

# Gender Justice for the UK Church

## Version 3

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## Introduction

### Background

In December 2013 the gender imbalance across national Christian conferences<sup>1</sup> was revealed through collecting the number of men and women speaking from Christian event platforms throughout 2013-14<sup>2</sup>. It was found that 72% of speakers were male. Although this did not surprise many people, it did make visible the issue of gender injustice across the church. This data sparked discussions across the UK about what can be done to address the gender imbalance raised. Many women and some men have worked tirelessly, and yet the imbalance still exists.

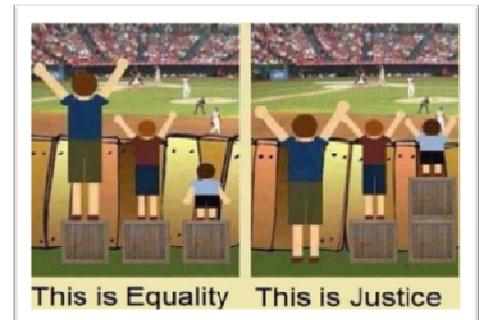
This is one of the many issues that are the consequences of gender injustice in the UK and in the church. Jenny Baker (author of the book "Equals") states, "It's a symptom of something systemic, and so is a useful catalyst for action but getting more women on platforms or in leadership doesn't necessarily address important issues for other women. [It's important not to] imply that having an equal number of female speakers will mean that the whole gender justice issue has been sorted!"

### Aim

Conversations happen, commitments are made, and yet the issues continue. This document is an attempt to quantify the many, many issues that contribute to gender injustice within the UK church. It is a work in progress and it is hoped that this document can form a springboard from which action can be taken. This document will approach the issues of gender justice from an egalitarian framework<sup>3</sup>, welcoming participation in all subsequent discussions from those who hold other views. Although this document focuses primarily on issues related to the platform, it is possible to attribute almost all the barriers listed to women's experiences across society.

### Why Gender Injustice?

The conversation about women's full participation in the UK church has been defined as striving for gender equality. However we are facing challenges that are deeper than working towards an equitable representation of women and men. Women currently account for 65%<sup>4</sup> of the UK church, but only 28% of those speaking at a national level are women. For the women across the UK prevented from fulfilling their calling, this is a matter of injustice, not of being treated "the same" as men. It is important to recognise that this document does not seek for the different languages of "equality" and of "justice" to be set against each other, but rather is trying to address the misconceptions that are often attached to the word "equality". The tireless efforts of those who have worked under the banner of equality are incredibly important and using talking about justice is in no way intended to undermine that work.



<sup>1</sup> <http://god-loves-women.webs.com/apps/blog/entries/show/35601231-are-uk-christian-conferences-sexist->

<sup>2</sup> This data can be found in Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.whychurch.org.uk/gendergap.php>

When referring to “men” or “women” throughout this document, this is done in a political or societal sense and refers to women and men as corporate groups of people. It must be acknowledged that the experiences of women and men are as varied as the number of people on the planet, however, there is a shared experience of oppression/privilege, that though not experienced individually, is experienced corporately.

## Process

It is very easy to lay the responsibility for addressing gender injustice at the feet of those in positions of power; to expect conference organisers to instigate ratios and national Christian leaders to provide guidelines to address the issues. However it is the responsibility of each of us to work towards a more just church. The issues are enormously complex, ranging from how we raise girls and boys, to how we decide who will make it onto our platforms. No individual or organisation will be able to change things alone. This document will use a socioecological model<sup>5</sup>, to map out the issues contributing to gender injustice in the church on four different levels: Society, Community, Individual and Ontogenetic. Once these issues have been mapped out and defined for each level, the next stage will be to explore what actions could be taken by individuals and organisations to bring about change. The issues raised primarily focus on the platform-based leadership, but can be extrapolated to many other forms of gender injustice nationally and in some cases, internationally.

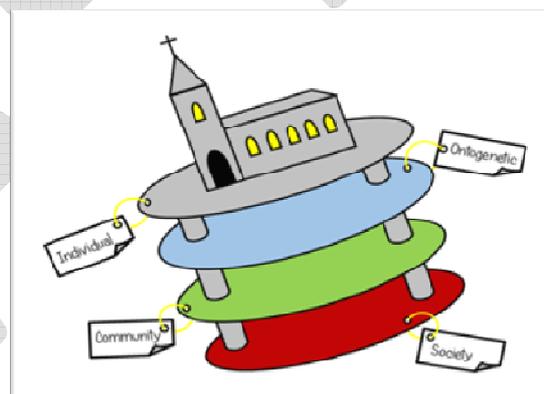
## Understanding a Socio-ecological Model

When looking at how to bring about change, the focus is often on individuals and enabling them to make better or healthier choices. However, individuals are just one layer of social structure. The other layers include:

### Society

This ranges from unhealthy media representation of women to lack of equal pay, it includes theology which sees women as less than fully human and the UK legal system. It includes:

- National and local government
- Economic institutions
- National and international legal systems
- National and international organisations e.g. conferences, denominations, educational establishments
- Media e.g. news outlets, TV, film, music and pornography industries, art, Christian media outlets
- Wider historical framework
- Commercial products e.g. beauty and toy industries
- The reality for the majority world (also referred to as the developing world)
- Scientific understanding
- Spiritual powers and principalities<sup>6</sup>
- Societal and theological assumptions and attitudes



<sup>5</sup> This was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 6:12

## *Community*

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Immediate and wider family groupings
- Local church
- Neighbourhood
- Peer groups
- Workplace.
- Educational establishments e.g. schools, colleges, seminaries, gap year providers
- Social media communities e.g. Twitter, Facebook etc.

## *Ontogenetic*

This is defined as “the development of an individual organism...from the earliest stage, to maturity”<sup>7</sup>. For the purposes of this document, it will refer to the development of a person, from before birth until adulthood at eighteen years old.

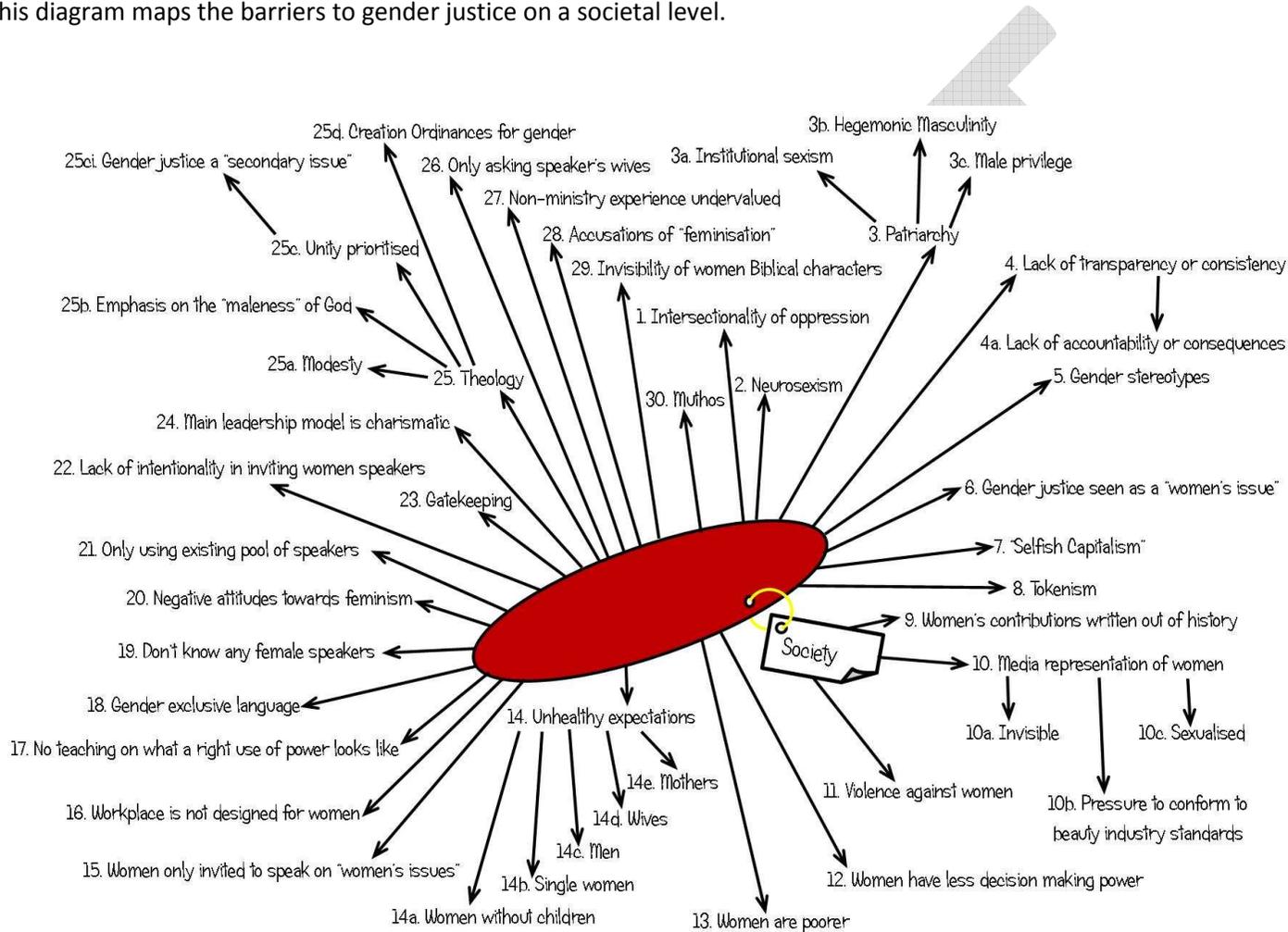
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<sup>7</sup> Oxford English Dictionary [2007] p.1000

## Mapping the Issues: Society

This diagram maps the barriers to gender justice on a societal level.



