

FAITH AND ABORTION: LISTENING TO PENTECOSTAL WOMEN'S STORIES,
SEEKING ETHICAL CHURCH RESPONSES

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Pentecostal churches have not historically provided support to women during contemplation or following abortion, defined as the surgical procedure to terminate and remove the fetus. Too often, the attitudes of these churches surrounding abortion are those of condemnation. The intent of this research is to challenge Pentecostal churches to change their spiritual responses from shaming condemnation to compassionate support. Informed by the voices of women who have had abortions while members of Pentecostal churches, this ethnographic study will explore the spiritual needs described by four (4) women who reflect upon their experiences during this critical decision-making period, the role of Pentecostal churches in responding to those needs, and the resources that are essential for Pentecostal churches to be most effective and supportive in its responsiveness to such women. Through a series of interviews, the following questions are answered: What are the spiritual, ethical and intellectual criteria upon which these four Pentecostal women potentially based their decisions to abort? What is the nature of their contemplative experience? How can Pentecostal Churches compassionately and respectfully fulfill their obligations to support women who contemplate or choose abortions? How can such churches be responsive to the range of spiritual needs women articulate and what kinds of resources enable them to do so? In answering these questions, it is hoped that Pentecostal churches will recognize the needs of women who

face unplanned pregnancies and contemplate or have abortions, and respond to them with compassion, providing the emotional and spiritual support they require during this critical period in their lives.

DEDICATION

Many marvelous educators have crossed my path and impacted my life. I would be remiss, however, if I failed to acknowledge my wonderful parents. They created a safe, loving environment and were driven to provide better lives for their five children. My siblings and I were always encouraged to pursue our education and never discouraged from expressing our uniqueness. They were wonderful parents and I was blessed to have been born to them. I credit them as being my first and most influential educators and therefore, dedicate this work to Jesse and Mary Ruth Davis. I will always love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction	3
Statement of the Problem	4
Statement of the Purpose	6
Assumptions and Limitations	8
CHAPTER 2: FAITH AND ABORTION.....	11
History of Pentecostalism.....	11
Misogyny in the Christian Church.....	13
Abortion Politics and Religion	18
Theological Framework.....	23
CHAPTER 3: THE WOMEN AND THEIR VOICES.....	29
Method	29
Participants.....	30
Ethical Considerations.....	32
Data Collection.....	33
Research Questions	34
Voices of the Women	35
Analysis of Responses.....	55
Table 1	66
CHAPTER 4: ETHICAL CHURCH RESPONSES	67
Descriptive Codes and Themes	68
Consequences and Implications.....	74
Ethical Church Responses	81
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION	89
Discussion.....	89
Next Steps.....	93
Evaluation.....	96
Conclusion.....	98
APPENDIXES
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter	102
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form	103
Appendix C: Questionnaire (Women).....	105
Appendix D: Questionnaire (Clergy)	106
Appendix E: Debriefing Form.....	107
Appendix F: Community Resources	108
BIBLIOGRAPHY	109
VITA.....

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Throughout this journey, I prayed for God's presence, wisdom and understanding. I requested that my ears would be open to the truth and that my heart would be full of love and compassion. I sincerely hope that these qualities are reflected in my work. May all the honor and glory belong to God, who gave me the strength to speak and the words to say. I pray in earnest that this research will be used for the betterment of the Pentecostal Church and the furtherance of God's Kingdom.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abortion: Defined as a surgical procedure involving the termination and removal of the fetus.

Backslide: A term used to denote a member who had turned away from their faith tradition and adopted a sinful lifestyle.

COGIC: Church of God in Christ

Holistic: Characterized by the treatment of the whole person, taking into account mental, spiritual, emotional and social factors, rather than just the presenting symptomology.

Holy Spirit Baptism: The term for the infilling of the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in a language unknown to the individual, as described in the book of Acts, chapter 2.

Modesty Rules: Rules that govern a women's behavior, manner, or appearance (particularly her clothing, jewelry and makeup) intended that she would avoid impropriety or indecency.

PAW: Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc.

PCAF: Pentecostal Churches of the Apostolic Faith International, Inc.

Salvation: To be saved by God from the consequences of sin through the redemptive power of the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Sat Down: A practice to remove a member from his or her position for a period, following the discovery of a committed sin.

Saved: To be fully submersed in water and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit as described above.

Silenced: A practice to ostracize an individual following the discovery of a sin committed. (See "Sat Down")

Spiritual Insecurity: The lack of confidence in the church's ability to care for an individual's emotional and/or spiritual well-being.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”

—*Mother Teresa*

“Find your rub. What gets to you? What keeps you awake at night and makes you want to stay in bed on Sunday morning? What are we missing at church? Sometimes we tend to just walk through open doors rather than bump our heads against brick walls? Part of the challenge is developing the voice of the church, and not just the Pastor.” These were the words spoken by Dr. Dale McCormick, former Drew University 2018 Doctorate of Ministry prize winner, to my *Courageous Leadership* cohort in response to my question, “Dr. McCormick, what advice can you give us as we begin our projects?” Dr. McCormick’s question changed my life.

I’d chosen the subject of my project a year prior to my admittance into Drew’s Doctoral program. I had already begun researching the topic and gathering sources in preparation for my project after my first semester. When asked to give a five minute presentation to the class on the subjects of our projects, I was ready! I remember walking across campus later that evening feeling quite confident in the knowledge that I had fully prepared for this moment. I recall taking a shower that night, settling for the evening to begin typing my presentation. As I stood looking at myself in the mirror, I thanked God for giving me the vision long before that day. I was ready! Then I heard words in my head that would forever change the scope of my project: “But, that’s not your rub. This is your rub.” My mind was immediately transported to an experience 2 years earlier

It was extremely hot that July summer's day, especially for Michigan, who's summer temperatures seldom reach 100 degrees. However, on this day, my Honda's thermometer read 104. I cursed my choice to wear shorts, as my thighs stuck to my leather seats. It was almost unbearable. I had stopped at the local vitamin shop for supplies and was pulling out of the driveway onto the busy street when I noticed a commotion at the corner. I observed a group of picketers who were yelling and screaming. I remember thinking, "What on earth could they be complaining about? Whatever it is, couldn't it have waited until a cooler day?" As I approached the corner in my vehicle, I could not clearly hear what they were saying, but there was no mistaking their intentions from the signs that they were waving: "You're going to hell!" "Murderers" and "Baby killers!" I realized that the sidewalk on which they stood was directly in front of a Planned Parenthood facility.

The picketers were carrying white, plastic baby dolls which had been slathered in red paint. They were loud, vicious and cruel. And many of the signs they carried had fish or crosses painted on them, indicating that they represented Christians. What was especially disturbing is that young children, some as young as grade-schoolers, were with them. They, too, were shouting and screaming words of anger and hatred. A slow chill crept up my spine, followed by overwhelming feelings of anger, and finally, deep sadness. Several questions immediately came to mind: "Don't you think these women already feel bad enough without your added condemnation?" "Why are you, who profess Christianity, teaching your children to hate?" I was embarrassed that these people would be associated with my loving and kind God. That they identified as Christians, like me, made me ill. Did they forget Jesus' redemption of all sins, including theirs, on the cross?

I imagined myself pulling into the parking lot of the clinic, parking and waiting for the women to exit the building. I imagined pulling each one into my arms, holding each of them close. I imagined whispering to them that it would be all right, and reassuring them that God loved them, and I did too. I wanted to, but I didn't. Instead, I cried. I remembered all of this in a matter of a few seconds while preparing for my class presentation. I did nothing for the women at that particular Planned Parenthood in the summer of 2016, but I could do something for them now. I'd found my rub.

Introduction

The topic of abortion has indeed emerged as one of the pivotal political issues in an ever-growing cultural debate on the sacredness of human life. For decades, evangelicals, of which Pentecostal churches are a subsection, have mobilized effective campaigns targeted toward maintaining the rights of unborn children and the protection of innocent lives, concluding that the act of abortion is sin, characterized by immoral behavior and therefore, punishable in the eyes of God (Dunnett 1990). Although previous literature has examined these conservative views (Dunnett 1990; Falwell 1986; Lee and Sinitiere 2009), little is known regarding the specific views of Pentecostal churches regarding its position on providing emotional and spiritual support to women who have had abortions. To my knowledge, no research is available regarding the impact of these views on Pentecostal women's decisions to abort, nor was any evidence discovered indicating that Pentecostal churches provide support to women during contemplation or following abortions¹.

¹ Abortions defined as a surgical procedure involving the termination and removal of the fetus.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the long and short-term effects of oppressive practices within Pentecostal churches regarding women; specifically, the attitudes and beliefs surrounding unplanned pregnancies and abortion. This study will address the impact that these practices have on women who are members of Pentecostal churches, and the ongoing threat these practices pose to the sustainability of Pentecostal churches. The study will also explore the roles of women as defined by Pentecostal churches and the restrictions governing such roles.

This study will not address the pro-life vs. pro-choice debate. Much research has already been conducted regarding this topic and this study will not contribute to that discussion. However, it will examine the question of Pentecostal churches' obligation, regardless of its views toward abortion, to provide spiritual and emotional support to women who have unplanned pregnancies and/or contemplate or have abortions.

Statement of the Problem

A 2014 study concluded that between 2008 and 2014, abortion rates declined by 25%. Nevertheless, 24% of women aged 15 to 44 will choose abortions by the age of 45 (Jones & Jerman 2014). Translated, 1 in 4 women in the United States will have had an abortion at some point in their lifetime. These statistics do not seemingly exclude women who identify as Pentecostals.²

Roe vs. Wade's 7-2 landmark decision issued in 1973 by the United States Supreme Court on the issue of the constitutionality of laws that criminalized or restricted

²Data taken from the Guttmacher Institute's May 2016 Abortion Provider Census (Jerman, Jones & Ondo), which surveyed known abortion-providing facilities in the United States. No data was collected regarding the religious preferences of the women who were indirectly involved. It is therefore surmised that women of the Pentecostal faith tradition were not excluded from this study.

access to abortions was enacted as an answer to a public health concern (*Roe v. Wade* 1973). Following the legal precedent of *Griswald v. Connecticut* (1965), which upheld the right to privacy involving contraception and medical procedures, the Court ruled that the privacy rights of women to choose abortions were guaranteed by the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution. Prior to *Roe vs. Wade*, abortions were criminal offenses in the United States. Therefore, women who obtained *backwoods abortions*—those conducted without the benefit of trained medical personnel, sterilized equipment or proper medical facilities—did so illegally and often died, themselves, as a result of the procedures. *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortions in the United States, establishing safe procedures that could be conducted by medically trained personnel in sterilized environments.

According to the Center for Reproductive Rights, we may now face the greatest risk to the future of reproductive rights in more than a generation. Given the political climate of the day, *Roe vs. Wade* could be overturned in the very near future (Center for Reproductive Rights 2018). Replacing retired Justice Anthony Kennedy, Justice Brett Kavanaugh, a deeply conservative judge while seated on the District of Columbia Appellate Court, could potentially reshape the constitution in the area of reproductive rights (Hill 2018).

While overturning *Roe vs. Wade* would not immediately ban the practice of abortion across the nation, it would give jurisdiction back to the states and each state would then be given the ability to decide whether to allow abortion within its borders. The overturning of the law would also impact other reproductive rights, such as the use of contraceptives, sex education in public schools, and access to reproductive health

services (Center for Reproductive Rights 2018). The United States could easily revert to a time in which reproductive rights became a public health concern. What would be Pentecostal churches' obligation to women in such an occurrence? What, if any, should be their response?

Historically, Pentecostal churches have not extended emotional or spiritual support to women who face unplanned pregnancies and/or have abortions. In fact, the attitudes of most Christians toward women facing these extenuating ethical circumstances are often condemnation (Pew Research 2009). Understanding the importance of extending love and compassion to such women by providing them with the types of emotional and spiritual support they require is not only a moral obligation, but also theologically sound. Throughout his ministry, Jesus extended concern and benevolence to those in emotional, physical and spiritual distress. He teaches his disciples to do the same. Discovering and meeting the emotional and spiritual needs of women who face unplanned pregnancies and contemplate or have abortions will not only demonstrate the love and compassion of Jesus, but also promote a healthy and welcoming church which is safe for those who enter.

Statement of Purpose

The intent of this study is to begin a dialogue in Pentecostal churches, that these churches might change their responses to women who experience unplanned pregnancies and have or contemplate abortions from shaming conviction to compassion. Informed by the voices of women who had abortions while members of Pentecostal churches, this ethnographic study will explore the spiritual needs described by four (4) women who reflect upon their experiences during this critical decision-making period in their lives,

the role of Pentecostal churches in responding to those needs, and the resources that are essential for Pentecostal churches to be most effective and supportive in its responsiveness to such women. It is my hope that through this series of shared stories, an opportunity might be opened for a larger discourse regarding how Pentecostal churches might respond, specifically, to the following primary questions: What are the spiritual, ethical and intellectual criteria upon which these four Pentecostal women potentially based their decisions to abort? What is the nature of their contemplative experiences? How can Pentecostal churches compassionately and respectfully fulfill its obligation to support women who contemplate or choose an abortion? How can such church support be responsive to the range of spiritual needs women articulate and what kinds of resources enable them to do so? In answering these questions, Pentecostal churches may better understand the emotional and spiritual needs of women in these circumstances and develop healthy practices which promote emotional and spiritual healing.

The four (4) women interviewed in this study struggled with voicing their concerns regarding their own reproductive health. This project was designed to listen to these four women who have terminated pregnancies while members of Pentecostal churches and determine what spiritual and emotional resources they required from the church during the contemplative process to guide them during their journeys. If effective, this research might serve as a catalyst to raise the consciousness of Pentecostal churches regarding this very emotional and crucial period in women's lives. This study speaks to the accountability of Christians to each other and the ethical and moral responsibility Christians share in providing emotional and spiritual support to women.

Assumptions and Limitations

There were several limitations to this research. While many of these limitations were beyond my control, some were of my own volition. First, I assumed that all the participants in the study answered honestly to the questions posed during the interviews. I also assumed that the women responded truthfully prior to the interviews when affirming that they were members of Pentecostal churches at the times of their abortions.

One limitation of this study is that I discovered no existing literature specifically regarding the treatment of women belonging to the Pentecostal faith tradition who have experienced unplanned pregnancies and/or had abortions. While this lack of research posed difficulties in substantiating the findings of this study, it also provides an excellent opportunity to shed light on a subject that has not been previously explored.

I utilized *snowball sampling*³ to recruit the study participants. While this technique was necessary due to the sensitive nature of the study, using snowball sampling limited the control I had in selecting subjects and did not allow for diversity, particularly racial diversity, among participants. Snowball sampling also had another disadvantage. It limited the actual number of participants involved in the study, as only those who were willing to volunteer to be interviewed were included. Therefore, this research cannot be generalized, given the small sample size and lack of diversity amongst the participants. However, coupled with existing research regarding the history of both the Christian and Pentecostal churches and the general attitudes toward abortion among these groups, the study reveals oppressive practices within Pentecostal churches that transcend ethnicity.

³ A sampling technique where existing research subjects recruit other subjects from among their acquaintances.

These practices compromise the spiritual and emotional well-being of all women who experience unplanned pregnancies or have abortions while members of Pentecostal churches.

The four courageous women who agreed to participate in this study are African-American. As an African-American woman myself, I struggled with the decision to direct this research toward outcomes which exclusively effect African-American women. In the end, I made the very difficult decision not to do so. That being said, there are a number of African-American female scholars, such as Kelly Brown Douglas, Stephanie Crumpton and Traci West, whose rich contributions pertaining to violence, abuse, shaming and other issues which impact African-American women lend to important research regarding the cultural implications surrounding this particular group of women. While I may refer to the work of these fine scholars in a broad or general context, I will not do so specifically from the perspective of the African-American experience. If my work peaks further interest specifically to women of African-American descent, I would strongly encourage the reader to examine the work of the aforementioned scholars, as they will provide deeper insight, including historical perspectives specific to African-American women.

This study was designed to offer Pentecostal churches an opportunity to change its spiritual response from shaming conviction to compassionate support toward women who contemplate or have abortions. By listening to the voices of the participants who had abortions while members of Pentecostal churches, this study will aid Pentecostal churches in their understanding of the experiences of these women and explore the emotional and spiritual needs which Pentecostal churches might provide that are most

effective and supportive in its responsiveness to such women. It is hoped that the results of this study will serve as a foundation for a change to healthy practices within the Pentecostal denomination that promote the emotional and spiritual well-being of women members.

Four additional chapters will follow. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the history of Pentecostal churches, the general attitudes of Christian churches regarding abortion, unplanned pregnancy and reproductive rights and set the theological foundation for which the argument can be made that Pentecostal churches have a moral obligation to emotionally and spiritually support women who experience unplanned pregnancies and abortions. Chapter 3 is designed to introduce the methods upon which this study was developed and chronicles the journeys of the 4 participants who were members of Pentecostal churches during their contemplation and following their abortions. Finally, the shared stories of the participants will create the foundation in which the theory that Pentecostal churches do not emotionally or spiritually support such women is tested. Through the process of coding, themes are constructed, and concepts formulated. Chapter 4 further explores these themes and concepts, analyzing in greater detail the significance of the findings, including the consequences for women and the impact on Pentecostal churches. Lastly, this chapter will provide suggestions regarding strategies to best spiritually and emotionally support women who face unplanned pregnancies and the decision to abort. In Chapter 5, the research will provide an in-depth exploration of the outcomes of the study, including suggestions to promote healthy change within Pentecostal churches.

