

## ABSTRACT

FITZWATER, LAURA BETH. "The City Evangelical Dude Route to Dudeness": Examining a Discourse of Hegemonic Masculinity in an Urban Megachurch. (Under the direction of Sinikka Elliott.)

This study examines the making of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in an urban megachurch. Using theoretical sampling, I conducted a content analysis of 30 sermons preached by the pastor of this church, spanning a decade. My research question asks: How does this pastor construct a discourse of masculinity and femininity that places men in a dominant position and women in a subordinate position, and does this discourse change over time and in response to challenges to its legitimacy? My findings indicate that this pastor constructs a discourse—what I term the dude discourse—in three specific ways. First, he uses Biblical exemplars who embody hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. These are people whom his congregation should strive to live up to, men who are the “dude of dudes” and women who are “good and godly;” yet living up to such exemplars is rarely attainable. Secondly, the pastor positions himself in a place of authority, having created a resource of power within the church, and casts himself as the embodiment of a dude for his male congregants to see and strive to be like. Thirdly, the pastor situates himself as the father of the church and explicitly states that, just as a father should cultivate his children and be the head of the patriarchal household, his goal is to cultivate the gendered selves of the members of the church, especially the men’s. The pastor has created this church to be a male-dominated institution that legitimizes men’s dominance and women’s submission. Additionally, I found no indication that the dude discourse has changed over time, or in response to challenges to its legitimacy. The findings of this study provide empirical support for Connell’s (1987, 2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity and

emphasized femininity. At this church, femininity is created in relation to masculinity, and women are significant only insofar as their behavior is compliant with maintaining the dude discourse.

“The City Evangelical Dude Route to Dudeness”: Examining a Discourse of  
Hegemonic Masculinity in an Urban Megachurch

by  
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## DEDICATION

For Jennifer.

## BIOGRAPHY

Laura is currently a graduate student at North Carolina State University. Her areas of interest are family and inequality. Laura first became interested in sociology after taking an undergraduate class in research methods. Sociology provided a lens through which to see the world and make sense of it. Before coming to graduate school, Laura devoted two years to working at an urban homeless shelter for women and children. Laura aspires to become a sociology professor and mentor to students.

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I felt apprehensive the first Sunday I visited City Evangelical Church. Although I regularly passed the large building on my way to work, I had never before been inside. After spending several years listening to comments from others about the church, I decided it was time to check it out for myself, not as a church worshiper, but as an undergraduate majoring in sociology. With notebook in hand (which did not appear out of place since many people take notes at church), I made my way through the quiet city neighborhood in which the church is located, crossed the busy street with the help of a crossing-guard (a volunteer from the church), and entered through the large glass doors.

My interest in this particular church began with two fellow sociologists in early 2006. We had heard accounts of this fast-growing church with a pastor who preached about strict gender ideologies. We began collecting data: listening to sermons online and transcribing them, checking the website frequently, reading blogs and news articles about the church, having discussions with people we knew who were involved in the church, and occasionally attending the church or church-sponsored events. At one forum for the church's single population, people submitted questions to a pastor and his wife. This well-attended event lasted three hours on a Friday night. The pastor told the single women they were "made to be attractive to men" and should have an "air of availability" about them in order to attract one. To do so, they should "put on makeup and perfume, and don't wear baggy sweatshirts." Likewise, men were created to be a "father, husband, sage, [and] warrior" and once a man embraced this role, he would become attractive and desirable to women. One young woman asked the pastor what women can do "to prepare for headship [of a husband] if they are older

and single.” The pastor replied, “If the woman is more capable financially, she needs to lay aside her job and income so that the man can be the provider and she can submit to him.” He added, “It’s not logical, but it’s *theological*.” This was my first personal exposure to City Evangelical’s strict gender ideology, and it encouraged me to continue my quest to study the church more in depth. Although I no longer live near the church, I have been able to continue to study it via its website.

This study’s goal is to examine the discourses around gender at City Evangelical Church—a controversial urban megachurch. Specifically, my aim is to explore how a hegemonic version of masculinity that reinforces gender inequality is created through church discourse—taking into account cultural context and change over time. In order to examine this process, I conducted a content analysis of a theoretically-informed sample of transcribed sermons delivered by the “teaching and preaching”<sup>1</sup> pastor at City Evangelical Church (CEC), Pastor Jeff Johnson, who prefers to go by the title “Pastor Jeff.”<sup>2</sup> My central research question is: how does Pastor Jeff construct a discourse of masculinity and femininity that places men in a dominant position and women in a subordinate position, and does this discourse change over time and in response to challenges to its legitimacy? I propose that Pastor Jeff constructs a version of hegemonic masculinity within the church that places him as *the* hegemonic man. His discourse, which I will call the “dude discourse,” is rarely attainable by the average dude, yet it is the norm for men at CEC to strive for and measure themselves against. I use the term “dude” because it is the word Pastor Jeff routinely uses to

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<sup>1</sup> This is Pastor Jeff’s role according to the church website.

<sup>2</sup> All names and places have been changed.

describe the ideal man. In my findings, I will further address the significance of this term for my analysis. The dude discourse is most clearly legitimized by Pastor Jeff himself, as he situates himself and various Biblical exemplars as embodiments of dudeliness for his male congregants to emulate. Moreover, this discourse is quite stable over time, changing little over a 10-year period. Before I attend to the theoretical framework guiding this analysis, I first briefly describe CEC and place it within the larger historical context of similar religious movements.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### *City Evangelical Church: “A Cool, Hip, Urban, Arty Church”*

City Evangelical Church began as a “home church” in 1996 when Pastor Jeff Johnson and his wife, Stacy, gathered people into their living room to study the Bible. According to Pastor Jeff, they “started this church with no people, no money” and Jeff had “no ministry experience.” For the first three years, Pastor Jeff says he did not receive a salary and worked side jobs for income. What started with 12 people grew to over 1,000 by 2003. By this point, the church had moved to different locations several times to accommodate their growth. In 2006, and still growing, CEC decided to start other church sites, called “campuses,” around the city and its suburbs to accommodate their members. Information on the church website says that *Outreach Magazine* has recently recognized CEC as the sixty-fifth largest, fortieth fastest-growing, and second most innovative church in the United States.

The main CEC campus<sup>3</sup> is located in a large U.S. city on the West Coast in a large warehouse-type building. The church offers limited parking spaces due to its location, and therefore encourages members to park in the nearby neighborhoods and walk several blocks to the church. This causes a good deal of traffic around the church on Sundays, therefore the church uses volunteer crosswalk attendants for each service. The outside of the church is painted dark gray, and the inside is dark and spacious with high ceilings. The church has two main entrances which are well-lit and full of tables with information about the church and how to become involved. Volunteers hand out free tea and coffee from a small service counter, and chairs and tables are provided for attendees to sit and visit with friends. People are welcomed to bring their drinks into the sanctuary during the service. The sanctuary is one large room, filled with plush stacking church chairs, lined up in rows facing a stage. Lights are kept low or turned off during the service, and there are no windows. Because of the room's size and the distance from the stage to the last row of chairs, large screens hang from the ceiling for people to read the words of the songs and to have a clearer view of Pastor Jeff as he is broadcast live onto the screen. The front of the sanctuary often displays different types of decoration or art that occasionally reflect the theme of Pastor Jeff's sermon. Three services offer childcare for children of all ages; the last service, which goes from 7:15 to about 9:15pm, does not offer childcare and attracts mostly younger adults and college

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<sup>3</sup> The main campus is where Pastor Jeff preaches, and he is broadcast via video feed to all the other campus services. There are nine campuses total as of September 2010, and a tenth has recently been acquired. Most of the campuses are located within a half-hour's drive of the main campus, either near the city or in the suburbs, but one campus is several hours away in another mid-sized city, and one campus is located in another state. I base my description of the church on the main campus because it is the only site where Pastor Jeff is physically present, and his discourse is the focus of my study. Additionally, it was from this location that the church began to branch out into other locations, and it is the campus with the highest average attendance.

students. Pastor Jeff often makes comments to this audience that they are “the fun crowd at the end of the day” and that this is the service with all the “young” and “single” people. The audio (and now video and transcript) files from this late service are typically uploaded to the church website and made available online. I know this because Pastor Jeff regularly refers to earlier sermons he has preached that day or states the time of day in his sermon.

As of September 2010, the main campus hosts four services each Sunday, two in the morning and two in the evening; Pastor Jeff preaches a live sermon at each one. Between 700 and 800 people are in attendance at any given service. For a short time several years ago, due to high rates of attendance, the church hosted five services each Sunday. Services last about two hours each. They typically start with music and singing, followed by Pastor Jeff’s sermon (which lasts between an hour and an hour and twenty minutes), and then more singing and communion.<sup>4</sup> Many musicians attend the church, thus a different band plays each Sunday on a rotational basis. The music is typically loud and often consists of electric guitars, bass, and drums. The bands often write their own songs. During my informal fieldwork at CEC in 2006, I described the music in my fieldnotes as sounding like “anti-war music, protest movies, hard-sounding, not uplifting...hard rock, or at least loud rock.” As of July 2009, CEC reported an average weekly attendance of 6,703 people across seven church

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<sup>4</sup> “Communion” is the Protestant tradition of remembering the last supper Jesus had with his disciples. They do so by taking bread and wine or grape juice to symbolize Jesus’ body and blood that he sacrificed to save people and bring them to eternal life in heaven (Torrance 1996). CEC practices communion by setting out tables with bread, wine, and grape juice because they recognize that different peoples’ experiences and beliefs might make them prefer one or the other, and they want to be conscious of people with alcohol addictions. The congregation leaves their seats and lines up at each table, taking their portion, and returning to their seats as the band plays music from the stage.

campuses, and 3,041 “active” members.<sup>5</sup> In 2010, the church saw a record number of attendees: 13,000 total across all campuses on Easter Sunday.

Because of its size, it is easy to attend CEC and avoid meeting other people. Therefore, the church leadership encourages people, via information from the church and on the website to “get connected” in “community groups,” small groups of 10-20 people who meet weekly at someone’s house to pray and study the Bible together. The church claims that community groups are one of the keys to its successful growth. In a July 2009 report, CEC estimated that 3,933 CEC attendees participated regularly in community groups. Attendees are also encouraged to “stay connected” through their online social network, created exclusively for CEC. Although this network is open to anyone who attends the church, people can only obtain access to the network by visiting a church campus and signing up, or via their community group leader. As of July 2009, there were a reported 9,578 users of the online social network. Additionally, the church provides many ways for its parishioners to become involved. For example, CEC members volunteer each Sunday as childcare workers, musicians, and security workers.

CEC does not allow outside parties to poll their members, but based on informal observation I conducted as an undergraduate, most members of the church are white, in their twenties or thirties, and dress in a “preppy” style. Pastor Jeff often wears dark stonewashed jeans and a button-up shirt, or a tight-fitting t-shirt under a jacket, and many of the other pastors emulate his style. The church’s age demographics reflect the age demographics of

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<sup>5</sup> More than simply attendees, members are people who have gone through a class that the church teaches about its doctrines. Thus “active” members are those who have pledged their allegiance to this church and its teachings.

the city in which it is located: twenty-one percent (the modal category) of the city's residents are between the ages of 25 to 34.<sup>6</sup> The city's race demographics are about 70 percent white, 13 percent Asian, and 8 percent black.<sup>7</sup> Although I lack information on the church's racial composition, the church posts pastor and staff pictures on its website. Out of the 66 pastors and staff currently listed, 59 (89 percent) are white men, five are Asian men, one is a black man, and one is a white woman.

Many couples attend the church, as well as many small children, and, as families have "grown up" in the church, CEC has expanded to include groups for older children and teenagers. Pastor Jeff's own family is one such example. He and his wife Stacy have five children between the ages of 13 and 5, and they would have had six except that Stacy had a miscarriage. Pastor Jeff encourages church attendees to marry and have many children as well. He remarks proudly, "Christians make more babies. At City Evangelical we do. We have a few hundred weddings and hundreds of babies born a year."

