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From Consensus to Division: Tracing the Ideological Divide Among American Catholic Women, 1950–1980

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the changing images of womanhood within two American Catholic publications: *Catholic Mind* and *Catholic Digest*. In the early 1950s, the periodicals had similar constructions of women, with a divergence in thought in the 1960s. *Catholic Mind* wrote very little on women for the majority of the decade. *Catholic Digest* in the 1960s featured women who worked in traditionally male roles while they also maintained that women's primary sphere was in the home. The difference between the two publications becomes stark in the 1970s. *Catholic Digest* leaned conservative to mainstream and focused on women's roles in home and secular society without asking ecclesial questions. *Catholic Mind's* articles on women primarily examined ecclesial roles (e.g., women's ordination) and demanded equality in the secular world. This fissure in female identity among American Catholics coincides with the political divide in the United States more generally.

From Eleanor Roosevelt to Melania Trump, from Cinderella to Fa Mulan, from Dorothy Day to Maria Goretti, from mothers of 12 to virgin mothers of one, there are a host of images to serve as models of womanhood. Obvious from this short list, many of these women magnify particular aspects of femininity while they minimize or obscure others; these images tend to invite controversy, pleasing some groups and offending others. Although images of womanhood have changed in the Catholic imagination according to time and place, prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) they changed more or less collectively among American Catholics. For the first half of the 20th century, Catholics shared a fairly monolithic view of the proper role of women with little deviation (Dolan, 2002). The cultural revolution of the 1960s bifurcated this longstanding consensus into two distinct Catholic worlds, a division that parallels the political divide in the United States more generally (Hunter, 1989; Lakoff, 1996; Wuthnow, 1988).

This article examines the cultural divide as it occurred among American Catholic women. Catholic women in the United States offer a more dramatic look at this cultural fissure because they not only experienced the general ideological changes in American society with the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, but they were also directly affected by the feminist movement and the Second Vatican Council. Further, unlike other denominations that have separated into smaller subgroups to accommodate ideological diversity (e.g., Lutherans dividing into the progressive evangelical Lutheran Church in America and more traditional Missouri Synod), Catholics remain a single denomination. Thus, rather than having ample cultural space to specify what is properly Catholic, Catholics navigate a contested space where they struggle with their coreligionists to define what is central and peripheral to the faith (Bruce, 2011; Cuneo, 1997; Dillon, 1999; Konieczny, 2013; Konieczny, Camosy, & Bruce, 2016). The more obvious nature of this political contention among Catholics magnifies the ideological and cultural shifts of American society more broadly.

In order to understand the changing cultural meanings of womanhood, this article will examine the portrayals of women within two Catholic periodicals during this time period. Other literature has established the role of magazines in communicating ideas and ideals of the feminine (Turner, 2008). To look to some recent works, one study notes gender egalitarianism is held alongside heteronormativity in a Canadian triathlete publication (Couture, 2016). Another finds a changing notion of femininity and romantic love in a three-decade examination of horoscopes (Gresaker, 2017). A third article demonstrates that a gaming magazine began its publication with a reflexive use of gender, only to use virtually exclusive masculine language within a few years (Kirkpatrick, 2017). The study here also uses content analysis to see the ways these magazines offer windows to popular ideas about gender, using content analysis to arrive at a socio-historical analysis of the changing notions of womanhood among Catholics (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

It is important to situate this analysis within the context of other scholarship on media and public opinion. Some studies report that the media have a negligible impact on public opinion (McGuire, 1985). Others believe that the media influence the topics people think about, with little impact on the content of the beliefs themselves (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). And still others contend that in setting the issues people consider, the media shape public opinion a great deal (Entman, 1989). Recognizing these important top-down studies indicating that media may in fact shape public opinion, it is also important to note a bottom-up perspective: Especially for popular publications seeking to win readers, public sentiments shape what is published. From this vantage point, these articles are important because of the ways they *reflect* their readers' views of Catholic womanhood. That is, I am analyzing these articles from a demand-side perspective, recognizing that the publications are attempting to appeal to a cultural niche for their readership. Rather than theorizing the effects these articles could have on their readers, I argue that these articles offer an important lens to view shifts within the Catholic imagination over these 30 years of cultural transformation (Schudson, 1989). To clarify, the direction of influence does run both ways, but the analysis herein takes a demand-side perspective, using popular media as a window to determine the images and meanings of the Catholic imagination at the time.

