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Gendered Motivations for Religious Exit among the Former Amish

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Abstract

In response to calls for more theoretically informed attention to gender in sociological studies of religious phenomena (Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo 2015; Charlton 2015; Cornwall 2009), this paper conceptualizes religion as a gendered institution (Avishai 2016a) in an examination of religious exit from a conservative Christian group, namely, the Amish. The present study identifies gender variation in individuals' motivations for exit and considers how gendered religious ideologies, gendered placement in religious organizational structures, and gendered religious practices explain this variation. Based on analysis of qualitative interviews with fifty-nine former Amish adults, I find that concerns about gender inequity motivated some respondents, almost entirely women, to leave. Men's and women's other motivations for exit appear more similar on the surface, but closer examination reveals variation by gender. Analysis reveals that the intersection of religion and gender in the Amish context differently shaped men's and women's religious realities and, therefore, colored in some way all of their reasons for leaving. These results suggest that most of the previous research on religious exit, which either overlooks gender entirely (e.g., Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013; Shaffir 1997; Smith 2011) or conceives of it narrowly, with little attention to gender theory (e.g., Cottee 2015; Hurst and McConnell 2010; Roozen 1980; Vargas 2012), has misrepresented gender variation in motivations for exit and failed to provide adequate explanation for differences identified. Considering the multiple dimensions through which the institutions of religion and gender intersect allows for a deeper understanding of religious phenomena and provides insights into the ways in which gender is produced and reproduced within religious groups.

In recent years, a number of scholars have called on sociologists of religion to incorporate gender in their research (Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo 2015; Charlton 2015; Cornwall 2009). These calls do not result from the complete absence of gender from the sociological scholarship on religion but rather from its uneven treatment and, at times, atheoretical application (Avishai and Irby 2017). While there has been innovative and insightful research on gender and religion including but not limited to agency and women in conservative religions, masculinities, and religious women's political activism (see Avishai 2016a, 2016b for reviews), insights from gender theories have not been fully extended to many other religious phenomena. Given the pervasiveness of gender in shaping all social institutions, including religion (Martin 2004), our understandings of various religious phenomena are compromised as a result.

Attention to gender has been particularly uneven in research relating to reasons for religious mobility. Research on conversion and retention motivations among women in conservative religious groups has engaged deeply with theoretical concepts from gender scholarship. These studies have shed light on women's motivations for group membership, including access to empowerment and instrumental advantages as well as the pursuit of religious goals (e.g., Avishai 2008; Chen 2008; Davidman 1991; Kaufman 1991; Mahmood 2005; Wolkomir 2004). Scholarship has also revealed the development of gendered religious dispositions and subjecthood in the process of conversion (Rao 2015). But fewer studies have considered related but inverse questions regarding women and men who leave conservative religious groups. Much of the research, including studies of the former Amish (Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013), that examines reasons for religious exit has overlooked gender entirely (e.g., Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013; Shaffir 1997; Smith 2011) or has attempted to identify gender differences with little or no theoretical justification (Cottee 2015; Hurst and McConnell 2010; Roozen 1980; Vargas 2012; for exceptions, see Davidman 2014; Faulkner and Dinger 2014). This lack of theoretically informed attention to gender in the literature limits our understanding of processes of religious mobility, lived experiences of religion, and the intersection between gender and religion.

The present study, then, contributes to the literature on religious mobility by examining motivations for religious exit through a theoretically informed gender lens that conceptualizes religion as a gendered institution (Avishai 2016a). It investigates how the intersection of gender and religion within a particular religious group, the Amish, with its attendant gendered religious ideology, organizational structure, religious practices, and behavioral expectations, shapes individuals' religious realities and, therefore, their reasons for exit. Analysis of qualitative interviews with fifty-nine former Amish adults reveals that, while Amish men's and women's motivations for exit seem similar on their surface,

they are, in fact, gendered and, at times, relate to the gender inequities embedded in the Amish gender system. Men's and women's narratives of religious exit highlight how being and living as an Amish person is, in many ways, fundamentally different for men and women. These narratives underscore how motivations for exit are, in part, responses to gendered lived experiences of religion. In addition, gender variation in exiting motivations provides clues into the ways in which gender is "produced, reproduced, and enacted" (Avishai, 2016a: 388) among the Amish. More broadly, this study demonstrates that greater understanding of religious phenomena may be gained through conceptualizing gender and religion as intersecting social institutions.

GENDER AND MOTIVATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EXIT

Over the last several decades, scholars have uncovered several different factors that motivate individuals' exits from a variety of different religious groups. Some individuals leave their religious groups due to cognitive or intellectual doubts; that is, they are skeptical about their religious group's doctrines, such as particular characteristics of a religious supernatural (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997; Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Davidman 2014; Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; Shaffir 1997; Smith 2011; Vargas 2012; Wright et al. 2011; Zuckerman 2012). Instrumental doubts relating to religious groups' prescribed lifestyle rules also motivate exits (Bahr and Albrecht 1989; Cottee 2015; Davidman 2014; Hoge 1981; Shaffir 1997), as do moral doubts, which result from what individuals view as unfair or hypocritical religious practices and doctrine (Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993; Shaffir 1997; Zuckerman 2012), at times relating to gender inequality (Cottee 2015; Davidman 2014). Personal contextual reasons such as intermarriage or migration (Albrecht, Cornwall, and Cunningham 1988; Roozen 1980; Vargas 2012; Zuckerman 2012) and an increased achievement orientation (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977) also spur some exits. Other important reasons for exit include interpersonal, intrachurch, and role conflicts (Bahr and Albrecht 1989; Hoge 1981; Roozen 1980; Wright et al. 2011).

Research on the Amish, which has not been well integrated into the broader religion scholarship, delineates a set of reasons for religious exit that are different from but related to those identified in the broader literature. More specifically, studies indicate that individuals leave the Amish because of spiritual and philosophical issues, such as desires for more intense spiritual experiences; lifestyle restrictions; educational and occupational aspirations; dissatisfaction with Amish church leadership; dysfunctional family situations; and romantic relationships with non-Amish persons (Faulkner and Dinger 2014; Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013). These motivations correspond in some ways to the cognitive doubts, instrumental doubts,

achievement orientations, moral doubts, conflicts, and personal contextual reasons, respectively, identified in the broader literature.

