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Gendering by Design: The Visual Language of
Essentialism in Evangelical Material Culture

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Abstract

One in four Americans identifies as an evangelical Christian. In the “parallel universe” of the evangelical subculture, gender essentialism is advocated as divine mandate. The material culture that shapes everyday evangelical life reproduces and naturalizes gendered dualism so that egalitarian views are delegitimized and rendered unthinkable. This study contributes to the literature on evangelical gender ideology as it goes beyond written texts and examines the visual language of evangelical material culture. As representative artifacts of this culture, mass-circulation women’s and men’s devotional magazines published by the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest evangelical denomination, are analyzed. Their respective designs reveal symbolically potent arrangements of texts, fonts, graphics, images, colors, and patterns that work in combination to tacitly reify evangelical gender norms. Using Hall’s Audience Reception Theory as a framework, the study demonstrates how evangelical institutions encode, and evangelical audiences decode, a dominant reading of gender essentialism in the visual language of mass evangelical material culture.

In her ethnography of evangelical Christian women, Julie Ingersoll (2003) concluded, “If the evangelically produced material culture is essentially gendered, then evangelicalism itself is essentially gendered” (p. 120). Her fieldwork included site visits to local Christian bookstores in five states, from the Northeast to the Far West. Ingersoll described at length the stores’ striking homogeneity as they “market the accoutrements of a distinctive subculture” (p. 120). And not just books and music but apparel, jewelry, home décor, plaques, posters. Perusing the women’s section, she was struck by “the radical difference in the color of the books; they blend together like a wall of soft pinks and blues.” Just as noteworthy is what she did not see: “there was not one book on courage or leadership” (p. 120). Instead, categories for evangelical women were “devotional books, books on friendship, and books ... about dealing with a chaotic home” (p. 123). On the whole, Ingersoll discovered, “there is almost no inventory that is not intended specifically either for men or women” (p. 122).

My own work focuses on the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1974) and how evangelicals employ language to construct a shared culture—a community of faith with which 1 in 4 Americans identifies (Pew Research Center 2015) and is the nation’s single largest religious tradition (Putnam and Campbell 2010). As such, I have explored how gender ideology is reproduced locally through sermons (Ward 2019a), institutionally through evangelical broadcasting (Ward 2014), and linguistically through communal discourse (Ward 2018a). But reading Ingersoll (2003) prompted me to take her advice and “visit a local Christian bookstore to see examples firsthand” (p. 120). Walking the showroom, I paid new attention to its material culture. As a grandparent, I was drawn to the children’s clothing. Tees for girls were in light pastels, mostly pink and white, accented with hearts or angels, butterflies or flowers, and “sweet” messages in cursive scripts. In contrast, tees for boys were in earth tones, imprinted with slogans in bold san serif type, often a stencil font that evoked “official” sports gear.

To be clear, my standing in relation to evangelicalism is an “insider” who came of age in the subculture. So, my ethnographic research is grounded in moments when “mundane social practice[s] ... inexplicably shed their accustomed air of ‘naturalness’ and become interpretive sites for the exploration of cultural sense” (Katriel 1991, 2). And from that moment in the bookstore, I began in my fieldwork to notice how “gendered dualism is perpetuated on a popular level by virtue of the fact that the [evangelical] material culture that gives shape to everyday life reproduces it” (Ingersoll 2003, 107). Yet my epiphany also brought a new thought: In addition to the spoken and written language of evangelicalism that I study, profound meanings about gender and power are also conveyed through *visual* language. Though my work in sociolinguistics is a vital part of the picture, the gendered dualism of evangelical material culture is visual as well as textual. Addressing this problem would require me “to consider not only text but to examine why a particular

arrangement of textual and graphic elements has symbolic potency within a given institutional or organizational culture” (Ward 2010, 63). Toward that end, the present study analyzes representative artifacts of evangelical material culture for their information design—that is, how their texts, fonts, graphics, images, colors, and patterns work in combination to achieve “transformation into valuable, meaningful information” (Shedroff 1999, 268).

The artifacts are *Journey* and *Stand Firm*, the monthly devotional magazines for women and men from the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention (2020a), the nation’s largest Protestant denomination with 14.5 million members and weekly worship attendance of 5.25 million at more than 47,500 local churches. To make its argument, the present study reviews the literature on evangelical gendering, describes the research method, parses the magazines’ information designs, and analyzes the designs through Stuart Hall’s (2009) Audience Reception Theory to demonstrate that producers of evangelical material culture encode, and their audiences decode, a dominant reading of gender essentialism through visual language.

GENDERING IN AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

The evangelical consensus of the early American republic, which arose together with the Second Great Awakening of the early to mid-nineteenth century, spawned a mass popular literature that linked women’s piety to traditional gender roles (Brereton, 1991). When the evangelical consensus declined in the late nineteenth century, evangelicals launched campaigns of mass evangelism and, by the twentieth century, built a mass subculture in which preservation of traditional gender roles remained a prime concern (Bendroth, 1993). By the final quarter of the twentieth century, evangelicals’ subcultural institutions had grown sufficiently to provide an infrastructure for engaging the American cultural mainstream (Balmer, 2017).

Historians now peg the rise of the New Christian Right, not as a reaction to the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion, but to a 1978 ruling by the Internal Revenue Service that threatened to shut down church-run day schools (Balmer 2014; Martin 1996; Williams 2012). Dismayed by Supreme Court rulings in the 1960s that disallowed state-sponsored Bible reading and prayer in public schools, evangelicals in the 1970s created their own alternative education system at a rate of two new schools per day (Crespino 2008). In 1978 the IRS, citing a 1972 Supreme Court holding that any segregated institution is not “charitable” and thus not entitled to a tax exemption, declared that church schools would be presumed as de facto “white flight” academies. Tax exemptions would be revoked unless the schools met minority enrollment quotas. Ultimately, the rule was shelved after evangelicals massively protested that the IRS had mischaracteriz-

ed their schools' religious purpose and interfered with their religious freedoms. By the mid 1980s, evangelical schools enrolled more than a million children—prompting scholars to ask: What were they teaching?