In recognizing that each medium must resonate with its audience to be effective and culturally consumed, this study treats these articles as cultural artifacts that offer deeper descriptions of sociological trends. The articles provide insight to several things: the lived experience of women of the time, particular ideals of womanhood, contested understandings, and glimpses of dissenting voices. This study more generally highlights the importance of media as a primary source for cultural insight on popular beliefs and ideologies at a given point in history.

Methods and Data

To determine the ways the notion of womanhood evolved through the preconiliar and postconiliar periods, this article examines two popular Catholic publications, *Catholic Digest* and *Catholic Mind*. I chose these periodicals because they enjoyed a substantial readership and were written throughout the critical decades of this 20th century cultural shift. Although both periodicals begin with fairly uniform conceptions of women, *Catholic Mind* later becomes more progressive and *Catholic Digest* remains more centrist, leaning somewhat to the right.¹ Articles were selected by perusing the table of contents within these publications and reading all articles that had a title indicating that it was for or about women. After reading these, articles in which gender was a peripheral issue were excluded. To be clear, these types of articles were completely excluded and are not apparent in any of the article totals. Clear patterns emerged from the included articles, establishing both journals' dominant narrative on women within each of the decades, albeit with a minority of dissenting articles. A

¹A more conservative publication was not available simply because I could not find a publication that was both in print throughout this entire time frame (1950–1980) and did not become so conservative that it only spoke to the sentiments of a relative few, especially after Vatican II. For example, *Ave Maria*, a more mainstream conservative periodical, ended publication in 1970. *The Wanderer*, which did not publicly endorse Vatican II until 1970, is too fringe to represent the typical conservative Catholic.

limitation to this study is that the author was the lone coder, so there is no confirmation of intercoder reliability.

After coding, the articles were grouped into one of two categories: those that reinforced these norms and those that challenged gender norms of their time. The most prevalent themes that were grouped into this first category include maternity, that wives should emotionally support their husbands, women as pretty or graceful, nuns as devoted to service, charity as feminine, profiles of women who were especially altruistic, nuns as very holy, and domesticity. The most common subcategories among those who rejected the prevailing notions of gender at that time were nuns in traditionally male roles, nuns as adventurous, women in public life, women working, nuns breaking gender norms, supporting the feminist movement, supporting women's ordination, asserting that the essential differences between the sexes warrants women's equal presence in civic and ecclesial life, featuring women in the Vatican or in Church roles, and that the Church needed to radically rethink its understandings of women. Articles were excluded from analysis if there was not a significant number of articles that addressed that theme (e.g., virginity) or did not have any apparent gender expectations (e.g., mother-in-law woes).² To clarify, unless noted otherwise, only articles that could be classified as either reinforcing or undermining typical gender roles of that time are included in the percentages. *Catholic Digest* has far more articles than *Catholic Mind*. This resulted in a fair number of exclusions for *Catholic Digest*—36 in the 1950s, 22 in the 1960s, and 21 in the 1970s—and no exclusions for *Catholic Mind* (due to the smaller number of articles, small quantities of a theme could not warrant exclusion). Although quantitative data are provided, the analysis of these articles is qualitative. That is, the primary focus here is on the broader themes of womanhood articulated in the articles, with the percentages indicating theme frequency rather than a measure of statistical robustness.

A word on the periodicals themselves. *Catholic Mind* was founded by the Jesuits in 1903. The readers of *Catholic Mind* appear to have a stronger Catholic identity³ than those of *Catholic Digest*, reflected in the inclusion of magisterial documents and the greater percentage of articles that were explicitly rooted in Catholic thought. *Catholic Mind* thought of itself as literature that “cannot be read on the run” and its circulation was steadily growing in the early 1950s, from 10,672 in 1949 to 12,327 a year later (Masse, 1950, p. ii). At the close of the publication in 1982, however, the circulation was about 5,000 (Stockwell, 1999).

