

**UNSUFFERING OURSELVES:
CO-CONSTRUCTING WOMEN'S AGENCY
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
A FEMINIST LUTHERAN PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS**

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

D: I'd like to begin with you describing the time you felt silenced, felt your agency was diminished or your voice was compromised in the church.

M: Well, I'll tell you, to be honest, it's hard to narrow it down to one.¹
(Mariah, personal communication, August 12, 2011)

It is a familiar occurrence for women in the church, ordained and lay, to experience attempts by others to silence their voices, diminish their experiences, and compromise, if not deny, their agency. It is *not* a familiar occurrence for women in the church to be asked to intentionally speak publicly about such attempts, richly describe how they keep acting and speaking through such experiences, and reflectively make meaning of how their theology guides their agency in this movement. Prior to the awareness that the feminist movement brought to the church about the lack or invisibility of women's voices and experiences in its theology and structure, such a question about women's denied voice and agency in the church was considered a "nonquestion," something not even brought into consideration because there was no context for such a question (Daly, 1973, p. 12).

For some, questioning women's voices and agency in the church still is a nonquestion. Considering the quote above where one interviewee acknowledges a repertoire of experiences from which to choose to answer the question, one wonders if clergy women's stories almost become "nonstories": so common, so much a part and result of the institution and its thinking, and so subjugated by the dominant tradition that their stories are taken for granted, invisible, or

¹ This research project included interviewing eight clergy women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) who could identify experiences of transformational movement from suffering to unsuffering, or from diminished voice/agency to increased voice/agency in the church, and could identify agency as assisting in this movement. All eight ELCA clergy women interviewed expressed that they had *multiple* experiences/stories of denied agency from which they could choose to share in an interview.

simply ignored. Or, perhaps, clergy women's stories simply remain "unstories," stories not told because women cannot find meaning for such stories in their particular contexts and/or because there is no audience who can listen to their stories (Bons-Storm, 1996, p. 57). What happens if these nonstories or unstories are considered *alternative stories* of differing values and ideas that motivate different voices and actions? What *knowledges* might these alternative stories make available to clergy women, to the church, to pastoral theology, and pastoral practitioners about *agency*?²

This project seeks these nonstories and unstories of eight particular clergy women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in order to learn from them how they choose to exercise agency in and through attempts to minimize or deny their agency in the church. By inviting a careful telling of and listening to these stories, this project aims to contribute to how the church thinks about agency from a pastoral theological perspective, including how agency might be increased among persons who have felt their agency denied in some meaningful ways.

Guiding Question

My particular interest in this topic surfaced when I as an ELCA pastor experienced harassment within a congregation where numerous women had experienced and were experiencing on-going harassment. By harassment, I mean sexual harassment in the form of unwelcome and unwanted sexual advances, jokes of sexual nature that were demeaning to women, and intimidation of women that interfered with their participation at church and created an unsafe environment for me at work and at home (a parsonage next door to the church). A

² "Alternative stories" and "knowledges" are narrative counseling theory terms used to describe the multiple stories and ways of knowing that are always available to people. Because these stories/knowledges are based on "personal" experience, they often are dismissed as un-scientific, not normative and not credible, discouraging people from speaking their own stories aloud and benefitting from their own wisdom. These terms will be discussed further in Chapter 4 "Agency and Narrative Counseling Theory."

culture of harassment within and beyond the congregation made it difficult, if not impossible, for people to hear the voices of women who were speaking aloud and challenging the dominant story that the harassment had “already been dealt with.”

Supposedly, the harassment had “been dealt with” a year prior to my arrival, yet it was painfully obvious that consistently holding the one accountable who was causing the harm had not happened. Because no formal plan or policy was put in place to prevent such harm, women who had been in leadership for years at this church implemented an informal plan of safety amongst themselves: no woman was left alone with the perpetrator; no woman was left alone in the church; women and other men ran interference between the perpetrator and certain women whom he had harassed and continued to harass; and women made sure that the perpetrator would not be involved in any ministry programming that put other women (including the children and youth) at risk. These women’s actions so challenged the overall desire of some in the church for the “already had been dealt with” story to be a “past” story that their roles and responsibilities were revoked without explanation by a senior leader. They tried to raise questions of safety and accountability at meetings of the church council and were denied the right to speak, and they never were given a formal opportunity to speak.

As pastor, I was threatened by the same senior leader not to talk about my own or others’ experiences of harassment as such talk would have “grave consequences” for my future as a pastor in the church. However, I did choose to act and disrupt the “already had been dealt with” story. The costs of challenging this story were high and many—including the directive not to have contact with the women with whom I shared similar experiences of harassment and who were starting to speak out about their experiences of harassment/abuse *and* of being silenced by

church leadership.³ The directive's intent was to honor "professional boundaries," but in the context of abuse, such a directive serves to isolate women and attempt to silence and ignore, if not deny, a potential source of healing for women: collective *agency*.⁴

Given the directive, I initially chose not to contact or respond to the other women and yet found myself feeling the fragmentation of this experience personally, pastorally, and theologically. Ironically, it was not church leadership who raised the question that would invite healing, but rather it was a counselor, an active member of the ELCA herself, who out of curiosity asked me: "Why haven't you talked with the other women about this?" Having exercised agency throughout the challenges of this situation, *why* would I now heed a directive that attempted to co-opt that very agency and impede healing? Her question pushed me to a realization: idolizing boundaries without questioning the basis of such boundaries (especially those defined and protected by patriarchal structures) is a form of denial—of relationship, of myself, of my own voice and agency, and of God.⁵

³ Although an implied expectation exists within the ELCA that pastors do not maintain contact with former parishioners, this is not a consistent expectation or a universal practice within the denomination and/or among ELCA clergy. I respect, support, and advocate for appropriate and healthy boundaries between pastors and congregational members. I also believe that to invoke "professional boundaries" in this particular situation was a naïve and simplistic response by a patriarchal system unable and/or unwilling to hear the voices of the particular women involved and to assess the seriousness of these experiences. This lack of hearing and comprehension resulted in: 1) masking the on-going harm, 2) making those who had been harmed vulnerable to further harm, and 3) blaming those who had been harmed *and* making them responsible for the on-going harm they/we were trying to stop. I am aware of growing literature that supports traditional ways of thinking about boundaries and challenges these norms. See, for example, the conversation between Carter Heyward and Marie Fortune (1994) in "Boundaries or Barriers? An Exchange," *Christian Century*, 111(18), 579-582.

⁴ The use of the term *agency* will be defined further in the section "Definitions and Limitations" of this chapter.

⁵ I credit the clarity of this learning to two courageous and faith-filled women who walked with me through this experience and who taught me to question for whose benefit boundaries are maintained and to remember that only when boundaries reflect the honesty of a relationship do they have integrity. Boundaries exist to affirm and protect relationship, not to deny and betray it.

This realization and this experience raised many practical, theological, personal, professional, and pastoral questions for me as a woman and as a pastor in the church: Why are silence, dismissal, and resistance such ready responses to women's exercising of agency in the church, but belief, acknowledgement, and encouragement are not? How can members and leaders of a Lutheran denomination that confesses a theology of the cross *not* see the stories of suffering in their midst *and* the stories of *unsuffering* that are arising in numerous places because of women's agency?⁶ In the face of the many challenges to women's exercising of agency, what is it that contributes to and precipitates women's desire and ability to speak up and to attempt to unsuffer ourselves?

This experience and the questions it raised alongside the experience of graduate education in pastoral theology and pastoral counseling shape the question guiding this dissertation:

How does listening to the voices and stories of women who have experienced suffering and transformational movement toward unsuffering, particularly from silence to voice or diminished agency to increased agency, help the field of pastoral theology thicken its theological understanding of agency and help develop practices of care that intentionally invite agency in this movement toward unsuffering?

This dissertation seeks to address this question by bringing into constructive conversation experiential, theoretical, psychological, and theological perspectives to understand how women who are ordained pastors in the ELCA and who have experienced attempts to silence their voices and diminish their agential power in the church use agency to participate in the movement from suffering to unsuffering.

⁶ The term *unsuffering* will be defined further in the section "Definitions and Limitations" in this chapter.

History of the Question in Pastoral Theology and Rationale for the Project

Pastoral theology takes seriously lived experience and pays particular attention to experiences of suffering with the intent to generate theological practices of care that contribute to unsuffering and/or healing. Because of these commitments, the field of pastoral theology itself and its literature have embodied and demonstrated the ability to listen to women and their experiences of suffering, to explore women's experiences theologically, and to create practices of care to address women's particular needs in the church and in culture. In addition, the diversity of voices within the field of pastoral theology has helped the field to develop a keen awareness of the needs of "particular" women and to not essentialize certain women's voices and experiences over other women's voices and experiences in ways that can and do harm.⁷

Reviewing the history of pastoral theological literature in light of the guiding question of this project--"How does listening to the voices and stories of women who have experienced suffering and transformational movement toward unsuffering help the field of pastoral theology thicken its theological understanding of agency and help develop practices of care that intentionally invite agency in this movement toward unsuffering?"--one clearly identifies progressions in how the field listens to a diversity of women and takes their experiences seriously.

Peggy Way (1963, 1964, & 1972) and Emma Justes (1971 & 1978) are two of the early published female voices who speak and draw attention to the particularity of "women's" experiences in and of the church. In the late 1970's and in the 1980's, attention to women's

⁷ I am aware of the "essentialist" arguments about women and will address this topic further in Chapter 3. I do not support the essentialization of women's voices and am interested in how the social construction of gender influences agency. The history of the pastoral theological literature explored in this section demonstrates the shifting of gender from an essential category to one that is more socially constructed.

experiences in the church would surface through a particular lens, that of abuse (Adams & Fortune, 1995; Fortune, 1987, 1989, & 1993; Fortune & Poling, 1994). Marie Fortune's work on clergy abuse and ministry with victims of abuse raised serious questions about pastoral leadership and care, especially in relationship to women who were more often than not the victims of such abuse. Fortune's book, *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship*, amplifies the challenges and risks involved for women when they dare to claim their agency and disclose their experiences of abuse: they face personal, professional, legal, ecclesial, and other consequences and repercussions. Fortune authors her book on behalf of the women who cannot write it with the hope of giving *their stories* a voice and affirming the agency of women to speak out in the only way they can without causing further harm to themselves—through Fortune's voice and writing.

In the decades of the 1990's and 2000's, a significant increase in the volume of pastoral theological literature *by* and *for* women continued to raise questions and awareness about women's experiences of violence, abuse, and suffering; the construction of identity, voice, and agency of women in our culture and in the church; the importance of listening to women and their experiences and the particularity of their experiences; and the challenge to pastoral leaders/churches to understand that taking women's experiences seriously would impact not only pastoral leadership and care practices but also pastoral theology itself (Bons-Storm, 1996; Cooper-White, 1995; Doehring, 1992 & 1995; Glaz & Stevenson-Moessner, 1991; Gorsuch, 2001; Neuger, 1993, 1996, 2001, & 2004; Ramsay, 1991, 1992, & 1998; Ramsay & McClure 1998; Stevenson-Moessner, 1996 & 2000; Stevenson-Moessner & Snorton, 2009). Despite the increase of literature *by*, *for*, and *about* women and the reality that several women who write are

clergy, one is challenged to find extensive literature that engages *clergy women's* experiences of agency and unsuffering and how these experiences impact and inform their practices of care.⁸

The suffering that women experience in regard to silencing, disbelief, and denied agency continues to be a problem in the church and in our culture. Often women's suffering is not only ignored or minimized but also dismissed as a potential resource for learning about the agency it takes to survive such suffering and to move toward unsuffering. Women clergy in particular are in a unique position as they not only listen and witness to the stories of women who have been silenced and have found the courage to act, but also they hold their own stories of these experiences. Too often women clergy do not have either a safe place to share their stories or an audience who can recognize the challenges, repercussions, and possibilities of exercising their agency as *women* and as *women* pastors.

This dissertation assists the church, its leaders and members, to be an intentional source of and contributor to women's agency and unsuffering by listening to and believing women's voices and experiences and seeing, recognizing, and acknowledging the agency women are exercising in the midst of suffering and in the movement toward unsuffering. Analyzing the role of agency amplifies the story of movement and suggests ways in which pastoral care practices can intentionally invite agency and assist in such movement.

Historically the field of pastoral theology has relied heavily on psychodynamic psychology focused on care of self/individual. These practices often have unintentionally contributed to women's suffering by separating women's private and public lives, by keeping

⁸ In searching for articles on "clergy women," one finds the following limited topics often addressed: stress; "lifestyle"—usually referring to whether one is married, single, or in a same-sex relationship; sexual abuse and leadership styles. These findings and the history of the literature reflect the shifting of gender from an essential category to that which is socially constructed.

women's voices and experiences isolated from one another and the church, and by perpetuating a diagnostic and limited view of women rather than building on their identity and agency as human beings who are fully part of God's vast and diverse creation (McClure, 2010).

In the last twenty years, shifts in the field of pastoral theology reflect the impact of critical postmodernity, the communal/contextual paradigm, and the reality that people are not separated individuals but are embedded in a "living human web" (Miller-McLemore, 1996 & 2004; Patton, 1993; Ramsay 2004). Such shifts expose that theological assumptions and norms are not universally relevant or applicable to all people in all contexts and suggest that agency (or lack of) is not an individual possession or problem but is constructed by and in relationship and social context. Such shifts have invited postmodern and social constructionist counseling theories into conversations with pastoral theology and theology in general (Gergen, 2002a & 2002b; Neuger, 2001). These theories focus on acknowledging, affirming, and increasing people's sense of agency in their lives and how that agency can be used to deconstruct and reconstruct the narratives of their lives as well as their identities. This "re-authoring" enables people to be "more able to live full responses to their vocations" (Neuger, 2001, p. 56). This dissertation explores what can be learned about women's movement toward unsuffering themselves when agency is a starting point rather than women's (personal) suffering.

Postmodern theories tend to grant significant agency to the individual, yet they do not fully address how and/or when human agency is limited and/or expanded or the role of God in such agency. This is where theology offers a thoughtful critique, particularly a theology of the cross, which is essential to Lutheran theology. Although feminist, liberation, and process theologies are widely used in and formative for pastoral theology and developing pastoral practices of care, pastoral theology has not actively engaged the theology of the cross as a

helpful resource except for Sharon Thornton's (2002) recent work --*Broken Yet Beloved: A Pastoral Theology of the Cross*.

Informed by Douglas John Hall and Dorothee Sölle's interpretations of a theology of the cross, Thornton offers a pastoral theology of the cross that intends to unsuffer the suffering by exposing the realities of suffering and by noting how the political cross calls us to reflect on our agency as it contributes to or reduces our own and/or others' suffering. From a Lutheran perspective, her construction of a pastoral theology of the cross is a significant contribution to the field. Although in some ways she utilizes this theology as more of a "tool," essential to alleviating the suffering that she is trying to address, rather than as a theology essential to her own faith tradition, she challenges Lutherans to utilize our faith tradition as more than just a confession of what we believe but as a call to act in the face of suffering.

Thornton's interpretation of the theology of the cross corresponds with a feminist theology of the cross in terms of its liberative bent; however, it proves helpful to bring her interpretation and a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross into a conversation with one another. Such a conversation enriches both by reflecting more deeply on the features, meaning, and complexities of suffering and unsuffering and on the strengths and limitations of being provoked by a more political understanding of the cross and agency. Thornton's pastoral theology of the cross encourages, aids, and challenges feminist Lutheran theology to see the possibilities to act for liberation, to not allow a faith tradition to justify action or lack of action in the face of suffering without explanation, and to own its faith tradition including its limitations.

Because pastoral theology as a field has not typically embraced the theology of the cross as a potential partner for conversations about healing and care, there is ample room to expand the conversation and explore the possibilities of such a discussion. This dissertation brings pastoral

theology into conversation with a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross, in order to broaden the field's understanding of both suffering and unsuffering and to highlight the liberative aspects of a theology of the cross that contribute to agency in the midst of suffering and to movement toward unsuffering. Further exploration of a theology of the cross from pastoral theological and feminist Lutheran perspectives offers the Lutheran tradition a challenge to revitalize and live its faith claims in ways that compel one to see and respond to suffering and to prevent unnecessary suffering, to pay attention to and account for one's ability to act in the face of suffering, and to develop a sense of how and whether a theology of the cross could play a vital role in one's choice/ability to exercise agency, especially by clergy women trained and educated in such a theology.

Having noted the available literature as well as the gaps, this project contributes to the field of pastoral theology by helping it develop: 1) a definition of agency that is co-constructed by the experiences of women and from the perspective of a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross; 2) a more profound understanding of suffering and unsuffering and how women choose to use agency in the movement from/between suffering to unsuffering; and 3) practices of care that intentionally invite agency and assist in unsuffering women.

Definitions of Terms

Agency, suffering, and unsuffering are essential terms in exploring the guiding question of this dissertation: How can listening to the voices and stories of women who have experienced suffering and transformational movement toward unsuffering help the field of pastoral theology increase its theological understanding of agency and help develop practices of care that intentionally invite agency in this movement toward unsuffering? Although a revised critical correlational method is used in this project to bring experiential (one-on-one interviews with eight ELCA

clergy women), theoretical, psychological, and theological perspectives together to explore, challenge, augment, and redefine these terms, I began my research by creating working yet tentative definitions of suffering, unsuffering, and agency that were shaped by my theological perspectives.

As a pastoral theologian informed by a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross, I understand the theology of the cross to boldly affirm that God does not remove God's self from human experience or from the reality of suffering but suffers *with* us. However, the emphasis of a theology of the cross is *not* on suffering for the sake of suffering, but rather on a God who subverts human expectations of power (as control) by choosing to embrace human experience, including injustice, oppression, and suffering, and not exempting God's self from it. When God subverts human expectations of power by choosing to embrace human experience, this embrace is not a naïve or passive engagement with reality. When humans recognize that they are not alone and that their experience is no longer outside of God's experience, humans are led into the world with "a new kind of openness, attentiveness, and compassion" and empowered to make choices for life and to live life in relationship with God, each other and the world (Hall, 1989, p. 30; Hall, 2003a, p. 53). God's use of divine agency to willingly participate in human suffering both enhances and invites human agency. This theological perspective informs my understanding of suffering, unsuffering, and agency and shapes my interest in exploring how and why clergy women are able to exercise agency.

My initial understanding of *suffering* was that it is a part of life and of being human, and there is some suffering that exists that is unnecessary and without purpose. Suffering can be the pain felt or harm caused by neglecting or being forced to neglect one's own voice and experience and/or the voices and experiences of those who say "I'm hurting"; it can be the helplessness

and/or hopelessness felt when one's own sense of agency is diminished or denied; and it can be the result of not having the choice *to* suffer.⁹ Suffering also can be a conscious choice to use one's agency to participate in hearing one's own and others' voices that say "I'm hurting" and in empowering oneself and others to address the hurt and decrease the sense of helplessness and/or hopelessness.

Un suffering is a term coined by narrative therapy co-founder David Epston and used in his co-writing with Julie King on anti-anorexia/bulimia. Adapting this word from a Lucinda Williams' song, Epston uses "unsuffering" as a verb to indicate an act of "undoing" suffering (Epston, 2008, p. 1; King & Epston, 2009, p.9). For King, a survivor of anorexia/bulimia, the term unsuffering "raised the possibility that I didn't have to remain 'stuck' in the quicksand of anorexia/bulimia (a/b). . . . I wondered if it was a word that could both signify grim resistance and defiance of a/b at the same time as a movement toward joy and celebration" (Epston, 2008, p. 1). Unsuffering is not the absence of suffering but rather it "encompass[es] and acknowledge[s] both suffering and its undoing" (Epston, 2008, p. 1). For the purpose of this project, I define *unsuffering* as a liberative and agential process by which the one being silenced or denied agency chooses to both name the suffering as real and participate in making choices for "life," for healing, and for increased power in/over one's life. The process and choice of unsuffering is a not a passive experience but active, and may include the choice to suffer.

"Choice" and the power to choose are integral to the kind of *agency* explored in this project. I offer a tentative definition of *agency* as the power one has to name her experiences of suffering and unsuffering; to get informed about and to reflect on the choices one has to unsuffer

⁹ Sharon Thornton (2002) writes that "When we hear the cry 'I am hurting,' we are to listen with a deep and focused attention. . . . We are to listen precisely because their cries critique the ways we live our faith and do theology" (p. 2).

herself; to be able to choose how and when to act and participate in effecting change in one's life that contributes to unsuffering; and to have the ability and opportunity to make meaning of one's actions. I understand the theology of the cross to affirm, invite, and empower human agency, and I understand narrative counseling theory to acknowledge, respect, and seek to contribute to/increase one's sense of agency. Informed by social constructionist theory, narrative counseling theory recognizes that, in our culture, agency is defined, limited, and created by one's social location, cultural identity, religious beliefs, and relationships; thus no "objective" definition of agency exists, and the meaning that does exist derives from and in relationship. A theology of the cross also affirms meaning constructed in, through, and by relationship.

Taking seriously that meaning is constructed in relationship, I conducted a trial interview with another ELCA clergy woman (who was not one of the eight ELCA clergy women officially interviewed for this project) to test out my working definitions of terms before beginning the formal process of research interviews. From the trial interview, I recognized the need for definitions that would enable interviewees to access and engage the terms in relation to their experiences as well as the importance of not overly defining the terms in ways that would discourage or prevent interviewees from creating their own definitions, from challenging and expanding my definitions or from deepening their and my definitions.¹⁰

Although my interest was in individual's stories and experiences of agency, I acknowledge that the various definitions of "agency" that surfaced in the course of the research interviews with the eight ELCA clergy women are constructed in and through relationship to others including God. Therefore, I anticipated that these clergy women's own constructions of

¹⁰Throughout this project "interviewees," "participants," and "clergy women" are used interchangeably and refer only to the eight ELCA clergy women who participated in the research interviews.

agency and their participation in a qualitative interview process itself could and would contribute to a *co-construction* of agency. By focusing this dissertation on the co-construction of agency, I intend to honor the wisdom that has evolved and continues to evolve from women's collective experiences as "inside experts" but often is overlooked and/or dismissed as simply individual experience (or problem); to develop more richly textured theological definitions of agency that can account for how and when women make choices and exercise options to unsuffer themselves; and to be open to the possibilities of what can unfold by bringing theological, theoretical, psychological, and experiential perspectives of agency into conversation with one another (Jones, 2000, p. 74).

