teachers of preaching that all preaching possesses some level of intentional theater. What remains critical to the idea of natural is in the desire to evaluate a preacher's sincerity and the related concern of blending together a preacher's embodied life and a sermon's ultimate aim. The ideals of congruence and consistency between preacher and preached sermon are worth preserving. The hopes for bringing a sermon to life through body and voice in order to transform both preacher and listener are goals worth keeping as well. But congruence, consistency and embodied performances can be retained without maintaining "naturalness" as their crucial indicator.

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of how the body enacts its gestures provides a path for reconfiguring the naturalness of gestures. Affirming that gestures develop from the layered habits of a body always thrust into the world, Merleau-Ponty argues that the meaning and significance of any gesture are created by the one moving and the ones receiving (and interpreting) the movements. The meaning of the gesture is developed collaboratively amid the performance. A female preacher, attempting to navigate her way through the gestures of her sermon will seek to reconcile – and quite likely alter - gestures not crafted in, through and by her body. This process is akin to an organist, who sits down as a guest performer preparing to play an organ he or she has never played. The organist can learn the organ in just one rehearsal, asserts Merleau-Ponty. To do so, "he does not act like a person about to draw up a plan. He does not learn objective spatial

positions for each stop and pedal, nor does he commit them to memory."[359] Instead, "he sits on the seat, works the pedals, pulls out the stops, gets the measure of the instrument with his body. He settles into the organ as one settles into a house."[360] Gaining knowledge through the body, "his movements during rehearsal are consecratory gestures; they draw affective vectors, discover emotional sources and create a space of expressiveness as the movements of the augur delimit the templum."[361]

A gesture, argues Merleau-Ponty, requires "a certain structural co-ordination of experience."[362] As "a pattern of my bodily behavior endows the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others," gestures work when that significance is recognizable by both preacher and congregant.[363] Rev. Adams borrowed a cultural gesture and consecrated it. The gesture succeeded because she and her listeners shared the symbol, born of their shared experiential knowledge. One reason female preachers struggle with gestures may lie in the gap still existing between accepted preaching gestures and the movements born in a female preacher's body. A solution to this gap is to draw from other pools of shared knowledge. Two preachers – Rev. Adams and Rev. Harris – moved towards the dramatic, relying upon "a structural co-ordination" within theatrical actions rather than the inherited "natural" gestures assigned to preaching.

Merleau-Ponty's organist gained familiarity with a new instrument by playing it. The organist's movements consecrated a relationship between player and instrument, performed music and those who gathered to listen to it. As the bodies of preachers

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[359] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 168
[360] Merleau-Ponty, 168.
[361] Merleau-Ponty, 168.
[362] Merleau-Ponty, 225.
[363] Merleau-Ponty, 225.

become more and more diverse, the sermon, as a moment of consecratory rehearsal, may create spaces for new gestures. Like the organist learning a new organ, female preachers are still settling into a gestural house they did not build. But as they move in, they may well rearrange the house as every preaching occasion extends the potential field of expressive movement. In the meantime, many women in this study named the expressiveness of their hands. Existing alongside those preachers who relied upon intentional theater were other preachers who re-routed discussions of gestures to describe how they talked with their hands.

Talking with the Hands

Sprinkled across many of the interviews were references to using the hands. Rev. Erica Williams credited her growing love of preaching to a female mentor. After naming her dynamic delivery, she concluded, "she talks a lot with her hands." Reflecting on her own preaching movements, Rev. Harris said, "I know I talk with my hands." With uncanny similarity, Rev. Shannon Baker said, "I use broad speaking gestures. Try for a whole body performance. I speak with my hands a lot." The phrase "I talk with my hands" reoccurred often in conversations. It was frequently uttered in a reflexive, almost unconscious manner. Furthermore, upon observation, the women did talk with their hands. Their hands moved throughout a sermon, displaying an expressive energy not observed as readily in other aspects of embodiment. Some hand movements would be classified as gestures that emphasized a point or illustrated another. But whenever women remarked, "I talk with my hands," they appeared to leave the topic of gestures for new territory. Like code words that only scratch the surface of the body's meaning, talking

with the hands revealed something of how these women found their way to preaching naturally.

When Ms. Clark began her sermon, her hands were clasped together and held at waist level in front of her body. The hands quickly drew apart, though, as she spoke the opening sentences. She gestured towards the congregation by spreading her hands, palms open, to them. Shifting her hands to be parallel with one another in front of her body, she moved them up and down as the sermon's first movement continued. They moved with greater speed and expanse as she spoke the opening scenario's punch line. Then her hands moved back together as she began the next segment, returning to the clasp in front of the body. Again, her hands drew apart and opened outwards as she moved through the movement. This time, though, her index finger pointed high into the sky as the final punctuation of her second point. Throughout the sermon, her hands continued to move, often keeping time with the rhythm of her words. Ms. Clark did use some illustrative gestures, and she formed a pointer hand to emphasize some key points. The majority of her actions, though, were less connected to the content of her words than to where she was in her sermon and her own emotional response to her preaching. Her hands could illustrate or emphasize, but when Ms. Clark "talked with her hands" she told a story about her body's relationship to her preaching.

Gesture studies name such hand movements 'beats.'[364] In a beat, the hands repeat a small selection of hand motions that are relatively abstract and provide insight into the structure of the discourse. Ms. Clark's gestures formed a circle. With a base position of

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[364] David McNeill, *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1992), 15. He elaborates, "beats look like beating musical time. The hands move along with the rhythmical pulsation of speech."

having her hands clasped in front of her body, she moved her hands as she proceeded into the next point in the sermon. The same hand gesture reappeared at similar points throughout a sermon, with repetition happening at introductions, key points, teaching moments or stories. Her movements illustrated how beats plot the points, punch lines, disjunctions and transitions in speech. Because they are not related to content, beats reflect "the speaker's conception of the narrative discourse as a whole."[365] A listener could follow Ms. Clark's message by watching her hands and not hearing the words. Beats also signal the speaker's relationship to her speech. Ms. Clark's hands revealed her emotional response to particular points in her sermon. When she was trying to tease out a key element, her hands made a spiral circle in the air, an encircling motion that gained momentum as she spoke. When she was trying to summon additional energy amid a slow-developing illustration, Ms. Clark's hands moved up and down in a faster, slightly frantic way. As she moved into a longer exegetical unpacking of the scripture, Ms. Clark's left hand stayed at her side tracing in an endless circle. Observing it, I wondered if Ms. Clark felt the lull in the sermon that I was also experiencing. Beats, then, provide a visual map of a sermon's structure and clues to how a preacher feels amid her preaching.

Although unique to her preaching body, Ms. Clark's manner of talking with her hands was replicated by many preachers in this study. Their actions remained concentrated in the hands, occasionally spilling over into the arms. Hands stayed at or near waist level. Energy and passion was displayed less through large, expansive movements and more through the quick dexterity of the fingers. Typical motions included clasping the hands together in front of the body, creating a pointing gesture with

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[365] McNeill, 15. "Beats mark information that does not advance the plot line but provides the structure within which the plot line unfolds."

the thumb and two forefingers all touching, circling their hands one over the other, and spreading the hands out to the congregation. While similarities existed across preachers, each preacher had her own style. The flick of the wrist, the spread of the palms, and the placement of hands in relation to each other were personal moves that indicated a preacher's particular 'spin.' Ms. Clark's hands are round, with shorter fingers and closely cut fingernails. Her hands were often cupped and moved in more rounded, circular shapes. Rev. Harris' hands are larger, with longer fingers and longer, noticeable nails. She drummed her fingers a few times, akin to a piano player, tended toward squared gestures and even flicked her wrists. Largely spontaneous and unconscious, these gestures were distinct from typically defined gestures and yet very much an aspect of the women's preaching.

When they reported that they "talked with their hands," these preachers reiterated how natural the movements felt. Even if they had said, "I don't use gestures," they stated confidently, "I talk a lot with my hands." Some women elaborated on how their hand motions appeared to flow from their verbal speech. The Rev. Sarah Lockhart reflected, "It is almost like I cannot express a thought without showing you. What I am communicating is so much that it comes out from more than just my voice." These hand movements, then, held some of the qualities of "natural" gestures, even as a woman distinguished her actions from the category of gestures. As beats, "talking with the hands" is a type of gesture. The apparent emphasis on the hands may connect to their lived experience as females. Iris Young's assertions that women can move with more timidity, can take up less actual space than men or generally operate with a type of bodily constriction may resonate with these preachers. They shifted conversations around

gestures away from large, full body movements to smaller, more contained hand movements. In doing so, these women created a new space around the hands. In their descriptions of the hands, though, they transferred many of the "natural" qualities – of being unconscious, unplanned and linked to the private or innate sphere – to their movements with their hands. Through such a transfer, they abandoned a framework of gestures that didn't work for them, while embodying other ways they could "bring a sermon to completion."

Both "talking with the hands" and the use of dramatic artifice communicate at a macro level about female preaching and performance. These preachers confessed their hesitancy in naming performance, performance. Yet through their ownership of their voice, their questions and experiments with intentional movements and their capacity to pour energy into their hands, they clearly performed. Their hesitancy could be attributed to the ways in which gender has been linked so closely with the standards around performance. Specifically within gestures, women may perceive that natural gestures are not available or applicable to their bodies. Rather than attempt to be natural in ways that are difficult and even unnatural, women found other ways to act. Utilizing Butler's language but amending it, women acted in semi-authorized manners that exposed the conforming nature of natural performance guidelines and created territory for altered performances.

Performance Reconsidered: Agency, Sincerity and Embodied Life

This chapter has concentrated upon the ways performance approaches to preaching have fallen short for a small selection of female preachers. While affirming

that every preacher does perform, it argues that the ideology surrounding a natural performance has prevented the full performance of many women, who find that creating a space for their bodies requires creativity, negotiation, an unlearning of some models and retooling of some others. The spaces for preaching may feel haunted by the past and inhospitable to a female's embodied presence. Because their bodies are the site of so many mixed messages, the task of performing a sermon – rather than simply writing a manuscript – can be a loaded, risky task. These female questions about performance were both practical ones about precisely how one effectively brings verbal shape and physical embodiment to written words and deeper ones about the meaning of the female preacher's presence. These questions also involved other questions about how authentic, sincere or truthful one appears as the preacher.

The ideal of a natural performance presents itself as ahistorical. In reality, naturalness has formed steadily over time to be identified through certain gestures and vocal inflections. Because naturalness developed within a social context, the markers of natural are products of a culture, and specifically gendered embodiments born from the assumed male preacher. When female preachers attempted to respond to the expectations of a "natural performance" and imitate these male forms, they experienced a split between the kinds of preaching performances that came naturally to them and the preaching roles they were expected to assume. The women within this study took two distinct roads to healing the rupture, both of which included laying aside the prevailing "natural" ideal. A small number of women embraced skills borrowed from the theater. They focused intentionally upon their bodies, staging their sermons and occasionally using props. A larger number of women abandoned the motifs around performance,

including gestures, in favor of the habitation around "talking with the hands." Both strategies illumine the women's agency. Preachers discovered ways to maneuver around the obstacles presented by performance as it is currently construed. Furthermore, in their differing deployments of preaching performance, both avenues of agency remain encompassed with the criterion of sincerity. As Rev. Adam's example demonstrated, intentional theater can be deeply sincere. And Mrs. Clark's movement of her hands symbolized how her body stayed alert and attune to her to her sermon. While naturalness as it stands is a criterion in need of correction, sincerity is a critical aspect of a preacher's performance and a criterion worth preserving.

In his work on performance, Richard F. Ward concludes, "the aim of a performance-perspective in preaching is not to aggravate the preacher by aiming a spotlight at his or her vocal or physical agility, but it is for deepening our understanding of why we preach at all."[366] We preach, suggests Ward, in order to bring into the sacred conversation those who have dwelled for too long on the margins. Ward writes, as "in performance a human being reveals self to self," the sermon provides a way "that the selfhood of both preachers and listeners are reconstituted during the preaching event."[367] Such reconstitution requires agency and sincerity to be at work in the preacher. As the experiences of female preachers enable the re-constitution of performance, the preacher and listener can more readily meet each other and receive together the proclaimed word. Rev. Harris decided one Sunday to use a ladder to illustrate the people who support our climbs of faith. Sitting in the pew before the sermon, she panicked. "How am I going to

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[366] Richard F. Ward. "Performance Turns in Homiletics," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 30, no. 2 (1996), http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=340(accessed October 10, 2011).
[367] Ibid.

climb this ladder with this manuscript in my hand?" she thought. "And it was like the voice of God said to me, 'You wrote this. Just get up there and preach it.'" In risking her own particularly crafted performance, Rev. Harris discovered the power of her own embodiment and how her living body makes possible the revealing of self to self.

CHAPTER SIX

PREACHING PREGNANT

Following the spring of her graduation from seminary and ordination in the United Methodist minister, the Rev. Erica Williams was appointed as the associate minister to a thriving suburban congregation west of Baltimore, Maryland. She married her college sweetheart a few weeks after graduation, entering ministry and marriage in the same season. The church had a long history of female pastors. They welcomed her wholeheartedly, quickly responding to her frank yet easy-going style. Initially, the main reactions to her presence focused upon her age. Rev. Williams is in her mid-twenties, making her the youngest minister ever to serve the church. "I have been really honest with people about my age," remarked Rev. Williams. "I know that I'm young."[368] When a congregant said to her "I've never had a minister young enough to be my granddaughter," Rev. Williams laughingly replied, "If it would make you feel better, I can call you grandma." Her non-defensive, open nature won her many admirers. So did her preaching. Viewing preaching as "a very holy place to be," Rev. Williams removes her shoes when she begins, gravitates towards a style of preaching that stresses "lingering in the text" and comfortably moves from pulpit to sanctuary floor. Finding her sermons well received, she gained confidence in crafting ones she hoped would both comfort and challenge her congregation.

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[368] Personal Interview with a Female Preacher, December 3, 2009.The names of all interviewees are being held in confidence by mutual agreement. For more information about this qualitative study, see Appendix A.

Whether it was her age or her newly married status, Rev. Williams frequently fielded questions about pregnancy. "Almost since day one of being here, I've had people routinely ask me whether or not I'm pregnant," she said, "or when I'm planning on having children." If she held a baby in front of the congregation during a baptism, inevitably someone commented, "You're looking mighty comfortable there. Are you thinking about starting a family?" If she remarked around the office "I could really go for a hamburger right now," someone asked "Are you sure you're not pregnant?" Sometimes the inquiry came entirely unbidden. Church members stopped her in a hallway to say, "I hope you don't mind me asking, but are you expecting?" Although recognizing the questions arose from her public role and her status as a married woman of childbearing years, the persistency of the questions disturbed her. "I am very comfortable with my body," Rev. Williams reflected "but it would give me a complex if I took seriously the amount of times people have asked me that question." As the months passed and the questions continued, she found herself dressing in form-fitting clothes that avoided a loose, flowing look. She also thought carefully about the subtext embedded in the questions and their relationship to her developing identity as a female preacher.