## Defining the Issues: Society

The definitions below explore each of the issues mapped in the diagram above.

### 1. Intersectionality of oppression

Every individual experiences intersections of oppression and privilege e.g. a white women experiences privilege as a white person, while experiencing oppression as a woman; a disabled white man experiences privilege as a white male, but also experiences oppression as a person with a disability. This intersectionality means that gender justice can never be achieved without also addressing other forms of injustice, including that related to race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, disability, neuro-diversity etc.

### 2. Neurosexism

Neurosexism refers to neuro-scientific research and so called facts which reinforce inequality, as Neuroscientist Cordelia Fine states, it “reflects and reinforces cultural beliefs about gender – and it may do so in particularly powerful ways, Dubious ‘brain facts’ about the sexes become part of the cultural lore.” Often neurosexism makes its way into sermons, conference talks and Christian books, reinforcing gender injustice.

### 3. Patriarchy

Defined as “a system or government ruled by men” it can be understood not in relation to individual men, but rather as “a system in which both women and men participate in.” A Christian understanding of patriarchy is that it is a direct consequence of The Fall. In Genesis 3:16 God declares that “your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” As Christian social scientist Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen states, from this point, “human history becomes in large part a story of the fallenness of gender relations.” This fallenness could be referred to as patriarchy. Walter Wink explains within his book “Engaging the Powers” that patriarchy is a spiritual power and principality.

#### a. Institutional sexism

This can be defined in a similar way to institutional racism, which is, “that which, covertly or overtly, resides in the policies, procedures, operations and culture of public or private institutions - reinforcing individual prejudices and being reinforced by them in turn<sup>8</sup>.” Similarly institutional sexism exists within the system, structure, culture and values of the Church. It involves explicit or implicit actions or intentions which seek to maintain a power differential between men and women.

#### b. Hegemonic masculinity

This refers to the system which allows men as a group to hold the dominant position in society, while women hold a subordinate position. It asserts that the only appropriate masculinities are those which ensure men hold more power than women.

#### c. Male Privilege

In a world where men hold the majority of the power, a man will have unearned rights, benefits and opportunities because of his gender. Gender theorist Michael Kimmel states that “Privilege is invisible to those with it.”

### 4. Lack of transparency or consistency

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<sup>8</sup> A. Sivanandan, Director, Institute of Race Relations  
<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/feb/24/lawrence.ukcrime7>

There are few requirements across the UK church for transparency regarding gender justice. Churches who hold complementarian theology are often not explicit about the full implications of this for men and women. Consistency is often undermined by rules that allow women to teach or preach “under a man’s authority” in some contexts, and then prevent women preaching in another context.

a. **Lack of accountability or consequences**

Where individuals or organisations make commitments to gender equality, there are few sanctions or mechanisms for ensuring action is taken. Also, those with egalitarian theology are not held to account in publically upholding women’s full participation throughout the church.

5. **Gender stereotypes**

A stereotype is defined as “an image or idea of a particular type of person or thing that has become fixed through being widely held.”<sup>9</sup> It is often assumed men are more able to deal with conflict, less emotional and process logically; women are seen as weak, more emotional and more capable of multi-tasking. These stereotypes, whether held privately or declared publically damage women’s and men’s views of themselves and others and often lead both men and women to assume women are less able to lead effectively.

6. **Gender justice seen as a “women’s issue”**

The exclusion of women in some areas of church life affects the whole church, and is an issue for all humanity. It will require all individuals and organisations to take the issue seriously for things to change. When gender justice is categorised as a women’s issue and relegated to being a niche area, women become responsible for addressing it. As it is often men who hold the power and influence to change things, both men and women must see this issue as a human issue.

7. **“Selfish Capitalism”<sup>10</sup>**

This has “caused a substantial rise in emotional problems through ramping up consumerism, unrealistic material expectations and massive personal debt...[a] defining feature [of this] is the conviction that consumption and market forces can meet human needs of almost every kind.”<sup>11</sup> Selfish Capitalism exploits gender for the purposes of increasing profits. It seeks to increase the insecurity of men and women in order to sell self-worth back to individuals for the highest profit margin possible.

8. **Tokenism**

This is “the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do something, especially by recruiting a small number of people from under-represented groups in order to give the appearance of equality within a workforce<sup>12</sup>.” Rather than addressing gender injustice, tokenism is an empty gesture which does not address the underlying issues causing under-representation.

9. **Women’s contributions written out of history**

Marilyn French states that “One way men perpetuate women’s exclusion from political life is by obliterating evidence of their participation in public affairs.”<sup>13</sup> One example of this is in

<sup>9</sup> Oxford English Dictionary [2007] page 1415

<sup>10</sup> Oliver James [2013] Exploiting Childhood page 13

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Oxford English Dictionary [2007] page 1515

<sup>13</sup> The War Against Women [1992] Marilyn French page 43

Romans 16:7 where the apostle Junia's name was changed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century by medieval copyists, who changed her name to the male form of the name "Junias". Recent scholarship has evidenced that Junia was a woman.

## 10. Media representation of women

The impact of the media representation of women is difficult to measure, but it is clear that it interferes enormously with women's and men's perception of what it means to be "normal". The representation of women is problematic in almost all media including; pornography, the beauty and fashion industries, older women, women of colour and women with diverse body types are underrepresented across the media

### a. Invisible women

Older women, women of colour and women with diverse body types are invisible across the media. The fact that only one "type" of woman is represented can leave the vast majority of women feeling inadequate and invisible.

### b. Pressure to conform to beauty industry standards

People are exposed to 5000 adverts per day (in 1971 it was only 500 adverts). The use of Photoshopped images across society leads to an unattainable model of beauty being portrayed as the norm. The pressure to conform to a standard that can only be achieved by computer generated images can be debilitating. Research has found that on average women engage in habitual body monitoring every 30 seconds. Men's time and energy is rarely focused in this way, giving them more time and energy to dedicate to their other areas of life<sup>14</sup>.

### c. Sexualised

96% of images in the US which sexualise human beings are of women<sup>15</sup>. At the core of the sexualisation of women is the "object/subject dichotomy"<sup>16</sup>; women are portrayed as objects to be acted upon by men. Across the media the lie is being sold that value and power can be gained through becoming sexually objectified. This leads women to aspire to be objectified and leads men to act upon women, not with women. Women's own agency is removed, leaving women less able to see themselves as subjects, with the ability to act. This impacts the whole of women's perception of themselves including their gifts, call and choices.

## 11. Violence against women

Globally male violence towards women is at pandemic proportions. In the UK twenty five per cent of women will experience domestic abuse from a partner or ex-partner at some point in their lifetime.<sup>17</sup> At least 112 women a year are murdered by a partner and rape, sexual harassment and stalking as well as other forms of violence are common experiences of women across the UK. The experience of being abused is terrifying and can leave women

<sup>14</sup>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMS4VJKekW8&desktop\\_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DkMS4VJKekW8&app=desktop](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMS4VJKekW8&desktop_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DkMS4VJKekW8&app=desktop)

<sup>15</sup> Caroline Heldman

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMS4VJKekW8&desktop\\_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DkMS4VJKekW8&app=desktop](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMS4VJKekW8&desktop_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DkMS4VJKekW8&app=desktop)

<sup>16</sup>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMS4VJKekW8&desktop\\_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DkMS4VJKekW8&app=desktop](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMS4VJKekW8&desktop_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DkMS4VJKekW8&app=desktop)

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic\\_violence\\_topic.asp?section=0001000100220041](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic_violence_topic.asp?section=0001000100220041)

traumatized for many years. Without specialist support and counselling there are many women who will never be free from abuse. Without freedom from abuse, or the fear of it, women will never be able to fully participate in the life of the UK church. Women and girls in the church are at the same risk of suffering male violence against them as those in the wider community, and it has been suggested that the more male dominated family structures that are often rooted in patriarchal theology are more likely to have men who perpetrate domestic or sexual violence.