Despite its non-denominational status, CEC is without a doubt a Christian evangelical megachurch (Smith 1998; Thumma & Travis 2007). Pastor Jeff reminds his congregation that they are "Protestants...self-identified born-again evangelicals, that's our team (audience laughter), just so you know." "Evangelical" is a label that essentially describes an "activist faith" in which the participants believe in influencing the world outside the boundaries of the church walls (Smith 1998). CEC believes that its members should be "activists," participating in two different kinds of "wars," as stated in their 2008-2009 annual report.

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau information, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> In order to protect the privacy of this church and pastor, I refrain from providing the city's actual location.

First, they write: “a healthy church needs an effective Ground War,” which involves “training” members to proselytize their local community. Second, they state that “a healthy church needs an effective Air War.” Because their goal is to “reach thousands of people at a time,” CEC provides attendees and curious website visitors with online podcasts, links to websites, as well as free printed resources, sermons, and lectures available for downloading. The 2009 annual report consistently reminds its readers that CEC’s goal is to “be a church of 50,000 people” by 2019.

Additionally, Smith (1998) found that evangelicals experience an “evangelical burden” that prompts members to spread their faith. Pastor Jeff places himself on the frontlines of CEC’s mission to spread their faith: “You and I, as City Evangelical Church, have this big opportunity, because of the voice and platform that God has given us, *and this begins with me*...to call people, beginning with ourselves, to repentance of sin” (emphasis mine). Finally, Pastor Jeff evokes external threats (Smith 1998), which create boundaries between CEC and “the world.” In a sermon in late 2006, he describes CEC as “possibly [the] third most hated church in America.” Creating these boundaries and feelings of conflict and tension with the outside world strengthens evangelical identity in general, and is a shared identity that draws CEC members together.

Despite this created tension, however, evangelicals in general, and CEC members specifically, participate in this subculture and yet are still members of the privileged dominant group in the United States insofar as they tend to be white, married, and have higher levels of education compared to non-evangelical Americans (Smith 1998). In Smith’s

(1998) survey of American evangelicals,<sup>8</sup> 65 percent were female, 87 percent were white, and 78 percent were married. Almost half the respondents were between the ages of 35 and 54, making the “typical” evangelical a middle-aged, white, married woman. CEC claims to reach a different population: young, single men. This is a part of Pastor Jeff’s strategy to be “different” and countercultural. Rather than a female-dominated evangelical church—or as Pastor Jeff says, churches filled with “families and children and minivans and soccer moms and juice boxes”—his objective is to recruit young, single men to CEC, a goal that Pastor Jeff asserts he has largely achieved. If he is correct and the majority of CEC’s congregation is comprised of young, single men, the CEC subculture may be *more* similar to the current dominant, privileged group in the United States: white, educated, middle-class men. As the privileged group, then, they also have the power to produce and maintain inequality, which is rooted in relationships, practices, and processes (Schwalbe 2008). Schwalbe et al. (2000) describe boundary maintenance as one way that groups produce and maintain inequality. Groups protect the material and social capital they acquire by regulating access to the capital, controlling network access, and using the threat of violence to maintain their boundaries. Despite Smith’s (1998) description of evangelical Christians feeling embattled and marginalized by mainstream society, if Pastor Jeff’s congregation is comprised of people from the current most privileged group in the U.S., then the congregants likely hold substantial social, political, and economic power because they are a part of the dominant group.

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<sup>8</sup> This was the 1996 Religious Influence and Identity Survey. It was a cross-sectional, nationally representative telephone survey designed to gain knowledge about the religious and social beliefs, identities, and behaviors of Americans over the age of 17 (Smith 1998).

### *Historical Context and Group Rhetoric*

Churches such as CEC are not new and not unusual, although megachurches comprise only about 0.4 percent of all Protestant churches in the United States (Thumma & Travis 2007). Megachurches are commonly understood to have 2,000 or more weekly attendees. Pastor Jeff's push to recruit members of the dominant, privileged group also reflects a larger social movement. In *Manhood in America*, the sociologist Michael Kimmel (2006) documents recurring themes of men's insecurities regarding their masculinity and the social movements that have taken place in response to these feelings over the last century. In the early 1900s, religion was seen as a woman's domain, and the iconography of Jesus portrayed him as thin with a lean face and gentle eyes. When men converted to Christianity, people expected them to transform into a pacified form of a man, like this image of Jesus. Muscular Christianity was a movement created in response to the pacified Jesus. Kimmel (2006:117) describes Muscular Christianity during the turn of the century as a "movement designed to bring manliness in its various manifestations to church and to keep it awake when it got there." Movement leaders, such as evangelist Billy Sunday, recast Jesus as a working-class hero with a strong body and master intellect. Images depicting Jesus began to shift away from the pacified man, toward a more "masculine" look, showing Jesus with dark hair and calloused hands, a man who could be the "average man's" hero. The Men and Religion Forward (M&RF) movement took Billy Sunday's revival-type message and attempted to implement Muscular Christianity ideas directly into the church, with the purpose of bringing men back into the church pews. This movement, however, was

organized around an image of *white* Muscular Christianity; it did not extend to black and non-native born Americans (Kimmel 2006).

In the 1920s, in *The Man Nobody Knows*, Bruce Barton recast Jesus as a modern corporate leader. Barton's vision of Jesus as the founder of a modern capitalist enterprise was the epitome of what Kimmel (2006) refers to as "the Self-Made Man." The self-made man was an image that aided the attempt to remasculinize work, as increasing numbers of women were entering the workforce. During the Great Depression, however, many unemployed men could no longer look to their careers to establish conventional masculine identities. High unemployment rates meant many men were also unable to fulfill their "role" as the family provider (Kimmel 2006). During the 1920s and 1930s, as men found it increasingly harder to prove their masculinity through work—and as parenting "experts" began to sound alarms about effeminate boys raised solely by their mothers—men turned to their sons with the goal of molding them into men, thus demonstrating their masculine ability through raising strong, powerful sons. This, however, did not relieve men from the provider role; men were still expected to be employed *and* to be involved in their sons' lives (Kimmel 2006). Men who fought in World War II found the battlefield a temporary place to prove their masculinity, by being protectors and providers for their families back home; however, this feeling was short-lived: returning from war and reentry into work and the family proved difficult for many men (Kimmel 2006).

In the post-war world, fathers became the embodiment of masculinity, argues Kimmel (2006), and suburbia became the location for men to prove their manhood. The

accepted image of middle-class masculinity, then, became men as breadwinners and providers for their suburban families. A man was supposed to have a job and to be involved in family life by helping his wife with domestic duties, such as occasionally washing the dishes. In order to avoid the appearance of femininity, men were also encouraged to engage, with their sons, in hobbies such as collecting stamps and coins. The ideal image of the 1950s man was a nurturing father who found a heroic thrill in cowboy-themed movies or novels (Kimmel 2006).

In the 1960s, the image of the “stable man”—the primary breadwinner of the home—and the image of the “Self-Made Man,” began to erode as marginalized groups began to rebel through various collective movements (e.g., women’s rights, civil rights, gay and lesbian rights) (Kimmel 2006). Newton (2005) asserts that, starting with the Black Panthers in the 1960s, men’s movements included marginalized groups of men (black men and gay men) organizing to transform ideals of masculinity. In the 1970s, many men sought their own “liberation” from prescribed roles of husband and father, and a new model of manhood was popularized. Jesus once again became the archetype of this new man. Catholic theologian Leonard Swidler wrote about Jesus as a feminist who advocated for the equality of women with men (Kimmel 2006). This portrayal was contradictory to the images of Muscular Christianity, but it flowed from the underlying belief of the men’s liberation movement, that if men rejected the previous masculinity of the Self-Made Man, they would live better lives, and they would do so by living in closer relationships with their wives, children, and other men (Kimmel 2006).

Men's liberation was short-lived, however, and as Kimmel (2006) argues, the "new man" of the 1970s—the man who was sensitive and compassionate—also strove to avoid the appearance of the "wimp." Despite being sensitive and compassionate, this "new man" also became the man who repudiated the wimp, as wimps were perceived to be submissive and passive. Thus new men turned their attention to the repudiation of threats to masculinity stemming from feminists and "weak" men. Journalist Susan Faludi argues that since the beginning of feminism, there has been a cultural backlash against feminists, focusing largely on putting women in their "place," meaning the home (Faludi 1991). The attacks on women and men who appeared to be weakening the position of men's dominance in the '80s and '90s indicates that men felt their position in the cultural hierarchy was threatened by cultural shifts, and they needed to relocate themselves at the top.

One such movement to reposition men was the mythopoetic men's movement of the 1990s, which provided a space for men to "feel better about themselves as members of a dominant group," essentially offering men a therapeutic space to express their masculinity (Schwalbe 1996:213). A religious men's movement, the Promise Keepers, coincided with the mythopoetic men's movement. Messner (1997) argues that leaders of both groups had an aversion to the "feminization" of men, but that mythopoetic men blamed modernization whereas the Promise Keepers blamed feminism, gay and sexual liberties, and the "breakdown of the family" for men's problems. Both of these movements attracted white, educated, middle-class, middle-aged men and promoted a need to "retreat" from women. The mythopoetic men's movement attracted this privileged group of men because it was not a

break from “traditional masculinity,” but rather a part of a shift in the construction of the current dominant form of masculinity (Messner 1997; Schwalbe 1996). The therapeutic spaces afforded by these movements allowed men to feel good about themselves without addressing how their privileges were based on the subordination of women and other men. The Promise Keepers asserted that “real men” did not have to fight or deal with problems in a self-destructive manner, rather, all one needed to be a “real man” was to faithfully keep his promise of being a responsible husband, father, and breadwinner. Thus the Promise Keepers used religious legitimization to reaffirm and naturalize the gender hierarchy (Messner 1997).

The Promise Keepers were also a part of the religious revival of evangelism, which centered around bringing men back into the churches and remasculinizing the church (Kimmel 2006). Jesus was this time depicted in a militarized manner, as a religious Rambo. Religious leaders reconstructed religion as a place where men could assert their masculinity by battling evil. Preachers adopted “masculine” styles, such as firm handshakes and learning about hunting. Jesus was also repackaged as a Wall Street middle-manager, one who was responsible and hard-working at his job. This “new” Muscular Christianity was also greatly supported by Christian athletes who demonstrated that masculinity could mean not only physical, but also spiritual power (Kimmel 2006).

Clatterbaugh (1997) also identifies common themes between the Promise Keepers of the late twentieth century and Muscular Christianity of the early 1900s. Both addressed challenges to men’s privileges, for example Billy Sunday addressed issues of women’s suffrage while the Promise Keepers encouraged men to reclaim from women their role as

“head of household” (Clatterbaugh 1997). Both movements also offered a space for politically conservative activism. Clatterbaugh (1997) argues, however, that the men who rallied around Billy Sunday’s message eventually dwindled because of World War I. The social climate changed, but the message of masculinity did not, and men grew tired of hearing the same things. Clatterbaugh (1997) thus suggests the Promise Keepers face a similar fate. Indeed, by the late 1990s, the attendance at annual Promise Keepers conferences was declining (Bartkowski 2004).

In 2001, John Eldredge’s *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secrets of a Man’s Soul* was published and quickly became popular within the Christian community. Moving away from the Promise Keeper’s emphasis on responsible manhood and the need to be providers and leaders at home and church, Eldredge emphasized man’s personal struggle with God and argued that a man is a “dangerous thing” and should take risks. In Eldredge’s opinion, men’s souls were made for adventure, thrive when embattled, and must seek a “beauty” to rescue. Eldredge’s rhetoric draws on warrior metaphors, cultural images such as *Braveheart* and solo heroes, and discourages traits such as gentleness, meekness, humility, and tenderness among men (Gallagher & Wood 2005).