Catholic Digest published its first issue in November of 1936 and in 1938 began incorporating secular sources; by 1950 it was a bricolage of American pop-culture—akin to a Catholic version of *Reader's Digest*—with many of the articles on women reprinted from *Redbook* and similar secular sources. This was a deliberate choice on their part, with the editor promising readers in 1941 that they would not find any “sickly, pseudo-pious writing” within the pages (Klejment, 2003, p. 106). It had a circulation much larger than *Catholic Mind*, with 100,000 print orders in 1940 (Klejment, 2003), 500,000 in 1952 and peaking at 850,000 in 1957 (Klejment 2000). The magazine experienced its first drop in circulation in the early 1960s, reflecting the shrinking market that many Catholic periodicals experienced at this time. *Catholic Digest* was published monthly in the years studied as was *Catholic Mind*—other than 1957–1962 in which the latter was produced every two months. It is important to use these popular sources to see the ways Catholics made sense of the changes in their religion and world. Official Catholic teachings on women's primary role as mother remained fairly static during these decades (compare Pope Pius XII, 1945; to Pope John Paul II, 1988). At the same time, the Catholic Church came to emphasize spousal equality over patriarchy within marriage (compare Pope Pius XI, 1930; to Pope Paul VI, 1965). Using a socio-historical lens, these magazines

²The reason that I excluded articles with few others of their theme was that with only one or two articles within a theme it was difficult to conclude, without ample comparisons, whether these supported or undermined traditional gender norms.

³While the facets of what makes any group's identity stronger or weaker than another is certainly debatable (Cuneo, 1997; Dillon, 1999; King 2017), for these purposes it indicates the degree to which the magazines engaged with official Catholic teachings, even as the writers may disagree with these documents.

reveal that the *popular* understanding of womanhood within Catholicism changed considerably in this period, yielding two distinct cultural frames with which to understand Catholic womanhood.

To eschew the onerous task of counting each article, the number of articles was estimated. I did this by sampling the January issue of each publication in 1953, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1973, and 1978; a cursory look indicated these were representative of the other issues within that year. These estimates indicate that *Catholic Digest* published just over 3,000 articles in the 1950s and 1960s and approximately 2,500 in the 1970s. *Catholic Mind* published roughly 1,100 articles each decade. In *Catholic Digest*, roughly 4–5% of the articles were for or about women across the decades. In *Catholic Mind*, 1.3% of the articles were on women in the 1950s, dropping to 0.8% in the 1960s and skyrocketing to 2.3% in the 1970s.⁴ Although *Catholic Mind's* percentages reflect small changes absolutely, they are relatively large changes, publishing roughly three times more articles on women in the 1970s than in the 1960s.

Catholic Women in the 1950s: Mother, Wife, and Nun

In the 1950s, the two periodicals had similar constructions of women. Women actualized their identity through motherhood, with a handful of articles discussing the lives of nuns. The articles featured women as mothers at varying stages and truly enjoying their many, many children. This was a universal sentiment within the periodicals, with only one article on motherhood in the entire decade significantly breaking with this romanticized maternity. To quantify the articles in broad strokes, a large majority of the articles on women—66% of the included articles in *Catholic Digest* and 80% from *Catholic Mind*—reinforced typical notions of femininity. Working women and those breaking gender barriers were the most common themes among the dissenting voices. However, even these reinforced the norm as the women were by and large unmarried and therefore not seen as shirking their domestic responsibilities.

One article that reinforces gender expectations was an early 1950s profile of Phyllis Moran, depicted as beautiful and selfless (Caldwell, 1952). Moran had eight children and was also a model. The author described her as appearing to be 23, although she was actually 30. The article goes on to read, “her voice is high-pitched and light. Her whole personality radiates a lovable, bubbly child-likeness” (Caldwell, 1952, p. 24). Although she was a mother, she was also paradoxically portrayed as juvenile. The author praised her tactful and poised maternal skills, saying “any number of her children can beset her at once. She patiently and gently listens to everybody at the same time and seems able to disentangle the stories and give each one the desired consolation or advice. Minutes later, she may be up dancing with one of them, and you would think that being the mother of eight children was the most fun in the world” (Caldwell, 1952, pp. 26–27). The author revealed the noble and undaunted mother when writing of the night the Morans’ home caught fire. Unable to escape as she and seven of the children were trapped on the second floor, “Phyllis stood coolly at the back window, while a concerned neighbor woman kept shouting, ‘Why doesn’t somebody rescue Mrs. Moran!’... Only when the frightened little ones were being comforted by the older children did Phyllis climb down the ladder” (Caldwell, 1952, pp. 27–28). This sort of self-sacrificial, yet joyous mother was a typical caricature in the articles of this decade.