Structure of Chapters

Focusing on the question guiding this dissertation, I interviewed eight ordained women in the ELCA who identified as having experienced transformational movements from suffering to unsuffering or from diminished voice/agency to increased voice/agency in the church, and who identified agency as assisting in this movement.¹¹ Acknowledging that each one's experience is different, I paid attention to their particular experiences of transformation. I listened for how they exercised agency to move from a situation of suffering to unsuffering, to how they defined agency, and to what informed their definitions of agency, particularly whether a theology of the cross did or did not contribute to their use of agency in their situations. Because lived-experience is integral to this pastoral theological project, interviews and the knowledges gathered from the interviews are used to keep clergy women's voices and experiences engaged in dialog with feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross.

¹¹ See Appendix A for "Interview Questions."

Chapter 2, “Methodology,” describes how this research and these interviews were conducted and structures this conversation using a revised critical correlational methodology.

In Chapter 3, “Agency and Feminist Theory,” I offer an overview of feminist theory and its purpose for this project. I then utilize feminist theory informed by poststructuralism to deconstruct patriarchal discourses that exist in culture and in the church where denial of women’s voices, experiences, and agency often exists and becomes a de facto way of life for women. Having provided a context for understanding how these discourses influence and shape the agency of women, I invite clergy women’s voices into this conversation by sharing from the interviews their descriptions of particular situations in the church where their agency has been obstructed and their descriptions of the elements of suffering they experienced related to these obstructions. This section concludes by bringing together feminist theory and clergy women’s voices to offer some beginning integrative reflections on how clergy women are constructing agency.

Narrative counseling theory is used in Chapter 4, “Agency and Narrative Counseling Theory,” to explore and suggest how “unsuffering” is a possibility and a preferred story for women in our culture and church. Specifically, I draw on narrative counseling theory’s concept of “agency,” which recognizes “that deep within [people’s] own stories [they] have the resources and possibilities to create less problematic and more productive lives,” lives which they actively create and shape (Neuger, 2001, p. 87). Narrative counseling theory deeply respects a person’s agency and makes space to hear and see the ways in which women are already deconstructing discourses about agency and women that get in the way of their exercising of agency. Returning to clergy women’s experiences, I reflect on how clergy women are constructing agency in ways

that help them take action toward unsuffering and suggest how their constructions begin to point toward a co-construction of agency.

Of the resources mentioned, theology uniquely offers the potential to address profound meanings and understandings of suffering, unsuffering, transformation, and agency in people's lives. In Chapter 5, "Agency and Theology of the Cross," I begin with offering a Lutheran historical perspective of a theology of the cross before engaging a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross to highlight the liberative aspects such a theology presents: it can expose suffering; it can hold a vision of unsuffering; and in its innate call for ongoing reform, it can affirm and call forth an alternative story of agency and active participation in both suffering and unsuffering.¹² Sharon Thornton's pastoral theology of the cross is also explored and brought into conversation with a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross. Once again, I return to the voices of the clergy women interviewed, listening to how they speak about suffering, unsuffering, and agency in their lives, and reflect on how a theology of the cross informs their theological constructions of agency. I conclude by suggesting how the various perspectives of a theology of the cross discussed and articulated in clergy women's narratives propose a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross that can assist clergy women in constructing agency to unsuffer themselves.

In Chapter 6, "Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Practice," I return to the question guiding this dissertation—"How does listening to the voices and stories of women who have experienced suffering and transformational movement toward unsuffering help the field of pastoral theology thicken its theological understanding of agency and help develop practices of care that intentionally invite agency in this movement toward unsuffering?" I review the contributions of eight ELCA clergy women's experiences, feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and the

¹² Thompson (2004) states that one of the functions of a feminist theology of the cross is that it can "disrupt any and all versions of a glory theology that suppress and oppress women" (p. 125).

theology of the cross to a co-construction of agency; tentatively explore a surprising discovery from my qualitative research that baptismal theology is critically informative to participants in shaping their agency, and then propose that by joining baptismal theology and a theology of the cross, pastoral theology has the opportunity to deepen its understanding of agency and develop pastoral theological practice that can invite agency and contribute to unsuffering.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

Pastoral theology is a constructive and contextual theology. Because this is a pastoral theological project, it must account for lived experience and context which are engaged in a critical conversation with social scientific questions and theories and theological reflection, so that we are better able to understand human experience, God, and our relationship to God, as well as create practices of care for “persons-in-context” (Lartey, 2006, p. 91). As a pastoral theologian seeking to construct new knowledge about agency and a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross, I draw upon the sources of theology, social theory, and counseling theory, and two methodological elements which are core to the field of pastoral theology: lived experience as a starting point for reflection, and the revised critical correlation of social scientific and theological resources (Graham, Walton, & Ward, 2005, p. 158; Tracy, 1975, pp. 33-34).

This chapter begins with noting how my own social location informs and limits this project, then discusses the revised critical correlational method and the sources chosen for dialogue, and concludes with detailing the interview research process and noting the limitations of this project.

Social Location and Location within Pastoral Theology

My interest in the topic of how clergy women exercise agency is not random but deliberate and evolves from my own experience as a woman connected to the church throughout my life and as one whose agency has been both encouraged and denied within the church. Baptized, raised, nurtured, and ordained in the Lutheran (ELCA) church, my understanding of faith, theology, and agency are connected to my cultural, familial, and communal identity. My theology is shaped by Lutheran theology, by the Lutheran ecclesial structure, and by the

mentoring of many faith-filled women who invited me to “be” church with them and modeled agency in their actions and words in the midst of a church structure that often undervalued women’s roles and agency.¹³ These women provided me with a vocational model of how to be a pastoral and practical theologian, and my interaction with them shaped and continues to shape my feminist commitments and practices of ministry. From them I gained the confidence to both utilize and question my Lutheran tradition and theology. As a White, Northern European American, heterosexual female who is middle class, educated, and ordained, I live in a culture where I have the privilege (and burden) to challenge and enrich this Lutheran tradition.

I began seminary in the mid-1990’s, a time in the field of pastoral theology noted for the influx of diverse voices, especially of women whose experiences, theology, and social and political critique of culture and the church were challenging and changing the field. I sought continuing education in pastoral theology and pastoral care for my own care and well-being and for the care that I found myself expected to provide to women who were seeking care from pastors who could/would “listen” to women, believe them and their experiences, and discern the differences between *their* stories and the stories culture and the church often tell about women for women. In this work, I learned and continue to learn from women about what kind of care is or is not helpful as well as how theology and the church both support and hinder care. This has

¹³ These women included my mother and grandmother and the women of my home church, St. Paul Lutheran, who were the “Ladies’ Aid,” and now the “Women of the ELCA.” This women’s group is usually the most active and agential group of people in the ELCA in terms of providing care and serving others, showing hospitality, modeling stewardship, studying scripture, contributing to global and local missions, and highlighting the church’s connection and responsibility beyond the walls of the church. Ironically, it is a population most often “taken for granted” within and by the church (its leaders and its membership). The influence of these women has helped me to see the “unstories,” to learn about “alternative knowledges,” and to boldly claim agency.

meant that I have had to “un-learn” and “re-learn” aspects of my own seminary training and formation, pastoral identity and authority, and theology and practices of care.

As a pastor of Lutheran parish and campus ministries I continually have addressed issues of power and agency, especially regarding gender, within personal, professional, and pastoral relationships, and sought to establish models of ministry where people are valued, where power is acknowledged and accounted for, and where agency is affirmed and respected. As an associate pastor, I became aware of, experienced, and disclosed situations of harassment and abuse within a congregation.¹⁴ Such abuse and disclosure revealed the fragility and resiliency of relationship, the potential for power to be abusive and redemptive, and the reality that gender was both a gift and a liability in my role as pastor.

As a mainline, confessional, Protestant Lutheran (ELCA) pastor, I believe that I have an obligation to embrace the particulars of my own faith tradition. As a pastoral theologian, I believe that I also have an obligation to seek out and study other theological as well as philosophical, sociological, and psychological resources that can inform and expand the care of God’s creation, in particular God’s human creation. An assumption that exists within my faith tradition is that to engage in philosophical, sociological, and psychological discourses, especially those that are considered postmodern, a confessional tradition risks entering the territory of relativism and losing its supposed indispensable truths. I propose that a pastoral theologian/pastoral counselor from a confessional faith tradition has much to offer and to receive from entering into these discussions. Most importantly, I believe that a richer understanding of theology can evolve from such intentional exchanges; thus, this dissertation seeks to present/embody such an exchange.

¹⁴ This is referenced in Chapter 1, “Introduction.”

I disclose my social location to acknowledge both the perspective from which I engage the subject of agency and my accountability to various communities of which I am a part or serve, which include the women who mentored me in faith, rostered clergy in the ELCA, clergy women, female parishioners, female colleagues in other denominations/faiths, and the professional guild of pastoral theology. I do not presume that my perspective is a truth claim for all but is simply my perspective that is shaped by context and within relationship and community. I offer and own my social location to make transparent how I see my identity and context shaping the lenses through which I choose and do not choose to look at the topic of agency as well as influencing my choices of resources used to explore this topic. My own experiences offer depth and insight to this project as well as empathy and compassion to the clergy women interviewed. At the same time, my experiences prevent me from seeing others' perspectives, skew my interpretations, and limit or obscure, my ability to hear other clergy women's stories and experiences in their fullness and depth.

My social location and world view resemble that of the clergy women interviewed in this project, and my intent is to use this commonality, my agency, and my perspective to locate these clergy women's voices and experiences at the center of this project and conversation, a place rarely experienced by these women. In *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context*, authors Ackerman and Bon-Storm (1998) write:

Self-reflexiveness is seen as an essential aspect of transformative research, requiring an awareness of one's own position. Emancipatory feminist research aims at being reciprocal, encouraging deeper self-reflection and understanding on the part of the researched and the researcher in mutual subjectivity. (p. 5)

The clergy women interviewed expressed gratitude for the opportunity to tell their stories and to reflect on their experiences. I acknowledge that the voices and experiences of these clergy women also engaged me in deeper self-reflection and theological reflection, challenged my assumptions and broadened my understanding of agency, and only increased my sense of gratitude and respect for clergy women who daily face challenges to their agency and keep on acting in and through such challenges.

In a qualitative research project that involves personal interviews, the researcher does not “stand outside” of the project but is directly involved with receiving, interpreting, and presenting the information gathered, thus “critical self-reflection” is essential (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 59). In order to respect and safeguard participants’ voices and experiences, I worked to attend to my own personal and pastoral emotions, feelings, and issues provoked throughout my research and in the interview process. I monitored concerns with the assistance of my dissertation director and pastoral and professional colleagues outside of this project who have been able to listen, support, advise, and correct when needed. In addition, I sought the assistance of a second reader to review transcriptions of all interviews and to assist me with “listening,” perspective, and interpretation.¹⁵

Revised Critical Correlational Method

I assert that experience, theology, and social sciences make important and distinct contributions to exploring the concept and role of agency especially in the movement toward unsuffering; therefore, in this project I utilize a pastoral theological method that can allow for the integration of these resources. Many in pastoral theology identify this method as revised critical correlation. Building upon Paul Tillich’s one directional method of correlation, questions

¹⁵ More will be said about the second reader in this chapter in the section “Description of Research Interviews/Data Analysis.”

provoked by human experience find meaningful answers in the Christian message, and Seward Hiltner's critique that "culture may find answers to questions raised by faith as well," David Tracy developed a revised critical correlational method where "both secularity and traditional Christianity [are] challenged in accordance with publicly available criteria for meaning, meaningfulness, and truth" (Tracy, 1975, pp. 33-34; Graham, Walton, & Ward, 2005, p. 158).

Recognizing that a postmodern and pluralistic context could generate a "crisis of meaning" *and* new possibilities for the Christian tradition to constitute and renew itself, Tracy constructed a method that allowed for "mutually critical and corrective" dialogue where both lived experience and the Christian tradition could "pose questions *and* answers" (Tracy, 1975, p. 4; Graham, Walton, & Ward, 2005, p. 160; Browning, 1991, pp. 44-47). Tracy's revised critical correlational method is used widely in pastoral theology because of its ability to create and expect a mutual dialogue between experience, context, theology, and social sciences whereby each can contribute to, critique, and enrich the other and offer new possibilities for theology and care (Marshall, 2004, p. 139). I am utilizing a revised critical correlation methodology because it can take theology seriously and expect theology to take seriously human experience and other conversation partners that can enrich and assist theology/a faith tradition to articulate its faith claims honestly, contextually, meaningfully, and "care-fully."

A valid critique of revised critical correlation is that it results only in a controlled dialogue and does not move into relevant and practical action with/for those who suffer most (Chopp, 1987, pp. 120-138). Calling in earnest and urgency for pastoral theology to become relevant and to respond to the suffering in our midst today, pastoral theologian Sharon Thornton (2000) states that methods of critical correlation are helpful, but what is needed even more is our "commitment" or willingness to make the choice to stand with the last, least, and lost (p. 69).

My hope is that this project embodies not only a critical dialogue but also a dialogue with “constructive” possibilities for caring action generated by the types of sources I choose to engage: interviews with clergy women, feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross. Below I briefly state how each of these sources contributes to the dialogue constructed by this methodology. The contributions of these sources are further developed throughout this project.

Interviews

Each chapter incorporates the voices and experiences of the clergy women interviewed and the data gathered from these interviews in order to engage the theoretical and theological resources with the realities of lived experience. Because this is a dissertation in pastoral theology, I reflect on human experience from a pastoral theological perspective and expect that theology can/will be constructed from human experience. As a way to pay attention to and to take seriously clergy women’s experiences, I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews with ELCA clergy women. I will elaborate further on my choice to conduct one-on-one interviews in the section “Description of Research Interviews.”

Feminist theory

One of feminist theory’s goals is to unsuffer women. By paying attention to the experiences and agency of women, not missing the “invisible” stories of how women do survive (and even thrive) amidst and in spite of the suffering they know, feminist theory offers a vision of an “alternative future without oppression” (Jones, 2000, p. 3). Feminist theory shares with theology the importance of taking seriously lived experience, specifically the experiences of women, and provides a framework to assess the social, cultural, and political contexts/factors that may define, limit, and/or increase women’s experiences and exercising of agency.

In this project, feminist theory informed by poststructuralism is utilized because of its capacity to move beyond liberal feminism in its ability to question and attend to “the relations between discourses, subjectivities, and power” (Hughes, 2002, p. 66). Feminist theory informed by poststructuralism deconstructs patriarchal discourses in culture and in church that attempt to promote and maintain a singular identity about women and their ability to exercise agency, hears in the diversity of experiences of clergy women interviewed their resistance to the power of these discourses, and recognizes that in their ability to exercise agency in situations of suffering, clergy women are constantly generating “new ways of being and doing” that go unnoticed because they cannot be storied in patriarchal discourse (Hughes, 2002, p. 66).

Narrative counseling theory

Informed by feminist theory, narrative counseling theory begins with a similar ethical commitment to respect the identity, voice, and agency of all people. Also informed by social constructionist theory, narrative invites women to question and deconstruct cultural discourses, including discourses about theology and faith that hold power over their lives and/or take power from them to shape their own lives (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p. 33). This can be challenging, freeing, and painful for clergy women as they discover ways in which their theology/faith both restricts their agency and contributes to increasing their agency.

In this project, a social constructionist approach to narrative counseling theory is used to analyze data gathered from interviews to explore how women are constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing “agency”; creating alternative stories of meaning and identity from their experiences of exercising agency, and discovering and seeing how they made choices to use agency to contribute to their preferred story, which I assume to be “unsuffering.” In the interview process, narrative questions helped to enhance the story of agency and the movement

between meaning and action related to agency. Narrative questions also aided in asking women if/how their faith and theological beliefs contributed to their actions and understandings of agency and where/how they identified their faith/beliefs to be in conflict with their actions and understandings.

Theology of the cross

Because this is a pastoral theology project, the role of theology is central. A theology of the cross asserts that there is knowledge and power of God in suffering and that suffering is not the totality of human experience. Because of this, a theology of the cross has the ability to affirm and expand our understanding of suffering and human and divine agency in the midst of suffering. In addition, a theology of the cross also offers a vision of unsuffering for ourselves and our neighbors in its assertions that the cross sets us free and that faith reorients life and our responses to God and neighbor. In this project, a Lutheran historical perspective of a theology of the cross, a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross, and Sharon Thornton's (2002) pastoral theology of the cross are explored and then engaged with responses from interviews to see if/how a theology of the cross may be providing a framework for clergy women in constructing and/or inviting agency.

Before engaging a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross, I provide a Lutheran historical perspective of the theology of the cross and address how this perspective is often misconstrued as atonement theology. A feminist Lutheran theology of the cross critiques a Lutheran historical perspective of the theology of the cross, especially when it proposes atonement as requiring suffering (which has a history of contributing to the silencing and suffering of women), exposes theology that attempts to silence and oppress women, and insists that this Lutheran tradition still can speak life and hope to women.

Thornton (2002) uses a theology of the cross to explore the depth of human suffering, to expose injustice, and to liberate people from suffering. Her focus is on a political cross and an agential Jesus who calls us to *act* by choosing the side of the suffering and to empower the powerless. Her interpretation of the theology of the cross requires caregivers to pay attention to and reflect on our practices of care so as not to be contributing to putting people on the cross. Thornton's agential Jesus challenges a Lutheran fear of works and emphasis on grace as well as raises questions about the limits/boundaries of human agency.

The intent of putting into conversation these theological perspectives of the cross with the real life experiences of the clergy women interviewed was that a deeper and richer theological understanding of agency could emerge, a more nuanced interpretation of a "feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross" as it relates to and is shaped by real life could evolve, and that both would have implications for practices of care that are mindful and intentional about inviting agency. I did assume that the theology of the cross would be core to these clergy women's identities, studies, and practices as Lutheran pastors. My assumption was challenged and called into question during the interview process. This corrected assumption will be addressed further in Chapter 5, "Agency and Theology of the Cross."

Using a revised critical correlational method brings theology into dialogue with feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and other interpretations of a theology of the cross and contributes to theological discourse in the following ways: 1) challenging a theology of the cross to clarify, broaden, honor, and enact its theological claims and to be transparent about the impact and ramifications of its theological claims; 2) offering the opportunity to deconstruct and reconstruct the theological claims of a theology of the cross and the working assumptions and

definitions of agency; and 3) raising questions that can expand and open new pathways to theological understandings of suffering, unsuffering, and agency.

Description of Research Interviews

Given that *agency* is the focus of this project, direct and intentional listening to clergy women telling their stories was essential; therefore, I chose to conduct qualitative research interviews with ELCA clergy women.¹⁶ In this section, I explain my choice to use qualitative research interviews, clarify participant selection, introduce the participants in this study, and explain the processes of data collection and data analysis, including the reasoning for employing a second reader to assist with reviewing interviews.

Qualitative research interviews

One-on-one interviews allowed interaction face to face, the opportunity for the participant to tell her story as deeply and fully as she chose to tell it, the option to ask follow up questions and/or pursue different directions in the conversation, with the possibility for new understandings, learnings or meanings to be created or developed in the course of the interview and in the telling/re-telling of a participant's story/narrative. New understandings and meanings generated in and by the interviews held the potential for "chang[ing] the world," not just "comment[ing]" on it (Swinton & Mowatt, 2006, p. 31).

In qualitative research, interviews can honor participants' individuality and perspectives, help the researcher to appreciate and understand "process" more than "product," and allow for collaboration and co-construction between the researcher and participants (Maxwell, 1996, pp. 17-21). As the researcher of this project whose social location resembles that of the clergy

¹⁶ Prior to beginning this project, I obtained approval of my research protocol from the Texas Christian University Institutional Review Board to protect the welfare and rights of participants.

women interviewed and who also shares experiences of denied agency in the church, I was struck by how the qualitative interviews allowed both the interviewees and me to “pay attention” differently to similar experiences, or to “render the familiar strange,” in ways that revealed new layers of meaning, challenged previously held assumptions, and added “complexity” to these women’s experiences that had not been previously acknowledged (Swinton & Mowatt, 2006, pp. 31-32).

Qualitative research often is perceived as “subject(ive) and bias(ed),” because it is subjective when compared to quantitative research and modernist assumptions about the possibility of obtaining objective truth (Gall, J., Gall, M., & Borg, W., 1999, p. 131). The purpose of qualitative research is not “objectivity” or “explanation,” but rather it is “meaning and deeper understanding” (Swinton & Mowatt, 2006, p. 37). Such a purpose requires interpretation on the part of the researcher, which accords the researcher much power in selecting information and discerning meaning and understanding. To honor the multiple voices and experiences of the clergy women interviewed and the possibility of multiple interpretations, I made digital recordings of interviews so that there would be an accurate record of data gathered; I transcribed interviews verbatim, and I enlisted a second reader to assist with reading, reviewing, and interpreting all interviews.

