

Matriarchal Influence and Spiritual Identity: Exploring Women's Spirituality in Young Sheldon

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Abstract

The study analyzes the TV series Young Sheldon (2017–2024) through maternal and spiritual feminism. It is a prequel to The Big Bang Theory, set in the 1980s. It is based on a ten-year-old Sheldon's struggles to adjust to his environment. It aims to examine the study critically, emphasizing the role of his mother and her maternal and spiritual practices through episodes of seasons one to five. The study works on five objectives; Mary's Character analysis, Generational spirituality, Tension between faith and science, and the intersection of faith and family dynamics. It further works on Women's spirituality as a source of empowerment and resistance. Data analysis employs a qualitative approach as its research design and an analytical research method. The study's main finding is Mary Cooper's character in Young Sheldon, which highlights the complex intersection of women's spirituality, gender roles, and family dynamics. Furthermore, the research underscores how Mary's compassionate authority shapes Sheldon's moral and emotional development while reinforcing the broader themes of maternal feminism. Her actions reflect a nuanced blend of devotion, resilience, and intuitive guidance that influences the family's interactions. The study also notes that Mary's spiritual grounding serves as a stabilizing force amid ongoing conflicts between logic and belief. Overall, the analysis reveals how her role extends beyond traditional motherhood, representing a deeper expression of identity, care, and personal empowerment within a patriarchal setting.

Keywords: Spiritual feminism, gender, matriarchal influence, spirituality, family dynamics

INTRODUCTION

The term feminism was derived from the Latin term Femina, meaning women. It is a movement or philosophy that questions the unequal balance of power between men and women (Feminism and the Women Movement - The Memory) [1]. It is defined in many ways by different authors and critics, According to the Cambridge Dictionary, feminism is;

“The belief is that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state.” (Feminism) [2]. According to Nahal, the term feminism can be defined as;

“A mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group or ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes.” (77) [3].

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Feminism was coined in 1837 by the utopian philosopher and radical socialist Charles Fournier as a reaction to organized activism for supporting women's suffrage (Malinowska, 1) [4]. It promotes equal status for women (Raina, 73) [5]. Raina asserts that the feminist movement is distinctly

categorized into three waves, as identified by Maggie Humm. The first wave concentrated on achieving equal voting rights and access to Parliament. The second wave was dedicated to securing women's equal legal and social rights. The third wave emerged in the 1990s and powerfully advocated for social justice, introducing essential concepts like ecofeminism and gender studies. Furthermore, scholars have confidently identified a fourth wave that began in 2012.

Feminism is an umbrella term, and it has some branches: Liberal feminism, Cultural feminism, Social feminism, Capitalist/Marxist feminism, Radical feminism, Womanism, Postmodern feminism (Saulnier, 8–19) [6], and Spiritual feminism (Ross, 32) [7]. The primary focus of this paper is spiritual feminism, a part of feminism.

Spiritual feminism emphasizes the vital reconsideration and reconstitution of spiritual life as a powerful avenue for achieving individual liberation and emotional success within the confines of a capitalist, patriarchal society (Walters, 16) [8]. Spiritual feminism has two prominent branches: reformists who engage with the Judeo-Christian tradition and revolutionaries who boldly forge entirely new spiritual visions including witchcraft (Luff, 91) [9]. The primary focus is to examine Christian tradition through the character analysis of Mary Cooper in the TV series *Young Sheldon*.