The large-family ideal is quite common in this decade. *Catholic Mind* featured St. John Vianney, who died in 1859 (Flanagan, 1953). The article recalled that he told a pregnant woman who had misgivings about adding yet another child to her already large family, “you look very sad, my child, but be comforted. If you only knew the *women* who will go to hell because they did not bring into the world the children they should have given it” (Italics mine; Flanagan, 1953, p. 9). Not only does this article highlight the expectation to have large families, but it also places this responsibility on the shoulders of the mother, not the father, and warns her of eternal punishment should she fail. Another article features

⁴These percentages for *Catholic Digest* and *Catholic Mind* include all of the articles on women, not just those that were easily classified as reinforcing or undermining gender roles typical of the time.

Rose Sparaci, who gave birth to two boys and raised an additional 100 children (Turkel, 1955). Sparaci had always given a home to six foster children at a time—the legal maximum. The reader met Johnny, who was about to make his first communion, and learned that over 50 of her children had served in the military, underscoring the patriotism of Catholicism at this time. Sparaci joked that the poor mailman has to carry quite a load on Mother’s Day and Christmas and added, “the house was always full of children, the way houses are meant to be” (Turkel, 1955, p. 9).

The articles treated working women, especially married working women, with ambivalence. An article stated that women worked for three basic reasons “companionship, the desire to feel needed, [or] ‘not enough to do at home’” (Taft, 1953). While the author found these to be noble reasons and criticized those who “lambast working wives,” she suggested that alternatively this same sort of fulfillment could—and should—be found through volunteering (Taft, 1953, p. 554). This and other articles made it clear that not only were work and home in competition for women’s time, but that domesticity was the better choice.

However, despite the social expectations of domesticity and maternity, there were also women who dissented from this, indicating that this did not fully reflect women’s experiences and sense of self. One anonymous woman wrote a letter to the Virgin Mary, revealing her apprehension in facing an unplanned pregnancy, “for it is only in myths and sentimental lore that life’s coming is a gentle and delicate thing. In reality it is somewhat ruthless. One is aware very early of the presence of an alien being. . . Many good and reasonable arguments have been given in defense of babies, of motherhood. But they do not seem apropos just at this moment” (Anonymous, 1953, p. 705). She went on to lament of her plans that will be postponed, agonized over the already difficult budget and dreaded the “long months of physical handicap, depressing fatigue, the discouraging struggle back to strength. . . from the physical standpoint the thought of another child is almost appalling” (Anonymous, 1953, p. 707). She finally concluded that a child is simply a cross in disguise, a gift of mortification for one’s own salvation. This hardly echoed the experience of the charming and effervescent Phyllis Moran, model and mother of eight. While the vast majority of the articles may have portrayed women as youthful and excited to nurture large families, this article indicates that many women were quietly unhappy to have yet another child. This article should not be written off as an outlier as these are not diary entries, but articles that came to an editor who carefully weighed whether or not a particular piece would resonate with the readers. One can conclude that in the 1950s Catholics harbored a dominant ideal of women as wives and mothers at the same time that there existed a subculture—literally anonymous in this instance—that privately rejected this.

Catholic Women in the 1960s: Beginning of Division

In the 1960s, the two periodicals had a very different approach toward women’s issues. *Catholic Mind* wrote fewer articles, less than 1%, on women than in other decades and much of it was ambivalent, recognizing traditional categories at the same time that it invited readers to reconsider these. The dramatic shift that comes in the 1970s indicates that this quieter time was a period of renegotiation of the periodical’s attitudes toward women. While the Catholic Church continued to teach that women’s primary role was within spiritual or biological motherhood, many American Catholics came to question this norm. With so many changes in the lives of American-Catholic women, including Vatican II and feminism particularly, this soon-to-be-feminist publication could not offer a clear position amid all of the turmoil. Many things that were once taken for granted by American Catholics (e.g., Mass is to be said in Latin, women are to be mothers or nuns) were being challenged or negated altogether. In these unsettled times, *Catholic Mind* opted for ambivalence over inconsistency and incoherence. Again, to lump the nine articles on women into three broad categories—a third category was necessary for this decade—four of the *Catholic Mind* articles rejected the prevailing view of women’s roles, one lauded motherhood and four others were ambivalent. This final category includes articles that saw the value in things like motherhood and

a strong mariology at the same time that they pushed their readers to rethink these and plumb Catholic tradition and their personal experiences on these points.