Another important force of masculinity that Kimmel (2006) notes is the increased visibility of extreme right groups in the first decade of the twenty-first century. According to Kimmel, men in extreme right groups are driven by a desire to return to the heroic “Self-Made Man,” a white man who protects white women and the family, and who protects America and American masculinity. The terrorist attacks of 9-11 revitalized the image of

heroic masculinity, as men who were firefighters, police, and rescue workers were praised for their masculine strength in action. A few years later, George W. Bush was reelected in the 2004 presidential election, affirming the reassertion of “traditional” masculinity (Kimmel 2006).

Recent *New York Times* articles have noted a revitalization of Muscular Christianity. Several churches now advocate ministries that revolve around men participating in mixed martial arts and fighting. One article suggests that this outreach stems from some ministers’ “fear that their churches have become too feminized, promoting kindness and compassion at the expense of strength and responsibility” (Schneiderman 2010: A1). The fighting is “intended to promote Christian values” and attract young men, ages 18-34. The article states that this is reminiscent of Muscular Christianity insofar as these evangelical leaders advocate “weight lifting as a way for Christians to express their masculinity” (Schneiderman 2010: A1). The emphasis on fighting is likely also linked to U.S. militarism—we have been a nation at war for the past nine years—and the associated discourses surrounding heroic masculinity. Additionally, although this article states that black churches for the most part tend not to participate in martial arts ministry, another recent *New York Times* article about a black pastor from Georgia observes that this pastor has adopted a view of Muscular Christianity, emphasizing “a warriorlike (*sic*) man who serves as the spiritual authority and protector in a family” (McKinley & Brown 2010: A1). Similar to Pastor Jeff’s style, this pastor has created a modern, hip image, using slang in his sermons and dressing like a hip-hop mogul.

In addition to shifts in the larger culture, it is important to locate CEC within evangelical group rhetoric, which on a whole, indicates that there continues to be advocacy within evangelicalism for a return to separate-sphere roles for men and women—that is, men belong in the public realm, and women in the private (Bartkowski 1997; Bloch 2000). Evangelical literature mostly supports a patriarchal family structure, where wives must submit to their husbands, although they also include “egalitarian” rhetoric which advocates for “mutual submission” between husbands and wives (Bartkowski 1997). A review of literature endorsed by the Promise Keepers organization indicates approval for gendered separate spheres (Bloch 2000). Promise Keepers command husbands to reclaim their roles as leaders of the family, and criticize men for not taking on their designated responsibility of taking care of their families. Additionally, conservative Protestant family manuals advocate paternal involvement in children’s lives (Bartkowski & Xu 2000). Fathers should not be so involved in their careers that they neglect their families, as they need to be home in order to demonstrate “proper” gender roles to their children. The prominent discourse around conservative Protestant fathering is one of authority, provision, and affection (Bartkowski & Xu 2000).

As the larger remasculinizing men’s movements were taking place in the beginning of the twenty-first century, the population at CEC also began to grow tremendously. The church nearly doubled in size from 2004 to 2005, from around 1,500 to 3,000 in average weekly attendance. The community was responding to what they considered a “social crisis.” Muscular Christianity, M&RF, the Promise Keepers, and the *Wild at Heart* craze,

however, are all movements that have seen a decline in popularity; yet CEC has not. On the contrary, the church continues to grow. Not only do they have nine campuses in the city and state where they started, they have recently started another campus in a different state.

CEC's annual report from 2009 states that their goal is to have 100 churches around the U.S. and reach 50,000 people weekly around the world by 2019. Therefore, what *is* distinct about the CEC movement? Why might some people be drawn to an understanding of gender that supports a patriarchal dividend? What needs are being met at CEC, and who benefits?

Before turning to these questions, the next section will address the process of "doing masculinity," subcultural identity theory, subcultural identity work, manhood acts, and how these theories guide my data analysis.

### *Masculinity and Identity*

In examining the discourses of gender at CEC, I found Connell's (1987, 2005) work on gender and power particularly useful. Connell (2005) describes gender as a relational process within an overarching gender hierarchy, and argues that masculinity and femininity are "done" in culturally specific ways. Hegemonic masculinity embodies the culturally current idealized form of masculinity, which secures men's dominance and the subordination of women, and is constructed in relation to subordinate masculinities and women. The ideal of hegemonic masculinity establishes the standard against which all men must measure themselves. Hegemonic masculinity represents one group of men's ascendancy over others (Connell 2005). It is important to recognize that hegemonic masculinity is specifically about

*male* dominance. The practice of hegemonic masculinity allows men's collective dominance over women to continue, as it legitimates the subordination of women to men (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity is also public, meaning that this ideal image is what most men are motivated to support, but not necessarily what men actually *are*. Few men achieve hegemony, but most men collaborate in order to sustain the image of hegemonic masculinity, since most men benefit from the subordination of women (Connell 1987). This image is often found in exemplars of masculinity, ideal men who become authority symbols, such as sports stars or movie actors. These men embody hegemonic masculinity despite the “everyday” man's inability to live up to the standards set by hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Men who do not strive for hegemony but who uphold hegemonic masculinity are a part of what Connell (2005) calls the “complicit” category. These men gain from the patriarchal dividend—the advantages men receive through the subordination of women—because they are a part of the dominant group and do not challenge male dominance.

Because femininity is constructed within the context of the subordination of women to men, Connell (1987) argues that women do not construct themselves within a hierarchy, as is the case with hegemonic masculinity. Men have sociocultural and political power; therefore women *do not* have the same access to hegemonic power to construct power relations relative to other women. This premise has been disputed more recently by scholars such as Schippers (2007) and Pyke and Johnson (2003). Pyke and Johnson (2003) challenge

Connell's work as having a white, middle-class bias that discounts how other axes of domination (e.g. race, class, sexuality) create a hegemonic femininity that is exalted in the dominant culture. Schippers (2007) further argues that since hegemonic characteristics found within a culture are those which serve the interest of people in power, femininity can also be hegemonic. She defines hegemonic femininity as "womanly" characteristics that "establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Schippers 2007:94). In this way, both hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity serve the interests of men and male dominance and are dependent upon heterosexuality. Whether or not hegemonic femininity exists, however, is not the point I am trying to make. What is important about this idea of hegemonic femininity, or what Connell (1987) calls "emphasized femininity," is that femininity is constructed in relation to masculinity, and more specifically, it is constructed in *subordination* to masculinity.

Within their subordination, women engage in strategies of compliance, resistance or non-compliance, or combinations of the three, in relation to men. When women comply with their subordination, and accommodate the interests and desires of men, they participate in what Connell (1987) calls "emphasized femininity." Emphasized femininity is seen when women accommodate the desires of men; for example, when women forgo fighting discrimination at work to be conventional stay-at-home wives and mothers. This accommodates men because, first, it removes women from the public sphere, and second, it places women in the private sphere, the home, where they can "work" to serve their

husband's needs. As emphasized femininity is performed and maintained, it prevents other forms of femininity from gaining cultural recognition, and men continue to benefit from male dominance.

In addition, my analysis draws on Smith's (1998) subcultural identity theory of religious persistence and strength. According to this theory, humans search for meaning in life, and religion is one institution where many people find meaning. Smith argues that religion survives and thrives in pluralistic modern societies (like ours) because when it manifests in a subculture, it can provide morally orienting collective identities to those involved and offer them meaning and belonging. Religious groups grow strong when they draw clear boundaries between themselves and outsiders, yet at the same time bridge that gap and engage with the outsiders (Smith 1998).

I argue that Pastor Jeff offers his congregation not just a religious identity, but also a masculine one. He calls the men in his congregation to not only live distinctively evangelical lives, but also to live up to certain ideals of masculinity: men should live distinctively *masculine* evangelical lives. In doing so, Pastor Jeff engages in the antifeminist backlash (Faludi 1991). When Pastor Jeff started CEC in 1996, the backlash against feminism was highly prevalent and, as we will see, Pastor Jeff often rails against feminists for threatening to destroy the family and weaken masculinity. Thus, Pastor Jeff's discourse of masculinity and femininity—what I term the dude discourse—is designed to legitimize hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in order to appeal to an audience of largely young men striving to locate their masculinity at the top of the hierarchy. I use the word “dude”

because it is a word Pastor Jeff frequently uses to describe an ideal man. Using the word “discourse,” I refer specifically to how Pastor Jeff’s “talk” works at CEC. Miller (2000:317) refers to “talk” as “interpretive resources” and that “speakers use talk strategically to accomplish their purposes in a particular setting.” I argue that Pastor Jeff uses the dude discourse to accomplish his purpose of creating and maintaining hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity at CEC. It is therefore critical to examine how Pastor Jeff conveys standards and expectations of masculinity and femininity to his congregation that are “in compliance” with men’s dominance. One way he does this is by creating his own identity that embodies hegemonic masculinity, and thus, serves as a model for his congregation.

Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996:121) discuss subcultural identity work as “the work people do together to create the signs, codes, and rites of affirmation that become shared resources for identity-making.” Pastor Jeff is the face of CEC and, as such, he is able to create an image of those who belong (and do not belong) at CEC. He does this through what I call the dude discourse. As the members of CEC participate in identity work around the dude discourse, they create shared symbolic resources around what it means to be masculine and feminine; more specifically, they create resources *for the men* to maintain their dominant position over women. Additionally, the identity work that Pastor Jeff does around masculinity appears to be a collection of “manhood acts” (Schrock & Schwalbe 2009), signifying practices that establish and uphold his masculinity. Manhood acts are the criteria by which men judge themselves, and are judged by others, to be masculine. Thus, this identity work is done to claim membership in the dominant group, maintaining privileges

over subordinate groups. Just as hegemonic masculinity is culturally specific (Connell 2005), so too are manhood acts shaped by the culture in which they are located.

Taking this literature into account, an examination of CEC's discourses around gender warrants further investigation. CEC experienced growth during a time of "remasculinizing" the church at large, yet has continued to grow even as other masculinity movements have lost steam. Drawing on Connell's (1987, 2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, Smith's (1998) subcultural identity theory, Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock's (1996) theory of subcultural identity work, and Schrock and Schwalbe's (2009) concept of manhood acts, I will examine the discourses around gender at CEC and explore how a hegemonic version of masculinity that reinforces gender inequality is created through the dude discourse.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### *Project Design*

I chose to conduct a content analysis of Pastor Jeff's sermons using theoretical sampling and grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). Rather than taking a quantitative approach to the data, in which the frequency of phrases or patterns would be the main focus, I instead adopted a qualitative approach to content analysis (Esterberg 2002), focusing on the patterns of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in the discourse at CEC. I searched for concepts and themes that represented masculinity and femininity, with a particular focus on *how* they are used in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. My aim was exploration

and analysis in order to add to the growing body of literature about the reproduction of inequality. Additionally, I used theoretical sampling when I collected my data in order to focus on a specific period in time and track possible cultural shifts (Charmaz 2006). My goal was not to have a fully representative sample of sermons from the available time period, nor was it to have generalizable results. Instead, my goal was more theoretical—to examine and develop theories of gender. Finally, although I focused on concepts surrounding hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity, and the reproduction of inequality, I did not use prestructured coding categories, instead I created and recreated codes as I analyzed the data.

Additionally, in the last four years, I have taken a reflexive approach to my study of CEC. Initially, back in 2006, I began exploring the concept of “strict gender ideologies.” Sampling and data collection at that point consisted of transcriptions of sermons from 2006, as well as informal fieldwork at the church on Sundays and at two discussion forums. Then in 2008, when I began my graduate work, I began developing the concept of “the dude discourse” and how Pastor Jeff uses this discourse to construct a version of masculinity in his church. My sampling was based on a “controversial” sermon series from 2008, and several other audio recordings from 2006. I collected data again through transcription and coded for “mega themes” of policing masculinity, protection, provision, men’s dominance over women, and contrasting dudes with feminized men, or as Pastor Jeff calls them, “chickified dudes.” My interest at this time was in understanding how men are socialized and held accountable for their masculinity at CEC to gain a better understanding of how gender inequality is reproduced.