## 12. **Women have less decision making power**

Gender injustice means that women have less decision making power across society. This creates a catch 22 situation where gender injustice is invisible to decision makers (usually men) and so no action is taken to address the issues. It is worth noting that gender injustice can go unnoticed by women too. It is important that all people with decision making power are aware of the issues that contribute to gender injustice and take action to bring about change.

## 13. **Women are poorer**

Women as a group are poorer in part because much of their work - namely caring for children and family - does not contribute to the UK economy. In a monetary system, only waged work is seen as having value. Women are paid less on average 15% less than men and are more likely to be single parents which makes working difficult.

## 14. **Unhealthy expectations**

Within the UK church and in wider society, the expectations on both women and men can prevent them from fully realizing all God has called them to be. Such expectations are perpetuated throughout the church. The assumptions such expectations are based on are so deeply rooted that they are often implicit and held as facts.

### a. **Women without children**

Those who do not have children are often shamed by the tendency of churches to give motherhood high value for women. Women are often questioned about their fertility and it is expected that all women should "want" to have children. This very personal part of a woman's life is made into a public conversation. This is not the case for men who do not have children, although issues of infertility can cause both men and women to feel their fundamental humanity is under threat if they are unable to reproduce. Throughout society women will regularly be questioned about whether they have children to a much greater extent than men are; a woman's value has become intrinsically linked to her ability to have and/or want children.

### b. **Single women**

The marital status of single women is often questioned if they are in a leadership role. Without a husband or partner, women are often given "helper" roles within the church e.g. administration, tea and coffee making etc. Single women may be looked on with suspicion by married people in the church; there may be a suggestion single women are a "temptation" to married men, something which removes men's ability to make good choices, and characterises single women as "temptresses".

### c. **Men**

The expectations on men to provide for their family, be a competent and proficient leader and to be comfortable with conflict and not emotional can cause enormous issues for men. Men can feel unable to be vulnerable or honest about their struggles.

d. **Wives**

Married women are often expected to support their husband's ambitions and many women have been either explicitly or implicitly informed that their role is to "help" their husbands, not have their own ambitions, hopes or dreams.

e. **Mothers**

As mothers women are expected to selflessly give their lives to their children, while fathers are able to continue working without feeling concerned that they will be seen as selfish. Mothers can never win; if they go back to work they are seen as neglecting their children. If they don't go back to work, they are perceived as being reliant on their partner and/or the state. Both options can result in enormous guilt for women, that is rarely experienced by men.

15. **Women only invited to speak on "women's issues"**

The issues that are defined across the church as "women's issues" include any subject which is stereotypically seen as affecting only, or mainly women and/or issues which are attached to stereotypes of women as emotional, weak, caring. This includes subjects such as abuse, self-harm, parenting, working with children, and relationships. That all of these issues affect men and boys is often ignored to the detriment of everyone.

When women are only invited to speak on such issues, this reinforces that women are not experts in a variety of subjects, only "women's topics". It can seem that to be a white, able bodied, heterosexual male is to be human; to be anything else is to be less than fully human. The artist Grayson Perry has referred to men who fit into this category as "Default Man"<sup>18</sup>. The lack of women's contribution to most subjects within the Christian community reinforces this.

The fact women are given a platform to speak about "women's issues" at events can mask that women are not fully engaged in all aspects of church life.

16. **Workplace is not designed for women**

The UK workplace was designed for adult men with wives able to support their ambitions. Across the workplace we find that pregnancy and child-rearing are issues to be addressed rather than the norms of working people. The average pay gap between men and women within the UK is 15%<sup>19</sup> which means that women essentially work for free from 7<sup>th</sup> November until the end of the year.

17. **No teaching on what a right use of power looks like**

There is little understanding of what a right use of power looks like across much of the UK church. Gender justice is about operating within of a right use of power. Often what a misuse of power looks like is articulated, and may be addressed, but a right use of power is rarely, if ever communicated. This means there is no positive model to aim for in the use of power.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2014/10/grayson-perry-rise-and-fall-default-man>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/equal-pay-day-2013/>

**18. Gender exclusive language**

Language powerfully reinforces the beliefs and values of a community and, for example, using the term “mankind” instead of “humankind” or “son” rather than “child” can exclude women and may lead women to either consciously or subconsciously feeling not fully included in the church community.

**19. Don't know any female speakers**

Women are often excluded from networking opportunities. This results in event organisers and male speakers not knowing they exist. This also results in tokenism; inviting the only female speaker known within wider networks. As Jenny Baker has written, “It’s a vicious circle – women don’t get invited because they don’t have experience or aren’t known, and they aren’t known and have less experience because they aren’t given opportunities<sup>20</sup>.”

**20. Negative attitudes towards feminism**

The attitudes of the UK church towards feminist groups is at best difficult and at worst outright hostile. This is due to many factors including:

- The feminist fight for abortion rights
- The movement is broadly atheistic or humanistic in approach
- Stereotypes of feminists as aggressive and anti-male

Although for some Christians (though not all) there are conflicts between a feminist and Christian worldview, the current chasm between the two makes it very difficult for the church to achieve gender justice. Feminist theory on violence against women and patriarchy is integral to addressing gender injustice, and until Christians are able to acknowledge this, while still fully owning the many areas of disagreement, it will be difficult to move forward.

**21. Only using existing pool of speakers**

Conference organisers invite speakers they are aware of and have seen speak. This means that competent women speakers who are not in existing networks do not gain opportunities to speak, which creates a “catch 22” situation.

**22. Lack of intentionality about inviting women speakers**

Conference organisers focus on the theme or topics for their event. With so many competing priorities and few human resources, appropriate representation of women on the platform is rarely an intentional part of seeking conference speakers.

**23. Gatekeeping**

This is the process individuals and organisations use to decide which information to release; although this is a necessary role of conference organisers, gatekeeping can engender power misuse. Gender justice is invisible to many responsible for gatekeeping, therefore unintentionally (and sometimes intentionally) women are excluded from full participation.

**24. Main leadership model is “charismatic”**

Although there are many recognised leadership models, the charismatic one (defined as “exercising a compelling charm which inspires devotion in others<sup>21</sup>”) is seen as a litmus test for success within the Christian world. This style has been culturally coded as male and

<sup>20</sup> <http://jennybaker.org.uk/2013/11/14/where-are-the-women/>

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.google.co.uk/?gfe\\_rd=cr&ei=A9mJVJLPF-Wq&wfS-oDoDA&gws\\_rd=ssl#q=define+charismatic](https://www.google.co.uk/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=A9mJVJLPF-Wq&wfS-oDoDA&gws_rd=ssl#q=define+charismatic)

women who use a charismatic leadership style are often seen as “aggressive” or “manly”. This use of the word charismatic refers to the leadership style and not Charismatic theology or faith expression<sup>22</sup>.

Issues with charismatic leadership include that it can undermine the servant nature of Christian leadership, can invite idolatry of the individual<sup>23</sup> and denies the importance of the many parts of the body of Christ<sup>24</sup>. Charismatic leadership has the propensity to feature a misuse of power and a rejection of appropriate accountability.

## 25. Theology

Both explicitly understood theology such as complementarian versus egalitarian views and the more deeply embedded and implicit messages lead to people holding views that restrict women’s involvement in the UK church.

### a. Modesty

Modesty teaching focuses on women’s actions and clothing. It has done much damage to women’s sense of agency and value. The teaching often results in women feeling ashamed of their bodies and responsible for men’s lustful desires. Such teachings can leave women deeply scarred.

### b. Emphasis on the maleness of God

While descriptions of God focus almost solely on male imagery it reduces God and makes women “other” than in the image of God. While we ignore the feminine imagery of God found in the Bible women are prevented from fully inhabiting their value as created in God’s image; Genesis 1:26 states, “Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.”<sup>25</sup>”

### c. Unity prioritised

Many in positions of power feel a responsibility to promote unity in the Body of Christ above disputes about what they perceive as “a theological argument”. However, the mistreatment and devaluing of half the human race requires urgent action, and as noted is a justice issue. We are called to be united in Christ, who said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”<sup>26</sup> Gender justice can also be seen “as inherent in a good theology of mission. That a dysfunction in the relationship between those called to be the image of God impairs their partnership in the mission of God to build the Kingdom of God. This makes it not about a theological argument, but rather at the heart of God’s mission.”<sup>27</sup>”

#### i. Gender justice a “secondary issue”

As gender justice is not part of the Nicene Creed it can be considered a “secondary issue”; one which is not primarily about the Gospel. Many women, and some men, have left the church, and refuse to engage with Christianity or Jesus because of the church’s treatment of women. In light of

<sup>22</sup> Thank you to Jenny Baker for pointing out the difference between big and little C charismatic.