Studies of religious exit provide insight into factors that shape religious mobility, yet both the broader literature and scholarship on the Amish rarely attend to gender. In the general literature, the few studies that consider gender at all do not engage with gender theories. For example, two studies of religious exit include gender as a variable in their analyses but provide little theoretical justification for doing so beyond referencing the literature on gender and religiosity (Roozen 1980; Vargas 2012), much of which does not utilize theoretical innovations regarding gender (Avishai 2016a). Another study finds that moral doubts relating to the unequal treatment of men and women contributed to motivations for exit among all of the former Muslim women interviewed but otherwise overlooks gender (Cottee 2015). Ebaugh's (1977) research, which focuses on the exit of nuns from their Catholic orders, finds evidence that gender inequity and organizational change factor into some women's reasons for leaving but does not engage with gender theories. Davidman's (2014) study of former Ultra-Orthodox Jewish individuals is exceptional for its focus on gender. She finds that issues of gender inequity motivated half of the women's and a few of men's exits, and she also suggests that men's greater exposure to the secular world and women's greater vulnerability to sexual abuse differently shaped their motivations for exit. While Davidman's (2014) work provides greater insights into the relationship between gender and motivations for religious exit, reasons for exit are not the primary focus of her book, and her discussion of them is quite limited.

Research on reasons for exit from the Amish also suffers from a lack of engagement with theoretical perspectives on gender. For example, Meyers (1994) notes that men leave the Amish more than women and hypothesizes that Amish men's greater opportunities to access the non-Amish world might help explain this relationship; however, he does not make use of gender theory in his analysis. In another study, although Hurst and McConnell (2010) examine the relationship between motivations for exit and gender in a sample of forty-nine former Amish individuals, they do not provide theoretical justification for their gender analysis and report no statistically significant correlation. More recently, Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt (2013) fail to discuss whether gender relates to reasons for leaving the Amish, entirely overlooking any possible relationship between gender and motivations for religious exit, even as they acknowledge gender variation in rates of exit.

Only one recent study of motivations for exit from the Amish employs gender theory. Faulkner and Dinger's (2014) exploratory analysis of eight former Amish adults points to variation in exit motivations by gender among those who left after baptism; more specifically, men described complicated spiritual and interpersonal

conflicts, and women emphasized negative feelings about lifestyle restrictions. Citing Risman's (2004) work, Faulkner and Dinger (2014) consider gender an organizing structure that shapes men's and women's positions in Amish society and reasons for exit, but their small sample size does not permit a thorough gender analysis.

Altogether, then, the current body of research on motivations for religious exit suffers from two shortcomings. First, much of this research fails to study gender at all, misrepresenting religious exit as a gender-neutral experience. Second, attempts to analyze gender have rarely engaged deeply with gender theories. As a result, the gender variation identified to date has largely been treated in a shallow manner that does not consider how individuals negotiate or interpret the gendered realities of their religious experiences as they make choices about religious mobility. To address these shortcomings, the present study undertakes a closer and more theoretically informed examination of gender and religious exit. As a result, it uncovers previously overlooked connections between gender and motivations for exit and demonstrates how these motivations for exit relate to the ways in which gender infuses religious ideologies, organizational arrangements, practices, and behavioral expectations.

RELIGION AS GENDERED INSTITUTION

While the literature on reasons for religious exit rarely engages with gender theories, other scholarship in the sociology of religion has employed theoretically sophisticated approaches to gender. Although not always explicitly articulated, much of this research draws on the conceptualization of gender as a social institution (Avishai 2016a). Martin (2004) articulated the notion that gender is a social institution equivalent to other institutions like the economy, the family, and religion. Martin (2004) contends that all social institutions, including gender, share a set of features in common, including their social nature, endurance, recurring practices, behavioral constraints, defined social positions, ideologies, conflict, change, and inequality (pp. 1256–58). Furthermore, institutions are interdependent and intersect with one another (Martin 2004). To consider gender a social institution, then, means that it is a complex social system with a history that can be traced rather than an individual, biological, or psychological characteristic (Connell 1987; Martin 2004). Consequently, Martin and other gender scholars (Connell 1987; Lorber 1994) emphasize gender's social features, such as its legitimating ideologies, organizational structure, cyclical practices, and connection to human agency and power, which make "gender's invisible dynamics…more apparent" (Martin, 2004: 1249).

Avishai (2016a) incorporates this perspective into the study of religion as she highlights the intersection of the social institutions of gender and religion. She

contends religion is a gendered social institution "where ideas about gender, femininity, masculinity, men, women, sexuality, and the body emerge and are negotiated, developed, and practiced" (Avishai, 2016a: 388). These gendered religious ideologies organize religious structures, define communities, and shape individuals' daily lives, interpersonal interactions, religious conduct, or the "doing" of religion (Avishai 2008), and individuals' identities. As a result, gender profoundly influences individuals' lived experiences of religion (McGuire 2008) and senses of religious subjecthood (Rao 2015). While Avishai (2016a) conceives of religion as a gendered social institution broadly, she emphasizes that each religious group's gendered and religious context, in conjunction with its external social, economic, and political realities, produces and justifies its own religious gender regime that shapes the lives of its members. To understand religious phenomena more fully, then, scholars must analyze them in relation to the complex gendered logics of specific religious groups (Avishai 2016a).

Empirical research provides evidence of this gendering of religion at different levels within specific religious groups. For example, Sumerau and colleagues' (Sumerau, Cragun, and Smith 2017; Sumerau and Cragun 2015) research reveals the gendered ideological underpinnings in Latter Day Saints' archival materials. More specifically, they found that religious leaders constructed ideal Mormon womanhood and ideal Mormon manhood to emphasize feminine obedience and masculine self-control, respectively. Ideologies such as these form the logics of a particular group's religious gender regime, defining and justifying gender categories, appropriate forms of masculinity and femininity, gender inequalities, and organizational arrangements.

Research has also illuminated ways in which gender is embedded in religious organizational structures. These studies emphasize how access to religious authority and responsibility is related to gender. For example, in their research on immigrant religious groups in Houston, Texas, Ebaugh and Saltzman Chafetz (1999, 2000) found that women did not hold primary positions of religious authority in any of them. Further, in her research on two Theravada Buddhist centers in the United States, Cadge (2004) observed that men and women had different access to positions of authority, engaged in gender-typed responsibilities in the centers such as food preparation and cleaning among women and care of center property among men, and were dramatically unequally represented in religious iconography. These organizational arrangements both reflected gendered religious ideologies in some ways and also shaped gendered expectations for behavior.