Now in 2010, guided by an emergent analysis, I returned to the data, this time with specific points in time to examine, in order to further develop the concept of the “dude discourse” in relation to the reproduction of gender inequality, hegemonic masculinity, and emphasized femininity. I sampled a new set of sermons using theoretical sampling techniques, and I sampled more sermons than before. Data collection again involved transcribing, but this time I used a more systematic approach to coding, which was necessary due to the large amount of data. This paper presents the data analysis and interpretation of this most recent content analysis of CEC sermons. My specific aim is to examine how Pastor Jeff constructs a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, and to explore who benefits from this dude discourse. Additionally, I want to know whether and how this discourse changed in light of a challenge to its legitimacy, and if and how it changed over a 10-year period.

### *Data Collection*

Pastor Jeff’s sermons are available on the church’s website, beginning from September 2000 to the present, and are free to download. Beginning in the fall of 2006, the church added video to their available downloads, and in the fall of 2009, they also added transcriptions of the sermons that can be downloaded and read. Sermons typically last at least an hour. Pastor Jeff preaches sermon series on different books of the Bible, which can last between a few weeks to an entire year, depending on the length of the book.

One part of my data collection involves sermons from the fall of 2006. At this time, a megachurch pastor in a different state was caught in a “sex and drug scandal” where he was

accused of having a three-year relationship with another man who also allegedly sold him methamphetamines. Pastor Jeff's public response to this event, via his blog, was not to chastise the pastor or the other man, or to condemn drug use. Instead, Pastor Jeff blamed the pastor's wife:

Most pastors I know do not have satisfying, free, sexual conversations and liberties with their wives. At the risk of being even more widely despised than I currently am, I will lean over the plate and take one for the team on this. It is not uncommon to meet pastors' wives who really let themselves go; they sometimes feel that because their husband is a pastor, he is therefore trapped into fidelity, which gives them cause for laziness. A wife who lets herself go and is not sexually available to her husband in the ways that the Song of Songs is so frank about is not responsible for her husband's sin, but she may not be helping him either.

At around the same time, Pastor Jeff blogged about the Episcopalian church electing a woman as a bishop: "If Christian males do not man up soon, the Episcopalians may vote a fluffy baby bunny rabbit as their next bishop to lead God's men." Pastor Jeff's language caused an outcry among evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike. A group of people in Pastor Jeff's city decided to protest at his church. Their ultimate aim was to get him fired from his pastorship, but before the scheduled protest, Pastor Jeff met with the group and publicly apologized for his comments, again via his online blog. Unfortunately, this content, as well as the content quoted above, has since been removed from his blog; however other media reports indicated that he said he was "'sad and sorry' to hear that things he said have

made some people feel ‘personally attacked.’” He also indicated that he had learned from the experience that his “inflammatory language and such need to be scaled back.”

Instead of the protest they had planned for a Sunday in the fall of 2006, a small number of this group showed up with a giant sign reading, “Thank you Pastor [Jeff] for apologizing.” They held up this sign and walked back and forth on the sidewalk across the street from the church while church members entered and exited the building. I was a witness to this event.<sup>9</sup> The church, despite the “reconciliation,” placed security guards on top of and around the church building, appearing like snipers without guns. Two men with a video camera stood on top of the roof, but it was unclear if they were media or church personnel. A conversation I had with the protesters revealed that the apology had indeed taken place, and that their sign and presence were sincere. They were hoping for change.

In order to explore how Pastor Jeff constructs a discourse of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, and whether this discourse changed in light of the challenge to its legitimacy, I collected 20 sermons from the time of the events described above. Pastor Jeff preached six of the sermons before the “sex and drug scandal,” four sermons between the time of the scandal and the protest, one on the day of the protest, and nine after the protest. The second aim of my study is to discover if and how Pastor Jeff’s discourse changes over large periods of time. I collected the five earliest sermons available on the website, which are from the fall of 2000, and the five most recent sermons available on the website (at the

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<sup>9</sup> The account of this “protest” is preserved on a video I took during my informal fieldwork.

time of data collection), which were from the spring of 2010. My entire sample thus comprises 30 sermons spanning a decade.

Data collection involved downloading each sermon from the website as an mp3 file onto a computer.<sup>10</sup> The sermons are free and available for public use. I used *Dragon NaturallySpeaking* software to help with my transcriptions, but because I could not “train” the program to understand Pastor Jeff’s voice, I listened to the sermons through headphones and dictated them back to the computer for transcription. I also used *Express Scribe* software for the transcriptions. Because *Express Scribe* works only with audio files and not video files, I was not able to simultaneously view Pastor Jeff while transcribing. After my initial transcriptions and dictations, I reviewed each transcription a second time to make corrections as necessary, and to make particular note of audience laughter, clapping, and Pastor Jeff’s voice intonations. To help with analysis and coding, I used *Atlas.ti*, a qualitative data analysis tool.

### *Data Analysis*

Once the data were transcribed I began coding, which consisted of two phases, initial and focused (Charmaz 2006). Because my research question asks how masculinity and femininity are constructed in order to place men in a dominant position over women, and if the discourse about male dominance changes over time or when faced with a cultural challenge, I focused my initial coding on what Pastor Jeff says about men, women, gender,

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<sup>10</sup> Five of the sermons were collected by Dr. Jennifer McKinney through a Seattle Pacific University Faculty Research Grant and were transcribed by a professional transcription service. I was then given access to electronic copies of these transcriptions.

masculinity, femininity, and family. I also focused on “contextual” elements: the time of day the sermon was recorded and descriptions of the city and church. These elements are important because Pastor Jeff frequently locates himself within these contexts, by either referring to the congregation as the fun, hip crowd, or comparing himself to others who reside in the city. The next phase was focused coding, where I reorganized all of my initial codes into significant themes, which pointed to the underlying patterns of his discourse. Rereading all the transcriptions, I focused my coding on Pastor Jeff’s descriptions of himself, his family, and his identity; the identity of CEC and the men and women who attend; phrases he uses to get a reaction out of the congregation; Biblical exemplars of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity; certain common characteristics of men and women, such as emotions, grooming, and marriage; the use of violence; and the ideal image of a dude.

## FINDINGS

### *“He’s a Man’s Man, He’s a Guy’s Guy, He’s a Dude’s Dude”*

Pastor Jeff uses the word “dude” to refer to men. He uses the term casually when describing conversations with other men: “...and I said, dude, why are you doing that?” He also uses it in describing men: “I mean, dude’s a sniper,” “Jeckeniah, bad dude,” “that dude does not blink,” “he’s a good dude,” and “he could fight, he’s a dude.” The ultimate description, however, is when Pastor Jeff says it twice: the “dude of dudes.” Men might *just* be dudes, but men who are a “dude of dudes” have reached hegemony. Pastor Jeff

specifically uses this term in describing three Biblical exemplars, Jesus, John the Baptist, and Boaz. Of Boaz, he states:

He's worthy of respect, he's worthy of trust, he's worthy of imitation. So I'd say, gentlemen, many of you are single, imitate *Boaz*...Boaz, dude of dudes. His name literally means strength, mighty one, man's man. We love this guy. He doesn't own a sweater vest, he doesn't drink decaf (audience laughter), he's never heard of Mariah Carey or the Spice Girls, he has never physically been in a Volkswagen Cabriolet. He's a man (audience laughter). He is a man. He's the dude of dudes, okay? That's Boaz.

This summarizes Pastor Jeff's main ideas about dudely dudes, not only what they *are*, but what they are *not*. Dudeliness embodies worthiness and strength, and it repudiates embodiments of femininity. Dudeliness defines what it means to be a man. Thus, through the dude discourse, Pastor Jeff reinscribes a hierarchy not just between women and men but also among men. There are degrees of manliness, according to Pastor Jeff.

It is curious that Pastor Jeff uses the term "dude," a slang term which could be just as easily associated with slackers. I contend that the use of the word "dude" is a manhood act (Schrock & Schwalbe 2009) that is designed to appeal to the men who attend Pastor Jeff's church: white, middle-class, young men who live in a large, cosmopolitan city. As I will show in my analysis, Pastor Jeff communicates different degrees of masculinity, and spends much of his time chastising men for not living up to hegemonic masculinity or real dudeliness. In addition, Pastor Jeff performs manhood acts that signify dudeliness in order to

model this version of ideal masculinity for his male congregants. The dude discourse may also be designed to appeal to men who desire membership in the dominant group. Religious Christian men who were raised to believe that men and women should occupy separate spheres (Bartkowski 1997; Bloch 2000) but are unable to attain this practically in their lives may be searching for other means to signify masculinity. For example, the city in which CEC is located has a high cost of living, meaning that few couples can live out the breadwinner/homemaker roles that Pastor Jeff and Stacy model. Pastor Jeff's discourse provides legitimacy for men's and women's separate spheres by offering "real men"—dudes—membership in the dominant, privileged group. And, like the mythopoetic men's movement and the Promise Keepers, Pastor Jeff offers an escape for men to shore up their masculinity. By engaging in manhood acts around dudeliness, men can spiritually affirm their dominance over women, and some men's ascendancy over others.

In my findings, I argue that Pastor Jeff sets himself up as the ultimate expression of a dude by using the "dude discourse," which is the expression of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity at CEC. Pastor Jeff also uses Biblical exemplars to discuss men who embody the "dude of dudes," ideals that are unachievable by the average dude. Additionally, because gender is relational (Connell 2005), Pastor Jeff establishes the expected pattern of femininity at CEC to involve submission to men's dudely authority. Before I focus my attention on the dude discourse, I will first describe the location of CEC and its importance to the discourse.

*Locating the Dude Discourse: “We’re in One of the Least Churched Cities in America and We are Growing Fast.”*

Hegemonic masculinity is culturally situated and changes over time (Connell 2005), thus in order to discuss the dude discourse, it is important to locate CEC. Pastor Jeff’s discourse construction of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity is positioned in specific relation and response to the city in which CEC is located and where Pastor Jeff lives. In lieu of a pseudonym, I will refer to it simply as “this city.” CEC is a church made up of multiple campuses strategically placed around this city and its suburbs; only two campuses are outside the city. Pastor Jeff’s goal is to increase the number of CEC campuses to 100 across the U.S. by 2019. Despite CEC’s spillover into areas outside of this city, its location is still important because, as I discuss below, Pastor Jeff’s discourse is infused with references specific to the location.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000 the median age of people living in the city was 35 years old, 70 percent of residents were white, and about 47 percent of residents had a bachelor’s degree or higher. About 40 percent of residents age 15 or older were married, and about 42 percent had never been married. This is also a large metropolitan and cosmopolitan city, in which citizens tend to favor democrats in politics and profess liberal ideas. It is a city where recycling is highly valued and being a cyclist commuter is encouraged. Pastor Jeff, however, positions himself and the church as “contrary” to those in the city, thus creating an “us versus them” tension (Smith 1998). Because Pastor Jeff is “heterosexual, married, I got five kids, I eat meat, I have a job, and I wear pants” he claims

that his is “the alternative lifestyle in [this city]... I'm going against the man. The naked vegetarian unemployed atheist man.”