<sup>23</sup> Thank you to @Lostheskald for articulating this

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

<sup>25</sup> New Living Translation

<sup>26</sup> John 13:34-35

<sup>27</sup> Rev. Jody Stowell

this gender injustice becomes for some people, a “salvation issue”. For others, their walk with Jesus does not end when they leave the church, but they feel unable to be part of a community of believers, for them it is not a salvation issue, but that some people feel unable to participate fully in the body of Christ is also not a secondary issue<sup>28</sup>.

**d. Creation Ordinances for Gender**

“Creation Ordinances” refer to the inference within the Creation stories of Genesis that some people interpret to mean that women are inferior to men. This includes:

Creation story points	Inferences of inferiority	Egalitarian response
Man was created first.	Man is superior to woman.	Animals were created before man, such logic would suggest animals are superior to man.
Woman is taken from man.	Man helps to create woman.	The origin of life is from God, man contributed to woman’s creation by falling asleep. Another understanding of this is that “the ‘Adam’ who sleeps is not the ‘Adam’ who awakes and although there is continuity in the creature, the narrative emphasises the discontinuity and the man and woman are defined in the other” <sup>29</sup> .
Man calls woman “Eve”.	Man names woman so woman is under man’s dominion.	Man does not name woman, he recognises her as his equal.
God refers to woman as a “suitable helper”	Woman is subordinate to man.	The word “helper” is used of God and isn’t a term of inferiority.

**26. Only asking speaker’s wives**

Conferences often invite wives of male speakers to contribute to events. This may be in part by a theology of headship which understands women to need male covering to teach or preach. It may also be because it is easy to ensure their qualifications and suitability for the event. It is not to say that women who are wives of male speakers are not competent or capable, but it can leave a lasting impression to conference attendees that a woman must marry a male conference speaker to gain national speaking opportunities.

**27. Non-ministry experience undervalued<sup>30</sup>**

Across the church it is often only those who have formal ministry qualifications or experience that are given platform opportunities. Wider life experience through family or workplace are often not considered valuable from a conference speaker. As women are more like to be the primary carer of children or dependent adults, they are less likely to have gained the relevant ministry experience required to be given a platform.

**28. Accusations of “feminisation”<sup>31</sup>**

<sup>28</sup> Thanks to Rev. Jody Stowell for this distinction.

<sup>29</sup> Rev. Jody Stowell is quoted here using ideas from Phyllis Trible’s work.

<sup>30</sup> Thanks to Dr Sara Batts for identifying this issue.

Discussions on the feminisation of the church have been raised numerous times over the last few decades. Books such as “The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity” proceeds to dichotomise masculine and feminine traits in a way that reduces men and women. The idea of the feminisation of the church is almost discussed as a bad thing, and causes women to be at the root of everything that is failing within the church. There are definitely issues within the church that need address, but they will never be addressed by laying the issues of the feet of women. Such language can also shame women and leave them feeling devalued and unappreciated in a church that, while including more women, is still mostly led by men.

**29. Invisibility of women Biblical characters<sup>32</sup>**

In preaching, books and other material covering Biblical characters the focus is rarely, if ever on women Biblical characters. Material for children, young people and adults generally focusses on men like Abraham, David and Noah while the great women of faith in the Bible are either ignored or only mentioned occasionally.

**30. Muthos<sup>33</sup>**

This article (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n06/mary-beard/the-public-voice-of-women>) by Professor Mary Beard explains the history of “muthos” which can be defined as “authoritative public speech”. Muthos has historically been seen as something that only men can engage in. Professor Bear explains that “What I mean is that public speaking and oratory were not merely things that ancient women didn’t do: they were exclusive practices and skills that defined masculinity as a gender.” Though women do now have a voice it can be seen the Muthos is still seen as a male activity and that when women do speak, whether the listeners are women or men, they are not heard simply because they are not men.

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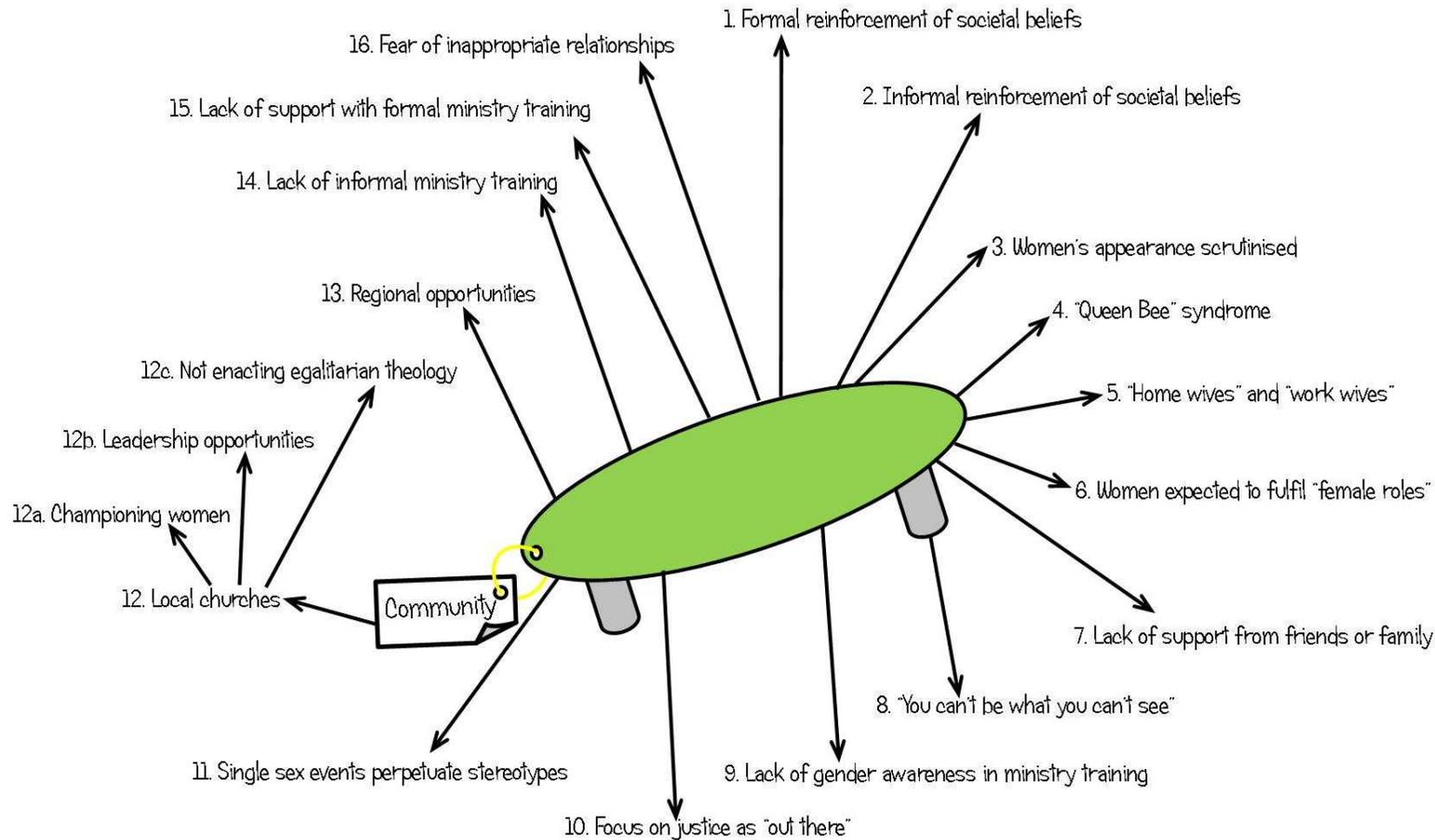
<sup>31</sup> Thanks to Rev. Dr Sally Nash for raising this.

<sup>32</sup> Thanks to Veronica Zundel for this.

<sup>33</sup> Thank you to Catriona Robertson for this.

## Mapping the Issues: Community

This diagram maps the barriers to gender justice on a community level.



## Defining the Issues: Community

The definitions below explore each of the issues mapped in the diagram above.

### 1. Informal reinforcement of societal beliefs

Though some of these have been mentioned elsewhere in the document, it is important they are articulated as part of the language and culture of the church community. Such reinforcements are by nature part of subconscious processes, the impact may be subtle and difficult to articulate. They include:

- Jokes and phrases which play on male/female stereotypes e.g. referring to men as “under the thumb”.
- Lack of inclusion in social events for those who do not fit stereotypical roles
- Organising events with assumptions men/women will be able to attend based on stereotypes about gender. E.g. women’s events during work hours (assuming women don’t work); not providing childcare at men’s events (assuming men always have wives to provide childcare).
- Not working towards increasing the diversity of role models in all areas of the church community.
- Ignoring women’s contributions to a discussion, but when the same ideas are put forward by a man, taking them forward.