The primary focus of the study is *Young Sheldon*, an American sitcom (a genre of comedy specially created for television and radio) TV series from 2017 to 2024 about an intelligent young boy named Sheldon Cooper (Wikipedia contributors) [10]. There are six main characters in the serial. Sheldon, the protagonist or hero of the serial, has rational and scientific thoughts. George Cooper is Sheldon's father and a football player. Mary Cooper, Sheldon's mother, has faith in spirituality. Georgie Cooper is Sheldon's elder brother who is a philanderer. Missy Cooper is Sheldon's sister, more girlish in nature. A significant character in this narrative is Mimaw, Sheldon's grandmother, who highlights the thoughts surrounding generational gaps. Sheldon is a ten-year-old boy who is more intellectual than his age. His scientific ideas and her mother's spiritual beliefs sometimes lead to differences. To make his mother happy, he confidently attends church and participates in religious practices. However, he doesn't shy away from challenging clergymen with his questions about the existence of God. Mary Cooper tries to influence all family members with her religious and spiritual thoughts. She balances her responsibilities as both a mother and an individual. The series illustrates how she imparts moral and spiritual values to her children and husband, helping them become good members of society. Mary's religious practices lead this study towards spiritual feminism. Further, it extends the knowledge that women can mediate between God and humans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Xiong, the study explores humor in *Young Sheldon* through Relevance Theory, emphasizing how implicature, relevance inconsistencies, and context gaps create comedic effects (81–85) [11]. Another study thoroughly examines politeness violations in *Young Sheldon*, effectively illustrating how these moments reveal character traits and contribute to humor within the context of social norms (Sui, 162) [12]. According to Fan, humor in *Young Sheldon* is examined through the lens of Grice's Cooperative Principle, demonstrating how violations of this principle reveal character traits and psychological motives (208) [13]. Zhao discusses in his study that these violations of Grice's Cooperative Principle not only enhance the humor but also contribute to character development, reflecting real-life communication. Furthermore, he notes that the show reveals deeper meanings by deliberately flouting these principles, thereby enriching viewers' understanding of dialogue and cultural nuances (Zhao, 5). Zhao's paper also explores cultural contrasts between China and the United States as depicted in *Young Sheldon*, highlighting differences in values such as family, education, and relationships. Understanding these differences can foster mutual respect and pave the way for stronger cross-cultural collaboration and enhanced cultural confidence (57) [14]. Iain Armitage reflects on his growth during the run of *Young Sheldon*, expressing gratitude for the show's impact on his life and excitement for future projects. After the series finale, he enjoys flying and exploring new acting opportunities (Haltermann, 1) [15].

RESEARCH GAP

After getting review of all the above articles, it is found that the series is explored. This article demonstrates a significant gender research gap regarding this series. There is a research gap regarding women's spirituality in family sitcoms, especially in *Young Sheldon*. Although studies have looked at faith, science, and gender in media, little attention is given to how female characters like Mary Cooper navigate spirituality within family dynamics and societal expectations. Additionally, the representation of generational differences in spirituality remains underexplored, highlighting an opportunity to examine these themes through feminist theory and cultural criticism in modern television.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study investigates the matriarchal influence of women's spirituality in *Young Sheldon*, specifically focusing on the character Mary Cooper. It explores how her faith impacts her role within the family and affects her interactions with other characters. The research also examines the broader cultural implications surrounding gender, religion, and family dynamics. The study is based on five key objectives:

1. To analyse Mary Cooper's role as a spiritual leader.
2. To explore the influence of generational spirituality.
3. To explore the tension between faith and science.
4. To examine the intersection of faith and family dynamics.
5. To investigate women's spirituality as a source of empowerment and resistance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative approach that combines content analysis and feminist literary theory to examine key episodes of *Young Sheldon*. Data will be collected through episode analysis and academic sources to understand the cultural implications of faith and gender in the American South.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF MARY COOPER (SHELDON'S MOTHER)

Mary Cooper's strong Christian faith influences her identity and parenting in the series. Mary is depicted as a deeply religious woman. She consistently incorporates her Christian values into her daily life and interactions with her family. Her faith shapes her identity and informs her approach to raising her children. For example, Mary often relies on Christian teachings to guide her parenting, especially when Sheldon's scientific views challenge her beliefs. In one episode, she explains to Sheldon.