Rev. William's primary objection to questions about pregnancy lay in their intimate nature. She pondered over "the information people think they have a right to know about you as a pastor," including information about one's sexual behavior. "Do you realize," she remarked "that basically you are asking me if I've had unprotected sex with my husband?" Although acknowledging that most parishioners were probably "just thinking 'we want to play with a baby,'" the intimate nature of the questions transgressed the professional boundary she desired to set between herself and the congregation. At the

same time, she recognized the questions could be viewed as well-meaning attempts to forge a connection with her. “I think it is a way to relate to me,” she said, “because I am so much younger than them. And while they accept me as a pastor, with that authority and role, I think it is challenging for them to really understand how to relate to me interpersonally.” Eventually she took such questions as an opportunity to establish her role. “I usually say, for the record, no, I’m not pregnant. For future reference, that is not an appropriate question to ask somebody because you never know what they are going through. They could be having trouble conceiving or they may just have had a miscarriage or God forbid they are pregnant and they aren’t ready to tell people.”

The topic of pregnancy came up often during Rev. Williams’ initial interview, as questions about preaching, bodies, theology and ministry seemed to circle back to questions about being pregnant. What I, as the interviewer, did not know at that time was that Rev. Williams was newly pregnant. About six weeks along, she chose not to divulge the information even as pregnancy – and being a pregnant preacher – served as the focus of the interview. Fourteen months later, we met again. During the second interview, Rev. Williams spoke at length about an early miscarriage, her second pregnancy that led to the birth of a son and the impact of all these experiences on her preaching life. In this conversation, the issue of boundaries came into sharper focus as she enumerated what information she shared with her congregation and what she kept private, how she navigated the physical changes of her body as a public figure and how she handled boundaries that expanded by necessity. The processes of pregnancy, miscarriage and childbirth were intensely physical experiences. They called upon her internal resources,

her theological worldview and her flexibility in relating to her congregation. Ultimately these experiences raised questions about how embodied life impacts proclamation.

When asked to describe her theology of the body in her first interview, Rev. Williams said confidently “the body has value, worth and purpose, otherwise Jesus wouldn’t have taken one on. But I don’t believe the body is all of our identity either. It is only a piece of who we are.” A year later after listening to her description having a “loveable alien in her belly,” I asked Rev. Williams if her perspective of the body had changed during pregnancy and childbirth. She answered “No, not substantially. I do still think that our bodies are very much a part of who we are but at the same time they don’t define us. We are more than just our bodies.” She named pregnancy, when her body felt out of her control, as a time that strained her belief in the body’s partial role in forming identity. Food cravings, weight gains and the baby’s movements kept her acutely attuned to her body. Her growing belly forced her to modify her activities and remember she was sharing bodily space with someone else. Yet even within this tension she maintained, “the fundamental core of who I was hasn’t changed, even as my body was so different than what it was.”

Pregnant Embodiment: A Doubling

In her work “Pregnant Embodiment,” Iris Marion Young argues, “the pregnant subject…is decentered, split, or doubled in several ways.”[369] As the pregnant woman’s bodily self-location becomes “focused on her trunk in addition to her head” and the body’s “inner movements belong to another being, even as they are not other,” the

[369] Iris Marion Young, “Pregnant Embodiment” in *Throwing Like A Girl and Other Essays*. 160.

pregnant woman "experiences her body as herself and not herself."[370] Akin to Rev. William's language about having a "loveable alien" in her belly, Young suggests that the process of hosting another body makes fluid the boundary "between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate."[371] She writes, "I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body."[372] Living within this fluidity of boundaries, the pregnant woman splits into two modes of being. She is her former body, often using pre-pregnant forms of movement. She is also a different, new body, discovering that she has less balance, more weight and moves in heavier, less spontaneous ways. These physical changes, and especially the doubling of the body, challenge the assumption of a self as always and everywhere unified.[373] The pregnant woman attends to both herself and her baby. Her materiality is simultaneously her old body and a new body just as her physicality contains both her former body and the developing fetus. Thus pregnancy reveals how "the unity of the self is itself a project, a project sometimes successfully enacted by a moving and often contradictory subjectivity."[374]

In her recollections of pregnancy, Rev. Williams articulated the tension that arose as her body hosted another life. The changes wrought by a "loveable alien" made her keenly aware that her body felt less like her body or even her possession. Simultaneously, she strongly affirmed that the core of who she was had not changed. The unity of the self was a project during her pregnancy, as she held the contradictions of a body changing in

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[370] Young, 160.
[371] Young, 163.
[372] Young, 163.
[373] Young writes, "Pregnancy, I argue, reveals a paradigm of bodily experience in which the transparent unity of self dissolves and the body attends positively to itself at the same time that it enacts its projects." Young, 161.
[374] Young, 162.

ways beyond her control and a self that maintained some continuity with her pre-pregnancy state. With so much attention focused on the physically quantifiable aspects of pregnancy, the pregnant woman may wonder, “am I just my body?” or “only my body?” These questions have particular poignancy as the body feels less and less their own. Wondering if one can maintain one’s identity as the body undergoes radical change exposes the enduring separation of the mind and the body and the locating of identity in the mind. As the locus of attention turns from head to trunk, the pregnant woman encounters how physical changes impact identity, even if the changes do not alter it entirely. A self that is a project, and sometimes a contradictory project, can hold the paradox of “I am my body and I am more than it also.”

Preaching Pregnant: Finding the Boundaries

Pregnancy and childbirth call upon the body in specific and profound ways. Over the course of forty weeks, the entire body expands as blood volume doubles, the belly grows and everything from feet, hands and face grow in concert. The pregnant preacher contends with these bodily changes while she preaches. As her belly extends, she may find her balance skewed, her energy diminished and her lungs incapable of holding their normal capacity of air. As the body “weighs into” the sermon in a new way, the pregnant preacher encounters an ever-watchful congregation. Many will comment freely about her body’s changes or routinely ask her how she feels. Preachers face anew situations in which the congregation exhibits perceived ownership over their bodies, just as a baby stakes his or her claim. Young correctly conceives of the pregnant body as doubling or splitting, naming well the blurring boundaries that occur between mother and baby, inside

and outside, self and other. But within this small group of preachers, the experiences of pregnant embodiment involved tackling the project of the self – not necessarily a unified self or a self devoid of contradictions – by marking their boundaries with greater clarity, precision and confidence. Pregnancy became a time when they learned the limits of what they would share publicly and what they would not, established firmer lines between their embodied lives and their congregations and began to recognize how their evolving embodiment intersected with their preaching.

Rev. Williams was one of seven preachers in this study who combined child bearing with preaching. Four of those seven preachers, Rev. Rebecca Harris, Rabbi Monica Levin, Rev. Sarah Lockhart, and Rev. Williams, spoke in detail about being a pregnant preacher. This chapter will explore how these four women navigated the task of preaching while pregnant, in hopes of drawing broader insights into how the ever-developing, embodied self informs preaching. Pregnancy is a decidedly female experience. Pregnancy can intrude upon the female preachers who aren't pregnant, as they also may deflect questions about pregnancy or manage their bodies to minimize such inquiries. Furthermore, pregnancy brings into sharper relief the commonly shared experience among female preachers of having their bodies closely observed. The preachers in this study often said "it is as if my body is not my own" when they talked about being a female preacher. Language like this arose in discussions about choices in shoes, hairstyles or clothes to unwanted advice about preaching postures. Since both the congregation and the growing fetus can foster such thoughts, exploring how the pregnant preacher reasserted some ownership of her body may offer new possibilities for embodied reclamation in all dimensions of preaching. By charting the key stories shared

around pregnancy in preaching, the complex, ever-evolving and at times elusive embodied sense of the self becomes more visible as do the successful efforts to stake a claim on one's identity. If it is true that "without bodies preaching is not worth talking about," then the pregnant preacher's experience that her body and her efforts to create more life-giving space - for baby, herself and her sermon - are vital to understanding the unfolding project of preaching as well.[375]

Preaching through Miscarriage

Before they could talk about pregnancies, these women told stories about their miscarriages. All four women suffered the heartache of preaching amid a pregnancy loss. The commonality of their histories reflects how miscarriage and pregnancy do go together, with one in four pregnancies ending in miscarriage.[376] As is often the case, these women had not publicly shared the news of their pregnancy when they lost the baby. Consequently, they found themselves preaching amid an atmosphere of silent knowing, often attempting to bring a sermon to birth while their bodies were shedding a life. Two of the four preachers were absent from the pulpit the weekend following the loss. Rabbi Levin already had scheduled to be away from her congregation, while Rev. Williams shared the news with her senior minister and asked to be excused from worship. Revs Harris and Lockhart, for liturgical and scheduling reasons beyond their control, had to preach. Faced with holding their grief while delivering a sermon, they spoke of separating what was happening in their bodies from their preaching.

[375] Childers wrote "without bodies, preaching is not worth talking about" in "The Preacher's Body," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27 no. 3 (2006): 224.
[376] Elisa Erikson Barrett. *What Was Lost: A Christian Journey Through Miscarriage* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), xiii.

Reverend Harris miscarried on Christmas Eve. "I was standing in the pulpit, preaching about babies," she recounted "and I was bleeding. I knew something was wrong, and that was really hard. It was one of the few times I had to really disconnect my body, my physical embodiment from the words I was preaching." Normally a preacher keenly aware of and situated in her body, Rev. Harris used starkly different language to talk about her experience that evening. Faced with an achingly painful night in which to preach while miscarrying, she set aside blood, fear and sadness in hopes of embodying babies, birth and joy. In such a situation, she made the necessary and wise choice to block out, temporarily, one embodied event in order to perform another. It was the middle of Lent when the Rev. Lockhart learned that she was pregnant, after struggling several months to conceive. "I found out that I was pregnant in March," she said, "and in April of Holy Week, when Michael [the senior pastor] was away on a trip, I had a miscarriage. I had gone for a sonogram earlier because I had had a little bit of bleeding. There was a heart rate but it wasn't really fast enough. When I went back two weeks later, it was gone." Devastated by the loss, Rev. Lockhart was scheduled to preach in two days. "So the next Sunday, I had to preach a Palm Sunday sermon," she continued. "It was a really good sermon and I remember feeling like normally preaching is one of those things that takes out of me, in a really good way. It is one of those 'this is me' type of moments. And in that situation I felt like I was able to do it and there was nothing of me that I was really giving." Like Rev. Harris, Rev. Lockhart preached through a miscarriage. Left to shepherd the congregation while the senior pastor traveled and entering the central week of the Christian year, she framed her experience with similar words of disconnection.

What was typically a “this is me” type moment became a space where “there was nothing of me” to give.

Rev. Harris and Rev. Lockhart both described situations in which they preached through death and all the shock, sorrow and pain such loss evokes. Countless preachers have preached through crisis; approaching the pulpit after the death of a child, as they await results for biopsy or while undergoing a marital crisis or divorce. What deepens these two preacher’s experiences comes through the immediate juxtaposition of birth and death. On a material level there was no separation between the processes of miscarriage and the actions of standing, speaking and moving to preach. The women evoked the language of separation to describe how they survived the moment. They made space between the internal events of their body and the occasion of their preaching. They preached “without anything of me” in the sermon. Their language illuminates how the mind-body split remains operative, such that it is possible to conceive of preaching having “disconnected one’s body from one’s words.” In reality, the mind is never separated from the body, the body is always present in one’s preaching and the body and the mind are constantly responding to one another. Within this fragile unity, though, Rev Harris and Rev. Lockhart attempted to convey how different it was to preach amid miscarriage. The agony that forces a separation between mother and preacher unveils how deeply the events of our lives – the things that happen in, through and with our bodies - impact our whole selves. They inescapably shape not just what we preach but how we preach. Without embodied life we, and those who listen to us, might well say, “there was nothing of the preacher in that sermon.”

While extreme, preaching through miscarriage represents the shared experiences of many preachers who temporarily suspend something, whether a memory, feeling or present occurrence, in order to concentrate on a sermon. It is in these moments that idea of a fully unified self is shattered, exposed for the illusion that it is.[377] When one feels shattered in the pulpit, torn into pieces by life, one becomes attuned to the diverse pieces of the self making diverse demands upon the sermon. Describing such experiences as preaching from a dis-embodied state, the preacher attempts, in a halting way, to re-remember the harder to integrate aspects of embodied life. She speaks to the loss of the illusion, articulating what happens when the self does not feel coherent. In these moments, the vitality possible in embodiment is present in its absence. Young suggests the recognition of the illusion prompts a reconfiguration of the embodied self. The doubling process of pregnancy ultimately empowers the pregnant woman to attend simultaneously to her body and the growing fetus. She is not expected to make these two things one, although the mother and the baby coexist in the same space. Her task is to hold them in a paradoxical harmony, sometimes easily in sync and sometimes painfully at odds. In corresponding ways, the "me" that is potently possible in preaching is never a perfectly formed, internally reconciled, static self. It is the "me" of contradiction, paradox and uneasy growth.

Two weeks later, Rev. Lockhart preached again. Having survived Holy Week, in which reading Jesus' words to his mother Mary standing at the foot of the cross required enormous effort, she poured her heart, soul, and body into a resurrection sermon.

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[377] Iris Young refers to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* as where he "locates the 'intentional arc' that unified experience in the body, a move that affirms the idea of a unified self as the condition of experience." Young, 162.

> I preached the Sunday after Easter and I started crying during my sermon. It was something about believing in the Resurrection, that I believe in resurrection. I never said what I was talking about and so people could have thought that I had just gotten emotional. But I remember feeling how cathartic it felt to write it. It was the first real thing I had written about it [the miscarriage]. It felt - not like it was healed - but that it was healing to preach it. *Yeah, it felt like me again.* (emphasis mine)

Your Preacher Is Pregnant: Sharing the News

Dealing with a miscarriage while preaching regularly raised questions about women's embodied selves and to what degree a preacher could separate aspects of her life from her preaching. While clearly impacting a woman's preaching, a miscarriage tended to remain private. Women might share them in small groups settings, but rarely did they bring them into the pulpit. The questions around miscarriage remained questions of the self as one experienced the self, allowing loss to be in tension or in tandem with their sermons over time.

The questions shifted, though, when a pregnancy proceeded as hoped. Upon learning they were pregnant, most preachers shared the news only within a small circle of close connections. But as they approached the twelve-week mark, when the risk of miscarriage diminished significantly and their bodies started showing its pregnant state, women faced decisions about announcing the pregnancy to a congregation. Their decision-making processes focused on framing the message in a manner that not only shared the joyous news but also affirmed their identity as preachers and pastors.