To look at this ambivalence a bit more closely, one of the *Catholic Mind* articles of this decade is among the first to offer Mary as a model for all Christians, not limiting her holiness to women and girls, “what He asks of you and me is active receptivity—that, when we hear the word of God, we welcome it, and Him, within. For on this depends our holiness, our oneness with God, our redemption—the openness, the freedom, the utterness with which we can respond: ‘Be it done to me according to Thy word’” (Burghardt, 1968, p. 31). This author, a Jesuit priest, sees Mary as a model for everyone, regardless of gender. The lesson of discipleship within Mary’s assent to become the mother of Jesus, he contends, lies not in her pregnancy but rather in her “yes” to God, a universal invitation God extends to all. Seeing Mary’s “yes” as central rather than her maternity, both affirmed and challenged traditional mariology and notions of proper womanhood and manhood, raising questions for the next decade to answer in more concrete ways.

In contrast, *Catholic Digest* continued to publish articles about women at the same rate as in the previous decade, with about one-third of the articles rejecting the gender roles of the time and two-thirds reinforcing them. This decade saw the greatest number of religious brothers and sisters in the history of the United States (D’Antonio, Dillon, & Gautier, 2013) and the number of articles on nuns more than doubled compared to the previous decade, from 22 to 54. *Catholic Digest* published fewer stories on nuns breaking barriers and more on the many services they provide. This began a shift in their portrayal of sisters, writing a lower percentage of articles on their adventures and more on their service and other-regarding behavior. Looking to single and married women, articles examined those breaking cultural barriers both in the workplace and within the Church, but often motherhood remained an underlying theme. The result of this perspective makes a fair number of the *Catholic Digest* articles difficult to classify as simply supporting dominant gender norms or undermining them; even the profiles that highlight working women tend to have the dominant gender norms just below the surface.

An example of this duplicitous lens was “Lady With a Baton,” which featured Carmen Campori, a renowned symphony conductor (Madden, 1961). The article pointed out a double standard in the industry: “A woman conductor must be careful about things a man can blithely ignore. . . Toscanini could hurl his watch at the musicians, and get away with it. People would say, ‘What a personality—strong, decisive!’ If a woman did anything like that she would be called hysterical” (Madden, 1961, p. 81). Although acknowledging the double standard, the article did not criticize it. It later illustrated the effective and more “feminine” ways Campori goes about dealing with her frustrations as a conductor. The article concluded, in keeping with the maternal sentiments of the day, by pointing out that the greatest hardship of her career is that it often takes her away from her family.

Just a few months after the close of the Second Vatican Council, *Catholic Digest* published a lengthy article on the ecclesial roles of women in the early Church (Meyer, 1966). The article upheld Church teaching prohibiting women from the episcopate and presbytery at the same time that it was innovative in arguing for women in the diaconate. The author wrote, “theologians have never denied that there were deaconesses in the early Church. What they did was much worse. They denied that they were truly ordained” (Meyer, 1966, p. 83). The article then went on to say that the sacramentality of the order of deacons was exactly the same in the early Church for both males and females. Clearly there were writings that pushed the limits of women’s conventional roles.

However, the majority of the articles in this decade maintained the status quo. One woman wrote that she loves being a mother (Seton, 1966). While she conceded that her life as a homemaker was not for everyone and opened a cultural space that allowed for women’s employment, she also juxtaposed her position with that of “feminists with flaring nostrils” (Seton, 1966, p. 107). Despite the distance this woman perceived between herself and those who worked, she emphasized that being a mother was *her* only way to be happy and that others might find fulfillment in paid work. The feminist movement’s emphasis on choice may have influenced the language surrounding motherhood in this decade. The articles of the 1960s encouraged women to see motherhood as a personal vocation rather than a universal nature for all women. Other research corroborates this

shift in preference of achievement over ascription in other areas of identity (Smith, 1998). As *choosing* an identity or lifestyle became a more powerful legitimizing agent, both mothers and career women began using this language to justify their role. The articles of the 1960s indicate that one had to choose between becoming a mother *or* a worker as they portrayed these roles as mutually exclusive. Further, although motherhood and career were both available choices, most of the articles deemed the former choice better.