"The Bible says that God created the heavens and the Earth, not science." (*Young Sheldon*, Season 1, Episode 2) [16].

Mary's strong faith greatly influences her efforts to instill Christian values in her children. She also addresses the conflicts that arise between her beliefs and Sheldon's scientific worldview. Her faith serves as a source of comfort and identity. In the series, she frequently references her relationship with God to help her navigate various challenges, including family struggles and issues related to Sheldon's behavior. In the second episode, she states,

"I believe in God, Sheldon. I trust Him. And that's how I make it through every day" (*Young Sheldon*, Season 1, Episode 2) [16].

This dialogue highlights how Mary's spirituality is a foundation for her identity and influences her decisions as a mother. By this analysis, it becomes evident that Mary's Christian faith shapes her parenting style. It reinforces her identity as a mother who strives to balance her religious values with her son's scientific reasoning. Her actions illustrate the strong connection between faith and parenting in her role as a matriarch. In one memorable scene, Mary tells Sheldon that;

"You're gonna say your prayers and be grateful for your blessings. That's what we do in this family" (*Young Sheldon*, Season 1, Episode 3) [17].

This dialogue showcases Mary's efforts to pass on her spiritual practices, despite Sheldon's skepticism about the existence of God and his resistance to the idea of prayer. Mary's commitment to including prayer in the family routine establishes a foundation of spiritual guidance. She hopes to influence her children's moral and ethical development, even in the face of Sheldon's reluctance. Additionally, Mary often relies on her faith to provide advice or comfort rooted in Christian principles. For instance, when Sheldon is facing a challenging situation, she offers him encouragement and support based on her beliefs,

"God has a plan for all of us, Sheldon. You just have to trust Him" (Young Sheldon, Season 1, Episode 2) [16].

While Sheldon rejects the advice offered to him, Mary's unwavering belief in God's plan demonstrates how her spirituality shapes her parenting style. She strives to provide guidance rooted in faith, even though her son does not share the same perspective. Mary's faith unites her and her children under a shared set of values. It simultaneously creates division with Sheldon. His scientific mindset leads him to question the very concepts she holds dear. This contrast often serves as a central source of tension in the family, resulting in frequent clashes between Mary and Sheldon over religious matters. Despite their differences, Mary's devotion to her faith provides stability and structure within the family. It reinforces her role as the matriarch who seeks to guide her children both morally and spiritually.

Although, Mary's spiritual practices significantly shape her approach to parenting and influence the family dynamic, fostering a blend of connection and conflict between faith and science. Her efforts to integrate religion into everyday life lay a foundation of spiritual discipline that permeates the Cooper household, even as Sheldon resists these teachings.

GENERATIONAL SPIRITUALITY:

Mary's spiritual role is influenced by her mother, Meemaw, as seen through generational spirituality. Though different in its expression, Meemaw's faith shapes Mary's understanding of religion and its role in her life. The contrast between Mary's and her mother's spiritual practices becomes evident when they discuss the importance of faith in their lives. Meemaw says,

"You know, Mary, I'm proud of you, but I don't think a lot of people need the same kind of church that you do. You can be spiritual without all the pomp and circumstance." (Young Sheldon, Season 2, Episode 22) [25].

This conversation highlights the generational differences between Mary and Meemaw in their expressions of spirituality. While Mary finds strength and purpose in her structured, church-centered faith, Meemaw represents a more individualistic and less formal spiritual approach. The dialogue also underscores how Mary's spirituality, influenced by her mother's perspective, is both empowering and limiting as she navigates the societal expectations placed on her as a woman in the church.