Announcing the pregnancy generated much thoughtful preplanning. No preacher spontaneously told her congregation. Rather, all perceived the announcement as the key moment in which private news moved into the public domain. It became the method by which they guided their congregations in relating to a pregnant preacher. The dilemma of the self became organized around holding two identities, mother-to-be and preacher, in a loose, shifting manner that both related to the congregation and created limits in the congregation's involvement in the pregnancy.

When she was expecting her first child, Rev. Harris chose Mother's Day to tell her church. Utilizing the community's tradition of giving flowers to the oldest and youngest mothers during worship, she paused when the time came to give the flower to the youngest mother and said, "Oh, I guess that is me." When she was pregnant with her second child, she folded the announcement into the Vacation Bible School Sunday celebration. During the sharing of joys and concerns before congregational prayer, she said, "It is so wonderful to have all these kids here and we're just so excited about how much our church is growing. So Peter and I have decided we want to contribute to this growth." In both instances, Rev. Harris used annual events to offer relatively brief, upbeat messages about the coming baby. She intentionally drew upon congregational rites, seeking to fit the pregnancy into the church's on-going life. "I wanted to put it in that context," she said "and have people see me in that moment as both pastor and as mother, that I'm wearing these two hats." By blending the news with church news, she remained firmly within her role as pastor even as she touched upon her role as a mother. She created a framework for how the congregation would relate to her. They would share in her pregnancy but she was primarily their pastor.

Now faced with sharing the news of a third baby on the way, Rev. Harris admitted to feeling self-conscious each time she approached these announcements. Speeches about pregnancies heightened the attention directed towards her and especially towards her physical appearance. “My body is going to change,” she continued. “The thing I was really aware of when I was pregnant with Duncan was how much more quickly I showed, and how by the time I was comfortable announcing it at church, it was fairly well obvious.” By keeping the announcement short and within the secure container of a liturgical moment, she hoped to decrease some of the intense observations. She recognized her efforts would meet limited success. Rev. Harris had waited well into the second trimester to share the news of her coming second child, delaying the announcement because of her earlier miscarriage. Afterwards several parishioners remarked, “We knew [you were pregnant]. We could tell.” “It was strange,” commented Rev. Harris “to think that people had been watching and looking at my body and making assumptions.” With this third occasion, she has debated not making a formal announcement. “I’ve considered just telling SPRC and Leadership Council and small groups of people and letting the word get out,” she said. Thinking it might be fun to see what happened, she has wondered what it would be like to have “people just ask me, so are you pregnant?” Although fairly certain she will share the news more formally in worship, she’s equally aware of the appeal embedded in avoiding an announcement altogether.

Although the interview conversations about these decisions were often light-hearted, the moment of saying publicly “I am pregnant” was a deeply serious matter for each woman. Having lost a pregnancy, they felt keenly the risks associated the letting the

news start to spread. They never forgot they were speaking to their congregations, a fact that kept their pastoral identity in the forefront. Choosing to speak as the first trimester faded into the second, the announcement itself became a hinge point in their experiences as pregnant preachers. Most women start talking about their pregnancies in wider circles once they pass the twelve-week mark. It was a logical moment, as what has been a largely internal event starts to become externally visible. From a different analytical lens, these women spoke about their pregnancies just as the boundaries of their bodies started to become truly fluid. During the second trimester, a woman will start to feel the baby move, her belly will noticeably swell and she will really need maternity clothes. Her body's boundaries – between mother and children, self and world - recede as the growing baby takes up more and more space and the mother's expanding belly pushes out into the world. As her body's boundaries diminished, Rev. Harris found ways to remain the preacher-pastor. She stayed in her preacher role as she introduced a pregnancy. Her announcement affirmed her professional identity and attempted to create a fluid yet firm boundary between her pregnancy and her preaching. Another preacher took it one step further. In her announcement, she communicated some specific expectations about the boundaries around her pregnancy within her congregation. She drew a line around her body through the medium of sharing the news.

When describing pregnancy announcement in her interview, Rev. Williams began with a prior experience. "My husband and I have over the course of the last year lost some weight," she explained. "When I first started losing weight, I would have old ladies in the receiving line [after worship] put their hands on my hips and say, 'you look so good.' They would have a hand on my butt. And I'd be [thinking], 'wow, you really just

felt me up there.' It was clear they did not understand my body was my own and not their territory. I thought to myself 'if they feel that comfortable now, when I'm not pregnant, how much more so are they going to feel that way when I do get pregnant.'" Prior even to conceiving, she knew she wanted to curtail the congregation's access to her body.

So when she came to share the news, Rev. Williams announced what she named as both a joy and a concern during the prayer time of Sunday morning worship. "The joy," she said, "is that Chris and I are expecting our first child." The congregation clapped and cheered. "But my concern," she continued, "is that I have this serious phobia of people touching my belly." As she expected, her congregation laughed. Then she said, "No, I'm serious, so serious that my friend made this t-shirt for me." She held up a shirt with a handprint marked through with a big X and a caption underneath that read "Hands off the belly." The congregation roared. She concluded, "So you can pray for the health of the baby and that when people touch my belly I can respond in a Christian way." She repeated her announcement at all three services.

Rev. Williams used the announcement of her pregnancy to say far more than that she was expecting a child. She combined an unorthodox approach with a great deal of humor to create a firm boundary between her pregnant body and her congregation's eagerness to touch. Her announcement revealed the vulnerabilities attached to the pregnant body. The pregnant preacher knew the risks associated with the congregation's over-whelming, even relentless attention and boundary-transgressing touch. Acknowledging that people are drawn to pregnant bellies and encouraging the congregation's welcome of the coming baby, Rev. Williams proclaimed what they could

and could not do. The hands would stay off the belly. Her body (and her baby) would have ample, secure space to grow.

Preaching as a Pregnant Body

Although creative in her communication strategy, Rev. Williams' desire to craft a boundary between her pregnancy and her church was a commonly shared goal. Announcing the pregnancy was the first step in the process. Maintaining enough space for the baby to grow and the preacher to be a mother-to-be preacher would be an on-going project, involving self-reflection and negotiation with the congregation. Self-reflection came first, as women attended to their growing bodies. The changes in their bodies correspondingly altered their preaching.

Young characterizes this altered body as the one aware of its fullness rather than its lack.[378] Moving away from assumptions that the massive weight or ungainly cumbersomeness creates a gulf between a woman and her body, Young argues that pregnant embodiment encourages a women's awareness of her new body and her "using it as the means to the accomplishment of my aims."[379] Perhaps in a way not previously experienced, the pregnant body becomes a productive body, a body not defined by its capacity to distract nor minimized in its femininity, but powerfully embodied by the task of nurturing life. Young's reversal of lack into fullness resonated with this group of pregnant women. Their narratives illustrated her main proposal, demonstrating how

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[378] Young, 164-5. She is drawing on the work of Sally Gadow, who argues for viewing the pregnant body through an aesthetic mode. Gadow writes, "That is, we can become aware of ourselves as body, and take an interest in its sensations and limitations for their own sake, experiencing them as a fullness rather than a lack." Gadow "Body and Self: A Dialectic," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 5 (1980): 172-185.
[379] Young, 164.

living in and through a pregnant body grounds a woman, both in the solid materiality that is her body and in the potency of growing fetus. While speaking frankly about the physical challenges and inconveniences that accompanied pregnancy, these women also told of discovering new strengths and hidden potentials.

Echoing many other pregnant women, women recited with ease the list of bodily discomforts that accompanied them through the nine months. When they walked towards the pulpit, they did so at a slower pace and with an unsteady balance. As they preached, they did so with aching backs and swollen feet. "It took more out of me physically to preach," reflected Rev. Lockhart. "Pregnancy was definitely a challenge," said Rabbi Levin. "I'm not a loud speaker anyway, and it took more effort to speak with more limited breath, less air space and [because of her larger belly] farther away from the microphone." Rev. Harris remembered, "getting so hot underneath her robe" and being momentarily distracted when the baby moved or kicked. The demands of a pregnant body could intersect with the requirements of preaching, sometimes in unanticipated or awkward ways. Rev. Lockhart struggled to make it through worship without needing to use the bathroom. She said "A couple of times I had to pee in the service right before I was going to preach, and I thought 'what do I do?' Do I go and then they are going to be waiting for the sermon? I don't want everyone quiet and me walking back in from going to the bathroom."

The body makes its presence known during pregnancy. As women progress through immense physical changes, knowledge of their basic physicality extends to those around them. The task of maintaining their roles as preachers and all the accompanying expectations for professionalism, décor or bodily competency may feel more tenuous.

Moving with obvious effort, speaking with less air or having to rush to the bathroom make the preacher's body, and the preacher herself, appear less in control.

Pregnancy also affected the preacher's capacity for sustained concentration. The women in this study reported "blank moments," both in writing sermons and in preaching them. Admitting she was a Saturday night sermon writer, Rev. Lockhart said, "It was harder to focus and write my sermon. Preparation wise I was so exhausted and mentally all over the place." Rev. Harris recounted a time she lost her place during a sermon. A preacher who preaches without a manuscript, she remembered, "One time, I went completely blank. I had one of those pregnancy brain moments. I said 'I have no idea what I was going to say,' which made everyone laugh. Then I said, 'I hate pregnancy.' Everyone laughed again. It was a humorous moment and then I got back on track." Just as women adjusted to a different physicality, they faced compensating for altered mental capabilities. As the focus moved from "head to trunk," their preaching occasionally reflected the shift.

Although certainly presenting some challenges, these bodily changes located women in two simultaneous tasks. They were preachers who were pregnant. One mode of interpretation suggests pregnancy imprisons women in their bodies as they become bound to their physical limitations.[380] Offering an alternative analysis, Young argues that in pregnancy a woman becomes exceptionally aware of her essential embodiment. Buoyed by the hope of growing, new life, she attends closely, as she goes about her daily work, to being a pregnant body in the world. This newfound consciousness produces a sense of

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[380] See Robyn Longhurt, *Maternities: Gender, Bodies and Space* (New York: Routledge, 2008) and Rachel Westfall, "The Pregnant/Birthing Body: Negotiations of Personal Autonomy" in *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999), 263-276.

"power, solidity and validity" gained directly through the body's exceptional weight and materiality.[381] In their ability to compensate mental lapses or less lung capacity, these women attended positively to their bodies while continuing to enact the project of preaching.

Experiencing the body as full rather than lacking, women reported feeling and perceiving their bodies differently while pregnant. They expanded the images they held about themselves, and discovered dimensions usually neglected. In general, they spoke about feeling more feminine. Rev. Harris said, "It [the body] changes so much, so rapidly, and I feel so feminine. I feel like I'm so curvy, so busty." Pregnancy," she continued, "is such the fertility Goddess thing. I'm fairly flat chested but not in pregnancy, not when I'm nursing. You are glowing, [the] thick hair…the hormones make you feel all the more." Although a larger chest and curvy hips made her more self-conscious about her body, Rev. Harris also reveled in her body's powerful beauty. Rev. Williams, who prided herself on not caring too much about her clothes in pre-pregnancy days, noted how "while I didn't drastically change my [dress] style, I did dress more feminine when I was pregnant. I'm not much of a dress person or a skirt person, but during the pregnancy I wore a fair amount of those. And wanted to, which I just found really fascinating." Rev. Williams could not account for exactly why she shifted towards more explicitly feminine clothes. Long after her son was born she remembered her instinctive gravitation towards attire that communicated "I am a woman" or "I am a pregnant woman." The physical changes of pregnancy do accentuate breasts and, at least for some time, hips. Like the body's powerful intrusion though backaches and swollen

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[381] Young, 166.

feet, these embodiments are difficult to dismiss. The physiological changes in pregnancy may work in tandem with physical accentuations to enable access to elements of the self normally minimized. Whatever the reasons, pregnant embodiment resulted in a shift in the self for each of these women. One woman felt more feminine. Another dressed in ways more associated with the feminine. And they characterized such femininity in positive, powerful terms. It was the "fertility Goddess thing."

The capacity of the body to produce life may spark the knowledge of the body's fullness. Over time the baby – this life that is a part of them and yet not them – contributed to the fullness as well. Rev. Williams' baby asserted his presence whenever she prepared or delivered a sermon. She recalled, "Anytime I sat to write my sermon or was preaching my sermon, the baby moved almost the entire time. It was really distracting to have this baby doing summersaults. At first I thought it was a fluke, but it just kept happening. And so I told my husband, 'I don't know if it is my energy level or emotional state of being, [but] I'm pretty sure I'm not imagining this.' My husband looked at me and said, 'What other baby do we know of that moved in the presence of Christ?'"

Pregnancy initiated significant self-reflection. With such different bodies than they had had for much of their lives, women found themselves approaching embodied life from new perspectives. They possessed greater appreciation for the body's strength and its capacity to change. Fullness rather than lack proves an apt description, as limitations were humorously tolerated and the sense of pregnant possibility reigned supreme. Reflection was not limited to the self, or even to the baby and the self. A baby's

awareness that the mother is engaged in the holy work of proclamation anticipated a fullness of preaching also.

The Pregnant Preacher and Her Congregation

Amid more intimate self-reflections, female preachers interacted with their congregations. Here the fullness of the pregnancy was challenged by eager parishioners, who often flooded women with intrusive questions, unwanted attention and unsolicited comments about their changing bodies. Each woman reacted uniquely in such occasions, but they all worked to keep in place the professional relationship affirmed in the pregnancy announcement. The blurring of boundaries occurring within them, between mother and child, was contrasted by outward efforts to create stronger boundaries between themselves as preachers and their congregations.

Once congregations were aware the preacher was pregnant, they maintained a steady interest in the unfolding pregnancy. They inquired frequently about the woman's health. They noted weight gains or other physical changes. Rev. Lockhart began to expect the regular check-up questions while greeting worshippers at the sanctuary door each Sunday. She said "I remember a friend saying how exhausting it got for people to ask 'how are you feeling?' every week for seven months." Upon hearing her cheerful "things are great," reply, congregants moved on to her appearance. Rev. Lockhart was a slight woman of medium height, whose growing belly was quite noticeable. She was frequently told she looked like Friar Tuck in her robe with the belt tied just below her belly. She said "Every week someone would come up to me and make the same joke about where the belt was, as if I hadn't heard it already. Several people said 'if you get much bigger that

robe isn't going to fit.' I remember thinking Wow. I'm okay with being pregnant and looking big but I'm not okay with people commenting on it." Reacting in a similar fashion to similar comments, Rev. Williams privately created a list of things people shouldn't say to a pregnant woman. The list included "You've looking plump these days," "there she is eating again" and "Don't do anything to hurt the baby." "It is interesting" she reflected, "that people feel like they can say whatever they want when you are pregnant. For me, it was constant." Unsolicited, and often slightly derogatory remarks about the size of their bodies or the amount of food of their plates stirred discomfort in these preachers. Aware of their very public roles, women viewed the comments as tangible reminders of how intently and often judgmentally others watched their bodies. Rabbi Levin also experienced how "people make obnoxious, although not necessarily malicious, comments about the size of my belly." She concluded that "having the body changes happen in front of a congregation," creates another situation in which congregations act "as though your body belongs to them. What you do and what you look like, they can comment on." None of these women articulated anxiety about their changing bodies. Attuned to its fullness, they emphasized the healthiness associated with proper weight gain and a well-balanced prenatal diet. Their disquiet stemmed from others' comments about their bodies. As Rev. Lockhart accurately articulated, when a woman realized "I'm okay gaining this weight, but not okay with you commenting on it" she instinctively recognized that a congregant had crossed the boundary.