Selection of participants

An email explaining the purpose of this project and requesting participation was sent to personal and professional contacts (male and female clergy and laity) within the ELCA along with the following attachments for their review: 1) a recruitment letter stating the purpose and nature of this project, its potential risks and benefits, the time it may require, and my contact information; 2) a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix A); 3) a Potential Participant

Questionnaire (see Appendix B); 4) a consent document; and 5) a Media Recording Release form. Two men (both clergy) responded to this email with names of potential participants; one lay woman responded with a name of a potential participant, and the other responses came from clergy women themselves, expressing interest. For those who expressed interest, I followed-up with emails or phone calls, addressing any questions they had about process and/or confidentiality, and then confirmed they had copies of the Potential Participant Questionnaires and all consent documents that needed to be completed for consideration of participation.

Potential participants completed Potential Participant Questionnaires documenting that they met the inclusion criteria and indicating their social and geographical locations so characteristics of the participant population could be defined and used in the analyses of data collected from interviews. In addition, the Potential Participant Questionnaire asked potential participants to briefly state the date and nature of the situation/experience about which they were willing to be interviewed in order to assess if there had been ample time to process the experience, to identify who/what had helped them to process the experience, to assess their readiness to participate in the interview, and to assess their access and openness to supportive and professional resources. The intent of these questions was to respect participants' experience and agency and to determine if potential participants might be excluded from participation because their experiences were too recent and unsuffering had not yet been experienced significantly.

Upon receiving and reviewing the Potential Participant Questionnaires and consent documents, I determined participants' participation by using these inclusion/exclusion criteria: women's ability to identify an experience of transformational movement from suffering to unsuffering or from diminished voice/agency to increased voice/agency in the church, and to

identify agency as assisting in this movement. If potential participants met inclusion criteria, which all did, and indicated that they could participate in this interview without causing undue stress to themselves, then I contacted them to confirm their interest and willingness to participate and arranged a date, time and location for an interview at their convenience. Participants were assured in writing and verbally that if at any point they chose to end an interview or withdraw from the study, they were welcomed and permitted to do so without penalty. Participants were not compensated for participation in this study.

Participants

I interviewed eight ordained women within the ELCA, ranging in age from their late 20's to early 70's, who identified agency as helping them move from suffering to unsuffering in a situation in the church where there were attempts to silence their voices and/or diminish their agency. Because the ELCA is a mainline denomination with a predominant White, Northern European, middle class population and because of my own social and geographical location, the women I interviewed were White, Northern European, middle class, educated, and theologically trained women from the Midwest who are serving or have served as pastors in congregations. Below I offer a brief introduction to each of these participants whose real names are not used in order to ensure confidentiality.

Wilma is a second-career pastor, has over ten years of ordained ministry experience, and is currently serving in a solo call. The experience that she shares in her interview happened in her second call a few years ago where she was part of a "team" ministry and where her colleagues called into question her supervision of her staff. At the time, she served as an associate pastor at a large size congregation where she was the only ordained woman on the pastoral staff and the first ordained woman to serve as one of the congregation's pastors.

Taylor is a second-career pastor, has over twenty years of pastoral experience, and is now retired from ordained ministry. She chooses to describe an experience of sexual harassment in her first call, an experience that continued over several years. In her first call, she served as associate pastor on a staff at a large size congregation where she was the only ordained woman and the first ordained woman to serve in this congregation.

Bethany is a second-career pastor with over fifteen years of ordained ministry experience. She has served several congregations and is currently not serving a congregation. She describes a situation that happened seven years ago where her agency was being called into question, and the agency of another woman on staff was being minimized. At the time of this incident, Bethany was serving as this large size congregation's first female senior pastor and the only ordained woman on staff.

Olivia is a first career pastor, having served over five years in ministry and is currently serving as an associate pastor on a staff at a large congregation. The experience that she describes happened over a period of three years during her first call to an inner-city congregation. She names the challenges to her agency and pastoral and personal identities by congregational members who were not used to a "young" pastor and who were experiencing their first female pastor of the congregation.

Nicole is also a first career pastor, who has under five years of pastoral experience. She is currently serving in her first call in a rural area and serving on a staff where she is the only woman and only ordained staff member. In our interview, she shares about a situation that happened two years ago where she experienced a male lay leader who wanted to keep information from her about a congregational crisis because of her "young" age and her gender.

Carol is a second-career pastor with over seven years of pastoral experience and is now serving in her second call in a small town where she, too, serves on a staff where she is the only woman and ordained staff member. The experience she shares happened over seven years ago in her first call and over a span of four years while she served as an associate pastor of a medium size congregation. She was the first female pastor at this church and served with a male senior pastor who became threatened by her presence and abilities and sought to discredit her and her ministry.

Mariah is a first career pastor and has almost twenty years of ordained experience. She continues to serve as one of the pastors on staff at her first call congregation. She relates an experience that happened to her eight years ago when the church council challenged her authority because she challenged their authority and decision-making. At the time, she was serving as one of the two associate pastors on staff. She was the only female on the pastoral staff and the first female pastor of this church. Although her male associate also challenged the church council, he did not receive any pushback.

Danielle is a second career pastor with over five years of pastoral experience. She continues to serve at her first call congregation in a small town where she is a solo pastor and the first female pastor at this congregation. She spoke about a situation that happened three years ago and unfolded over a period of two years. This situation had to do with her financial struggles and a diagnosed addiction to shopping. Although she was in treatment for these issues, she had not shared this information with her church council. This incident culminated with her walking in on a church council meeting where the council was discussing her and her personal situation.

Data collection

Before beginning formal interviews, I arranged for a practice interview with an ELCA clergy woman (who was not one of the participants in this project) in order to assess and revise interview questions and the time needed for the interviews. From this practice interview and in consultation with my dissertation director, I did make changes in interview questions such as directly asking participants for their (working) definitions of “agency” and asking them to identify pieces of their experiences that felt like “suffering” and “unsuffering.” Although I was more curious about what they and their experiences would contribute to a definition of agency, I also realized that having a tentative and working definition of agency was important to them as it helped facilitate their reflections and our conversations. For the purpose of the interviews, all participants were able to engage the term “agency”; although, most were more familiar with the term as a noun for an entity that makes decisions on behalf of others rather than thinking about it as one’s own power to make decisions.¹⁷ As a more creative approach to get at participants’ definitions, I decided to ask participants for “images” of agency. Using images appeared to assist some participants in naming or describing what they “felt” or experienced agency to be for them.

As noted above, interviews were arranged with participants at a date, time, and location convenient for them. All interviews took place between June and August 2011. Although I requested at least two hours for the interview to allow adequate time for participants to share their stories and experiences, interviews on average took between 1-1.5 hours. Interviews did

¹⁷ I am using the narrative counseling term “agency” intentionally in this project because it more accurately describes the kind of power/ability to act that I am interested in exploring. I also wanted to use a term that would be less familiar in order to decrease the chances of it being confused with or co-opted by church jargon (such as the overused word of “empowerment”) that so often keeps women/the church from thinking about and reflecting on agency from new or alternative perspectives.

not begin until I reviewed with participants all forms, addressed any of their questions/concerns, and received appropriate signed forms. I provided participants with copies of all forms they had completed and signed and informed them that every attempt would be made to keep information shared confidential and that any person handling their information was responsible for maintaining confidentiality.

The interview questions and the interview process itself were structured in ways to invite agency and respect. Narrative questions guided the interview but were not asked in a linear fashion. To attend to the co-construction piece of this project, I asked questions that invited participants' agency in shaping this work. Throughout the interviews, attention was given to when it appeared that participants had discovered or realized something "new" about their own understanding or use of agency, and in that moment, I asked questions about what the discovery or new learning was or meant to/for them. I concluded each interview by asking participants: 1) to reflect on the interview itself and if/how our conversation provoked any thoughts that surprised them or invited them to think differently about agency, suffering, and/or unsuffering, and 2) if the interview raised any feelings, emotions, or issues that surfaced in the course of the interview that needed professional care and/or attention. None of the participants noted a need for a professional referral to receive additional care/attention.

All interviews were digitally recorded, and I took written notes throughout the interviews. Two participants asked me to shut off the digital recorder in the course of the interview in order to share particular parts of their stories/experiences that were highly confidential. I respected both of these requests, and in each situation asked the participant to state in her words what she would like noted in the transcript about what was recorded off-record. All digital recordings were transferred to my laptop computer, and I personally transcribed all interviews. All

recordings, transcripts, and notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet during this study and under password protection on my laptop computer.

I did ask each participant if she would like a copy of the interview transcript and if she would review the transcript and inform me of any changes/edits that should be made to honor content or confidentiality. Only one participant chose not to receive a copy. I also asked participants how they would like to receive transcripts, either by email attachment or by registered mail. Five participants requested email attachments, and two requested registered mail. All transcripts were provided to participants for review within one to two weeks of their interviews. Two participants responded with changes regarding content and confidentiality, and five participants responded with approval of transcript “as-is.” Any changes made in the transcript were sent back to participants for their review and final approval.

One week following the interviews, I contacted participants by phone or email to ask if they had any further thoughts/reflections about Interview Question #5 (See Appendix A, Interview Questions): “Was there anything in the course of this interview that surprised you, was a new insight for you, or invited you to think about your situation/experience, agency, or a theology of the cross in a new or different way? If so, what?” and about Interview Question #6 (See Appendix A, Interview Questions): “Has this interview and conversation surfaced any feelings, emotions, or issues that you feel you may need to discuss further? If so, do you have someone with whom you could discuss these things or would you like me to refer you to a professional resource?” Of the eight interviewed, only three participants responded to Question #5 with additional thoughts. In response to Question #6, none of the participants felt that the interview raised issues that needed to be discussed further, and all expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be interviewed. Participants also were informed that they may be contacted again

with follow up questions and/or to clarify responses, and all participants were open to this request.

All data collected was handled in a manner that respects the dignity of participants. Participants were assigned alphanumeric codes to respect their right to privacy and confidentiality, even though some participants stated that they were not concerned about having their names mentioned. To ensure confidentiality, no real names of participants interviewed are used in this dissertation or will be used in any presentation or publication related to this research.

Data analysis

Listening to clergy women's voices and experiences as invited by the questions during the interviews, I began noting various themes and dynamics involved in the transformation from suffering to unsuffering; how agency is constructed, deconstructed, and/or reconstructed; what informed/contributed to their decisions to act and to move toward unsuffering; and how their understanding of the theology of the cross did or not did not inform or empower their sense of agency and movement.

As I transcribed all the interviews and became familiar with the data across the interviews, I began developing a set of questions about the interviews. I expanded this work upon completion of interview transcripts by going through each interview and noting themes in six areas related to my questions: 1) constructions of agency – based on participants' definitions and images; 2) theology – how theology/theology of the cross informs agency, what agency teaches them about theology, and what theology teaches them about agency; 3) participants' descriptions of "unsuffering"; 4) participants' descriptions of "suffering"; 5) what invites agency from women – from them as female pastors and how they invite agency from other women with whom they work and for whom they care; and 6) new realizations about agency during or due to

the interview. Using the interview questions, transcripts, and the above themes, I then created a draft “Survey of Interviews” form (See Appendix C) to be used as an instrument for myself and a second reader to score all interview transcripts, collecting information and tracking interpretations.

As noted earlier, qualitative research interviews allow for the gathering of rich stories; however, such stories need interpreting and can easily be misinterpreted by the researcher. With the desire to honor the voices and experiences of the clergy women interviewed and to allow for more than one interpretation, I sought the assistance of a second reader to aid with perspective, to enrich interpretation, and to provide a more public and accurate presentation of this study. After discussion with my dissertation director, I chose an ELCA clergy woman who is knowledgeable about the theology of the cross and narrative counseling theory and shares a commitment to listening to and learning from other clergy women. The second reader signed a consent document stating she understood that she would not have access to participants’ identifying information and would be responsible for maintaining confidentiality in regard to data gathered and shared from interviews. Transcripts were mailed to the second reader by registered mail, and she was instructed in writing to keep transcripts in a secure place (such as a locked filing cabinet) and to shred or return transcripts to me by registered mail upon completion of review. The second reader did receive a \$50 honorarium per interview reviewed to acknowledge her time, competence, and professional work.

To test the draft “Survey of Interviews” form, the second reader and I each used the form to score the same interview transcript, and then I contacted her to discuss the survey and receive feedback. The second reader’s responses included her honesty about her hesitancy in making interpretive leaps with other women’s experiences – given her own experience as a woman in the

church, her recognition after reading through just one interview that each woman's experience/story is so much more than what the survey or our interpretations can portray, and her critique of needing clarity about terminology used in the survey. In response to her critique, I did create a "Key to Survey of Interviews" to assist her (see Appendix D). Based on our conversation, I was able to clarify with the second reader what information I was hoping to collect from each section, and we were able to proceed with the survey to review all eight interview transcripts.

After receiving the surveys from the second reader, I reviewed her findings, compared them with mine, and completed a survey form with both our findings in order to see where there were similarities and differences in interpretation. Overall, our analyses were very similar. Where there were variations, I followed up in conversation with the second reader to review our interpretations. The differences in interpretation predominantly had to do with the challenges of "reading" a transcript versus hearing the information in the context of a personal interview.

The findings from these interviews will be shared in the following chapters and placed into conversation with feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and a theology of the cross with the intent to keep clergy women's voices and experiences actively engaged in and throughout this project. In addition, the overall in-depth review of these interviews and the process of gathering the findings from these interviews were formative early steps in my research that shaped both what I read and how I engaged the theoretical and theological sources and the integration of and movement between these sources and the voices and experiences of the clergy women interviewed in this project.

Limitations

As briefly noted in the earlier sections on “Social Location” and “Description of Research Interviews,” the scope of this dissertation is limited by my own personal, professional, and pastoral experiences and perspectives and by my choice to focus attention on Lutheran women’s voices and experiences, specifically the voices and experiences of eight clergy women within the ELCA. Their and my similar social identities present limitations in understanding agency from the diverse perspectives of race, ethnicity, class, education, and theological training and raises questions and awareness about how a group of people who are considered “privileged” in our culture define and experience suffering, agency, and the need to unsuffer ourselves.

Because I limited my conversations/interviews to only these eight ELCA clergy women, I did not have conversation with others in the interviewees’ communities, including those who may have participated in the suffering and/or unsuffering in some way. Such focus on one side/perspective of these experiences/stories and their dynamics does not pretend or presume to represent the multiple views/interpretations held by the whole community and/or by those who participated in the suffering and/or unsuffering. The intent of this dissertation is to pay attention to one part of a larger narrative, to give preference to hearing a part that often does not get a venue in which to be heard, and to learn from one particular perspective.

I will readily admit that in conducting the interviews, I often wondered “what could be learned?” or “what possibilities could emerge for the church?” if all the people who played a part in these stories could sit together and hear one another tell in their own words their stories/experiences, each from his/her own perspective. Such conversations would have gone down paths beyond the scope of this dissertation, such as exploring components that create an

abusive environment in the church, male/female clergy dynamics, boundary definitions and who gets to define boundaries, and the process of forgiveness.

Although restricting the number of interviews to clergy women within the same denomination can be perceived as a limitation of this project, it is a limitation that allows for specific stories in specific contexts to be told and heard, for richness and depth of participants' unique stories to be developed, and for listening to where there is "resonance" among the experiences/stories shared that allow for insights to be generated for the purposes and possibilities of pastoral theological construction (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 47). Because a theology of the cross is utilized for this project and is the foundation of the theology of the ELCA, interviewing within my denomination allows for the possibility (and specificity) of generating ideas and language about how the theology of the cross informs or does not inform clergy women's constructions of agency and movement toward unsuffering. The focus on the role of a theology of the cross also means that I am exploring the particular theological tradition of a theology of the cross within Lutheranism and not a variety of faith traditions in this project.

Although I am engaging the particular experiences of the eight ELCA clergy women interviewed, I do not pretend to be engaging the experiences of all "clergy women" or "women" in general. Such an essentialist claim is contrary to the feminist theory and narrative counseling theory engaged in this project. I do limitedly address in Chapter 3 the term "women's experience," yet I acknowledge that I do not explore in detail the essentialism/social construction debate.

In this project, the pastoral theological method of revised critical correlation allows me to bring together very diverse conversation partners including theological and theoretical sources with very different fundamental values and truth claims. Such a method entertains, generates,

and sustains diversity in the conversation; however, sometimes this method is criticized for being limited in its ability to move beyond diverse conversation to concrete action. In addition, the qualitative scope of my method permits me a significant role in interpreting as well as misinterpreting experience and information gathered from interviews. The involvement of a second reader in reviewing and interpreting the interviews is intended to increase the possibility of a more accurate reading and to honor the voices and experiences of the clergy women interviewed. I acknowledge that other methodologies and resources could be utilized to explore the topic of agency, and that the methodology and sources I have chosen are merely a beginning point for my exploration of this topic.

In this chapter, I have presented the methodology utilized in this project. I have offered how my social location and location within the field of pastoral theology shape my choice of pastoral theological method, explained the reasoning for my choice of conversation partners to explore the subject of agency, provided a detailed description of the research interview process I conducted, and noted the limitations of this project. I now utilize this method to continue the dialogue by engaging feminist theory and its contributions to understanding the role of agency in the movement toward unsuffering.

CHAPTER 3

Agency and Feminist Theory

“It came down to the fact that I’m a woman, and I am the age of his daughters, and that I am to be protected, and that information was too heavy for somebody like me . . .”

(Nicole, personal communication, June 9, 2011)

As Nicole’s experience reveals, cultural assumptions about women and gender greatly impact the ability of the clergy women interviewed to exercise agency in their lives, and such assumptions also account for how/why women get relegated to the positions of objects rather than subjects of their own lives. In her book, *A History of Women in Christian Worship*, Susan White identifies with these challenges in her own research to piece together a history of women’s participation in and shaping of Christian worship: “Those on the underside of the power structures – traditionally women, the poor, and the socially marginalized – appear in the literature and the documents of Christian worship almost exclusively as the reflections of ideas about them held by the power elite” (White, 2003, p. 5). White points out that women’s religious experience “is so often written in the margins of traditional church history rather than in the center of the page” (White, 2003, p. 10).

Nicole’s experience, as noted in the excerpt above, and White’s research demonstrate how easy it has been and can be for women’s experiences and agency to be overlooked and/or displaced. An assumption fundamental to this project is that women are the subjects of and actors in their own lives, thus through the method of qualitative interviews, I go to the “margins” to listen directly to clergy women’s (often unstoried) experiences of being able to exercise agency in the church in the midst of attempts by others to deny or minimize their agency. Because feminist theory takes seriously the lived experience of women and has the tools to expose cultural assumptions about women and gender that attempt to impede women’s agency,

feminist theory is utilized in this project with the expectation that it can contribute to clergy women's constructions/definitions of agency that they use to unsuffer themselves.

This chapter will begin with a brief overview of feminist theory and its import for this project. Accountable to the needs of women who live their daily lives in a society structured by patriarchy, feminist theory informed by poststructuralism is used to analyze the discourse of patriarchy and how this discourse affects the agency (and identity) of women in culture and the church. With this context in mind, I utilize the qualitative interviews to hear what eight ELCA clergy women themselves identify as obstructing their ability to exercise agency in their particular situations in the church.¹⁸ In the course of the interviews, I discovered how frequently these clergy women encountered and resisted patriarchal discourses and just how challenging and demanding the situations are in which they find themselves having to act. Because of this insight, I directly asked participants about their experiences of “suffering” which challenged my assumptions and helped me to more richly understand and appreciate what it takes for and from them to continue to speak and to act, adding a new dimension to my understanding of agency. This chapter concludes by bringing feminist theory and participants' voices into conversation to begin to shape some integrative constructions of agency.

The Importance of Feminist Theory

Emerging in the roots of feminism in the 1960's and 1970's, feminist theory has sought to empower all women to not only be the subjects of their own stories but also the authors of their stories. Over the years, feminist theory has been developed, broadened, and challenged to see diversity among women and diversity in experiences among women. In her book, *Feminism*

¹⁸ Throughout this project “interviewees,” “participants,” and “clergy women” are used interchangeably and refer only to the eight ELCA clergy women who participated in the research interviews.

is for Everybody: Passionate Politics, bell hooks (2000) sketches the beginning of feminist theory and offers a basic definition of feminism--“a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. 1). I utilize bell hooks’ definition and perspective because she, as an African American woman, has so clearly experienced and critiqued how feminist theory limits itself and its applicability when feminist theory is only generated and shaped by the experiences of White, upper middle class, educated women from the Western world.

hooks (2000) describes how, in meeting and talking with one another about their lives and experiences, women were exposed to, learned, and discovered language to speak about feminism (p. 19). In their gatherings, women began to “create feminist theory which included both an analysis of sexism, strategies for challenging patriarchy, and new models of social interaction” (hooks, 2000, p. 19). Together women not only thought about why and how they had been “socialized by parents and society to accept sexist thinking,” but also they began writing about it (hooks, 2000, p. 19). The burgeoning of writings by women, increased interest in writings by women, and the establishment of women’s studies programs at colleges gave feminist theory a public forum and gave women (and men) an opportunity to learn, think, and write critically about their particular experiences – acknowledging more than sex/gender but also race/ethnicity and class (hooks, 2000, p. 22).

Feminist theory also found its way into feminist theology and shows up in print in the 1960’s article, “The Human Situation: A Feminine View” by Valerie Saiving, who raises the critique that much of theology is done from the male perspective and male experience. In *Sexism and God-Talk*, feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983) writes: “The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women’s* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the

past” (p. 13). Certainly the privileging and valuing of women’s experience has been a significant step for women in beginning to trust and own their experiences as valid and legitimate as well as to begin to fully live into their experience without minimizing or apologizing for it.

Although women have been able to claim experience and particularity, some women, especially “white women in the middle- and upper-class groups,” have been criticized for claiming these at the expense of non-White, working-class and poor women, as noted earlier (hooks, 2000, p. 19). Feminist theory’s strength is that it recognizes that there is *more* than one experience, one voice, one way of being human; thus it is helpful in challenging discourses such as patriarchy and sexism that presume and insist there to be only *one*. However, even with this recognition, feminist theory has not always been able to acknowledge that there is more than one way of being “woman” or “women.” Feminist theology and theory have been challenged to embrace the wide variety of “experiences of women” and to avow openness to different experiences without claiming a single “women’s experience.”