Furthermore, scholars have explored the intersection of gender and "doing religion," performances of religious identity through conduct (Avishai 2008). For example, studies have examined the meanings made through gendered forms of religious practice including observance of sexual purity instructions among

Orthodox Jewish women (Avishai 2008) and veiling (Mahmood 2005) and critical public engagement with religious texts among Muslim women (Rinaldo 2014). Recent research suggests that gendered forms of religious observance, such as dressing practices and polygyny among American Muslim converts, make different demands on men and women and, consequently, encourage their development as distinctively gendered religious subjects with different religious dispositions (Rao 2015). Irby's (2014) study of dating among young evangelical adults, however, also reveals variation among men and among women in how they engage with gendered religious ideologies and indicates that gender is not equally salient across all religious contexts within a particular religious gender regime.

Although the scholarship on gender and religious mobility in the form of conversion and retention among women in conservative religious groups (see Avishai 2016a; Burke 2012; Rinaldo 2010 for reviews) does not draw explicitly on the gender-as-institution approach and recently has shifted focus to theorizing about agency (Avishai 2016a), it points to how religious gender regimes, embedded in broader social contexts, provide women with motivations to join or stay in conservative religious groups that are less relevant to men. In contrast to studies focusing on women's resistance to their conservative religious groups' beliefs and practices (e.g., Gerami and Lehnerer 2001; Hartman 2007), some of these studies find that many women join conservative religious groups for gendered forms of empowerment, such as converts to Orthodox Judaism who gain honor and respect as mothers (Kaufman 1991). Others demonstrate that conservative group membership provides women instrumental advantages. For example, upon conversion to Christianity or Buddhism, Taiwanese immigrant women acquire greater ability to negotiate within patriarchal familial constraints (Chen 2008). Furthermore, a growing body of research emphasizes that women actively participate in conservative religious groups to pursue religious ends and to fashion gendered pious selves (e.g., Avishai 2008; Mahmood 2005).

There is no comparable body of gender and religion research that focuses on men's retention in or conversion to conservative religious groups. But, given the gendered features of women's reasons for joining and remaining in conservative religious groups discussed above, it appears that the types of empowerment and instrumental benefits that shape men's reasons may differ in some ways. Even motivations for retention and conversion that appear gender neutral, such as the pursuit of religious ends, may, in fact, be gendered given that the practices that are a part of religious pursuits and the pious selves fashioned through them are also gendered (Avishai 2008; Mahmood 2005), such as the gendered dressing and marriage practices among Muslims that help form responsible and sacrificial religious dispositions among male and female converts, respectively (Rao 2015).

In sum, this literature suggests that gender, operating across multiple dimensions simultaneously within religious groups, fundamentally shapes men's and women's experiences as religious subjects along with the meanings they make within religious systems, particularly within conservative religious groups. Given that individuals' religious experiences and very sense of themselves as religious subjects are deeply shaped by gendered religious ideologies, organizational structures, and practices, it seems likely that individuals' reasons for leaving will vary by gender. The lack of consideration of gender as a multidimensional social institution in previous research has stifled insights into the multiple ways in which the intersection of gender and religion shape individuals' lived experiences of religion and, therefore, their motivations for religious exit. With a close analysis of individuals' motivations for leaving the Amish, the present study clearly demonstrates that gender, as it relates to religious ideologies, organizational structures, practices, cultural expectations, and religious subjectivities, plays a part in shaping individuals' lives as Amish and, consequently, their motivations for religious exit.

THE AMISH GENDER REGIME

In order to make sense of the relationship between gender and motivations for religious exit among the former Amish, it is important to understand the Amish gender regime and the religious system within which it is embedded. The Amish are an Anabaptist religious group, who number over 315,000 and live in thirty-one states and parts of Canada and South America in more than 2,350 districts, groups of geographically-bound church communities of twenty to forty families that worship together (Young Center 2017). The Amish abide by basic Christian tenets but promote somewhat distinctive values of discipleship, obedience, humility, and *Gelassenheit* (submission to the will of God and others) and practices of nonviolence, separation from the world, and adult baptism (Hostetler 1993; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013). They discourage Bible study and prioritize "faithful practice over doctrinal belief" (Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, 2013: 69). Each church district defines its forms of practice in the *Ordnung,* an oral set of guidelines for matters not specifically delineated in the Bible relating to dress, technology, work, and more (Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013). Members are expected to abide by their district's *Ordnung* rules and face sanctions when they fail to do so.

Those born into Amish families do not become full members of the church, and are not expected to uphold all *Ordnung* rules, until they are baptized as adults, usually between ages eighteen and twenty-four (Stevick 2014). Most Amish young people join the church, although young women do so at higher rates than young men (Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013; Stevick 2014). Only about

15 percent of those born into Amish communities leave, and most do so before baptism, when they are not yet subject to excommunication and shunning (Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013).

Scholars contend that the Amish gender system is patriarchal but includes moderating tendencies that "soften" this patriarchy (Johnson-Weiner 2001; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013; Olshan and Schmidt 1994). Like other conservative Christian groups, the Amish gender regime is based on the biblical notion of a "divine hierarchy" that places God above man and man above woman in social and religious life (Huntington 1994; Johnson-Weiner 2001; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013). This hierarchy sorts men and women into distinct but complementary roles, which they learn from very young ages, "reflecting the structure of God's ordered universe" (Johnson-Weiner, 2001: 235). While this ideology asserts binary gender difference as fundamental and holds men above women, it also requires from *all* Amish people loyalty and submission to God (Hostetler 1993). Some scholars suggest that this belief, plus scriptures that assert men's and women's equality before God and the community emphasis on submission, tempers the Amish gender hierarchy (Huntington 1994; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013).

