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'Sisters in Strength': Re-Evaluating Agency Among Women in Two Low-Income Congregations in South Los Angeles

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“Sisters in Strength”:

Evaluating Agency among Women in
Two Low-Income Congregations in South
Los Angeles

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Goals for the Presentation

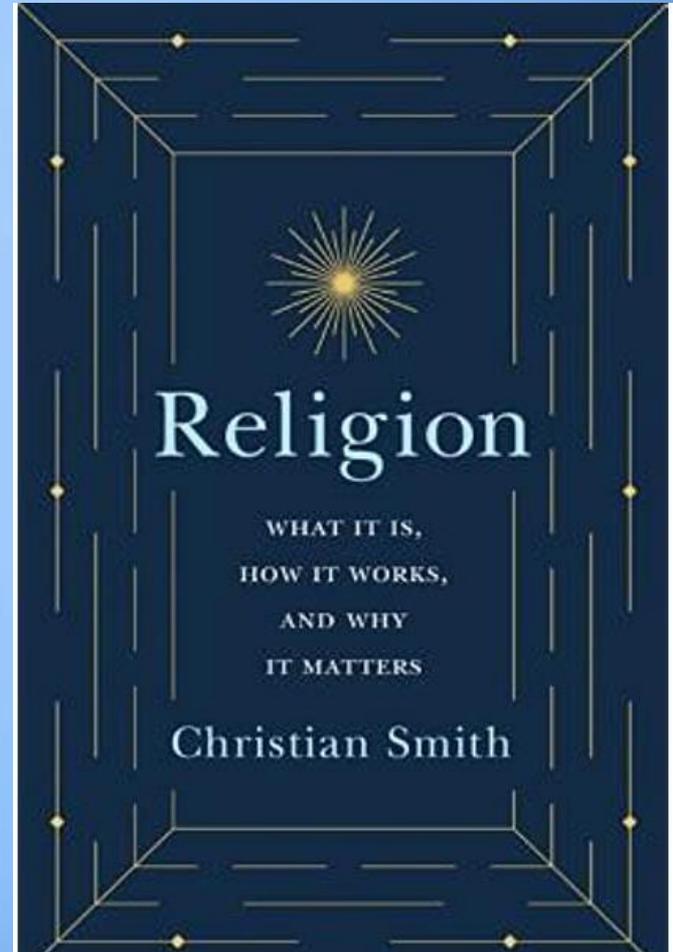
- To present the theoretical framework for the research.
- To present the background findings of the research (2010 to 2015)
- To present the research design of the current project.
- To summarize the current findings (2015 to 2021).

The Goals

- n To develop a critical realist theory for understanding oppression within the context of female congregational leaders in low-income contexts.
- n To identify the constraining and empowering factors affecting women in two congregations in South Los Angeles.

The Critical Realist Paradigm

“Critical realism situates itself as an alternative paradigm both to scientific forms of positivism... and also to the strong interpretivist or postmodern turn which denied explanation in favor of interpretation...” (Archer, M., et al. 2017. *What is Critical Realism?* Perspectives: A Newsletter of the ASA)



Summary of Theory

Margret Archer

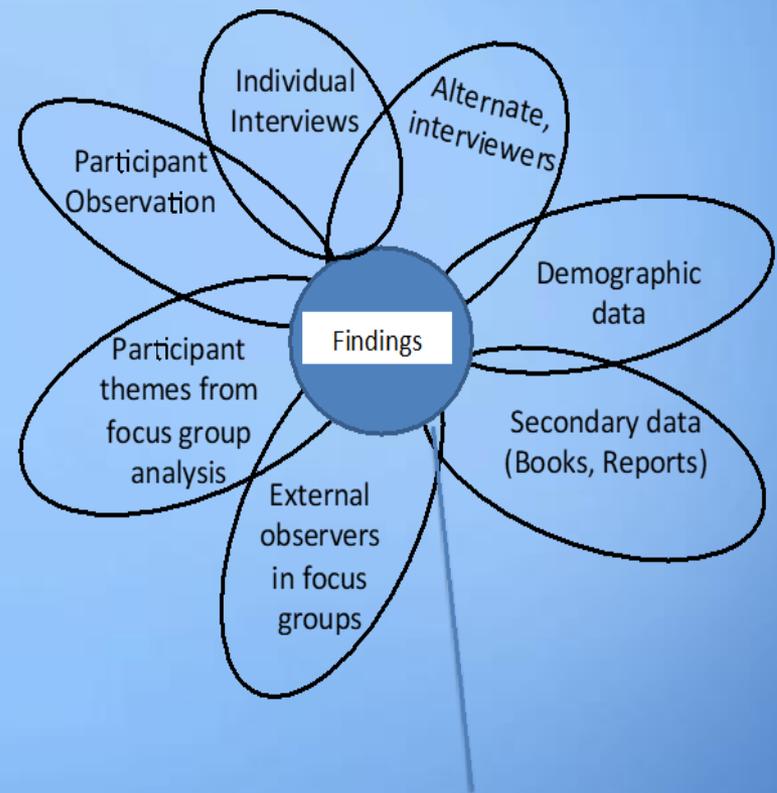
- “Analytical Dualism” - Separation between Agency/People and Structure