### 2. Formal reinforcement of societal beliefs

Such reinforcements are usually conscious and the impact highly visible. Formal reinforcements include:

- Unequal pay
- Job interviews and opportunities often weighted heavily in favour of men<sup>34</sup>
- Parental rules which reinforce gender stereotypes
- Sermons which include neurosexism (See Society: Obstacles), complementarian theology and other explicit reinforcements of gender injustice.
- Church discipline which unfairly discriminates against either women or men.
- Refusing to give a female leader the title “Lead Pastor” and insisting they are given the title “Associate Pastor” so as not to offend complementarian church members.

### 3. Women’s appearance scrutinised

Female politicians and sportswomen are constantly judged on their appearance in a way men in the same field are not. Within the church this same different treatment of men and women also exists. When speaking on a platform it would be usual to see women wearing make-up, this is not the norm for men, women who are overweight will often feel under pressure to lose weight, in a way men usually don’t. Often women compare themselves to other women, not in terms of competence, but around appearance. This is encouraged across society, and women are almost expected to be in competition with one another.

### 4. “Queen Bee” Syndrome

This “describes a woman in a position of authority who views or treats subordinates more critically if they are female.<sup>35</sup>” Research from 2010 found that although sixty two percent of workplace bullying was perpetrated by men, when women were the perpetrators, 80% of their victims were other women<sup>36</sup>. With so few spaces on the platform for women, a survival mechanism of women in leadership can be to become extremely protective of their position and

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.inc.com/will-yakowicz/how-to-help-end-gender-bias-while-hiring.html>

<sup>35</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen\\_bee\\_syndrome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_bee_syndrome)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.workplacebullying.org/wbiresearch/2010-wbi-national-survey/>

networks, with the aim of excluding or avoiding competition. Often the motivation for such behaviour comes from an internalising of sexism and a fear of giving up power. When one has very little power, any power gained becomes precious.

5. **“Home wives” and “work wives”<sup>37</sup>”**

Male Christian leaders often have a support system at home in the form of a wife, who often either works only part time, or not at all in order to support her husband. This can be seen most clearly in the expectation or stereotype of the ‘Vicar’s Wife’ who, although unpaid, works in many roles supporting her husband. At work, male Christian leaders often employ women, either as paid or voluntary staff, who fulfill the role of “work wives” e.g. Personal Assistant, Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Pastor etc. Female Christian leaders rarely have husbands who offer an equivalent “Vicar’s Husband” role, and are unlikely to have “work husbands”.

6. **Women expected to fulfil “female roles”**

It is often assumed that women will take up stereotypically female positions in the church community e.g. childcare, cleaning, coffee making, welcome etc. This prevents women from having the time to explore a calling into leadership. Men are often not invited to offer their skills to such roles, which can mean they either don’t realise such tasks are needed, it doesn’t occur to them to offer their help or they can be embarrassed to offer their skills to such roles because it’s not the norm.

7. **Lack of support from friends or family**

If a woman’s family or friends hold a complementarian view of theology and/or strongly believe in traditional gender roles they may discourage her from pursuing a leadership calling, or refuse to offer practical or emotional help to enable her to move forward.

8. **“You can’t be what you can’t see”**

This is the strapline from the US documentary “Miss Representation”; a film which explores the representation of women in US media. While there are very few women in positions of power, or on platforms, it is difficult for other women and girls to have aspirations to such positions. Alongside this, if women in positions of power conform to a certain stereotype, this can exclude all women who do not conform to such a stereotype.

9. **Lack of gender awareness in ministry training**

Gender awareness is rarely part of the curriculum within Christian ministry training, this can result in both men and women entering full and part time ministry blind to the issues of their own prejudice and privilege.

Rev. Jody Stowell a priest in the Church of England explains, “Women may have been taught that they are ‘allowed’ to lead, but have little understanding of how they justify their presence either within their own theological framework, or to others who will question their validity. As such women find their presence questioned, often continuously, through their ministry training, and often are not given any material with which to assist them in their own exploration of these issues. As a result, women often finish ministry training conflicted about the negative messages they have internalised, and the calling which they have followed. Men in these situations are encouraged to see the established culture as the ‘norm’ and may feel uncomfortable about any suggestion that there is oppression and injustice inherent within a system that they understand to have divine sanction. In this situation this means that the men training are ‘allowing’ the women to be there.”

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<sup>37</sup> Thanks to Vicky Walker for this term.

## 10. Focus on justice as “out there”

Often justice is seen as an issue related to the developing world; connected to extreme poverty. Focusing on justice as “out there” makes it easy to see the problem as “out there” with “those people”. It allows us to be benevolent rescuers, rather than recognising and addressing our own sinfulness.

## 11. Single sex events can perpetuate stereotypes

Men’s and women’s events can be a valuable part of the Christian community. However they often reinforce gender stereotypes. Both on and off the platform jokes about the opposite sex are seen as a necessity. There is also a catch 22 situation as the nature of such events is to attract a single sex audience and so the advertising and content caters for a stereotype rather than the broad range of human experience within male and female groups. Such events are often led by people who present themselves in a way that reinforces gender stereotypes. When single-sex events are approached with an understanding of these pitfalls they can not only be a more welcome space for all attending, but they can also benefit the cause of increasing women’s access to public spaces<sup>38</sup>.

## 12. Local churches

Women need to gain support and experience within a local context in order work at a regional or national level. The support, encouragement and commitment that local churches can choose to offer women is of the utmost importance in bringing about change.

### a. Championing women

The status quo of gender injustice will be maintained if churches and organisations do not champion women at all levels. This includes being intentional about enabling women to preach, offering training and equipping opportunities, being explicit about egalitarian theology, being clear that the issues women face are recognised and taking actions to enable women to overcome any issues.

### b. Leadership opportunities

Whether through leading discipleship groups or traditional preaching situations women need opportunities to lead in a supportive environment with constructive feedback and practical and emotional support.

### c. Not enacting egalitarian theology

“One doesn’t have to look far to see the lived beliefs of a person who holds complementarian theology, but often one has to look extremely far to see the lived beliefs of a person who holds egalitarian theology”<sup>39</sup>. Churches who hold an egalitarian theology often do take no or little action to uphold their egalitarian convictions.

## 13. Regional opportunities

Once women have gained experience in a local context, they need support to access opportunities on a regional level, this includes developing networks and increasing expertise. Regional opportunities include diocese wide events, county-wide events, events for church networks (e.g. vision days), regional prayer days etc.

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<sup>38</sup> Thanks to Revd Rosemary Lain-Priestley for raising this.

<sup>39</sup> Wendy Beech-Ward

#### 14. Lack of informal ministry training

Formal ministry training is usually full-time, often requires living in a Bible college, and may involve large financial investment. This type of training is not compatible with many women's lives. Women often come with children and may be responsible for elderly relatives and women are often less able to financially support themselves through training.

#### 15. Lack of support with formal ministry training<sup>40</sup>

Due to the wider societal issues already raised, formal ministry training has less expectation of and encouragement for women that it does for men. "Women are often living with inherent cultural sexism in their marriages, which prevents them from moving and taking up full time ministry training, because of childcare or their partner's desire not to move jobs. Conversely women may be making decisions about childcare which prevents them accessing formal training.

#### 16. Fear of inappropriate relationships<sup>41</sup>

Amongst some elements of Christian culture there is a belief in the inability of men and women to have platonic relationships. This can be especially true for those in positions of leadership. Male leaders will refuse to meet women alone, which prevents important networking opportunities and immediately creates a dynamic between men and women that is assumed to be sexual, inappropriate and risky. On this topic Jenny Baker writes, "Instead of making elaborate arrangements to avoid each other, women and men need to work on their maturity and emotional health<sup>42</sup>."

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<sup>40</sup> Thanks to Rev. Jody Stowell for raising this issue.