Mary Cooper's spirituality in the series is rooted in a strict, traditional Christian faith, which influences her parenting style and her role as a spiritual guide for her family. She says;

"The Lord works in mysterious ways, and that's why we have to trust in His plan." (Young Sheldon, Season 1, Episode 4) [18]

Her devoutness is demonstrated through her regular church attendance and her strong commitment to instilling moral values rooted in her faith. In contrast, Meemaw maintains a more relaxed approach to religion. While she acknowledges God's existence, she prefers personal experiences over formal religious practices, which allows her to connect with her spirituality in a meaningful way. For example, she shares with Sheldon,

“God’s got a plan, but it doesn’t hurt to have a little fun while you’re waiting.” (Young Sheldon, Season 1, Episode 9) [19].

The generational differences in spirituality are evident in how Mary and Meemaw guide Sheldon. Mary advocates for a more structured belief system, while Meemaw promotes a more flexible and individualized approach. This contrast highlights the broader cultural shifts between generations and illustrates the various ways faith can be interpreted and practiced within a family.

TENSION BETWEEN FAITH AND SCIENCE

In this series, the stiffness between Sheldon’s scientific worldview and her mother’s spiritual beliefs is central to their relationship. Sheldon, who approaches the world rationally, logically, and evidence-based, frequently clashes with his mother’s devout Christian faith. For example, Sheldon dismisses religious teachings because they do not align with his scientific reasoning. Sheldon argues,

“The Bible is not a science book, which highlights his firm stance on the separation of science and faith.” (Young Sheldon, Season 1, Episode 4) [18].

Mary firmly believes that faith and science can coincide harmoniously. She adeptly guides Sheldon’s moral and ethical decisions through her strong religious teachings. This conviction is especially evident when she asserts,

“You need to pray for guidance, Sheldon, even though Sheldon responds sceptically, questioning the practicality of prayer.” (Young Sheldon, Season 1, Episode 9) [19].

The tension in the series serves as a recurring theme, highlighting the contrast between the scientific mind and the spiritual heart. Sheldon’s refusal to accept religious explanations for the world conflicts with his mother’s desire to instill in him a moral compass grounded in Christian teachings. While Sheldon’s intellect and questioning nature challenge Mary’s faith. They also provide her with an opportunity to showcase the strength and significance of her spirituality in shaping her family dynamics and values. Conversely, Sheldon’s skepticism catalyzes her to reflect on how her faith can offer moral and emotional support, not only for herself but also for her children. This conflict emphasizes broader societal debates about the relationship between science and religion. It also explores themes of family, belief, and personal growth. In the episode titled *A High-Pitched Battle*, Sheldon and Mary have the following exchange:

Sheldon: “I don’t understand why you go to church. It’s all just a bunch of fairy tales. Science gives us real answers.” (Young Sheldon, Season 2, Episode 1) [20].

Mary: “Well, Sheldon, faith isn’t about proof. It’s about believing in something bigger than yourself, something that helps us make sense of the world.” (Young Sheldon, Season 2, Episode 1) [21].

This dialogue illustrates the core conflict between Sheldon’s reliance on empirical evidence and her spiritual faith. Sheldon’s cynicism towards religion contrasts with her belief that faith offers emotional and moral guidance beyond what science can provide. In *The Quantum Ring* episode, Sheldon must choose between a science conference and a religious event with his mother.

Sheldon: “Why should I waste my time on a church event when I could be at a conference, learning about quantum physics?” (Young Sheldon, Season 2, Episode 14) [22].

Mary: “Because sometimes we have to do things for the people we love, even if we don’t understand them.” (Young Sheldon, Season 2, Episode 14) [23].

This exchange highlights her strong commitment to her faith and family, while Sheldon's rational mindset makes it difficult for him to recognize the emotional and spiritual importance of the event. Their differing views on what matters illustrate the ongoing tension between science and religion in their relationship. With this discussion, the third objective of the study is achieved.

THE INTERSECTION OF FAITH AND FAMILY DYNAMICS

In *Young Sheldon*, women's spirituality is often depicted through characters like Mary Cooper, who showcase nurturing, resilience, and a strong sense of community. This portrayal reflects the cultural values tied to gender roles, spirituality, and family dynamics.