Faced with an off-putting remark, Rabbi Levin typically smiled and kept moving. She noted her displeasure, sensed the congregant had crossed into her personal space and occasionally drew a mental line between herself and the commenter. As was her custom,

she strengthened her internal defenses without verbally challenging the boundary transgression. Possessing a more open, relaxed personality, Rev. Lockhart considered herself a very public person. Few remarks nettled her. She often enjoyed a free flowing give and take with church members that bordered on friendship. She was surprised by her reactions to congregants' inquiries about her pregnancy. When asked "How are you feeling?" after church each Sunday, she appreciated the care yet rarely said anything beyond "all is well." She explained, "It was hard in this very public thing. People are constantly asking you about it. If I was feeling really anxious about something, I couldn't spill that on them." In fact, she consciously chose not to share her anxiety on them, even while recognizing the uniqueness of that choice for her. She learned she didn't want to provide the private details of her pregnancy to her congregation. She said, "I am not as public as I think I am. I'm very open but there are limits to that, and I hadn't known them that much until this whole experience."

In addition to frequent comments and questions, parishioners touched the bellies of their pregnant preachers. Reaching out to feel the belly was a more evocative and intimate action than noticing eating habits or weight gains. Each woman had her own perspective on having her body touched. Rev. Harris said, "I'm a fairly touchy person. I hug people all the time at church. It depended for me on who it was, what the context was. If it was someone I felt comfortable with, then I didn't mind. I've touched other pregnant women's bellies. It is a really cool thing. I can see why people would want to do it." As long as she was in the right space, Rev. Harris welcomed sharing her pregnant embodiment with others. Rabbi Levin was a more private person. Acutely conscious of the multiple times she felt inappropriately touched, she said, "Lots of people didn't ask

before they touched. I definitely remember having this feeling that my personal space had been invaded. Again, I was public property." Occasionally she would ask someone not to touch her. But typically she would walk away while silently protesting, "this is my body. It does not belong to the entire congregation." Rev. Williams had drawn a strong line around her belly prior to its most prominent growth. She expected that her request would decrease the number of times she was touched, but not eliminate the touching all together. She was pleasantly surprised when "not a single person in this congregation touched my belly without first asking me." The pre-established belly boundary further strengthened her ability to interact with the congregants who struggled with her request. "I had one woman who came up to me and said, 'I'm going to touch your belly yet,'" she elaborated. "And her husband goes, 'I keep telling her not to.' And I said 'Resist the urge, resist.' And so we all laughed and she walked away and it was fine."

Young's work on pregnancy focused upon the processes occurring within a woman's body. Her argument is largely an internal one. Her notions of doubling or splitting relate to the pregnant body's expansion, as two lives share one house. From this perspective, pregnant embodiment is characterized by a fluidity of boundaries. The strength of the argument lies in its reclamation of the body's resourcefulness. By re-orienting the body's boundaries, Young promotes a pregnant woman's lived awareness of her embodied strength and potential. These female preachers, though, were also public figures. They were constantly relating with congregations highly interested in their doubling bodies. The process of preaching pregnant stretched thin the already established boundaries between parishioners and pastors. Invited into an intensely personal and physically focused nine months, congregations often enacted that invitation by being

overly invested in or inappropriately inquisitive about mother and baby. Many of their behaviors are socially sanctioned and replicated far beyond the domain of female preachers and their churches. But as they juggled an additional splitting or doubling in the task of being both preacher and pregnant woman, these women established boundaries. Sometimes they knew enough about themselves to create a boundary before the fluidity of their body began in earnest. Sometimes a boundary transgression prompted new insights and they found themselves crafting stronger limits. And like every other aspect of embodied life they felt their way through the pregnancy, negotiating with the congregation as the months unfolded. But however the boundaries came to be, what was internally fluid became externally firm.

Preaching about Pregnancy

Amongst their boundary establishing decisions, women faced choices about whether or not to bring their pregnancies into their sermons. While they sometimes referred to their pregnancies in passing ways, they rarely decided to incorporate their pregnancies in any meaningful form into the content of the sermons. Given the rich descriptions they had already offered about being pregnant, their silence in the pulpit stands out. Although such silence might be interpreted in several ways, I would argue women carved out a space in which their pregnancies took a supporting role to the primary task of preaching. They were still very much pregnant as they preached – even liturgical robes could not hide their growing bodies – but by not explicitly mentioning their pregnancies or their soon to be born children they asserted another set of limits.

When the interview topic turned to preaching about pregnancy, women first named their hesitation. Each remembered those in the pews who longed for a child or grieved the loss of a baby. Pastoral sensitivities, it seemed, dissuaded them from drawing explicit attention to the emergent life. Alongside a desire to protect listeners from undue pain, women wanted to avoid anything that might encourage further the congregation's overly active attention to the pregnancy. Pregnancy said Rev. Harris "is very personal, very physical experience and I was not sure I wanted to talk about it in a public way." Rabbi Levin echoed her sentiments. "While I definitely used my pregnancy as a prop," she said "making slight references to it or a joke in passing, I never wanted to get very personal." The personal dimension of pregnancy for both themselves and their listeners seemed at odds with the public nature of proclamation.

Occasionally an element in worship made it impossible not to refer to their pregnant status. Rev. Shannon Baker was preaching one Sunday when the epistle lesson came from second Timothy. She sat listening to a parishioner lead the congregation through words that included "women being saved through childbirth." Eight months pregnant at the time, she then walked into the pulpit, said "Well, I know I'm saved" and proceeded to preach on the Gospel text. She reflected, "I made a joke about it. It was just too strange to preach on that [text] to women who might be childless or infertile. And I couldn't ignore it [the passage] because I was so obviously pregnant." Sometimes pregnancy inserted itself into the preaching moment, as impossible to dismiss as the discomfort of week thirty-nine.

Rev. Harris was the only preacher who recalled a specific time in which she used her pregnancy in a sermon illustration. One Sunday in December, she compared her now

weekly doctor's appointments, in which the nurse checked her weight gain, the baby's growth and position to the measurements taken by those spiritually preparing for Christmas. It was the opening illustration and she moved on quickly to the sermon's main message. Listening to her retelling, the story felt appropriate to the season, personal without being exceedingly revealing and ultimately well contained within the sermon's larger purposes. Most significantly, Rev. Harris offered just one instance in which she included something about pregnancy in her preaching, despite having preached regularly over the course of three pregnancies. For her pregnancy and sermon did not go together.

"I, too, was surprised that I didn't choose to preach on pregnancy too often," said Rev. Lockhart. "It wasn't just because it would get old. It was also that I needed some of it just to be for me and not for everyone to share. Again [it became] one of those places where I discovered the boundary. I didn't want to tell everyone everything that is going on." Some aspects of pregnancy cannot be hidden from public view. But other dimensions are harder to make public. Having a body that is theirs and not theirs, woman may struggle to find adequate words to describe the experience. They may find the process is so intimate that even the closest companions have limited capacity to enter into it. Having something that "is just for me" may be a critical piece of the journey. By not preaching about their pregnancies, women maintained some distance between embodied preacherly life and embodied pregnant life. They created a place where "everyone didn't know everything that was going on." Such a space may have been precisely what they needed in order to preach.

While they did not share their pregnancy experiences within their sermons these women did make rich theological connections between pregnancy and God. They spoke

with passionate eloquence about the insights gained during pregnancy and childbirth. "My emotional understanding of the Incarnation is much more personal now" said Rev. Harris. "Even now, baptism is so emotional. It is hard to get through the liturgy without choking up. In the fullness of time Jesus was nurtured in the water of a womb." Rabbi Levin reflected, "Pregnancy didn't change my theology as much as it affirmed it and strengthened it. A life being brought into this world – how can you not believe in God after that moment? I truly believe we have a partnership with God and that we're all created in the image of God." Such insights eventually wove their way into their sermons. But that happened later, after the baby was born. They chose to keep those connections to themselves while they were pregnant. When asked whether they brought illustrations of their pregnancies into the pulpit, women often responded with memories of sharing stories about raising children. As long as their bodies proclaimed the baby they refrained from mentioning it. In this way, the sermon functioned as another boundary.

Pregnant Identity: Intersections of Body and Self

Pregnancy caused women to be de-centered, existing in a doubled space between their pre-pregnant and pregnant embodiments, between the needs of their growing babies and the calls of their congregations. Through Young's rich contributions, pregnancy can be understood as the process in which the boundaries do become fluid, as well as filled with possibility. To discover the expectant space as a place of fullness is the hope of every mother and quite possibly the God who was made flesh and dwelt in a mother's womb.

When caught up in the fluidity of pregnancy, these female preachers became especially attuned to the fluidity at work between themselves and their congregations. As one set of boundaries broke down in their embodied lives, they created better boundaries in another arena. These decisions were intentional, self-conscious actions, but they flowed from immediate, lived experiences. "I realized I wasn't as public a person as I thought I was" and "I didn't know my limits until they exerted themselves" were apt phrases for the processes at work. One motivating factor for such boundary making moments surely emerged from sensing their bodies were not their own. The assertions of ownership by another happened on two fronts during pregnancy. Congregations continued habits of intrusive involvement. Simultaneously, a baby stakes his or her own claim. "My body is mine, but it is not mine" was a pregnant realization. Rev. Williams shared "I kept saying to my husband, my body is no longer my own. Even my body isn't something I can lay claim to at this point." The assertion of stronger, more definite boundaries, created through limitations on what questions they would answer, what stories they would share or who could touch their swelling bellies came in response to a diminished sense of embodied ownership.

All of this body-talk pushed women into reflections about the self. Young argues that the doubling that occurs with pregnancy illustrates the falsity of a unified self. The self, she asserts, is a project, always in the process of enactment and often enacted through contradiction. Pregnant preachers experienced that contradiction in concrete, reoccurring ways as they held together dual identities as preachers and potential mothers. Preaching while miscarrying, they knew in their materiality the contradictions of birth and death. Trying to preach with less than ample breath and a smaller bladder, they felt

the tension of a body beyond their control and a sermon they were expected to preach. They also experienced the development of the self, as they found themselves speaking up when they previously might have been silent, being surprised by their boldness in setting limits or gaining new nuances to long held theological beliefs. The self was a self in process, a project always under construction. In both the tension of contradiction and the energy of growth, women expanded the boundary of the self.

Pregnancy further brought the conceptions of self and body together with greater urgency. Although an embodied self remains the most accurate terminology, the intense physical changes created, at times, the illusion of a separation between mind and body, mental or spiritual identity and the physical state. In trying to share these experiences women's language broke down. Terms like self and body seemed inadequate to fully delineate the events or questions under discussion. So much focus turned to one's physicality during pregnancy. In one sense, a woman's efforts to set boundaries was a re-assertion of the self during immense changes in the body. Can the self still be the self, when the body changes so much?

Rev. Williams delved most deeply into this topic. Having asserted that the body was only one aspect of one's overall identity, she returned to the topic in her post-pregnancy interview. Here, she wondered about the self and the body.

> For me it [pregnancy] made me realize that we are much more than our bodies. I was still the same person. You are changing and your identity is growing as you come to terms with being a new mom but the fundamental core of who I was hadn't changed any. And yet my body was so different

> than what it was. If my body was my identity and it stopped there, and then that sense of truly who I was would have changed a lot more in that process.

When asked to elaborate on what about the self had remained unchanged, Rev. Williams replied

> I still knew myself to be a child of God. I still knew myself as one who laughs at all the same things and still finds the same things unnerving and still find some things just unacceptable. All of the things that sort of end up creating this sense of identity hadn't really changed. It was just my body that was going through this really crazy time and so I don't really know how to name that.

A strict embodied approach might challenge Rev. William's words, asserting that the body's changes – and particularly the enormous changes of pregnancy – would inevitably change the self. It might be that Rev. Williams' insistence on not changing was a defensive stance. She asserted everything was the same just as everything churned in upheaval. But her openness to examine her pregnancy belies that idea. Another explanation might attribute her position to the long cultural history of placing women in close proximity to their bodies. Acquainted with the notion that a woman, especially a pregnant woman, was just her body Rev. Williams adds in the vastly important other elements of her identity: her theology, her sense of humor and her values. Whatever the reason, she created another strong line, this time drawing a continuum between her pre-pregnant and post-pregnant selves.

The heart of an embodiment perspective is the theory that all knowledge comes through our bodies. Or as Merleau-Ponty states "consciousness is always and everywhere incarnate." Every aspect of Rev. Williams' identity – the on-going project of her self – is gained through bodily life. It stands to reason, then, that the self both shifts and stays continuous through pregnancy. Her embodied self reacted to pregnancy just as it had reacted to other major life events, such as adolescence, college, ordination or marriage. Of course, in pregnancy one shares intimate, physical space with another life. It is different than adolescence, college or ordination. But the knowledge gained in pregnancy can be a deeper awareness of the physicality of all life. The self is added to or enhanced, but rarely loses touch with the self previously constructed. "I still knew myself to be the same person. It was just that my body was changing so much" is an accurate depiction of the pregnant self.

Before, during and after pregnancy, these women preached. The insights they discovered as pregnant preachers proclaim something about preaching. In the previous chapter's discussion of performance in preaching, Richard Ward's argument that a performance perspective deepens our understanding of "why we preach at all" was used to make an argument about the use of the embodied self in proclamation. But Ward's emphasis stays firmly focused on the preacher's embodied awareness of the other. He quotes Wallace Bacon, who states, "You cannot know yourself by yourself. You are you because you are not the other, but you can find yourself only by going out from yourself…."[382] Ward concludes "A performance-centered approach to preaching

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[382] Richard F. Ward. "Performance Turns in Homiletics," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 30, no. 2 (1996), http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=340(accessed October 10, 2011).

emphasizes that the aim of the preacher is to develop this "sense of the other" in the process and practice of preaching."[383]

Pregnancy is a profound time of othering. Rather than going outside the self to learn of the other, women looked inside to discover an "other being" profoundly connected to them and also in the process of becoming entirely not them. They came to know themselves by hosting the life of another. Such knowledge can and should enlarge our preaching. The pregnant preacher both learns of herself and becomes reverently aware of "the opportunity to give voice and embodied presence to the Other."[384] Rev. Williams' term for such othering was stewardship. She framed pregnancy as a process that deepened her understanding of being a steward of the world. Naming the holy discomfort of sharing the space of her body, she would say to her husband, "my body is no longer my own. Even my body is something I cannot lay claim to at this point." It was, for her, an exercise in stewardship. Her grasp of embodied stewardship challenges preachers to think of their embodied proclamations within the same stewardship framework. Because she says it so well, she will have the last word:

> It really changed my understanding of the Holy Spirit. We always talk about the Holy Spirit being God in us and in other people, and to have this new life being birthed from within me made that more tangible for me. Sam has been his own person from the moment that he was conceived. [But] That something could be inside of me and a part of me and not me that really helped me understand the Holy Spirit better. I found myself often singing the song Sanctuary, Lord make me a sanctuary in that

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[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid.