CHAPTER 2: FAITH AND ABORTION

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

—*Maya Angelou*

This chapter provides a brief overview of the history of the Pentecostal movement, presents Pentecostal churches’ positions on gender roles and women operating within the church, and broadly discusses the general attitudes of the Christian Church regarding abortion and reproductive rights. It will also offer a statistical overview of abortions in the United States and discuss the current political climate surrounding reproductive rights issues. Literature and research available on Pentecostal churches’ views regarding unplanned pregnancy and abortion will likewise be presented. Finally, the chapter will culminate in a biblical and theological argument for the emotional and spiritual support of women who have had abortions while members of Pentecostal churches.

History of Pentecostalism

Pentecostals comprise approximately 10 percent of the 18 percent of all Charismatic Christians reported in the United States (Pew Research 2009). Pentecostalism dates from 1867 with the beginning of the *Holiness Movement*. Its origins trace back to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, and the Holiness Movement, a campaign rooted in the belief that faith in Jesus Christ included sanctification from sin and transition into a holy or sacred lifestyle (Patheos 2009). Grounded in this same principle, Pentecostalism rose from this movement. Its arrival in the United States is most notably linked to the famous Azusa Street Revival of 1906, led by William Joseph

Seymour, and is said to have lasted for approximately three years (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center 2012).

Several other denominations which identify as Pentecostal emerged in the early 1900s and were also derived from the Holiness Movement. These include the Church of God, Church of God in Christ, and the Assemblies of God. Distinctions among these and other religious groups rooted in this belief include practicing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, the laying on of hands in prayer, miraculous healing, and full-immersion water baptism in the name of Jesus. However, no ritual demarcates the Pentecostal denomination more than the baptism of the Holy Spirit.⁴

Because of its Wesleyan influence, the Holiness Movement was actively involved in social justice, including compassionate care ministries, racial equality and women's suffrage (Robeck 2018). Women played significant roles in the formation of both the Holiness and Pentecostal Movements, assuming the roles of ministers, evangelists, pastors, and even bishops in their infancy (Robeck 2018). Seymour appointed many women to positions of rank in the early the Pentecostal Church, garnering much ridicule.⁵ In fact, Seymour, together with Florence Crawford, another highly visible and well-respected leader within the early Pentecostal movement, began missions and outreach work across the United States (Robeck 2018). Crawford later broke from Seymour in 1908 and established the Apostolic Faith Church in Portland Oregon. She later organized

⁴ The term for the infilling of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in a language unknown to the individual, as described in the book of Acts, chapter 2.

⁵ A disparaging cartoon drawing of the Azusa Street mission was depicted on the front page of the Los Angeles Evening News on July 23, 1906, ridiculing Seymour for what was viewed as a violation of Paul's command in 1 Cor. 14:34 regarding the silencing of women.

congregations in other parts of the United States, Scandinavia and East Africa (Robeck 2018).

Women, therefore, clearly played a defining role in early Pentecostal churches in the United States. What transpired to change the attitudes of spiritual leaders within the denomination from inclusivity and admiration, to subjugation? Robeck attributes this change in mindset to the absorption of the Pentecostal identity into the conservative, evangelical identity. He opines that the resistance to women clerics stems from pressures thrust upon younger men by their older, more traditional colleagues, influenced not by their Pentecostal roots, but by conservative evangelicals (Robeck 2018).

Regardless of the explanation, there has been a pronounced and steady shift toward patriarchy in Pentecostal churches, signaling a trajectory which clearly deviates from its early beginnings. Examining the early Christian Church may provide a clearer perspective.

Misogyny in the Christian Church

Throughout history, women have fought for rights equal to those of men. While praised for the ability to give life, women continue to be viewed as intellectually and socially inferior to men, valued less than men, and limited to the roles of wife, mother, and subordinate to men. Unfortunately, these characterizations have spilled into the Christian Church. As in the early years of Pentecostalism, this, too, was not always the case. In *Holy Misogyny: Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter*, April DeConick reminds the reader that when the Holy Spirit was gendered in the early works of the bible, it was characterized as female. This was likely because the word

spirit in both the Hebrew (*ruah*) and Aramaic (*ruha*) languages is feminine (DeConick 2011, 4-6). The *Holy Spirit* is also closely tied to another female personification—the Spirit of Wisdom. In Hebrew, *wisdom* is a grammatically feminine noun, just as it is in its Greek form, *sophia*. Wisdom is referred to in the feminine within the book of Proverbs.

While the early church might not have adopted misogynistic practices, interpretations of certain scriptures have certainly supported misogynistic views. In an article titled “Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Marginalisation⁶ of Women”, Rosinah Gabaitse suggests “[T]here is a link between the marginalisation of women and hermeneutical strategies such as literal readings and proof-texting⁷ of the Bible.” She attributes the subordination of women in Pentecostal churches to misinterpretation of the bible (Gabaitse 2015). An example of one such interpretation is below.

In the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians, Paul’s letter to the church of Corinth addresses order in the church, specifically, maintaining decorum during meetings and the silencing of women in assembly. This scripture has been one of several which have shaped views prohibiting women from serving in ministry. In the passage, Paul appears to prohibit women from speaking openly in church, advising that if they have questions, they should consult their husbands. According to this passage, Paul suggests that it is shameful for women to speak in public. This scripture has been the subject of much debate among theological scholars, particularly, for its abrupt placement between two seemingly unrelated passages of scripture. It also appears to be somewhat out of context, as the preceding and following passages in many historical manuscripts can be found in

⁶ The British spelling of *marginalization*.

⁷ The use of a particular biblical, or other scriptural passage to prove a particular doctrine or opinion; (in extended use) the use of any text to prove a specific point (Oxford Dictionary Online).

different locations. Lastly, the passage seems to contradict I Corinthians 11:5, where Paul previously mentions women praying and prophesying. DeConick, provides one explanation for this ambiguity. She asserts that many theologians argue with uncertainty about the placement of verses, explaining that “It is not uncommon in the New Testament manuscript tradition to find comments of the scribes written in the margin of the manuscripts as their own ruminations about whatever they were copying. It was a general practice of later scribes, when copying manuscripts that contained the marginal comment, to incorporate the comment into the main text of whatever they were copying, especially if they were uncertain about the origin of the gloss” (DeConick 2011, 53-73). DeConick’s account could very well provide an explanation as to why the above text seems so out of place. Gabaitse (2015) supports DeConick’s opinion that “[Women] occupy subordinate positions.... [T]he marginalization of Pentecostal women is due to a considerable extent, to the ways in which the Bible is read and interpreted within the Pentecostal tradition.” Another example of Gabaitse’s theory is found in I Timothy 2:11-15, which also is often taken out of context and used in the subordination of women. In this passage, Paul writes:

Let a woman learn in silence in all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

It is important to understand the context in which this passage was written. Paul’s purpose in writing this epistle was to encourage Timothy in his assignment to instruct the church of Ephesus. For Timothy, this proved to be an arduous task, as there were significant problems within this church, including numerous doctrinal errors in teaching. Paul provided Timothy with instruction to address the specific issues he faced with this

particular church. Rather than a global generalization of all women, it is likely that Paul is simply addressing a specific concern within the church of Ephesus. Regardless of his intent, some interpretations of Paul's words in this passage have been employed to subjugate women.

Theologians such as St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Martin Luther (1483-1546), have also contributed biblical text interpretations in support of the belief that women should be excluded from leadership positions and that they should maintain distinct gender roles within the Christian Church. For example, Augustine expressed that woman, absent man, is not created in the image of God. Augustine, who refers to women as "...the glory of man" wrote, "[B]ut, when she is referred separately to her quality of help-meet, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God...." Similarly, Martin Luther in his discourse on marriage and celibacy, makes his opinion of the role of women quite clear. Luther asserts "Men have broad and large chests, and small narrow hips, and more understanding than the women, who have but small and narrow breasts, and broad hips, to the end they should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children" (Luther 1483-1546). Luther later altered his opinions regarding women to that of equality. Some credit Luther's conversion to his wife Katharina von Bora, a runaway nun and reformist in her own right (Smith 1999). Luther himself attributed much of his success to Katharina, who was revered by religious scholars as one of the most prominent women of the sixteenth century (Smith 1999). Although Luther's beliefs about the gender roles and sexuality of women might have changed in his later years, his early patriarchal opinions greatly influenced sixteenth century Christian theology.

Historical perspectives and early attitudes about the roles of women in the Christian Church have greatly influenced modern day religious sects. Martin Luther and Augustine both adopt the attitude that women should remain silent, functioning in the roles of wives, mothers, help-meets and child-bearers for their husbands. Their voices contribute to adverse attitudes concerning abortion and reproductive rights among various religions.

Similar to the freedoms described by Robeck in early Holiness and Pentecostal movements and the gradual exclusion of women in leadership roles of the early Christian Church in the U.S., DeCormick (2011) provides an account of the political influence of Roman society on the suppression of women in the early church. DeCormick explains that women in the Christian churches of the second and third centuries, were granted certain freedoms. Whether single or married, Christian women during this period were known to minister alongside their brethren in the streets, attend meetings on their own and visit the incarcerated, all without restriction. However, in Roman society, these intimacies of public association shared between Christian men and women were considered indecent (DeConick 2011, 112). According to DeConick, there were only two trains of thought in traditional Roman society regarding women: The women were either confined to their homes and subject to the rule of their husbands, only venturing out of their homes with escorts and covering themselves while in public; or they were on public display and considered immoral (DeConick 2011, 13-14). There was no middle ground. Thus, Christian men began to view the liberties afforded women as a threat to the church, and allowing them to exercise those freedoms unencumbered, became a liability.

Additionally, rumors of sexual impropriety between Christian men and women began to circulate. Christian men went to great extremes, up to and including castration, in their efforts to dispel these rumors and demonstrate their aversion to sexual immorality.⁸ Likewise, churches encouraged Christian men and women to marry in order to freely operate as couples in ministry, also to dispel any rumors of impropriety. The men soon realized, however, that there was another, less extreme way to address the attack against their morality. If they could control the women by reestablishing the man's role as her head, there would be no need to subject themselves to such extreme measures (DeCormick 2011).

DeCormick cites influential Roman leaders such as Tertullian, Clement, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, who supported measures to control women, outwardly criticizing Christian churches for allowing women to operate in leadership roles. These Roman leaders, particularly Tertullian and Clement, moved to suppress the marriage bed advising, from their interpretation of Paul's writings, that sex in marriage was strictly for the purpose of procreation. Therefore, sexual expression and enjoyment, even in the marriage bed, was prohibited. Both women and men in some of the early Christian churches, were prohibited from exploring their sexuality or seeking sexual satisfaction and fulfillment, even in marriage.

Abortion Politics and Religion

It is not surprising that the early Christian church adopted an aversion to abortion, especially if sexual intercourse was only acceptable for proliferation of the human

⁸ Justin, *Apology* 1.29.2. Cf. Brown 1988: 140.

species. It is suggested that early Christians adopted the ethics of pagan moralists, specifically, Stoics, who disapproved of abortions based on the belief that abortions stifled procreation (Gorman 1982). Many stoics considered abortions an attack against sex, marriage, parents and perhaps the gods, but not the fetus. Christians were therefore distinguished from pagans because of their concern for and protection of the fetus (Gorman 1982, 77-78).

More recently, Christians have taken a more active and visible role in abortion politics. Religious groups became involved in abortion politics shortly after the Roe vs. Wade decision (Evans 2002). In 1976, representatives from both the Catholic and United Methodist Churches appeared before a Congressional Hearing regarding a constitutional amendment to overturn Roe vs. Wade. The Catholic Church diametrically opposed Roe vs. Wade, while the United Methodists assembled a coalition of Protestant denominations who advocated in support of the law (Evans 2002). Abortion and reproductive rights are key issues which polarize the political landscape in the United States.

In a study conducted by Pew Research (2009), one-third of Americans (32%) polled say their religious beliefs are the primary influence on their attitudes toward abortion. More than half of those who say abortion should be illegal (53%) also cite religious beliefs as the primary influence on their views (Pew Research 2009). According to this research, the majority of Americans (52%) say that having an abortion is morally wrong; however, there is a strong connection between views on whether abortion should be legal, and views on the morality of actually having an abortion. Of those who oppose abortion, 20% say that having an abortion is morally wrong and more than a quarter of

those who say abortion should be legal (28%), also believe that it is morally wrong to have one.⁹

A 2017 Gallop report on moral issues such as abortion, premarital sex, gays and lesbian relations and the death penalty, stated that respondents from the Pentecostal faith tradition were the most conservative on all issues measured, including abortion. According to those polled, 13% said that abortions were morally acceptable (Newport 2017). Given the time span involved in collecting this data (2001–2017), absolute percentages of those who found behaviors acceptable may have changed. A 10-country survey of Pentecostals conducted by Pew Research in 2009 support the 2017 Gallop findings, reporting that 64% of Pentecostals in the United States say that abortion can never be justified. The researchers define Pentecostal as a term used to describe individuals who belong to classic Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God or Church of God in Christ, having formed after the Azusa Street Revival of the 20th century (Pew Research 2009).

Religious traditions have indeed played a pivotal role in the abortion debate on both sides of the issue. Some have expressed moral outrage in this debate, especially regarding elective choice (Hindson & Dobson 1983; Falwell 1986), while others such as the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Assemblies of God have issued position statements that address when abortions are permissible (Hoffman & Johnson 2005). While I have discovered no evidence to suggest the existence of a unified position on abortion from a

⁹ Pew Research 2009

collaborative body of Pentecostals in the United States, The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada published a statement reflecting its official position. It reads:

Human life begins at conception. Human life is a continuum from the moment of conception to the moment of death. The only possible justification for the interruption of a pregnancy would be in the extremely rare situation in which an abortion is performed in order to save the life of the mother. Abortion performed for any other reason is the deliberate taking of human life and is equivalent to murder.

Given the preceding data regarding the attitudes concerning abortion among Pentecostals in Canada (Pew Research 2009), there is good reason to believe that most Pentecostals in the United States predominantly share the sentiments reflected in the position statement issued by the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

Though it may not be true of Pentecostals, as previously indicated, some religious denominations have embraced a more moderate approach to social and political issues. For example, the Presbyterian Church-USA, the United Methodist Church and the American Baptist Church have issued statements in the 1980s and 1990s opposing elective abortions. They did not, however, propose government prohibition of abortions, nor did they advocated to impose criminal penalties upon those who performed or sought abortions (Hoffmann & Johnson 2005). Similarly, the Religious Institute, a multifaith organization founded in 2001 to advocate for sexual, gender and reproductive health, education and justice, posted on their website the following statement concerning abortion: “Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child. We recognize tragic conflicts of life may justify abortion, and in such cases, we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures by certified medical providers.”

Clearly the topic of abortion is a complex and multi-faceted one. By listening to the voices of the four women who contributed to this research, I explored some of the complexities involved in their decisions to abort and the underlying Pentecostal practices that influenced those decisions. In order to fully comprehend the impact of those influences, it is essential to understand the extent to which women are immersed into the faith culture.

I am a legacy of Pentecostalism. Both of my parents were Pentecostal, as were my maternal grandparents. Our church was located on the same block as my maternal grandparents' home and because of its close proximity, we visited the church, either for services or socialization, almost every day. Church was the source of my spiritual consciousness and its members were my community. As a youth, my friends and I conformed to the traditions of the church. We did not question the practices, we simply obeyed the teachings of our mothers and other women in the church, who were our mentors. We were extremely vulnerable to suggestion and hung on every word they said. These women served as ushers, hostesses, cooks, missionaries and in rare instances, evangelists, while the men preached sermons and led conferences. This didn't seem odd or unusual, as this was our collective norm. The members all looked to our pastor for counseling, advice and spiritual guidance, and his word was sovereign. Although not as obvious to us then, it is apparent now that the men of the church, ruled the church. In addition to the pastor, the deacons were responsible for order and the operations of the church, while trustees like my father, managed the church finances. My mother was the church secretary. I did not realize until I became an adult, that many of these practices were misogynistic and oppressive.

As a youth and well into adulthood, I did not truly comprehend the depth of our vulnerability. We were susceptible to the influences of those in leadership, including our parents, whom we trusted. We were taught to “obey those who rule over you,”¹⁰ giving no thought to whether we were receiving ethical treatment from those who ruled. In most instances, we obeyed mindlessly, believing that if we did not, we would be hell-bound. As young girls and later, young women, we were not aware of the underlying dynamics of power and control and even today, misogyny is so prevalent in the church that women often miss it. When we do recognize it, we are frequently dismissive.

Theological Framework

Why should Pentecostal churches be concerned about its treatment of women? As Marc Dupont maintains in his book *Toxic Churches*, in part, because unhealthy churches lean toward legalism¹¹ as a means of control, and ritual practices in unhealthy churches are built on legalism. According to Dupont, legalism leads to emotional pain and oppression. He asserts that despite preaching the gospel of Grace, oppressive rules and rituals take precedence over the gospel of Grace and Jesus’ accomplishments at Calvary. He indicates that Jesus died so that we could experience a relationship and intimacy with God and that eventually, those who are victims of oppression turn away from the presence of God (Dupont 2004). Legalism and oppressive practices are harmful to the church because they stifle an individual’s relationship with God, thus nullifying Jesus’ accomplishments on the cross (Dupont 2004, 122-123). Through the shedding of His

¹⁰ Taken from Roman 13:1-10.

¹¹ The tendency to place laws above the gospel, creating rules that lead to salvation rather than it being freely given by grace through faith.

blood, we are no longer responsible for the *inadequacy of insular responses*,¹² but rather yield to God's Grace and look to Jesus for our salvation. Jesus, through his actions, teaches his disciples to walk in compassion, free from judgment. Evidence of his teaching much of the time reflect his loving nature and extension of grace. One excellent illustration of his mercy and compassion is found in John 4, the story of the Samaritan woman.