Research provides evidence of gendered understandings, behavioral expectations, practices, social positions, and access to authority among the Amish over the life course. Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt (2013) note that the birth of a baby girl or baby boy is regularly accompanied by the label "another dishwasher" or "a little woodchopper," respectively (p. 193). As they get older, boys are expected to be rambunctious and loud, while girls are expected to be more restrained and reserved in their behavior (Hurst and McConnell 2010). Behavioral expectations vary but are still gendered over the life course and are reinforced by practices of gender separation during religious services and when socializing (Stevick 2014). Rumspringa, the period of time before marriage when young people in their teens and early twenties socialize and date and, as primarily non-members, are not subject to *Ordnung* rules, varies across Amish communities but is a consistently gendered rite of passage (Hurst and McConnell 2010). In particular, young men, who often acquire their first buggies or, in some districts, cars, tend to have greater freedom of movement than young women, who often lack access to their own modes of transportation (Hurst and McConnell 2010; Stevick 2014).

The Amish organizational structure also assigns men and women different roles. Women may not hold official positions of church authority or serve on special committees that address community issues or engage with local, state, and national governments (Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013). Yet both baptized men and women take part in selecting the men who fill church leadership positions and vote on the church's *Ordnung* twice a year.

Many *Ordnung* rules are explicitly or implicitly gendered, including rules relating to dress and to work, which commonly discourage women, especially married ones, from working outside the home (Hurst and McConnell 2010).

According to this gender regime, men are spiritual and household authorities. They are expected to devote considerable time and energy towards work, though sometimes that work is close to home on the family farm. Amish women are viewed as men's "helpmeets" and are expected to dedicate themselves to their homes and children after marriage, though they may also work on the family farm or, less often, maintain small shops, usually on their family property (Johnson-Weiner 2001; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013). In practice, husbands and wives sometimes take on each other's responsibilities when necessary (Johnson-Weiner 2001). Amish wives are expected to submit to their husbands, but this submission tends to be greater in public than private spaces, where spouses often make decisions together (Johnson-Weiner 2001; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013).

While the Amish gender system clearly affords men and women different opportunities and responsibilities, researchers find that many Amish women, like women in other conservative religions, are not unhappy with their places in their religious gender regime. Amish women describe deriving empowerment from participation in their communities, express their agency by engaging in careful observance of religious dictates, and are deeply satisfied with their lives (Hurst and McConnell 2010; Neriya-Ben Shahar 2017). There have been no investigations into Amish men's perceptions of the gender system, perhaps because men are assumed to be satisfied with a system that privileges them in various ways. Still, of course, some individuals, both men and women, leave their Amish communities, expressing some kind of dissatisfaction with their Amish lives. Given that the Amish gender regime shapes individuals' lived experiences of being Amish, their practices as Amish, their positions in their communities and families, and their religious subjecthood, it also sets the stage for the motivations that prompt their religious exits.

DATA AND METHODS

In this paper, I qualitatively analyze former Amish respondents' narratives of religious exit to examine how they made sense of and described their reasons for leaving. This analysis does not attempt to understand why some leave and others stay Amish nor is it an examination of how some individuals were able to express agency in their decisions to leave in the face of constraints; instead, it explores how the intersection of religion and gender shapes the factors motivating men's and women's religious exits among those who have left the Amish.

The data I examined in this paper come from a larger study on the former Amish. Between 2012 and 2014, I conducted in-depth interviews with fifty-nine adults—thirty-one women and twenty-eight men, ranging in age from eighteen to eighty-one—who were raised in Amish churches but have since left those churches. I located potential respondents via colleagues' and acquaintances' contacts, local and online advertisements, and postings on Amish-related Facebook pages and other websites, using snowball sampling techniques to identify additional participants. My respondents were brought up in thirty different Amish communities across the United States and Canada.

I conducted interviews through a few different media. I met in-person with the twenty-five respondents who lived near Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. I conducted six interviews via Skype and the rest on the telephone. My respondents lived in sixteen different states at the time of interview. Telephone and Skype interviewing provided access to this geographic variety without being cost prohibitive. Research suggests that high quality data can be acquired through Skype and phone interviews (Novick 2008), although nonverbal cues are lacking (Aquilino 1994). This issue may be especially significant among the Amish, who, to varying degrees, limit telephone and other communication technologies (Umble 1994); however, my phone and Skype respondents had left their Amish communities about twenty years ago on average, and the most recent leavers had used cellphones regularly (if surreptitiously) before their religious exits. As a result, my respondents had likely developed a considerable amount of comfort with these communication technologies, potentially lessening the impact of the lack of nonverbal communication on their interviews.

In the interviews, I asked respondents to walk me through their experiences of religious exit and discuss the factors that contributed to their exits. In-depth interviews are an appropriate method for gathering data about the former Amish since research on this group is very limited and there is no way to generate an adequate sampling frame. Furthermore, in-depth interviewing makes it possible to investigate nuances in the ways in which gender played a part in shaping motivations for exit. As scholars have noted, it is impossible to study religious experiences as they occur (Yamane 2000); therefore, narratives provide researchers with access to individuals' accounts of their experiences. While narratives do not completely reflect reality, they demonstrate how individuals make meaning about their experiences (Yamane 2000).

After having the interview recordings transcribed, I used inductive qualitative coding to examine former Amish men's and women's motivations for religious exit. In initial reviews of interview transcripts, I looked for emergent themes about reasons for leaving in respondents' narratives. I used open coding to distinguish the reasons respondents described for their religious exits, making use of Lofland et al.'s (2006) approach. I further specified the original codes through

a more focused coding approach, drawing sharper distinctions between the categories. As I proceeded, I discovered that the codes I generated aligned well with the motivations for exit identified in previous research on the former Amish; therefore, I decided to make use of those coding schemes, with some refinement, to organize my results. Then, I compared and contrasted these codes to identify patterns of similarity and difference among former Amish men and women. Given Faulkner and Dinger's (2014) findings, I also examined how exiting motivations varied by baptismal status. Finally, I considered how Amish gendered religious ideologies, organizational structures, religious practices, and subjecthood helped explain the variation I identified.