> whole process. Yeah, it was cool. And I'm not a singer…so it was only in the shower.

Stewardship in preaching begins with the preacher's embodied existence. Pregnancy brings to the forefront many of the issues accompanying the living body, including how the body can assert its presence, how an individual and others relate to the changing form and most especially how a rupture can emerge between physical body and the living self. In Rev. Williams' experience, the challenges presented by pregnancy provided the possibility of deeper embodied knowledge. The potential for other ruptures within embodiment – and the women's movements in response – will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EMBODIED PREACHER: APPEARANCES AND DYS-APPEARANCES

In the summer following first grade, the Reverend Jane Lee contracted polio after a swim in Lake Ontario. She spent weeks in the hospital, isolated from her family and from the freedoms of her early childhood. She watched as the baby in the crib beside her died. Although she counted herself one of the lucky ones, sent home with working legs after the worst of the symptoms subsided, she would endure innumerable surgeries, countless weeks on crutches and limited physical stamina for the rest of her life. “All of it became part of my identity,” she said.[385] Despite the challenges, she continued, “I was determined be as normal as possible.” So for decades she plowed through surgical reconstructions, returned to work in a walking cast and learned to “push through the pain” when her body’s cries for rest were at odds with the demands of her life. She could do this, she said, “because the body is awesomely made. In polio the muscle fibers that were orphaned from the death of the nerve cells are innervated by adjacent muscles, who grow extra nerves, attach themselves to the orphaned fibers and they began to work.” But several decades after the onset of the disease, polio survivors typically lose their remarkable capabilities. The muscles that grew extra nerves are now giant motor neurons. After years of supporting five hundred or more additional fibers they experience “metabolic fatigue.” “They began to drop out,” explained Rev. Lee, “and because they

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[385] Personal Interview with a Female Preacher, November 29, 2010.The names of all interviewees are being held in confidence by mutual agreement. For more information about this qualitative study, see the Appendix A.

had taken over so many nerves, you would lose a lot of function quickly." Once able to sustain her identity as an "essentially able bodied person with a little problem," she encountered the life-changing limitations of post-polio.

The ministry was a second career for Rev. Lee, begun after several decades as a distinguished teacher of nursing. When she had walked a hospital floor with her students the post-polio symptoms of pain, fatigue and limited mobility had been present in minimal, minor ways. They were on far greater display in her church setting. Now she found herself having to sit in the hospital lobby before visiting a parishioner, exhausted from the walk from her car to the building. The demands of a pastoral emergency, whether it came in the form of a late night interruption or through the multiple tasks of a funeral, could leave her limping for days And on the Sundays that she preached she crawled into bed after worship and slept until dinner.

Rev. Lee approached preaching with trepidation. She loved scripture. She possessed the gifts of wise interpretation and gentle words. But she hated preaching. Serving on a large church staff, she preached only occasionally. Yet as her preaching day loomed near, her anxiety soared. She knew she could craft a good sermon on paper. She doubted her ability to deliver it. Specifically, she knew the physical hurdles she would face in attempting to deliver it well. "First of all," she explained, "preaching is hard physically. It is. It is exhausting." Rev. Lee had dealt with occasional exhaustion at other points in her life. On rare occasions, she had had to retire to bed for a couple of days after a busy work or family season. Preaching on a Sunday morning drained her completely. "I physically couldn't stand up for more than twelve to fifteen minutes," she said. "I always needed the lectern to hold on to, so I used only one-handed gestures and would pour

energy into the intonations of my voice. And when the style of preaching moved to the more informal style, I couldn't do it." Her dread of preaching began before she reached the pulpit. "I always had anxiety about the steps [up to the pulpit]," she said. Whenever she climbed them "the awkwardness of my gait was embarrassing to me. It was very anxiety-producing, just the physical piece of getting up there and getting down." Rev. Lee thought about her body at each stage of a sermon. Preaching proved arduous for her, as a sense of inability - "I can't do that" - became attached to basic tasks. "My disability has informed my ministry in very significant ways," she concluded, "not just emotionally and spiritually but also the physical experience of it."

Rev. Lee was one of two preachers in this study whose preaching embodiments were informed by long-term, chronic physical conditions. The tasks associated with preaching – walking to the pulpit or stage, standing for a prolonged period and using gestures – were more demanding for the individual whose body had less mobility, strength or stamina. One might approach an exploration of Rev. Lee's preaching embodiments through the lens of disability. Post-polio syndrome would meet most understandings of what counts as a "disability," generally defined as an impairment or restriction in a person's ability to perform a function to a typical standard evidenced across individuals or groups. Rev. Lee made use of some items that often count as markers of disability, including a handicap parking permit and, on occasion, a wheel chair. And she sometimes described herself as disabled. When comparing her preaching to her colleagues, she judged herself as lacking the expected skills necessary for "informal preaching" or standing without a supportive hand on the pulpit. A framework

of disability could help illumine some of these choices and experiences, and the ways they matter – and do not matter - to Rev. Lee and to her congregation.

While a disability framework can do important work, a lived-body approach can do more to grasp how, using Merleau-Ponty's terminology, Rev. Lee's body "rises to her tasks." A lived body approach is less concerned with what Rev. Lee can or cannot do, because every body can and cannot perform some tasks, and more intrigued by how Rev. Lee lived in, with and through the limitations and potentials of her body. A lived body approach shines a spotlight on how Rev. Lee experienced her body, wanting to examine when she was most cognizant of being bodily, when she made intentional uses of her body and when her body's presence faded from conscious view. Focusing on the body's presence and absence to consciousness has the additional advantage of demonstrating greater continuity with analysis of the preaching embodiments of each woman in this study. Every preacher had moments when her body's presence came to the forefront of her awareness, as well as moments when she "forgot" her body while preaching. Examining these rhythms of bodily presence and absence can expand and deepen our understanding of the diverse approaches to embodied preaching.

The Absent Body: The Contributions of Drew Leder

In his phenomenological exploration of the body, Drew Leder poses "the question of why the body, as a ground of experience, tends to recede from direct experience." [386] While affirming Merleau-Ponty's orientation to the body as the mode and medium through which we experience the world, he argues that our primary experience of the

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[386] Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1990), 1.

body is often of its absence. Even though "human experience is incarnated" and "the body plays a formative role," Leder writes, "this bodily presence is of a highly paradoxical nature. While in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence."[387]
Hoping to heal the long-standing opposition between mind and body, the abiding Cartesian paradigm, Leder illuminates how biological and physiological realities make the body disappear so long as it is functioning properly only to re-appear in prominent and problematic ways when dysfunction occurs.[388] "Certain modes of disappearance are essential to the body's functioning," he writes.[389] "These disappearances particularly characterize normal and healthy function."[390] Because we tend to think less about the body when it can fully "enact its projects" and find ourselves unable to stop thinking about the body when it breaks down or is in pain, the self becomes identified by cognition, the thinking we do when the body recedes, and the physical body, obvious in distress, is rendered an "it" opposed to us.[391] The disrupted body becomes separate from us, an "Other" – or object - opposed to the self.[392]

A preacher who easily bounds up the pulpit steps and stands at will until she chooses to move may either forget her body, rendering it absent to her perception, or feel so alive to her movements that she feels free in her body, released from the prison of former constraints. Rev. Lee, awake to her pain and aware of her limits, will not forget

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[387] Leder, 1.
[388] Leder, 4, 69. In speaking of the body's processes, he writes, "the body falls back from its own conscious perception and control. As ecstatic/recessive being-in-the-world, the lived body is necessarily self-effacing." Leder, 69.
[389] Leder, 69.
[390] Leder, 69.
[391] Leder, 76-7.
[392] Leder, 69-70.

her body. She might describe her body as absent, but here it is "the very absence of a desired or ordinary state."[393] She detailed her preaching through a series of tasks her body cannot do: I cannot preach beyond fifteen minutes, without holding on to the lectern, or in a relaxed, informal style. She experienced her body as constricting her preaching.[394] Leder terms this body the "dys-appearing" body. He writes, "In moments of breakdown, I experience to my body, not simply for it. In contrast to the 'disappearances' that characterize ordinary function, I will term this the principle of dys-appearance. That is, the body appears as thematic focus, but precisely as in a dys state…." [395] Akin to persons with pain or disease engaged in other tasks, Rev. Lee's landscape for preaching is "viewed not as a field of possibility but of difficulties to negotiate. The ordinary sense of free and spontaneous movement is now replaced by calculated effort; one does not want to take chances."[396] In her most pain-filled or weakened state, the body "stands in the way, an obstinate force interfering with our projects."[397] Rev. Lee wants to walk comfortably up to the pulpit. But her body slowed her down. She admires the easy stance of a colleague, who preached as if he were carrying on a conversation. But she must concentrate on the calculations necessary for her to stand for fifteen minutes. Her body appeared precisely as an "obstinate force" opposing her efforts to preach.

In seeking to explain why an embodied person can experience her physical body as such an oppositional or constraining presence, Leder uses a phenomenological lens to

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[393] Leder, 4.
[394] Leder, 75. Speaking specifically about the impact of pain, he states "The tendency of pain to disrupt our intentionalities never leads to a complete collapse of the world. However, the new world into which we are thrust by pain has a constricted aspect. We are no longer dispersed out there in the world, but suddenly congeal right here."
[395] Leder, 83.
[396] Leder, 81.
[397] Leder, 84.

break apart the long reigning dualism of the body opposed to the mind. He argues that it is precisely our experiences of embodied living that encourage the body-mind split. The body became negatively associated with brute force because the cycle of absence in health and presence in breakdown encouraged precisely such conceptions.[398] Discussing the tenacious association of the self with the mind in Western thought he asserts that "a phenomenological treatment of embodiment must not merely refute this view but account for its abiding power."[399] Drawing on the philosophical distinction between *Körper*, the physical body, and *Leib*, the living body, he suggests, "*Körper* is itself an aspect of *Leib*, one manner in which the lived body shows itself."[400] Thus, an individual's *Körper*, or physicality, is not reduced to mute or unthinking materiality but rather is an integral aspect enabling and responding to the *Leib*. Correspondingly, the *Leib*, encompassing the range of activities, cognitions, emotions and intentionalities integral to embodied life, happens in, with and through the body as an integrated whole.[401] Exploring the lived body as both *Körper* and *Leib* "reveals the deeper significance of corporeality as generative principle."[402] Leder acknowledges how one's experiential sense may remain "the recalcitrant body as separate from and opposed to the "I,"" but he emphasizes that the sense of separation happens within the embodied self.[403] Even the sense that the body has separated from the mind occurs within an undivided embodiment. He explains, "The self that takes note of the body remains a moment of the organism, an embodied self. As I look down on a paralyzed limb I may be struck by the alien nature of embodiment. But I

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[398] Leder, 3-4.
[399] Leder, 69.
[400] Leder, 5.
[401] Leder, 6.
[402] Leder, 5.
[403] Leder, 88.

still use my eyes in looking down, my nervous system in thought, my other limbs in compensation for the paralyzed one."[404] Embodiment becomes the fragile holding together of disparate pieces of living, which exhibit moments of powerful coalescence and which suffer moments of painful rupture. While Leder often uses the term body as a *Körper*, he searched for how the *Körper* shapes and is shaped by the *Leib.* That the *Körper* can be a generative force for the *Leib* creates new pathways towards healing the *Körper-Leib* divide and enabling every living body to find greater communion in the world.

Dys-appearance as a Mode of Analysis

It would be inaccurate to label the female body as an "obstinate force" to a woman's preaching. At the same time, many of the elements traced through Rev. Lee's narrative, including the reoccurring sense of the body as an "Other" and the prevailing sense of preaching as a series of physical difficulties to negotiate, find translation in these women's stories about their preaching bodies. In speaking of clothing and hairstyle choices, some women framed the body as a distraction that needed to be minimized. In recounting her efforts to improve her voice, Rabbi Monica Levin named it a "physical issue" related to her ability to be heard and accepted as the preacher. In discussing her preaching gestures, Rev. Erin Robinson confessed a need to be more comfortable and her sense of "being wooden." Interspersed throughout many stories was a sense of listeners noticing and commenting upon a preacher's physical appearance. While extreme in her sense of the body's weighty presence, Rev. Lee's experience represents a commonly

[404] Leder, 88.

shared narrative of bodily dys-appearances among this group of female preachers. Gender, then, plays a role in how preaching bodies consistently dys-appear.

These preachers, though, did not report only moments of the body's appearance through dys-function or non-conformity to accepted preaching forms. They also shared instances in which the body receded from their awareness, becoming absent in its high functioning state. The reoccurring "I talk with my hands" was one attempt to put flesh to a well-performing body. Preaching with bare feet might be another. These experiences of the body's presence in absence, however, felt more complex and ambiguous in comparison to Leder's polarized dynamic of physical absence or dys-function. An experience of talking with the hands or preaching without shoes resisted a single interpretation of embodiment. To understand how an individual preacher experienced her embodiment entails inquiries about how a preacher is alive in and to her body. She may explain her embodied choices as working ***for*** her body, and thus reveal herself as an embodied self. Alternatively, she might describe a preaching decision or movement as relating ***to*** her body, and thus demonstrate a split between the self as subject and her body as an object. Her sense of agency had a role in her understanding of and response to the ways her body dys-appears.

Leder's analysis of the body that recedes and re-appears provides an excellent avenue through which to study the female preacher's embodiments. In exploring the ways bodily absence and presence weave in and out of the lived experiences of these preachers, this chapter will also examine how preachers stretch towards self-conscious, purposeful embodiments within their preaching and how gender and agency influence those embodied events.

The Appearing and Dys-appearing Body during Preaching

The Rev. Rebecca Harris agreed that preaching is physical work. "Preaching is physically demanding for me, because I do use my whole body," she said. "But it is energizing too." She experienced times of being self-conscious about her body, especially the afternoon she officiated at a wedding while seven months pregnant. "I wore the wrong shoes and I was hot," she said. "My balance had changed and I couldn't stand in the heels. And I had worn a sweater underneath my robe. The whole time I was thinking how hot I was." Pregnancy is a time when the body reappears, made prominent by the physical shifts of housing a life and the socially sanctioned emphasis upon a pregnant woman's body. Rev. Harris experienced a different kind of embodiment on another Sunday, capping a sermon about how the Holy Spirit makes us move with a grand jeté down the aisle. "I was really anxious about it," she remembered. "Are people going to think this is weird? Am I going to be able to do it? But people's response was really good. And I thought, this is a totally different way of preaching."