A key consideration that drove many evangelical parents to seek a “Christian education” for their children was concern over “value neutral” sex education in public schools (Irvine 2002). After 18 months observing a church-run school, Peshkin (1986) found a correlation between the sex education controversy and the creationist view that God made men and women to each fulfill roles appropriate to their gender. In meeting “the special needs of male and female children,” educators proceeded from “a Christian view of sex roles” in which “sons need to learn craft skills, work habits, gardening, manners, economics, leadership, music, and rhetoric” and “daughters need to learn cooking, housekeeping, household management, manners, sewing, growing and arranging flowers, interior decoration, literary skills, and child care” (p. 127). Similarly, Rose (1988) observed two schools and concluded that evangelicals felt beset by threats on multiple fronts, including “progressive education materials that ... ‘diminish, deny, or denigrate traditional sex role norms as historically understood in the United States.’” As such, “The new Christian schools represent just one thrust of a multi-pronged attempt to exercise influence on social morality.” By “reuniting the three major socializing institutions of family, church, and school, evangelicals hope to achieve a greater coherence in their own lives, bring up their children in the faith, and bring morality back to the United States” (p. 26).

These developments gave rise to a minority counterreaction among evangelicals' own ranks. By the 1980s, mainstream evangelical presses were publishing popular books by authors (e.g., Bilezekian 1985; Gundry 1977, 1980; Siddons 1980) who espoused what came to be called “evangelical feminism” (Cochran 2005; Ingersoll 2003). Women who felt that gendered dualism curtailed their ministries came together in 1987 to found Christians for Biblical Equality (2020). That same year, traditionalists countered by forming the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (2020) and crafting The Danvers Statement to affirm, “Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order.” Four years later, Council cofounders John Piper and Wayne Grudem (1991) published *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Received with wide popular and institutional acclaim, the bestseller's “biblical” defense of gendered “complementarianism” and its critique of “egalitarianism” quickly coopted evangelical discourse.

The book's wide influence, from evangelical opinion leaders and pastors to the pews, was revealed by two studies conducted in the early to mid 1990s. After field observations of a large evangelical church and interviews with numerous couples, Bartkowski (2001) found a “general commitment to masculine-feminine difference” and that “essentialist rhetoric figures prominently into the construction

of gender” (p. 165). On a larger scale, Smith (2000) surveyed some 2,600 white and black evangelicals and interviewed more than three hundred. Most “clearly do feel the need to maintain a meaningful ideology of [male] headship within the subculture” (p. 186) and “are quite comfortable with the idea that the husband should be the head of the family. They believe the Bible teaches this, and they very much want to take it seriously” (p. 189). Yet both studies also discovered that the complementarian ideal provided rhetorical cover for gender-role negotiation in marriages. Thus, to make complementarianism work in practice, the principle of “mutual submission,” based on Ephesians 5:21, allowed couples to “retain their commitment to the general rule of gender difference while accounting for the numerous exceptions to this rule” (Bartkowski 2001, 165). Rather than practice unqualified male headship, “A more common approach—one which holds perhaps the greatest potential to legitimate male-privileged marriage through the rhetoric of equality—was to contend that husband and wife are equal in value and spiritual importance, but are *functionally* different” (Smith 2000, 173, emphasis in original).

Several field studies in the 1990s explored evangelical gender ideology from the viewpoint of ordinary women and found they genuinely experienced female submission as empowering. “Women themselves claim the doctrine of submission leads both to freedom and transformation” and saw their “voluntary submission to divine authority ... [as] a bold surrender, an act of assuming a crucial role God has called women to play” (Griffith 1997, 179, 199). Sexual polarity allowed “women’s ministries” to operate as “a counterfoil to male dominance in congregational life” (Brasher 1998, 64). And though “positions of formal authority are reserved, according to the patriarchal model, for men ... organizational strength is built through family ties sustained, by and large, by women” (Ault 2004, 316). Women further believed that abandoning the complementarian principle would rob them of love, security, and respect (Gallagher 2003). But if evangelical women framed submission as a clear choice, options for men were less plain. Studies showed men negotiating their roles either by adopting the standpoint of “soft patriarchy” (Wilcox 2004), choosing among suitably Christianized archetypes from Rational Patriarch to Expressive Egalitarian to Tender Warrior (Bartkowski 2004), or embracing “heroic” masculinity against the “‘feminized’ expectations of ... servant leadership and involved fatherhood” (Gallagher and Wood 2005, 135).

Rhetorical complementarianism thus permitted “the majority of ordinary evangelicals [to be] pragmatically egalitarian” while deferring “the ideals of ‘biblical’ or evangelical feminism [to] remain relatively marginalized within evangelical subculture” (Gallagher 2004, 215). One study compared surveys of *Christianity Today* readers, conducted in 1990 and 2001, and found that as perceived threats from the surrounding society increased over time, evangelicals grew more conservative in their gender ideology (Frederick and Balswick 2006). “[T]hey are relying upon patriarchal gender ideologies ... as identity markers to distinguish themselves

from others in mainstream America” (p. 1) and “using gender ideology for boundary maintenance” (p. 5). The conviction that God created gender differences and ordained male headship held firm. “Although women are working more, evangelicals challenge whether this is good for family life” and “are resisting gender role changes, perhaps thinking such resistance will serve to support the traditional family model” (p. 6). Given this dominance of complementarian discourses, research since the mid 2000s has focused on its manifestations from sermons (Ward 2019a) and forms of personal address (Ward 2009), to evangelical radio programs (Vance 2016) and family communication (Colaner 2009), and to dating (Irby 2014) and career aspirations (Colaner and Giles 2008).

METHOD OF THE STUDY

An ethnographer stands toward a culture as either a “complete observer” who observes without interaction, an “observer-as-participant” who interacts to gather predetermined types of data such as structured interviews, a “participant-as-observer” who interacts spontaneously to shadow culture members and learn their ways, or a “complete participant” who is already an initiate (Gold 1958). My standpoint in relation to the evangelical community is a complete participant who came of age in the subculture after a teenage conversion experience and thus can access members’ unarticulated assumptions. Ethnographies of American evangelicalism written from a complete-participant standpoint are not uncommon, from Balmer’s (1989) classic field survey of multiple evangelical traditions to Malley’s (2004) in-depth study of a single church. Numerous ethnographies have also focused on gendering as integral to evangelical communal life and inseparable from congregational leadership, social hierarchy, organizational discourse, and individual identity-work (e.g., Bartkowski 2001, 2004; Bendroth 1993; Brasher 1998; Gallagher 2003; Griffith 1997; Ingersoll 2003; Ward 2019a).