RESULTS

In their narratives, my respondents reported motivations for exit that closely aligned with those described in the literature on the former Amish (Faulkner and Dinger 2014; Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013). Closer examination, however, revealed gender variation relating to all of these motivations. Furthermore, contrary to the Amish literature (Faulkner and Dinger 2014; Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013) but in line with a few studies of exit from conservative religious groups (Cottee 2015; Davidman 2014), gender inequities provided additional motivation for exit to some of my respondents. Finally, in contrast to Faulkner and Dinger (2014), motivations for exit did not vary markedly by my respondents' baptismal status, perhaps because of my larger sample and lesser focus on the emotional valence of individuals' reasons for leaving; therefore, I do not discuss baptismal status further in the results. Below, I discuss the gender variation in my respondents' motivations for exit that align with those identified in the previous Amish literature before focusing on additional gender inequities that respondents reported. Throughout, I examine how men's and women's motivations for exit reflect their distinctive positions in the Amish gender regime.

One of the factors that most commonly motivated my respondents' exits, regardless of gender, related to spiritual transformation. Most of these respondents decided to leave the Amish after learning ideas about salvation contrary to Amish ones, oftentimes accompanied by an intense "saving" experience. These new ideas created cognitive doubts about Amish beliefs and practices, and both men and women described their experiences quite similarly. For example, from interactions with former Amish family members who were "saved", Malinda came to believe that her Amish understanding of salvation, in which "you rely on your good works and…at the time you die, God will make his judgment," was wrong. Instead, she came to believe that "you *can* know and have a hope in knowing that I am born again and that God has a different future for me…the

assurance of salvation." Similarly, through exposure to an evangelical Christian group, Will came to believe that "I'm going to Heaven without a doubt…Because of what He [Christ] did—it's the only way to Heaven." Will contrasted the notion that salvation comes from Christ's actions with what he viewed as the Amish perspective that salvation results from members "just following rules." For Malinda, Will, and many other respondents, these newfound beliefs in the assurance of salvation through faith alone were transformational because they called into question the Amish lifestyle, with its many "manmade rules." Although the rules that these former Amish individuals followed often varied by gender, their descriptions of spiritual transformation did not.

Still, I found evidence of gender difference in the processes through which married men and women were exposed to new ideas about salvation. For single men and women, sources of this information included co-workers, employers, and family members; however, among married couples, husbands were almost always the sources of new spiritual information for their wives. For example, Hannah described how after an encounter she and her husband had with former Amish friends, he began engaging in close reading of the Bible, instead of reading it "like a storybook" as they did previously. She explained, "Luckily, he was somebody who shared what he found…. He was very open and would keep me with him every step of the way," ultimately leading them both to have serious doubts about Amish ways. In a couple of cases, husbands and wives learned new beliefs jointly, but wives were never the sources of these new ideas for their husbands, although they helped make the final decisions to leave.

These narratives related to and revealed some of the contours of the Amish gender system. While foundational doctrinal beliefs about salvation among the Amish and the Christian groups my respondents joined appear relatively free of gender variation, the intersection of gender and religion was more apparent in the process of acquiring and acting on new beliefs within married couples. This pattern reflects the divine hierarchy ideology. This ideology holds men above women in religious and social life and is further demonstrated through rules that prohibit women's access to positions of church leadership, promoting men's spiritual authority and women's submissiveness to it. The gendered ideology and rules helped support the development of these former Amish women's practices and dispositions of spiritual submission to men. At the same time, Amish rules that allowed for married men's greater engagement in work and social life outside of the home gave married men greater access to new religious information than their wives, who all stayed in the home to raise their children and, in some cases, work on family farms. Moreover, husbands' greater authority in their households may have lent greater weight to their new beliefs in couples' decisions to exit.

There was clearer gender variation in other motivations for exit, including dissatisfaction with church leaders. Both men and women expressed

dissatisfaction, but the reasons for it varied. In their narratives, men highlighted what they saw as church leaders' unchecked authority and community members' lack of voice. Jonas, for example, explained, "I realized that what bothers me is the sense of authority that a few men would have over everyone else…kind of the way they would dictate many times arbitrarily." Although scholars suggest that such church leaders are uncommon (Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013), for Jonas and several other men I interviewed, some church leaders abused their authority and, therefore, prompted these men's moral doubts.

In contrast, among the women I interviewed, dissatisfaction with church leaders tended to result from what they described as personal mistreatment. For example, when church leaders discovered that Leah had gone on a date with a non-Amish young man, they came to visit her: "There were a deacon and two preachers that came and talked to me. Me. Because my mother wasn't home. Talked to *me.* And they were so hateful and so rude in how they spoke to me. Such bitterness. I just—I knew the moment I turned eighteen I would leave." Because Leah was not baptized and, therefore, had not promised to abide by her church's rules, church leaders lacked the authority to punish her for breaking them. Instead, it would have been customary for them to bring up the matter with her parents who might punish her as a result (Stevick 2014). Leah, then, was indignant about the church leaders' breach of protocol and the mean-spiritedness of their interaction. The disrespect and mistreatment that Leah and some other women I interviewed described provoked their anger, resentment, and moral doubts and contributed to their exits.

These gender differences in dissatisfaction with church leaders reflect men's and women's positions in the Amish gender regime. The arbitrary enactments of church leaders' spiritual authority was problematic and a motivation for exit for some men because it challenged what they viewed as the appropriate role for church leaders and also limited their own spiritual authority, which the gender system granted them within their families and potentially within their churches. In contrast, women, who lacked the potential for spiritual authority and for whom spiritual submissiveness was expected and practiced, appeared more accepting of authoritarianism from church leaders but viewed ill treatment by them as grounds for leaving.

Along with these motivating factors, lifestyle restrictions commonly contributed to my former Amish respondents' desires for religious exit, causing instrumental and, in some cases, cognitive doubts for them. Apart from the restrictions relating to cars, however, different rules featured in men's and women's exit narratives. Rules about technology, particularly work-related technologies, were far more central in men's narratives. For example, Jacob admitted, "I remember thinking like what would be wrong with having an ATV? We could go out to the back…and fix fence or check on the cows or little things

like that. What would be so wrong with that? Why would we go to hell if we had one?" Jacob was frustrated with the rule because it made his work more difficult. Moreover, to Jacob, the rule existed to prevent members from going to hell, but he wasn't convinced that ATV use was worthy of eternal damnation. Many other men I interviewed echoed Jacob's claims that the rules unnecessarily burdened them and that explanations for the rules were implausible or flawed.