In this story, Jesus, after having left Judea and weary from his journey, takes refuge by a well in the Samaritan town of Sychar. As a Samaritan woman arrives to draw water from the well, Jesus greets her and requests that she give him a drink of water from the well. The woman, realizing that he is Jewish, responds to Jesus in astonishment, asking how he, being a Jew, could speak to her, a Samaritan. A controversial dialogue then begins between Jesus and the woman. In her commentary on this passage, Gail O'Day explains the significance of the rivalry between Jews and Samaritans.¹³ O'Day states, "[T]he most intense rivalry [between the Jews and the Samaritans] began about 300 B.C." (1992).¹⁴ According to her commentary, the Samaritans' shrine built on Mt. Gerizim, competed with the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.¹⁵ The Samaritan woman, well aware of the rivalry, knew that Jesus could not accept water from her, nor should he as a rabbi, speak with her in public. Jesus is breaking several protocols. The woman finds herself in a position of vulnerability. She is opening herself to scorn and possibly

¹² This phrase was inspired by Dr. Traci West in her book titled *Solidarity and Defiant Spirituality: Africana Lessons on Religion, Racism and Ending Gender Violence* (2019), from Part I. A Thirst for Truth-Telling: From the United States to Ghana, Section 1. Constricted Religious Responses, pg. 42.

¹³ From *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Newsom & Ringe, eds., Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1992, pg. 295-296

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

punishment for holding a conversation with a Jew. As O'Day reveals, Jesus, however, is challenging the status quo. First, as a Jewish rabbi, he engages in friendly conversation with the woman, which is forbidden. This particular woman is of Samaritan descent. Also forbidden. Finally, he is willing to accept water from her vessel, which is likewise forbidden.

The dialogue continues with Jesus responding to the woman by informing her of his identity: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." As he reveals himself, Jesus too, becomes vulnerable. Stephen Moore, in his discourse on the subject, believes the relationship between Jesus and the Samaritan woman to be reciprocal, suggesting that both need something from the other (Moore 1993, 207-229). I concur. As Jesus reveals himself, he needs this woman to accept him as the Messiah, for whom she has been waiting. Equally, the woman needs Jesus to accept her, as she is likely the victim of injustice and is perceived by many, as immoral. The latter is also the way in which many interpret this passage. If we envision this encounter as one of reciprocity, we understand why Jesus says to her, "You have said well, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that, you spoke truly." Jesus is revealing his power and relaying to the woman that he acknowledges and understands her situation.

The text does not fully divulge the woman's plight, nor the circumstances in which she finds herself with six husbands. Though there is no indication of this fact in the text, traditionally she is assumed to be of ill repute (O'Day 1992). Yet, during this period, women could not seek divorce on their own, so likely, her situation was not of her own

making (Gorman 1982). In *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, Traci West provides insight into gender roles and class during the Greco-Roman era (2006), the time in which this passage took place. West writes,

For instance, in the household, the central unit of organization for their society, women's lives were restricted on the bases of gender. In general, women were subject to the control of men. In the family, daughters were subject to their fathers, wives to their husbands, fatherless daughters to their father's male relatives, widows to their own sons. Female slaves were subject to their master, including the daughters of their masters. Slave women were thus subject to the authority of women as well as men.

DeConick adds to West's argument. She ponders whether Jesus was aware of divorce laws and the potential abuse the law afforded husbands (2011). She speaks to the vulnerability of the women in marriage, advising that there were few options for women once their husbands divorced them (DeConick 2011, 46). Perhaps a more accurate and historically sound argument for the interaction is that Jesus, showing compassion and concern for the circumstances in which the Samaritan woman finds herself, responds by acknowledging that he is aware of her situation, and therefore, "You have had five husbands..." is not an indictment or a means of shaming her, but rather an act of acknowledging that he sees and knows her intimately. Perhaps Jesus is expressing to her that he accepts her as she is, free from judgment. Moreover, he extends to her grace, offering her the same opportunity he would afford his own people—the opportunity to experience the "living water" that only he could provide. He invites her to know him more intimately, as a man who values her and will treat her with the respect and dignity she deserves, and desires. Her response is one of faith and courage. Although it may be to her peril, she continues to engage Jesus until she receives the answers that she realizes

only he can provide. Through this mutual act of vulnerability, the Samaritan woman discovers Jesus.

Just as the Samaritan women, assumptions have been made about the women in this study, and just as the Samaritan woman, the participants in this study are women of faith, speaking out boldly and courageously. If he were embodied in flesh today, Jesus would extend to each of these women the same compassion and grace given to the Samaritan woman. Are Christians not the students of his teaching? Should we not, by example, extend grace to these women and others who find themselves in situations where they face unplanned pregnancies and have abortions?

Jesus calls for his disciples to follow his example as students of his teachings. To break tradition and look past our assumptions to discover truth in every situation. In *To Know as We Are Known*, Parker Palmer writes of the spirituality of education. Written from a Christian viewpoint, Palmer asserts that in order to operate in truth and understanding, the roles of student and teacher must often reverse (1993). He emphasizes that in any learning experience, there are three involved parties: the teacher, the student and the subject itself. He advises that the voice of the subject must speak its own truth. Palmer writes, “To practice obedience to truth we must strain to hear what the subject is saying about itself beyond all our interpretations....” Palmer here asks the student to engage the subject in dialogue, speak for the subject, respond to the subject and listen to the voice of the subject for counter-responses. In doing so, one becomes rich in spirit, more compassionate and operates with a better understanding of the world and those around them (Palmer 1993).

In chapter 3, I will introduce the women of the study. I ask the reader, as Palmer suggests, to insert themselves into the stories of these women, not merely as distant observers, but as active components, sharing a participatory role. View these women from the perspective of Jesus. How would Jesus interpret their circumstances? To whom would Jesus hold responsible for considering the emotional and spiritual well-being of the women? Knowing him, what would be Jesus' response to those who subject women to unequal treatment governed by rules and standards imposed on only women which lead to shame, judgment and condemnation? And then, as Palmer suggests, write the continuation of their stories from the perspective of the subject: ethical church responses. What would be the desired ethical responses? How and by whom would they be executed? I am confident that this level of contemplation will stimulate conversations among Pentecostal churches that will produce compassionate, ethical responses to women who face unplanned pregnancies and contemplate or choose abortions.

CHAPTER 3: THE WOMEN AND THEIR VOICES

And they overcame by the Blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.

Rev. 12:11

This chapter introduces the research method for this study, which explores the hypothesis that Pentecostal churches have not historically provided support to women during contemplation or following abortion. Listening to the voices of four women who have self-identified as Alexis, Becky, Sheila and Susan, I will analyze their responses to determine whether this hypothesis holds true. If so, I will determine the emotional and spiritual supports needed to assist these and other women contemplating abortion or following their decision to abort.

Method

For this study, the *Qualitative Ethnographic* research method was employed. *Qualitative* design refers to “[A]ny kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.” (Strauss & Corbin 1990). *Ethnography* is a way of studying individuals within their social context. Broadly defined, it is “[A] way of immersing oneself in the life of a people in order to learn something about and from them.” (Moschella 2008, 25) As a pastoral practice, “[It] involves opening your eyes and ears to understand the ways in which they [people] practice their faith.” (Moschella 2008, 4) Qualitative ethnographic research therefore relies on lived experiences. I utilized this method, as it allows for deeper exploration of

my research questions by permitting participants to share their unique stories without restraint. As a result, I was able to capture statements germane to the research that may have otherwise gone unspoken. *Coding*, a method used in research to analyze data (Guetterman 2016), was applied line-by-line during the transcription of the interviews to identify concomitant themes within the texts of participant responses. In qualitative research, a code “[Is] most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” (Saldaña 2009) In this instance, the data was drawn from interview transcripts. The themes associated with the codes were compiled to develop overarching concepts and finally, a theory, which can be utilized as the framework for future research. This traditional approach used in qualitative analysis is known as *Grounded Theory* (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

Participants

Four (4) women between the ages of 24 and 55, were interviewed either in person or by phone. All interviews were recorded and conducted free of intimidation or coercion in a quiet and intimate location free of distractions, in which the participants advised they felt comfortable. In an effort to avoid retraumatization, it was imperative that the women were at least 2 years beyond the time in which pregnancies were terminated. To preserve validity, it was established that all participants were members of Pentecostal churches at the time in which they terminated their pregnancies.

As I noted in Chapter 1, the participants were recruited utilizing *snowball sampling*, a technique where existing research subjects recruit other subjects from among their acquaintances. This sampling technique is often used when the population from which

the subjects are drawn might be difficult to approach. Interestingly, only two of the participants are actual acquaintances and none were aware of the others' involvement. Additionally, the participants were not involved in project analysis or editing, and they provided no input in the project other than providing their respective stories.

All who participated were also asked to complete the "Informed Consent Form" (Appendix B) describing the project, including the type of research being conducted, their role in the research, the expected outcomes, and the name and contact information of the researcher, advisor and Drew University Internal Review Board. Additionally, the consent form advised participants of the confidential and voluntary nature of the research, the importance of maintaining their anonymity, that their participation was completely voluntary, and that if at any time they felt uncomfortable, they could immediately terminate the interview.

Finally, four (4) ecclesiastical leaders from various religious denominations and organizations including Pentecostal churches were interviewed to explore support programs and ministries designed for women who have contemplated or decided to have abortions, investigate their efficacy and determine best practices for ministry with this specific population. Leaders were identified through existing networks of Pentecostal pastors already interested in faith and reproductive choice issues as well as organizations such as the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. These individuals were also informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and that unless requested, their names, positions and organizations would be disclosed in the study.

Ethical Considerations

The Belmont Report (Department of Health Education and Welfare 1979) was reviewed and this study was conducted following the guidelines for research involving human subjects as outlined: respect for persons, beneficence and justice. Per the document, the three primary areas of application—consent, assessment of risks and benefits, and selection of subjects—were followed.

Emails were sent to each of the women prior to interviews welcoming them to the study and confirming dates, times and locations for interviews. The ‘Informed Consent Forms’ were attached to the emails as documents and participants were required to return them signed and dated before the interviews were held. Confidentiality and anonymity were stressed. If per chance confidentiality were breached, there could potentially be social stigmas ascribed to the women, particularly in church circles.

There were, moreover, no physical risks associated with this research. However, due to the sensitive subject matter, participants might have felt uncomfortable, as questions could have prompted difficult spiritual, emotional and/or psychological responses or invoked painful memories. For this reason, clergy were available to provide Pastoral Counseling if needed. As a licensed Social Worker through the State of Michigan, I monitored the participants for distress and encouraged them to report to me any discomfort felt during the interviews. Finally, counseling and mental health service referrals were given to each participant immediately following the interview (Appendix F). Through the “Informed Consent Forms” (Appendix B), participants were apprised of the voluntary and confidential nature of the interview. Additionally, participants were advised that if at any time they felt uncomfortable, they could immediately terminate the

interview. At the conclusion of the interview, I provided each participant with de-briefing forms, which included counseling and family planning services, hospital locations and health education resources.

It is also important to note that only qualitative data was collected. No identifying data was requested from the participants nor gathered for use during the process. However, for research purposes, participants were asked to divulge their age, race/ethnicity, education, the industry in which they were employed (if applicable), marital status and religious affiliation. Accordingly, pseudonyms were used rather than actual names to preserve anonymity. There is the possibility that this study will be published, or that in the future, I or other researchers will refer to it in published writings. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms. I have also altered some identifying details within the narratives in order to further obscure the identity of the participants.

The participants were advised that they would be recorded prior to the interview and that all files, including audio recordings and my written notes from the interviews, would be destroyed upon the approval and submission of the completed project. Again, participation in the study was strictly voluntary. None of the participants received monetary or any other form of compensation.

Data Collection

The women were asked a series of open-ended questions and as necessary, individually adapted follow-up questions for the purpose of clarification. The length of the interviews ranged from 19 to 72 minutes, with an average duration of 47 minutes. Each participant was informed that the interview would be recorded and given this

information, asked if they were comfortable to proceed. The recordings began when the woman felt comfortable and concluded when she voiced that she had nothing more to contribute.

Research Questions

I relied on the following four (4) foundational questions to build my theoretical framework and guide my inquiry during interviews:

1. What are the spiritual, ethical and intellectual criteria upon which these four (4) women based their decision to abort?
2. What is the nature of their contemplative experience?
3. How can Pentecostal churches compassionately and respectfully fulfill its obligation to support women who contemplate or choose an abortion?
4. How can Pentecostal churches be responsive to the range of spiritual needs women articulate and what kinds of resources enable them to do so?

The following six (6) questions were suitable in answering the foundational questions and were explored with each participant during their interviews:

1. How did your church shape your perception or beliefs about women, your body and unplanned pregnancies?
2. Describe the circumstances surrounding your decision to abort?
3. What were your spiritual and emotional needs during your contemplation of abortion and following the procedure? Were any of these needs met by Pentecostal churches?
4. What emotional and spiritual resources do you wish you'd had?

5. What were the hinderances to receiving the support you required?
6. Where, if at all, did you recognize God during your journey?

The Voices of the Women

Alexis

I have been a member of the Pentecostal church from the womb. My parents were members of the church. The majority of my life, we attended a very strict church where we were told what was right from wrong, but not really explained why we could or could not do those things. The majority of the church were women, so it was normal for us to live a certain lifestyle. If we weren't working, we were supposed to do the cooking, cleaning and taking care of the kids, while the men worked. That was the role of women. I've been married for 4 years and in the beginning [of the marriage], I had this idea that I was supposed to cook and clean, and that he was supposed to work and thought I had to stay in that role. Later, I decided that it wasn't biblical.

Unplanned pregnancies were a big thing at my former church. We were told that our bodies belonged to God until we got married. The message was that if you did get married and you weren't a virgin, you weren't pure. Even if you abstained prior to getting married, you weren't pure when you got married because you weren't a virgin. You did not have sex before marriage and if you did, there was this thing called *silencing*. The rest of the church couldn't talk to you. You couldn't engage in ministry or [church] activities. If you confessed that you were pregnant, you were sat down for the entire pregnancy and even afterwards—for as long as the pastor decided. You had to wait to be released [to serve in the church again] by the pastor. You also had to confess [that you were pregnant]

in front of the entire congregation. I don't ever remember the man having to come forward like the woman. I assume it's because the woman's sin was more visible.

I was 19 years old when I decided to have an abortion. At 18, I got pregnant and had a son who was about a year and a half when I got pregnant again. I was just getting into the swing of caring for him, working, realizing that he was my responsibility. Growing up, I watched my mother take care of all my nieces and nephews when my other sisters had babies before marriage. I decided that I didn't want her to have to do that. So, when I found out I was pregnant again, I knew that I was in no shape to even fully take care of myself and my son. How could I bring another child into the world and why would I, knowing that we were all just going to struggle. At the time, we began attending another [Pentecostal] church that was much more relaxed and laid back than the former church—the church I grew up at—but the rules and the things we were taught at my old church still haunted me.

During the time I was making the decision [to abort], I was still praying and telling the Lord, “If you feel like I can handle this and everything's going to be okay, then I won't do it.” Even up until I had the procedure, I was still praying. There was a sense of peace that actually came over me about it. So much so, that even the night before I did it, I remember my mom telling me that we were going to figure it out and that she'd help me, but I believe God had [already] given me peace about it.

When I made the decision [to abort], I only told one person—my sister. My mom found out and it was really bad. She was not supportive at all. Even afterwards, I was never told that she loved me anyway. I pretty much had to deal with it by myself with my sister. By my mom not supporting me at all, it made me feel like nobody would. I

remember we got into an argument some time afterward. It was just a random argument at our house. I can't even remember what it was about. My younger siblings were there and I will never forget her saying to me in front of them, "Well who pays for the insurance that would allow you to get that abortion." I will never forget that. It made me feel like, wow, well if my own mother isn't going to accept something that I felt like I had to do, why would I go tell anybody else. After I had the procedure, I couldn't even go home. I was worried about how my mom would treat me. I was feeling a lot of shame.

I hadn't talked to my current pastor at the time. Because all of those teachings from my former church, I pulled back from every ministry. I even pulled back from certain church friends because I felt dirty. I felt like I had really done this horrible thing. At the same time, I felt it was something that I didn't have a choice in doing. I couldn't handle two children. I really just needed to know that I was still loved by God. That it was okay. That He'd understood. Certainly afterwards, I needed to know that. It haunted me for a while. I still think about it from time to time. After I got married, I went through a really bad miscarriage before I had my second son. A voice in my head told me "This is what happens when you get an abortion." I was beating myself up thinking that I was never going to be able to have [more] kids because I did this one thing that I thought was the best option for me at the time. I had a mentor back then and I did eventually tell her. She later told me everything that I wanted my mom to say to me. Years later, I also told my current pastor, but because I was so scared about what was going to be done to me, for years I stayed to myself and didn't engage in any ministries. It really hurt me.

I wish I would have had counseling. I went to planned parenthood and that was okay, but I really needed spiritual counseling. That would have made the process better

for me. I think that's what we're lacking. No one is educated in counseling in the church. We need to have some licensed psychologists and therapists. I think the biggest thing that I wish I could have done earlier was to deal with the guilt and the shame. I wished I would have reached out to my mentor and new pastor earlier. When I did finally speak with my pastor, he told me that [my abortion] was between me and God. I think that had I heard that earlier, it would have stopped my guilt and shame. I could have been growing more in Christ had I not shut down for all those years.