The term “women’s experience” has come under scrutiny as a “norm” because of its tendency to generalize, universalize, and essentialize women and their experiences in ways that undermine the multiplicity and diversity of women’s experiences and ignore/hear only certain women’s voices (Davaney, 1997, p. 4). How “women’s experience” is understood and defined depends on the type of feminist and feminism utilizing it.¹⁹ Liberal feminism, shaped by the ideals of Modernism and Enlightenment, invoked “women’s experience” to appeal to a subject that had equal rights and access to freedom to become a “rational individual” (Cady, 1997, p.

¹⁹ Rosemarie Putnam Tong’s (1998) book, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, provides a detailed overview of the multiple types of feminisms: Liberal, Radical, Marxist and Socialist, Psychoanalytic and Gender, Existential, Postmodern, Multicultural and Global, Ecofeminism. For the purpose of this project, I list only Liberal and Essentialist (or Radical) in relation to Postmodern as they represent two of the key paths feminism has taken in theology and the church.

19). Liberal feminism sacrifices the particularities of “women’s experience” and “women’s needs” for the “neutral” but equal individual with generic needs (Cady, 1997, p. 21). Essentialist feminism invokes “women’s experience” in the manner that “the female subject purportedly shares a common identity with other women and a common experience of oppression” (Cady, 1997, p. 21). Essentialist feminism creates a category of “woman” that is separate from “man” and in doing so creates “abstract homogeneity” among women, neglecting history and the particularities of women for which it critiques liberal feminism (Cady, 1997, p. 21).

Liberal feminism and essentialist feminism are both challenged by postmodern feminism, which denies the possibility of a category called “women’s experience”: “in place of a unified subject, postmodern feminism speaks of the multiplicity, even fragmentation, within the subject” (Cady, 1997, p. 22). Dissolution of the subject “woman” begs the question: How do “women organize together and develop new positive identities if there [is] no essence of womanhood” to unite women in working together? (Weedon, 1997, p. 170). Some feminists also question if the dissolution of the subject raised by postmodernism is yet another way in which privileged men are able to squelch “women’s voices and experiences.” Nancy Hartsock (1990) eloquently articulates this critique:

Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic? (p. 163)

Acknowledging these valid critiques, I also believe that postmodernism has exposed feminists’ own blind spots. In the same way that feminism exposes men and women’s unequal access to power, how male voices and experiences are privileged over women’s or how a dominant group is able to define “truth” and norms for others, postmodernism has helped

feminists see the risk of utilizing feminist theory as a “grand narrative” that presumes to know what is best for all women while causing harm to some. Postmodernism challenges all women to take note of overly relying on the category of “women’s experience” in a way that keeps “women’s experience” marginalized by its uniqueness rather than by how it is socially, culturally, and linguistically shaped and constructed.

In her book, *Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist Theology*, Mary McClintock-Fulkerson (1994), critiques the “appeal to women’s experience” as limiting the complexity of the subject, replicating a “universal” subject, and not taking seriously the women who do not identify with feminism or participate in feminist conversations (pp. 3-4).

McClintock-Fulkerson (1994) advocates for “changing the subject,” or as she says, “respecting its multiple identities” which requires examining the production of identities and how social location constitutes women’s identities and realities (p. 11). To “change the subject,” McClintock-Fulkerson (1994) utilizes feminist theory informed by poststructuralism and “liberationist concerns” (p. 62).

Defining poststructuralism as a “theory of language” that uses the speaker as much as the speaker uses it, McClintock-Fulkerson (1994) claims that poststructuralism offers feminist theories and feminist liberation theologies opportunities to analyze how language *constructs* rather than *represents* meaning, how deconstruction of language can expose power and harmful discourses, and how in destabilizing the (liberal) subject there can be openings for new ways in thinking about and constructing the subject (pp. 62-68). Poststructuralism can open for women new ways of hearing and seeing the challenges and contradictions they experience in culture and the church, new ways to question their experiences, new ways to understand power, and new language for speaking their experiences. Because these new possibilities hold the potential to

contribute to positive change and increased agency for women, feminist theory informed by poststructuralism will now be used in analyzing how the discourse of patriarchy attempts to and does affect how the agency of the clergy women interviewed is constructed in culture and in the church.

The Discourse of Patriarchy and the Construction of Clergy Women's Agency

Historically, essentialist and liberal feminisms have argued that “women’s experience” is “the source of true knowledge and the basis for feminist politics” (Weedon, 1997, p. 8). This argument, however, relies on a modernist understanding of the subject as a rational, gender-neutral individual who can interpret his/her own “reality” independent of social relations (Weedon, 1997, p. 8). From a poststructuralist standpoint, such an understanding of subject and reality is impossible, and such an understanding only contributes to women’s subordination and inability to make changes in their lives. Feminist theory informed by poststructuralism does not neglect experience but utilizes it as the beginning point to understand how women make meaning of their lived experience *and* how they account for the structure of power in their lives (Weedon, 1997, p. 8). For feminist poststructuralist theory to have any merit, it must be able to “address women’s experience by showing where it comes from and how it relates to material social practices and the power relations which structure them,” both materially and discursively; thus feminist poststructuralist theory pays particular attention to language and discourse (Weedon, 1997, pp. 8-9).

Drawing from Michel Foucault’s research on “power and knowledge” as inseparable in discourse, Madigan and Law (1998) state: “Foucault’s (1980) description of discourse refers to both what can be said and thought, and also who can speak and with what authority” (p. 6). Dominant discourses are culture’s way of defining people, knowledge, and what is real.

Dominant discourses are the larger stories of culture in which women find their own stories.

These dominant discourses are the “preferred and customary ways of believing and behaving within the particular culture,” and they influence people by inciting them to rank the importance of particular life experiences over others (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 32). In both culture and the church, the dominant discourse of patriarchy is destructive to women’s (and men’s) identity and agency.

Patriarchy can be defined as “the hierarchical ordering of the world on the basis of the (ruling class/tribe) fathers’ rights to control the world and their responsibilities to care for those under their control” (Heyward, 2001, p. 220). With fear and a mindset that power is scarce and limited, patriarchy and its discourses seek to maintain power *over* people while pretending all are working together in a structure that truly benefits the common good. The reality (and sin) of patriarchy in the church is that “power is always in the hand of the dominant man or men, with others ranked below in a graded series of subordinations” (Johnson, 1997, p. 23). Within this kind of ranking system, women’s place is always “less than” and on the margin, even though their faith and efforts are central to the ministry of the church. In reality, patriarchal discourses can construct women’s agency and identity in the culture and in the church in ways that disadvantage women and co-opt their agency, if women are seen as having agency at all.

Pastoral theologian, Christie Neuger (2001), begins her book, *Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach*, with the chapter, “Setting the Scene,” in which she patently identifies the harmful effects of patriarchy: “Women and men still live out their lives in a world that is profoundly sexist, racist, ageist, classist, and heterosexist and these harmful dynamics are at the heart of much of the distress and ‘pathology’ that is brought to the pastoral counselor” (p. 1). These dynamics are often perpetuated by a dualistic or binary way of thinking -- about

gender (male/female) and other social and personal identifying characteristics (Black/White; old/young; poor/rich; straight/GLBT) -- that exists in our culture and is maintained by hierarchical power relationships.

The danger of “binary thinking” is that it assigns positive characteristics to one group, making that group superior or “dominant” over another group (Scheib, 2004, p. 21). This way of thinking evolves from “the process of establishing a dominant group’s experience and culture as the norm,” also called “cultural imperialism” (Scheib, 2004, p. 20). Those who are not part of the dominant group are viewed as deficient and not of significant value; thus, they are denied power and agency in the culture. It also is easy to render these people as virtually non-existent or invisible and to begin to construct stereotypes that describe these people as “other” (Scheib, 2004, p. 20). As these stereotypes go unchallenged, they become more real and fixed. These stereotypes often are reinforced by gender training--being taught how to live according “traditional sex role expectations” (Neuger, 2001, p. 19). For example, men are leaders and women are followers; women stay at home to work in the private realm of home and family, and men work in the public realm; men speak, and women listen.

In our culture, the “dominant group” is composed of White, Northern European, heterosexual, middle class, educated men. (These characteristics are also reflective of the dominant group on the clergy roster of the ELCA.) The “other” in our culture are those who are not part of the “dominant group,” and in this project, “other” is defined as clergy women who, interestingly, are also White, Northern European, heterosexual, middle class, educated, and ordained yet disadvantaged primarily because of gender. The disparities between the dominant group and “other” are significant in terms of cultural, social, political, and economic power and are the realities of living in a patriarchal system that imbues every aspect of women and men’s

lives. Neuger (2001) in particular explores the inequities between men and women in terms of: 1) access to employment, wages, work hours, job segregation, and job satisfaction; 2) the repercussions of these inequities on women's personal lives and well-being, and how these repercussions manifest as "pathology" for women; and 3) the stark reality that women live in a culture where violence against them is normative (pp. 16-19).

According to a 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 1.3 million women were raped in 2009; 1 in 5 women are raped in their lifetime (compared to 1 in 71 men); 1 in 6 women are stalked during their lifetime (as compared to 1 in 19 men); and 1 in 4 women are victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner (as compared to 1 in 7 men).²⁰ Women demonstrably experience violence at a disproportionate rate when compared to men, and the toll of such victimization is apparent in the physical and mental health issues that are presented as responses to such violence. These staggering statistics justify the genuine fear women have in our culture of being physically and sexually harmed, in addition to encountering verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual harassment in the workplace, in church, in school, etc. Given how widespread abuse and violence against women in our culture are, Neuger (2001) warns that pastoral counselors "must never fall into the trap of trivializing any of these forms of abuse" (p. 23). Patriarchal discourses simultaneously initiate, perpetuate, and trivialize abuse and violence against women in culture and in church.

Living in a culture shaped by patriarchal discourses that can: 1) enforce binary thinking, stereotypes, and gender training; 2) proliferate violence against women; 3) attempt to control

²⁰ NISVS "is an ongoing, nationally-representative telephone survey that collects detailed information on sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence victimization of adult women and men in the United States." The 2010 survey is the first year of the survey and will provide a baseline for future research and tracking. See in references under Center for Control of Disease and Prevention.

who has access to power; and 4) dictate whose voices matter and in what order voices matter, it is evident and possible to understand how the larger systems, realities, and perceptions shape the individual lives of women and their ability or inability to exercise agency in their lives on multiple levels (personal, social, political, professional, etc.). When patriarchal discourses inform people's perceptions of and actions toward women, women can find themselves limited, devalued, and dismissed. If women receive messages that they are unimportant and invisible as well as not worthy of respect or attention, they will be discouraged from taking seriously themselves, their stories, and their own lives. Add to this reality the dimension of abuse, one can ask whether women would tell such stories at the risk of their experiences and their very selves being minimized, ignored, or denied. How can women believe that such stories might be heard, let alone "matter," to anyone?

This is one of the questions that Riet Bons-Storm asks in her book, *The Incredible Woman*. Bons-Storm (1996) uses the word "incredible" not in terms of describing women as "amazing" or "fabulous" but in terms of describing how culture portrays women as "unbelievable" and how male-biased views embedded in theology and psychological theories teach caregivers not to take women seriously, thus preventing caregivers from listening to and believing women (p. 31). When patriarchal sexism and the disbelief of women go hand in hand, women question whether to speak up at all and risk telling their stories for which there is no context but a male context.

The dynamics of "church" -- itself enmeshed in patriarchal discourses in which a male norm for clergy still exists -- only add to these challenges.²¹ How does the church construct or

²¹ Ackermann & Bons-Storm (1998) note that "practical" theology was a product of modernity, and because "the male was the subject of modernity," so was the male the subject of clergy.

attempt to construct clergy women's agency, and how do these constructions inform clergy women's understanding of agency? Bons-Storm is one of few pastoral theologians who raises the question about how the disbelief of women particularly affects *clergy* women who hear many women's stories but seldom have the opportunity to have someone hear theirs. Bons-Storm (1996) aptly describes how clergy women "will not burden their parishioners with their personal dilemmas and problems," do not always have access to female colleagues, may not be able to expect their male colleagues to understand their experiences, and often risk being labeled as a "feminist" if they do speak up about their experiences that are problematic (p. 21). Bons-Storm's (1996) work raises three particular questions about the construction of women's agency in the church that are relevant to the clergy women interviewed in this project and the result of living in a culture and church shaped by patriarchy: 1) How do clergy women speak within a tradition where God is often constructed as male?; 2) How do clergy women experience agency when they are not able to integrate their personal and pastoral/professional identities?; and 3) What happens to clergy women's agency when they become part of the patriarchal system itself? (pp. 22-23, 53-55, 79, 118).

Bons-Storm writes (1996): "Men are enhanced in their consciousness of reasonable, potentially powerful human beings because men (unlike women) take it for granted that their sex can be thought of together with the Divine" (p. 22). When God is so identified in the Western Christian tradition as a male who is reasonable and powerful, then men (and women) can define and see men as "God" without even consciously thinking about it (Bons-Storm, 1996, p. 118). Men also have the possibility to identify with the many stories in scripture that are predominantly about men and with male language for God used frequently in scripture, worship,

They also write: "The male clerical paradigm in practical theology not only barred women from the clergy, but, as such, also excluded them from being theological subjects and actors" (p. 2).

and prayer. Women do not have these multiple opportunities for identification with the Divine and that which represents the Divine, which can challenge women to see their faith stories as credible and see themselves as being worthy and agential subjects. Male and female congregational members often subscribe to patriarchal theology as well as images of and language about God without recognizing their biases and simply assume they are speaking of a non-gendered God if they are using male language as a “universal” language. Such biases often inform how they choose to encounter and interact with clergy women.

One of the biases that congregational members may have about clergy women is that as women they are choosing to step outside of “normal,” or traditional female and family roles by having a professional career that takes them outside of the home. Bons-Storm (1996) comments on how public and private lives for women cannot be linked in the same way they are for men (p. 53). For example, clergy men who are married with children seldom have to answer questions about how they will be a pastor *and* a “good” spouse and father, too. Clergy women, however, might be asked how they will manage the multiple roles of pastor, spouse, and mother. The bias behind these assumptions is that the public world is man’s domain, and the private realm is the woman’s domain (Bons-Storm, 1996, p. 50).

In reality, professional women in a patriarchal culture and church always are living in dual roles, if not more than dual. In an ethnographic study with conservative church lay women, Ewing and Allen (2008), professors of marital and family therapy, discovered that the women “simultaneously authored an accentuated set of beliefs that supported patriarchy, while also narrating another, less dominant belief system, which supported gender equality” (p. 106). Although their study is conducted with lay women, their findings are relevant to clergy women, too, in that they highlight how women are able to (and often choose to) “live with contradictions

and paradoxes in families (Baber & Allen, 1992) and institutions with liberatory aims (Ruether, 1993)” (Ewing & Allen, 2008, p. 97). To be a clergy woman in a patriarchal culture and church is to be able to author multiple storylines at the same time. This authoring ability may reveal a particular characteristic of women’s agency as well as speak to a challenge that clergy women may experience in integrating a sense of personal and professional identities.

The inability to integrate the private and public roles and the personal and professional/pastoral identities often contributes to a “split attitude” about women by women (Bon-Storm, 1996, pp. 135-136). This split attitude encapsulates how women feel, trying to fit in to both a patriarchal narrative of who they should be by traditional standards and gender roles, while being aware that such a narrative does not honor who they are, their voice, their agency, their choices or perhaps, even their theology. Miller-McLemore (1991) would describe this split attitude as not “living in tune” which is part of women’s “internal process” that honors “a god internal to oneself” (p. 72). To not honor one’s internal process is sin and violates one’s own integrity and authenticity (Miller-McLemore, 1991, p. 72).

Clergy women often live on the boundary between patriarchal discourses and listening to their own voices. Ironically, Bons-Storm (1996) contends that “The more formal education [women] have, the more they are trained to participate in [patriarchal] discourse and to honor it” (p. 79). Thus, through seminary education and formation as well as the formal process of ordination, clergy women risk becoming a part of the very system that seeks to define and dismiss them as credible agents. By learning the language that enables them to maneuver, communicate, and possibly survive within the system, clergy women may have to temporarily abandon their own voices and knowledges. Miller-McLemore (1991) discusses how patriarchal discourses not only have “limited the definitions of womanhood” but also have tried to impose

on women the “patriarchal ideals of adulthood” and a patriarchal view of “success” (p. 69). Such success tempts women to deny themselves and their values, imitate the oppressor, and seek their own personal gain at the expense of others – including other women (Miller-McLemore, 1991, p. 70).

Clergy women who participated in this project are very aware of these temptations and pressures, especially when they encounter expectations to conform to a male model of pastor and/or of ministry, recognize how often they will be expected to assume “associate” (not “senior”) pastoral roles, understand the fear that comes when they cannot trust male colleagues and/or church hierarchy to hear their voices and concerns or feel the exhaustion from the time and energy it takes to continue to navigate multiple roles and work with people and within an institution that often can only imagine women in one role. Church, denominational, and theological structures so often default to a patriarchal and hierarchical order, failing to offer vision and support to clergy women. This lack of support as well as the temptations and pressures for clergy women to be someone or something they are not have the potential to expose a “gap” between a clergy woman’s voice/experience and patriarchal discourses: “She can deny the gap and play her ‘Woman’ roles for the rest of her life. She can also gradually or suddenly decide that her truth is not the same as the truth of the dominant sociocultural narrative” (Bons-Storm, 1996, p. 83). The latter decision says something about women’s agency and reflects the agency exercised by the clergy women interviewed for this project.

Feminist theory anticipates, exposes, and engages these “gaps” or contradictions between women’s lived experiences and the dominant narratives of patriarchy operating in culture and church. Feminist theory also can highlight and utilize these very places in the work of liberating and unsuffering women. Clergy women interviewed in this project demonstrated a distinct

ability to live and work in these “gaps” and/or spaces of contradiction. Because feminist theory regards women as “active agents and ever-engaged protagonists” and because this project’s credibility relies on its ability to learn from the clergy women’s lived experiences, it is critical to now hear the voices and experiences of the clergy women interviewed (Jones, 2000, p. 6).

Clergy Women’s Voices: Identifying Obstructions or Opportunities?²²

In the introduction to *Through the Eyes of Women*, pastoral theologian Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (1996) writes that part of the goal of editing a collection of essays by women on the subject of care of women “is to maintain, without glamorizing or glorifying suffering, that pain is not the end of the story” (p. 4). In this section, participants’ narratives reveal that pain is part of their stories, but pain is not the totality of their stories. My having deconstructed patriarchal discourses at work in culture and in the church in the previous section, a context is now provided for listening to what participants identify as obstructions to their agency and where they recognize patriarchal discourses at work in their lives. Because interviews revealed the intensity and complexity of the situations in which these clergy women faced obstructions to their agency, I could not help but ask about “suffering” to which their responses were both surprising and eye-opening. Their experiences, as described in the interviews and feminist theory informed by poststructuralism, should caution the listener to hear not only stories of obstructions and suffering but also opportunities to demonstrate resistance and agency.

After conducting and reviewing the interviews in depth, two categories of barriers to participants’ agency emerged in their stories: 1) Clergy women and others’ conflicting and contradictory personal and professional expectations of women in general and of women in the role of pastor; and 2) Conflicting and contradictory expectations of how women should exercise

²² In this section, the referenced voices and experiences of clergy women represent only those of the eight ELCA clergy women who participated in the research interviews.

agency or even *if they should* exercise agency if it poses a challenge to, and/or threatens, the status quo. These barriers that participants have encountered are not surprising, and should be expected, given their experiences are situated in the larger cultural and social narrative of patriarchal discourses (perpetuated by men and women) that attempt to define and limit women's agency.

Conflicting expectations of women/clergy women

This first category of barriers involves clergy women and other people's conflicting and contradictory personal and professional expectations of women in general and of women in the role of pastor. Conflicts and contradictions are evidenced in: familial, cultural, and religious beliefs about how a woman should act in church and in culture; how pastoral identity and pastoral authority are integrated/claimed and respected by clergy women themselves; how pastoral identity and pastoral authority are respected and supported by others, including male and female parishioners, congregational leaders, pastoral colleagues, and synodical leaders; and how personal and professional boundaries are observed and/or respected by congregations/colleagues and clergy women. The conflicts and contradictions experienced within this first category are supported by the excerpts from interviews below.

Interviewees articulated how familial, cultural, and religious expectations or stereotypes of "women" influence the treatment they receive primarily from male (and some female) parishioners, congregational leaders, and pastoral colleagues. Often gender is viewed as a deficit or a liability to one's agency, and if "young" in age and early in pastoral experience, then these clergy women are at an even greater disadvantage in exercising agency. This is well illustrated in the interview excerpt prefacing Chapter 3, where Nicole points out that even though she is in the professional role of pastor, her gender and age are perceived by the male congregational

president to make her too weak to possibly hear, let alone handle, the harsh news about the embezzlement of church funds. She also is not given the choice to *not know*. A male congregational president makes the decision based on his assumptions and beliefs about women as well as his own constructions of “male” and “female”--women need to be protected, and men must do the protecting. His decision denies Nicole her agency as a woman and disempowers her in her professional role of pastoral leadership.

Taylor shares her experience of harassment by a male, senior pastor whose sexist assumptions about women objectify her (and other women in the church) and prevent him from acknowledging her as a professional colleague and pastoral leader. Standing in the church office in the presence of female church secretaries and Taylor, an associate pastor and his colleague, the senior pastor asks Taylor why she does not wear high heels like the two female church secretaries, since she’s “got nice legs” (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011). Taylor and the secretaries are embarrassed by the senior pastor’s comment; he is not. He even tells Taylor what kind of shoes to get and that he will buy them for her.