My own fieldwork has encompassed both breadth and depth, from four years touring weekends with a gospel singing group that visited nearly 200 churches in 17 states, to three years observing the life of a single church, to media ethnographies of evangelical radio, television, and streaming content. In so doing, I have followed Pike’s (1971) emic method by deferring any a priori classification system, allowing units of analysis to emerge naturally from the functional relations of the culture, and then seeking an analytical framework with explanatory power for the observed phenomena. Often, my analyses are grounded in the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1974), a branch of sociolinguistics that elicits how a speech community (Hymes 1962) constructs a shared culture through members’ shared rules for interpreting discourse. Over the years, I have reported on American evangelical culture as constructed at the macro level of national institutions and their mass-mediated representations (Ward 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2018b, 2018c,

2018d, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c), the meso level of local rhetoric in sermons and other congregational discourses (Ward 2010, 2015a, 2015b, 2019a, 2020d), and the micro level of private talk and role enactments (Ward 2009, 2015c, 2018a). More recently, I have also taken in visual communication (Ward 2018e) and critical examination of race and gender conventions in White evangelical culture (Ward 2018f, 2019c).

The present study blends various threads of this research program in analyzing how evangelical material culture combines textual and visual elements to (re)produce gender norms. In fieldwork I have gathered a broad range of material artifacts—weekly church bulletins, song sheets, prayer lists, activity calendars, Sunday school lessons, small group Bible curricula, youth group materials, gospel tracts, devotional reading guides, books, magazines, videos, music CDs, and more. Once the gender constructs that suffused this material culture began to “shed their accustomed air of ‘naturalness’ and become interpretive sites for the exploration of cultural sense” (Katriel 1991, 2), the potential corpus of artifacts was vast. Rather than attempt a broad survey, I concluded that a highly granular analysis for a limited number of representative artifacts would potentially yield more comprehensible and productive findings.

But what artifacts might be broadly representative of evangelical gender norms? When not conducting formal fieldwork, like any ethnographer I continue to informally observe the community that I study. During the spring of 2019, while attending a large Southern Baptist church in a midsized city of the southwestern United States, one Sunday I walked past the literature table in the lobby. There I saw, stacked side-by-side for free distribution, *Journey* and *Stand Firm* monthly magazines. That they respectively targeted women and men was instantly recognizable from visual clues alone. After picking up monthly issues of *Journey* and *Stand Firm* between March and June, I determined to proceed with a closer investigation.

The magazines are published by LifeWay Christian Resources (2020), the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest Protestant denomination with 14.5 million members. Since its takeover by conservatives in the 1980s (Ammerman 1990), the convention is the single largest “home” of American evangelicals. LifeWay itself is a massive institution. Based in Nashville on a 277,000-square-foot campus, LifeWay in 2019 reported revenues of \$267 million and assets of \$367 million (Southern Baptist Convention 2020b). The organization operated 170 stores until exiting brick-and-mortar retailing in 2019, and now distributes product through some 470 local Christian bookstores nationwide. With its current emphasis on e-tailing, LifeWay’s online store offers “Christian resources” in every imaginable print, video, and digital format. Product development is guided by LifeWay Research (2020), a sophisticated market research and opinion polling division. LifeWay’s twelve print magazines, from *Adventure Devotions* for ages 7 to 10, to *Mature Living* for “older adults,” are thus not idiosyncratic productions

driven by the gut instincts of editors. *Journey and Stand Firm*, which are sold individually through subscriptions, in bookstores, and in bulk to churches, are designed with focused intentionality for broad appeal to evangelical gender norms.

The literature on information design provides warrant for interpreting combinations of textual and graphic elements for *Journey* and *Stand Firm* in more than purely instrumental terms of transmitting information. Scholars have long critiqued the assumption that clarity, accuracy, and precision are the only relevant criteria for conveying information as itself an ideological construct (Miller 1978). For example, Spinuzzi (2003) traced how organizational discourses about information design legitimized the “designer-as-hero” who rescued the “worker-as-victim” from unclear information. The discourse thus privileged “centralized solutions [which] assume that design solutions must spring from ... decision makers with specialized knowledge” and “be officially refined and consolidated by a trained designer if these underlying problems are to be truly solved” (p. 3).

Similarly, Iedema (2003) described information design as socially situated sign systems to be understood “within the practices, social rules, resource availabilities, and ‘moral habitats’ that bear on how we are able to mean, and on how our meaning makings unfold” (p. 40). He analyzed an iMac set-up manual with “colored pictures of someone doing something to a nicely colored computer, rather than vertically-arranged lists of recipe-like instructions.” Through its information design, the text metamorphosed from a “technical manual” to a “brochure” and thus projected Apple’s ideology of a “user-friendly ethos” (p. 47). Ward (2010b) reached a similar conclusion when he analyzed a Nazi “racial education” pamphlet. Its design used then-new Isotype pictograms to effectively simplify newly enacted 1935 racial laws. But, in analyzing an information design that sought to reify “a seemingly rational agreement to exclude Jews from their community,” Ward observed, “purely instrumental definitions of information design ... will not do” (p. 63). Ward argued that information design tacitly responds to a social exigency through symbolic arrangements of text and graphics that seek to “coordinate a meaning and satisfy a mutual need to establish a rule of action and ensure the continuance of [a] common world” (pp. 68-69).

Thus, the information designs of *Journey* and *Stand Firm* may be interpreted not simply as neutral conduits for neutrally transmitting information with neutral accuracy, precision, and clarity. The respective design conventions by which *Journey* and *Stand Firm* combine texts, fonts, graphics, images, colors, and patterns may be interpreted as ideological constructs that privilege centralized solutions and, within a socially situated sign system, seek to coordinate a gender essentialist meaning where traditional roles are the rule of action and a common social world is continued. In turn, this sociocultural view of information design justifies ethnographic observation as a research method and an analytical framework grounded in cultural studies—Audience Reception Theory—to explain why evangelical audi-

ences accept the dominant gendered reading intended by the designers of evangelical material culture.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ARTIFACTS

Journey and *Stand Firm* were both published in full color on coated (“slick”) magazine stock in a 5¼” x 8¼” format, all of which are common among national parachurch ministries in the devotional magazine genre. Among the four issues examined, March thru June 2019, all the *Journey* editions were 44 pages in length and *Stand Firm* 40 pages. The *Journey* covers (front, inside front, inside back, back) were printed in a heavier and brighter paper stock than the inside pages, while *Stand Firm* used an eight-page folio so that its first four and last four pages were printed in the heavier and brighter stock. Thus, *Journey* was published in two 16-page folios, an eight-page folio, and four-page cover folio for a total of 44 pages, while *Stand Firm* was published in two 16-page folios and an eight-page cover folio for a total of 40 pages.