Women's narratives generally followed the same kind of logic surrounding the rules, but they focused far more often on dressing rules than men, despite the fact that these rules existed for both men and women. For example, Ruth explained:

> I think the dress code was the biggest thing for me in general…. Our belts on our aprons had to be one-and-a-half inch; they couldn't be one-and-three-quarters inch or two inches, they had to be one-and-a-half inch…. Little things like that that were so simple, but yet they were such a huge thing—I mean, like the bishop is going to come measure my belts? It just never made sense to me why that was an issue or why that was a rule to have to abide by.

To Ruth, the strict dressing rules were not just burdensome but also pointlessly strict. Ruth and other women I interviewed could not see how something like a quarter inch of fabric could be connected to their status in their communities nor the eternal future of their souls. For these women, the pickiness of the dressing rules was illogical and raised questions about Amish ways.

Some former Amish women were additionally bothered by what they viewed as the unfairness of the dressing rules in comparison to Amish men. For example, Lovina confessed, "I absolutely hated straight pins in my dresses. That I really detested because it hurt…if you made a mistake…. I hated that and especially the fact that men were allowed to have buttons on their shirts and women had to have pins on their dresses. That, to me, seemed very unfair." Here, Lovina highlights a gender distinction in dressing rules in some Amish church districts that puts Amish women at risk of discomfort and limits their mobility in ways that Amish men's dress does not. Other women attested that Amish women's dressing rules were more elaborate and involved than men's. According to Sarah, "[Amish] Men, they can just throw on a pair of pants and a shirt and go," while it took her approximately two hours to iron and pleat her cap correctly and an additional forty-five minutes to get dressed for Sunday services. Sarah and other former Amish women revealed their frustration with the greater investments of time and energy that went into looking "plain" for women than men. These women described these double standards as unreasonable and unfair, contributing to their desires for exit.

Gender variation in the lifestyle restrictions that motivated exit related to gender differences in the rules themselves and Amish gender ideology, *Ordnungs*,

traditions, and cultural expectations that organized men's and women's lives and their religious subjecthoods around work and home, respectively. As a result, rules about work-related technologies were central to men's decisions to leave. Among former Amish women, the daily burden of their more onerous and less functional dressing rules featured more prominently as motivation for exit.

Achievement orientations, specifically educational and occupational aspirations that conflicted with *Ordnung* rules and Amish traditions, also motivated some former Amish individuals' exits. Here, I focus on gender distinctions in occupational aspirations only, which followed a clearer pattern of gender variation among my respondents than educational aspirations. In their narratives, the men I interviewed referred to occupational aspirations rather obliquely, emphasizing general desires for broader horizons and greater freedom to pursue their goals than their Amish lives permitted. For example, John explained, "Generally, I wanted an education. I wanted to read books. I wanted to think about things, think about things that are just important in life rather than… [being like] most of the young people [who] were just sort of aimlessly living their life until they would get married." John did not discuss career limitations specifically; instead, he suggested that what he saw as an overall provincial ethos among the Amish was unappealing to him and motivated his exit. Other men I interviewed were similarly motivated by these and other large philosophical issues surrounding Amish resistance to curiosity, adventure, and exploration.

In contrast, the former Amish women highlighted the narrower set of career options they faced and sometimes explicitly compared their options with Amish men's. For example, in her narrative, Rachel revealed, "Well, the big thing for me is I felt like as a woman, I had no options…. I just was expected to be in the home and have babies…. If I would've been a guy I think it might have been easier for me to stay because I would feel like I have more options." Rachel explained that she was unhappy with her lack of career options, but it was not just her Amishness that limited her. Instead, it was her position as an Amish woman that especially restricted her opportunities. For Rachel and some other women I interviewed, the occupational rules they were expected to follow as Amish women were unacceptable to them and prompted their exits.

The different kinds of occupational aspirations that motivated men's and women's exits, then, reflected their distinctive positioning within the Amish gender system. Ideologies regarding gender, *Ordnung* rules, and gendered expectations for behavior placed men as household authorities and emphasized the importance of their contributions as household heads, including in an economic sense. In contrast, the gender system emphasized the importance of home and motherhood for women, limiting their work opportunities, especially after marriage and childbearing. As a result, men required loftier occupational

goals than women to be motivated to leave by the occupational restrictions they faced.

Dysfunctional family relationships, and the interpersonal and other conflicts they produced, also motivated my respondents to leave the Amish, but different "dysfunctions" featured in men's and women's narratives. Among the former Amish men I interviewed, conflict with fathers was central. Daniel, for example, explained:

> My dad and I got into a big argument and he sent me to go work for my [Amish] older brothers that were married…. I'm trying to make my dad money and be responsible and he didn't—I don't know, me and him didn't see eye to eye, so he decided to send me away. And that really irritated me. I was sure then that I was going to leave.

Daniel was deeply troubled that his efforts to please his father were unsuccessful and that his father rejected him. Other men's narratives echoed these kinds of father conflicts, which often created difficult, painful situations for them.

Women, however, tended not to report interpersonal conflicts with their parents as much; instead, they described "dysfunctional" family situations that led other Amish individuals to look down on them and made their lives difficult. These situations were due to parents' mental illness, mothers' difficulties with maintaining community standards of cleanliness, and/or family poverty. For example, Rebecca, whose father was mentally ill, admitted, "A lot of the family members wouldn't let their kids hang out with us or be friends with us because we had a dad that was different." For Rebecca and some other women, their family situations marked them as Other and prevented them from fitting in and forging relationships in their communities. Rebecca's father's illness played a major role in motivating her exit: "I always say I honestly don't know if I would've left if my parents would've had a normal Amish home because there was so much instability already in our home that leaving wasn't that big of a problem for me." As Rebecca and these other women revealed, their family situations not only created discomfort, stress, and shame, which they desired to escape by leaving, but also inhibited their ability to forge social ties within their communities and, therefore, made leaving easier and less disruptive.

The intersection of gender and religion among the Amish influenced the distinctive experiences that were most salient in men's and women's lives and, therefore, contributed to their exits. Given gendered *Ordnung* rules and expectations for young men to be eventual providers like their fathers and young women to be more generally concerned with the home, father-son conflict and non-normative family status tended to be the salient family dysfunctions for men and women, respectively. Expectations for women to be submissive also appeared

to contribute to their lower manifestation of interpersonal conflict with parents among their motivations for exit in contrast to the men I interviewed.