Pastor Jeff encourages single members of the congregation to marry and have children, because this city is one with “the fifth highest concentration of college educated singles, age 25 to 39 in America,” and has a cohabitation rate “250% higher than the national average” because “in [this city] living together is what you do instead of getting married.” Additionally, in 2000 and 2006, Pastor Jeff refers to the lack of religiosity in the city by claiming this is “the least churched city in the United States” and joking, “we have less Christians in [this city] than dogs or children.” Pastor Jeff positions CEC as the site for a “social revolution, not because we hate the city but because we love it, and because we don’t want this to any longer be one of the least churched cities.” In 2010, however, Pastor Jeff stated that things have changed: “[This city] used to be the least-churched city in America. It no longer is. [This region] used to be the least-churched region in the country, it no longer is.”

Pastor Jeff also acknowledges that his “humor doesn't translate that well out of [this city].” Because the dude discourse is culturally and locally situated, he claims he cannot tell his usual jokes outside of this city. He states he found out “the hard way” that when he preaches in the South, “redneck jokes don't go over well.” Curiously, however, despite Pastor Jeff’s assertion that his sermons don’t “translate well” into the rest of the nation, the CEC annual report from 2009 reported their website received over 11 million pageviews, and over 4 million copies of the online sermons were downloaded in one year. Due to the

accessibility of Pastor Jeff to his national (or international) “congregation” who reach him through the internet, we are left wondering who else is listening.

Location is a significant aspect of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). The three types of location—local, regional, and global—are linked together. For example, a version of masculinity practiced at the local level may construct a masculinity at the regional level, which in turn affects another local level. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) give the example of star athletes who, through engaging in sport at the local level, shape the star athletes at the regional level, which in turn affects the masculinity practices in another local setting. I propose that Pastor Jeff is doing the same thing. What began as a discourse of masculinity and femininity at the local level in this city, has now grown into a regional phenomenon. This is evident, as mentioned above, through the many people who have accessed the church website and podcasts online, as well as the growth of the church network founded by Pastor Jeff. His masculinity and his image, through his own creation, have in a way transformed him into a “star pastor” at the regional level, which may in turn affect the masculinity practiced at other local levels outside of this city (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). The dude discourse, then, appears to be tapping into a fear of a “crisis” of masculinity that is not limited to this one city.

*The Embodiment of the Ultimate Dude: “‘There are Many who Oppose Me,’ That’s My Life”*

Pastor Jeff Johnson is a 40-year-old white man with a square face, dark hazel eyes, scruffy unshaven face, and dark brown hair most recently styled into a faux-hawk, drawing

attention away from his receding hairline. Several “fans” on his Facebook page commented on his latest profile picture, describing him as a “stud,” “macho man for Jesus,” “so hott,” and “the man.” Pastor Jeff thus creates his identity not only by talking about himself during his sermons, but also by participating in subcultural identity work (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996) via his Facebook page and other public forums which allow other people to contribute to his identity. He uses these means to create an image for himself as the kind of man who belongs at CEC. Pastor Jeff is a former Catholic-turned-Calvinist, a self-proclaimed “sports-freak” who enjoys watching baseball, basketball, football, and ultimate fighting, and always has the appearance of being busy. He occasionally goes on speaking tours, attends conferences, contributes to magazines and newspapers as a columnist, and writes books in between preaching four sermons each Sunday. He most recently claimed, via Facebook, that he is writing a book about “sex in marriage” with his wife, Stacy.

Jeff was born in 1970 in the Midwest into an Irish-French working-class family and moved during his childhood with his family to the city where they currently reside. He is the oldest of five children, and he often speaks about how he admires his father who hung sheetrock for a living for twenty years in order to feed his family. His mother stayed at home to raise the children, and occasionally his father would have to work side jobs to make enough money. They were a “very hard-working family, but we were poor.” Jeff grew up in the southern part of the city, which is much less affluent than other areas of the city. He describes living near a “ghetto daycare,” and attending both public and private Catholic schools as a child. Although his family attended the Catholic Church and he was “an altar

boy for some years,” he felt uncomfortable with the feminization of his family’s church, calling his family’s priest “gay” and thus “unrelateable.” During his teen years, he claims he was “disinterested in Jesus” because he always saw pictures of Jesus where “he had feathered hair, was wearing a dress, listening to a lot of Elton John,” and Jeff thought, “Why give your life to a man you can beat up?” Pastor Jeff’s message is clear: to be worthy of respect, a man must be able to dominate.

Despite his disinterest in religion, Pastor Jeff states he did not drink, smoke, or do drugs, rather he was the “good guy” who “loved baseball and girls and being left alone.” Jeff recalls being very popular in high school, being voted “most likely to succeed, student body president, four-year letterman, man of the year, on the football team, captain of the baseball team, natural helper, writer for the newspaper...every dance they put a crown on my head because I’m the king of every [school dance].” Whether this is actually true or not, it is significant because it is a part of his constructed identity. Everything that Pastor Jeff shares about himself is part of the image he is trying to convey. Additionally, Pastor Jeff frequently mentions how at the age of 19 he became a Christian. When he went to college, he decided to join a fraternity because he had “never really done what guys are supposed to do”—meaning, drink, party, and date a lot of women. Despite the anticipation he felt for his first fraternity party, he ended up leaving before it began, and then quitting the fraternity because he did not “feel right about going to the frat [house] and getting drunk and meeting girls.” Rather than seeking outside counsel, Pastor Jeff recalls reading the Bible on his own accord and suddenly feeling like “God just called me to belong to Jesus...No one was there, no one

prayed with me.” As he tried to apply this new calling to his life, he thought that since he was a speech-communications major, he would become a preacher.

Along with his identity as a pastor, Pastor Jeff is a husband and father. He often talks about how close he is with his family, that when he travels he misses “tucking [the kids] in bed and wrestling with my boys and snuggling with my girls...it bums me out.” Jeff met his wife Stacy at age 17 when he was a junior in high school, and he told her two weeks later that he wanted to marry her. She was a year ahead of him in school, and he recalls “obstacles” between him, Stacy, and marriage. She transferred to his college, and they married when Jeff was 21, between his junior and senior years of college. Stacy’s actual age is unknown, but from Pastor Jeff’s stories I estimate that she is in her late thirties or early forties. Stacy has green eyes and long blonde hair; Pastor Jeff describes her as “smokin’ hot” and as spending her time at home, raising their five children. He also says that she is a good wife and mother and—firmly establishing her religiosity and desirability and his own heterosexual virility—says he enjoys coming home to find her “in bed with [Biblical] commentaries and books,” upon which he tells her she is “sexy talking about theology.” Despite his busy schedule, Jeff claims that he and Stacy go out on weekly “date nights” every Friday night. Stacy herself is not a pastor, which Jeff makes clear, but she occasionally comes on stage after sermons to participate in a question-and-answer time with the audience. Pastor Jeff recounts how Stacy is a “helpful wife” who asks him questions about what he plans to preach about on Sunday. Although Stacy seems to be an active participant at CEC,

she may be even more involved in the behind-the-scenes church operations than Pastor Jeff lets on.

Although I did not examine my data quantitatively, I could not help but notice the frequency with which Pastor Jeff talks about himself during his sermons. Pastor Jeff positions himself as *the* hegemonic man with standards which other men should strive to live up to. Men's lives are structured around power relationships and access to power, thus a hegemonic man is one who is in power, with power, and of power (Kimmel 1994). Power, however, is also dependent on having the skill and resources to use it effectively (Schwalbe 2008). Pastor Jeff appears to have all the power at CEC (although he claims he does not), as he is the face of CEC, and the one who defines what the church is.

Pastor Jeff started CEC in 1996. As it grew in membership, a leadership structure was put in place that involves other pastors and elders who work as a team. Pastor Jeff is the leader of the elders, but he states that "every two years there's a vote as to who is the leader of the elders...that means every two years I'm up for vote...I love City Evangelical...but if the elders don't think I'm the man, then I'm not." Thus despite his obvious position of power in the spotlight of the stage four times each Sunday, he claims that he does not have *all* the power but rather has to earn his privileged position. That is, he claims to command other men's allegiance because of his superior abilities. Pastor Jeff is the charismatic figure around which CEC has been built, however, and despite the growth in church membership and campuses, other pastors have not taken over the preaching and teaching role. Rather, it is Pastor Jeff who is broadcast to all the church campuses. Thus, it appears that *his* discourse

is what draws people to the church; therefore removing the discourse (i.e., Pastor Jeff) would not benefit the ultimate goal of increased church membership.

As the ultimate dude then, Pastor Jeff is able to cultivate an image of himself to the congregation. One prominent aspect of this cultivated image is intelligence. Pastor Jeff creates an image of himself as highly intelligent by talking a lot, talking quickly, and talking about things in a highly technical and specific manner. In doing so, he conveys an image of a rational man of knowledge. A common gender stereotype is that men are rational and women are emotional. Men who are a part of what Connell (2005) refers to as the “new middle class,” meaning men who work in knowledge-based industries, who are highly educated, or who have multiple credentials, are men who have a *claim* to some expertise, but lack social authority. Because many aspects of current culture are organized around rationalization, and men are perceived to be rational (and women are deemed irrational), rationality serves to legitimate men’s dominance over women. Pastor Jeff’s practice of cultivating a rational, intelligent image is consistent in his sermons across the 10-year time span. Although he may have developed social authority over this time, as his popularity in evangelical circles indicates, it may have been necessary for him to start out with a claim of expertise (Connell 2005). Because this strategy for cultivating an intelligent image worked to gain members, it makes sense that it has not changed.

The two main ways Pastor Jeff claims intelligence is through intricately describing the historical background of the topic he is preaching on, to, as he puts it, “give [the congregation] some sort of foundational understanding,” and through quickly explaining

large chunks of arcane Biblical text. In order that his audience does not “get completely lost” Pastor Jeff prepares notes with scripture references that are distributed to the congregation prior to the sermon. Additionally, Pastor Jeff uses big words (real or made up), rattles off statistics, quotes other authors, and boasts about reading “a great number of [Bible] commentaries” each time he studies for and preaches about a portion of the Bible. Statements such as these appear to be designed to establish his high level of intelligence, and thus are likely meant to gain the trust and respect of his audience.

Another consistent part of Pastor Jeff’s image, although this theme only arises in the later sermons from 2006 and 2010, is one of tension between him and the world, which also mirrors the tension between CEC and the outside world (Smith 1998). Pastor Jeff frequently recognizes that he receives a lot of criticism for his opinions; in fact, this has become part of his image. It remains unclear as to who exactly is criticizing him: Pastor Jeff refers regularly to criticism he receives via email, phone calls, and online bloggers. He comments that “you’d think I have a part-time job clubbing seals and drowning puppies...people say the worst things about me.” Pastor Jeff believes that there are two reasons for this criticism. First, “sometimes people get offended when I speak out of the place of truth,” and second, “some of [the criticism]...is totally deserved.” Yet Pastor Jeff’s response to both of these reasons is the same. If he believes he’s speaking out of truth, he does not care, and even if he believes the criticism is deserved, he states that “sometimes [it’s] even enjoyed because it gives me something to do.” Thus, the criticism and opposition that Pastor Jeff receives only seems to strengthen his identity because that tension is a part of his created identity. As the

hegemonic dude, he is able to withstand all opposition, proving his dudeliness and thus his deserved place at the top of the masculine hierarchy. A real man does not let others push him around.

*Dude-Making Versus Dude-Breaking: “We See CEC as a Man Factory. Boys Come In, Men Go Out. Period.”*

What makes a dude and what breaks a dude? According to Pastor Jeff, dude-making is a man’s embodiment of responsibility. He instructs the single men of his congregation in this way:

It’s a time for you to act like a man. ’Cause marriage is for men, not for boys. Too many men think, “If I get married, that will make me a man.” No. No. No. You become a man to prepare you for marriage. You don’t expect marriage to make you a man. And as a man, you leave your father and mother’s house, you finish your education, you get a job, you make some money, you keep yourself out of debt, you pay off school loans if you have them, you go ahead and save up so you can buy a home, so that when God should bring along the woman of your dreams, you’re able to get married.