Front Covers

While the old maxim warns, “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” magazine covers are significant indicators of a publication’s branding and marketing strategies. For one, covers are printed on heavier and brighter stock in order to stand out and convey high-quality production values. After that, text and graphics are designed and arranged to instantly convey, even on first impression, the magazine’s appeal to its target audience. Description of the gendered information designs of *Journey* and *Stand Firm* thus begins with their March 2019 front covers.

Neither front cover featured headings that referenced articles in the magazine. Instead, the branding and market appeal were almost entirely visual—and wholly gendered. The *Journey* cover conjured a nostalgically “safe” ambiance, a world of “family values” and white, middle-class, domestic joys: cross-stitching, flower arranging, handwritten notes, and the leisure each morning to wake up, put on comfy jeans, sit on a tartan, and have quality time for “spiritual journaling” and “daily devotions” with the Bible. No need to set the alarm, dress hurriedly for work, and rush to the office! Because a woman is said to be designed by God to be emotional and find satisfaction in relationships, her deepest needs are met by “intimacy with God” and by the network of family (cross-stitching, flower arranging, tartans, comfy mornings—and thus homemaking), friends (handwritten notes), and church (Bible study, devotions) evoked by the cover design. Succeeding issues featured the same cross-stitch background and framed circle photo of an anonymous woman: she is holding a spray of Queen Anne’s lace and framed by butterflies (April 2019),

March 2019 *Journey* Cover

Nameplate: *Journey* is yellowish brown in a cursive upper-and-lower-case font with thicker downstrokes and thinner upstrokes, evoking a woman's handwriting in an old-fashioned ink pen. *Journey* slants upward at a slight angle from left to right, further evoking nostalgia for personal handwritten messages.

Tagline: A Woman's Guide to Intimacy with God

Cover Image: A thin, right-handed white woman with shoulder-length straight blond hair, dressed in denim blue jeans and a short-sleeved solid light-blue plain top, is seated on a tartan coverlet. In her lap is an open spiral-bound notebook or "spiritual journal" and, on top of it, an open Bible. She is holding the Bible open with her left hand and writing in the journal with a #2 pencil in her right hand. The day-lit color photo is a circular cut-out, like old-time family portraits, but the woman's face is cropped out above the chin so that she is anonymous.

Background and Colors: In the background of the cover is a light beige woven pattern that evokes a cross-stitch palette.

Other Elements

- issue date in the upper right quadrant
- orange-red banner across the top with the tagline in white sans serif letters
- red flowers with green leaves that frame the cut-out cover photo
- barcode at bottom left corner that prices the magazine \$4.95 per copy
- LifeWay logo and tagline, "Biblical Solutions for Life," at bottom right

March 2019 *Stand Firm* Cover

Nameplate: *Stand Firm* is rendered in 1½" tall capital letters with a bold sans serif font. The "D" and "R" are modified to resemble military-style stenciling. The nameplate is literally black (*Firm*) and white (*Stand*), accentuated as the words are printed across a solid olive-green banner.

Below the nameplate in small, sans serif, reverse white capital letters is printed: *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. I Corinthians 16:13*

Tagline: God's Challenge for Today's Man

Cover Image: A photo of a deep forest is taken looking up from near ground level so that the tall trees reach upward at an angle, like looking up to the ceiling of a cathedral. Between two trees, just below the nameplate, the sun is breaking out in a sunburst. Readers' eyes are drawn upward to the nameplate and especially the word *Stand* in reverse white.

Background and Colors: The cover features only the nameplate and the forest photo. The colors are forest foliage, dark-to-black tree trunks, the olive-green banner for the nameplate, black type for *Firm* and reverse white type for *Stand* and the tagline.

Other Elements

- issue date in the upper right corner
- barcode at bottom left corner that prices the magazine \$4.95 per copy
- LifeWay logo and tagline, "Biblical Solutions for Life," at bottom right

riding past cherry blossoms on a bicycle, holding a floppy straw sun hat, and framed by daisies (May 2019), or planning a summer vacation as her straw hat lies on the kitchen table beside a world map, cup of tea and strainer, reading glasses, and camera, all framed by a passport and airline luggage tags (June 2019).

The March 2019 *Stand Firm* cover invoked masculine heuristics: big bold letters, earthy greens and browns, tall trees, the upward look. Believed to be divinely designed for the role of leader and protector and by nature competitive, he revels in “God’s Challenge” and—he meets it! He can “stand firm” and, heroically against all odds, can “keep the faith” because he “acts like a man” and thus can “be strong.” He is “Today’s Man” for God! He is a mighty tree (March 2019); the stone that creates ripples in a pond (April 2020); the steady prow of a boat that plies the bay at dawn (May 2019); the rocky bed of a flowing mountain stream (June 2019). By implication he is a “man’s man,” an outdoorsman—the forest, the pond, the bay, the mountains. Though he is a loving and sensitive Christian husband and father, by nature he is still a primeval creature, a lone wolf who yearns to run free in the wild where he can be closest to God.

Front Matter

After the front covers came the “front matter,” starting with the masthead that stated each magazine’s name, purpose, ownership, contact information, ISSN number, copyright notice, and credits for the executive, editorial, and production staffs. For the latter, *Journey* and *Stand Firm* credited their “Production & Ministry Team.” In the role usually credited as Publisher was the “Director, Adult Ministry,” and the role of Associate Publisher was credited as “Manager, Adult Ministry Magazines and Devotionals.” Interestingly, the “Graphic Design Specialist,” who for purposes of this study functioned as the information designer, was the same for both *Journey* and *Stand Firm* and was a woman. Graphic designers often have styles that run like a signature through their work. That the designs of the two magazines were radically different—and radically gendered—even under the supervision of the same person, suggested that the designs were formulas guided by product research and branding considerations.