A Theory of Social Change 2010 to 2015

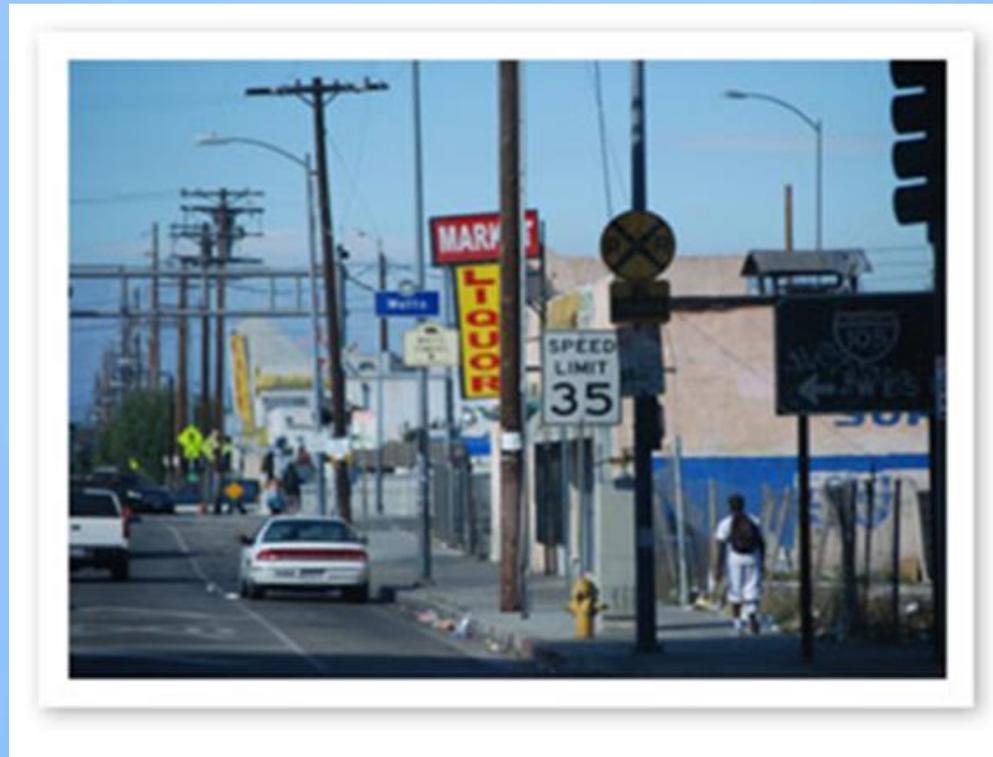


Methods

- Two case studies, over a five-year period,
 - Spirit Filled Church
 - True Community Church
- Participant observation
- Surveys (n= 62)
- Focus groups (n=5)
- Interviews (n=32)
- Secondary Literature (Census data, etc.)