Becky

I have been a member of Pentecostal churches for 30 years. I was 24 when I joined. The church shaped my image of myself by tapping into my feminine side. I grew up Baptist and they weren't as strict. There weren't a lot of does and don'ts. I could wear pants, jewelry. You couldn't wear pants, sweats or any male looking attire. I was a tomboy and really didn't like to wear dresses at all, but after I got saved, baptized in Jesus' Name and filled with the Holy Spirit, I had to purchase dresses and even purses. I never carried a purse.

The church absolutely had specific ideas about sexuality. It was like you're saved now, so no sex before marriage, no unplanned pregnancies, no drugs, no this, no that... They were very rigid, very strict. It was almost like having a set of very strict parents. There were rules at home, but it wasn't like at the church. That was a totally different experience. You can't do this, you can't do that. [As a Baptist] it was nothing to pull up in front of the church and see someone smoking. We used to smoke and drink and party and still come to church on Sunday. We had communion every first Sunday. But my husband grew up as a staunch Pentecostal, so on New Year's Eve, they had foot washing

and communion service. At this particular time, he was really into the church and I was not at all! I remember one New Year's when we were dating. He told me that he was going to church for communion and foot washing. I said that I'd like to go with him and he said "No, you can't take communion if you don't confess all your sins." That's what I'm saying...it was very rigid. I couldn't understand that because we had communion every first Sunday at the Baptist church. The rules weren't as rigid. His grandfather was Pastor at the time and he would say to the people [before communion], "Some of you might need to go into the office and confess before we partake of the blood and body of Jesus Christ." The people would start lining up. It was almost like a death sentence if you didn't confess before taking communion. At least that's what I was told, since I couldn't take communion at the time. Once I got saved, then I was clear to go!

The day that I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I left the home where I'd received it and went to the church that I had been attending. In my excitement, I had on pants. Even though they were excited for me, the attitude was "Okay, we're glad sister, but make sure the next time you come into the house of God, you dress appropriately." So that was like a turning point in my life, I was reminded by those women that you put on a dress. You put on stockings. You don't wear nail polish. You don't wear earrings... "Women don't wear men's clothing," they said. You don't want to offend a brother, or make a brother go into a lustful state because you're looking a certain way. You don't want to be a stumbling block to one of our brethren by coming into the church dressed loosely.

I had two abortions while I was in Pentecostal churches. One was my first child and the other was my last. The first was within the year I'd just gotten saved. I was 25.

My boyfriend (now my husband) and I started dating and in the Fall of that year, I got pregnant. For one, I'd become active in the church. I began directing the choir and teaching Christian Education, which I felt were my strongest places of power. Of course, I didn't want to damage that. I already knew the church would not be accepting of it at all. I would have had to sit down. I wouldn't have been able to direct or teach and would have experienced the shame of being "the new girl" who was rough around the edges. Then, my mother was telling me that I wasn't married and I didn't even know if we were going to get married. "You don't have health insurance and you don't have the income," she said. "It's just not a good time right now, so it might be just best that you do that [abort]." Both times, I wasn't okay with it. I always did what somebody else wanted and they had influence over me. I'm still dealing with it all these years later.

The second time was in 2004, and that child would have been 13 or 14. It's funny that you don't forget when they should have been here. You always remember. That time, my husband and I felt like we were too old to have more kids. Again, he had influence. First it's my mom and church, and now it's my husband, but it couldn't have happened without my consent. I don't blame anyone. I had a choice to follow through with it. That [decision] also affected a later decision when my own child got pregnant. She, too, felt it wasn't right to terminate her child, but she was influenced by me, my husband and my father. I regret standing with my husband and my dad. Mentally, she wasn't as able to handle it like I was. I'm a little tough. My daughter is a little different. I regret that [my feelings] spilled over onto my child and her seed. If you're not careful, if you're not completely delivered (healed) of your own [issues]. That's what I did and I have regrets. I should have a 2 month-old grandbaby right now and I don't. I won't

forget it and she won't forget it. There are two children and a grandchild that are gone at my hands.

We suffer in silence. We can't share it, we can't tell anybody about it. I couldn't talk to my Pastor about it and I'm sure my daughter can't either. They're the ones who have the power in church. Although they [Pastors] say that the Lord anoints you—that your gifts come without repentance, yet those human beings hold in their hand the ability for you to function or not function within the body of Christ. They can put the finger on your ministry until *they* decide you're remorseful or repentant. They also believe that they're the only ones that hear from God concerning you. You could not have made a mistake like that and hear from God! Yet, God heard our cries and forgave us of our sins, but your pastor, and the board of elders, and the board of deacons literally make you stand in front of the church and proclaim that you're having a baby. Nobody asked where the father was. It was always the woman who had to live with the shame of it. It could have been rape, incest, coercion—nobody brings the male. They always focus on the female, who alone has to deal with the shame. I think that's the biggest thing—dealing with the shame. You're ashamed and nobody knows. Usually, you're ashamed when you're exposed, but there's a spirit of self-shame that comes over you. It's the secret that you can never disclose. One that only you and momma know about, or only you and your husband or boyfriend know about, or only you know about. You sit in that clinic and see all those other women. Some are young, some are old. Some have plenty of money and some seem like they're spending their last dime. Financial status is not a factor. Who do you seek out for help? The people who encourage you to have the baby and rebuke you if you don't, have no solution. The church certainly has no solution.

It took me years to confess it. I had held it in for so long. I'd begun to serve in a leadership capacity at my church at the time and I was convicted in my spirit that until I confessed the thing, I really couldn't be free. The spirit of condemnation and shame was always something that made me feel very convicted. At the time—almost 20 years later and after the second abortion in around 2006—I was working very closely with my pastor's wife and I was able to share it with her. I can honestly say that if there was a place that I found God in all of it, it was when I finally found that person that I could share it with and it was okay [emotionally]. We prayed and fasted about it and nothing changed in our relationship or my ministry. I finally found a safe place after all those years. That was the first time I had ever told anybody outside of my husband and my parents. It took almost 20 years before I felt safe and comfortable enough to talk to somebody in the church. I will never forget that day. Once I confessed that to the Pastor's wife, it was like a load lifted. I will never forget when and where it happened. It was like a brick wall fell off my chest. I felt so free. However, I wasn't free enough to teach a Sunday school and say that I had had an abortion. I couldn't freely incorporate that into my lesson—to help the one out of four sitting in my class, who may need healing. I thought I'd be shut down.

There's no safe place you can go and not be judged. We can't come out and talk about it. I wish I'd had a support system. I wish I had people who weren't closeted. Just as gays and lesbians have been closeted for years, we're closeted. I have a very close friend that I would never tell that I made the decision. She is very conservative and I know she'd judge me. It is like no, you made a decision. You're a killer. You're a murderer. Or you get a lecture about your ungodly decision. The church could at least

acknowledge that 1 out of 4 women have had abortions. It's there, in the pews, and they need support—WE need support. Someone with clinical experience—even to help women who contemplate making that decision. We don't have or utilize professionals in the church who are willing to provide counseling services. The Pastors aren't professionals. The person needing the help still comes out of the counseling session with the Pastor feeling condemned. Some kind of way, you still come out of the office feeling condemned!

I really think pastors are a little intimidated by the professional people. So, they tend to focus on the disenfranchised because their easy to catch. The prostitute or the drug addict. They're looking for hope. There seems to be economic disparity between who we think needs the gospel and who doesn't. We need more than just musicians in the church. We need doctors, dentists, lawyers, psychologists—all of them need to be baptized in Jesus' Name and filled with the Holy Spirit and bring all that knowledge right into the house of God! Then when we have a problem, we can be referred right in the church to members that can assist—in confidentiality.

I attend a church now where if I chose to disclose my story, expose to people who I am, I think I'd be okay. Now, the only hindrance to revealing my story is me. I can reach ladies that have had abortions at 25 and at 42. My story had nothing to do with the stereotype of being on welfare, having 7 babies with 5 different fathers. This is my testimony—my story, and I am not apologetic about it. The bible lets us know that we overcame sin by the Blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. All through the bible, people were introduced to Christ by giving their testimony. Paul would always tell HIS testimony, not a manufactured one. They took ownership of their own stories and

THAT'S why we go through these things. So that we can help somebody else. I, too, have a testimony and can help somebody else.

Sheila

I was 13 when we joined Pentecostal churches. The church very much shaped my beliefs about women by the messages that I heard. Women were born to marry, give birth and take care of the home. That was a women's role. To be beside her man, to be there for her husband. We were taught how to sit and walk properly as ladies... I came from a family of lots of Pentecostals, so at an early age, we actually had an etiquette class that we had to go through. At church, we were taught about our appearance—how to properly dress and how to carry yourself. I had a very unique situation. My mother was a registered nurse. She was very open about discussing our bodies, about sex and intimacy. I had different teaching in my home than what other kids in the church were exposed to. My mother would give what we called “the weekly seminar.” She would give us assignments and tell us to go ask our friends what they knew about sex. We would bring in our lists of responses from our friends and she would do this thing called “facts and myths.” I will never forget this one girl told me that you couldn't get pregnant if you had sex standing up. I thought that was the dumbest thing I'd ever heard. I put that on my list.

During the sessions, my mother explained to us how our vagina was shaped, how it was connected to other female organs, how it was designed to give pleasure. She explained your body parts, his body parts. It was a full-fledged education! I remember thinking it was very gross. I remember her saying to me “Well, after you have experienced [oral sex], tell me what you think about it for real.” My mother was very

open. My sister called her an “over-sharer”, but she simply didn’t want us to be ignorant about our bodies. I had a wealth of knowledge that my friends didn’t.

In church, we were taught that you were not supposed to have sex before you got married and if you did, you were to confess it. You had to go to the pastor, have a conversation and tell what you did. In some instances, they would even have you stand before the congregation and tell what you did—openly confess your sins! Having a baby out of wedlock was totally out of the question, but if you did get pregnant, you were expected to have the baby. Now, when you had a baby out of wedlock, you didn’t get a baby shower. People might give you stuff, because they didn’t want to honor the fact that you’d done it the wrong way. It was a sin to have a baby out of wedlock and it was more of a sin to commit murder by having an abortion or not bringing the baby to term unless there was something [medically] that happened to you.

I was away in college, I think 19 or 20, probably. I went away for a summer program in Mississippi that prepared you for graduate school. I was attending this church and witnessing and worshiping with them, but I was also hanging out with my dormmate. Really hanging out! That’s when I first started having sex and realized it was pretty good! Back at that time, there was no Aids discussion or anything like that. I knew I was pregnant before I left the program. My roommate encouraged me to have the baby and I knew I wasn’t going to have it. All I could think of is that if I had a baby, my life was over. I would be stuck in [my small town] for the rest of my life, fail college and that could NOT be my story. I thought I was being punished by God for having sex. All I thought about was that I’d condemned myself to a life a poverty. Many people that I knew that had babies didn’t end well. They didn’t finish college. They were saddled in

low-end jobs. That is what I felt would have been the outcome of my life. I wanted a chance to become somebody.

I remember that all of my friends were getting married. I knew that most of them were just getting married to leave home. One day I was at the alter crying my eyes out. Our pastor's wife at the time asked me what was wrong. I told her "I don't want to be married. I want to be somebody." She told me that nobody was going to make me get married. If you don't want to get married, you don't have to get married. That was the most liberating thing that I had heard, because in my circle, you were supposed to get married, then have a family. Your greatest hope was that he [your husband] would be in the ministry, so that you could be called "sister" or "mother" or something like that. That was NOT what I wanted. My town was a beautiful place. I wasn't abused, but it wasn't a happy time. When I go back home, I am happy to see everybody, but there is that poor mentality. I never wanted that to be my story. My father was abusive and had a bad reputation as being dangerous. By the time I came along, they were separated, so when I went off to college, I saw it as a chance to reinvent myself. An opportunity to leave my past behind.

The guy I got pregnant by told me not to call him or his family if I had the baby. I asked him if he was insane! We were just having fun! I wasn't having a baby! So, I told my mother that I was going to visit my cousin and while there, I called the doctor and told him I wanted an abortion. I had it on my way home, paid for it, stayed with my cousin and then took my little secret home with me. But, when I got home, my mother knew. She never came out and said so, but she told me she'd been in prayer and the Lord showed her that I needed to be very careful. I bargained with God. If he allowed me to

get through it, if he forgave me, I understood that I would never be able to have kids. Later, when I was told that I could conceive, but that I'd never be able to bring a child to term, I felt that it was because I had that abortion. I felt that it was a punishment—that since I'd had the abortion, I gave up my right to have a child.

Several years after that, I got engaged and my fiancé wanted children. That didn't work out. A lot of things were happening and it was very devastating for me. I had always had gynecological problems. I had to have surgery for endometriosis and the doctors told me that they didn't know if I could even get pregnant. When I was born, surgery was performed on both me and my mother to save my life. It caused my ability to conceive questionable. I had a hysterectomy at age 31, which was a very young age. I always thought that because of the abortion, this was a part of the punishment. Now, I realize that it didn't make much sense to think that way, because I'd always had debilitating, painful periods even before the abortion.

I felt extreme guilt. I was upset with myself because I could have used a condom, I could have been on pills. I mean, I knew I was having sex. So when they told me I probably wouldn't be able to carry a baby to term, I thought, "Did I have the abortion for nothing? Would it have even lived if I had it?" When you're young, you do stupid stuff. What was interesting is that I knew it was wrong, but I knew I was going to do it anyway. I did not talk to anybody who was saved. I only talked to people who were unsaved. I didn't want the judgment. I'll give you an example. I was talking to my girlfriend [from church] today and she asked me how my boyfriend was doing. I told her fine and that we would probably be getting married. She asked "Well, is he saved?" I thought, "Here we go." She told me that she was going to pray for me because that just wasn't right. I

remember coming home after I'd pledged [a sorority] and I had on a pair of pants. They went into circle prayer because I had on a pair of jeans! Can you imagine me telling those jokers, "Hey, I'm thinking about having an abortion?" They would've had a hard time getting past me having premarital sex!

It took me a good 20 years before I could even talk about it with saved folks. I talked about it, but just not with people in the church. Now, I'm an open book. I remember we had a program for young people and we were riding together in the car. One of the girls was pregnant and she said to me, "My momma doesn't believe in abortions, so we had to have the baby. Sis. Sheila, I don't want to hear judgment. You don't know what it's like." I told her, "Baby, you'll never hear me tell you anything about having an abortion. I had one." Everybody in the car just stop talking! They were done! They just decided to pretend that I hadn't said what I said! It does not bother me like it did when I had it. It is a part of my story. It's like you read a book and there are many chapters. Some chapters are better than others, but it's got to be written. It's a part of my story. It's who I am. Interestingly, I was talking with a group of friends of mine not too long ago and when we had finished the conversation, 4 out of the 5 of us had an abortion in college.

I honestly don't know what I would have needed from Pentecostal churches. There are many different organizations within Pentecostal churches, but the PAW [Pentecostal Assemblies of the World] was the one that I grew up in and they've always been judgmental. There is so much shame that comes with abortion in our church. There seems to be an overwhelming need to condemn. They're already condemned. There is nothing that they haven't already condemned themselves for.

I cannot imagine who at that time would have given me understanding. I know that I had lots of people that I could go to, but I did not want the judgment. I didn't want to hear, "Let me pray for you." And, I didn't think I was worthy of the prayers and I didn't think the prayers were going to be about forgiveness. I wish I had of been in a position to accept forgiveness. I grew up in church where there was a lot of hell and brimstone. They are just getting to the place where they talk about love. God loved me into fellowship and when I had my abortion, I am not sure that my church knew how to love me back into fellowship. My engagement didn't work out and I was drowning in guilt. I had been seeing somebody, but I still wasn't well. Little things would take me into a crying fit and if you know me, I'm not a crier. I realized that I had to get a handle on my emotions. I was supposed to get married and didn't. He wanted children and I had to come to the realization that I wasn't going to be able to give him that. So at 31, I had a surgical procedure and they advised that if I wanted children, I needed to try to have them. Then I found out he cheated on me and two girls claimed they were pregnant by him. I was unhappy with my job. My career wasn't moving. I was unhappy and struggling financially. There were so many things that were affecting me and I wasn't doing well. All those things kept coming back.

I needed a spiritual healing. I left work one day and just couldn't go on feeling the hurt and shame. I just wanted to release it. I drove to my new church and spoke with pastor. I told him that I needed to talk, but in order for this to work for me, I can't look at you. He sat on one end of the room in the basement leading up the stairs where you couldn't see him, and I sat in the middle of the room at a table. If someone had come downstairs, they would have thought I was talking to myself. He said "I'm going to turn

my back and you just talk.” I said so much stuff and he just listened. He told me that the God we serve is a God that loves. He said God forgives and he loves and when he forgives, he throws it in the sea of forgetfulness. You haven’t done anything that is unforgiveable. I always tell people that when I started going to that church, I was sent there to get spiritual healing. When I left church that day, I didn’t cry about any of that stuff anymore. It was my place of healing.

Susan

I am a member of Pentecostal churches and I have been a member for over 32 years. We moved our membership when I was 12 years old, but from my recollection, women were looked down upon, we were dictated to. The mothers in the church taught us that we couldn’t wear any pants. We couldn’t wear any jewelry. We couldn’t wear any makeup. Our sleeves had to be three-quarters or long-sleeves—no shoes with toes or heels out. We couldn’t wear any V-necks, so there was a lot of emphasis on our appearance. You can imagine, a 12-year old going into high school, that was very difficult for me, because my peers didn’t dress that way. We had to dress that way 365 days out of the year. Our place was if you were married, you were your supposed to be your spouse’s helpmate and basically, you didn’t really have a say-so. Whether they took your opinion into consideration, I don’t know but, he was the head of the household. I don’t think it [my body image] was really an issue, but when I got to high school, I was looking at how other girls dressed, and then how I dressed. Of course, I was self-conscious because I was covering up everything. There weren’t rules like that for men, only women. Women were the weaker vessel. Our role was to take care of the house—barefoot and pregnant.