Therefore, responsibility is the top priority of CEC men, according to Pastor Jeff. In his discourse, men become dudes when they are responsible. This is not unlike Kimmel’s (2006) argument against modern strands of the mythopoetic men’s movement. Kimmel argues that men should not run off to the woods to discover their manhood—as the contemporary

mythopoetic men's movement urged men to do—but instead live responsible lives with those they love. Responsibility in and of itself is not a bad thing, and I would argue (and I think Kimmel would agree) that responsibility is indeed a good thing for all people, men and women alike. However, there is a strong conservative undercurrent to Pastor Jeff's discourse of responsibility. Pastor Jeff asserts that becoming a responsible dude requires men to walk a narrow path. A dude should finish his education, get a job, buy a home, find a woman, make babies, and be wise with his money. In a family, dudes are the ones who provide, protect, defend, and comfort. They should be respectable, masculine, and faithful. This is a form of responsibility that involves men's dominance and women's submission. Interestingly, "dude" is not a term usually applied to mature, responsible men. Pastor Jeff may strategically use this term because of its "hip" connotations in order to connect with the young men of his congregation he claims the church attracts.

Dudes, according to Pastor Jeff, should especially protect the women in their families, their wives and daughters. Having the ability to fight makes a man a real dude. Dudes thus also need strength, but this strength must be used for good. For example, strength means standing up to other men who use their strength in negative ways, proving that they are *not* dudes:

You've got to be strong enough when you see a guy, even in this church, if he's not being nice to his wife or his kids, he's not working hard, he's not being honorable.

You need to have courage. You need to have strength. You need to have boldness.

You need to be able to put your finger in this guy's chest and say, "Look, you're a

Christian. You go to City Evangelical. You're a City Evangelical man. Don't treat your wife like that. Don't treat your kids like that. Don't work your job like that. That's not how we do things. That's not how City Evangelical men are. That's not how God's men are."

Yet overall, Pastor Jeff preaches contradictory messages about violence. On the one hand, dudes are *not* to be harsh and violent, especially toward women and children. Pastor Jeff says men who "take [their] masculine strength to punish women and to subjugate them by force" are sinful and wicked. He tells men not to be harsh, and not to be violent, rather they should be like Jesus and "do everything in love." In addition, because our culture is one where "men do atrocious and horrible things" to their own daughters, sisters, girlfriends, and wives, the men of CEC "must not, cannot, we will not be those men."

These messages condemning men's violence appear sparse next to Pastor Jeff's discourse endorsing men who use violence to protect, as entertainment, or as humor. Connell (2005:111) also describes men who "put a lot of work into keeping up a [violent] front" and the critical role that violence plays in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. Pastor Jeff uses his platform to create a resource for identity-making (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996), the resource being power through physical strength, and, if necessary, violence. This is done through his descriptions of protecting his daughters, discussing Ultimate Fighting, play-fighting with his sons, and describing violence in terms of humorous antics and Biblical exemplars. This involves a lot of talk: I could not find any images or descriptions anywhere of Pastor Jeff actually *engaging* in fighting (aside from playing with his sons). His image of

toughness and power is created and sustained by this manhood act of displaying his verbal prowess.

Pastor Jeff first upholds violence as a means of protection, especially a father's protection of his daughter's chastity. As Pastor Jeff states, his own daughters will be virgins "for a long time, or I will be doing prison ministry from the inside, right?" Here he implies that he would perhaps go so far as to kill anyone who had sex with his unmarried daughters. As a father, Pastor Jeff claims it is his duty to make sure his daughters remain virgins before they get married, and he will do so "by God's grace and my gun."

Pastor Jeff routinely makes references in his sermons about Ultimate Fighting, either that he enjoys watching it on television and considers it "normal" for dudes to enjoy it, or he tells stories about engaging in play fights with his sons, encouraging them to work on their fighting moves. Ultimate Fighting is a mixture of combat sports, attracting an audience of boys and men who enjoy fantasizing about fighting. "Ultimate Fighters" engage in combat in an octagon and they wear no protective padding on their bodies, except for open-fingered gloves with knuckle padding, allowing the men to grab and punch, but with less risk of injury to their hands. Additionally, Pastor Jeff uses wrestling terms when talking about men in the Bible. He calls Jesus' disciples "cowards, they were not ultimate fighters, they were ultimate chickens." He calls John the Baptist a "freaky WWF nut job" and comments about how Jesus and John probably wrestled as kids, saying that John might have said, "I remember the

day I suplexed him. That was God, we were only nine, but I suplexed God.”<sup>11</sup> Thirdly, when talking about the disciple Peter he says, “Jesus...gives him this WWF nickname, he says you will be the Rock.” Finally, in describing something that men should be allowed by women to do, he says “let him watch the ultimate fight on the big screen with his friends.” In the dude discourse, violence is something that entertains men, and sends a message that dudes should be ultimate fighters who dominate one another through fighting and at the same time do not subjugate women by force.

Pastor Jeff also uses violence in his jokes. As the audience laughs, he talks about wanting to “punch [people] in the throat” for being fakers, and “whip” people for giving bad customer service. In another story, he talks about his son Cole’s interpretation of a Bible story, that Jesus was “whopping up on an old man...in a walker” and that was “kind of funny in a sick way.” Cole said that Jesus “should have just kicked him in the nuts.” Throughout his sermons, Pastor Jeff insinuates that men’s violence is funny.

Finally, violence is also legitimated biblically, through one of Pastor Jeff’s Biblical exemplars, Jesus. He describes Jesus as an “ultimate fighter,” and that “this guy right here, I can’t take him, right? He’s got a robe dipped in blood. Any guy who has a robe dipped in blood as an accessory is tough, right? And it ain’t his blood, that’s another point.” If dudes are to be like Jesus, and Jesus wears a robe dipped in someone else’s blood, this sends the message that men are supposed to be capable of violence. Pastor Jeff recasts Jesus as a fantasy figure, a hegemonic man that other men are supposed to live up to, even though they

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<sup>11</sup> A “suplex” is an offensive move used in entertainment wrestling, which involves one wrestler picking up the opponent off the ground, then using their body weight to force the opponent back down to the ground with the attacker landing on top of the opponent.

can never attain this status (Connell 1987). Indeed, what Pastor Jeff may be selling is an impossible yet comforting illusion.

On the flip side, Pastor Jeff's discourse positions men who are not dudes, or who have not yet achieved dudeliness, as embodying the opposite qualities of dudely men. They are completely irresponsible and lazy, insofar as they do not do anything to prepare for a future wife, home, and family. Rather than getting a job and being wise with their money, these are the men who live with their parents, or live with lots of other guys and spend their money and time on video games. Pastor Jeff claims these are the men who do not own cars because they have too many DUI's. Because they do not have jobs and money, they lack the ability to provide. These men also lack the ability to protect; Pastor Jeff consistently describes these men as cowardly and passive. Rather than being masculine, these men are "soft." Pastor Jeff describes the opposite of a "man's man," a "guy's guy," a "dude's dude" as "a guy wearing a Snuggie, open-toed sandals, flicking his hair, rocking out to Elton John, drinking decaf, listening to tape sounds of running water, got most huggable in high school." Pastor Jeff's description clearly establishes what is not acceptable for dudes. Similar to Pascoe's (2007) discussion of the "fag discourse"—whereby boys call one another fag in an effort to repudiate everything deemed feminine—by describing non-dudes as effeminate, Pastor Jeff constructs dudes as devoid of femininity. This leads us to a discussion of femininity at CEC, and Pastor Jeff's construction of the "godly" versus "godless" women.

*“Godly” Versus “Godless” Women: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*

Whereas men in Pastor Jeff’s discourse are defined as being dudes or not dudes, women are defined in terms of good or bad. Femininity in its “ideal” form, whether termed emphasized femininity (Connell 1987) or hegemonic femininity (Schippers 2007), is organized around women’s compliance with hegemonic masculinity. Pastor Jeff’s discourse of femininity reproduces this relationship of (male) dominance and (female) subordination. To Pastor Jeff, women who accept men’s dominance are good and “godly.” For example, when interpreting a Bible passage about women’s roles in the church, Pastor Jeff inserts his own commentary that legitimizes women’s compliance with men: “If [the women are] in a church, they respect the elders, they respect the Bible, they respect Jesus, they’re respectful godly women, then they can pray and prophesy.” Women, however, can also be resistant to men’s dominance (Connell 1987) and Pastor Jeff refers to these resistant, non-compliant women as the bad or “godless” women. His interpretation of the same Bible passage chastises resistant, “feminist” women, denying them the ability to serve in the church:

If she’s an ungodly woman, with a godless feminist agenda that she borrowed from the serpent like her mother Eve in Genesis 3, and she’s on some tirade mission to represent all women, which is what sometimes happens. Women nominate themselves to represent all women. I love it when the National Organization for Women, for example, comes out and says, “And representing [all] women...” What women? Did they take a vote? Did all the Christian women vote? Did the mothers

vote? Did the wives vote? No. You don't represent all women. You represent a liberal feminist constituency, period. Not all women. Not all women.

Thus, Pastor Jeff communicates a message that warns the women of his congregation away from collective feminist movements. He goes on to say, "Don't affiliate yourself with all women. There are good women, there are bad women," further emphasizing his point that when it comes to women, there are only two categories: good and bad. This quote also illustrates the tension that Pastor Jeff tries to create between the women of CEC and the women of the world. According to Pastor Jeff, the "Christian women," the "mothers," and the "wives" of his congregation are distinctly different from the "liberal feminist constituency." Applying Schippers' (2007) framework of hegemonic femininity, the "godly" women are constructed as superior to "godless" women; however, as we will see, the central theme of Pastor Jeff's discussion of women is their relation to men, not to each other.

Discussing women, Pastor Jeff frequently returns to three distinct themes: sexuality, character, and submission. Women who are sexually pure are the "good" women, Pastor Jeff states. They have remained sexually chaste as compared to the "bad" women who are equal to prostitutes. He uses stories to illustrate this point. In discussing a woman who is led away from "godliness" by men, he says that she is not "keeping her clothes on like she's supposed to." Additionally, addressing a fictitious single woman who is desperate for a date, Pastor Jeff comments on what she might say, using the term "clear heels," which he frequently evokes to refer to prostitutes or loose women:

“I’m going to get my clear heels on” (audience laughter). You all know what that means (audience laughter)... You need to have holiness, and you need to stay in the place that God blesses. You can’t, well, “I’ll go shack up with this guy, or date this guy, or sleep with this guy, or flirt with this guy till Boaz comes,” cause if Boaz does come, he is not going to be interested. Boaz is going to look and say, “I’m not interested, that gal’s trouble. She’s not holy, she’s not staying in the place that God would bless her, waiting patiently, faithfully.”

In this excerpt, Pastor Jeff uses the example of Boaz, one of the exemplar men described as the “dude of dudes,” a man Pastor Jeff encourages men to strive to be like. Therefore, in order for a woman to get a man who is a dude, she must be good and godly. Otherwise, dudes will not be interested in her, and they will know that she is “trouble.”

A woman’s compliance or non-compliance with hegemonic masculinity is also reflected in her character. Similar to his use of men who are Biblical exemplars of hegemonic masculinity, Pastor Jeff describes two women who are Biblical exemplars of emphasized femininity (Connell 1987). First, he describes Ruth as a woman who is “hard-working” and “loyal.” He says that God used her hardships “to make her into a woman of great character and nobility and work ethic.” With a godly character, a woman can be very attractive to a man. This is in contrast to women who make “it an art of creating drama and crisis in an effort to attract a Boaz.” Women who do so are described as “drama queens [and] high maintenance,” both of which are “wicked,” according to Pastor Jeff.