The two mastheads respectively stated that *Journey* “is a Christian women’s devotional magazine” and *Stand Firm* “is a Christian men’s devotional magazine.” Both publications’ front matter included a head shot and brief message from the editor. The *Journey* editor was a fiftyish white woman in a blue blouse and pearl necklace, with a round face and blond hair cut in a “sensible” short style. In a Bible passage that is well known among evangelicals, older women “are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and in submission to their husbands, so that God’s word will not be slandered” (Titus 2:3-5).

By contrast, the *Stand Firm* editor was a well-built fortyish white man, handsome by conventional standards with a full head of brown hair, confident smile, strong jawline, fashionable shadow of facial hair, and wearing a denim-blue, open-collared casual shirt.

In her brief message, the *Journey* editor recounted everyday domestic occurrences—her husband’s bad do-it-yourself haircut (March 2019), an opossum trapped in the trash can (May 2019), an “accidental” recipe that won praise (June 2019)—as metaphors for sin. By contrast, the *Stand Firm* editor reminded men that “Feelings are fickle things” (March 2019), “Jesus secured victory” (May 2019), and “the best thing we can do as fathers is not to try to be the perfect hero, but point [our children] to the only perfect hero, Jesus” (June 2019). Thus, the two editors respectively normalized assumptions that women’s chief interests are in domestic life and that men must not be deterred by emotion as they emulate the values of victory and heroism.

The magazines’ front matter was rounded out by their tables of contents. Since *Journey* used heavier and brighter cover stock in only a four-page folio, its contents were only briefly listed on page 2 beside the masthead. *Stand Firm*, on the other hand, featured an eight-page folio of cover stock so that its contents occupied all of page three. Both publications were formatted with daily devotional readings divided by the day and week, followed by a feature article and then regular features. While the *Journey* table of contents was a simple half-column textual listing, the full page of *Stand Firm* contents left room for text and images. The March 2019 issue was typical: The feature article title was accompanied by a photo of a man in silhouette standing alone on a mountaintop, hands triumphantly on hips, just as the sun breaks through the clouds. One regular feature was illustrated by a forest lake, the dawn mist rising from the water; in the far distance, two silhouetted men in a skiff are patiently trolling for fish. Finally, the regular “Good Humor” feature was accompanied by a funny cartoon of a grimacing man with a deer-in-the-headlights expression. Clad in only his tee shirt and presumably needing to press his dress shirt in a hurry, he is holding up an iron but apparently does not know what to do with it.

Devotional Readings

Following their front matter, *Journey* and *Stand Firm* launched into 30 or 31 pages (depending on the length of the month) of daily devotional readings. Though here the text carried most of the information, the respective graphic designs of these pages may be noted. The woven cross-stitch pattern on the *Journey* cover was replicated on each daily page of devotions, as was the framing motif (flowers, butterflies, etc.) from the cover. Further, each day’s theme and Bible verse reference was printed within a circle cut-out. Each daily headline featured a keyword in the same cursive script as the *Journey* nameplate, while a serif font was used for

the text. Finally, each devotional reading ended with a suggested “Steps of Faith” first-person prayer. Again, the visual ambiance was feminine, domestic, relational, personal. In contrast, the graphic design of the *Stand Firm* daily devotional readings was “industrial” and unemotional. The text was rendered in a sans serif font. The date was printed in a light green “tab” in the upper left. On the left was a page-length “call-out” box, again in light green, with a pithy quotation and then bullet points directing the subscriber to read a Bible verse and then challenge himself with a series of questions. The overall effect evoked an office memo and accompanying PowerPoint.

The writing style of the daily devotional genre in American evangelicalism is well established: a pithy attention-getting story, often from personal experience or about a famous Christian, followed by a short biblical lesson and suggested personal application. Reviewing here each of the 244 printed daily devotions in *Journey* and *Stand Firm* for March through June 2019 would be impractical. Yet the stories and settings for the March issues of the two magazines were typical and instructive as to the narratives that respectively “make sense” and seem “natural” for the lived experiences of evangelical women and men readers.

What stood out in the women’s devotional readings was the collective narrative that a Christian woman’s lived experience centers primarily on her domestic roles as a nurturing and caring wife and mother (or daughter to her own mother). Her struggles are relational and social, not only in marriage and as a parent, but also in coping with the presumed expectations of womanhood and then overcoming insecurities about how others see her. Among the readings, only one featured a woman with a job (March 25), plus one single adult woman (March 30) and one engaged in sports (March 3). By contrast, readings in *Stand Firm* were less emotional and their narratives not as personal, while at the same time conveying male role expectations.

The lived experience of Christian men, as narrated by *Stand Firm*, was wholly different from that of women. While devotional readings in *Journey* are oriented toward introspection and personal narrative, readings in *Stand Firm* are more oriented toward actions. In their world of *Stand Firm*, men are expected to graduate from college, get jobs, work hard, have careers. They struggle not with insecurities but with desires for wealth and status. Men are by nature competitive and aggressive, preferring action and daring to emotion and introspection. These instincts, designed by God, are negative if untamed. But the traits are good when channeled into providing for and protecting their families and pursuing God. Men do the heavy jobs—yardwork, moving furniture, taking the wheel on the road—but enjoy sports and the outdoors as outlets for their competitive instincts. Thus, in the gendered world of *Journey* and *Stand Firm*, God’s plan for women and men unfolded in a complementarian design.