There were a handful of articles that explored the differences between men and women. These did not often discuss the role of nurture and nature and were regularly used to legitimate women's roles in the home and men's place in public life, "a woman's five senses are generally more acute. It may be that her senses are keener in order to protect her children and home. Her sight is unusually sharp and she is likely to have fewer defects than men. Her hearing is excellent: she hears even slight noises at night. Her sharp sense of smell is probably a developed trait. Taste may be keener because of her concern over food preparation" (Battista, 1966, p. 144). If men had been the stronger-sensed one, no doubt his differences would have been attributed to his role as provider, giving him an advantage in the hunt. Here, though, the woman's physical advantages makes her a better mother and homemaker.

At the close of the decade it is clear that there were changes in the views about Catholic women. *Catholic Mind* appears to be undergoing cultural negotiation and *Catholic Digest* generally upholds the home as women's primary sphere while it makes room for some paid employment. Women who stayed at home or conducted orchestras each received affirmation for what they were doing. However, the freedom of choice emphasized in its articles—albeit within a frame that some choices are better than others—obscured the deepening cultural divide that becomes more visible in the 1970s.

Catholic Women in the 1970s: Two Ideal Types

The 1970s illustrates a clear separation in these periodicals' understandings of women. *Catholic Mind* restricted the scope of its articles to women's issues within the Catholic Church. Specifically, it addressed the theological arguments for and against women's ordination and inclusion in other ecclesial ministries, paying little attention to secular issues. *Catholic Digest* had a less radical ethos by showing appreciation for women's contributions in the workplace while maintaining the traditional Catholic distinction between men's and women's spheres. *Catholic Mind* is a clear champion of progressive causes and *Catholic Digest* was more mainstream-to-conservative and wrote on issues that were more American than explicitly Catholic.

Even as it was supportive of women's contributions to public life, *Catholic Digest* emerges as the more conservative of the two publications, with 21% of the decade's articles undermining the older gender norms and 79% reinforcing them. *Catholic Mind* reverses these; 77% of the articles argued for women's full inclusion in civic life, Church life, or both, and 23% upheld the norms of the previous decades.

Catholic Digest: Maintaining the Status Quo in Church and Society

The articles in *Catholic Digest* that undermined expectations of motherhood and domesticity did so by affirming women's place in both the home and public life. Illustrating the growing sentiment that women have a right to work, a young woman wrote about her mother beginning a nursing career (Silver, 1972). The daughter wrote about the ways her mother changed: she had more energy, picked up her old love of music, and she enjoyed life more than before. The family helped out more with the mother's former chores and her outside occupation helped them as individuals: "Mom's schooling made all of us, including Dad, rely more on ourselves. And it was fun. We all grew" (Silver, 1972, p. 57). The article concluded by taking the mother out of her former role as hub of the family, "and we found out there is a lot more to being a family than just a group of people leaning on Mom" (Silver, 1972, p. 57). The perspective of the author shows that a mother's employment can actually add more to than take away from the family, affirming both work and family simultaneously.

Although there were articles that reflected ideas from the feminist movement, most articles illustrated the values from past decades and were directly critical of the feminist movement. “Beyond Women’s Lib” reads, “the revolt of women often leads not to freedom but to wild experiment, and the pathetic attempt to convince oneself that new sexual partners are better than the old. . . . But the so-called feminine qualities are really *human* ones, needed by both sexes, though it is women who have the best opportunity to understand and use them” (Haughton, 1974, p. 25). The author argues that the feminist movement—reducing it to experiment and promiscuity—brings more harm than benefits to women. She invites the reader to reconsider feminine qualities, to see the virtues they bring for both men and women. However, rather than a radical reversal of a gendered hierarchy, she concludes that women have a natural proclivity to these virtues and can utilize them better than men can. This provides the reader with an essentialist argument for separate spheres for men and women. “Liberated Woman” argues that paid work lacks fulfillment for women, “We used to pity the poor working girl. Now we praise her and scorn the dull lady at home. But listen: that working gal is no swinger. . . . She is lucky if she likes her job” (Evslin, 1973, p. 48). At a time when many women were entering the workforce, this author elevates the role of the at-home mother. Arguing against the view that the domestic sphere is “dull” or insignificant, she counters, “I do very important work. I am a mother. I raise human beings” (Evslin, 1973, p. 48). The decade as a whole created a cultural space for women to work even while it made the domestic sphere primary, illustrating that simply having diversity in models of womanhood does not mean that all are equally affirmed (Chen, 2014).