We were raised on “fire and brimstone”. That teaching was engrained in me since birth, so church shaped my perception about a lot of things in life. That’s all I knew. The message that I got when I was growing up is that if you sinned, you would be sat down. Either you live holy, or you’re going to hell. There was no in between, so as a woman, we were scared to do anything. We could not interact with the world, or listen to their music, or dress like they did. If you wanted to do recreational things or play sports, you couldn’t. It was very difficult for me to know who I was, because I could never do anything to explore things I might like. It was so strict. I wanted to be a cheerleader, but I couldn’t because the skirts were too short. I remember a time when prom came around. I helped with the floats, assisted with the decorations, but when it came time to attend, I didn’t go because I was not allowed. My friends brought back mementos to me from a prom that I couldn’t go to.

Unplanned pregnancy was a no-no. Sex was not something we were supposed to do. It was fornication and in most situations with my friends in church, if they did fornicate and it resulted in a pregnancy, they were sat down very publicly until the child was born, or the pastor gave them a timeframe and it was usually a year. If you were the person that was sat down, no one could talk to you. We were told that we couldn’t interact with that person. That was the purpose of them being sat down and no longer a part of the congregation. Being sat down meant that the person came before the congregation and all their business was put out. The pastor would indicate that the person had committed fornication or adultery and as a result, a child was conceived. We were told not to communicate with them. If the guy was in church, he was sat down as well. If they knew that you had sinned, you were shamed. The whole point of it [being brought

before the congregation] was to bring on shame. They didn't even get baby showers like the women who were married and were pregnant. I didn't want to be ostracized if I got pregnant. It was very embarrassing and when a lot of young people turned 18, they left the church.

I went away to college at 18 and was introduced to worldly ways. When there were parties on campus, I was literally in turmoil. I thought that if I sinned, I was going to hell. Can you imagine an 18-year old struggling with that? When I finally went, it was like a whole new world. I remember thinking if I ever had children, I would do things very differently. I never wanted them to experience what I did. I wanted them to make informed decisions. I wanted them to have experiences. They needed to know that they could live and still be a part of the church.

When I had my abortion, I was either 21 or 22 and married. I'm still married to the same person. We were struggling, barely making it. The thought of having another baby was traumatic. We already had a child that was less than 6 months old and we were pregnant again. We were both in college, so another child would have been very difficult. Of course, I didn't want to bring a child into that type of environment. At that time, I felt that an abortion was my only choice. Having an abortion was a no, no. You're not supposed to do it. I struggled with that decision and it was a very traumatic time for me. I really needed spiritual guidance, but I thought I was in a backslidden¹⁶ position. I was taught that you were either hot or cold. You can't be lukewarm. Because I had indulged in worldly things—going to parties on campus, listening to worldly music—I was

¹⁶ A term used to denote a member who had turned away from their faith tradition and adopted a sinful lifestyle.

perceived as living my life for the devil. I would have been considered in a backslidden position. The word of God was always in me, but things happen in life that pull and tug at you. I really did need spiritual guidance, but at the time, there was no one to turn to.

Everyone's perception in the Apostolic-Pentecostal churches was "you brought it on yourself", deal with it. I didn't talk with anyone and my church didn't know. It was just between my husband and I. Because of the stigma from church, I put pressure on myself. Only 5 to 10 years later was I able to talk to another pastor, who was actually my Godfather, and ask for forgiveness because it was heavy on my heart. I had become involved in church again and I knew I needed to confess to the man of God, as they say. My husband and I both went to my Godfather and confessed it. According to them [Pentecostals], when you confess your sin to the man of God, then God forgives you. The pastor's role was to intercede for you. We were taught that we couldn't go to God for ourselves and that in order to truly repent or be forgiven, you needed to confess it to "the man". My Godfather talked about the seriousness of it with us, and because we'd terminated life, there would be serious consequences—even though we had confessed it and God had forgiven us. He said it in a loving way, but it was something that has always stayed with me. When something was going wrong in your life, I always equated it to having an abortion. Is this a part of that consequence? You really don't know and always second guess yourself.

I know the shame kept me from reaching out. It was the kind of thing you just kept to yourself and dealt with. Even though I was married, they could have sat me down. I couldn't reach out to my mom, because she was brainwashed the same way. I was probably in that predicament because there was no relationship with her. It was like, well

if I call you and you're not in your room, you must be out there sinning. That's how it was. There was really no support at all. I needed someone just to be able to say [to me] I know that you weren't expecting to get pregnant so soon, but you can do this. I didn't have that, I just truly didn't. No one in Pentecostal churches could have met my needs at that time. I was married, so getting pregnant would have been acceptable, but to think about having an abortion? Oh, they would have probably had me re-baptized and speaking in tongues again, praying demons out of me.

It would have been nice to have been taught certain things. There was no sexual education. You were just told if you had sex you were going to hell. We weren't taught how to pray. You weren't taught how to read your bible. Young people really needed to be taught. We had youth pastors, but they didn't teach that. We were supposed to be living saved, so [to them] we didn't need that type of teaching. Yes, we were saved, but we were still in this world. We weren't equipped. There are things that you come up against. [Teaching] is a pivotal opportunity for the church—to educate young people. If you don't, they'll get it from somewhere else.

I stayed with Pentecostal churches all these years because I believe in the Apostolic doctrine. Man has changed it. If you don't know your bible, you will fall into what is similar to a cult. The practices they put in place were not in the bible. There is nowhere in the bible that says women can't wear pants, or makeup. When I think about it, [back then] the church was made up of single women with children. Our pastor preyed on them. That's what he gravitated to. It was easy to manipulate their minds. My mom is a very strong woman, but because she was in a very pivotal point in her life, the pastor used that to reel her in. Things were practiced that were not biblical. They dictated to you

how to live your life. I wasn't free to live my life. I know there are pastors in the Apostolic-Pentecostal churches that still practice that way. There needs to be change, especially with young people, and women need support. There should be resources in place. Women need to feel that they can turn to their church as a safe haven. There should be no shame associated with whatever they are dealing with. We keep things in and it leads to other problems [including] mental illness. The church is like a hospital and its where we should be able to turn to for support and resources. But leaders in the church have to be open to that and have to be trained. I believe that's an area where churches fail. They want to put the perception out there that they want to help, but they don't have the tools to help. They aren't trained. You would think that in 2019 things would be different, but they're not.

Analysis of the Responses

Below are the collective responses to the research questions (RQ) explored during the interviews. As often as possible, direct quotes are used to emphasize details of importance.

RQ1. How did your church shape your perception or beliefs about women, your body and unplanned pregnancies?

All four participants indicated that the church had a significant impact on their perceptions of a woman's role in society. They revealed that church teachings adopted misogynistic roles of women, including getting married, caring for a husband and birthing children. None remembered early teachings with regard to women furthering their education, entering the business world or seeking professions other than the role of a wife, mother and homemaker.

The women were taught by other women in the church to dress modestly, and wear no clothing that exposed breasts, necks, arms or legs. Each participant expressed that there were a torrent of rules emphasizing what not to wear: no jewelry; no nail polish; no pants; no makeup; no open-toed shoes, etc. Becky indicated that the rationale for such modesty was to discourage women from “offending a brother, or make a brother go into a lustful state because you’re looking a certain way.” Wearing dresses and carrying handbags was not natural to Becky, as she indicated that while growing up, she considered herself a tomboy. She claims that these restrictions imposed by the church reshaped her image and “tapped into her feminine side.” Similarly, Susan stated “[A]s a woman, we were scared to do anything. We could not interact with the world, or listen to their music, or dress like they did...It was very difficult for me to know who I was, because I could never do anything to explore things I might like.”

The women unanimously voiced that the church had absolute and or uncompromising ideas regarding sexuality. They resoundingly advised that the church spurned unplanned pregnancies and each woman reported the practice of “silencing” or “sitting down” women for a period of time (usually decided by the Pastor) when she became pregnant and was unwed. The women described this practice as being shunned, ostracized and stripped of her ability to operate in the ministry. Members were told to have no interaction or communication with them. Susan reported that while baby showers would be cheerfully given for wed mothers, the unwed mothers received no such consideration. Each described the practice of bringing unwed mothers before the congregation to “confess” their

sins of becoming pregnant before marriage. According to the participants, the sole purpose of these exercises was to invoke shame. Only one of the four reported that the father of the child was subjected to the same treatment.

RQ2. Describe the circumstances surrounding your decision to abort?

While the circumstances surrounding each participant's unplanned pregnancy differed, all either expressed or implied that the primary reason they chose to have an abortion was to avoid the anticipated shame and judgment to which they would be subjected from the church. The following comments are of significance:

Alexis: "At the time [of the abortion], we began attending another [Pentecostal] church that was much more relaxed and laid back than the former church...I grew up at, but the rules and the things we were taught still haunted me."

Becky: "I already knew the church would not be accepting of it [the pregnancy] at all. I would have had to sit down. I wouldn't be able to teach and would have experienced the shame of being 'the new girl' who was rough around the edges." "I thought I'd be shut down."

Susan: "I didn't want to be ostracized if I got pregnant. It was very embarrassing and when a lot of young people turned 18, they left the church."

Sheila: When speaking of the women who've had abortions, Sheila reminds us of a very important fact: "There seems to be an overwhelming need to condemn. They're already condemned. There is nothing that they haven't already condemned themselves for," she argues.

RQ3. What were your spiritual and emotional needs during your contemplation of abortion and following the procedure? Were any of these needs met by Pentecostal churches?

Resoundingly, each woman described the need for love, acceptance and forgiveness following the procedure. They also expressed a decline in or reluctance to continue involvement in church activities. Alexis even expressed that her decision to withdraw from church involvement stunted her spiritual growth. “I could have been growing more in Christ had I not shut down for all those years,” she said. The participants expressed the need to know that God still loved them. As Alexis passionately declared, “I really just needed to know that I was still loved by God. That it was okay. That He’d understood. Certainly afterwards, I needed to know that.”

Sadly, but tellingly, none of the participants indicated that they reached out to anyone in Pentecostal churches for support, guidance or direction, for fear of condemnation. As Becky responds, “It took almost 20 years before I felt safe and comfortable enough to talk to somebody in the church.” The other participants echoed Becky’s sentiments. Alexis, whose mother was a devoted member of the Pentecostal church stated, “It made me feel like, wow. ...if my own mother isn’t going to accept something that I felt like I had to do, why would I go tell anybody else?” Susan, whose mother was also a devout member advised, “I really did need spiritual guidance, but at the time, there was no one [in the church] to turn to.” Sheila reported, “I cannot imagine who at that time would have given me understanding. I know that I had lots of people that I could go to, but I did not

want the judgment.” She further stated that she purposely spoke with only those who were “unsaved.” She attributes this to avoiding the judgment of those in the church. Sheila later added, “I honestly don’t know what I would have needed from Pentecostal churches.” Becky disclosed that she could never speak of her actions to even her very close friend, also a Pentecostal, for fear of judgment and rejection.

RQ4. What emotional and spiritual resources do you wish you’d had?

There were a number of needs expressed by the participants. All wished they’d had a “safe place” in which to divulge their struggles and not be judged.

Additionally, they needed support systems. “It was a really traumatic time for me,” Susan said. Becky expressed that she needed the church to admit that even women in the church have abortions. She passionately declared, “The church could at least acknowledge that 1 out of 4 women have had abortions. It’s there, in the pews, and they need support!”

Every participant likewise expressed the need for professional counseling. They felt that counseling is a missing component within the church. As Alexis prescribes, “I wish I would have had counseling. I went to Planned Parenthood and that was okay, but I really needed spiritual counseling. That would have made the process better for me... I think the biggest thing that I wish I could have done earlier was to deal with the guilt and shame.” Like Alexis, Sheila also articulated the need for spiritual healing. Becky, the most vocal on the subject, advised “We need support! Someone with clinical experience—even to help women who

contemplate making that decision. We don't have or utilize professionals in the church who are willing to provide counseling services. The Pastors aren't professionals. The person needing the help still comes out of the counseling session with the Pastor feeling condemned. Some kind of way, you still come out of the office feeling condemned!" said Becky. Susan states, "There needs to be change...and women need support. There should be resources in place. Women need to feel that they can turn to their church as a safe haven." "The church is like a hospital," she says. "It's where we should be able to turn to for support and resources. But leaders in the church have to be open to that and have to be trained. I believe that's an area where churches fail."

Most noteworthy was the fact that each participant indicated it took years for them to feel safe enough to reveal to anyone in Pentecostal churches that they'd terminated their pregnancies. Alexis waited 4 years before speaking of the incident, while Susan reports that she couldn't speak of it for at least 5 years. Both Becky and Sheila held their secret for over 20 years before divulging it. Not surprisingly, each participant stated that they did not share their experiences with anyone in Pentecostal churches until they felt compelled to do so, consumed by guilt and shame, to the point in which they could no longer hold it. Even still, they maintained their silence until they were able to seek out an individual with whom they felt safe.

RQ5. What were the hinderances to receiving the support you required?

Fear appeared to be the most pronounced hindrance to the participants receiving support. Fear of condemnation and judgment were the most apparent. Alexis indicated, “I was so scared about what was going to be done to me. For years I stayed to myself and didn’t engage in any ministries.” Becky once again cited the lack of professional care as her biggest obstacle. She recommended that the church adopt a holistic approach to wellness, incorporating doctors, lawyers, psychologists—those to whom members could be referred when needed. She stressed, however, the need for confidentiality.

Both Sheila and Susan indicated the need to forgive themselves. As Sheila stated, “I wish I had of been in a position to accept forgiveness.” Likewise, Susan advised, “Because of the stigma from church, I put pressure on myself.”

Finally, every participant perceived that subsequent reproductive complications were associated with their abortions. As Alexis conveys, “After I got married, I went through a really bad miscarriage.” “A voice in my head told me this is what happens when you get an abortion,” she continued. Becky blamed herself for her *daughter’s* abortion stating, “I regret that [my feelings] spilled over onto my child and her seed...That’s what *I* did and I have regrets.” Sheila, who was forced to have a hysterectomy at the age of 31 and never birthed any children stated, “I always thought that because of the abortion, this was a part of the punishment.” Even Susan, who indicated that the conversation she and her husband had with her Godfather was healing, stated, “My Godfather talked about the seriousness of it with us, and because we’d terminated life, there would be serious consequences,

even though we had confessed it and God had forgiven us. He said it in a loving way, but it was something that has always stayed with me. When something was going wrong in your life, I always equated it to having an abortion. Is this a part of that consequence? You really don't know and always second guess yourself."

Becky best describes the feelings of shame and isolation. "We suffer in silence," she says. "We can't tell anybody about it. You're ashamed and nobody knows. Usually, you're ashamed when you're exposed, but there's a spirit of self-shame that comes over you. It's the secret that you can never disclose. One that only you and momma know about, or only you and your husband or boyfriend know about, or only you know about," she says.

RQ6. Where, if at all, did you recognize God during your journey?

All participants either sought God during their contemplation or recognized that God was present during their journeys. None of the participants expressed anger with God during any aspect of their experiences. None blamed God for their circumstances. Neither of the participants reported feeling abandoned by God. Their criticism was directed toward church leadership and members. Sheila spoke of God's unfailing love. She said, "God loved me into fellowship and when I had my abortion, I am not sure that my church knew how to love me back into fellowship." Susan advised, "The word of God was always in me, but things happen in life that pull and tug at you."

Most interesting is that each of the participants discovered the love of God through the compassion of that one individual with whom they felt safe enough to

relieve themselves of their heavy burdens. This was the source of healing each wished they had discovered sooner. Alexis experienced the love of God through her understanding mentor, whom she says, "...told me everything that I wanted my mom to say to me." Becky found God almost 20 years after having her first abortion and several years after her second, in her Pastor's wife, who listened to her confession and never judged her, nor disclosed her revelation. "I can honestly say that I found God...when I finally found that person that I could share it with and it was okay." Sheila disclosed that she poured out her heart to her Pastor after leaving work one day and not being able to continue carrying the burden of hurt and shame. She says, "I just wanted to release it...I said so much stuff and he just listened. He told me that the God we serve is a God that loves. He said God forgives and loves, and when he forgives, he throws it in the sea of forgetfulness." Sheila's guilt and shame was so great, that she informed her Pastor that she couldn't look at him while disclosing her truth. He accommodated her and she reports, "When I left the church that day, I didn't cry about any of that stuff anymore. It was my place of healing." Finally, Susan discovered God in her kindly Godfather whom she and her husband were able to turn to for support.

While reviewing the interviews and coding participant responses, I discovered several common themes that are of great significance. These commonalities, I found, were threaded throughout the women's stories.

- Although the participants were from different organizations within Pentecostal churches (PAW, PCAF, COGIC, etc.), they expressed the same experiences of *shaming practices* within their ministry contexts.

- All the participants reported *longevity as members* of their respective Pentecostal churches, three of whom were raised as Pentecostals and the fourth joined at an early age. Three of the participants recall that the strict *rules of the church* spilled over into their homes.
- All of the participants *had their abortions as adults*. None were teenagers or carried the traditional stereotypes of being young and uneducated. To the contrary, two of the four were married at the time they had abortions and two were either in college or college educated at the time in which the abortion was performed.
- All of the participants *chose not to disclose their pregnancies* to anyone in Pentecostal churches for fear of shaming, condemnation and rejection. All of the participants *experienced long-term trauma* as a result of the hindrances in receiving the support they required to heal.
- Several of the participants *expressed that they'd heard the "hell and brimstone"* message all their life, implying that this way of teaching was a means of control and manipulation. Moreover, the participants all disclosed that the strict rules and practices of the church were geared toward the women, rather than the men.
- Also noteworthy was *the influence of the participants' mothers*. Many spoke either of their mother's support or opposition, criticism and reproach. Two of the participants describe their mothers as placing greater value on their obedience to the church, rather than on supporting their daughters.