Analysis and Implications



Mechanisms of Change

Socio-Cultural Mechanisms

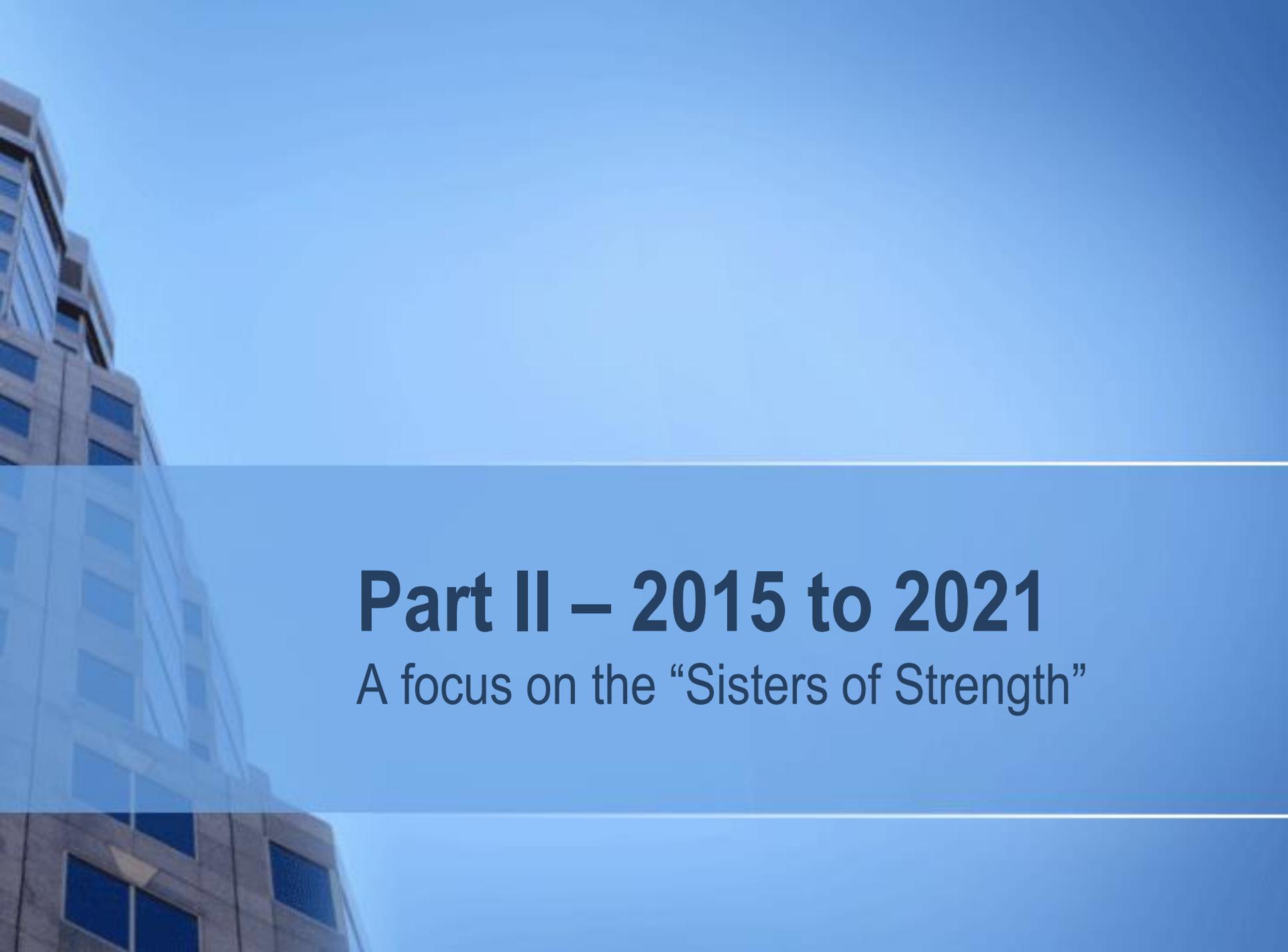
- Emancipation through intra-congregational networks
- Emancipation and stasis through the pastor as the editor of ideology
- Emancipation and stasis through new formal role schemas and commissioning rituals.



Social Mechanisms of Change



- Intra-congregational networks, particularly small business networks
- Emancipation and stasis through external resource provision/partnerships
- Emancipation through “Positive examples” ...
- Emancipation through safe, alternative settings.



Part II – 2015 to 2021

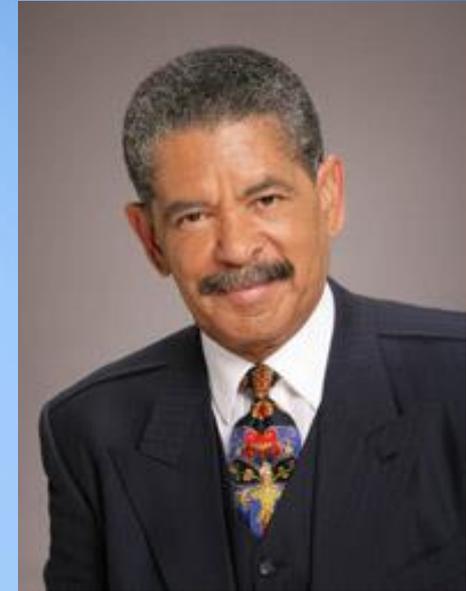
A focus on the “Sisters of Strength”

Methods

- Two case studies,
 - Secondary Literature (Census data, etc.)
 - Digital Ethnography
 - Survey – 21 questions
 - Focus groups
 - Interviews
- IRB Approval

Limitations

- Covid & Congregations in South LA
 - “I’m swamped...I don't honestly know if I can get the participants for you right now. A key family in our church just experienced a death...and my admin lost her father a few months back.”
 - True Community Pastor
 - Limited responsiveness
- Limited recall in participants



Mechanisms of Change

Socio-Cultural

- Intra-congregational networks
- The pastor as the editor of a mediating ideology
- Formal role schemas and commissioning rituals.



Social Mechanisms of Change



- Intra-congregational networks, particularly small business networks
- External resource provision/ organizational partnerships
- “Positive examples” ...
- Safe and/or alternative settings/spaces

Further Research and Questions