Taylor expresses the awkwardness of the situation in which she finds herself as a professional woman in the presence of women co-workers. After the senior pastor leaves the office, one secretary says to her, “You know, I don’t know why I wear these high heels. It seems to me it doesn’t make sense at all” (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011). Taylor states that the secretary’s comment makes her feel that “she was kind of taking care of me, you know, and apologizing, unfortunately, for her own actions which I didn’t think she had to do, but I felt supported by that, and do you know she never ever wore high heels to work again” (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011).

Taylor also expresses the awkwardness of this situation as a professional colleague in relation to the senior pastor: “Here’s a person who’s several inches taller than you are maybe, almost, standing over you and telling you that you have nice legs, and you ought to wear high heels, and he’s your boss” (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011). The senior pastor even sent her pictures, cut-outs from magazines, of women’s legs from the knees down and with high heel shoes on their feet. One can only guess the reasoning for his decision to send these pictures. For Taylor, she is “well-tuned” to the reality that his actions constitute “harassment,” are “inappropriate in [a] collegial relationship,” and reflect a lack of boundaries (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011).

Such expectations of and stereotypes about women affect how women themselves are able to claim and integrate their pastoral identity and pastoral authority and how others are challenged to respect their pastoral identity and authority. Olivia describes the challenges of being a younger woman (in her mid-twenties) in her first call in a congregation, where the average age of members is 65. There is both the expectation that she was “a young, energetic person,” who would have the ideas and abilities to redevelop an older, inner-city congregation, and the resistance from long-time members, who realize she is changing the culture of the congregation by opening its doors to its Spanish-speaking neighbors (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

In the midst of these challenges and while she is trying to discern and integrate her personal and pastoral identities, she also is hearing subtle and not so subtle “small comments” from people that felt like they are meant to “throw me off my game or question my authority or my right to be there” (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011). She often wore a clergy shirt and collar as a way to remind people (and herself) of her pastoral role. One day when she

decides not to wear a clergy shirt, she receives a comment from a female member and leader of the congregation: “Oh you’re just a regular little girl today” (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011). This comment “belittled” Olivia and initially made her believe that she would have to “compartmentalize” herself, even though she was “longing to integrate” her identities as a young woman and as a pastor (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

These awkward moments are regular occurrences in these clergy women’s lives. Even though these moments appear to expose a gap between women’s identities, they also allow women the opportunity to discern and explore identity/ies and eventually, as in the case of Olivia, learn “that I can really be who I am fully and be a pastor, too” (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

Expectations of women and of clergy challenge pastoral identity and authority and can raise questions about personal and professional boundaries not being respected as demonstrated in Danielle’s experience as a pastor in her first call and as the first female pastor at a small town congregation. More than a year before the interview, Danielle had been experiencing financial struggles, related to what she had come to identify through counseling as an addiction to shopping for which she now was in treatment. She acknowledges that her personal situation did play out in her professional role: there were rumors of bounced checks among employees at the local bank and among members of her congregation; people noticed her license tabs were not renewed; she borrowed money from petty cash, and people wondered why she was not available for particular pastoral calls in the evening when she actually was in treatment. Gossip and secret meetings by congregational leaders further complicated the boundaries between personal and professional and impacted her pastoral identity and authority within the congregation. In addition, synod staff was called in to this situation to meet with the church council. She never

was included in a joint conversation to hear and address their concerns as well as to share her own. During this experience, Danielle felt pressure to “go public” with information about the addiction, and she wondered how people would see her as a pastor and hear her preach if she shared such personal information. (Danielle, personal communication, July 14, 2011.)

Wilma details her experience where personal and professional boundaries are violated by male colleagues, a senior pastor and the other associate pastor. The senior pastor calls her into his office--where he sits at his desk and the associate stands in the doorway blocking the door with his arm—to reprimand her for not being able to “control” her staff (Wilma, personal communication, June 7, 2011). The other associate pastor also joins in the questioning and tells her: “Make sure [your staff] understands the boundaries here” (Wilma, personal communication, June 7, 2011). The irony is rich, given that her colleagues identify the topic of disagreement as “understanding boundaries,” yet their words and actions that follow do not demonstrate an understanding or an appreciation of boundaries.

The senior and associate disagree with *how* Wilma supervises her staff, which she describes as “not micromanag[ing]” and being “friendly,” and they even accuse her of *not* supervising her staff. During this confrontation, the senior and associate’s voices escalate into “yelling” at Wilma. Feeling criticized and not feeling like she has a voice, Wilma starts crying during this confrontation. Her male colleagues ask, “What are you crying about? This is no way to behave as a pastor.” Feeling “attacked,” unsafe, and not being heard, Wilma leaves the office, having to “literally walk under [the associate’s] arm” to get out the door. As she walks out the door, four staff people are standing there—having heard what went on in the office—and ask her if she is OK. They do not inquire about the well-being of the other two pastors, and later *they* come to Wilma to apologize to her for the way she was treated by the other pastors. Wilma

states that when she left, “my immediate reaction when I got into my car was ‘I have to leave this place. This is not healthy.’” When Wilma returns to talk with the senior pastor about his behavior toward her, she encounters a colleague seemingly unaware that he has not respected her personal or professional boundaries. (Wilma, personal communication, June 7, 2011.)

These excerpts from interviews illustrate how conflicting and contradictory personal and professional expectations of women in general and of women in the role of pastor present a real barrier to clergy women’s ability to exercise agency. We now look at interview illustrations that support the second category of barriers to these clergy women’s agency: conflicting expectations of how/if women should exercise agency.

Conflicting expectations of how/if women should exercise agency

Wilma’s experience with her colleagues (as noted above) also is an example of the second category of barriers to participants’ exercising of agency: conflicts and contradictions that result when women exercise agency that expresses a different approach to leadership; challenges status quo, others’ identity/authority, traditions, and theology, or reveals abuses of power, secrets or truths. This second category blatantly reveals that when women’s agency challenges status quo, or is experienced as threat by others, there often are professional and personal repercussions (and/or suffering) such as silencing, isolation, subtle threats, exhaustion, depression, doubt, or fear that then also have the possibility of getting in the way of women further exercising agency.

Mariah relates her experience as an associate pastor working with another associate (who is male) and a church council (where all but one member are male) during an interim period when the church is searching for its new senior pastor. The council mailed a poorly written stewardship letter to congregational members without allowing the pastors to review it. Mariah

recognizes that if the former senior pastor (who was male) had been there, this would not have happened. She questions the council and their authority in making this decision, which is symbolic of the larger process of leadership and decision making that is not working. (Mariah, personal communication, August 12, 2011.)

After this meeting she receives an invitation to lunch by one of the male members of the council who informs her that he was sent to “deal with Pastor Mariah” which she infers as “to get me to shut up.” Interestingly, the other associate pastor is raising the same questions; however, no one is sent to “deal with” him, “so it was just the female who was out of line by being assertive” (Mariah, personal communication, August 12, 2011). She describes having to ask for a conversation with the leadership group to discuss how “the way we were operating with each other is not acceptable,” knowing that her perspective as a woman may not be respected but dismissed as “that soft, cushy women stuff” (Mariah, personal communication, August 12, 2011).

Carol notes how her male colleague, the senior pastor who had twenty-five years of experience as a pastor and four to five years of experience at the congregation prior to her arrival, finds his assumptions about leadership challenged by her pastoral identity and authority and her approach to leadership. Initially he tries to “teach her the ropes” saying, “You know, this is how I do it, but I know you’ll have your own way of doing it in time, too” (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011). While she is “learning the ropes” and functioning like an “intern,” the call is “not difficult”; however, when she does learn the ropes, becomes “empowered,” and begins to speak up and question her colleague about his decisions and the imbalance of pastoral acts between them, “it became a threatening atmosphere to him” (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011). As soon as the senior pastor feels his pastoral identity

and authority challenged as well as his leadership style, the atmosphere for Carol becomes unsafe for her as “his response and behaviors came out in that threatening mode” (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011). He undermines her, discounts her publicly, and speaks about her to staff in a negative and untruthful way

Whereas Mariah and Carol serve in traditional associate pastor roles and challenge leadership structure and/or authority from those positions, Bethany challenges from the position of a senior pastor’s role (with a male associate pastor). Bethany is the only clergy woman interviewed in this research who served as a senior pastor; however, her primary role is that of an “interim” pastor who goes into a congregation with “an overt and covert agenda” with which the synod office sends her (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011). Part of this agenda is to make sure that the male associate pastor, who has built up a supportive following of people who want him to stay, would “move on” (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011). To do this in a way that people do not see her taking power from the associate, Bethany immediately changes the leadership structure, makes her and the associate male pastor “co-pastors,” and takes a pay cut in order for her and the associate to make the same amount of money (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

In this interim call, Bethany not only finds herself having to challenge the pastoral identity and authority of her male colleague, who has come to see her as “the enemy,” but also she has to find a way to appropriately dismiss a male administrator of the church’s daycare center, who is harassing a female coworker and end the ministry of a male pastor who is the founder of an ethnic mission-start congregation, worshipping at her church and who is found out to be guilty of child sexual abuse (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011). When it came time to leave this call, Bethany said, “I was kind of glad to get out of the place without

being tarred and feathered. ... They really came to dislike me intensely, and it was mutual” (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

In re-telling this experience during the interview, Bethany finds herself surprised to recognize that her voice had been denied by the synod staff who were set on sending her into this call even though she acknowledged she did not have the administrative skills to be there. This realization comes to Bethany as she is noting the importance of empowering women who have been disempowered, especially in situations where women have been sexually harassed and who are “too afraid to tell anybody who can help” (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011). In the middle of explaining the importance of empowering women, she pauses, looks at me, and says questioningly, “What, if any, help did I ask for from the synod? I don’t think any because I knew there wouldn’t be any. Interesting.” (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

Bethany recognizes that the synod which “dropped [her] into this mess in the first place” is the last place from which she expects to receive help and support: “I saw myself as valuable to the synod in as much as I would do whatever they told me to do without making trouble for them, period. That they would be supportive of me wasn’t in the picture; it never entered my head” (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011). Bethany notes that despite her attempts at communicating with synod staff that she did not want this call or feel prepared for it, a female assistant to the bishop tells her that she’s “the best we’ve got,” so Bethany gives in, for her, a decision that “felt like me capitulating to my inner ‘gotta be a good girl’ voice” (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

Even as Bethany asserted her agency with synod staff, clearly noting that she did not feel that she had the gifts or skills to be entering this call, her agency is dismissed. She is sent into a congregation having to confront situations of sexual harassment and sexual abuse by men in

positions of authority in the congregation and having to endure the sexism expressed by the male co-pastor. Bethany acknowledges that her ability to continue to act and speak in her role in that congregation took “a terrible toll from me, on me. When I left that congregation my blood pressure dropped by 40 points. My doctor couldn’t believe it. I went from high blood pressure meds to no meds and haven’t had any since” (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011). Interestingly, Bethany does not describe her health risk as a repercussion of her agency being denied or dismissed, but rather for her it is simply part of what exercising agency takes and exacts from her.

These interview excerpts illustrate what I have identified as the second barrier to clergy women’s agency--conflicting and contradictory expectations of how women should exercise agency or even *if they should* exercise agency if it poses a challenge to, and/or threatens, the status quo. To me, some of the interviewees’ descriptions revealed situations of such intensity and opposition that I was amazed by these clergy women’s ability to continue exercising agency and had to ask about their experiences of “suffering” in these situations.

Elements of Suffering

It is only by listening to interviewees’ voices through the interviews that this project can even attempt to grasp the dynamics of the particular situations in which these clergy women find themselves having to exercise agency. In identifying what they experience as obstructions to their agency, clergy women reveal situations where they have been sexually harassed, demeaned, discounted, insulted, ignored, violated and unsafe. Curiously and surprisingly in the course of the interviews, *none* of the clergy women interviewed specifically invoked the term “suffering” to describe their experiences. Clergy women only acknowledged “suffering” in response to my direct question, “What would you describe as pieces of suffering in this experience?” Only then

did all women interviewed provide the following descriptions of what they experience as “suffering.”

Even though Bethany comments that “The army takes better care of its people than [the synod/church],” she does not describe her health issues related to stress as an experience of “suffering.” For her, suffering is related to seeing the pain of others and her inability to (legally) hold accountable and publicly expose a male employee for sexual harassment of a female coworker. Although that would have been her preference, she respects the fear and boundaries of the female coworker, who is scared of possible repercussions for naming the harassment and the one causing the harassment.

For Mariah, exercising her agency to challenge particular leadership practices and sexist behavior toward women leads to her experience of suffering as “internal turmoil.” The “inner turmoil” keeps Mariah awake at 2 A.M. “having the whole situation going around and around and around in your mind,” knowing that the situation is “not healthy or normal,” that she is being treated as “less-than by others who ... have claimed the power and decided they are the ones to call the shots,” and that as a woman pastor “you constantly have to prove yourself in every new situation, that your track record doesn’t get to speak for you” (Mariah, personal communication, August 12, 2011).

Although Nicole does not use the phrase “track record,” she does speak to the challenge of not yet having a “track record” because she is a “first call pastor.” People perceive her as not yet having enough experience or are “wondering ‘does [she] know anything?’” (Nicole, personal communication, June 9, 2011). These perceptions may contribute to people withholding information from her, which she describes as her experience of suffering in the situation: “For me some of the hardship was to know that ... or to feel like I was never really getting all the

information or ever really able to lead ... at least at the start” (Nicole, personal communication, June 9, 2011). To know that she is specifically called by a congregation to be in a leadership role, and yet some leaders/members of the congregation do not give or trust her with the information she needs to adequately and appropriately provide leadership, was challenging, yet it also presses her to rely on and trust her own instincts and ability to lead in the midst of her congregation’s crisis.

Wilma expresses experiences of professional and personal suffering related to her situation. As a pastor, her intentions are to “bring people together,” especially when she thinks of herself working as part of a “team” ministry, but instead, she felt “physically at war” with her colleagues, who could not hear her and who intentionally silenced her voice (Wilma, personal communication, June 7, 2011). Not being able to “bring people together,” Wilma describes her personal experience of suffering to include being “disappointed in myself” (Wilma, personal communication, June 7, 2011).

Taylor describes a different kind of disappointment that is part of her suffering – disappointment with the women and men who know about the senior pastor’s sexist behaviors/harassment toward women but choose not to acknowledge it or discount it by saying, “that’s the way he is” (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011). She further describes her experience of suffering to include humiliation, shame, and oppression that are directly related to “being brought down in the eyes of the other women” she worked with and ministered to within the church (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011).

Danielle and Olivia each relate the suffering they experience to “feeling very alone” and a “deep sense of loneliness” (Danielle, personal communication, July 14, 2011; Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011). They also both serve in their first call congregations as solo

pastors. Danielle describes “feeling hopeless” in a situation that was very “hard” and “scary,” and she would have appreciated more support from the congregation and its leaders (Danielle, personal communication, July 14, 2011). Olivia describes a sense of “stuckness” and not being able to be who she fully is -- not only as a pastor to a congregation she had grown to love but also as a wife and a friend -- as she grapples with discerning and integrating her personal and professional identities and authorities in her first call (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

Carol was serving in her first call as an associate pastor where she quickly and aptly developed her sense of pastoral identity and authority, which became threatening to the senior pastor. Carol describes “suffering” for her as “that exhaustion that kept coming every time we went through the cycle” (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011). The “cycle” that Carol is referring to is the on-going attempts by the senior pastor to “disempower” her in her role as pastor. Carol clearly communicates the “energy it takes” to resist the disempowerment and “the energy it took to speak forward” in an environment where someone is trying continually to pull her down, to sabotage her and her ministry, and to prevent her from moving at all (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011). When the exhaustion was too much, she would say, “Thank you, God, that I know you’re grieving; you are holding me in the midst of this” (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011).

Carol articulates a common thread running through each of the clergy women’s stories that is related to women’s suffering as well as to their agency--the exhaustion involved in the work and energy required of clergy women to exercise agency in the face of attempts to deny or minimize their agency--and *this* exhaustion is always *in addition to* the usual exhaustion that is already part of the work and energy that their professional roles and responsibilities require of

them. It appears that this additional exhaustion is a byproduct of having to navigate one's own course while ministering with and to others in the midst of patriarchal discourses and structures.

Having listened to how participants encounter obstructions or barriers to their agency in the church and how they experience suffering related to such obstructions, one sees parallels between their experiences in the church and women's experiences in the larger culture. In a church and culture imbued with patriarchal discourses that demean women and attempt to reject their experiences, how are these clergy women constructing agency in order to speak and act in the midst of such obvious attempts at discrediting and discounting? Having engaged the insights of feminist theory from a poststructuralist perspective, the impact of patriarchal discourses on clergy women's agency, and the voices and experiences of clergy women themselves, I now suggest some tentative ideas about what is shaping these clergy women's constructions of agency.

Steps Toward Integrative Construction

When feminist theory informed by poststructuralism and the voices and experiences of the clergy women interviewed come together, there are possibilities for generating new and/or different definitions/understandings of agency. Feminist theory offers clergy women the resource of "deconstruction," which opens new ways to see, hear, and question the challenges clergy women face in exercising their agency, reveals that clergy women's agency reflects a different understanding of power, and provides new ways of speaking about and claiming their agency and identity. For now, I briefly consider each of these insights that help us understand how these clergy women construct agency that leads to unsuffering. These constructions begin to point us toward a co-construction of agency that is discussed in Chapter 6 "Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Practice."

As defined in section two of this chapter, deconstruction is a process by which truth claims are taken apart and exposed as merely “perspectives” that are used to benefit a particular group and disadvantage other groups (Neuger, 2001, p. 8). By deconstructing “the grounding assumptions, orders, and rules that actively but often invisibly contribute to both the oppression and the ultimate flourishing of women,” the patriarchal discourses at work in women’s lives are exposed and deprived of the power that a supposed “grand narrative” holds (Jones, 2000, p. 4). In the experiences of the clergy women interviewed, patriarchal discourses are evident in the minimizing/denying of their agency in the following ways: sexism is a given; women are considered too young or inexperienced to be a pastor; women are assumed unable to manage or be trusted with problematic or sensitive information; women are assumed not to have the authority or the ability to make decisions; verbal and sexual harassment are acceptable; attention is focused on women’s physical appearance; personal and professional boundaries can be breached by people in positions of power *over* women; women are not supposed to blend public/professional and private lives; women are unable to be seen or taken seriously in a supervisory position; it is unacceptable to question hierarchy; expectations of women tend to be higher and different; women’s voices often go unheard; and women’s experiences are often not acknowledged or included.

The evidence for how patriarchal discourses disadvantage participants is overwhelming and palpably demonstrates the challenges they experience in having their voices heard, their stories believed, their experiences perceived as legitimate and credible, and their identity as women taken seriously, personally and/or professionally. It is interesting to note that although the clergy women interviewed acknowledged in some way the reality of sexism in culture and in the church, none specifically identify how “patriarchy” and its repercussions, such as sexism, are

enmeshed in the theology they are taught at seminary and in the theology practiced in local congregations where they serve.

In the same way that patriarchal discourses are actively at work, so, too, is there evidence of feminist theory at work in participants' reflecting and acting, although this is not overtly identified by them, except in some of their comments related to feminist theology. Their theology (which will be further explored in Chapter 5) certainly offers these clergy women an alternative discourse that is shaping their agency and is evident in their comments about their "baptismal identity." For example, baptismal identity justifies their "worthiness" to be "subjects," not objects, whose "actions" are purposeful. It appears that they find and hold other narrative threads to construct and incite their agency and have some ability to "deconstruct" that which gets in the way of their agency. However, I wonder if the "tool" of deconstruction that feminist theory informed by poststructuralism presents could offer a more critical means to identify and expose the patriarchal discourses at work in their lives, nuance their understanding of how it is that these discourses come to have the power they do, aid them in generating language that stories their experiences of agency while not contributing to patriarchal discourses, and offer them more complex yet specific definitions of agency.

One specific definition of agency that would and does benefit from integrating feminist theory and participants' experiences is the definition of agency as "power." Feminist theory recognizes "interconnection" among humanity and creation and that the oppression of one in this interconnection is the oppression of all (Jones, 2000, p. 6; Chittister, 1998, p. 4). This insight is evident throughout the interviews where participants articulate an understanding that power is to be used to benefit the whole. This understanding of interconnection and feminist theory's

assertion that there are multiple stories, not just one, are two ways in which feminist theory and participants' experiences are challenging and redefining agency as power.

In the interviews conducted, the topic of power (its use and abuse), as well as one's assumptions about power, emerges repeatedly whether "power" is named aloud or not. In a culture and church shaped by patriarchal discourses, power is viewed as belonging to an individual, quantifiable, and having to be brokered by the dominant group. Feminist theory and interviewees acknowledge that an individual has power; however, both also understand that power does not belong to one person but "is a relation" and exists within relationship (Weedon, 1997, p. 110; Jones, 2000, p. 140). I would further define a feminist understanding of power as a transparent process of accountability within relationship, taking seriously the power the other brings to the relationship.

Participants' experiences reveal clashes between men and women and their understanding of power. As discussed, patriarchal discourses socialize people's identities along the lines of gender and shape how people interact and use power between each other. These socialized identities and ways of using power often do not appear to "take the form of overt violence against persons" or to be "obvious forms of procedural discrimination" because they simply are taken for granted and socially accepted (Jones, 2000, p. 140). These identities and interactions may even appear to look like an attempt at "equalizing" power in relationship, but in a patriarchal culture, equalizing power is often a covert patriarchal strategy used to minimize difference and justify self, offering the pretense of relationship without the risk of being changed or having one's power challenged in relationship. Patriarchal structures are threatened by and have to challenge the understanding of power as relational and/or accountability in relationship

in order to maintain a hierarchy in which power is an entity to be used or co-opted to justify the hierarchy.