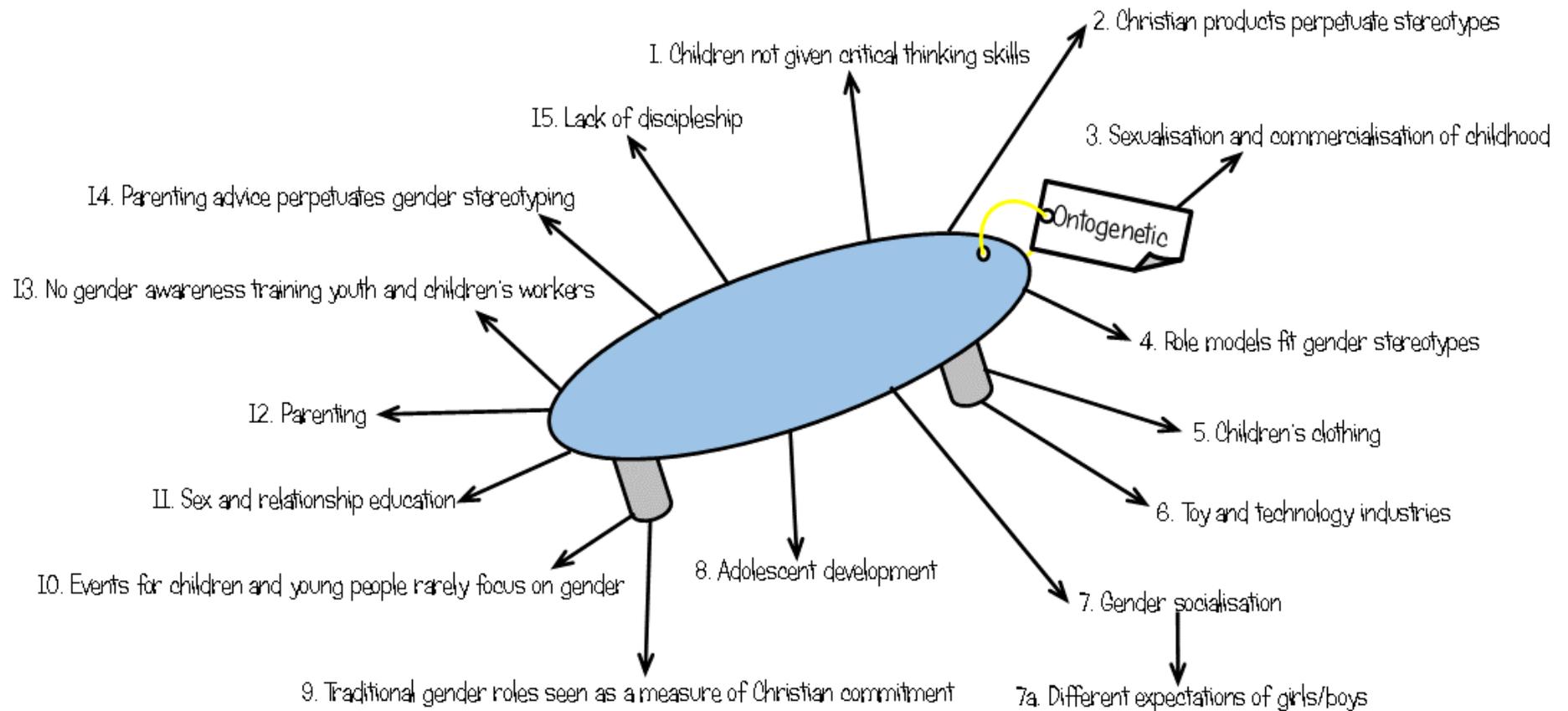
<sup>41</sup> Thanks to Jenny Baker for raising this as an issue.

<sup>42</sup> <http://jennybaker.org.uk/2013/11/14/where-are-the-women/>

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## Mapping the Issues: Ontogenetic

This diagram maps the barriers to gender justice on an ontogenetic level.



DRAFT

## Defining the Issues: Ontogenetic

This is defined as “the development of an individual organism...from the earliest stage, to maturity”<sup>43</sup>. For the purposes of this document, it will refer to the development of a person, from before birth until adulthood at eighteen years old.

The definitions below explore each of the issues mapped in the diagram above.

### 1. Children not given critical thinking skills

Although education in the UK has begun to equip children to think critically, in many classrooms there is still a focus on regurgitating facts. This is amplified within the church, where faith is often seen as blindly accepting received teaching, rather than learning for oneself. While children and young people are not taught to critique their culture, they are disabled from making informed choices about how they live their lives.

### 2. Christian products perpetuate stereotypes

Rather than challenging gender stereotypes, Christian children’s products often reinforce misconceptions about gender. The bright pink “My Princess Bible Purse<sup>44</sup>” for toddlers and “Bible Stories for Boys<sup>45</sup>” reinforce to pre-school children that gender differences are an integral part of being Christian. Bible Story books and Children’s Church materials rarely highlight female Bible heroes leaving children with no strong female Biblical role models. This is detrimental for both boys and girls.

### 3. Sexualisation and commercialisation of childhood

The UK Government define this as “the pressure [on children] to take part in a sexualised life before they are ready to do so; and the commercial pressure to consume the vast range of goods and services that are available to children and young people of all ages.<sup>46</sup>” Larger profits can be made by toy and clothes industries through promoting highly gendered toys and clothes (e.g. pink/blue products). Sexualisation equates the female as submissive and the male as dominant and highly aggressive.

A 2013 report sexual abuse amongst children and young people found “the belief that, as one girl put it, “we are objects” has not sprung from nowhere. Such beliefs are bred, born, nurtured and promoted by adults who are often making vast sums of money in the process. The music and pornography industries, for example, have a great deal to answer for<sup>47</sup>”.

### 4. Role models fit gender stereotypes

Traditional gender roles amongst adults in church can perpetuate gender stereotypes amongst children and young people. While the majority of speakers and preachers in church are men, and the majority of coffee making and childcare is done by women, children are going to continue to think these are the roles they should inhabit as they grow older. Children, and even adults may gender ministry positions in part because such work requires someone to pour much of

<sup>43</sup> Oxford English Dictionary [2007] p.1000

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.eden.co.uk/shop/my-princess-bible-bag-4069577.html?origin=googleproductsearch&utm\\_medium=cpc&site\\_id=162595&adposition=%7Badposition%7D&adwords\\_producttargetid=%7Badwords\\_producttargetid%7D&keyword=%7Bkeyword%7D&creative=%7Bcreative%7D&kwd=%7Bkeyword%7D&source=%7Bifpla:pla%7D%7Bifpe:pe%7D&gclid=CJK9k7CfprsCFWfkwgo doFsAfA](http://www.eden.co.uk/shop/my-princess-bible-bag-4069577.html?origin=googleproductsearch&utm_medium=cpc&site_id=162595&adposition=%7Badposition%7D&adwords_producttargetid=%7Badwords_producttargetid%7D&keyword=%7Bkeyword%7D&creative=%7Bcreative%7D&kwd=%7Bkeyword%7D&source=%7Bifpla:pla%7D%7Bifpe:pe%7D&gclid=CJK9k7CfprsCFWfkwgo doFsAfA)

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.eden.co.uk/shop/bible-stories-for-boys-hb-3979353.html>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letting-children-be-children-report-of-an-independent-review-of-the-commercialisation-and-sexualisation-of-childhood>

<sup>47</sup> It’s Wrong, but you get used to it [2013] Sue Berelowitz page 1

themselves into the role, and so their identity, their role and their gender becomes integrated in a way in may not for non-ministry positions<sup>48</sup>.

## 5. Children's clothing

The reinforcing of gender stereotypes in children's clothing includes clothing slogans such as "Cheeky Monkey" for boys and "Pretty Princess" for girls. Blue and pink clothing. Girls being clothed in dresses that restrict their movement, while boy's clothes being practical for physical activity.

## 6. Toy and technology industries

It has been suggested "that many businesses set out to deceive...this takes the form of:

- The use of celebrities to exploit a child's trust in authority figures
- Focusing on gift and giveaways rather than the actual product that is being sold
- The use of jargon and culturally complex language to take advantage of a child's limited vocabulary
- The excessive use of emotional triggers to exploit a child's insecurities and gullibility<sup>49</sup>"

Many toys reinforce gender stereotypes, use gender coded colours (e.g. pink/blue) and are advertised through reinforcing stereotypes. The technological revolution has given children and young people access to vast quantities of information. Cyber bullying, sexting, exposure to pornography and other explicit material can reinforce oppressive attitudes to women and girls.

## 7. Gender Socialisation

From the moment the sex of a child is known, our language, tone and perception of that child is filtered through stereotypes. As neuroscientist, Cordelia Fine states, "when... we categorise someone as male or female, gender stereotypes are automatically primed."<sup>50</sup> Throughout childhood children are exposed to aggressive marketing, social conditioning and cultural understandings of gender. Within the church we may find children's activities reinforce stereotypes e.g. boy versus girl competitions.

### a. Different expectations of girls/boys

When boys who misbehave or are aggressive they are seen as "roughhousing" and often the statement "boys will be boys" excuses unacceptable behaviour. When girls emotionally manipulate a situation with comments such as "I won't be your friend unless..." this is met with an acceptance of "that's what girls do". This type of behaviour management in homes, schools and churches can embed behavioural patterns that are then argued as innately male or female.

## 8. Adolescent development

It can be difficult for children and young people to consider how their values interact with individual situations, instead faith can be seen as a list of rights and wrongs. The church's polarisation of male and female means gender roles may be taken by children and young people as a measure of how they identify as part of the church, consequently they may believe living out their faith means conforming to gender injustice.

## 9. Traditional gender roles seen as a measure of Christian commitment

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<sup>48</sup> Thanks to Rev. Jody Stowell for this observation.