Over the years of her preaching, Rev. Harris' body appeared and disappeared. Its appearance was dramatic, but not necessarily welcome or unwelcome. She could be uncomfortably aware of her physicality when unsteady and sweating. But she could also sense the energy, a "whole new level of engagement" for both her and the congregation when her body came to the fore and performed well. At other times her body receded into the sermon but its absence was tempered by her sense of its creative strength. Her body mattered for preaching in many different ways, but it always mattered. She thought about its significance in theological language. Believing "we are made in the image of God" with "beautiful, amazing and diverse bodies," she conceived of "the word of God

dwell[ing] within us." She drew upon a Christian theory of the Word made flesh to conclude, "My role as the preacher is to give voice to that word of God, [so that] God wells up in other people." Using embodied life to inform her proclamation, she named the body as the site of God's presence and speech.

Other preachers also experienced the intermingling of body and theology in the midst of their experiences of the absence and dys-appearing of their bodies. Rev. Shannon Baker had a background in vocal performance. She described her preaching as a "whole body performance." She said, "I use gestures, facial expressions, an intonation of voice and my hands. I tend to talk with my hands a lot." She attributed her approach to college days spent in musical and speech competitions. "When you are doing a Mozart opera, you are acting as well as thinking" she reflected. Alongside words about using "everything I have to get the message across," she quickly added that once she is preaching, "I ignore my body." The body receded as it rises to its projects, performing in ways that fulfill and exceed its training. Rev. Baker valued this absence of her body from her consciousness. It is one reason she wears liturgical dress for worship. "The alb helps me ignore my body," she reported. "Once the robe goes on my body is a vehicle or a tool." The body reappeared, though, without its prescribed liturgical cover. One Sunday she inadvertently left her robe at home. "It was just a really strange feeling to be up there without it," she said. "I was very uncomfortable all service long. It was like being naked in front of the congregation." While she didn't describe the particular nature of her discomfort, she did assert, "I think women are looked at differently." Conscious of being looked *at,* she was distracted with thoughts about her clothing. She wondered if her sleeveless dress was appropriate for worship. Her recent weight gain felt more obvious.

For a moment, she moved from living in her body to observing her body. The watchfulness reduced her body to a physical thing, which might be preaching but was also being seen and evaluated. In Leder's language, the absence of an alb made her body dys-appear.

A Social Dys-Appearance

Leder weaves through his analysis the reality that the embodied self is also inescapably social.[405] We recognize our embodied nature in communal spaces, "arising out of experiences of the corporeality of other people and of their gaze directed back upon [us]."[406] While one hopes the directed gaze affirms our solid and situated life in the world, the gaze of others "can tear the body apart from itself," rendering a person highly conscious of her body as a *Körper*.[407] Leder identifies this as a "social dys-appearance," in which various groups of people are known only in and through their physicality. If "the primary stance of the Other is highly distanced, antagonistic or objectifying" then the link of body to self – the link of *Körper* and *Leib* - is threatened.[408] Internalizing the objectified perspective of the Other, "I become conscious of myself as an alien thing. A radical split is introduced between the body I live out and my object-body, now defined and delimited by a foreign gaze"[409] Leder asserts that "modes of social dys-appearance…can be initiated by a discrepancy in power. When confronting another who has potential power over one's life and projects…there is a tendency on the part of the

[405] Leder, 4-5, 34.
[406] Leder, 92.
[407] Leder, 96.
[408] Leder, 96.
[409] Leder, 96.

powerless to a heightened self-awareness."[410] Gendered differences in power mean "that within our culture women tend to be more conscious of their bodies than men." Attuned to the ways their bodies are observed and evaluated, women are more likely to devote intense energy to clothes, hairstyles, jewelry and make-up. They contend with cultural representations that depict not diverse possibilities of embodiment but the female *Körper* as a strange, altered or dangerous object.[411] In social dys-appearance one does not experience her body as her own. Severed from the self, the meaning of the body is interpreted by an external, powerful Other.[412]

During her ten years as a rabbi, Rabbi Monica Levin learned how congregants watch her body. They have noticed, she said, "how my body has ebbed and flowed" through two pregnancies, various hairstyles and New Year's resolutions to join the gym. At the synagogue's gathering for Purim each year, she and other colleagues come in different costumes. One year, she recalled, "I was so cute. I was wearing a Cinderella type gown. I thought I looked like all the little girls." The next year she wore a different costume. "Some of the dads were asking me if I was going to wear the Cinderella dress again. I realized that it was not so much that I was dressed like the little kids but the busty nature of the dress." Such moments, she said, "are definitely times I'm very aware of my body." She continued, "There is a certain degree of neuteredness that comes with being a rabbi, but there are definitely times that they see me in a way that I'm clearly a woman." Rabbi Levin lived her rabbinical role closely attuned to her femaleness. After once

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[410] Leder, 98.
[411] An exemplary exploration of the cultural images of woman as "other" is Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: feminism, Western Culture and the body*, 10th ed. (Berkeley: University of California, 2003).
[412] Leder, 98-99.

accompanying another woman to the labor and delivery room when the baby made a surprise, early appearance, she felt keenly the miracle of "being with other people at that moment of birth or death." Out of her experiences of childbirth and parenting, as well as preaching and teaching, she conceived of her body as a sacred tool. She hoped her preaching brings listeners closer to the ways "our bodies are God's instruments to do God's will in the world." Intermingled with these powerful evocations was the vulnerability of being "woman." Even if it was a complimentary "you look great," Rabbi Levin never forgot "the fact that they are going to notice my haircut when I don't think they ever comment on a male rabbi's haircut or their shoes." Conscious that others are noting her physicality, she joined Rev. Baker in watching her body rather than living bodily. The hovering external gaze threatened her empowered embodiment while heightening the tension between corporeality and selfhood. With each body-directed compliment or criticism, she registered the risk of being owned by the congregation, always "amazed how much people saw [her] as their possession." Like many of the preachers in this study, Rabbi Levin oscillated between the moments when her body appeared, disappeared and re-appeared. On those occasions when her body dys-appeared, the dys-appearance often could be attributed to the social dys-appearance of a female body. The gaze of the Other was not all encompassing. Rabbi Levin retained her sense of embodied potential, naming the living body as a place of divine possibility. Yet the alternate possibility – to be owned by an outside earthly power – remained in her purview. Aware of her body because it was being watched, Rev. Levin potentially preached with a rift between physicality and self. That rift contributed to the lived experience of preaching for her.

Agency amid Absence and Dys-appearance

In his conceptions of the absent body and the dys-appearing body, Leder provides tools for grasping how embodied life comes in and out of view in the preaching experiences of these women. Of course the bodies of preachers were always present, in some sense. But the physical body appeared, disappeared and then re-appeared in the preachers' stories about their preaching. A disability might prompt awareness of the body's presence, just as a flying leap down the aisle might awaken a preacher to the power inherent in her body. An unsolicited comment about her appearance might startle a woman into self-consciousness about her body. Leder's notion of social dys-appearance helps explain these phenomena. But the experience of dys-appearance, while significant, never fully determined the actions women took. In the experience of dys-appearance, a preacher might cover her body with a liturgical robe. She might ask a stranger not to touch their pregnant belly. She might redirect a listener's provocative comment to her preaching or pastoral role. Absence and dys-appearance help illumine the experiential context in which women acted, but they do not determine the ways in which women acted.

Leder's structure of absence and dys-appearance emphasized the negative quality of the body's appearance to consciousness. But women also described how their body appeared in positive, empowering ways. "This is a totally different way of preaching," said Rev. Harris. Rev. Erica Williams drew strength from her growing baby's movements as she wrote a sermon. Rev. Deborah Lewis felt energized on the Sunday she set her sermon to rap and danced alongside the youth who performed with her. Rabbi Julie Kahn

took pride her strong, variable voice, saying, “It is a strength for me. I know when I stand in front of a group, I command attention immediately.” When asked when she most felt empowered in her body, Rev. Emily Thompson recalled the prayer breakfast in which she recited Maya Angelou’s poem “Still I Rise.” She recounted, “There is a line in it that says ‘Does my sexiness offend you?’ So I had to get up at the pulpit and say ‘Does my sexiness offend you?’ I was terrified.” She practiced the poem with a colleague from a nearby theater group, who encouraged her “to own” the words. “And so I did,” concluded Rev. Thompson. “That was four years ago and I met someone the other day who said, ‘You don’t remember me but I remember when you recited that poem.’” These preachers knew the power of their embodied lives.

Furthermore, these preachers expressed a subtler blending of appearance, disappearance and reappearance than Leder’s polarized extremes. Even when it seemed the body completely receded; traces of embodiment were still experienced. Even when it appeared the body was a mere materiality, a brute obstacle to be overcome, the hopeful potency of one’s living body came alive amid proclamation. Quite often preachers exhibited that hopefulness in their conceptions of the body’s role in preaching. Claiming the body as “a powerful tool,” “an instrument for God’s will” and a dwelling site for the word of God, these preacher demonstrated how maintaining an awareness of the *Körper* always involved in the *Leib* generated a deeper understanding of lived experience – and of preaching.

While Leder’s theories help illumine the experiences of these women preachers, the theories can also be enriched and refined by careful attention to these experiences. One reviewer of Leder’s work asserts that Leder “shows concretely how various modes

of the body's absence contribute as much as presence to lived experience."[413] In this study, one preacher stood out for the absence of her body within her reflections about her preaching. Her absent body, as understood in Leder's terminology, was central to her experience and understanding of preaching. At the same time, an analysis of her preaching – and her words about preaching – revealed how Leder's straightforward correlation between absence and presence does not fully represent the complexity of any living body.

The Absent but Present Preacher

The Reverend Laura Martin is the minister of a small, urban congregation where she serves as the pastor, preacher and music leader. Since "singing is [her] way of worshipping God," she enjoys being "fully engaged" with the praise and worship team on Sunday morning until the sermon's beginning. When it is time to preach, she places her sermon outline on the pulpit and then "leaves it" to preach a message she hopes would "live" within the congregation gathered that day. Like many homileticians she imagines preaching as a conversation between God, herself and the congregation. When she tunes into God's presence during worship, she diverts her attention away from her body. When asked about her approach to preaching, she portrayed herself as simultaneously unconscious of and unencumbered in her body's movements. "People say I preach with my whole body," she said. "Others will comment that I kick my legs, I use my hands, that my eyes preach. It is hard to hear talk about my facial expressions because I am not aware that I'm doing that. My body is generally the last thing I am thinking about."

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[413] Walter B. Gulick, review of *The Absent Body* by Drew Leder, *Tradition and Discovery* 18, no. 2 (1991-1992): 45.

Rev. Martin reiterated her lack of focus on her body frequently throughout her interview. She spent little time on bodily decisions prior to preaching. "As far as getting dressed for worship," she explained, "I'm pretty casual. It is no real effort. Something simple. A regular dress. I am limited in my makeup and small earrings." The de-emphasis on the body continued in the pulpit. She elaborated, "Preaching is God using me. For me, it is just not about my body. [While] I don't want people staring at me, I don't think preaching is about me. They don't need to remember what I looked like." Amid these minimizations of the body, she also named her willingness to use her body. "When God is speaking you have to step outside your comfort zone to do what God wants you to do. When it comes to God, I'm uninhibited," she explained. "So God says leap, I leap. Run, run. Stand still, stand still." Not thinking about her body, she employed her body in all manners of movement. Using Leder's framework, her body was absent to her awareness as it functioned well to her expectations.

Rev. Martin's conception of preaching was almost exclusively orientated to God as the author, director and ultimate end point of her sermons. She attributed her body's absence to her belief in God's transcendent, activating presence. Through an entire sermon, she reported, she asks, "What do you want to say to this, God?" Focused on a divine movement rather than her body's movement, she nevertheless did move. She used her body to jump, kick, whisper, wave, walk and stand still. Daringly free in her body, Rev. Martin professed no pre-mediated plans or post-sermon knowledge of these actions. She even suggested a bodily disconnect amid the sermon. She said, "In preaching, sometimes I feel like and people will tell you, it is another person. They know it is my voice. But even for me it is an out of body experience." This moment out of her body, of

course, happened through embodiment. Open to her body, her body became less and less present to her. Becoming less and less conscious of her body she used her body more and more.

Interspersed with her body-effacing words were layers of bodily awareness. Rev. Martin thus far has avoided watching videotapes of her sermons. Yet she voiced a longing to observe her preaching face, a tacit acknowledgement of the rhetorical power of nonverbal expressions. She professed a long-held disinterest in her body's presentation, saying "I was never one of those girls who cared much about her appearance." But she wore well-crafted, elegant clothes and straightened her hair to lie simply around her shoulders. It may be that "not caring about her appearance" equaled a well-chosen but pared-down self-presentation. And it may be that she had nurtured habits of dress such that her choices did not require much thought or planning. These ingrained choices reflected great care, even as she did not experience a consciousness about her care. In addition to the ways her absent body was deeply embodied, Rev. Martin's appearance hinted towards some inklings of embodied awareness. The awareness was woven into and guided by her lack of self-consciousness, but her absent body did not erase it entirely.

Embodied awareness also emerged in her stories about her preaching relationship with her listeners. She described how she uses her body to strengthen the connection between pulpit and pew. When she first began preaching, Rev. Martin was a manuscript preacher. She felt a distance with the congregation, as if the papers formed a wall between pulpit and pew. Subsequently her hope became "to be that person who knew her manuscript verbatim. I would love to have every word so polished." But even when she preached from a memorized manuscript, she said, "I was still thinking 'okay what word

now.' I couldn't connect with the congregation." One Sunday, she inadvertently left her written sermon at home. Forced to preach without it, she realized "it felt like freedom." From that experience, she learned "I can let go. I can trust God in this." She also gained a new reliance on her body's knowledge. Reiterating the need for a sermon to live, she felt a sermon come to life when her eyes left the printed page and focused upon the listeners' reflecting gazes. "I had every 'i' dotted and every 't' crossed," she said, "but when I have your eye, I could reach you in some way beyond reading the manuscript or even memorizing it." Rev. Martin identified her efforts to be acutely alert to what is occurring within the worshipping congregation and to God's leading as the foundational knowledge for each sermon. She then conceived of acquiring that knowledge through her interactions with the "corporeality of other people."[414] "For some reason, I need to touch you," she reflected later. "I may not know what is going on but if I can hug you, touch you [then] I can tell how you are doing." Having described preaching as an out of body experience, Rev. Martin also used her material being – and the physicality of others – to increase her connections to her listeners. Although her body remained an absent body, working in expected and habituated ways that keep those bodily deployments from presenting themselves too strongly in her consciousness, Rev. Martin had not lost touch with her body's capacity for insight. Leder argues that the intellect grows out of basic sensiory perception. [415] Correspondingly, Rev. Martin's groundedness in the embodied interactions between herself and her listeners increased her perception of the needs within a worship service. Living as a body profoundly present in its absence, she gleaned from her embodied knowledge skills to increase the power of her preaching.