In the chapter, “Truth, Power, and Love: Challenges for Clergywomen across the Life Span,” from *In Her Own Time: Women and Developmental Issues in Pastoral Care*, Nancy Ramsay writes about the connection between relationship and power for women, specifically clergy women. Referencing the Stone Center’s research on relational developmental theory, Ramsay (2000) states that “community” is implicit when understanding women’s agency and power (p. 276). Power in relation is “expansive” and “used to enlarge the resources of all involved” (Ramsay, 2000, p. 276). Such an understanding of power introduces a new ethic of “response/ability” where power is not only used for oneself and others but also one is aware that her power can affect another, for good or for worse (Ramsay, 2000, p. 276). In the context of this relational model and ethic, “authenticity” is required for “mature” relationship, and it speaks to the ability and skill to recognize “differences in power” and to speak truth for oneself and in relation to others (Ramsay, 2000, p. 277). As Ramsay (2000) points out and as interviewees suggest and/or imply in the interviews, authenticity--trusting one’s experiences and ways of knowing and engaging with others with such awareness--is directly related to one’s development of pastoral identity and pastoral authority (p. 276).

Participants’ ability to claim their identity and exercise agency outside of and in the church is greatly impacted by patriarchal assumptions about gender. Clergy women interviewed were highly aware that such assumptions held by culture, church, others, and themselves attempt to limit their agency, impose unrealistic expectations on them, and leave them with a feeling of dissonance or contradiction between these assumptions/expectations and their own lived experiences. Feminist theory anticipates, exposes, and engages such dissonance and

contradiction between women's lived experiences and the dominant narratives of patriarchy operating in church and culture and utilizes such dissonance/contradiction in the work of liberating and unsuffering women (and men).

Feminist theologian Serene Jones (2000) states that feminism has two aims: 1) "to identify the various forms of oppression that structure women's lives;" and 2) "to create an alternative future without oppression" (p. 3). This chapter has utilized feminist theory informed by poststructuralism to deconstruct patriarchal discourses at work in eight clergy women's lives that contribute to oppressing them and denying or minimizing their agency. Deconstruction takes apart supposed "truth" claims and provides an opportunity to discover something new. In the very process of deconstructing, a "reconstructing" is also happening. This reconstruction includes a naming, reclaiming, and inclusion of the missing experiences, owns its perspective(s) and lenses through which it sees experience, and asks epistemological questions of itself, not pretending to simply "know" but asking why and how a particular perspective is known and comes to be held (Neuger, 2001, p. 8). The processes of deconstruction and reconstruction are now developed further in Chapter 4, "Agency and Narrative Theory," as we continue to explore how it is that clergy women continue to exercise agency, given the staggering challenges to their agency in culture and in the church.

CHAPTER 4

Agency and Narrative Counseling Theory

*D: Any part of this interview surprise you or bring up a new insight for you?
I: . . . putting together the pieces and thinking through the family systems things that I was asked to go through, how robbing those experiences were . . . and how frustrated I was that that was the only theory offered to us.
(Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011)*

The power of “narrative” is highlighted in this excerpt from an interview with one of the participants in this project. This clergy woman, Carol, exercises her agency by choosing to participate in an interview where she uses her voice to story an event in her life, and she brings the expectation that her voice and experience will be heard. In sharing her story and in her willingness to entertain intentional questions about her story, she reflects on and assesses her experience of an attempt to minimize/deny her agency, and she identifies discourses of therapeutic theories and of the church that contribute to this attempt.²³ By reflecting and assessing, she repositions herself in relationship to these discourses, discovers other parts to her experience that had yet to be explored or storied, and articulates the meaning she identifies and connects with her experience and her agency.

In using language as “a medium for experiencing [her] experience,” she not only reflects on her experience that is the subject of the interview but also on the experience/impact of the interview itself (White, 2011, p. xxvi). The interview provides her a platform from which to tell her story and to look at herself and her experience differently. In this, she is able to see: 1) the attempts to obstruct her agency; 2) how these attempts almost “robbed” her of her identity as a

²³ A Lutheran understanding of “church” based on Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession is an “event” that happens amidst a community where the Word of God and the sacraments are rightly taught and rightly administered (Wengert, 2008, pp. 48-49). My use of the phrase “the church” refers to the church as an institution whose structure and theology have been greatly shaped and informed by patriarchy.

“truth teller” *and* her ability to “name the truth” of the injustice she sees and encounters in the actions of a senior pastor and by a church that does not have more than one theoretical resource to assist congregations and pastors in situations of “conflict”; and 3) that in the midst of these attempts, she continues to act and to speak. Her act of speaking does more than “talk” about or “represent” her identity and agency--it *constitutes* her identity and her agency (White & Epston, 1990, p. 19; Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 39).²⁴ In the words of narrative counseling founder Michael White, “The stories we tell are the stories we live” (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007, p. xix). People are not “products” of the stories they tell: people are “cocreators of themselves through the creation of their stories and their culture” (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007, p. xx).

Similar to feminist theory informed by poststructuralism, narrative counseling theory contributes to the purposes of this project by focusing on the voices of eight ELCA clergy women and how they story their experiences and by valuing how language constructs meaning. Narrative counseling theory allows for multiple stories to emerge, problematic discourses to be challenged, power to be made transparent, and reconstruction to be possible. Because of these aspects as well as its demand for a deep respect for one being an active and meaning-making agent in her own life, narrative counseling theory is crucial to this project’s aims. In this chapter, I begin with a brief overview of the narrative counseling theory I am using in this project, expand on its ethical premise of respect for agency and voice, explore how it assists participants in naming and deconstructing discourses that get in the way of exercising agency, and identify alternative and/or preferred stories of agency. I conclude this chapter by bringing narrative counseling theory and interviewees’ voices into conversation and begin to shape some integrative constructions of clergy women’s agency.

²⁴ The *constitutive* function of language refers to “the way [language] produces human experience” (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 39).

Narrative Counseling Theory

What is now known as *narrative counseling* began as a therapeutic “approach” within the field of family therapy, evolving out of feminists and classists critiques of family systems therapy in the mid-1980’s (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004, p. 329; Denborough, 2012). Shaped by the work and research of social worker/therapists Michael White and David Epston, narrative counseling challenged family systems theory to think of “persons with stories” rather than persons caught in “systems” or “structures” of dysfunction (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 15; Schneider, 1998, p. 417).²⁵ When thinking in “systems” or “structures,” one focuses *within* those, looking for how (and assuming that) each person in the system does contribute to the problem and, thus, can contribute to a solution. This focus emphasizes individual responsibility as well as the assumption that each person has equal ability to contribute to the problem *and* solution. A feminist critique of this assumption is that it can have the potential to blame a “victim” and/or hold responsible a “victim” for his/her own victimization, as indicated in the interview excerpt at the beginning of this chapter (Schneider, 1998, p. 416).

When thinking in “story,” one is not looking for underlying causes of dysfunction within a system or how each participant is part of, or is to blame for, the problem. In narrative, “story” invites individual stories *and* stories *beyond* the individual, encourages people to identify themselves not *as* the problem but *in relation* to a problem, and opens up other options/possibilities/story lines from which people can choose to live. Although an initial strength of family systems theory was its expansion of focus beyond the individual to the family, this also became its limitation in that it did not go beyond the family in recognizing how

²⁵ Although Michael White and David Epston are primarily credited with founding the narrative approach to counseling, therapist Cheryl White is also recognized for her early and on-going contributions to this approach.

individuals and individual stories are connected to, shaped and limited by larger social and cultural narratives.

Narrative brought to family systems a shift *from* a focus on behaviors of individuals within a system *to* a focus on how people make meaning and choices that are shaped and influenced by many social and cultural systems. This was a monumental shift from assuming behaviors could be “labeled” or “diagnosed” (and pathologized) in an individual, often taking/depriving one of his/her agency and often under the pretense that the power involved in such diagnosis was neutral or not influenced by a larger culture than the family system. Such a shift required a willingness to see problems originating in cultural discourses rather than individuals, an openness to complexity and particularity, a recognition of multiple truths, and a stance by the counselor in relationship to the counselee that demonstrated an awareness of self-reflexivity and the power involved in the counseling relationship (Brown, 2007, p. 12).

This “shift” denotes the type of “narrative” I am utilizing in my understanding of “*narrative* counseling theory.” Because “narrative” is a widely used and popular term across academic fields, and because the metaphor of “narrative” is used differently within the field of counseling itself, I want to be explicit that my interpretation is shaped by White and Epston’s work. Their use of the narrative metaphor is shaped by Gregory Bateson’s understanding that “all knowing requires an act of interpretation,” Jerome Bruner’s linking of action and meaning of stories across time, Clifford Geertz’ concept of “thick description” in story-telling that allows the possibility of alternative stories to emerge, Michel Foucault’s understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge and awareness of “normalizing techniques of power,” and Kenneth Gergen’s understanding of social constructionism (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007, xii-xiii). Given these influences, my use of “narrative” is not about “telling” stories; my use is about

the “constitutive” nature of stories. With this understanding of narrative, I now explore narrative’s respect for voice and agency.

Respecting Agency and Voice

The excerpt at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates how one clergy woman felt when her agency and voice were not respected nor taken into consideration in the psychological theory utilized in her particular situation. It is experiences like these--of “perceived” loss of agency and/or voice--in women’s lives that often bring women to consider counseling. Narrative counseling “puts people in the driving seat of their lives” by acknowledging that people already have agency, by respecting this agency, and by contributing to it (Drewery & Winslade, 1997, p. 33). Central to narrative counseling is the belief that people are always acting and never passive participants. This belief is directly connected to narrative counseling’s understanding of power as relational (more will be said about “power” in the next section “Deconstructing Discourses that Obstruct Agency”), thus power is not located in one person nor is it for one person to control. Even if one does not have the access to power that she would like, she can resist participating in various forms of power relations, and such resistance itself creates and fosters her agency (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 51).

Agency, in narrative counseling, is understood as the ability one has to take action in one’s life according to her values and “intentions” and to anticipate that “the world is at least minimally responsive to the fact of one’s existence” (White, 2011, pp. 78-79). When one feels overwhelmed by problems and is not able to act in the face of such problems, then one feels like she has “lost” agency (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997, p. 42). In narrative counseling, such loss is credited not only to the “stories we are telling ourselves about what is happening,” but also to the position/perspective from which we are telling these stories (Monk, et

al., 1997, p. 42). A problem story and discourses that reinforce the problem can influence one into believing that she is a passive participant rather than an active subject in her own life. Narrative counseling asks one to evaluate and justify her position in relation to a problem story and/or to the story she would prefer to be living. This evaluation gives one the opportunity to “reposition” herself (Drewery & Winslade, 1997, p. 42). Such repositioning can foster a person’s ability to “reclaim [her] voice” and speak from a “subjective” position rather than a “subjected” position (Drewery & Winslade, 1997, pp. 42-43).

Speaking from the subjective position is a position of agency because one *speaks* her own story. In narrative counseling, “speaking” and “voice” are “metaphors” for agency (Drewery & Winslade, 1997, p. 43). Narrative therapy co-creator, David Epston, articulates the connection between voice and agency (as well as discourse and power) in his question: “Who has the storytelling right to the story being told?” (cited in Madigan, 2007, p. 138). Who gets to tell the story also controls what and which versions of the story get to be told. Narrative counseling privileges individuals’ voices and stories while recognizing that there is never a single author to any story or only one version of a story. Multiple voices, negative and positive, allow for multiple storylines from which alternative stories can arise. The intent of interviewing clergy women for this project is to respect their agency/voice by attending to *their* telling of their experiences and to honor their multiple voices and knowledges in shaping alternative stories about “agency” in the church.

In narrative counseling, respect is embodied in the counseling relationship and in the stance of the counselor. A narrative counselor brings to the counseling relationship an attitude of respect for a person’s agency and voice, a curiosity about the other person’s stories and experiences, and knowledge of the process of therapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 44). The

“counselee” brings to the counseling relationship the knowledge of his/her own stories and experiences and a willingness to share them. A narrative counselor maintains the perspective that counseling is “not something done to a person” but that the counseling process is a collaborative endeavor between the counselor and counselee in which the counselee is an “agent in production” of the conversation (Winslade, Crocket, & Monk, 1997, p. 53).

Because an emphasis is placed on meaning-making in narrative and because meaning is created in relationship, the relationship between a counselor and counselee is “decidedly two-way in fostering membership in new communication and new life stories for both therapist and the people who consult them” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 265). In narrative, there is a sense that “our common humanity” is always acknowledged and shared (Besley, 2002, p. 140). There is no pretense that only the counselee is changed in relationship; however, the counselee’s transformation is always given preference, and focus is never shifted to the counselor.

With the desire to foster a counseling relationship of respect and collaboration and with awareness that there are “no neutral stories” and “no neutral hearing of stories,” a narrative counselor must be aware of and attuned to power and how it “manifests itself in social and professional practices” (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007, p. ix; Winslade, Crocket, et al., 1997, p. 54). A narrative counselor does not enter the counseling room without being as aware as possible of his/her own social location, its implied power, and how that impacts the counseling relationship and process. In addition, a narrative counselor is transparent about his/her power, being open and honest about his/her own values and sharing enough of his/her own “situation” in life and “life experience” that counselees have the opportunity to see the counselor as more “human” and less “expert” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 36).

A narrative counselor does not enter a counseling relationship with the intent to be an expert who has secret knowledge that can *change* a counselee and/or her life. A narrative counselor enters a counseling relationship with the intent to respectfully listen to/for another's voice and agency and to listen for "what we *don't know* [emphasis added]" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 44). Only then can a narrative counselor attempt to hear the meanings that people's stories hold for them, be curious enough to ask questions about people's interpretations of their stories and meanings, and recognize possible alternative stories (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 44). A stance of respect for agency and voice enables the counselor to contribute to and with the counselee in increasing agency and voice, repositioning the counselee in relation to problem stories, and in querying and taking apart the discourses that attempt to get in the way of a counselee's preferred ways of speaking and acting.

Deconstructing Discourses that Obstruct Agency

A basic premise of narrative counseling is that the stories people tell about themselves and their lives "constitute" their very being (White & Epston, 1990, p. 19). Listening to stories and what language and meaning people use to talk about who they are helps counselors to understand how people view and define themselves and how their stories may be constructing and/or constricting the way they live. People's stories can be riddled with negativity, influenced by dominant discourses, and centered on a "problem." When this is the case, people are in need of examining their stories in light of a larger narrative and in need of storying other experiences of their lives that can enlarge their frame of and for living.

Michael White states people seek counseling "when the narratives in which they are 'storying' their experience, and/or in which they are having their experience 'storied' by others, do not sufficiently represent their lived experience" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 14). People seek

and desire to story a different outcome for their lives--“an acceptable outcome would be the identification or generation of alternative stories that enable [people] to perform new meanings, bringing with them desired possibilities” (White & Epston, 1990, p.15). New possibilities can be generated when viewing people’s stories through the social constructionist and postmodern lenses that narrative counseling theory utilizes.

Before engaging the social constructionist and postmodern dimensions of narrative, including *deconstruction*, I want to note that the clergy women interviewed were selected based on their ability to not only identify an experience of a “problem story” (an attempt to have their agency denied) but also to identify an “alternative story” (how they are able to keep acting/speaking through such an attempt). Their stories are riddled with challenges of sexism, ageism, ability, and their own and others’ expectations of “pastors,” and their stories are in need of a larger narrative frame. I discovered from listening to participants how seldom they have access to a larger narrative frame within the church to story their stories. The frame they do have is overly formed by patriarchal structures and ideas as well as by male presence and dominance.

I also became aware of how the larger narrative frame for how women are seen and treated in culture (beyond the church) is not necessarily tapped by these clergy women for correlation with their experiences within the church. I am unsure if they (can) expect their “lived experience” to be represented in the church, even while I see that they are seeking different outcomes and living alternative stories within and in spite of the church. The social constructionist and postmodern lenses of narrative counseling greatly challenge a modernist church anchored in “truth,” yet these lenses, that we will now explore, embolden participants both to story their experiences and contest others’ attempts to story their experiences for them.

In his book, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, Kenneth Gergen (1999) writes:

“Truth” as a criterion is simply rendered irrelevant to the acceptance or rejection of constructionist propositions. Constructionism does not ask to be accepted because it is true. Rather, constructionism invites collaboration among people in giving sense and significance to the world, and pressing on toward more inclusive futures together. Alternative “truths” are not thereby abolished; they are invited as participants in the dialogue. In sum, constructionism is more like an invitation to a dance, a game, a conversation, or a form of life. (p. 228)

The theme of “invitation” runs throughout the writings of Gergen, a North American professor of psychology and the co-founder and president of Taos Institute.²⁶ Gergen understands social constructionist theory as a dynamic and creative approach to opening conversation among diverse conversation partners whose claims to “truth” often prevent or inhibit participation in a dialogue together. Social constructionist theory queries all “truth” claims, raising challenging questions about validity, legitimacy, and benefit.²⁷

The concept of reality as socially constructed is not new. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) introduced this thought in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality*. They proposed that the guiding question of sociological theory should be: “How is it possible that subjective meanings *become* objective facticities?” (p. 17). Because everyday experience is

²⁶ The Taos Institute is a non-profit, distributed organization, dedicated to education in social constructionist theory and relational practice. Information retrieved from <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/kgergen1/web/page.phtml?st=cv&hf=1&id=cvtaos>.

²⁷ I acknowledge that social constructionism itself is *a* perspective among many perspectives and raises a quagmire and philosophical argument about truth claims. In Chapter 1 of Kenneth Gergen’s (1999) *An Invitation to Social Construction*, he articulates the differences between modern and postmodern understandings, complications, and complexities of *truth*. I employ social constructionism for its ability to deconstruct unquestioned truth claims that are power-dominated social constructions masking as claims to truth. Such deconstruction invites conversation of alternatives in self-reflexivity.

experienced as fixed, it is taken for granted and not recognized as being constructed socially through human activities, including language. “Explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” is how Gergen (1985) defines the purpose of social constructionist theory (p. 266). In a modern world where “truth, rationality, objectivity, individual knowledge, evidence, and scientific progress” were valued and language was believed to “carry truth,” such an epistemological challenge did not exist (Gergen, 2001, p. 803). In a postmodern world where knowledge is communally constructed, “objectivity” is only “a relational achievement,” and language creates instead of reflects reality, questioning one’s epistemology is a given (Gergen, 2001, p. 803). The “self-reflexivity” invited by social constructionism challenges a person to contemplate his/her position and discern how he/she has arrived at and holds such a position (Gergen, 1999, p. 162). Without self-reflexivity, one’s own position is presented as a truth claim, and he/she is presented in the role of “expert” (Gergen, 2002a, p. 281). Such an individualized view of truth and people is what impedes and/or prevents conversation among people holding different and/or conflicting viewpoints.

In social constructionist theory, the individual and individual knowledge are replaced by “relational process” (Gergen, 2002a, p. 286). There is no self but the relational “self,” and all knowledge is relationally constructed and shared. Gergen (1999) identifies the period of the Enlightenment as the “birthplace of our contemporary--or modernist--beliefs about the self,” where the self as individual is the center of human life, capable of objective thought and knowledge, and valued at the expense of relationship (pp. 6-7). Social constructionist theory maintains that humans do not live in isolation but live in communal contexts that are shaped by history, culture, and language. Community, history, culture, and language are not “out there,” as

in separate from or outside of human experience, but are the very contexts that shape and effect human *being*, identity, experience, and meaning (Gergen, 2002a, p. 280).

In social constructionist theory, there is no private meaning as all meaning is derived from and in relationship. One person cannot create meaning for himself/herself or for the other, because meaning cannot be created until it has been received and responded to in relationship. For humans, language is the primary medium by which meaning is experienced, created, and disclosed. Language is a “continuous process of reciprocation” between people who are socially located in particular contexts and are familiar with particular patterns of discourse (Gergen, 2007, p. 366). This conclusion suggests that meaning is continuously created and simultaneously constrained. This deduction also implies that language holds a privileged place in social constructionist theory. Although I am referencing human relationship, it is important to note that meaning-making is not just “an outgrowth of relations among persons alone” but is also negotiated “in the context of what we [humans] call material objects, places, times, and so on” (Gergen, 2007, p. 367). Nonetheless, it is in relationship (with each other and the world) that humans are made aware of both their limitations and their potential.

Social constructionist theory also challenges modernist notions of power and makes power transparent. From a social constructionist perspective, power is not located in any one place or one person; thus power does not need to be sustained by an ideology--“shared ideas, values, and sentiments”--that justifies power (Gergen, 1999, p. 204). An ideology is employed by a power structure to reinforce its power; likewise, its power is then used to reinforce its ideology. The danger is when such power and ideology become equated, thus presenting a certain reality as *the* reality or a particular truth as *the* truth. Such power uses the very people it harms to sustain it. Social constructionist theory challenges any dominant discourses about

power, any ideas about “reality,” and any claims about “the truth.” These challenges make transparent who holds the power and who benefits from such power. From a social constructionist perspective, power resides in a “set of relationships” and is not only “productive” but also *constructive* (Gergen, 1999, p. 207 & p. 209).

Humans have power or agency to act in the world and to construct reality, and, as Gergen (1999) states, humans are “urged towards action” (p. 209). From a social constructionist perspective, action begins locally with how one chooses to live daily life; action takes into consideration a communal vision and the meaning behind this vision, and action incites dialogue when power is understood as relational and not competitive (Gergen, 1999, pp. 208-209). Because social constructionist theory insists on multiple truths, values relationship, and makes power transparent, humans are invited to use their agency *differently*. Humans do not need to be “experts” but can be “collaborators,” explorers, and learners with others (Gergen, 2007, p. 366; Gergen, 2001, p. 810). Humans can use their agency to be “curious about others’ beliefs and desires, and to foster dialogues across our diverse claims” (Gergen, 2007, p. 365). In doing this, Gergen (2001) asserts that humans are “released from the shackles of the taken for granted” and can use their agency to shape community and the world around them, to be creative, and to contribute to possibility, to healing, and to life (p. 810).