- Finally, all participants are *continued members of Pentecostal churches*, advising that regardless of the treatment they've received and the faulty practices to which they've been subjected, they continue to firmly believe in the Apostolic doctrine.

There are disturbing patterns and similarities woven throughout the stories of the participants. These are noted in Table 1 below and will be further explored in the following chapter.


TABLE 1				
Descriptive Codes		Common Themes	Overarching Concepts	Theory
1	Longevity of membership in Pentecostal churches	Pentecostal churches is the foundation for the family	Shaming and condemnation are used as a means to control members of Pentecostal churches—specifically, women	Could “Fear” be the driving force behind the condemning practices of Pentecostal churches and its treatment of women?
2	Rules and practices were established in the church to avert sin			
3	Parents who were members of the Church carried over church rules into their homes			
4	Church shaped their ideas about the roles and conduct of women			
5	Heard the message that you were going to hell if you sinned (fire & brimstone)	Strict church rules appeared to only apply to women		
6	Believed that the rules and stringency applied most consistently toward women			
7	Women enforced the rules and established by the church	Regulated practices were designed to shame women		
8	Witnessed public shaming practices within their ministry context as a consequence of sin			
9	There is strong teaching that premarital sex and abortion are sins	Abortion was a means of avoiding shame and condemnation	Pentecostal churches does not support women who get pregnant outside of marriage	
10	Feared being “silenced” and removed from church positions if pregnancy was disclosed			
11	Chose not to speak with anyone in Pentecostal churches regarding their decision to abort	Rejection and isolation induced feelings of self-loathing, internalized shame and long-term trauma		
12	Abortions were performed as adults			
13	Expressed the need for acceptance, love and forgiveness			
14	Decision to abort was not divulged for many years			
15	Continued membership in Pentecostal churches after abortion			

CHAPTER 4: ETHICAL CHURCH RESPONSES

“There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him it is right.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Chapter 3 chronicled the journeys of 4 women who were members of Pentecostal churches at the times in which they had abortions. The methodology was described, the voices of the women were captured, and a preliminary analysis of the data was conducted. Upon hearing the collective stories from the participants, themselves, codes were devised, themes constructed, and concepts formulated. Chapter 4 provides a summary of the research presented and the significance of its findings within the context of Pentecostal churches. This will include an evaluation of the work from both my perspective, and that of the Local Advisory Committee. Taking into consideration comments from interviews held with clergy and laypersons currently working in the areas of inner healing and reconciliation, this chapter will discuss the holistic approaches to which these individuals and organizations have embraced and implemented successful interventions with women who have faced unplanned pregnancies and abortions. Finally, I will make recommendations for change within Pentecostal churches and suggestions for future research that would strengthen our knowledge and enhance our awareness of the experiences of women who face unplanned and decisions to abort. This chapter begins with studying in greater detail the codes from Chapter 3, Table 1.

Descriptive Codes	Theme
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Longevity of membership in Pentecostal churches 2. Rules and practices were established in the church to avert sin 3. Parents who were members of the church carried over church rules into their homes 4. Church shaped their ideas about the roles and conduct of women 	 <p>The Pentecostal church was the foundation of the family</p>

Each of the participants described the traditions of Pentecostal churches as integral to their upbringing. They were either born into the faith, meaning that their parents were already members of Pentecostal churches at the times of their births, or their families embraced the faith early in their own childhoods. Becky was the only participant who had been raised in another denomination and joined a Pentecostal church as an adult. Particularly significant is the fact that all participants strongly voiced that their attitudes regarding the roles and conduct of women were shaped by the church.

The concept of faith as a family foundation is by no means unusual. Faith and religious principles within families have been documented for centuries as key components of moral development. In an issue published by the Michigan Family Review (2003), Dr. Gloria Warren describes family faith formation as "...a resiliency factor, a way of life, a pattern for successful adult roles, and as a paradigm for future family formation." The articles written in this particular volume discuss an array of experiences within several cultural frameworks. Dr. Warren observes an emerging theme within the articles as "...the role of faith-based institutions as an important physical space for cognitive and moral development across the life cycle" (Michigan Family Review

2003). Recognizing the importance of faith in family dynamics, Dr. Warren encourages practitioners and family social scientists to strongly consider incorporating faith as a “viable tool for strengthening and working with families.” (Michigan Family Review 2003)

Descriptive Codes

Theme

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Heard the message that you were going to hell if you sinned (fire and brimstone) 6. Believed that the rules and stringency applied most consistently toward women | } | <p>Strict church rules appeared to only apply to women</p> |
|---|---|--|

While the relationship between faith and family formation is predominantly viewed as positive, linking the former with sound moral development, like Marc Dupont (2004), Johnson & VanVonderen in their book *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, also argue that the fixation on established rules and practices within the church is a form of legalism¹⁷ and lead to detrimental outcomes. More precisely, unhealthy rules and practices, which focus on perfectionism and performance, cause shame and condemnation (Johnson & VanVonderen 1991, 67).

All of the participants received the message that they would surely go to ‘hell’ if they sinned. And in addition to the sins described in the bible, church leadership created additional rules that were also associated with sin. In fact, several of the women indicated that a set of regulations or *modesty rules* were enforced, whereby certain types of clothing or showing too much of a women’s anatomy were also unacceptable and

¹⁷ Defined by Johnson & VanVonderen (1991) as rules that govern a women’s behavior, manner, or appearance (particularly her clothing, jewelry and makeup) intended that she would avoid impropriety or indecency.

considered sinful. According to the participants, these rules did not apply to men. Those regulations, Becky established, were designed to prevent women from causing their brethren to fall into a “lustful state” or from becoming a “stumbling block” to their salvation. Both would imply that a woman was not only responsible for her own sin, but that she could also be responsible for the sin of someone else—particularly, a man. This practice lays culpability on the woman, who in most instances, is not even aware that a problem exists. Furthermore, a woman might not realize that such rules exist until she breaks one of them and is subsequently admonished by other women in the church. Johnson & VanVonderen (1991) define this as a form of spiritual abuse, where the lives of individuals are controlled by sets of spoken and unspoken rules. However, these modesty rules directly contradict God’s emphasis on personal accountability. However, in spiritually abusive churches and families where individuals stand on the authority of the scriptures, not even the scriptures themselves are more powerful than the rules (Johnson & VanVonderen 1991, 68).

Descriptive Codes

7. Women enforce the rules established by the church
8. Witnessed public shaming practices within their ministry context as a consequence of sin

Themes

Regulated practices were designed to shame women

Remarkably, the participants either state or imply that other women in their respective churches were responsible for enforcing the modesty rules. Consequently, obedience toward God became equated with the adherence to a stringent set of rules

governing a woman's behavior. The fact that women promote and impose on each other teachings that inevitably oppress themselves is provocative and requires further study.

Each participant noted that premarital sex, unplanned pregnancies (for unwed mothers) and abortion were considered sins and required penance. Several described a particularly disturbing and cruel shaming practice whereby unwed, pregnant women who carried their babies to term were stood before the congregation and publicly shamed and humiliated. Their conditions were then announced to the congregants and the congregation was instructed not to communicate with these women. This practice was followed by a period of *silencing*¹⁸ whereby the women were *sat down*,¹⁹ disfellowshipped²⁰ and not allowed to function within the church. The Pastor determined how long this period of silencing would last. In most instances, at the very least, the silencing would continue until the birth of the child. Additionally, the congregation offered no emotional or spiritual support to the woman during this time. Once again, most of the participants reported that they don't recall such treatment being imposed on the fathers of the children.

Descriptive Codes

9. There is strong teaching that premarital sex and abortion are sins
10. Feared being *silenced* and removed from church positions if pregnancy was discovered

Theme

Abortion as a means of avoiding shame and condemnation

¹⁸ A practice within Pentecostal churches to ostracize an individual following the discovery of a sin committed.

¹⁹ A practice within Pentecostal churches to remove a member from his or her position for a period, following the discovery of a sin committed. The imposed timeframe is generally determined by the Pastor.

²⁰ A practice in which an individual is stripped of his/her ministerial position and/or good standing in the church.

The participants described in detail the extent to which premarital sex and unplanned pregnancy was taught as sinful. Purity was synonymous with chastity and virtue, as Sheila suggests. This teaching appeared to accompany the modesty rules governing a woman's appearance and behavior. Thus, a woman's failure to follow rules governing her conduct and dress, lead to the unspoken rule that she was tainted, impure, and immoral. These attitudes lead to patriarchal assumptions about women, that are widely held but seldom expressed. In her book titled *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice*, Rebecca Todd Peters (2018) asks the reader to consider the following examples of these assumptions:

- Responsible women don't have unplanned or unwanted pregnancies.
- Women who have abortions are sexually promiscuous.
- Women who get pregnant must live with the consequences of their behavior.
- If you don't want to have a baby, you shouldn't have sex.

Peters suggests that within this framework, it is assumed that when women get pregnant, they will have their babies. Given this belief, one would assume that unwed pregnant women who make the decision to carry their babies to term would be celebrated; however, in the stories shared by our participants, we see the complete opposite. Women who choose to have their babies are scorned, ostracized, shamed and condemned. What then, is the benefit of carrying the pregnancy to term, if the consequences of aborting the child are the same? Faulting women for engaging in the very practice that is said to be condoned and encouraged is duplicitous. In the case of our participants, having abortions and not involving the church or its leadership seemingly factored into their attempts to avoid condemnation. Given the observed shaming practices and the inability to continue

to serve in the church, it is plausible that the decision to abort was, in part, due to shame avoidance. Would this not render the church partly culpable in the participants' decisions to abort?

Descriptive Codes

11. Chose not to speak with anyone in Pentecostal churches regarding their decision to abort
12. Abortions were performed as adults
13. Expressed the need for acceptance, love and forgiveness
14. Decision to abort was not divulged for many years
15. Continued membership in Pentecostal churches after abortion

Theme

Rejection and isolation induced feeling of self-loathing, internalized shame and long-term trauma

Paul W. Pruyser is one of the first to suggest a more holistic approach to ministry. In his book *Minister as Diagnostician* (1976), Pruyser maintains that historically, people turn to religion or their local clergy when experiencing problems. I believe that this still holds true in Pentecostal churches, which have remained predominantly conservative (Pew 2009). Pruyser maintains, "Their beliefs drive them into the study of their pastor. They want their tradition to speak to them, they want to discuss themselves in familiar terms; they want a glimpse of the light of their faith to clarify their predicament." People feel solace in turning first to those spiritual leaders whom they feel accepted and most comfortable. They seek the safety associated with their faith and only turn to outside intervention when necessary, often per the direction of their faith leader. Hence, the fact that the participants in this study made conscious decisions not to speak with anyone from their respective churches regarding their unplanned pregnancy is very unsettling. God entrusts church leaders, no matter the religion, to feed and care for His sheep. When

they abuse the sheep for whom they are responsible and cause them to be separated from God, it increases their culpability. Clerics should always be held to a higher standard because of the God-given responsibility associated with the profession. A diligent ethic of human responsibility for clerical leadership is true for not only Pentecostals, but for all clerics.

Consequences and Implications

The participants, like so many women in the church, have fallen victim to and are driven by shame and guilt. In *Healing Spiritual Abuse: How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences*, Ken Blue (1993) asserts that abusive leadership uses shame as a tool of control and subordination. Peters (2018) also noted *shame* as a major concern during her research. She relays a conversation with a pastor she'd interviewed regarding his encounters with the issue of abortion in his ministry. The pastor urged her to address the shame many Christian women feel after having an abortion. Blue (1993) makes a clear distinction between guilt and shame. He defines guilt as internalized emotional punishment for perceived bad behavior. He advises that it is directly correlated to one's own wrong doing. Shame, in contrast, is denunciation against one's essence. He states that guilt will cause us to hate what we've done, while shame prompts us to hate who we are. While guilt may cause repentance or restitution, shame, according to Blue, calls for punishment. This would in part explain the self-imposed shame and self-judgment experienced by all the participants post abortion. But is the self-imposed shame associated with the act of aborting, or rather, does it lie somewhere else?

In her work regarding women and violence, Marie Fortune holds that all too often, women are scapegoats for the violence brought upon them.²¹ She maintains that the complexities of shame are exacerbated by religious traditions that lay blame for women's abuse on their own embodiment and conduct (Crumpton 2014, 157-158). The end result is that abused women are made to carry the shame that should rightfully belong to their abusers and to those institutions who condemn them for the acts of violence perpetrated against them (Crumpton 2014). During her interview, Becky corroborates Fortune's summation. Becky declares, "It was always the woman who had to live with the shame of it. It could have been rape, incest, coercion—nobody brings the male. They always focus on the female, who alone has to deal with the shame."

In addition to self-imposed shame, the participants noted that the stigma associated with unplanned pregnancies in the church also caused them distress. Several studies (Reider 2014; Major & Gramzow 1999; Speckhard & Rue 1992) indicate that abortion stigma may in fact carry negative emotional consequences for women post abortion. In her doctoral dissertation, Shellenberg (2010) supported this claim indicating that abortion stigma could create negative feelings of self in women who have had abortions. She emphasized that stigma and social context, not the abortion itself, caused the emotional distress. The participants in this study exhibited the same phenomena. The fear of scorn and indictment from the church seemed to have been causation of anguish, rather than the act of aborting.

²¹ Marie Fortune is quoted by Stephanie Crumpton in her book *A Womanist Pastoral Theology Against Intimate and Cultural Violence*, 2014, 157-158.

The participants also reported that they remained silent about their abortions, refusing to share their experiences with members of Pentecostal churches for as many as 20 years post pregnancy terminations. Reider (2014) supports these phenomena in her doctoral research. She indicates that women are often unwilling to disclose that they have had an abortion due to the stigma associated with the act. Unfortunately, Reider advises, the more the women remain secretive about their abortions, the less support they receive. Consequently, the stigma that keeps them quiet also prevents them from obtaining the supports needed to combat that very stigma (Major & Gramzow 1999). Shellenberg (2010) suggests that future research should further investigate factors, including abortion stigma, that contribute to post-abortion emotional distress.

Additional research suggests that there are long-term emotional reactions to abortions. In her study of 16 abortion patients 15 or more years after their procedures, Trybulski (2006) discovered that emotional reactions to abortions were not time-limited and may occur intermittently over a period of years. There are also claims that the abortion experience may cause a condition known as Post-Abortion Syndrome (Speckhard & Rue 1992), symptoms similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), however, to my knowledge, there is little evidence to support these claims. Moreover, the emotional distress caused by the guilt and shame associated with abortion stigma may be the cause of long-term trauma, rather than the act of having the abortion itself. This may especially hold true for the four participants in this study, due to the attitudes and practices of Pentecostal churches to which they were exposed.

The preceding sections of this chapter have provided a clear picture of the harmful effects of misogynistic practices of Pentecostal churches on women. The

emotional, psychological and spiritual consequences of these practices have long-term implications, that directly affect the women's relationship with God, herself and others. What then are the implications of conformity to oppressive practices and how do those implications impact Pentecostal churches? What are the consequences of refusing to hear the voices of the women in this study and others who have been oppressed by misogyny within the Pentecostal faith tradition? One consequence is a decline in church attendance, as women no longer have confidence in the church as a safe, welcoming space. As the numbers decline, so does the revenue, forcing many churches to close their doors. According to Schultz and Schultz (2013) in their book titled *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore*, approximately 4,000 to 7,000 churches close their doors every year, and between 2010 and 2012, more than half of the U.S. churches reported that they added no new members. Schultz & Schultz (2013) suggest that the most common reason for this occurrence is that people don't want to be lectured, and they view the church as judgmental, hypocritical, and irrelevant. The authors list 7 trends impacting church decline. These trends attribute church leadership, including clergy abuse, church cover-ups, and fundamentalist preachers and congregations, as the primary factor that drives people away from church (Schultz & Schultz 2013). "Now, as God's people, we can defensively bark back and shift the blame to all those heathens and backsliders who've abandoned the church. But that will do nothing but hasten the decline of the American church," Thom Schultz wrote in a blog post, "Or, we can explore ways to better be the church."

For the purpose of this study, another, and perhaps more damaging consequence is the lack of confidence the participants ultimately have in the church's ability to care for

them individually, and/or their collective emotional and spiritual well-being. It appears that to control its members, specifically women, Pentecostal churches have developed oppressive practices which have created *spiritual insecurity*.²² What can this faith tradition in turn do to renew the confidence of women who share these experiences? How can they be reached and how can their assurance be renewed in the church's ability to create a safe, loving environment? Just as professionals rush to solve medical and societal epidemics, clerics should recognize this threat to the sustainability of Pentecostal churches and address it with the same level of urgency.

Several questions remain. Why is it necessary to control the behavior of women in Pentecostal churches? What is the impetus behind this need? Is 'fear' the driving force behind the condemning practices of Pentecostal churches and its treatment of women? If so, why and what is the source of this fear? In chapter 2, I discussed the Christian church's response to intimidation from Roman society. The early Christian church's response to the accusations of immorality and the concerns of Roman society regarding the freedoms of women ultimately resulted in the subjugation of women. This would imply that the Christian women were the problem. However, Christian men went to great extremes to prove that they were not sexually immoral, up to and including castration. I, therefore, submit that these men were unable to control their own lusts, and rather than accept responsibility, they projected their shortcomings onto their Christian sisters in the faith. This was a gradual process, with similar patterns emerging in the early 20th century Pentecostal churches (Robeck 2018). Above are discussions of patterns that have

²² The lack of confidence in the church's ability to care for an individual's emotional and/or spiritual well-being.

emerged in the early Christian churches. However, during the course of this research, other alarming patterns have surfaced.