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[414] Leder, 92.
[415] Leder, 7.

Rev. Martin's preaching body illustrates precisely Leder's phenomena of a body that recedes from awareness as it performs within the world. Claiming, "preaching is not about my body," she exemplified a living body engaged in preaching. "The body is "absent" only because it is perpetually outside itself," writes Leder, "caught up in a multitude of involvements with other people, with nature, with a sacred domain."[416] Rev. Martin's body faded into the background as she moved deeper into involvement with God and the congregation. She experienced herself as outside of her body, not because she has become disembodied but because her conscious attention had become so fully engaged beyond herself. At the same time, Rev. Martin maintained a tacit awareness of her integral embodiment. Her *Körper* did generate new manifestations of her – and her congregation's – *Leib*.

Although existing on the far side of embodied preaching descriptions, Rev. Martin was not the sole preacher to describe moments of bodily presence through absence. The Rev. Joan Anderson once had the song "This is the Day" resonate in her spirit all through the week. "By Sunday," she remembered, "it was so deep within." She asked the musician to play the song following the sermon. Feeling "propelled" she walked down into the congregation and began dancing. "I grabbed one [congregant] by the arm and swayed and then went to another and swung [them around]. It wasn't a conscious thing. It happened. Afterwards I felt, 'Gosh that was foolish. What are they going to say? What kind of simple acting pastor do we have?' But I haven't heard anything back at all." When sharing the story, Rev. Anderson placed it alongside an earlier time in her preaching when her nephew had commented to her "Aunt Joan, why

[416] Leder, 4-5.

are you standing there so stiff? It is like you are scared" after church one Sunday. Acknowledging, "I think he was right," she presented her morning of dancing as a time she felt free of any self-conscious constraint to be a body moving in surprising and risky ways.

What set apart the episodes narrated by Rev. Anderson and Rev. Martin – as well as Rev. Harris' grand jeté and Rev. Thompson's recitation of "Still I Rise" - came through the absence of self-consciousness. While she would worry – "do parishioners think I am a simple-acting pastor?" – after the service, *during* the service Rev. Anderson was engrossed in her body. The significance of these experiences did not lie in the specifics of the movements. Dancing is not more embodied than standing still. Instead, the instances were marked by the preacher's work to set aside or lift the social constraints accompanying female dys-appearance. Not distracted by being watched as an object, the preachers experimented with liberating uses of their bodies. Each of these instances displayed how female preachers found ways to embody their sermons. Upon choosing such empowering embodiments, they were drawn to continue to be physically present, buoyed by their own experiences of a body present to a sermon and their congregation's positive reactions. The meaning of the sermon lived in and through the body. And in their bodies, women had a glimpse of transcendence.

The Too-Present Body

Alongside moments of transcendence were moments in which the concrete needs of a preacher's specific materiality necessitated time, attention and purposeful care. Rev. Martin represented those moments when a preacher transcended self-consciousness about

the body. Rev. Lee exemplified the more intense decisions accompanying bodies requiring additional care. But most preachers in this study possessed bodies that functioned reasonably well. These preachers dealt with what they experienced as more mundane challenges, like an unfamiliar accent, a rickety knee or, as in the case of Rabbi Levin, a short stature. Having already modified her vocal expectations, Rabbi Levin also addressed how to preach behind a large, high pulpit while standing slightly below five feet tall. In the sanctuary in which she regularly preached, she required a step stool to be seen from behind the pulpit. Even then, she said, “I’m still not always sure if the people in the back row can see my full face or just the top.” As she dealt with the logistics of keeping the stool at the ready, she was continually alert to how her height caused her body to dys-appear and how to interpret her embodiment for the congregation.

Rabbi Levin typically pulled the stepstool in position behind the pulpit prior to a worship service. Occasionally, a custodian would pass through the sanctuary and unknowingly return the stool to its storage place. When Rabbi Levin shared a service with another rabbi or a cantor, the stool needed to be moved whenever her colleague spoke. The movement of the stool – behind the pulpit, away from the pulpit and then back again – created an additional tier of negotiations. “It is a challenge,” she acknowledged. “Just figuring out the dynamics is an extra piece of the puzzle.” The moment of ascending the stool becomes quite noticeable on those occasions when she had “to bend down and make a point of pulling it out.” She said. “It doesn’t pull out easily, especially if you are wearing heels.”

The actions around the stepstool directed her and others’ attention to her height. That focus only increased in services that included youth. When she stepped onto the

stool at a bar or bat mitzvah, she occasionally referred to herself as "the one who looks like a bat mitzvah kid." She joked about "the rabbi who has to stand on the stool to meet you eye to eye" and she grew to expect a soft ripple of laughter whenever she had to set the stool into place. In fact, humor became one of the main avenues through which she acknowledged her height. During her interview she characterized her responses to her step stool maneuvers as the choice either "to laugh, ignore it or to be self-deprecating." Although Rabbi Levin appreciated the light-heartedness of these moments, she also admitted her conflicted emotions. "I don't wish I were taller" she said, "[but] we're about something very serious and there is a moment of laughter first. It takes away from what I'm going to say." She categorized her height as "something that I struggle with in terms of my identity as a rabbi." In the pulpit and beyond, 'there are setting in which people don't see [me]." Not sure if they actually fail to see her or fail to see her as the rabbi, she simply termed those moments as times when "I'm not as visible."

When the body does not rise to its tasks in the ways we desire, argues Leder, it appears as "thematic focus."[417] In these situations, the body – in its pain, disease or limitation – becomes the locus of attention and mode for interpretation. Life revolves around the themes inherent in the unfolding dilemmas of the body. At other times, the challenges of an individual's physicality become prominent through a prompt from the person. Self-conscious of a body's quirk or minor challenge, a preacher might accentuate that aspect of physical existence, potentially extending its presence and influence. In these instances, "thematizing about the body can itself bring about dysfunction."[418] Like a piano player who suddenly can't play because he or she is too self-conscious about how

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[417] Leder, 83.
[418] Leder, 85.

the fingers are finding the keys, the preacher may become so engrossed in handling a troublesome trait of her physicality that she diminishes some of her embodied capacities.[419] Understandably vigilant about the stool presence and placement, Rabbi Levin often relied upon humor at her own expense to ease the awkward transition. But her joking manner drew even more attention to her height. Depending upon the congregation's reactions, her choice for humor might even diminish her preaching presence. She sensed how laughter robbed the sermon's beginning of its solemnity and how perceptions around her height potentially decreased her visibility.

The temptation to purposefully frame the conversations around the body was present for any preacher concerned about how the idiosyncrasies of her body appeared to the congregation. Whether it was the disability of polio, the distinctive process of pregnancy, a temporary shift to "street" clothes rather than a robe or an unalterable height, a preacher might feel inclined towards interpreting her body solely through that mode of embodiment. She might become excessively explanatory or overly dismissive of her bodily differences in ways that increase the listeners' attention to her body. She might make jokes about her body. Each mode of response, though, risked overwhelming her preaching by making her acutely consciousness of her body's presence. The desire to publicly promote a specific understanding of her body may be strengthened by the preacher's femaleness. With social dys-appearance placing an emphasis on her physicality, the female preacher becomes habituated to being hyper-conscious about every sound, step or shift of her body. She may well stumble in her body just as the pianist tripped on her newly remembered fingers. In addition, the preacher who

[419] Leder, 85. "Self-awareness can allow us to seek help and effect repair. However, it can also exacerbate problems, intensifying anxiety or a slump in performance."

thematized her body risked splintering the body from the self through her focus upon her physicality. Rabbi Levin knew her innate pulpit skills. She remembered the congregant who emailed her to say, “you are a born rabbi, posed, reverent, beautiful and inspiring.” But she lost some of her strength and her poise when the moment came to step up on the stool. Her light-hearted call and response with the congregation offered a regular, poignant reminder of her bounded embodiment and, perhaps, her own self-conscious discomfort with her body. At its best, thematized embodiment holds the potential to generate critical reflection that leads to a renewal in preaching. But in those moments when the preacher created a theme about her embodiment, and especially when she interpreted an element of her body that she can experience as constricting, she also risked deepening a rift between body and self.

Every preacher preaches with and through bounded embodiment. And in those embodiments, every preacher makes choices about how to conceive of, explain or promote the facts of her physicality. Rabbi Levin weighed her choices around acknowledging her height, knowing that it would be noticed whether or not she mentioned it. She then exercised her agency by choosing humor, and blended that choice with the occasional decision to ignore her small stature. The implications of her choice were readily apparent in her ambivalence, for she wondered if the laughter decreased the capacity for her to grow into her rabbinical role. Simultaneously, the stool functioned as an important symbol in her preaching. She needed it in order to preach. More importantly, to dismiss the stool was to dismiss the particularities of her body. Without a connection to the specificity of her body a preacher risks losing the power of her own embodiment. There is no easy, perfect or permanent answer to avoiding the instances in

which the body trips over itself to become thematized to consciousness. The choosing, acting preacher continually moves between acknowledging how the body dys-appears and re-casting those disappearances as vital ways in which the body connects to, informs and is the self.

Standing Up to Preach

Each of the women in this chapter has addressed the ways the body comes in and out of focus during preaching. The moments of appearance, disappearance and dys-appearance shaped their experience of preaching, and the meaning they attached to their preaching. The choices they made when the body came more prominently into view enabled subsequent embodiments. Since every embodiment had accompanying strengths and limitations, the critical task for each preacher arose in how she found ways to maintain and strengthen the connections between her physicality, selfhood and proclamation. One preacher, living with a congenital disease, synthesized the paradoxical pieces of body and preaching in such a way that embodied life fed into embodied preaching. A close listening to her narrative reveals how the rhythms of embodiment – its connections and ruptures, its presence and absence – informed her understanding of herself as preacher and her preaching.

Ms. Clark was born with a mild case of cerebral palsy. This disease of the central nervous system is "characterized by paralysis, weakness, incoordination or any other aberration of motor function."[420] Having worn leg braces as a child, Ms. Clark now walks with a barely noticeable limp. She has diminished mobility and near normal strength, as

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[420] William M. Cruickshank, ed. *Cerebral Palsy: A Developmental Disability, third ed*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1976), 1.

well as a quirky sense of humor and a self-professed love of talking. When asked to talk about her disease, she presented an upbeat, almost casual attitude. “I’ve never thought about it” she replied. “Sometimes I limp and sometimes I do not. As I age, the limp can be there more often. It hasn’t affected my actual life very much.” She characterized her occasional limps as a small inconvenience among a larger sense of health. Maintaining the same tone when the topic changed, Ms. Clark downplayed the effects of cerebral palsy on her preaching performance. She acknowledged, “my balance under stress can be worse than my balance normally and the stage we preach on wobbles a bit.” She categorized a single instance when she gripped the music stand throughout a sermon as a distraction quickly resolved by the next Sunday. “I’m not particularly excited to do a lot of walking around” she continued. “I pretty much stay in one place. I don’t know how much of it is cerebral palsy and how much of it is new preacher who doesn’t want to be away from her notes, lest I forget.” While her cerebral palsy played a prominent role in each of her responses to questions about her body and her preaching, Ms. Clark consistently minimized its significance. Like Rev. Lee’s early determination to “be as normal as possible,” Ms. Clark appeared to be working to decrease its impact on her embodiments and its role in her experiences of her body’s presence. Yet, her body did dys-appear through her limps, unsteady balance and occasional fatigue. She seemed caught between a dys-appearing body and her hopes for an absent one.

The paradox of dys-appearance and absence continued when Ms. Clark answered a question about her theology of the body. She first replied, “I don’t think I am as into my body as other people are. I’m sorta taken off the board because of the CP thing. I don’t care about my hair or my make-up. I have always been that way about my body. I think it

is rooted in the CP." In this response, Ms. Clark used her disease to diminish the other manners in which the body can appear, stating that she simply didn't think about the adornments connected to her bodily presence. Being "taken off the board" as a body also hinted to some negative associations to her specific body. Leder named how the dys-appearing body possessed an absence characterized by the "absence of a desired or ordinary state."[421] Ms. Clark separated out her thoughts about her body from her perceptions of others' thoughts about their bodies. This may indicate her lack of concern for other types of body appearances and disappearances – like being judged attractive or unattractive. It may also hint to a fissure between her body and her self, her *Körper* and her *Leib*.

After a brief silence, Ms. Clark offered more. "I think Incarnation. God came in a body, that God suffered in a body is valuable to me. You walk this line between saying, "your body is not all of who you are" and saying, "look, claim your body." To someone with a birth issue, you can say, "you are beautifully and wonderfully made." With her second response, Ms. Clark introduced two views of the body that appear slightly contradictory at first glance. Understanding the body as mere physicality might lead a person to profess, "your body is not all of who you are." Affirming the need to "claim your body" moved closer to embracing the *Körper* as one aspect of the *Leib*. As Ms. Clark traveled the boundary between materiality and lived body she named the rupture in a way that offered avenues for healing it. Between "your body is not all of your identity" and "claim your body, wonderfully and beautifully made" there was room for growth, not away from the body but within the body's knowledge. Merleau-Ponty wrote "we have

[421] Leder, 4.

found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body."[422] It is this embodied knowledge carried within our living existence that Ms. Clark pointed towards in the paradox of physical body and living self.

Ms. Clark loves to preach. She called preaching "the most important thing I do, the most life giving thing, the thing that if they took everything else away and let me have it, it would be enough." Having once practiced law, she drew some parallels between the witnessing of the courtroom and the truth telling of the pulpit. But the aim of preaching remained the alternative realm of God. Although initially presenting an attitude towards embodiment that minimized both her disease and her body, Ms. Clark grew more realistic about her living body's barriers as she spoke about the way she felt her body's presence when she preached. Preaching became the moment when she encircled her *Körper* into her *Leib*. Ms. Clark said, "I think having cerebral palsy is why I put so much weight on the moment of rising to your feet in that moment after the anthem or whatever comes before preaching. There is the silence and the waiting and I feel the congregation waiting and the act of standing is my moment of decision as a preacher." Every time she stood, amid the "O God, here we go sort of feeling" in the pit of her stomach, she was conscious "that the instant where your brain sends the impulse to your leg muscle is my moment of faith confession. It is a courageous and crazy act of faith to stand up to go to the pulpit." The biology behind rising to her feet was not lost on Ms. Clark. "I think" she said "cerebral palsy makes that moment what it is for me, because it is more work for me to stand and remain standing in a very subtle way than [for] most and so I ground my

[422] Merleau-Ponty, 239.

preaching there."   The dys-appearance of her body became itself a resource for her testimony.