One example of nurturing spirituality can be seen in *A Brisket, Voodoo, and Cannonball Run* episode, where Mary's faith helps her connect emotionally with others. She demonstrates her nurturing role by supporting Sheldon's emotional well-being, showing how her spirituality fuels her desire to care for her family:

Mary: "Sheldon, sometimes people need a little faith, even if they don't know they need it. It's okay to believe in something, even when it doesn't make sense." (*Young Sheldon*, Season 2, Episode 15) [24].

Here, she emphasizes the importance of faith, not just as a belief system but as an emotional support tool for herself and others. This underlines her role as the family's spiritual foundation and nurturing spirit. In *The Matrimonial Momentum*, we see another example of Mary's resilient spirituality when her marriage to George faces turmoil. Despite the struggles, she draws strength from her spiritual convictions, which guide her through difficult moments:

Mary: "I know things aren't perfect, but I have faith that we can work through it. God doesn't promise us easy lives, but He promises to help us through the tough times" (*Young Sheldon*, Season 2, Episode 22) [25].

This dialogue reflects Mary's belief in the strength of faith to endure life's challenges. It reinforces her resilient nature and how spirituality supports her through adversity. Furthermore, *A Stomach Ache* and *A Misplaced Meeting* episode showcases how Mary's spirituality is also community-oriented. During this episode, Mary's role as a spiritual leader is highlighted in the context of the church, where she leads a women's group. Her leadership is rooted in a nurturing approach, emphasizing collective support and growth:

Mary: "We're all here because we want to help each other grow, not just as mothers or wives, but as women of faith." (*Young Sheldon*, Season 3, Episode 2) [26].

This analysis demonstrates how women's spirituality is intricately tied to their roles as caregivers, resilient figures in the family unit, and leaders within their communities. Mary Cooper's faith frequently serves as a guiding force and a moral anchor for the family. It offers wisdom and clarity in moments of confusion, conflict, and ethical dilemmas. Several episodes highlight her role as a spiritual leader, where her Christian beliefs help her navigate complex family situations.

In the episode titled *The Hermit's Path*, Sheldon faces a moral dilemma when his father, George, becomes upset about a broken promise. In this moment of tension, Mary's faith acts as a calming influence on the situation. After Sheldon expresses his discomfort with his father's anger, Mary intervenes with a statement that reflects her guiding moral compass, rooted in her religious beliefs:

Mary: "You don't have to understand everything, Sheldon. But what you do need is to show grace. Not just to others, but to yourself." (*Young Sheldon*, Season 1, Episode 22) [20].

This dialogue highlights Mary's ability to balance her own beliefs with her familial duties. She teaches Sheldon the importance of grace in difficult situations. Her faith offers a grounding force for Sheldon, who is often skeptical about emotional or moral concepts. By encouraging him to practice grace, Mary influences his character development and introduces a Christian moral framework into the family dynamic.

In the episode titled *The Big Bear Precipitation*, Sheldon gets involved in a situation where he feels isolated from his peers due to his intellect. Mary steps in with comforting advice, reminding him of the importance of humility and kindness over intellectual superiority:

Mary: "Sometimes, Sheldon, it's not about what you know, but how you treat the people around you. And that comes from faith in something greater than yourself." (Young Sheldon, Season 2, Episode 13) [22].

Through this dialogue, Mary reflects on her Christian worldview. She stresses that intellectual pride should not outweigh the values of humility and kindness. She uses her faith to encourage Sheldon to be mindful of his relationships, emphasizing the importance of love and understanding in guiding his behavior.

In the episode titled *The Maternal Capacitance*, Mary's guidance becomes crucial when Sheldon struggles to understand social norms and his emotional responses. In a conversation with her son, Mary uses the Bible to reinforce moral principles, demonstrating how her faith serves as both a practical and spiritual tool in her parenting:

Mary: "The Bible says we're supposed to love our neighbours, but that doesn't mean we always understand them. Just be patient and try to see things from their point of view." (Young Sheldon, Season 3, Episode 4) [27].