Finally, “godly” women are those who submit to authority—not just any authority—man’s authority and the authority of the church. This pertains to both husbands and fathers, as well as male leaders in the church. Pastor Jeff uses the exemplar woman of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a submissive woman: “What does Mary say? ‘I am the Lord’s servant.’ That is a godly teenage gal... ‘Lord, whatever you want, I’m here to serve.’ I mean, she’s a great gal. I could see why Joseph’s attracted to her. Character like that, she’s pretty brilliant.” This discourse may be designed to appeal to the women of the congregation who are well-educated. As indicated earlier, close to half of the city’s residents have a bachelor’s or higher degree. By including in his discourse women who are “brilliant” but also submissive, Pastor Jeff may hope to convey the message that *educated* women, also, should adhere to emphasized femininity and a separate-spheres ideology. This submissiveness is in contrast with the resistant women who are “like Eve... likewise deceived saying, ‘You know what, we don’t need men, they’re idiots, we know what we’re doing, let’s just take control.’” Thus, Pastor Jeff constructs the “godless” women as feminist women with godless agendas who seek to take control and refuse to listen or submit to the men in their lives.

Pastor Jeff also emphasizes physical appearance for women. According to Pastor Jeff, women should be attractive to men, and a great deal of work goes into being attractive. For women who want to be noticed by men in a romantic way he recommends they “get all dolled up and girly up.” Additionally, according to Pastor Jeff, women should:

Go tanning. Get your hair foiled. Get a new dress. Put on some perfume. Shave your pits and your legs (audience laughter, pause, laughter). I’m just telling you,

right? Gentlemen, is this true? Yes. Men already have hairy pits, they're looking for something else (audience laughter), right? A lot of women are like, "It's natural." Hahaha. No, it's gross (audience laughter). Gross. Nasty. You don't, no guy is looking for Chewbacca.

Therefore, women's grooming and appearance should result in something distinctly different from men, since men are "looking for something else." Pastor Jeff's message is clear: in order to "get" a man, women need to be attractive and engage in beauty practices which will emphasize their difference from men. By stating that men are "looking for something else," Pastor Jeff may also be implicitly repudiating homosexuality. Men should sexually desire women, specifically women whose bodies look different from their own. Men are not "looking for Chewbacca," they are looking for a woman whom they are able to physically dominate (Pascoe 2007). Connell (2005) argues that people are taught to believe in a gender ideology where men's and women's bodies are inherently different, a fictional account voiced as truth by sociobiologists. This account of difference serves to naturalize gender inequality and heterosexuality. Likewise, Schippers (2007) discusses how heterosexual attraction is assumed to be a *natural* attraction because of men and women's "innate" differences. If erotic desire, then, is considered "naturally" heterosexual and attracted to difference, this reinforces (and legitimates) relations of dominance and submission. Pastor Jeff affirms and celebrates the differences between men and women. He also, however, reveals that this difference must be "done" when he describes the beauty rituals women undertake and instructs women to *change* their bodies to be attractive to men. He encourages

women to alter their skin tone through tanning, alter their hair color through hair foiling, alter their body hair by shaving, and alter their scent with perfume.

Although, Pastor Jeff does encourage men to wear “a shirt with buttons,” “put some product in [their] hair,” and even make sure they “have two eyebrows, not one” when they take a woman out on a date, men are not held to the same standard as women when it comes to physical appearance. If a man’s appearance is not “hot,” if he looks more like Homer Simpson than Brad Pitt, or if he does not have a “six-pack,” Pastor Jeff says this is okay, as long as “he has a job.” This also indicates that what is essential for a dude is his earning power, not his appearance—and this is the case even with the three exemplary men that Pastor Jeff describes. Jesus “looked like a normal dude,” and John, a “man’s man” was dirty and smelly. Boaz, the “dude of dudes,” was the older man with more of a “cooler” than a “six-pack.” Issues of appearance, however, are not problematic for men, according to Pastor Jeff. In fact, men who spend their money putting highlights in their hair rather than being “responsible” are the ones getting “cuts in the line to hell,” indicating that irresponsibility on the part of men is so sinful that it may result in eternal condemnation. Responsibility, therefore, does not translate into grooming and appearance for men, according to Pastor Jeff, whereas it is essential for women’s body practices (Connell 2005).

*Church as Family: “Welcome to Family!”*

Along with the power he has at the church, Pastor Jeff also describes the power he has at home as the head of the household: “I’m a dad and in a little way I’m lord of the

Johnson home...and in my little kingdom I have five children.” As a religious family, Pastor Jeff claims that the Johnson family ascribes power to God and the heavenly hierarchy. This hierarchy legitimates the domestic hierarchy (Denton 2004; Wolkomir 2004). As the self-proclaimed “head of the household,” Pastor Jeff has “all the rights as dad—like the nice seat at the table, and the big piece of chicken, and the remote.” Due to this position, he claims that “it’s a home of order and peace.” Through this position of authority, Pastor Jeff attempts to cultivate dominant masculinity and submissive femininity in his household among his children, and he also conveys to his congregation that this is the correct and best way to be a family.

Pastor Jeff and Stacy have three sons, Jackson, Cole, and Aaron whose ages range from 11 to 5. The stories that Pastor Jeff tells about his sons convey a sense of cultivating them to become hegemonic men who are intelligent, strong, and provide. Pastor Jeff, for example, tells stories about how he engages in “ultimate fighting” with his boys because “we watch a lot of ultimate fighting at the Johnson house.” Pastor Jeff’s stories suggest that he actively encourages his sons to cultivate a sense of power and violence. When Cole was five, Pastor Jeff proudly states he was “working on his triangle choke” while seven-year-old Jackson was “working on his arm bar” and eight-month-old Aaron “can’t do much so he crawls up on me and beats on me.” The Johnson boys are active, enjoying activities such as swimming, climbing trees, fishing, and hiking, which Pastor Jeff says are things that “boys are supposed to do.” Additionally, Pastor Jeff finds it important to prepare his boys for the future. When Cole was only five, Pastor Jeff describes asking him, “Where are you going to

live [when you grow up]? What are you going to do for a job? Who are you going to marry? How many kids are you going to have? What are you going to do when that kid wants to do drugs or alcohol?” When Jackson was seven, Pastor Jeff told how Jackson explained he was going to “do well in school, and then I’m going to go to college, and then I’m going to make a lot of money, I’m going to buy a house, I’m going to get married, and someday I’m going to be a dad.” Apparently, Jackson is already familiar with the CEC “dude route to dudeness.” Pastor Jeff makes it clear to his congregation that his purpose in talking to his young sons about their futures is for them to be on the “right” path, pursuing their dreams. Their dreams, however, must be in line with the dude discourse.

With his daughters, Peyton and Ava, ages 13 and 7, Pastor Jeff takes a different approach. He describes them as “creative, arty” and “sort of high maintenance little girls who like shoes and tea and flowers, and I love that because they’re girly and I dig them.” He also often describes Peyton, his oldest child, as being a “brilliant theologian” who is smart and organized, and he is so proud every time she “scores 100 percent on all her Bible quizzes.” Again, Pastor Jeff’s discourse may be designed to appeal to the well-educated women of the congregation. In contrast to in-depth conversations about Jackson and Cole’s futures, however, Pastor Jeff encourages emphasized femininity in Peyton and Ava, clearly conveying the message that they should become women who are compliant with men’s dominance (Connell 1987). Women are compliant insofar as they submit to men’s authority and allow the men in their lives (their fathers, then their husbands) to provide and protect for them. Pastor Jeff insists that “little girls need daddies,” and he is being a good daddy by

knowing his daughters. In describing his relationship with Peyton when she was nine, he says,

I love her, I know who she needs to marry, and who she does not need to marry (audience laughter). I'm very clear on that. I know her the best, I love her the most, and I am not going to just let some guy come and put his hands all over her. That's not the way it's going to go.

In order that they do not marry the wrong man, Pastor Jeff engages in “preparatory training for the daughters” through “daddy dates,” where he spends one-on-one time with each daughter. He also spends time with his sons, but this involves activities such as paintballing or snowmobiling. In contrast, he describes buying his daughters flowers and taking them out to fancy restaurants. He wants to teach them how real men, real dudes, should treat them, “so they don't run off with some wing nut in high school who drives the Camaro, you know (audience laughter). It's sort of setting a precedent.”

Across the 10-year span of sermon data collected, Pastor Jeff tells story after story of his wife and children and of cultivating hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in his own family. At the same time, he talks about the church and addresses his congregation using the word “family.” The church is supposed to be a family. When describing why he discloses the financial state of the church in a 2006 sermon, he says, “this is family business.” Of the men and women in the church, he points out, “we're brothers and sisters,” and he instructs the men to “treat all women as sisters.” (Although he also instructs the men to “hook up” and “fix” their singlehood, because at CEC finding a woman “is like fishing in

a trout pond, if you don't go home with a fish, there's something wrong with your bait [audience laughter].”) And in the family of the church, Pastor Jeff is the father. He tells the men in his congregation, “I want you men to know, I have the heart of a father. I may not have the age of a father yet...but I have the heart of a father for the men in this church.” When he talks to the church about “family business” his “dad tone comes out” because he speaks to them as a father. Additionally, he mentions the failing health factors that are common among older men, in terms of children aging their father: “you’ve already given me gray hairs and ulcers,” but those things are “better than taking the path of least resistance” and not being there for them as a father. It is interesting to note that there is no mention of mothers as a part of the “church family” despite the existence of many mothers in the church, including Pastor Jeff’s own mother. The message is clear: mothers do not participate in such an active role as fathers in the church family.

Finally, for the “children” of the church—the congregants who are to treat one another like brothers and sisters, but also get married and make babies—Pastor Jeff provides instruction in hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, just as he does with his own children. For women, there are few instructions. Pastor Jeff tells women to “aspire by grace to be like Ruth,” one of the Biblical women exemplars who is “a woman of great character.” Pastor Jeff also commands the women of CEC to be “soft” and “tender.” Before beginning a sermon about a “controversial” Bible passage, he states, “We believe that hard words produce soft people and that soft words produce hard people and Paul has for us here some very hard words. For you ladies, some very hard words. Some very hard words. My

hope is that they make you tender toward the Lord.” Finally, stepping in as the church “father” who guides the “daughters” in who they ought to marry, he jokes, “Some of the ladies are like, (high-pitched voice) I can’t find a good man. (normal voice) Maybe you’ll find a Boaz, welcome to City Evangelical (audience laughter). I’ll do my best.” Thus, women’s purpose for coming to CEC is to develop good character, become tender-hearted, and find a dudely husband, thus legitimizing men’s authority over women.

Pastor Jeff’s instruction to men is a different story. For one, there’s a great deal of talk about men at CEC. Men need to become real men—they need to become dudes. Pastor Jeff sums it up well:

[O]ne of the, the most personally, wonderful, encouraging aspects of our ministry is our men, is our men. We get a lot of criticism on this. (sarcastic tone) I don't know if you've heard any. Maybe somebody said a little something. (normal tone) The criticism is City Evangelical is just too much about men. And you know what, City Evangelical is about men. This is no denigration to the women. This text is about men, so I'll talk about men. We see City Evangelical as a man factory. Boys come in, men go out. Period. That's what we're about.

Understanding that CEC “is about men,” clarifies much of Pastor Jeff’s intent. His goal is to “encourage and inspire other men [by telling] stories of the men who are exemplary and worthy of honor,” to transform men to be “strong and courageous,” and to treat men respectfully so they can be “instructed and exhorted toward holiness.” Pastor Jeff frequently says his hope is that “men would learn from the example of Boaz,” one of the Biblical

exemplars of the hegemonic masculinity, thus becoming dudes. Pastor Jeff's reasoning is clear:

The result of [men having a deficient picture of Jesus] as well is a growing crisis in Christianity, where men don't think much of Jesus, men are not inspired by Jesus, men don't participate in church life, and if they do, they tend not to be the most manly... Why would so many men be so unimpressed and uninspired and unmotivated by Jesus?