A preacher's experiences of the body's dsy-appearance, then, are not solely negative or constricting experiences. When the body appeared by virtue of an injury, disease or lack of ability, an individual gains valuable knowledge about how her living body was grounded in materiality. She learns the resource of her living body. New avenues are forged into the knowledge within the body, a symbol of the generativity inherent at all levels of lived existence. And with new knowledge, a person discovers new methods for agency. Interestingly, Ms. Clark's body did not recede from her consciousness when she stood. Instead, she was able to stand precisely out of an intimate, embodied knowledge of the cost of her standing. With that, she learned anew the power of her ability to move. Making the moment into a confession of faith, Ms. Clark accessed the awesome wonder with which the body is made, the possibilities on her own embodied agency – her choice to stand and confess – and the sacred link between her living body and God's speech.

The Embodied Preacher: Appearances and Dys-appearances

Like Ms. Clark's ability to glean knowledge from her body's dys-appearance, the intermingling of appearance, disappearance and dys-appearance across these female preachers witnessed to the power of bringing the body, one's physicality, into one's consciousness. In many respects, the guiding goal of this study has been to illumine the body's appearance within the self-reflective, purposeful choices of these preachers. Even those moments of dys-appearance - when the body first felt its presence as an obstacle -

could be occasions for deeper knowledge, greater agential power, and more faithful proclamation. Whether it was Rev. Martin's commitment to leap when God says leap, Rabbi Levin's deliberations about how to interpret her shorter statute, Rev. Baker's willingness to use voice and hands, or even Rev. Lee's trepidation to listen to her body's pain, every time a woman worked to integrate her materiality into her lived body, her *Körper* into her *Leib,* she increased her ability to act as a body. To act as a body did not mean that every preacher strove towards Rev. Martin's absent yet present body. Nor did it mean that escaping the effects of post-polio was the only avenue for greater embodiment available to Rev Lee. Rather, these preachers acted as a body as they deepened their awareness of the body's knowledge, the wisdom we possess by virtue of "the fact that we are our body."[423] Since agency rested in the body, the capacity for choice unfolded as the women grew more and more present to their embodied existence.

Alongside considerations of agency, Leder's theory of social dys-appearance raised questions about the role gender plays in these preachers' embodiments. Leder argued that the female body dys-appears as women took in the objectifying gaze of society and were culturally conditioned to pay close attention to their bodies. The women in this study experienced that kind of gendered dys-appearance. Many had moments of temporarily forgetting their bodies but more often they described constant, close attention to and consciousness of the body. The dys-appearing body contributed mightily to these experiences of preaching. Rabbi Levin's sense of her congregation's ever-watchful eye upon her female body stood as a stark reminder about the impact of a body even partially split from the self and how social dys-appearances can diminish embodied life.

[423] Merleau-Ponty, 239.

But the women in this study also lived and preached in ways that cannot be captured by Leder's emphasis on the functioning of the absent body and the problematic nature of dys-appearance. They showed how a preacher's dys-appearing body could generate new testimonies about embodied life. Caught in the moment of rupture between materiality and embodiment, the preacher who grappled towards understanding how and why her body presented as dys-functioning moved more deeply into her flesh and learned more about the meaning of her flesh for herself and others.

The preachers in this study showed how a critical, faithful consciousness of one's body can even become a source of connection to God and others. Reflections on her cerebral palsy lead Ms. Clark into talk of Incarnation. And setting boundaries around her pregnant body allowed Rev. Williams to form new connections with her congregation. Speaking specifically about the biology of the body, Leder argued that every person is "sustained through a deeper "blood" relation with the world.[424] With bones bearing the same calcification as the inanimate world and cells playing host to millions of bacteria, "my body everywhere bears the imprint of Otherness."[425] Corresponding to the ways a performance in preaching can reach out to the Other of text or audience and to the ways pregnancy can enlarge an individual's capacity for that which is alien or other to us, a dys-appearing body can serve as an occasion for a preacher's recognition of the Otherness contained in her flesh. Such recognition itself is a form of embodiment, an Othering that assists a woman who wants to embrace her own preaching body, and, as that body, reach out to others and to God.

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[424] Leder, 66.
[425] Leder, 66.

CONCLUSION: EMBODIED PREACHING AND EMBODIED LIFE

This has been a study about how the preacher's body impacts, forms and ultimately speaks through her preaching. It has been sought to address how a preacher's living body – her actions, thoughts, movements and decisions – come to life within a sermon. Since we are our bodies when we preach, an examination of the multiple facets of bodily life illuminates how integrally and inescapably intertwined a preacher's embodied self is with her preaching.

What began as a study of a preacher's decisions about her body became an exploration of embodiment, the ways we always live as a body. Embodiment encircles both the physical body and the living self. To speak of embodiment is to reach for the collection of meaning and perceptions, habitations and movements an individual possesses, and through which she acquires coherency and competency in her world. Daily questions about what clothes to wear or what ways to move the body ultimately delve into deeper questions concerning identity. The embodied self is a fragile and incomplete self. Individuals can display different selves at different moments or situations. By attending to her own materiality and consciously deciding how to present herself on a given day, a woman gains knowledge within her body. She creates meaning by being alive to her embodied existence.

Too often conversations about the body, while soaring in their eloquence, quickly veer away from the actual body. This tendency reoccurs in theories about the body, in theological reflections and in homiletical literature. Yet the ordinary experiences of a small selection of contemporary female preachers demonstrated how the dilemmas about

the body emerge time and time again. When asked to describe their embodiments, women named concrete, significant and frequent decisions upon which they devoted much time, attention and thought. The impetus for this research originated in the female preacher who wonders why her body garnishes so much attention - for herself and her congregation - and yearns for stronger methods by which to be an embodied preacher.

The experiences of these fourteen women demonstrated how every choice, decision and action, regardless of how apparently inconsequential, held meaning. Many of the choices narrated in these pages were made at the intersection of the preacher's awareness of her body's potential to distract and her hope for her body to proclaim. Rev. Thompson's decision to wear a black cassock in a Baptist church touched upon themes of distraction and potential proclamation. A decision about preaching garments encompassed her personal preference for a robe over a suit, her experience of having the length of her skirts surface as a topic of conversation at a church meeting and her embodied awareness that a robe felt more covering – and thus more freeing. Rev. Williams' decision to announce her pregnancy with a strong message to keep the "hands off the belly" carried her sense of the congregation's interest in her body and her awareness of the cumbersomeness of her growing belly. Her decision was deepened by subsequent experiences of the baby's movements while she wrote a sermon. While the hope of the body's powerful presence stayed strong and steady, the moments of embodied distraction also remained ever-present. Every woman interviewed touched upon the possible link between distraction and femaleness. The potential for a female preacher's body to distract *in its femaleness* never strayed far from considerations. Thus

the female preacher's body, while not the shocking spectacle it has been in other centuries, still carries contentiousness as a preaching body.

At the same time, the preachers in this study continued to make choices and weigh the best ways to preach bodily. The stories they shared raise questions about agency, often conceived as a straight forward dichotomy between freedom and constraint. When beginning this research I believed the narrative would play out as a story about how female preachers have been long constrained in the pulpit and how they wrestled bodily towards freedom. In reality, agency is a far more complicated thread to untangle. What looked like a choice towards freedom – a rebellious decision to wear potentially provocative clothes or to preach with enhanced theatrics – was revealed to also be a choice shaped by cultural conditioning. Every choice was an occasion that illuminated how deeply bound a preacher was to her history, her body, her tradition and her congregation. Such insights are not necessarily negative ones. Merleau-Ponty argues we can only choose because we have a field within which to choose. The limits of agency, rather than being a simple case of limited freedom, might uncover the infinite power contained in every preaching body.

If we believe the preacher's body has great power, then the field of homiletics bears responsibility for fostering the capacity for embodied living. This study seeks to create a reflective mirror for female preachers who are preaching today. By reading the stories of other preachers' bodily decision with an accompanying set of theoretical reflections about embodiment, women will hopefully gain sturdier tools through which to think of their own bodies. The skills of self-consciousness and intentionality are especially helpful. To know something of why one makes the choices one does, and to

think about the meaning and message of any embodiment will only increase a preacher's effectiveness.

For those who study, write about and teach preaching, this study aims to change the on-going conversations about the body. Currently, professors of homiletics profess that the body is vital to preaching. We affirm that the body starts the sermon before the preacher opens her mouth. We state that the best preaching postures flow naturally from the preacher's unconscious self. Each of these statements begins, though, from a stance of looking ***at*** the body. To look at the body is different that experiencing ***to*** the body. Current homiletical practices of separating delivery from other aspects of sermon evaluation perpetuate a looking at rather than experiencing to the body. Continuing to affirm, directly or indirectly, historical and culturally biased expectations about how the preacher is to sound, move or act work in the same manner. How might we teach preaching as a bodily task performed by diverse, ever shifting, material, living selves? How might we evaluate preachers from a stance that inquires about the fullness of their embodied life? And ultimately, how can we give preachers the tools towards embodied living, such that they grow ever more sure of being living bodies proclaiming God's words to other living bodies?

Drew Leder writes

> This body's roots reach down into the soul of an organismic vitality where the conscious mind cannot follow. Its branches spread throughout the universe. When I gaze upon the stars, or the face of

> another, or the symbols of divinity, I transgress my limits. Through the lived body, I open to the world."[426]

For the women of this study, preaching was a holy place rich with the possibility of transformation. Every preacher who strives to live keenly as her body will increasingly discover how embodiment not only makes preaching possible but how transgressing our limits compels us to preach all the more.

[426] Leder, 173.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND METHODOLOGY

Description of the Project

This is a qualitative study, which the researcher understood herself as a participant-learner and assumed an interpretive, naturalistic approach. Qualitative research begins from a critical, inductive stance. The researcher asked broad, open-ended questions in hopes of understanding the experiences of female preachers as they describe them. It is expected that the study and subsequent scholarship will be guided by the gathered research and will shift in focus as the interviews proceed.

This research project was designed to explore the ways female preachers present, use and experience their bodies as they prepare to and are preaching. The aim of the research focused on delving more deeply and understanding more clearly the female preacher's experience of embodied life and how those experiences influenced their practices and understandings of preaching.

Fourteen female preachers in the Baltimore-Washington, DC metropolitan area participated in the study. The research was comprised of three parts: individual, one-on-one interviews, a small group interview and observations of the women preaching. All research was completed between 2009-2011.

The questions contained in the interviews included inquires about how an individual prepares her body to preach, the factors affecting her decisions about clothing, hairstyles, jewelry and make-up, times when the individual experienced her body

detracting or supporting her preaching and experiences of preaching while pregnant. The small group questions were developed from the responses in the one-on-one conversations. In this interview, the group of women were asked to reflect on language used around bodily attractiveness and bodily distraction, their understanding and connection to female preachers across history, and to discuss together the implications of different theologies of preaching on how they thought about and present their bodies.

Methodological Procedures

The women who participated in this study were recruited by word of mouth through the researcher's own professional connections in the Baltimore-Washington region. The researcher also circulated a letter of introduction through the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Office of the United Methodist Church. All women lived and worked in this geographical region. To participate in the study, a woman needed to be a clergy person who preached at least two times a month.

Fifteen different women responded to the inquiry and fourteen participated. All women agreed to a one-on-one interview. Interviews typically happened in the participant's church setting and lasted approximately ninety minutes. The Question Guide for one-on-one interviews is included in Appendix B. Follow-up contact happened with most women, typically through email communication. In two cases, subsequent interviews were also conducted. Six women participated in one group interview. Ten women were observed preaching. In four cases, the researcher attended a worship service in which the participant preached. In six cases, the participant was videotaped while she was preaching in her preaching context and the researcher watched the video.

The group did contain some diversity in religious traditions, age and racial make-up. Nine women were clergywomen within the United Methodist Church. Two women were Reformed Jewish rabbis. One woman was a Unitarian Universalist minister, one was ordained in the American Baptist Church and one woman had been ordained in the AME tradition but was now serving a Presbyterian congregation. In terms of race and ethnicity, four women were African-American women and ten women were Caucasian. Not every participant volunteered her actual age. In broad strokes, women ranged in age from the mid-twenties to the early seventies. Approximately half of the women clustered around thirty-five to forty-five years of age.

All participants were given a letter of introduction about the project as well as an informed consent document. All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Immediately following her interview, the participant was assigned a pseudonym, which has been used for the duration of this project. The creation and storage of interviews recordings and transcripts, as well as the storage of the videotapes of preaching has followed the ethical standards set by Vanderbilt University's Institutional Review Board within the Human Research Protection Program.

APPENDIX B

QUESTION GUIDE FOR ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS*

1. Preparing the Body to Preach

- Tell me about your routine before you preach.
- Describe how you typically prepare your body to preach. What do you typically wear, including makeup, shoes and jewelry?
- What factors affect your decisions about dress?
- How do you style your hair when you preach? Why?
- As you prepare your body to preach, do you aim for a certain persona or style? If so, what factors affect your chosen style?
- Have you ever radically changed your physical appearance while you have been preaching regularly? If so, what factors led to the change? How did the congregation receive you?
- As you think about your decisions in regards to clothes, hair or jewelry, what factors weigh most heavily upon your decisions?

2. The Body Preaching

- Describe your preaching voice, including the rate, range and volume you typically employ when you preach? How does the congregation receive your voice?
- What gestures do you typically use as you preach?
- Describe the physical space in which you preach. Do you feel comfortable in the physical space? Is it too small or too large for your physical frame?
- Have you ever felt constrained by your body as you preach? If so, describe.
- Have you ever felt empowered by your body as you preach? If so, describe.
- What comments or feedback have you received specifically relating to your body from your congregation?
- Describe your style of preaching.
- Do you ever- for the sake of preaching – wish your body were different than it is? If so, what kind of body do you find yourself wishing for? If not, why?
- What is the role of the body in preaching?
- What is your theology of preaching?

3. The Body in General

- What is your theology of the body?
- How do you feel about your body on most days?
- How do you think about your body's role in preaching?

4. Pregnancy

- Have you ever preached while pregnant? If so, describe your experience.
- How did you dress when you preached? How did you make decisions about attire?
- How did the bodily changes of pregnancy affect your preaching?
- What was your congregation's reaction to your pregnancy?

5. Preaching Models

- Who do you identify as your preaching models? What preachers do you really admire? What do you remember about their bodies? Their preaching styles?
- Tell me about the first time you heard a woman preach. What was she wearing? What did she look like? What did you notice about her?
- Tell me about a preacher who rubs you the wrong way. What don't you like about her preaching style? Her voice? Her appearance?

*In qualitative research, these questions serve as a general guide. The interview follows the lead of the interviewee. The research asks an opening question and then subsequent questions are based upon the interviewee's responses.

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