In a postmodern and social constructionist context where language constructs reality, language holds great power, and reality is always being reconstructed. To have the power and agency to tell or to “narrate” our own life stories is crucial, because we then have the ability to create the reality in which we live or want to live. If we do not have the power to tell our stories or others assume the power to tell our stories for us, we cannot shape the outcome of our lives.

Drawing from Michel Foucault's research on "power and knowledge" as inseparable in discourse, Stephen Madigan and Ian Law note how dominant discourses limit the language accessible to people to tell their stories and limit the meaning of people's particular stories. Madigan and Law (1998) state: "Foucault's (1980) description of discourse refers to both what can be said and thought, and also who can speak and with what authority" (p. 6). As described in Chapter 3, dominant discourses are culture's way of defining people, knowledge, and what is real and are the larger stories of culture in which we find our own stories. These dominant discourses are the "preferred and customary ways of believing and behaving within the particular culture" and influence us by inciting us to rank the importance of particular life experiences over others (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 32). We also may choose not to rank some experiences and dismiss them altogether (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 32). If people are assisted to identify the dominant discourses that are affecting them and the way they choose to story their lives, then they have the opportunity and freedom to be "unique" and "different" and "to develop and perform narratives that they prefer around the particularities of their lives" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 33).

As named in Chapter 3, sexism is a dominant discourse in our culture that women must identify in order to clear the path to their own stories, not culture's stories of who they are as "defective." A narrative approach moves us from the biological and physical limitations of these dominant discourses *about* women *to* the women themselves. The process that narrative counseling theory uses to shift this focus is called *deconstruction*: "a process in which discourses are exposed and people's positions within them are revealed" (McKenzie & Monk, 1997, p. 95).

As part of deconstruction, one listens for the ways in which dominant discourses have shaped people's stories, identities, language, and actions and asks questions that help people begin to understand the impact of such discourses in their lives. Freedman and Combs (1996) comment that if they ask questions about people's experiences that have people responding with "I've never thought of it that way before," then the right questions are being asked because the questions are "generat[ing] experience" for people and moving them beyond simply *relating* their experience (p. 17). Questions that begin to separate people from the dominant discourse can help people think about their experiences and not just feel the pain of such experiences. If women begin to think about sexism from a different and a more critical point of view, they can begin to see how sexism is a "problem," and how they and their gender are not problems. The process of deconstruction affects/effects a person's identity and agency by generating new experience, and, therefore, making possible the generation of new stories of people's lives.

In narrative counseling, deconstructive listening and questioning (on the counselor's part) are for the purpose of *externalizing the problem*. White (1990) defines externalizing as "an approach to therapy that encourages persons to objectify and, at times, to personify the problems that they experience as oppressive" (p. 38). Listening carefully to a person's description or naming of the problem is critical. People usually have internalized so much of the problem discourse that it is difficult for them to see themselves as subjects and the problem as an object. To talk about the problem as separate from a person is to remove the person from what was usually an already "problem-saturated" story so that the person (and perhaps other family members) can start relating to the problem with more energy, creativity, objectivity, and agency (Wright, 2003, p. 73).

With the problem(s) externalized, the problem(s) can be discussed without “thickening” the problem story, and the person experiencing the problem and others can unite against the problem and begin to think of ways to undermine it. This process may involve *mapping the problem*, which includes looking at the influence of the problem in one’s life and relationships and looking to see the person’s influence on the problem (White & Epston, 1990, p. 45).

Questions asked about the influence of the problem in one’s life help one see the patterns of where the problem appears and continues to drive a person. One then can decide if she wants to intervene in this pattern or if this is acceptable (McKenzie & Monk, 1997, p. 102).

In “Learning and teaching narrative ideas,” McKenzie and Monk (1997) state that spending time mapping the problem helps a person “clearly establish and name the plot in the problem story,” which then helps one to compare the “old problem story” to the “favored story” (pp. 103-104). In narrative counseling, a counselor continues to practice deconstructive listening in order to identify times when the dominant story or problem was not controlling a person’s life, but rather the person was able to have agency over the problem. These moments are called *unexpected outcomes* which lead to “alternative stories.” This concept will be discussed further in the next section, but for now it may be helpful to see how the use of *deconstruction* can contribute to the agency of the clergy women interviewed in the face of dominant discourses about gender.

When these clergy women experience a conflict with the internal sense of who they are and who they are portrayed to be by social constructions of gender, their “lived experience” is not only incongruent with the dominant narrative of culture but is often denied. In a culture where women’s experience is denied and where gender is so objectified, women do not expect to be listened to as subjects of their own stories. The act of deconstructive listening can be a

transformative experience for women who find their voices heard and their selves and their experiences respected. Questions asked of women in language that objectifies the problem and not the women themselves help women to begin to see that *they* are not the problem, but power constructed in ways to disadvantage women is, especially when it tries to talk them out of who they are/are becoming and exercising agency in their lives.

If “sexism” is named as the externalized problem, and not women who refuse to subscribe to such structures of power that intentionally disadvantage them, then women can begin to question what reinforces such structures, how it is these structures have come to have such power in their lives, and how they have been “recruited” by the problem (Kenyon, Clark, & de Vries, 2001, p. 277). After mapping the problem’s influence on them, they then can explore when they have influenced the problem and generated a *unique outcome*. Again, the concept of “unique outcomes” will be explored further in the next section, but, for now, the example of deconstructing a discourse such as sexism provides an awareness of how narrative’s concept of deconstruction can contribute to participants’ agency.

In the church, a common discourse in need of “deconstruction” and often invoked to suggest “agency” is that of “empowerment.” In my research, I intentionally did not utilize this term to describe or refer to “agency” (although some clergy women interviewed did suggest it), because of its exhausted overuse in the church (often by clergy). Historically in the church, empowerment tends to be informed from a patriarchal and hierarchical context where power is an entity or limited “commodity” to be brokered (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp. 49-50). Those at the top have the most power; those at the bottom have the least power. Thus in this modernist understanding of power, the only way to be “empowered” is for those at the top to give it away and for those at the bottom to receive it.

This understanding of “empowerment” tends to portray the “active agent” as the one “giving,” not “receiving,” and as a person who is generous, willing to share, and wanting the best for another. This understanding also is problematic, because it begins with the assumption that not all people have agency, relies on the benevolence of the ones with power to give power away, privileges certain people while disadvantaging others, and allows for the pretense that power is somehow being “shared” when in reality it is held by one person in a relationship. Such an understanding maintains status quo and takes agency from women.

Over the course of the interviews, several other discourses at work in participants’ lives began to emerge: therapeutism, “conflict,” models of leadership in the church, who/what pastors do/are, and “call.” Many assumptions are at work in these discourses, and I wonder how participants would benefit from critical reflection on or “unpacking” of these discourses in order to explore how the assumptions, values, and ideas associated with these affect their agency, actions, and options (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 43). Because such exploration may reveal how these discourses--so readily used and accepted in the church--can marginalize certain people and experiences (especially women’s) and how participants’ appeal to such discourses may actually contribute to their own marginalization, I attempt to deconstruct these discourses below.

Therapeutism is “an ideological discourse that focuses on individuals’ emotional problems and promises to ‘do good,’ while performing the social roles of surveillance, regulation, and control of moral and appropriate social behavior (Epstein, 1994)” (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007, p. xv). The concept of “therapy” itself is socially constructed and embedded with assumptions about what “emotional problems” are, what “health” is, what therapy can do for people or how therapy can “help” people. Although some people assign negative connotations to “therapy” in general (evidence of its social construction), seldom do

people critically think of therapy as a form of social control that can enlist people into socially controlling themselves (and others). In other words, even as people may be driven to seek counseling because of the pressures of social control in their lives, seldom do people identify therapy as part of the system of social control affecting their lives.

In the interviews, I heard discourses of “therapeutism” expressed by clergy women in the following ways: in language of assumptions about or expectations related to a particular system/theory of therapy (such as family systems) and what it can or cannot do in situations of “conflict”; in language of “health” and “unhealthy systems” within relationships and congregations; and in language of “addiction,” “treatment,” and the “12 Step Program.” Three of the eight participants identified previous experiences of therapy/counseling related to sexual abuse they experienced as children that greatly impacted their sense of “health,” safety, and ability to exercise agency on their own behalf.²⁸

Therapeutism is also evident across the interviews in discourses about “conflict”--its causes and its possible solutions. The situations in which participants experience their agency being dismissed or minimized are often described as situations of “conflict,” and in some cases they are perceived to *be* the conflict or the conflict is located *in* them. Such identification is based on a modernist notion of power (where power is an individual possession) and a “problem-solving” approach to conflict (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 32). This approach does not take into consideration social and cultural factors that influence an individuals’ power, and it assumes that conflict is due to an individual’s “underlying needs” not being met, which becomes a “personal deficit” that gets identified in an individual (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp. 32-34). Until these needs are met (which is presumably possible), conflict cannot be resolved.

²⁸ The experiences of clergy women interviewed reflect the statistics of abuse against women especially under the age of 18.

In narrative, conflict does not need to be “resolved” as it is an “almost inevitable by-product of diversity” (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 41). Conflict results from multiple perspectives/stories of any situation that lead to different “readings of events” (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 41). The church talks about community, unity in diversity, and multiplicity of gifts and abilities, yet the church and its leadership often undermine and reject such diversity by storying it as “conflict.” Unfortunately, when diversity of experience cannot be acknowledged, these clergy women and their different experiences can only be understood in contrast and in conflict with a dominant and acceptable discourse.

A modernist understanding of “conflict” certainly emerges in another discourse evident in the interviews: “church leadership.” Whether looking at leadership within a congregation or at the synodical level, participants articulated various understandings and expectations of what “church leadership” should be. At the congregational level, there are clearly different beliefs about what/who a solo, senior, associate, or co-pastor does/is and what kind of power he/she holds. Although the clergy women interviewed emphasize an awareness of wanting to provide and participate in different models of leadership--especially more “democratic” or collaborative models,²⁹ they all encounter the challenges by congregational members, leaders or colleagues to anything other than traditional leadership models.³⁰

²⁹ The desire expressed by clergy women interviewed to participate in alternative models of leadership is reflected in the work of Lynn Rhodes (1993), Letty Russell (1993), Judith Orr (1996), Musimbi Kanyoro (1997), and Susan Willhauck and Jacquelyn Thorpe (2001) who have written on the topic of women and leadership in the church presenting feminist perspectives on and alternative models/metaphors for leadership.

³⁰ Within the ELCA, “traditional” models of leadership for ordained ministry include solo pastor, senior/associate pastor or program/staff ministry where there is a pastor who is senior or head of staff. Such designations are listed on the ELCA’s Rostered Leader Profile. In addition, some ELCA synods cite Roy Oswald’s (1991) article, “How to Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program, and Corporate Sized Churches,” which references these traditional models of leadership to assist congregations in exploring leadership needed for their particular contexts.

Participants articulate an understanding of traditional senior/associate or staff models where it is assumed and expected that the senior holds the power and has the ultimate decision-making responsibility, and the associate(s) defer(s) to the senior.³¹ In staff models where there is a senior pastor and male *and* female associates, then the male associate pastors often hold more power than the female associates.³² This is evidenced in the experiences of Mariah, Taylor, and Wilma, whose male associates often stood by and watched a senior pastor challenge their female colleague but do not speak up to challenge the senior pastor as it would have “jeopardized” their jobs and, of course, challenged the very system of power from which the male associates presumably benefitted. Participants who are solo pastors know they have to make decisions as the only pastor, yet they also are aware that their decisions and ability to make decisions are questioned in ways associated with sexism, ageism, and ability. Two clergy women interviewed are supposed to be a part of more collaborative models: Wilma called her staff situation a “team” ministry, and Bethany denounced her senior pastor position in order to form a “co-pastorate” with a male associate pastor. Neither of these clergy women experienced these models in the ways they had hoped, and neither of these models had necessary or adequate support from within the congregation or from synod office/synod staff.

In the ELCA, the “synod office” refers to the office of bishop and his/her assistants, all who are rostered within the denomination but not necessarily ordained. The synod office aids congregations and pastors in finding appropriate placements. A synod office is often seen and/or portrays itself as a “resource” to congregations and pastors, aiding in discernment of call,

³¹ Senior pastors having more authority/power and ultimate decision-making responsibility is referenced in Roy Oswald’s (1991) article, “How to Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program, and Corporate Sized Churches.”

³² Carol Becker’s (1996, 2001) work on the impact of gender on church leadership and her exploration of mixed-gender ministry teams highlights this dynamic of gender and power.

situations of “conflict,” etc. In the interviews, clergy women state that synod offices are both helpful and not helpful. The phrase “synod office” is invoked by participants in ways that simultaneously assume it should be a resource even while they are aware that it often is unable to assess or even equipped to offer the resource(s) needed.

Participants’ expectations of synod offices vary from having no expectations to minimal expectations. Some participants did not believe that synod offices would support or listen to them, that it simply “seemed unimportant” to consult the synod office (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011), and that they are only “valuable” to synods as long as they do what they are told to do (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011; Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011). Other clergy women interviewed expect synod offices to be honest and truthful about the situations they are walking into in congregations, to appropriately include their voices when the synod office is called into a congregational situation/”conflict” and not “short circuit” the pastor, to believe their stories/experiences and not just when there is documentation, and to recognize and acknowledge that the therapeutic/conflict resolution resources being offered to pastors and/or congregations may not be appropriate or helpful to particular situations (especially when these resources do not take into consideration larger social and cultural narratives of power) and may only exacerbate the problem (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011; Nicole, personal communication, June 9, 2011; Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011; Danielle, personal communication, July 14, 2011).

Assumptions about how church leadership “is” and how participants expect/think/hope it “should be” are evident in another discourse about what it means to be a “pastor.” “Pastor” can mean an “office of ordained ministry” that implies “pastoral authority” and “pastoral identity,” which are also discourses with implied meanings/assumptions that may benefit

participants to unpack (Danielle, personal communication, July 14, 2011). Wilma believes discourses about “pastor” should evoke respect from oneself and others for one’s “place as pastor” or one’s “voice as pastor” (personal communication, June 7, 2011). In this sense, participants identify agency as part of (coming with) the ordained role.

Some clergy women interviewed talk about the challenges of seeing themselves as “pastors” because of the discourses about who/what a pastor is/does. For Nicole, she initially thought pastors had to be “hardened people” and “capable” of making hard/difficult decisions (personal communication, June 9, 2011). For Olivia, being a pastor means an on-going challenge of integration of who she is as a person and who she is and is expected to be as a pastor (personal communication, July 7, 2011). Even having to “integrate” a personal and a pastoral identity seems to be a challenge to the dominant discourse of “pastor.” There are even hierarchical levels within this discourse as noted in interviewees’ use of “first call pastor” or “first woman pastor,” both meant to reflect newness, presumed inexperience, vulnerability, doubt, and the need to prove oneself.

Although all of the clergy women interviewed question the discourse of “pastor” in some way, a majority of them also appeal to another dominant discourse used in the church to justify or make sense of their role as pastor, their decision to be a pastor and their reasoning for being able to exercise their agency--the discourse of “call.” “Call” will be addressed further in the next section, because I learned from the interviews that “call” has a strong correlation to generating alternative stories for these clergy women. For now, it is necessary to simply reference that “call” language in the church is one of the most readily used discourses to explain, answer, endorse, and discredit people’s decisions to pursue a vocational career in the church.

Overall, narrative theory's use of postmodern and social constructionist theory--of which "deconstruction" is a part--challenges and gives the church the opportunity to turn a critical lens on itself. In this project, the process of deconstruction particularly exposes discourses about patriarchal constructions of power that have distorted and continue to distort ecclesial/congregational life and leadership practices. These distortions, as revealed in participants' interviews, not only affect clergy women and how they lead but also affect clergy men's self-understanding and leadership practices and influence, if not affirm congregants' understanding and perceptions about pastoral leadership and practices. Deconstruction assists the church in identifying dominant patriarchal discourses in our culture and recognizing that such discourses are not separate from or only exist outside the church. In addition, deconstruction challenges the church to identify and acknowledge how certain discourses of the church not only invite certain aspects of people's lived experiences but also invite *only* certain people's experiences/stories to be told/ heard. Choosing to hear, believe or accept more than one story is a political stance that allows and invites alternative stories to emerge. I now explore the concept of "alternative" stories and listen to the alternative stories of agency that emerged from the interviews.

Clergy Women's Voices: Alternative Stories of Agency³³

As humans we are "multistoried" people with multistoried lives (Morgan, 2000, p. 8). We have many life events, experiences, relationships, skills, etc. that we choose to "weave" together to form a "story," and we use a "narrative" about who we are to weave these events together and create meaning (Morgan, 2000, p. 5). If clergy women interviewed have narratives about themselves as being "good pastors," then these narratives are used to connect events in

³³ In this section, the referenced voices and experiences of clergy women represent only those of the eight ELCA clergy women who participated in the research interviews.

their lives that underscore and “thicken” these narratives. Such thickening will then increase participants’ ability to see more and other examples of events/experiences in their lives that reinforce this meaning (Morgan, 2000, p. 6). Likewise, if their narratives about themselves are as “bad pastors,” they will likely only story those events that reinforce that meaning. In narrative, meaning is never “arbitrary”; it is intentional (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 39). When meaning can be ascribed to events and actions, people are then able to “embody personal agency” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 98).

In narrative theory, the deconstruction process does more than take apart problematic stories. Narrative counselor Jill Freedman asserts:

Whenever you’re taking something apart, you’re also putting something else together.

As that (the alternative to the problem) begins to come together, people make meaning about it and make decisions about whether it is a preferred direction or not. And each step that one takes makes possible a range of next steps (it also eliminates some other steps). (Schneider, 1998, p. 420)

As stories are questioned, problematic discourses identified and people’s preferences about what story they want to be living acknowledged, a path is opened for new and/or alternative stories to emerge and for people to decide which alternative stories they prefer to be living.

As referenced in the previous section, *unique* or *unexpected outcomes* are times when the problem did not control the person, her life, or her relationships or when she influenced the problem (White & Epston, 1990, p. 56). When a person can recall these moments in the history of her stories, she can draw on them to help make “new meaning” and “new stories” in the present and future (White & Epston, 1990, p. 57). As deconstruction and externalizing the problem help a woman to see her relationship with the problem and as unique outcomes help her

to see different ways she has related to the problem in the past, a woman is empowered to take responsibility for how she wants to relate to the problem in the future and enact her preferred story. This is called *reconstruction* as one continues to look for ways to “thicken” the preferred stories, which includes finding ways to continue to resist dominant discourses that are harmful and “find support in subcultures that are living different stories” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 33).

Clergy women certainly are an active “subculture” within the church that has found ways to live different stories and to resist dominant discourses that attempt to restrict and deny their agency and identity not only as clergy women but as *human beings*. The very existence of this “subculture” goes unnoticed by some or it is not acknowledged, because it is assumed unnecessary in a church where “we are all God’s children” or it is experienced as a “threat” rather than an opportunity to learn about other “knowledges” that exist and may benefit the church and the people it serves. Those who subscribe to dominant discourses that are oppressive to women would not want to acknowledge that “even in the most marginalized and disempowered of lives there is always ‘lived experience’ that lies outside the domain of the dominant stories that have marginalized and disempowered those lives” (Michael White as cited in Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 39). For example, participants have found ways to not allow patriarchal narratives to conceal their lives, as I discovered in the interviews. How have they done this? Why have they done this? What do they know about living life against the grain that would help others who live life the same way? How might their experiences of marginalization actually place them in a position of understanding the “gospel” differently? What stories might their actions tell about the church and its theology?

Participants' stories may appear to some as "simple" stories of injustice, yet that is not what these stories are. There is so much more! In their stories are possibilities of richer descriptions of justice in general, of justice toward women in particular, of suffering, unsuffering, power, agency, identity, theology, etc. Their stories are about them and about more than them as their stories point to larger narratives of challenges and possibilities in the church and in culture. Because of their "lived experience," participants know certain things other people/clergy cannot know. Their stories and knowledges are important and cannot be left to others to define, nor will others necessarily be able to or want to resurrect these stories/knowledges.

A significant aim of this project is to listen to and learn from participants' lived experiences, which often in the church do not get storied, let alone by clergy women themselves. In narrative counseling, it is recognized that the "position from which something is viewed is as important as the object being viewed" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 38). This does not mean that women are "objects," but rather it means women's lives and stories *and* their own telling and perspective of their lives and stories are *both* equally important. If others believe their perspective of clergy women and clergy women's experiences can be accurate, and if abuse of power or dominant discourses primarily inform others making these judgments about clergy women and their stories, then others will miss the alternative stories of agency that exist before their eyes. When others, such as experts, professionals or church leaders, identify social problems as "individual maladjustments" in clergy women or advocate for women to "adapt" to oppressive discourses, there is little possibility for alternative stories (Ewing & Allen, 2008, p. 110).

The intent of the interviews is to listen to and learn from eight ELCA clergy women directly about their ability to exercise agency in and through situations of “suffering.” Their stories are alternative stories of agency, and in listening to them, one learns that many other alternative stories of agency inform these stories. One also learns from these clergy women and their experiences that to be a pastor and to continue to be a pastor in a vocation where their agency is always being challenged involve for them the need to generate ongoing alternative stories.

As mentioned in the previous section on “deconstruction,” discourses about “pastor” and “call” are mentioned frequently by interviewees in discussing their use of agency. These discourses, so shaped by patriarchal and theological narratives in ways that often make others second-guess clergy women and cause clergy women to second-guess themselves, are also discourses that evoked strong alternative stories for participants about “who” they are and why/how they choose to act. Some participants do retrieve positive possibilities for agency from these normative discourses, and they do not hesitate to utilize them in ways that contribute to their pastoral agency.