Approximately 25 years ago, I was employed as a contractual mental health therapist. I held therapy sessions with several groups, including male perpetrators of domestic violence. There were distinct patterns of behavior exhibited by every perpetrator. Acts of intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, shaming, coercion/threats and male privilege were key components in every case. These behaviors occurred over time and initially, were barely recognizable. Gradually and subtly, many freedoms to which the women were accustomed were removed and/or replaced with rules established and enforced by the perpetrator to exude control over the woman through isolation and intimidation. Upon hearing the stories of our participants, I recognized similarities between the gradual subjugation of the women in their respective churches, and the elements of power and control observed in abusive relationships.

One such similarity was the expectation of trust. Threaded throughout the shared stories of our participants were their expectations that the church would be a place of acceptance, trust and safety. Another similarity are the stringent rules that govern the behavior of only the women in the church. Also, the elimination of privileges as observed in the “silencing” or “sitting down” of women, the removal of position, and the punishments executed when the rules were broken. Intimidation and shaming were used as a means of controlling behavior. Finally, during the timeframe in which the women in this study were introduced to the Pentecostal faith, the practice of alienation was prevalent. Members were instructed by their pastors not to fellowship with other

denominations other than Pentecostal and likened any association outside of those within the Pentecostal faith tradition to sin, considering these interactions contaminants.

The logic behind isolation was extended to the pursuit of higher education—especially for women. I recall that during a bible study one evening, our pastor admonished some of those present for desiring to go to college, stating that a college education was unnecessary for salvation and often led to a backslidden state. During a conversation with my former pastor shortly before I left home for college, I was warned about the perils of associating with those who were not in the faith and reminded that I lived a very sheltered and sanctified life while under my parents' roof. While he did not actually say so, he subtly cautioned me against becoming pregnant. Our chat culminated with my pastor handing me a slip of paper with the name, address and telephone number of a Pentecostal church located near my school. I was instructed to contact the church as soon as I arrived at the school. Other college-bound youth in my church circle recalled similar conversations with the pastor.

I would argue that mine and other Pentecostal pastors during that time were intimidated by those educated, as most often, they were not. In *Types of Pentecostal Theology*, Christopher Stephenson (2013) contends that while early Pentecostalism²³ was often dismissed as “merely a spiritual movement lacking theology,” in actuality, Pentecostals of the period contributed heartily to Theological discussion, particularly surrounding the Trinity, baptism in the Holy Spirit, divine healing, sanctification and other subjects closely associated with the faith tradition. Stephenson eventually goes on

²³ After the birth of Pentecostalism in the early 1900s.

to list several detrimental factors, however, that contributed to the general attitude that Pentecostals were intellectually inadequate. Most notably, he states, was the lack of formal education. Stephenson acknowledges that modern day Pentecostals are pursuing their education in increasing numbers. Though there are some leaders within the Pentecostal churches who have pursued education, I have not observed this to be prevalent. While Pentecostal church leaders of today may not openly discourage members from continuing or pursuing their education, many also do not encourage members to do so.

The last and most damaging of the similarities between the experiences of our participant and those of abused women in domestic violence situations is the element of shame. Each of the participants in this study expressed feelings of profound shame in the aftermath of their abortion experiences which directly correlated to the messages they received about themselves and their bodies while growing up in their respective Pentecostal churches. The implications and consequences of shame were discussed in chapter 2.

Ethical Church Responses

In *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*, Miguel De La Torre (2014) speaks to Christian ethical responsibility through its most important components: justice and love. De La Torre asserts that these concepts are threaded throughout the biblical narrative and that, “In short, there can be no faith, in fact, no salvation, without ethical praxis, not because such actions are the cause of salvation, but rather are their manifestation.” De La Torre writes,

Although Christ remains the ultimate revelation of God's character to humanity, the biblical text becomes the primary witness of this revelation and, as such, forms Christian identity while informing moral actions. The ultimate values advocated by the revelation of God through Christ as witnessed in the biblical text become the standards by which individuals and more importantly, social structures are judged. Regardless of how many different ways the biblical text can be interpreted, certain recurring themes, specifically, a call to justice and a call to love, can be recognized by all who call themselves Christians.

Here, De La Torre (2014) effectively argues that Christians are called to action, that as followers of Christ, we cannot simply ignore injustices, nor can we turn from the truth of our own wrongdoing. The women have shared their voices. Their wounds have been exposed. They have become vulnerable, sacrificial lambs in order to better the conditions of their Pentecostal faith tradition. What then shall be the response of Pentecostal churches and why is this response important?

While this research has shed Pentecostal churches in an unfavorable light, there are those within this faith tradition who have recognized the need for change and accepted the call to action. These courageous leaders in the faith community have begun the conversation around how Pentecostal churches can be healed, that they may be safe places of refuge for those who enter. One such leader, Dr. Sherill Piscapo, Senior Pastor of Evangel Christian Churches in Roseville, Michigan, has counseled men and women for more than 30 years. She and her husband, Bishop Jerry Piscapo, embrace the Pentecostal doctrine. Together, the couple are responsible for the oversight of more than 100 churches world-wide. Dr. Piscapo is quite familiar with Pentecostal churches. Although she nor her husband were raised as Pentecostals, many of their congregants were and therefore, the Piscapos witnessed first-hand the damaging effects of oppressive practices. During an interview, Dr. Piscapo shared her knowledge of historical

Pentecostalism. She advised “We have to remember that in Pentecostal churches, women are not valued for what they can do. They could be missionaries, wives, mothers, teachers and pray for people, but they couldn’t preach or be ministers. That has only recently changed.” Dr. Piscapo’s assertion holds true. Until 2017, never had a woman led one of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World’s more than 60 dioceses (Meyer 2017). This speaks volumes, as the organization has been in existence for over 100 years.

“When a woman gets pregnant, she is the one who’s shamed. The guy gets off easy and the guilt and shame is placed on the women. They [church leadership] forget it takes two,” she says. Dr. Piscapo believes that Evangel has been tremendously successful in working with people who present with several issues, including abortion. She and her husband have written a book describing inner healing and deliverance in pastoral counseling, and host day-long seminars on the subject. Furthermore, she advised that their inner healing and deliverance model has been duplicated and reproduced globally. According to Dr. Piscapo, in her counseling sessions with women, she stresses to women who have had abortions that theirs is not an unforgivable sin. She declares “The process of healing involves a lot of crying and talking and letting go of shame. Only Jesus can do that.” She further advised “I’m not here to judge them. I’m here to love them and leave the rest to God.” Dr. Piscapo states that the greatest hindrance to these women becoming whole is self-loathing. “It’s difficult getting through to them that they’re okay and can move beyond their past. It’s hard to get them to forgive themselves.”

Pastor Piscapo sees her role as a healing vessel. “Pastors hurt people,” she continued. “We’re supposed to be healing vessels, not bring people more pain.” Pastor Piscapo admitted that she has been hurt by other spiritual leaders because she takes this

stance. She declares “I’ve quit every Monday morning for the past 30 years. But this is what I signed up for when I took the job. People don’t sign up for [hurt] when they come to church.” The Piscapos recognize the need for church leadership to share their same views on the treatment of women and they have made a concentrated effort to teach their leaders to love and nurture every soul who enters the church. She advised “If they don’t have a heart to love people, they don’t get to be leaders!”

Minister Priscilla Shelton, a member of the Pastoral Care Team and the first ordained Deacon in the 40+ year history of the Walton Boulevard Worship Center in Pontiac, MI, shares Dr. Piscapo’s concern about the treatment of women in Pentecostal churches. Minister Shelton has a thriving ministry with women of all ages and from diverse backgrounds. She, who has been a member of Pentecostal churches since the age of 15, recalls that the expectation of women was to marry a Christian man, raise two children and not pursue an education or other personal goals outside of marriage and family. She expressed memories of wearing long dresses, no jewelry nor makeup and wearing no pants. She advised that she didn’t feel comfortable donning a pair of pants until after her oldest son left her home. She says “They took that whole ‘in the world but not of the world’ to the extreme. They never mentioned peculiar. We were a peculiar people!” she says.

Minister Shelton believes that Pentecostal churches have given mixed messages. “They look down on women who have unplanned pregnancies,” she argues. “They usually offer no hope or help to that young lady, but if she decides to adopt or abort the child, it’s condemnation and judgment.” Minister Shelton views the church as a source of silencing women. She argues “Women are silent. It’s a pain that they can’t deal with

themselves.... It's a deep hurt that they're ashamed of and the church does nothing to alleviate that pain. Those women have no voice because of the shame associated with abortion. We're to love them. Love is a verb, an action word!" "Women need from the church unconditional love. We have to be willing to talk to them, to reassure them that what they've done in their past doesn't define who they are. If God forgives, God help those who judge." Minister Shelton recognizes the need for the church to discuss issues such as abortion in the church. She measures her success one woman at a time. "I tell them that God has forgiven you and therefore, let all men be liars and His Word be the truth," she declares. "We have turned into pharisees in the church, haven't we?" she asks. "It almost makes the shedding of Christ's blood of no effect if even Christians will throw rocks at you."

Founded in 1973 following the U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) is an interfaith organization created by clergy and laypersons from various denominations and faith traditions to address reproductive health, rights and justice.²⁴ Those involved recognize that powerful faith traditions and moral teachings call for a prophetic voice for change.²⁵ During an interview with the RCRC's Executive for Religious Leadership & Advocacy, Dr. Cari Jackson reflected on her experience with Pentecostal churches when she was a member of the organization over 30 years ago. She described the misogynistic practices of the organization and recalled the experiences of one, particular young lady she counseled after the young woman attempted suicide. The young lady, who was in her early twenties,

²⁴ Language taken from the home page of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) website: www.rcrc.org.

²⁵ Language taken from the RCRC website.

grew up in a family of ministers within the Pentecostal faith tradition. According to Dr. Jackson, the woman was born into an extremely fertile family, as hers were the parents of 12 offspring. She was promiscuous and because of her religious upbringing, her behavior caused her to struggle with guilt and shame. Not recognizing her genetic predisposition to fertility, when she would engage in sex, she would become pregnant. Dr. Jackson advised that when she last spoke with the young woman, she had undergone 6 abortions. Dr. Jackson noted that the level of shame and guilt the woman felt was overwhelming for her. She experienced self-loathing and found herself in a vicious cycle. She used her sexuality as a means of finding love, but each time she had sex, she would become pregnant. Dr. Jackson responded to the woman with the reassurance that God loved and forgave her, and that God celebrated and accepted her for who she was. Dr. Jackson stated that she told the young woman, “God embraces you in all that you are and it is paining God’s heart that you’re living with such shame and guilt. That is what’s paining God’s heart.” Dr. Jackson is unsure as to what became of this young woman. Her attempts to contact the woman over the years and again for the purpose of this study, were unsuccessful. This is the harsh reality of oppressive regimes and the long-term impact upon those whom those regimes are imposed.

The RCRC has developed several projects that address the needs of women as they face the challenge of making reproductive decisions. One such program, Compassionate Care, is designed to educate interfaith clergy and other helping professionals, whether religious or secular, regarding reproductive decisions and loss. The program offers a one-and-a-half-day skill-building program led by experienced spiritual care leaders, to strengthen the ability of helping professionals to guide those in

which they service through multilayered situations.²⁶ The program has educated and empowered hundreds of professionals in the areas of reproductive health.

Pastor Nathaniel Nix, Senior Pastor of Pineview Church and my personal spiritual leader, recognizes the need for change. He recalls during his 26 years of pastoring in the Pentecostal Church and his personal recollection, having been birthed into the faith, that women who were unmarried and pregnant were considered sinful. Pastor Nix witnessed the ostracizing of women and the lack of support they received from the church when they faced an unplanned pregnancy. He advised “I am concerned for the mother, not just the child. Whether they keep it or not, or decide to put it up for adoption is of little concern. That is not my issue. I am concerned about her care, spiritually and emotionally. As a Christian, I’m supposed to love those women.”

Pastor Nix believes that there is a small group of pastors within the Pentecostal faith tradition who share his concerns and are actively pursuing ways in which to bring about reconciliation and restoration. He says, “There is a group of progressives who are working tirelessly to bring about wholeness—not to judge or ask questions, but to bring about healing.” Pastor Nix advised that he is more concerned about how we, as the Body of Christ, can help those who are hurting and fearful in a non-judgmental way. He recognizes the trauma involved for women who have had abortions and the long-term effects of the practices within Pentecostal churches that have brought them to a place of shame. Pastor Nix advised “I always sit down and have a discussion with them. I don’t focus on judging them, just listening. I worry that sometimes in these situations, we can

²⁶ Language taken from the home page of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) website: www.rcrc.org.

do all we can and still lose them. Especially if they don't feel safe or supported. I just don't think we need to die from bad choices. We can recover from bad choices.”

The clerics have provided insight into the role of leadership in the Christian church and our obligations as leaders to approach women who have had abortions with love and acceptance, free from judgment. They recognize that women choose abortions for many reasons and unfortunately, the avoidance of shame is often one of them. A 2017 survey conducted by the Guttmacher Institute describes more of these reasons. Many are not financially, emotionally or mentally prepared to raise a child. Others are concerned about the well-being and quality of life for other children in the family. Some have health factors that would impact pregnancy (Guttmacher Institute 2017). In listening to the shared stories of the participants, along with the success of programs designed by clerics and experts in the field of restoration and women's studies, a holistic approach is necessary.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

“Proclaim the truth and do not be silent through fear.”

—St. Catherine of Siena

In this final chapter, I will further explore results from this study and provide discussion regarding topics that include suggestions for next steps that should be taken to promote healthy change within Pentecostal churches, the evaluation process and lessons learned. Through a series of interviews, the following foundational questions were answered: What are the spiritual, ethical and intellectual criteria upon which these four (4) Pentecostal women potentially based their decision to abort? What is the nature of their contemplative experience? How can Pentecostal churches compassionately and respectfully fulfill its obligation to support women who experience unplanned pregnancy, and/or contemplate or choose an abortion? How can such church support be responsive to the range of spiritual needs women articulate and what kinds of resources enable them to do so? The responses to these questions are summarized below.

Discussion

FQ1. What are the spiritual, ethical and intellectual criteria upon which these four (4) women based their decision to abort?

The participants each respectively based their decisions to abort on several different factors, including financial instability, consideration for other children in the family who might be deprived or neglected with the addition of a new baby, and/or the inopportune timing of a baby due to other obligations. All but one of the four participants indicated that they feared being ostracized, shamed,

condemned and stripped of their positions and status in the church if they were to have revealed their unplanned pregnancies.

FQ2. What is the nature of their contemplative experience?

The participants described their knowledge of the history of Pentecostal churches with respect to its female members. They recounted the attitudes and beliefs of the church regarding premarital sex, unplanned pregnancies and abortions, describing these subjects as taboos and rarely discussed. They indicated that their beliefs regarding gender roles were shaped by Pentecostal churches and collectively relayed memories of the misogynist rules imposed on women. Furthermore, each participant witnessed the maltreatment of single women who revealed that they were pregnant. They described such practices as *silencing* women, bringing women before the church congregation to confess their sins for the sole purpose of shaming them, and the congregation's social exclusion of women when they revealed their unplanned pregnancies. These negative influences certainly factored into their contemplative process when they chose to terminate their pregnancies. The participants communicated that they wished they'd had emotional and spiritual support during their time of contemplation and especially, following their abortions. They expressed overwhelming feelings of shame, guilt and distress for many years following their procedures. Each indicated that tremendous feelings of shame and fear of judgment kept them from seeking assistance from Pentecostal churches. As a result, none sought confidants within the church for many years. In fact, only when they felt completely safe approaching the subject, did they discuss it with a member of the church.

Interestingly, when they finally disclosed their abortions to those in Pentecostal churches, they expressed that they were so overwhelmed with shame and self-condemnation at the time, that they were no longer able to keep silent.

It is of importance to note that each woman perceived that the church's reaction to their unplanned pregnancies and decision to abort would be that of judgment and condemnation. While we will never know whether this would have been their reality, the expectation of judgment and condemnation is significant and must be considered as the church moves forward in supporting such women.

FQ3. How can Pentecostal churches compassionately and respectfully fulfill its obligation to support women who contemplate or choose an abortion?

In Matthew 25, Jesus emphasizes the importance of compassionate care by stipulating that such acts will be used as the criteria on which humankind will be judged. God requires that the Body of Christ, that is, the Church, treat all with respect and dignity. According to Jesus' standards, the misogynistic practices and patriarchal system described by the women in this study are inhumane. If the church is to meet the mandate of love and compassion that God requires, women must be loved, supported and treatment respectfully and with compassion.

While the customs in many Pentecostal churches of the day are less extreme in comparison to those decades ago, the general attitudes and beliefs of this denomination described by our participants regarding women, their roles, their sexuality and unplanned pregnancies remain the same in present day. According to a 2015 study conducted by Lifeway Research which surveyed 1,038 women across the United States, only 4 in 10 women who have had an abortion agree that

churches are a safe place to talk about pregnancy options. In this same study, two-thirds of women who have had abortions agree that church members judge single women who are pregnant and nearly two-thirds agree that church members are more likely to gossip about a woman considering abortion than help her understand options (Lifeway Research 2015). Interestingly, the study indicated that self-identifying Christians, particularly evangelicals, have the most favorable view of the church's role and/or potential in safe disclosure of pregnancy, providing accurate advice regarding pregnancy and providing support to women who choose to keep children resulting from unplanned pregnancies. These findings are somewhat contradictory to those reported in this study and require further exploration, specifically, the role of bias in this study. As this research was conducted through surveys, those more likely to have had favorable experiences with the church were perhaps more likely to have completed and returned the surveys.