Along with these family conflicts, romantic relationships with non-Amish individuals also played a part in motivating some respondents' exits. While these relationships spurred both men's and women's exits, there was gender variation in how these relationships shaped respondents' exits. For example, for Joseph, one of the "things [that] influenced me in the Mennonite direction [and away from the Amish]…was marrying—falling in love with a Mennonite girl." Yet the non-Amish man Susie dated not only motivated her exit but also enabled it: "People were thinking that he was the reason I left. He was part of it. He made it possible for me. He gave me a soft place to land." Given the Amish prohibition against intermarriage, romantic relationships with non-Amish individuals contributed to men's and women's desires to leave, but only the former Amish women I interviewed emphasized that their non-Amish partners helped make leaving easier or even feasible by providing them with assistance, support, and information during their exits.

Again, the variation in men's and women's narratives of exit related to their positions in the Amish gender regime. Romantic partners provided important forms of exiting assistance only to women because, given their positions in the Amish gender system, women lacked the economic and other resources that Amish men's larger set of occupational options, greater freedom of mobility, and gendered behavioral expectations provided. Men, therefore, did not rely as much on these forms of assistance from their non-Amish romantic partners.

The above findings primarily focus on reasons for leaving identified in the literature on the Amish (Faulkner and Dinger 2014; Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013). They demonstrate that these motivations are not gender neutral, as they have largely been portrayed in the past, and, at times, are connected to women's concerns with gender inequities. Further analysis revealed additional forms of gender inequity that played a role in motivating some respondents' exits. More specifically, some of the women and one man I interviewed cited gendered double standards in behavior, problematic and assaultive dating experiences, and/or bias against women or femininity as contributing to their motivations for religious exits.

Some former Amish women suggested that they left in part because, within their Amish communities, they perceived themselves to be held to more difficult to achieve and contradictory standards of behavior than Amish men. For example, Lizzie explained:

> When we're with the youth group or when we're younger, it's so much more horrible when a girl does something like that, like drinks or smokes or something because they're supposed to be a light to the men or try to help the men along

> with. But then all of a sudden you get married and the girl's supposed to be, just be under the husband and submissive…it seems kind of twisted.

According to Lizzie, expectations for women's behavior were paradoxical and problematic. She expressed confusion about these contradictory power relations in which women served as moral exemplars to reckless men in their youth and yet submitted to these same men's authority after marriage. To Lizzie, this arrangement put women in an awkward and ambiguous location within their communities that was ultimately unsatisfying and contributed to her desire to leave.

In addition, several women I interviewed described problematic and, at times, assaultive experiences during courtship that contributed to their motivations for exit. While there is cultural variation across Amish communities, dating often involves a couple spending time together in the young woman's house late at night after a group social activity (Stevick 2014). Despite the fact that many dates are unsupervised (and, for some of my respondents, occurred in their bedrooms), sexual activity is prohibited among unmarried Amish people (Stevick 2014). Several women expressed significant displeasure with their dating experiences, describing them as "pathetic," "extremely excruciating," and "miserable." One woman revealed that "something happened [with a date] towards the end that probably just kind of put the nail on the cross for me to leave." While most of these women were not completely forthcoming about these experiences, Barbara was much more candid. She began to cry as she confessed:

> If you want to get married, you have to date somebody…. You have to put up with this stuff because they're guys and that's what guys do. I never got raped. I never had sex. I waited till I got married [after I left the Amish], but the fight, you know, that you have to do to keep it was like, like it's not worth it…. I had to fight so hard to have my own rights. And, if you go too far, everybody knows about it because they talk about it. And so I got tired of it.

According to Barbara, in order to marry, her Amish community's cultural traditions placed women in positions in which they were vulnerable to sexual advances but required to fend them off. These experiences placed a heavy, guilt-inducing burden on Barbara and exposed her to substantial trauma through the sexual assaults she appears to have experienced. While the other respondents were not as open about these matters as Barbara, their narratives suggested a larger pattern of distress, tension, and, for some, trauma surrounding their dating experiences and the heavy moral and physical burdens they imposed.

Along with the double standards for behavior and disturbing accounts of dating that some women revealed, two women and one man also explained that they left in part because they experienced being "female" or feminine as a

disfavored status among the Amish. Lydia, who left as a teen, put it bluntly when she stated, "I got messages that I was completely worthless. I was less than human because I'm a female and all that bullshit." Lydia's general sense of feeling "less than" and inferior played a major part in her drive to leave the Amish. Among the men, only Reuben explicitly articulated that gender played a part in his exit. Describing interactions in his Amish community, he explained, "I took the feminine values [from my Amish mother] into a patriarchal society and I got clobbered. That's a big part of my story." According to Reuben, his more "feminine values" marked him as Other and did not permit him to fit into Amish society. His experience suggests that the devaluation of femininity can play a part in shaping both men's and women's exits. Although most respondents did not describe their experiences in these ways, for those who did, they were powerful motivators of exit.

Apart from Reuben, none of the former Amish men I interviewed attributed his exit to gender inequities. In fact, when they discussed matters like Rumspringa or dating that proved highly problematic to some former Amish women, most men reflected on them positively. For example, Melvin revealed, "Why would I leave? …When you do have a car and it's your means of transportation, you can go wherever you want. You start dating. You pick up your girlfriend in the car. Your parents both are okay with it. I pulled right into wife's farm with a car to pick my wife, my girlfriend. It was okay." Melvin's freewheeling and fun Rumspringa and dating experiences, then, were reasons to stay Amish—not reasons to leave.