March 2019 *Journey* Daily Devotional Readings

| Date | Reference | Story and Setting |
|-------------|----------------------|---|
| 1 | Psalm 100:3 | Felt unworthy to marry pastor |
| 2 | Mark 5:36 | Insecure to sing solos in church |
| 3 | Ephesians 3:16 | Training to run marathon |
| 4 | Proverbs 3:5-6 | Providing meals for elderly mother |
| 5 | Joel 2:25 | Mother in ICU after stroke |
| 6 | Psalm 13:5-6 | Rejoices in husband's thoughtful love |
| 7 | Proverbs 11:25 | Memory of Christian children's video |
| 8 | 1 Thessalonians 5:18 | Desired to be part of social "in group" |
| 9 | 2 Timothy 1:7 | Abandoned by birth mother |
| 10 | Psalm 90:15 | Waiting on final week of pregnancy |
| 11 | 1 Corinthians 15:58 | Coping as youngest child enters school |
| 12 | 1 Peter 2:4-5 | Being a stranger in a different country |
| 13 | Hebrews 12:2 | Keeps writing despite rejections |
| 14 | Psalm 42:5 | Copes with depression, as mother did |
| 15 | James 1:19 | With laryngitis, learned to listen |
| 16 | Isaiah 53:3 | Overcame insecurity at middle age |
| 17 | James 1:3-4 | Exhausted in parenting difficult child |
| 18 | Job 2:13 | In NICU with newborn surgery |
| 19 | Ephesians 4:24 | Prideful in being "good" Christian |
| 20 | Philippians 4:8 | Helped child with low self-worth |
| 21 | Galatians 6:2 | Got complacent with church routines |
| 22 | Proverbs 4:23 | Struggled with others' expectations |
| 23 | Psalm 127:2 | Trouble getting toddler to sleep |
| 24 | Jeremiah 33:3 | Still learning from grandmother |
| 25 | Psalm 46:10 | Daily commute to work |
| 26 | 2 Corinthians 12:9 | Father died when she was girl |
| 27 | Psalm 73:26 | Doesn't want to yell at kids |
| 28 | Isaiah 43:1 | Sent oldest child to college |
| 29 | Romans 12:1 | Has silly habits at grocery store |
| 30 | Matthew 6:28 | Bought first home as single adult |
| 31 | 1 Chronicles 17:1 | Reflects on all that needs to be done |

March 2019 *Stand Firm* Daily Devotional Readings

| Date | Reference | Role Expectations |
|-------------|----------------------|--|
| 1 | Psalm 139:13-16 | “No matter our career...” |
| 2 | Luke 15:11-24 | “protect our marriage and children” |
| 3 | Proverbs 22:6 | “stay calm ... firmly offering correction” |
| 4 | Matthew 5:13-16 | “career path ... graduate school” |
| 5 | John 14:1-6 | “Jesus gave us a different end game” |
| 6 | Acts 17:10-15 | “Simple faith is wonderful” |
| 7 | Galatians 5:1-6 | “teaching [son] a great work ethic” |
| 8 | Proverbs 24:30-32 | “work hard, take care of my family” |
| 9 | Mark 1:29-38 | “[podcasts] apply to life and business” |
| 10 | Proverbs 17:9 | “the workplace ... get ahead of others” |
| 11 | Hebrews 2:1-4 | “Pursue Jesus with everything you have” |
| 12 | Luke 18:9-14 | “our masculine pride leads us to gloat” |
| 13 | James 2:1-7 | “glorify ... looks, wealth, prestige” |
| 14 | Ephesians 2:1-9 | “I can earn a raise based on [merit]” |
| 15 | Psalm 91:1-8 | “refusing to allow fear ... daring greatly” |
| 16 | Proverbs 20:4 | “Proverb [shows] need for hard work” |
| 17 | Luke 17:11-19 | “I want the good stuff” |
| 18 | Jeremiah 23:16-22 | “I was ... on a plane recently” |
| 19 | Romans 12:14-21 | “desire to ... harm those who wronged me” |
| 20 | 1 Chronicles 5:18-22 | “Life often seems like a battle” |
| 21 | Luke 5:15-16 | “men [don’t like to] sit alone and think” |
| 22 | Matthew 6:19-24 | “My treasure was money” |
| 23 | 1 Samuel 17:34-49 | “God call[ed] me to make a career pivot” |
| 24 | Proverbs 15:4 | “I once spoke to ... football players” |
| 25 | Proverbs 27:17 | “I was talking with some teenage guys” |
| 26 | Matthew 12:1-8 | “I am a stickler for rules ... when I drive” |
| 27 | Proverbs 17:7 | “Who shows up ... to help you move” |
| 28 | Matthew 13:47-52 | “I love to go out [fishing] on the boat” |
| 29 | Philippians 4:8-9 | “I love a good action film” |
| 30 | Hebrews 13:1-8 | “After I graduated and moved on ...” |
| 31 | Proverbs 17:22 | “I’m going to have to fight for [joy]” |

Features and Advertisements

These themes were carried through in the last components of *Journey* and *Stand Firm*, namely the feature articles and in-house advertisements that were interspersed among the daily devotional readings. Again, the March 2019 issues were typical and instructive.

March 2019 *Journey* Features

Regular Features

Jen's Journey (pp. 12-13) is subtitled "Diary of a Pastor's Wife" and authored by a "happy pastor's wife, mom of three, writer, and speaker ... As a brand new homeschooling mom, you'll find her swimming in coffee, chocolate, and all the books the library will loan her." She begins with an account of her nerves in meeting a well-known speaker at a Christian women's conference and segues to overcoming her insecurities through Jesus.

My Journey (p. 22) is written each month by a woman who has authored one of the daily devotional readings. The March author is a "social media professional" and begins with a story about she and her husband trading up into a larger home where "We looked forward to starting a family ... in a safer area." The deal fell through but a year later God blessed them with an even better new home with room to host extended family gatherings and "outdoor family fun."

Walking the Talk (pp. 30-31) was authored by the daughter of two evangelical heroes. Her missionary father was killed in the Amazon and her mother became a best-selling author and syndicated radio teacher. The column is excerpted from her new

March 2019 *Stand Firm* Features

Special Feature

"Keep Your Head in the Clouds" (pp. 20-21) runs across the centerfold and is excerpted from a book published by the Southern Baptist affiliated imprint. The call-out quotation advises men, "Our pilgrimage has a destination, and focusing on the destination empowers us to be helpful along the way," and is illustrated by a photo of a man standing triumphantly on a mountaintop, silhouetted against the clouds as the sun bursts through.

Regular Features

New Life in Christ (p. 28) is anonymous and a standard "presentation of the gospel" or "plan of salvation" that invites the reader "to begin a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus." Topped by an appropriate photo, the column begins, "Have you ever been fishing on a still morning and gazed at the beauty around you? Or perhaps you have been hiking and stopped to notice the silence of the woods?"

Good Humor (inside back cover) is authored by a syndicated radio speaker. A cartoon depicts a man in pajamas who is attempting to iron his dress shirt and is shocked when he puts the hot iron to his ear. The joke is that he mistakenly picked

book, published by the Southern Baptist affiliated imprint, of “The Personal Letters and Love Story” of her parents. The article is illustrated by photos of handwritten letter envelopes framed by sprays of lavender.

New Life in Christ (p. 32) is anonymous and a standard “presentation of the gospel” or “plan of salvation” that invites the reader “to begin a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus.” The column is accompanied by a photo of a thirtyish blond white woman, standing by a lake in a forest, wrapping herself warmly in a wool blanket, looking happily up to the sky.