<sup>49</sup> Sharon Beder quoted in *Exploiting Childhood* [2013] Jim Wild

<sup>50</sup> *Delusions of Gender* [2011] Cordelia Fine page 7

Conforming to traditional gender roles is often seen as “living in the world, but not of it<sup>51</sup>”. While children and young people have role models who further this attitude they will grow to have similar beliefs. Rather than being counter cultural, traditional gender roles conform to 1950’s culture, which is still “of the world”. Jesus told us His way was one of “life in all its fullness<sup>52</sup>” which is not about fitting within restrictive roles related to one aspect of our identity, but rather developing all aspects of our identity to serve Him.

## 10. Events for children and young people rarely focus on gender

Gender justice is rarely talked about at events for children and young people. If those speaking at youth events do not prioritise addressing these issues, young people may assume their negative experiences of gender are unimportant. If speakers and leaders at events use sexist language or gender stereotype this normalises gender injustice.

## 11. Sex and relationship education

Some Christian sex and relationship education contributes to gender injustice. Broad statements are made about the ways boys and girls are biologically wired which can lead to girls feeling responsible for boy’s sexual behaviour. Teaching on sex before marriage rarely includes teaching young people about consent. Focus on finding a Christian partner directs young people’s choices towards a potential partner’s belief systems, and away from their character or actions.

Churches generally seem focused on protecting children’s “innocence” without recognising that sexuality is an integral part of human identity from birth. Children don’t suddenly develop a sexuality when they become adults, or once they get married, it is developing from birth.

## 12. Parenting

Research into how parents relate to their children both before and after birth has found that “without meaning to, and without realizing it, we may be valuing boys and girls differently, and for different qualities within hours of birth<sup>53</sup>.” Though it is impossible to parent in a “gender neutral” way, parents can be intentional about challenging gender injustice with their children and be vigilant in what they buy, the language they use and how they interact with children and adults.

## 13. No gender awareness training for those working with children and young people

Without effective training those working with children and young people are likely to perpetuate stereotypes, use gendered language and not challenge gender injustice among young people.

## 14. Parenting advice perpetuates and encourages gender stereotyping

Christian parenting advice (including books, blogs, teaching and seminars) rarely diverge from gender stereotypes, backed up with neurosexism. Authors, speakers and those creating resources seem to have an unwritten agreement to perpetuate gender injustice in their advice to parents. Though these resources may be valuable in many other ways, many display deeply held assumptions and prejudices around gender. Other parenting advice includes family members, the church family and professionals, all of whom may stereotype and justify children’s or parent’s behaviour as gender coded.

## 15. Lack of discipleship

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<sup>51</sup> John 17:6-16

<sup>52</sup> John 10:10

<sup>53</sup> Cordelia Fine [2011] *Delusions of Gender* page 196

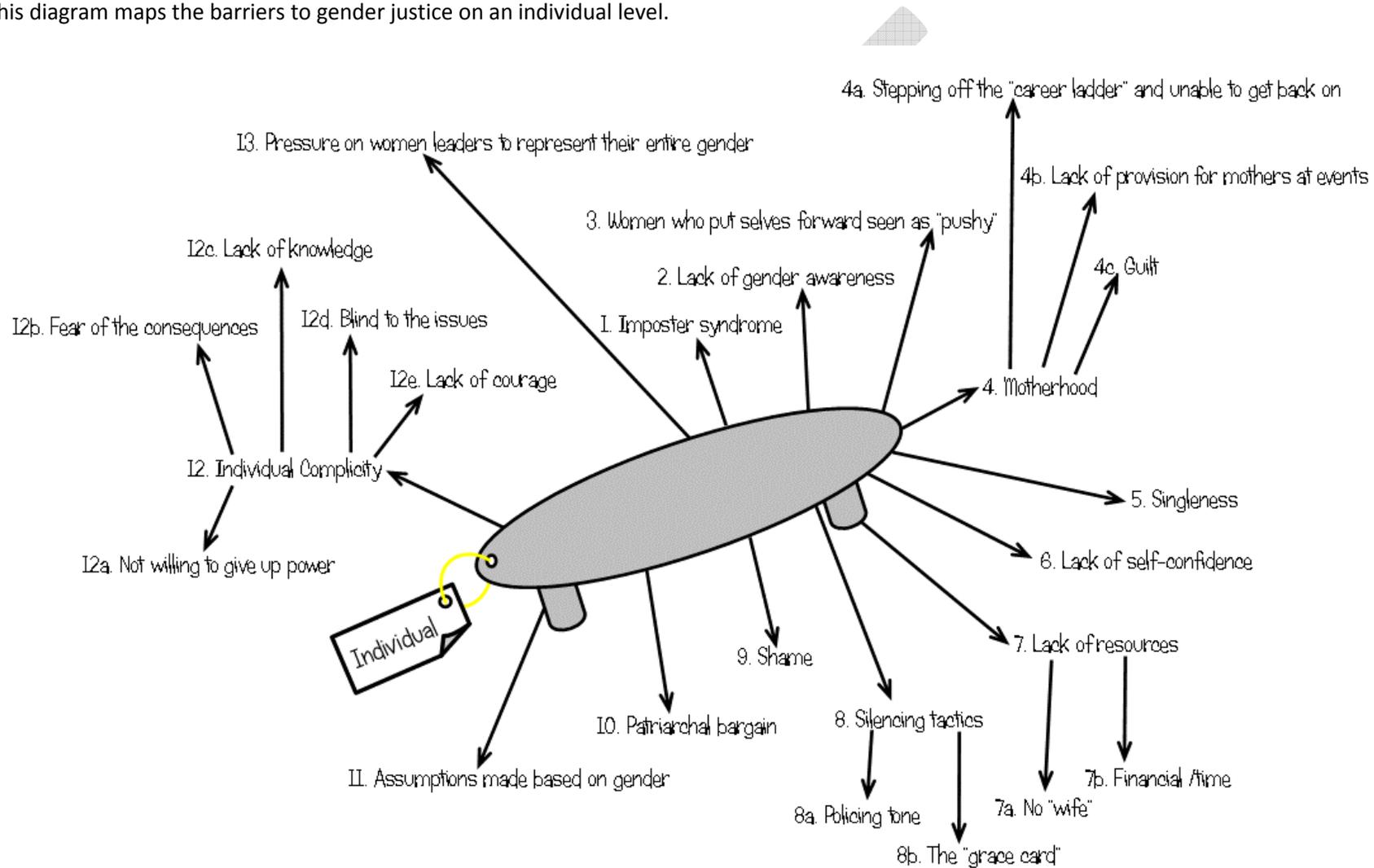
Many churches prioritise conversion over discipleship. This is an issue for the whole church, but especially for young people, who need mentoring and discipleship in order to fully inhabit their own faith.

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## Mapping the Issues: Individual

This diagram maps the barriers to gender justice on an individual level.



## Defining the Issues: Individual

The definitions below explore each of the issues mapped in the diagram above.

### 1. Imposter syndrome

This is a psychological issue where people become unable to internalise their achievements. It is experienced as “a nervous undercurrent that runs through your day-to-day experience, unacknowledged, only to crop up in salary negotiations or in small phrases like, 'It might just be me but...’”<sup>54</sup> Women (and men from minority groups) are much more likely to suffer from Imposter Syndrome. This suggests it could be linked to societal messages denigrating those from less privileged groups. Imposter Syndrome may perpetuate gender injustice; while women are unable to fully inhabit their competency, in a society in which confidence often counts for more than capability, they are likely to be perceived more negatively than their male counterparts

### 2. Lack of gender awareness

Lack of awareness on an individual level causes both men and women to be unable to see their prejudices or privilege. Without gender awareness men are unlikely to see the privilege they have access to and if one woman has had a wonderful experience of being treated equally, this may lead her to be blind to the inequality faced by many women. Where women have experienced discrimination, they may believe it is personal to them and not understand it as a systemic problem.

### 3. Women who put selves forward seen as “pushy”

The gender double standard means that often if men put themselves forward for a role they are positively seen as ambitious, whereas women behaving similarly are seen negatively as pushy. If a woman has experienced criticism for putting herself forward, this can cause her to feel unable to do so again.

### 4. Motherhood

Although not all women are mothers, motherhood is a reality for the majority of women. The difficulties that disproportionately affect women can include:

- Most contraceptives require women to be responsible for preventing pregnancy.
- Women who choose not to or are unable to conceive, face specific issues in a society where women’s value and worth is connected to their ability to have children.
- The effects of pregnancy may prevent women continuing work.
- After giving birth:
  - Women may feel overweight or unattractive and struggle to have a good relationship with their body, which may prevent them feeling confident in taking on leadership roles
  - It is a societal norm for women to take a majority role in child-rearing, which puts mothers at a disadvantage to fathers in most leadership roles.
  - Motherhood as a vocation is undervalued, because it has no monetary value in a financial system, as was stated by philosopher Marilyn French, “in societies that value primarily money and power, the value of a group is shown by its financial reward.”<sup>55</sup>

#### a. Stepping off the “career ladder” and unable to get back on

<sup>54</sup> [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2013/11/05/imposter\\_effect\\_women\\_feel\\_like\\_frauds\\_at\\_work\\_because\\_they\\_are\\_high\\_achieving.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2013/11/05/imposter_effect_women_feel_like_frauds_at_work_because_they_are_high_achieving.html)

<sup>55</sup> Marilyn French [1989] *The War Against Women* page 34

Motherhood interrupts any work, whether in a leadership role or not. Often women in leadership roles are unable to reenter the workplace at the same level they left due to motherhood. They may be unable to access flexible working hours, part-time options and higher pay in order to cover childcare costs, and may be forced to accept a less attractive job in order to accommodate childcare commitments. Fathers are unlikely to face this issue after the birth of their children.