Catholic Mind: Forging Tools for Progressive Catholics

By the time of the 1970s, *Catholic Mind* had a different focus in its articles covering women. Not only were the topics overwhelmingly more religious than secular, but they also were far more radical. Most demanded women’s full-inclusion in Church life, sought the ordination of women, called for a restructuring of the priesthood and worked to integrate women’s experiences into the theology of the Church.

To understand the Catholicity in some of these articles, it is important to note the importance of complementarity in a Catholic scheme of gender. The “second wave” feminism of the 1970s tended to emphasize the sameness between men and women; that is, it argued there is no ontological difference between the sexes and any apparent differences are due to socialization. However, official Catholic teaching insists that there is an inherent difference between the sexes, which is the rationale behind the complementarity of men and women. Complementarity asserts that when men and women work together, as in a heterosexual marriage, the gifts and talents of the couple will come forth through their mutual support. Complementarity has the power to liberate or pigeonhole and one must be attentive to its use in each situation.

In the early 1970s, an editorial addressed the exclusion of women from the office of acolyte and lector. This argued that women must function as first-class citizens for the sake of the entire Church, as women’s gifts were absent from many forms of ministry (Buckley, 1973). This author called for a theology of women that would, if nothing else, justify the reasons for exclusion. Another article argued for the emancipation of women within the Church and around the globe and used complementarity as the moral basis of her argument, arguing that the liberation of women will be the liberation of all humanity (Badeira, 1973). These articles illustrate that the feminist movement within Catholicism is far more Catholic than secular. All of the *Catholic Mind* articles use Catholic teaching as an argument for women’s inclusion.

In December of 1972, the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops released a statement that maintained the all-male diaconate and priesthood, and within the year, the executive director of the National Coalition of American Nuns responded to the statement (Gillen, 1973). As tradition is an important premise in Catholic doctrine that supports the all-male priesthood, the nuns’ response first pointed out that this tradition is androcentric, referring to it as “the male monologue” (Gillen, 1973, p. 3). The author traced tradition from the male scribes to the male bishops who formed the biblical canon. She further asserted that men have something to win or lose through the ordination of women, and quoted Poulain de la Barre as

saying that “men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit” (Gillen, 1973, p. 3).

While most of the articles calling for women’s equality came from women with no official institutional power, there were some ordained men who championed the feminist cause. For example, a bishop wrote a letter to his diocese in celebration of Epiphany in International Women’s Year in which he proclaimed the spiritual validity of women’s ordination. The bishop first pointed out the inconsistency in Catholic social teaching, namely the stance against discrimination, with the position on women’s ordination, “the gospel can hardly appear as the ultimate good if that same good news continues its discriminatory interpretation and implementation in the church” (Dozier, 1975, p. 61). He then illustrated that Mary can be a good role model for the modern woman in a seemingly innovative way. Mary’s earthly life typically appears in mariology in one of two ways: as handmaid of the Lord or as woman of valor. The various articles on Mary in these publications typically drew upon the handmaid image: the selfless, virginal mother for women to emulate. However, the image of the woman of valor, while less common, is equally legitimate and portrays Mary as “warrior and champion, as conqueror and leader” (Pelikan, 1996, p. 91). This bishop’s use is the first time these articles employ this image of the woman of valor when speaking about Mary. He took the following from *Marialis cultis* by Pope Paul VI:

Mary of Nazareth, while completely devoted to the will of God, was far from being a timidly submissive woman or one whose piety was repellent to others; on the contrary, she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions. The modern woman will recognize in Mary, who “stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord,” a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile. (Dozier, 1975, pp. 63–64)

Mary was not simply an icon of maternal sacrifice. By the 1970s American Catholics could also see her as subversive of the standing order, the ultimate liberator of all humanity.

By the close of the 1970s, readers of *Catholic Mind* had new cultural tools that came from their tradition with which to articulate and justify their discontent. The same is true of readers of *Catholic Digest* as they, too, reappropriated American notions and employed Church teachings that bolstered their position from within the tradition. Table 1 offers a summary of the changing content of these periodicals over each of the decades.