The above narratives regarding gender inequity demonstrate how the intersection of gender and religion among the Amish privileged men by providing them with more latitude as youth and greater power and authority as adults compared with women, such that the gender contradictions and traumatic experiences that motivated Lizzie's, Barbara's, and some other women's exits were not part of many men's lives and, therefore, did not often motivate their exits. In contrast, for some, but not all, women, the Amish gender regime shaped their lives in ways that they felt were unfair, and, therefore, led them to have serious moral doubts that contributed to their exits. While the divine hierarchy holds that men are spiritual authorities, according to some of the women I interviewed, in practice, young women are viewed as spiritually and morally superior to young men before marriage, as they are expected to be good examples for men and to fend off their dates' sexual advances. These women, then, occupied the role of "helpmeet" over the course of their lives, while expectations for men's behavior hinged more on their marital, and, relatedly, baptismal, status. Men's greater access to forms of freedom, authority, and privilege led most of them to internalize the Amish gender regime and experience its unequal arrangements as "normal" and unworthy of motivating their exits, in contrast to

some women. My respondents' narratives, however, made clear that not all men experienced these forms of privilege in the same way, such as those with "feminine values," like Reuben. Moreover, not all women considered these forms of gender inequality reasons for leaving. These results are in line with Martin (2004), who discusses the possibility for variation among men and among women within the institution of gender, and recent research that uncovers within-gender category variation in individuals' experiences of and responses to religious gender regimes (e.g., Irby 2014).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to answer continuing calls to make gender visible within religious processes and employ a theoretically informed gender lens in sociological analyses of religion. To this end, I examined how gender related to motivations for exit among fifty-nine former Amish adults. Results revealed that gender was associated with these motivations in two different ways. First, while on the surface men and women shared many of the same motivations for exit identified in the Amish literature (Faulkner and Dinger 2014; Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013) and that align with the religion literature more broadly (e.g., Bahr and Albrecht 1989; Cottee 2015; Davidman 2014; Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; Roozen 1980; Smith 2011; Vargas 2012; Wright et al. 2011; Zuckerman 2012), including spiritual transformation, dissatisfaction and conflict with church leaders, displeasure with lifestyle restrictions, occupational aspirations, family dysfunctions, and non-Amish romantic partners, closer examination revealed that all of these motivations varied in some way by gender, although gender variation in spiritual transformation was quite minimal. Second, some women and one man were motivated to leave the Amish because of concerns about gender inequities. These concerns related to gendered rules for dress and occupation, gendered double standards for behavior, women's troubling dating experiences, and/or the devaluation of women or femininity. Analysis revealed how the intersection of gender and religion among the Amish produced these gendered motivations. More specifically, the Amish gender regime's underlying ideology, organizational structure, religious practices, and behavioral expectations shaped which spouse's spiritual transformation had the most weight in a couple's decision to leave, the kinds of conflicts with religious authority figures that spurred exits, which rules felt most central and problematic in individuals' lives, how high occupational goals needed to be to motivate exits, the types of family conflicts that were most disruptive in their Amish lives, the roles that romantic relationships with non-Amish people played in their exits, and the inequities that were the most salient

reasons to leave. Motivations for exit, then, were responses to individuals' gendered experiences of being Amish.

Approaching the examination of reasons for religious exit through a gender lens advances our knowledge of religious mobility. These findings indicate that previous studies of religious exit that fail to incorporate a gender lens (e.g., Hurst and McConnell 2010; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt 2013; Roozen 1980; Vargas 2012) have minimized gender variation in motivations for exit, painting experiences of religious exit as far more gender-homogeneous than they are. Previous research has overlooked how gender variation in motivations for religious exit extends beyond individual-level gender differences in religiosity or general concerns about gender inequity (Cottee 2015; Roozen 1980; Vargas 2012). Even though gender is not equally implicated in all dimensions of religious experience, as Irby (2014) finds in her research on gender and evangelical dating, lack of attention to gender misrepresents individuals' lived realities of religious exit.

The present study, with its conceptualization of religion as a gendered institution (Avishai 2016a), not only provides considerable evidence for gender variation in exiting motivations but also allows us to make sense of the gender variation identified. The intersection of gender and religion plays a significant part in constituting individuals' experiences as members of religious groups and, therefore, is embedded in the factors that play a part in their decisions to exit them. Gender differences in motivations for religious exit emerge from and reflect the experiences of gendered individuals who encounter gendered behavioral expectations, occupy gendered positions within their organization, face gendered variation in their access to power and authority, and engage with gendered ideologies. Motivations for exit, then, mirror the gendered religious lives that men and women experience. Even when gender is less directly salient to exiting motivations, as in the case of spiritual transformation or romantic relationships with non-Amish individuals, gender still permeates the process of exit because of the ways in which religion and gender intersect among the Amish.

In addition to advancing our understanding of religious mobility, these findings help illuminate features at the intersection of gender and religion. First, these findings point to ways in which gendered religious regimes reproduce themselves. For example, if those who find the inequalities inherent to a particular religious gender regime problematic are more likely to leave, which may be the case among the Amish given evidence of perceptions of gender among members (Hurst and McConnell 2010; Neriya-Ben Shahar 2017), there are few consequences for the gender regime, and it will likely persist unchallenged. Second, these findings help to demonstrate the strength and persistence of gendered religious regimes and their gendered logics. Many respondents, including women, did not report that they left the Amish because of gender

inequities, even as the gender regime shaped their motivations for exit in other ways. In other words, even among those motivated to leave due to some form of dissatisfaction or incompatibility with their Amish lives, many did not assert a belief that the Amish gender regime's inequalities were problematic to them and, therefore, did not challenge the regime before or after exit. Finally, these results indicate that while gender infuses religious groups' ideologies, structural arrangements, and practices, it may not equally shape all aspects of religious experience. In the case of those who leave the Amish because of their spiritual transformation, my results suggest that gender is less connected to beliefs about salvation than other aspects of their religious realities.

While the present study investigates how gender relates to reasons for exit from only one conservative religious group, results of this study provide direction for future research regarding the relationship between gender and religious exit and religion more broadly. The present study calls into question the gender neutrality of many motivations for religious exit and underscores the need for greater considerations of gender in examinations of religious exit and other religious processes across different religious groups. Moreover, it demonstrates that conceiving of religion as a multidimensional gendered institution and investigating specific religious groups' gender regimes provides a fruitful way for making sense of gendered religious phenomena. Future research can help clarify the consequences of the intersection of gender and religion by examining how other religious groups' gender regimes play a part in shaping members' lived experiences of religion and the decisions they make regarding religious mobility.

In general, scholars contend that the experiences and meanings of individual religious mobility depend on the social and historical context in which it takes place (Zuckerman 2012). The present study demonstrates that gender is one of the essential elements of that social and historical context. Examining religious phenomena through a theoretically informed gender lens improves our understanding of nuanced and complex social processes and the gendered religious contexts in which they occur.

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