**b. Lack of provision for mothers at events**

Women speakers who are mothers may need childcare support. Currently most conferences provide children's activities during adult meetings but this facility is not adequate for speakers. Preparation and debriefing requires a window of up to an hour each side of a speaking engagement. Women speakers who are mothers may need additional financial support and lack of this provision may prevent women accepting speaking engagements on a local, regional or national level.

**c. Guilt**

Societal messages around motherhood lead many working women to feel guilty for not fully dedicating their lives to caring for their child/ren. The church often adds to this guilt by promoting traditional gender roles where mothers are required to be at home fulltime to raise emotionally and spiritually healthy children.

**5. Singleness**

The assumptions made about single women include:

- Needing to get them "married off before their ovaries dry up"
- Matching them up with every single man in sight
- Believing all single women are a homogenous group
- Thinking the only topic single women can speak about is singleness
- Considering their relationship status as public property, for all to own and discuss

Single mothers face some of these barriers alongside the challenges of motherhood. Alongside this there are many additional obstacles and multiple judgments made about their lives that are often not an issue for single fathers.

Some churches and groups hold to a theology that women need a "male covering" in order to lead, for these people, single women are immediately excluded from leadership.

**6. Lack of self confidence**

In order to lead, self-confidence is needed. For many women their self-confidence is eroded by many issues, including:

- Media representation of women.
- Unhealthy teaching on modesty.
- Experiencing abuse,
- The internalising of patriarchal beliefs stating that women are less valuable.

As stated by Revd Rosemary Lane-Priestley, "church mirrors and exacerbates society's preference for male leadership. If you've been brought up in a culture that prizes male hierarchies it's very hard not to internalise the implication that actually male is better/stronger/more competent."

**7. Lack of resources**

Developing in leadership requires numerous resources including time, money, support.

a. **No “wife”**

Traditionally married couples in Christian ministry have been seen as “BOGOF” (Buy One Get One Free). The husband attends training and the wife supports his ministry. Currently there are still “Ministers’ wives” conferences<sup>56</sup>, which assume that a) Ministers are male and b) women married to Ministers are defined by their husband’s role. Women leaders do not have “wives” who practically support their ministry and give up their career or calling to fully support them. Although many husbands of women leaders are supportive, the level of support given overall is much less than that of a “wife”.

b. **Financial/time**

Women as a group are likely to be paid less than men, have less disposable income and have more time commitments that prevent them achieving financially e.g. children, elderly relatives. Some women may not have financial issues, however financial barriers prevent women as a group from beginning to lead, or increasing their leadership opportunities.

## 8. Silencing tactics

When people speak out about injustice they may be subjected to silencing tactics. Such tactics leave those who speak out feeling invalidated, guilty, hurt and distressed. These tactics can include:

a. **The “Grace Card”**

This is where a person is encouraged to be gracious to those who are perpetrating or perpetuating gender injustice. A plea to be gracious can silence the person challenging injustice and can be deeply hurtful.

b. **Tone Policing**

When someone is angry or emotional about gender injustice, tone policing is when the focus shifts from the issues they are raising to their tone. This moves the focus away from the person’s very legitimate concerns and focuses on the way it has been said. Perceptions of women can lead to females who are assertive being accused of being “aggressive” and those who are passionately challenging something being perceived as “emotional”. Those engaging in silencing tactics may be male or female and may not be aware of what they are doing. Regardless of the intention, the impact on individuals is that they are often silenced, or feel invalidated.

## 9. Shame

Shame is a powerful societal tool for ensuring individuals conform to societal messages. Shame is used as a way of controlling women in a patriarchal society, some of the ways this is done include:

- Women are taught from an early age to be ashamed of their bodies; recent research found that by the age of 10 a third of girls cite their bodies as their main source of worry.
- Women are encouraged to cover up to prevent them becoming “stumbling blocks<sup>57</sup>” to men.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.proctrust.org.uk/conferences/spring-wives-conference>

<sup>57</sup> Romans 14:13

- “Women are between 2 and 3 times more likely to experience sexual abuse than men<sup>58</sup>” and 59% of young women experience at least one sexually intrusive incident before the age of 18.
- Women who are unable or unwilling to have children often feel shamed by a society which suggests a woman is not whole until she has children.

## 10. Patriarchal bargain

This “is a decision to accept gender rules that disadvantage women in exchange for whatever power one can wrestle from the system. It is an individual strategy designed to manipulate the system to one’s best advantage, but one that leaves the system itself intact.”<sup>59</sup>

## 11. Assumptions made based on gender

Assumptions are made about women based on widely held beliefs about gender. This leads to people making assumptions about women based on their sex. It can result in them being patronised by men in both professional and personal situations.

## 12. Individual Complicity

“All it takes for evil to prosper is for good people to do nothing.”<sup>60</sup> The system of injustice will continue while individual men and women are ignorant and while they don’t act for change. Some of the ways in which people are responsible individually are:

### a. Not willing to give up power

There are many benefits of being in a position of power. Many are unwilling to give up such benefits. There are a limited number of opportunities for public speaking across the UK and if more women are to gain opportunities, some men will need to give up opportunities. Also women will need to work in collaboration with each other rather than competition.

### b. Fear of the consequences

The consequences of people working towards gender justice may cause people to feel unable to take action as their job or credibility within a certain community may be at risk.

### c. Lack of knowledge

Once someone recognises there are issues, they may not know how to respond, the problems can feel insurmountably huge and without access to the right information it can be hard to gain the knowledge needed to move forward.

### d. Blind to the issues

The issue of gender injustice is invisible to many. Individuals may not be aware of the issues and if someone has not experienced gender injustice they may be unable to see that there are problems.

### e. Lack of courage

<sup>58</sup> [http://www.cwasu.org/page\\_display.asp?pageid=STATS&pagekey=88&itemkey=90](http://www.cwasu.org/page_display.asp?pageid=STATS&pagekey=88&itemkey=90)

<sup>59</sup> <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/05/22/women-damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-dont/>

<sup>60</sup> Though this statement is attributed to Edmund Burke, it was not said by him and the origin of the quote remains anonymous.

Fighting injustice of any kind requires courage; to stand out and speak up. For those pioneering gender justice, it will require much courage to move the situation forward positively.

### **13. Exclusion from informal networks**

“Old boys clubs” still exist and executive women have shared experiences of their exclusion from deals made in male-only spaces. The furtherance of someone’s career or calling is often about “whom they know” not “what they know”. This includes within the Christian world. Invitations for speaking or working at a national level come through informal networks, and with the current ratio of men to women at all levels of Christian leadership, it is difficult to women to gain access to such networks.

### **14. Pressure on women leaders to represent their entire gender**

When women are in spaces where they are in the minority they may feel a pressure to positively represent their entire sex. This can be exhausting and is difficult, if not impossible to sustain. The pressure may come from others within the context, or from within the woman herself.

## What next?

Having identified the issues contributing to gender injustice in the UK Church, the next step is to ask other individuals and organisations to view this document and consider whether there are gaps within it, and to ensure that the experiences of women and men across the UK are represented throughout. Once this document has been reviewed, the next step is to consider what actions can be taken to address the issues that have been mapped out and/or identified.

## Providing feedback

If you would like to provide feedback or suggest other issues that have not yet been identified, please email [sparkequip@gmail.com](mailto:sparkequip@gmail.com).

## Appendix 1

### Theological Framework

Within a Christian theological framework there are two main views on gender:

#### Complementarian

The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, define complementarian as, “Male and female were created by God as equal in dignity, value, essence and human nature, but also distinct in role whereby the male was given the responsibility of loving authority over the female, and the female was to offer willing, glad-hearted and submissive assistance to the man.”

#### Egalitarian

Christians for Biblical Equality define egalitarian as “all believers-without regard to gender, ethnicity or class-must exercise their God-given gifts with equal authority and equal responsibility in church, home and world.”

Other theological views on gender include Christian Patriarchy and Christian feminism, amongst others. This document will approach the issues of gender justice from an egalitarian framework, welcoming participation in all subsequent discussions from those who hold other views.

DRAFT