FQ4. How can such church support be responsive to the range of spiritual needs women articulate and what kinds of resources enable them to do so?

Willingness to extend compassion, care and earn trust are essential traits worth adopting within Pentecostal churches. The Church must exhibit the attributes of a loving and forgiving God, extending forgiveness and mercy, thus creating a place of peace. Women must believe that the Church is a safe space, a place of refuge. They must believe that when they enter the doors, they do so without facing condemnation and judgment. The participants in our study expressed the strong desire to be reassured that God forgave and still loved them. They found reconciliation with God when they were extended love, forgiveness and

acceptance. Another key component to their restoration was finding a listening, non-judgmental ear. The women sought out those who would listen to their stories without condemnation. The way to renew confidence in Pentecostal churches is by extending love and compassion in hopes that women will find God in these actions.

Next Steps

The first response to Pentecostal churches' efforts to become safe and inviting begins with educating church leadership. The church must be committed to intentional, targeted efforts to educate leadership and congregants alike regarding God's mandate to love and serve others. It is also vital to properly address stereotypes, prejudices and misconceptions about women that can stifle the healing process and perpetuate oppressive practices. Finally, given the many spiritual, emotional and physical needs articulated through the shared stories of our participants, I suggest that Pentecostal churches adopt a holistic²⁷ approach to serving such women, and all who enter the its doors.

I propose the creation of a "wellness ministry" in collaboration with community partners. Considering the broad range of needs expressed by our participants, this model would include on-site professionals in the fields of social work, psychology, law and medicine. Monthly workshops would be conducted in the community, providing various counseling, social work, medical and legal assistance to meet the specific needs of those served.

²⁷ Characterized by the treatment of the whole person, taking into account mental, spiritual, emotional and social factors, rather than just the presenting symptomology.

The participants also expressed a lack of resources in the church, specifically, professionals that were willing to guide them during their journeys to wholeness. Therefore, therapeutic, legal and medical professionals would be available to provide referral services for basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter, and information would also be available regarding educational opportunities, vocational training and employment assistance. Agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services, Workforce Development and Veterans' Administration, would be recruited for partnership to meet specialized, needs. Staff would develop person-centered plans to monitor an individual's progress pre- and post- service as a means of quality assurance.

It is my desire to create a duplicable, sustainable model that can be implemented in other churches across the globe. I pray that these efforts would promote a supportive environment for those in our congregations and communities, eliminating unethical practices, lessening fears and creating within Pentecostal churches a place of genuine spiritual acceptance and increased human safety.

As earlier indicated, to my knowledge, there is no existing literature on Pentecostal churches' treatment of women who have had abortions or experience unplanned pregnancies. This is both a strength and weakness to this study. The lack of sources posed challenges in identifying women who shared the experiences of this study's participants and limited the discovery of current best practices to support these women. However, the exploratory nature of this study provides a foundation from which future research to examine the associations between women members of Pentecostal churches and their treatment when facing unplanned pregnancies and abortion can be

conducted. Additionally, this study sheds light on the misogynistic attitudes and practices within this faith, which also provide opportunity for further exploration.

Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the snowball sampling technique was utilized to identify participants for this study. One advantage is that it allowed me to explore during the interview process, areas of potential research that may not have been discovered using other sampling methods. However, persuading potential candidates to agree to become a part of this study was challenging, as many were concerned about reliving difficult periods in their lives, and were apprehensive for fear of exposure. The study participants shared similar views regarding fear of exposure, which were realistic and proved to be an important component of this research.

The study was designed to include five participants; however, only four women agreed to participate. I had little control over the sample size. As I stated in the introductory chapter, all four participants interviewed were of African-American descent. The fact that these women were of African-American descent require further exploration, as there are aspects of the cultural experience that would not translate to other ethnic groups. Conducting further research concerning the treatment of women belonging to multiple ethnic groups within Pentecostal churches so that comparisons can be made would be of interest. It might also be of interest to interview men within Pentecostal churches to garner their observations toward the treatment of women, specifically, whether they have witnessed practices of shaming and condemnation, rules that govern women's clothing and behavior and whether they interpret the church's actions toward woman as misogynistic. Furthermore, it would be important to determine whether they,

too, have experienced rules that also govern their dress and behavior that could not be addressed in this study.

It should also be noted that only two of the four participants in this study were acquaintances, and those two were merely distant associates. This lends certain validity to the study, as the women were not privy to each other's stories, nor did they have an opportunity to discuss the study amongst themselves.

Another disadvantage to snowball sampling is that the results of this study cannot be generalized; however, several themes were detected during the course of this research that appear to transcend culture. Practices of shaming, rejection and condemnation, oppressive rules concerning women, and secrecy regarding the act of aborting were also threaded throughout the stories of the clergy interviewed, who were predominantly Caucasian. Thus, the stories shared by our participants do not appear to be isolated incidents. There are broader, more universal implications not limited to the four participants in this study. Their shared experiences coupled with the testimonies of the clergy participants lend support to a more universal truth that may transcend not only ethnicity, but also denomination, political affiliation and economic status.

Evaluation

Throughout this research, I worked collaboratively with the four members of my Local Advisory Committee (LAC). The committee was comprised of church leaders and laypersons associated with my ministry context whom I chose to serve as support through this project journey. The LAC worked supportively and collaboratively with me as I designed and implemented this project. They attended the site visit with my Drew University Advisor, Dr. Susan Kendall, and objectively evaluated my project from its

execution to completion. The LAC provided valuable insight from their various backgrounds and were essential to the completion of this project. The LAC was instrumental in creating a safe and welcoming space for me, as the researcher, to discuss the project and its implications for the advancement of the ministry.

The LAC and I met collectively three times throughout the course of the project at a location convenient for the members. Meetings were also held individually with members of the group either in person or by phone, as needed for the purpose of gleaning from their individual areas of expertise. Additionally, the LAC and I met collectively with my advisor, Dr. Susan Kendall, for the completion of the site visit. During the site visit, the Local Advisory Board indicated overall satisfaction with the qualitative approach to this study, its design, sampling, data collection and data analysis. The LAC evaluated this project, taking into consideration their engagement, the leadership abilities of the Doctoral candidate, the understanding of the Prospectus and its content, the nature and scope of the project, the potential benefits of the project, and its current and future implications. The following is a summary of their findings.

- **LAC Engagement:** The LAC indicated that their level of engagement in the project was appropriate and felt that the candidate kept them abreast of the project's progress. The members expressed satisfaction with their level of involvement and participation.
- **Candidate's Leadership:** The LAC indicated that I worked extensively with them in addressing any concerns and discussing the methods used in qualitative analysis and how they would structure and be applied to this project. They reported that the candidate exhibited strong leadership, organizational and communication skills.

- **Understanding of the Prospectus:** The LAC members indicated that they received the Prospectus prior to the initial meeting of the LAC and had a clear understanding of its content. According to the members, any questions were answered and concerns addressed. They recognize the sensitivity of this research and the challenges of locating participants willing to openly discuss their experiences.
- **Nature and Scope of the Project:** The LAC indicated that they were clearly made aware of the scope and nature of this project. They demonstrated a firm understanding of the significance of the project and how it will be useful to the congregants and community from their evaluation responses.
- **Project Benefits and Future Implications:** The LAC indicated that they understood the exploratory nature of the project and that the results of the project will only be shared with church leaders. No entities apart from the LAC will be privy to the full project nor its content. Members indicated that this study is relevant and will be instrumental in reconciling people with God and the Church.

Conclusion

Completing this project has been a journey and at times, extremely difficult. I was initially surprised that more women were not willing to come forward; however, after listening to the stories of the participants, I can certainly understand their apprehension. Although I would have welcomed a larger sampling, I am satisfied that the stories shared were genuine, authentic, and reflective, lending support to a rich and impactful study. While not completely surprised that few male spiritual leaders within the Pentecostal faith were willing to lend support to this study, I am saddened that more clergy did not view this project as an opportunity to create environments for women to

heal and reconcile with God. I, therefore, commend Dr. Sherrill Piscapo, Minister Priscilla Shelton, Dr. Cari Jackson and Pastor Nathaniel Nix for not only lending their voices to this study, but also for their tireless efforts in ministry to combat oppressive practices and respond to the needs of women with compassion, understanding and love.

As indicated in Chapter 1, I, too, witnessed and was often a recipient of the oppressive practices within the Pentecostal denomination. Pentecostalism has been the foundation of my family for decades and I strongly believe in the doctrine of this faith tradition. I realize, however, that there are unhealthy practices within Pentecostalism that must be addressed with urgency, as we are inflicting injury and suffering upon those who run to us for shelter.

I believe that successful transformation only comes when one is willing to become a part of the solution, rather than a contributor to the problem. There are many loving, kind leaders and congregants alike who embrace Pentecostalism. In this study, we have been introduced to a few of them. I therefore have every confidence that by being made aware of the negative impact upon women and the consequences of the disparate treatment of women within our congregations, other leaders within the Pentecostal denomination will rise to the occasion and begin the conversations necessary to become a kinder, more compassionate and sincere organization.

I have learned much from the four women in this study and commend them for their heroism. Their voices will be historically recounted as pivotal to this important research. These courageous women have renewed my hope in Pentecostal churches and given me the confidence needed to be a change agent within the Pentecostal faith community. I must admit that I was initially angry after hearing the shared stories of the participants. One

cannot hear such accounts and not be moved. I soon realized, however, that anger is unproductive. I recognized that even I needed spiritual and emotional healing. If these women, having suffered deep spiritual and emotional injury, can find the courage to heal and the strength to forgive those who have harmed them, I can plausibly do the same. We are fortunate that, despite their suffering, they remain loyal, active members of the Pentecostal faith tradition, each continuing to engage in leadership positions at their respective churches. This is a testimony not to Pentecostalism, but to the resiliency of the human spirit.

Appendix A

DREW

Drew University
Institutional Review Board
36 Madison Avenue
Madison, New Jersey 07940

G. Scott Morgan
Chair, IRB
Associate Professor
smorgan@drew.edu

November 5, 2018

Ms. Davis, Dr. Kendall, and Dr. West:

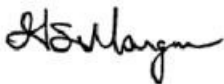
The Institutional Review Board has conducted a full review of your research for the project entitled “Faith and Abortion: Listening to Pentecostal Women’s Stories, Seeking Ethical

Church Responses”. The IRB has approved your research with one caveat: Any reports submitted to congregational leaders should NOT include any potentially identifying information of participants, such a demographics, age, race, etc.

This approval for your research protocol and the human participants’ component of your work is valid through 5-November-2019. If you plan to continue data collection for this research past this date, you will need to reapply for IRB approval. If you make any modifications to your research, you will need to obtain IRB approval for those changes as well.

Best of luck with your work!

Sincerely,



G. Scott Morgan

IRB Chair

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Introduction: My name is Pamela Davis, and I am a student at the Drew University's Theological School conducting an ethnographic study for the completion of the Doctor of Ministry program. My email address is Pdavisdrake@drew.edu. My Project Advisor is Dr. Susan Kendall and her email address is Skendall@drew.edu. You may contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this study.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to identify the needs of women during their contemplation and/or following pregnancy termination, discover the role of the Pentecostal Church in satisfying those needs, and determine what this assistance involves. Informed by the voices of women, it is my goal to raise the consciousness of the Pentecostal Church that it might guide women both spiritually and emotionally during this very critical period in their lives and demonstrate the love and compassion God requires of all Christians.

Procedure: If you consent, you will be asked a series of questions in an oral interview that will take place at Pineview Church, 6400 Textile Road, Ypsilanti, MI 48197. I will make an audiotape recording of the interview for my own research. It will be kept strictly confidential.

Time Required: The interview will take approximately 1 to 2 hours of your time.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any questions that cause you discomfort. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

Risks: There are no known physical risks associated with this interview. However, it is possible that you might feel distress in the course of the conversation. If this happens, please inform me immediately. You may stop the interview at any time with no consequences or negative judgment from me.

Benefits: While there is no guarantee, it is possible that you will appreciate the benefit of telling your story and sharing your views/concerns. This study is also intended to benefit the Pentecostal Church and by enlivening Christian discourse on the theology and practice of love, acceptance, and compassion. Your ideas, struggles, faith and knowledge can contribute to a deeper understanding of women's spiritual needs and the ways in which the church can be as effective as possible in responding to them.

Confidentiality/Anonymity: Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the interviews

and the only person who listens to the recordings. When I write your story, I will use pseudonyms—made up names—for all participants, unless you specify in writing that you wish to be identified by name. If you wish to choose your own pseudonym for the study, please indicate the first name you would like for me to use here:

_____.

Sharing the Results: I plan to construct an ethnography—a written account of what I learn—based on these interviews together with my reading and historical research. This ethnography will be submitted to my academic advisors upon the completion of my research. I also plan to share my conclusions with my church leaders. Portions of the thesis may be printed and made available to church members.

Publication: There is the possibility that this study will be published or that I will refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

Before You Sign: Understand that by signing below, you agree to an audiotaped interview for this research study. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you.

Statement of Consent: The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. If I have concerns about my experience in this study (e.g. that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may contact the Chair of the Drew Institutional Review Board regarding my concerns.

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Print Name: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Print Name: _____

Appendix C**QUESTIONNAIRE – WOMEN**

1. Are you currently or have you even been a member of the Pentecostal Church?
2. How did your church shape your perception or beliefs about women? Your body and planned or unplanned pregnancy?
3. What messages did you hear in your head about women and your body when you were growing up?
4. Did you undergo an abortion while you were a member of the Pentecostal Church?
5. Describe the circumstances surrounding your decision to abort?
6. What were your spiritual and emotional needs during your contemplation of abortion and following the procedure?
7. Were any of these needs met by the Pentecostal church? If so, what needs were met? If not, were these needs met by some other entity?
8. What were the hinderances to receiving the support you required?
9. What emotional and spiritual resources do you wish you'd had?
10. How do you think your faith informed your decision?
11. How did your race/ethnicity and culture shape your perception or beliefs about women? Your body?
12. Where, if at all, did you recognize God during your journey?

Appendix D**QUESTIONNAIRE – CLERGY**

1. What is the Pentecostal Church's current position regarding women who abort?
2. What are your personal beliefs about women who abort and how does that effect your ministry?
3. Do you believe that the Pentecostal Church has a moral obligation to emotionally and spiritually support these women?
4. Does your ministry context provide such supports? If so, what does that support entail? If not, why not?
5. Have the efforts of your ministry been successful and if so, how has that success been measured?
6. What are some of the hinderances that you've encountered to supporting these women?

Appendix E**DEBRIEFING FORM**

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to identify the needs of women during their contemplation and/or following pregnancy termination, discover the role of the Pentecostal Church in satisfying those needs, and determine what this assistance involves. As there is no existing research regarding this specific subject, it is hoped that this study will raise the consciousness of the Pentecostal Church that it might guide women both spiritually and emotionally during this very critical period in their lives, demonstrating the love and compassion God requires of all Christians.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, you were asked several questions regarding your experiences as they related to a pregnancy termination. I plan to construct an ethnography—a written account of what I learn—based on your response and that of the other 4 women interviewed in this study, together with my reading and historical research. This ethnography will be submitted to my Project Advisor upon the completion of my research. I also plan to share what I learn from this study with my church leaders. Portions of the ethnography may be printed and made available to the members.

3. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

While there is no existing research specific to this topic, if you are interested in exploring further information regarding the Church and reproductive rights, I would suggest the following resources:

“Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Marginalization of Women” by Rosina M. Gabaitse. University of Botswana, *Scriptura*, Vol 114 (2015), 1-12.

Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice, by Rebecca Todd Peters, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2018.

“Understanding Why Women Seek Abortions in the US” by M. Antonia Biggs, Heather Gould, and Diana Foster Greene, *BMC Women’s Health*, Vol. 13, No. 29 (2013)

4. CONTACT INFORMATION

If you are interest in learning more about this research or the result of the research of which you were a part, please do not hesitate to contact Pamela Davis at Pdavisdrake@drew.edu or my Project Advisor, Dr. Susan Kendall, at Skendall@drew.edu.

Thank you for your assistance and participation in this study.

Appendix F**COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

COUNSELING SERVICES

Crossroads Counseling PLLC
3830 Packard St., #160
Ann Arbor, MI 48108
(734) 929-9703

Deepwater Counseling, PLLC
2046 Washtenaw Ave.,
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
(734) 203-0183

Intentional Counseling Services
3150 Packard St.
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
(734) 879-0162

Integrative Empowerment Group, PLLC
2488 Golfside Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48108
(734) 945-6210

FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES

Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw
County
4925 Packard St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48108
(734) 971-9781

Family Life Services Clinic & Pregnancy
Ctr.
840 Maus Avenue
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
(734) 434-3088

Planned Parenthood – Ann Arbor Health
Ctr.
3100 Professional Drive
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
(734) 973-0710

Washtenaw County Sexual Health
Services
555 Towner St., #1103
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
(734) 544-6840

HOSPITALS

St. Joseph Mercy Health Centers
5301 McAuley Drive
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
(734) 712-3456

University of Michigan Medical Center
University of Michigan
1500 E. Medical Center Drive
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
(734) 936-4000

HEALTH EDUCATION

Washtenaw County Health Department
555 Towner Street
48198 Ypsilanti, MI Ypsilanti, MI 48198
48198
(734) 544-6700

Washtenaw County Health & Human
Services Ypsilanti, MI
Ypsilanti, MI
(734) 481-2000

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