This moment emphasizes Mary's role as a moral anchor in the family. By referencing her Christian values, she teaches Sheldon the importance of empathy and patience, key elements of both spiritual and ethical living.

Mary's faith is especially prominent when she must navigate a family crisis involving financial secrecy. She seeks guidance from her church and community, reflecting how she leans on her faith to deal with worldly problems:

Mary: "I don't know how we're going to fix this, but I believe God will help us through it. He always has, and He always will." (Young Sheldon, Season 4, Episode 11) [28].

This moment shows Mary turning to her faith not just for moral guidance, but as a source of hope in times of crisis. Her belief in God's support reflects the symbolic role of spirituality as an anchor for the family, keeping them grounded even during troubling times.

Through these moments, Young Sheldon effectively portrays Mary Cooper as a spiritual leader whose faith guides her and her family. She navigates complex situations with a strong moral foundation, using her Christian convictions to teach her children and husband the importance of grace, humility, patience, and trust in a higher power.

WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY AS A SOURCE OF EMPOWERMENT AND RESISTANCE

Through a feminist lens, we can analyze how Mary's spirituality both empowers and limits her, reflecting societal gender expectations and offering a portrayal of women's spiritual roles in both nurturing and constrained contexts. Throughout the series, her role as a mother and spiritual guide

reflects her deep commitment to her faith and her community. In the episode titled *A Rival Prodigy* and *Sir Isaac Neutron*, Mary plays a pivotal role in Sheldon's moral development. She reassures him that his intellect is a gift, but his faith will help him navigate life's challenges. She says,

"Sheldon, your brain is a gift, but sometimes faith is what gets us through. Trust that you'll find your way." (Young Sheldon, Season 1, Episode 2) [16].

This dialogue highlights her role as both a spiritual and emotional anchor for Sheldon. Her spirituality empowers her to guide him not just intellectually, but also ethically and emotionally. Her spiritual practices shape how she interacts with her children, encouraging them to trust in a higher power while facing challenges. This representation empowers Mary by showing her as a strong, guiding figure in her family's spiritual and emotional lives.

Mary continues her leadership role in the church. She leads the worshipers with confidence and grace, reinforcing her moral authority within the community. She says,

"We may have our differences, but kindness and love should be our focus. That's what faith teaches us." (Young Sheldon, Season 4, Episode 15) [29].

This shows how Mary uses her faith to unify others, empowering herself as a spiritual leader not just at home but within the larger church community. Her belief in kindness, as a central tenet of her faith, further elevates her as a nurturing figure who uses spirituality to influence and inspire others.

While Mary's spirituality empowers her, it also places limitations on her, particularly in the context of traditional gender roles. In several episodes, we see how her spiritual duties often conflict with her desires. For example, Mary confesses to Meemaw that her role as a spiritual leader often means sacrificing her ambitions. She says,

"I love leading the church, but sometimes I feel like I should be doing more for myself. I don't know if I'm allowed to have something just for me." (Young Sheldon, Season 5, Episode 4) [30].

This dialogue illustrates the internal conflict Mary experiences as she juggles her role as a mother, wife, and spiritual leader. While her faith empowers her to care for others, it also limits her ability to pursue personal goals. In a feminist context, this reflects how women in religious roles are often expected to prioritize others' needs over their own, a societal norm that can restrict their personal growth and aspirations.

A significant aspect of *Young Sheldon* is the ongoing tension between Sheldon's scientific worldview and Mary's spiritual convictions. This tension is highlighted throughout the series, but particularly in this episode titled *The Grandparents* and *a Grown-Up Fish*, where Sheldon's scientific rationality clashes with Mary's faith-based perspective. Sheldon says,

"Mom, science doesn't need God to explain things. It's all about facts *and evidence*." (Young Sheldon, Season 5, Episode 8) [31].