Both conservative groups (e.g., Catholics United for the Faith, Catholic Traditionalist Movement) and liberal groups (e.g., Dignity, Women’s Ordination Conference) proliferated throughout the American-Catholic scene in the years following the Council. This served to intensify the American cultural divide as people brought their political identities to their particular style of liberal or conservative Catholicism, each reinforcing the other.

Discussion

As women shaped and were shaped by a society that offered a gamut of ideas, beliefs, and symbols, they—both consciously and unconsciously, deftly and laboriously—borrowed from the available cultural repertoires (Swidler, 2003). American, Catholic, conservative, and progressive cultures

Table 1. The coverage of women over the three decades in percentages.⁵

	1950s	1960s	1970s
<i>Catholic Digest</i> , Affirmed Women’s Gender Roles	67%	65%	79%
<i>Catholic Digest</i> , Rejected Women’s Gender Roles	33%	35%	21%
<i>Catholic Mind</i> , Affirmed Women’s Gender Roles	80%	11%	23%
<i>Catholic Mind</i> , Rejected Women’s Gender Roles	20%	44%	73%
<i>Catholic Mind</i> , Ambivalent on Women’s Gender Roles	n/a	44%	n/a

⁵Some decades do not add to 100 due to rounding.

offered numerous tools for Catholic women to construct a way of understanding the world and themselves that was personally meaningful. The 1950s articles portrayed women as mothers, with both periodicals in agreement. For the most part, there is very little evidence of a cultural divide in Catholic notions of womanhood until the 1960s. In this decade, the articles in *Catholic Digest* still associated women with their families while giving social permission to enter the workforce in new ways. *Catholic Mind* had fewer articles on women and many published showed great ambivalence on the topic, together signaling an organizational renegotiation of the role of women in the Church. By the 1970s, *Catholic Digest* wrote less on uniquely Catholic issues and became more generally American, looking to legitimate women's participation in secular society while keeping "feminine" and "masculine" spheres intact by elevating the stay-at-home mother. *Catholic Mind* criticized the limited roles of women in the Church—while arguing with Catholic tools like complementarity—and took for granted the equality of women at home and in the public sphere. By the end of the 1970s, Catholics had two different ways to view women, both of which were institutionally legitimated for the readers as they appeared within Catholic periodicals. This analysis focused on the ways the periodicals reflect the values of the readers, but, as said above, we would be wrong to assume that the articles are only driven by the readers. In actuality, there is a dialectic, with the readers and the periodicals shaping one another. These articles looked to fill a niche for their readers at the same time that they honed and refined the rather raw experiences of the readers through a Catholic lens; each shaped the other, perhaps exacerbating the political divide.

As evidenced by contemporary events, the political division among Catholics grew. Jesuit sociologist Andrew Greeley notes that the number of Catholic feminists increased considerably from the early 1970s to the next decade, from 38% to 42% among Catholic men and from 41% to 57% among Catholic women (note the more dramatic increase among women; Greeley, 1985). Further, dissent to the left is more pronounced now than previously. Approval of women's ordination increased from only 29% of the laity in 1974 (D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, & Meyer, 2001) to 54% in 2011 (D'Antonio et al., 2013). There is also more dissent to the right, with 59% of Catholics believing that one can be a "good Catholic" without donating time or money to help the poor (D'Antonio et al., 2013), an increase from 44% in 1987 (Gallup 1987). Both liberal and conservative dissent illustrates the trend among Catholics to place less emphasis on magisterial teachings and grant greater importance to personal conscience on a variety of social and personal issues (D'Antonio et al., 2013).

The shift in understanding of Catholic womanhood and subsequent division among Catholic women is interesting in and of itself. Catholic women's ideological divergence also has wider political relevance as it reflects similar schisms that persist in the wider culture of the present day. These political differences likewise reach beyond women and into society more broadly. As this lacuna between liberals and conservatives widens, religion in the United States is more likely to divide groups than to integrate them, which Roof and McKinney (1987, p. 33) refer to as the "third disestablishment" of religion in America. Religion no longer carries the same transcendent authority that it once did and is more individually important than collectively important (Hammond, 1992). Further research is needed to understand the ways this cultural rift affects religion, politics and civil society more broadly.

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