In-House Advertisements

Page 21 advertises the book *Sacred Holidays: Less Chaos, More Jesus* whose cover features the title in cursive on a white background and is illustrated by a potpourri of pink, red, and green items representing various holiday crafts. The ad proclaims, “Holidays Don’t Have to be Frantic for Your Family.”

The inside back cover advertises six “2019 Must-Attend LifeWay Women Events.”

The back cover advertises a woman-authored small group Bible study curriculum for women entitled “We Over Me” and based on the Book of Revelation. A photo shows a dark-haired young woman, wearing comfy house clothes and a digital watch, sitting at home with her laptop and an open Bible on a sectional sofa and a white tile floor. A thumbnail shows the author, a young blond white woman.

up the iron when his smartphone rang—and did it twice! The story segues to the importance of spending “face time” with kids.

In-House Advertisements

Page 11 advertises a book and Bible study guide from the Southern Baptist affiliated imprint, *Heroic: The Surprising Path to True Manhood*. The striking cover is illustrated like an Art Deco superhero comic. The ad copy reads in all capital letters, “It’s in the movies we see. It’s in the news we hear. It’s in the stories we tell. Every man is stirred by the heroic. We want to be that heroic man but we do not know how. Jesus does.” Readers can “pre-order today and receive a free 30-day *Adventure into Manhood Trail Guide*.”

The back cover advertises the LifeWay book *Foundations: New Testament* which “guides you through the entire New Testament in one year by reading just five days per week” and applying “the H.E.A.R. journaling method.”

ENCODING AND DECODING GENDER NORMS

The present study, as noted earlier, follows Pike's (1971) emic method. Rather than impose an a priori classification system on the artifacts, units of analysis—namely, the gendered information designs of *Journey* and *Stand Firm*—emerged naturally from observations. The final task is to identify an analytical framework with explanatory power for the observed phenomena. Such a framework is Hall's (2009) Audience Reception Theory and its Encoding/Decoding model. When Hall first published his model in 1973, positivist approaches dominated media sociology (Gitlin 1978). Hall's theory is an alternative that "imparts a semi-otic framework on communication studies, moving away from earlier stimulus-response behaviorist models" (Shaw 2017, 593) and instead drawing on both "the agenda of the critical tradition (the concerns with power and ideology) and the empirical focus on audiences" (Madianou 2009, 326-327).

The Encoding/Decoding model accounts for the polysemy of mass communication by recognizing that producers' encoding and audiences' decoding are separable events. On the one hand, the encoding of media texts is an "ideological apparatus" (Hall 2009, 171) employed by producers to privilege a preferred reading. Yet as audiences decode a media text, they may either, in Hall's typology, accept the producers' *dominant* reading, attempt a *negotiated* reading, or adopt an *oppositional* reading. This decoding, however, is not an idiosyncratic individual construction. Rather, decoding is "a much more complex process, through which structural position might function to set parameters to the acquisition of cultural codes, the availability ... of which might then pattern the decoding process" (Morley 1992, 12). That is, audience members are situated within sociocultural structures that set parameters for their decoding.

Hall (2009) not only identified three stances that audiences might take in decoding a media text, but also posited the basic features of each stance. When an audience receives a media text and decodes it according to the producers' dominant reading, the audience thus "takes the connoted meaning from [the producer] full and straight" based on the "particular choice of presentational occasions and formats, the selection of personnel, the choice of images, the staging of debates" (p. 171). As Hall explained,

Dominant definitions connect events, implicitly or explicitly, to grand totalizations, to the great syntagmatic views-of-the-world: they take "large views" of issues ... even if they make these connections in truncated, inverted, or mystified ways. The definition of a hegemonic viewpoint is (a) that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and (b) that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy—it appears coterminous with what is "natural," "inevitable," "taken for granted" about the social order. (p. 172)

In a *negotiated* reading, however, the audience “acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules—it operates with exceptions to the rule” (Hall 2009, 172). By contrast, an audience that adopts an *oppositional* reading “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference” (pp. 172-173).

At the margins of American evangelicalism, both negotiated and oppositional readings of the dominant “complementarian” position on gender are observable. Christians for Biblical Equality (2020), for example, advocate a negotiated reading that accepts the metanarrative that the Bible’s words are divinely inspired. Further, the group accepts Bible interpretation by the “historical-grammatical” method, “a theologically sanitized form of the historical-critical method (the absence of ‘critical’ or ‘criticism’ is intentional) ... [and] a designation widely used among contemporary Evangelicals as a conscious alternative to historical criticism” (Aune 2010, 102). Yet, at a more restricted level, the group argues that the original Hebrew and Greek words can be alternately read to support a “biblical” interpretation of gender equality (George 2009). In contrast, the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus, also known as Christian Feminism Today (2020), detotalizes biblical literalism and retotalizes the Bible message within a framework of broader social justice concerns.

These minority readings notwithstanding, the conclusion that evangelical audiences accept en masse the dominant gender ideology preached from their local pulpits and national mass media is supported by large-scale surveys of evangelical attitudes toward gender roles (Frederick and Balswick 2006; Smith 2000), numerous ethnographic studies of gendering in evangelical life (e.g., Bartkowski 2001, 2004; Bendroth 1993; Brasher 1998; Gallagher 2003; Griffith 1997; Ingersoll 2003), and my own fieldwork (Ward 2018a, 2019a). Thus, *Journey* and *Stand Firm*, as representative examples of mass evangelical material culture, suggest that their audience “takes the connoted meaning from [the producer] full and straight” (Hall 2009, 171). The present study contributes the conclusion that *information design is a key element of producers’ ideological apparatus for encoding a dominant reading of gender essentialism* via the “particular choice of presentational occasions and formats, the selection of personnel, the choice of images, the staging of debates” (Hall 2009, 171),

As per Hall (2009), “Dominant definitions connect events, implicitly or explicitly, to grand totalizations, to the great syntagmatic views-of-the-world” (p. 172). In the information designs of *Journey* and *Stand Firm*, the grand totalization of essential male/female difference as a divine order of creation is encoded in the largely visual language of texts, fonts, graphics, images, colors, and patterns working in culturally and symbolically potent combinations. Dominant readings

“take ‘large views’ of issues ... even if they make these connections in truncated, inverted, or mystified ways” (p. 172). In the large view of *Journey* and *Stand Firm*, gender and difference are connected and then truncated through color coding and typography in which palettes and fonts for each gender are inversions of each other.