To which Mary responds,

"Sheldon, I know you believe in science, but there are some things that science can't explain. Faith is what keeps us going when facts can't do the job." (Young Sheldon, Season 5, Episode 8) [31].

This exchange between Sheldon and her mother illustrates the ongoing conflict between their worldviews, with Mary's spirituality acting as a counterpoint to Sheldon's scientific approach. For

Mary, faith provides moral guidance and comfort, whereas Sheldon's reliance on empirical evidence leaves little room for spiritual belief. The dialogue also reflects broader societal debates between faith and reason, and how women like Mary often serve as mediators between these two worlds, balancing faith, science, and familial duties.

Throughout all seasons of *Young Sheldon*, Mary Cooper's spiritual role is empowering and limiting. Her faith allows her to influence her family and community, acting as a moral anchor for those around her. However, her role as a spiritual leader also reflects the traditional gender expectations placed on women, often requiring her to sacrifice her desires for the good of others.

Young Sheldon subtly critiques and reinforces traditional gender roles through the character of Mary Cooper, who embodies a blend of conventional and progressive aspects of femininity. On one hand, she is the archetypal nurturing mother, devoted to her children and family, which aligns with traditional gender expectations. In several episodes, Mary is shown caring for Sheldon's academic needs, providing emotional support, and managing household affairs, thus fulfilling the role of the maternal figure that was historically ascribed to women. For example, in this episode, Mary is seen consoling Sheldon when he feels alienated from his peers because of his intellectual abilities. She says,

"Sheldon, you may not fit in, but you will always have your family to love you" (*Young Sheldon*, Season 1, Episode 2) [16].

This moment reinforces the idea of women as emotional caregivers who offer solace and unconditional support to their families, a theme traditionally associated with gendered expectations of womanhood.

However, Mary's character also challenges traditional gender roles by displaying independence and spiritual strength. In this episode, Mary is portrayed as a firm believer in her faith but also as someone who takes charge when necessary, including intervening in her husband George's actions when she feels it's in the best interest of their family. In this episode, Mary says,

"We are raising a boy who will change the world. That's more important than whatever it is you think you're doing" (*Young Sheldon*, Season 2, Episode 22) [25].

This conversation illustrates how she handles her duties as a mother, wife, individual, woman, and daughter. Amid these roles, she gracefully maintains her faith and imparts moral lessons to her children to help them become good members of society.

The series often examines gender roles by illustrating how Mary's commitment to conventional values clashes with her aspirations for her children. For example, her position as a committed Christian in a secular society sometimes conflicts with the current expectations surrounding women's independence. Her deep-rooted faith often clashes with contemporary views on gender equality, highlighting the tension between established beliefs and progressive ideas. Mary is portrayed as a complex character who both maintains and challenges traditional gender roles. While her fundamental identity as a caring and supportive mother is essential to her character, her confidence and autonomy challenge the conventional perception of women as solely passive or restricted to household duties. Through Mary's journey, the series delicately explores the changing role of women in contemporary society while still acknowledging the lasting significance of family and faith in influencing gender expectations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of Mary Cooper's character in *Young Sheldon* highlights the complex intersection of women's spirituality, gender roles, and family dynamics. Her Christian beliefs influence

her approach to motherhood, offering ethical direction and navigating the conflict between faith and scientific understanding, especially in her interactions with Sheldon. The generational differences in spiritual practices between Mary and her mother, Meemaw, reflect evolving views on faith and gender. While Mary's spirituality empowers her, it also sometimes limits her autonomy within traditional gender roles. This study underscores how media can reflect and critique societal expectations, offering a deeper understanding of the role of women's spirituality in shaping identity and family structures. The future scope of this study could include exploring the intersection of Mary's spirituality with broader societal trends, and examining how spirituality and gender roles continue to evolve in the context of popular media.

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