Because of this perceived "growing crisis" of the "most manly" men avoiding Christianity, Pastor Jeff feels responsible to inspire and motivate men to follow Jesus. To do so, echoing movements throughout the last 100 years, he recasts Jesus as the hegemonic dude, someone worthy of the dude discourse, models himself after this image, and calls men to join him. This image of Jesus largely downplays Jesus' pacifist teachings and ignores his celibacy. Pastor Jeff describes Jesus in one instance as "meek and gentle and humble and kind and loving and forgiving, even to his most ardent opponents and critics, even in their hour of most vile antagonism. And he stands as an example for us all." But Pastor Jeff also clarifies that for men "meek is different than weak... Weak means you don't have any strength. Meek means you have strength and you use it as needed for good. Okay? You're going to need to be strong." Therefore, Pastor Jeff recasts the image of Jesus, the pacifist, as requiring strength. Even as he prays at the end of his sermon, he summons the image of the dude:

I pray for *my* men, *these* men, the men of City Evangelical Church, your men, that we would have the family resemblance [of Boaz] as well, that we would be redeemers,

masculine, courageous, godly, decent, hard-working men who treat women as sisters, who treat wives as princesses, who treat daughters as gifts and are about redemption. Pastor Jeff thus conveys a message of family relationships by identifying the men as belonging to himself, and reinforces his position as their leader and someone they can trust and look up to. He also models and teaches a version of hegemonic masculinity to the men of CEC, and, to a lesser extent, a version of emphasized femininity to the women.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In writing this thesis, I asked, how does Pastor Jeff—the head pastor of an urban megachurch—construct a discourse of masculinity and femininity that places men in a dominant position and women in a subordinate position? My findings indicate that Pastor Jeff constructs this discourse—the dude discourse—by using Biblical exemplars, both men and women, who embody hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell 1987, 2005). These are people who his congregation should strive to live up to, men who are the “dude of dudes” and women who are “good and godly.” Yet living up to such exemplars is rarely attainable. Pastor Jeff, however, has positioned himself in a place of authority, having created a resource of power (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996), and thus has become the embodiment of a dude that men can actually *see* and therefore strive to be like. In addition, Pastor Jeff situates himself as the father of CEC, just as he is the father and head of his own household, his “little kingdom.” As a father cultivates his children, so Pastor Jeff strives to cultivate the members of CEC. Pastor Jeff makes it clear that CEC is *for men*. It is a male-

dominated institution that legitimizes men's dominance and women's submission. The institution follows this hierarchy, Pastor Jeff's family follows this hierarchy, and therefore the members should as well.

These observations, however, come from the mouth of Pastor Jeff, and even the stories he tells about members of his congregation (although these are rare) may be skewed to his liking, therefore I cannot draw out implications of the dude discourse in terms of how (or whether) church members implement it in their own lives and households. Rather, my contribution to the study of gender inequality is theoretical. With this project, I sought to empirically inform theories of gender, mainly the theory of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell 1987, 2005). Recent work on masculinity has focused on men's behavior, and as Schrock and Schwalbe (2009:289) remind us, "there has been a tendency to lose sight of the goals of trying to understand (a) the social construction of gender in general and (b) the reproduction of gender inequality." Manhood acts—the acts by which masculinity is signified and upheld—are practices that maintain *male* dominance. Additionally, Pascoe (2007) critiques those who use Connell's model of multiple masculinities to reify typologies of masculinity rather than highlight patterns in the practices and discourses of masculinity. A great deal of work on masculinity ignores women altogether and does not theorize femininity (Elliott 2010), thus overlooking the relational aspect between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. My analysis shows that in the dude discourse, Pastor Jeff constructs both hegemonic masculinity *and* emphasized femininity. His manhood acts and the practice of hegemonic masculinity allow men's

collective dominance over women to continue, and the practice of emphasized femininity legitimates women's subordination to men. My focus on the role of emphasized femininity in the dude discourse provides new insight for studying both concepts together.

Following Connell's theory, I found that the dude discourse is relational insofar as masculinity and femininity are constructed in relation to one another. The dude discourse is about men participating in masculinity, and the cultivation of dudeliness at CEC; however dudes cannot exist without women, specifically godly women. Dudes need to protect their women, using violence if necessary. Dudes need to provide for their families. Dudes need to be heterosexual, indeed they must be dudely enough to attract a woman with a "good, godly character" who will submit to their authority. Women who are not submissive are "godless." They are "trouble" for a man to become involved with and are constructed as the "bad" women. Thus, women are necessary, but they only play a supportive role. Women are found in the background of the dude discourse, even in parenting. For example, Pastor Jeff insinuates that his wife Stacy is "helping me raise my three sons and two daughters." Despite the fact that Stacy gave birth to the five children and stays at home to take care of them, Pastor Jeff asserts his power and authority as the head of his household. Dudes, then, depend on the submission of women to achieve dudeliness and thus the dude discourse is fundamentally about male dominance and female submission.

In addition, dudes are positioned against men who are *not* dudes, supporting Connell's (2005) theory of a masculine hierarchy. Although men who are not dudes are weak, irresponsible men who lack social power, they are not "bad," like "godless" women.

Rather, men who are not dudes threaten to challenge the legitimacy of male dominance, thus they need to be cultivated into dudely dudes. This is why Pastor Jeff positions himself as the father of CEC, positions the church as a “man factory,” and provides specific manhood acts for his male congregants to emulate. His goal is clear: CEC is for men, and this space gives men the legitimacy by authority of the church to take on the role of the dominant, masculine leader who is revered and respected by his family. “It’s time,” Pastor Jeff commands, “to act like a man.”

The question that also begs to be answered is why would the educated women who attend CEC continue to do so? Although I cannot speculate about what women get out of attending CEC—as this is an empirical question and an important area of future research—I can speak to what Pastor Jeff promises them they will receive if they enact emphasized femininity. Pastor Jeff constructs a discourse of femininity that posits women as “good” or “bad,” yet belonging to these categories is dependent on their performance of emphasized femininity. The themes that Pastor Jeff routinely discusses around femininity are sexuality, character, and submission. These are about women’s relations to men, not other women (e.g., women with godly character are attractive to men, compared to drama queens who are “trouble” when it comes to men). Women who “do” emphasized femininity correctly are glorified, and women who do not are stigmatized. If they are stigmatized (i.e., “trouble”), the message is that they will then not be able to gain a husband. This analysis indicates that a compliant woman is promised a dude, and noncompliant women are not. Additionally, subordinate groups may align themselves with dominant groups, identifying with the values

of the dominant group and reinforcing the idea that the dominant group members are and should remain dominant (Ezzell 2009). If the women who attend CEC become saturated in the dude discourse, they may find themselves identifying with the values of the men (the dominant group), or more specifically, the values of Pastor Jeff. Women may believe they will benefit from “gaining” a dude as a husband: a man who is responsible, who will provide, and who will protect. The women at CEC may also gain a “moral identity” (Schwalbe 1996) as women who enact the idealized form of femininity propagated by Pastor Jeff. They may also believe that, in part stemming from Pastor Jeff’s constructed identity as an intelligent, loving “father” of the congregation, what he preaches is a heavenly mandate and thus, for women to find favor with God, they must submit to men. In this way, religion is used as a tool to legitimate the dominance of men and the subordination of women.

A final aspect of this project was to examine whether the dude discourse changed over time. I sampled five sermons from 2000 and five sermons from 2010 to provide contextual support for the other 20 sermons from 2006. Furthermore, I sought to answer the question: does the discourse of masculinity and femininity constructed in Pastor Jeff’s sermons change in response to challenges to its legitimacy? For both of these questions, I looked for patterns in Pastor Jeff’s discourse in terms of how he constructs masculinity and femininity. Since his identity is also part of the discourse, I theorized that when faced with a challenge to his legitimacy as the face of CEC, he might adjust his discourse and identity work to maintain his popularity and position of power within the church. One such challenge arose in 2006, but, according to my analysis, did not disrupt the dude discourse. Despite

Pastor Jeff's "apology" in 2006 for the comments on his blog, and his statement that his "inflammatory language and such need to be scaled back," I did not detect a change in Pastor Jeff's discourse between 2006 and 2010. He continues to provide examples of men and women in the Bible whom his congregation should strive to be like, and he continues to use the word "dude" and indicate what actions make or break a dude. Additionally, he continues to talk about violence as entertainment and as humor, and to use examples from his life illustrating that dudes should have the ability to fight. Moreover, *his* constructed identity *has not* changed. He still positions himself as the father of CEC and as one of the exemplars of dudeliness. Moreover, the dude discourse, as described in this thesis, was present in the 2000 sermons and has changed very little over the first decade of the twenty-first century. Perhaps the discourse has not changed because it is tapping into something big. Pastor Jeff, for example, claims the church grew by 1,000 members around the time of the 2006 protest, suggesting that the controversy was good for CEC. A quantitative analysis of the sermons may also reveal subtle changes over time and is an important consideration for future research.

It is interesting that in neither of these cases, over time and with a challenge to its legitimacy, has the discourse changed, because masculinity *is* designed to change and respond to cultural shifts and challenges, and it does change over time (Connell 2005). Kimmel (2006) documents the changing images in the twentieth century of the man Jesus—one of Pastor Jeff's Biblical exemplars—moving from a thin man with a lean face and gentle eyes, to the working-class hero with a strong body and master intellect, to the modern

corporate leader who was the epitome of the “Self-Made Man,” to a feminist who advocated for the equality of women, to a religious Rambo, to a Wall Street middle-manager. Pastor Jeff’s portrayal of Jesus is a revitalization of Muscular Christianity: he describes Jesus as “not pacified, hippie Jesus, right? This is ultimate fighter, open-a-can Jesus...This is tattooed-up, white-horse-riding, blazing-eyes, all-seeing, sword-coming-to-slaughter-the-nations, robe-dipped-in-blood Jesus.” More than the “average man’s hero,” Jesus is the image of the hegemonic man, the embodiment of the dude discourse, who is strong and potentially violent.

Pastor Jeff’s description of Jesus has remained the same over a decade, so we might wonder what this indicates about the culture in which the discourse is situated. For most of this decade, as a nation we have been involved in war. Kimmel (2006) indicates that the Second World War was a way for men to reassert their masculinity on the battlefield. That was, however, short-lived. Perhaps during the current time of heightened awareness of war and feeling embattled as a nation, Pastor Jeff has tapped into these same feelings. Since the 9-11 terrorist attack in 2001, national leaders have used a fear-based discourse to mobilize support and to frame current political, economic, and religious movements. By highlighting men’s strength, or at least the strength of the ultimate dudes, the dude discourse is perhaps designed to tap into and assuage people’s fears of external threats as well as men’s sense of eroding privileges. Furthermore, CEC has had no drop in attendance. The only “drop” that is ever discussed is a drop in monetary giving at the church, which often seems to be remedied after a plea from Pastor Jeff. CEC grew from a living room of 12 people in 1996 to

(a claim) of 13,000 people across eight church campuses in 2010. Perhaps the rigidity of the dude discourse is part of the appeal of CEC, since it is Pastor Jeff's image and, thus, the overarching message of the church.

Overall, my findings indicate, as Pastor Jeff himself says, CEC "is about men." Dudes are supposed to be created in this "man factory." Yes, women attend, but Pastor Jeff claims the majority of the attendees are young men. He therefore primarily addresses the young men in his sermons and only includes the women in relation to men. Emphasized femininity, which is subordinate to masculinity and compliant with the needs and desires of men (Connell 1987), is necessary for hegemonic masculinity and thus male dominance: at CEC, women are only important insofar as they help to maintain the dude discourse. As Pastor Jeff said, "boys come in" to CEC, ripe for hearing the dude discourse and ready to be cultivated into dudes under his tutelage. Clearly, the most important people at CEC are the men.

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