The hegemonic viewpoint “defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture” (Hall 2009, 172). Readers of *Journey* and *Stand Firm* accept a textual and visual metanarrative in which women are emotional, relational, domestic, nurturing, yet insecure. Men by contrast are active, competitive, at best heroic, at worst aggressive and acquisitive. A mental horizon is created in which the meaning of gendered dualism becomes the complementarity of male headship and female submission. Through such gender relations, women gain a protector from their insecurities while men channel their aggression to responsible and productive ends.

Finally, a dominant reading bears “the stamp of legitimacy—it appears coterminous with what is ‘natural,’ ‘inevitable,’ ‘taken for granted’ about the social order” (Hall 2009, 172). Thus, *Journey* and *Stand Firm* take for granted, again both textually and visually, that gender difference is God’s created order, natural and inevitable. *Journey* takes for granted that women “naturally” respond to personal stories embedded in a visually emotive palette of light pastels, flowers and butterflies, nostalgic background patterns, and cursive scripts. *Stand Firm* assumes that men “naturally” resonate with how-to advice set in a visually straightforward presentation of solid earth tones, heroic images, majestic outdoor scenes, and bold sans serif type. As explained earlier, the two magazines are institutionally legitimated by the nation’s largest Protestant—and evangelical—denomination, the 14.5-million-member Southern Baptist Convention. Their editors, writers, and designers occupy positions of power that accord the right and presumption to authoritatively speak, both textually *and visually*, on gender. Nor are *Journey* and *Stand Firm* the idiosyncratic creations of their editors. Their textual and visual elements are guided by the sophisticated market research arm of LifeWay Christian Resources.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

What the present study demonstrates about the gendered information designs of *Journey* and *Stand Firm* and, further, suggests about the mass evangelical material culture that the magazines represent, fits well within the scholarship of visual communication and persuasion. Against the “traditional bias for modes of verbal expression and against visual images” (Hope 2006, 31) and “classical argumentation model of claim, evidence, and inference” (Balter-Reitz and Stewart 2006, 116), visual communication scholars adopt “an image orientation [as] a necessary first step” (DeLuca 2006, 87). Visual intelligence entails “an integration of immediate multisensory information, prior experience, and cultural learning”

(Barry 1997, 15). In turn, “culturally shared knowledge is organized into prototypical event sequences enacted in simplified worlds” (Quinn and Holland 1987, 24). Within these cognitive-cultural models, “things work, actors perform, and events unfold in a wholly expectable manner” (p. 20).

Seen this way, the gendered designs of *Journey* and *Stand Firm* and of evangelical material culture do not activate logocentric arguments of claim and evidence. Rather, the designs are cognized through a visual intelligence in which texts, fonts, images, graphics, colors, and patterns tacitly accord with evangelical audiences’ lived experience of their subcultural gender norms. Ultimately, these visualizations are integrated into cognitive-cultural models. Gender-specific visual palettes thus activate cognitive schemas of simplified worlds where women and men perform, and their roles and relations unfold, in an expectable gender-essentialist manner.

The present study likewise adds to a growing literature on religious material culture, especially in the American context. Multiple studies have explored the intersection of religious goods and the secular marketplace (e.g., Clark 2007; Kintz 1997; Moore 1994; Stieverman et al. 2015). Other works have presented “research on material culture that takes seriously the artifacts (mass-produced pictures of Jesus, religious trinkets, etc.) that many ... laughingly dismiss as kitsch” (Hendershot 2004, 2). Such popular artifacts illuminate “a heretofore neglected way that American Christians live their religion” (McDannell 1995, 276). Religious material culture and constructions of gender have also been linked in studies ranging from medieval nunneries (Gilchrist 1994) and early American testimonial tracts (Brereton 1991), to contemporary abstinence education curricula (Radosh 2008) and mass-market books, magazines, and videos for evangelical youth in which “[boys] are represented as hard and strong, whereas girls are emotional and weak” (Hendershot 2004, 87).

Visual communication in religious contexts has likewise received scholarly attention. One recent study (Ward 2018e) of visualization techniques in evangelical sermons connected the speaker and audience’s shared cognitive-cultural models to “peripheral cues” in Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion. As the preacher used PowerPoint slides with photos, images, maps, and diagrams to illustrate his points, congregants could shut down active cognitive processing of the message itself. Instead, the audience could “skip to the answer” by accepting evangelical tropes about biblical inerrancy and the preacher’s divine anointing to correctly interpret the scriptures for them. In the same way, the present study suggests that readers of *Journey* and *Stand Firm*—or shoppers at Christian bookstores—see the peripheral cues in gendered product designs, cease active message processing, and tacitly skip to taken-for-granted, simplified cognitive-cultural models of male/female difference. Through such “visual piety” (Morgan 1998) are religious meanings socially constructed

by means of a visual rhetoric in which ... images and language, rather than being discrete orders of representation, are intricately interwoven. Thus, although language is a symbolic form that we all share, it should not be understood as an isolated or autonomous operator in the construction of reality. Language and vision, word and image, text and picture are in fact deeply enmeshed and collaborate powerfully in assembling our sense of the real. (p. 9)

Given the extensive literature on gendering in evangelical life, the findings of the present study may not be surprising. What the study does originally find, however, is that the gendered dualism of American evangelicalism resides not only in its verbal texts, in the words that are spoken, written, and read. The ideological apparatus available to the dominant institutions of the evangelical subculture also encompasses visual encoding of its preferred essentialist reading. In turn, when this visual encoding is received, evangelical audiences decode the message by means of their own culturally situated visual intelligence. Ingersoll (2003) observed, “While there is evidence that evangelical feminists have gained significant ground on the institutional and theological fronts, the fact remains that gendered dualism is perpetuated on a popular level” (p. 107). The present study suggests why institutional gains have not penetrated to the pews. The dominant encoding of mass evangelical material culture also resides in information designs by which texts, fonts, graphics, images, colors, and patterns work visually in symbolically potent combinations. In turn, these are decoded beyond the level of propositional claims and evidence. The audience “takes the connoted meaning ... full and straight” (Hall 2009, 171) because the dominant reading visually reifies the gendered dualism by which evangelicals experience and cognize their subcultural world.

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