The discourse of “pastor,” when referenced formally in relation to an “office of ministry” or a particular “role” in the church, incites agency in participants out of a sense of responsibility and promise to fulfill a holy obligation as faithfully as possible. Even if they personally do not feel like they “had” agency in a situation, they choose to act, knowing that pastorally they have a duty and a commitment to act, to speak up for themselves and others, and to lead. The “pastoral authority” associated with the office of pastor is what some participants articulate as undergirding their own sense of agency to act for others, and how that very authority is sometimes a challenge for them to claim and use on their own behalf.

Danielle comments, “I don’t want to compromise [the office of ministry], you know, maybe I need to speak up for myself once in a while just because of that very fact that there’s a certain level of authority that comes with this office of ministry that I kind of don’t want them to forget” (personal communication, July 14, 2011). Taylor acknowledges that she uses her role as a woman to speak up for other women and uses “[the] role of pastor as my *reason* [emphasis added]” to speak up (personal communication, August 10, 2011). The authority of the office of pastor contributes to Taylor’s sense of agency. Danielle acknowledges the interchange between “the authority of the office of pastor” and agency; the office of pastor contributes to a clergy woman’s sense of agency and ability to speak up and to act in various situations; likewise, “speaking up for yourself helps reaffirm the authority of the office” (personal communication, July 14, 2011).

Carol clarifies the sense of agency she came to experience in learning to discern what is and is not “pastoral authority” and how this clarification helps her not to “compromise” her authority or risk robbing someone else or herself of agency. She states:

I want to speak about a negative and a positive to that first. Authority I think is an abused word in our clergy world because I see too many ways authority is misused. The senior pastor who stripped control when he first got there of all these lay leaders and ministry teams, committees, because this is the right way, and “I’m the expert that knows how to do it, and you’re going to do it my way.” That is wrong ... How I would interpret abuse. . . . The appropriate, or what I feel is the God-giving authority, is the pastoral authority we’re given; [it] is already that sense of “We call you, we need to get to know you as a person, but yet we know right now these gifts that you bring to us, we want to use,” and to say ... I don’t have to defer to another person; I don’t have to say, “Well let me go ask

this person” where in some ways being an associate forced me into that immediately, but to just come to a place of giving the gift of trust and authority they gave to me already and taking it in that healthy definition. (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011)

As a pastor, a woman, and in a role of “associate,” Carol has multiple perspectives and experiences from which to reflect on authority and how that is related to agency. She understands pastoral authority to come from God, and its right use is when it comes accompanied by the trust of the people one is serving as pastor. This kind of authority invites one to claim and use agency on behalf of themselves and others.

The “God-giving authority” and the trust of people to which Carol refers are not randomly given but anchored in identity and ability (personal communication, June 6, 2011). Several participants identify the connection of agency with identity and ability in alternative stories such as “call,” “giftedness,” “baptism,” “child of God,” and “priesthood of all believers.” It is interesting to note that three of the clergy women interviewed, who strongly emphasized “call” language, are all in their “first call” and all identify themselves as the “first woman pastor” at their churches. For Olivia, the alternative story with which “call” provides her is a “deep sense of God wanting me in that place.” She believes that her “own kind of calling and giftedness” by God helped her affirm that she “was right for that place and those people.” She adds, “You know, I’ve been called and gifted by the Spirit in the church and . . . I trust this is where I need to be.” A sense of “call” and being equipped by the Spirit “gave [her] a sense of staying power, a willingness to kind of stay checked in with folks who really challenged [her]” (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

“Call” provides Danielle with an alternative story about agency especially in regards to voice and speaking up. She discusses her realization about how important it is for her to speak

up for someone who is vulnerable, which she identifies as “my calling.” She says, “I have a pretty strong sense of being called to serve. Serve and care for others. And . . . that calling just gets stronger and stronger the more I know the people, love the people and the community.” She also notes that her sense of “call” is “threatened” when that ability to speak out on behalf of the vulnerable or the less able is threatened or impaired (Danielle, personal communication, July 14, 2011).

Nicole is very firm about her sense of call and how it informed and necessitated a response from her to act in her situation. She says:

I very much believe that I am called here to speak the truth . . . to testify to the gospel, to proclaim good news, but also to speak sometimes the words of challenge that need to be spoken, and this was one of those occasions I felt like that everything I was called to do here was being put into question . . . and the success of ministry here, the authenticity of ministry here depended on me being able to do what I was called to do here The integrity of it, I mean, I could be here and I could be the shadow . . . you know, I think I could be the shadow puppet controlled by whatever forces . . . and not speak up and just let things happen the way they’ve happened in the past or the way certain individuals would like them to happen . . . but that’s not what I’m here to do, that’s not what I feel called to do. (Nicole, personal communication, June 9, 2011)

Nicole’s sense of “call” informs her decision to stay engaged at her church and to speak up or as she says, “speak the truth.” Her sense of call and ability to speak the truth are shaped further by her sense of call and identity as a “child of God,” meaning for her, “I have that same right and voice that others do to be able to . . . point to where God is at work” (personal communication, June 9, 2011).

“Speaking truth” is an alternative story for Mariah and Carol as well, and they, too, identify a sense of call and baptismal identity that shape and undergird their choice of stories of agency to enact. Mariah references how Jesus spoke the truth and how that inspires others to do the same: “So I see that as, you know, a leadership role in that we are called as Christians and as a leaders in the church to state our truth, and granted it might be a little askew, but it’s our truth, and then we present it to the community of faith, and they refine it and take the truth from it and help you discern what is not truth, and you do that regardless of the consequences.” We do this, according to Mariah, because as Christians “we are called to be different” from how the rest of the world would use power. To speak and to speak truth are to live out one’s call that she is “claimed by God, and God has given her a gift and a voice and that contributing that to the whole is better for the whole” (Mariah, personal communication, August 12, 2011).

When Carol finds herself in the situation of a senior pastor trying to deny her agency, she recognizes it immediately because she recognizes that the “character of who I was as a unique called child of God was compromised, and I was not being in a place where I could use what I’d been given as gifts.” One of these gifts that she identifies and also describes as part of her “call” is her ability to be a “truth teller.” When the situation she was in attempts to “rob” her of this ability, it was “life-taking” for her. (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011)

Listening to these experiences of interviewees and to how they have reframed (and in some cases retrieved) discourses about “pastor” and “call” in ways that are meaningful to them, one learns about how these alternative stories aid them in reauthoring their own stories in which they are the subjects who have the ability to exercise agency in their own lives. In a process of reauthoring, some stories are resisted and some stories and knowledges are resurrected. Alternative stories are not necessarily “new” stories in their lives nor are they meant to be

“radical constructions” (White, 2011, p. 9). Rather, alternative stories are part and parcel of their lives that simply have not been given the same attention as other stories. Recognition and attention to these alternative stories “provide an opportunity for people to participate in the rich description of some of the skills of living and knowledges of life that are associated with the alternative stories of their lives and their identities” (White, 2011, p. 9). More will be said about these skills and knowledges in the next section on how participants construct agency to unsuffer themselves.

One hope that I held was that the interview itself would be a positive and affirming experience of participants and conducted in a way to contribute to their agency. At the end of the interviews, I would ask how they felt about the interview itself--if anything surprised them or was a new insight for them. All clergy women expressed a word of thanks for being asked to participate. I think the interview itself became an “alternative story” for some of the clergy women who recognized how much they had acted in their situations and how few opportunities they had for reflection on such experiences. The interview allowed for other stories and meanings to arise that contributed to their agency. Four clergy women commented at the end of the interviews about “feel[ing] stronger,” feeling “stronger than I thought I was,” having a “sense of empowerment,” and that the interview experience “reminds me of my strengths.” Two clergy women expressed appreciation for feeling “enable[d] to speak and share,” and that, in talking and “responding together,” one realized that “there’s a lot going on” in the experience she shared. Two other clergy women expressed new awareness about: 1) having a sense of gratitude for people who offered support, and 2) recognizing when the church does not have the resources clergy women need.

Alternative stories can provide new meaning, and new meaning can foster agency in

people to enact a different outcome. For participants to tell the story they want and are living, there has to be a place to speak, to hear their own voices telling their stories, and to know others are listening to their stories. One aim of the interviews in this project was to provide such a space for these clergy women. The interviews invited participants to share alternative stories of agency and to continue to reposition themselves to the problem stories. The interview process allowed multiple stories to be told and a collective voice to emerge. Collectively, the stories and experiences of these clergy women provide increasing alternative stories regarding agency (as well as resistance and justice). Narrative counseling theory not only assists and encourages these clergy women in telling their alternative stories, but also it aids them in recognizing their own “alternative knowledges” about agency and how they are constructing and utilizing “alternative knowledges” of agency to unsuffer themselves.

Steps Toward Integrative Construction

David Epston (n.d.) appeals to Michel Foucault’s use of the phrase “think differently” or as Epston says “think otherwise” as a strategy that helps him to think outside of “legitimated,” “outsider,” or “professional” *knowledges* that assume to be the expert voices in people’s lives (pp. 3 & 4).³⁴ These kinds of knowledges turn people into “passive recipients” of other people’s (usually the “experts” or “professionals”) knowledge (singularly understood) rather than “creators and users of their own ‘knowledges’” (Epston, n.d., p. 3). Epston (n.d.) reminds professionals who want to “help” people that these “insider” knowledges (or “unauthorized” knowledges) that people have about their own lives and way of living in particular cultures may serve and help people better than professionals and their professional knowledge (p. 3). He asks:

³⁴ Epston pluralizes “knowledges.” When “knowledge” is used in the singular it limits knowledge and who actually “has” knowledge and tends to invoke Foucault’s reference to professional knowledge as “regimes of truth.”

If we dismiss or disregard such situated or subjective ‘knowledges’ of those who suffer, are we unwittingly impoverishing them of that which matters most to them? Perhaps it is their knowledges, more than ours, that gives those who suffer the moral stamina to go on with their lives. And if we could conceive of such stuff as moral stamina, could we participate with those who suffer to endow both them and us with this? (Epston, n.d., pp. 3-4).

In a culture and church that so often dismiss women and women’s voices, what insider knowledges do clergy women hold that may go unknown by clergy women themselves who may not yet have the words to speak their knowledges, or when they do speak, their language is “different” and not recognized or acknowledged by the “institution” or “professionals” so shaped by social and cultural discourses to discredit or dismiss insider knowledges as overly subjective? What insider knowledges of clergy women go unknown and unnoticed by many people, the culture, and the church that could “inform as well as . . . inspire hope, excite the imagination,” and “go beyond what is already known”? (Epston, n.d., pp. 4-5). Could listening to and learning from such knowledges help those in caring “professions” participate *with* those who experience suffering and help contribute to “unsuffering”? Integrating narrative counseling theory with the voices and experiences of the eight clergy women interviewed, I now explore these clergy women’s alternative knowledges and constructions of agency that assist them to unsuffer themselves. These knowledges and constructions contribute to a co-construction of agency that is further developed in Chapter 6, “Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Practice.”

The phrase “unsuffering oneself” is a creation of David Epston, who borrows this word from lyrics of a song in order to suggest to Julie King (a woman with whom Epston was in conversation/correspondence about her attempts to influence and minimize the effects of

anorexia/bulimia in her life) whether “unsuffering” herself is what she was doing. King describes her interest in this linguistic phrase as a “conceptual turning point” for her: “To contemplate the potential ‘undoing’ of this suffering stirred my imagination and my hope. . . . I could begin ‘unsuffering’ my life through my thoughts and my actions” (Epston, 2008, p. 1). For her, “unsuffering oneself” acknowledges the suffering she experienced as real while acknowledging that suffering is not the “end” of her story. In Epston (2008), King says: “To me unsuffering signifies the undoing of pain, torment, shame and punishment in a journey toward hope and discovery, choice, excitement and joy; unashamed, unapologetic joy” (p. 9). This “undoing” is not random but a result of exercising agency.

“Unsuffering” is a term utilized in this project for several reasons: 1) It introduces new language and new opportunities for thinking and talking about what participants are saying and doing in the midst of situations (that I describe as “suffering”) where their agency is being minimized or dismissed, yet they are not allowing it; 2) It is intentionally unfamiliar in order to invite these clergy women to generate new language, meaning, thoughts, ideas, theology, etc., whereas, a familiar word like “healing” could invite them into using existing language in the church that can become filled with religious jargon and not meaningful; 3) Recognizing interviews are with ELCA clergy women, I assume that the “theology of the cross” is readily and easily invoked, which is weighed heavily with the language of “Jesus suffers with us” rather than “Jesus unsuffers with us” (this will be discussed further in Chapter 5); 4) I am curious about how unsuffering may relate to participants’ insider knowledges of agency; and 5) I wonder if introducing language of unsuffering could help in “double-listening” or listening to the “both/and” stories women have of oppression (suffering) *and* emancipation (unsuffering?).

Although none of the clergy women interviewed are familiar with the word “unsuffering,” they are willing to engage it and offer some definitions about how they understand it. “Suffering” and “unsuffering” will be discussed further in Chapter 5; however, for now, it is important to state that participants identify both “suffering” and “unsuffering” as “active,” not “passive,” experiences. Their exercising of *agency* has something to do with both of these concepts. My bias is that “unsuffering” is a “preferred story” of these clergy women and is an “alternative” story that they are *always* living in the church. Living this story is an act of agency in and of itself that often goes unnoticed because these clergy women’s “insider knowledges” of agency are not valued as legitimate knowledge. For the participants in this project, however, living this story involves continuous “exploitat[ion] [of] sites of resistance” to their agency, which presses them to look at and redefine their “self-stories,” “resurrect” their “suppressed voice[s],” and recognize the “agency and creativity available” to them (Brown & Scott, 2007, p. xvii).

Although *agency* is not a familiar word for the clergy women interviewed, they engage it and offer their definitions. A primary understanding of “agency” shared by the clergy women is that agency is God-given or part of one’s baptismal identity or “call,” and it is exercised because of this “call,” including one’s identity and authority as a “called” and ordained pastor. Secondary understandings of agency include: agency as integral to one’s own sense of identity, integrity, and authenticity as a person; having a choice to speak and when/how to speak on one’s own behalf and sometimes on behalf of or with others; and the belief that agency is used to make a difference for the good, to build up a community, and to invite the agency of others.

To get at how participants are constructing agency from a different perspective, I asked them for their “images” of agency. I wondered what these images might say about who these

clergy women are, what they value, and what is meaningful to them about agency. Collectively, the most prominent characteristic evoked by their images is *strength* in addition to courage, possibilities, identity, resilience, having a voice, flexibility, authority, persistence, relationships and community, and an ability to thrive. Some examples of these images include the following examples:

A.) An El Salvadoran cross hanging in one clergy woman's office with a picture of a woman on it demonstrating "all these different ways of leading and teaching and working and mothering . . . but in it all with her arms upstretched in praise to God and in thankfulness for all of these ways she's been called to work and express herself" (Nicole, personal communication, June 9, 2011).

B.) Another image of agency is of "Wonder Woman." Growing up with the comic book, one of the clergy women "loved" Wonder Woman, and for her it connects to the "warrior piece" within her and the "martial artist" she has been trained to be. She says, "There's just something in me that's made out of steel, and there comes a point . . . I can be pushed just so far, but when that point is hit, I go into kick-ass Wonder Woman mode" (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

C.) Two images came to mind for another clergy woman. First, a tree--"one of these big, old Redwoods that are strong with deep, deep roots but kind of reaching out and a sense of strength and flexibility, but then I realized I'd want something that moved more." Her second image is a "beautifully built Lego car with all kinds of pieces that a kid puts together. . . . They're all stuck together but move. It might not look perfect but [the pieces] are there and together" (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

These images and their attributes evoke thoughtful ideas about what these clergy women assign meaning and value to and how they are constructing agency to unsuffer themselves. In addition, paying attention to the lived experience that clergy women share in the interviews, one can hear and learn from their insider knowledges what agency looks, sounds, and feels like. Ways in which participants construct and utilize “agency” include: negotiation, speaking up, truth telling, “knowing something isn’t right,” used for a greater purpose, used behind the scenes, and trusting faith.

The clergy women who participated in this project spend significant time “negotiating” agency with others, especially male colleagues, who can be confused about agency when it is about more than “power” or “role.” For these clergy women, agency is part of their identity and integrity. To have another try to prevent them from exercising their agency can not only be perceived as a professional attack but also a personal attack. An attempt to deny or disregard their agency by others invites these clergy women *to exercise* their agency and identity. If one expects these clergy women to allow their agency to be denied, then he/she is surprised when they *act* or speak. Sometimes this is when these clergy women’s exercising of agency (or they themselves) will get (mis)labeled as aggressive, over-reacting, angry, sensitive or “threat.” Such mislabeling contributes to diminishing their agency while exposing another’s surprise and/or assumptions about how clergy women should act.

“Negotiation” of agency also is understood as helping others come to terms with their agency or in being careful not to distract from another’s agency, even in situations where these clergy women are at a clear disadvantage. Taylor states about the senior pastor with whom she worked:

I learned in relationship to this person that when you walk in, in the first minute and a half or so, he has to take control, and he'll have to say something that either puts you down or puts him up. Something where he knows he's in charge. . . . It took me a long time to realize this, but then when I did, I would just sit and wait for whatever that would be and then say to myself, 'Oh, there we are, now we can start.'" (personal communication, August 10, 2011)

She calls this "learning," and it is, but it also is much more than that. She exercises her agency by actually choosing to learn something about/from the senior pastor's behavior, to sit there and to wait to speak until he is able to hear her, and to not allow him or his behavior to take away from her acting/speaking. The agency she is enacting is almost invisible, and yet is agency enacted by many of the clergy women interviewed, especially in regard to having to "figure out" their male colleagues and how best their colleagues can be open to their agency.

Sometimes colleagues and others are not open to these clergy women's agency, but that does not keep them from speaking up. Believing that people are to take themselves and others seriously, participants do not readily give people an opportunity to dismiss their concerns--they speak up. Their lived experiences inform their ability to speak up at the risk of being discounted and knowing the consequences of not doing so--both for others who may be in harm's way as well as for the clergy women themselves. Sometimes when these clergy women speak up, it means they have to choose to compromise their own voices in order to protect the voices of others.

This kind of compromise is not a favored choice, because it means these clergy women are not able to state the whole truth of a situation or their experiences. They construct agency as "truth telling" and see themselves as having the ability, the responsibility, and the need to speak

truth when untruth is threatening it. Consistent across the interviews was that participants are not afraid to speak up and to speak truth because of their sense of call and their own lived experience of others attempting to deny their “truth.” They speak up, knowing that there probably will be consequences for them professionally, yet they also know the personal consequences of having to live with the knowledge that they did not say anything.

Once again because of their lived experiences as women in our culture and as women clergy in the church, their truth telling and speaking up are related to “knowing something isn’t right.” Some situations are intolerable, but equally intolerable is living with the knowledge of so much being “wrong” in a situation, and to stay in it would be to contribute to that “wrong.” These clergy women are not afraid to say a situation is simply bad, even in the face of others denying that. Several clergy women interviewed note the embodiment of their agency and knowing when a situation is not right because of their “gut,” “something inside me,” knowing “in my heart” or “I just knew.”

When something is not right, these clergy women use their agency to make things right, not just for themselves but also for others. This reaction looks like believing in people and believing people should have a chance to change; exercising agency may mean looking out for a colleague in helping him be aware of how his words and actions affect others. Participants construct agency in ways that include, unsuffer, and invite others to use their agency on their own behalf as well for a purpose greater than their own.

Similar to “negotiating” agency, recognizing how agency is used “behind the scenes” is critical for women. In all of the situations of the clergy women interviewed, they discuss agency going on “behind the scenes” (that other people could not see or recognize) in order to move through the suffering to unsuffering and the energy it takes to exercise such agency. One clergy

woman describes her surprise at “needing to push so hard” in doing the large and small things in order to keep exercising agency. Another clergy woman’s experience points to how often she has to raise questions about “process” and usually a process that disadvantages her. In her situation, she is expected to go to joint counseling with the senior pastor. She finds this experience to be very disempowering for her. When she questions the counselor about the theory being used and how it seems unable to address certain problems in her working relationship with the senior pastor, the counselor is not able to answer. Several clergy women interviewed use their agency to question the very processes put in place, supposedly for their benefit (or unsuffering).

Finally, it is a real trusting of their faith that contributes to a construction of agency that unsoftens these clergy women (and others). They believe in themselves and others as people of God who are *to act* and to act *differently* in this world because of their faith. As discussed in this chapter, narrative counseling theory takes seriously how participants’ stories constitute their identity and agency, aids in identifying the discourses at work in obstructing their agency and the alternative, but often unnoticed, stories of agency that these clergy women choose to live. Narrative counseling theory also enhances these clergy women’s respect for themselves and others and the role their faith and theology play in shaping their agency, thus the role of faith and theology are now explored, particularly the role of a theology of the cross.

CHAPTER 5

Agency and Theology of the Cross

“ . . . for a while [the theology of the cross] was a central piece . . . and I still deeply believe in it, but it hasn't been a deeply forefront theological thing.”

(Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011)

ELCA clergy women are interviewed for this project because of a working assumption that, as clergy trained in Lutheran theology, they have language for articulating and practice in utilizing a theology of the cross. The above response by one of the interviewees reveals a striking realization across interviews--that although these clergy women speak of a God who “suffers with” God’s creation, they do not readily invoke a theology of the cross when discussing their experiences or reflecting theologically on their experiences and choices to speak and/or act. This variant raises the question “Why not?” and also raises awareness about how few opportunities participants have for intentional theological reflection with others in relation to their pastoral work and especially in relation to their own personal experiences of suffering, unsuffering, and agency.³⁵

Recognizing that theology has the potential to address deeper meanings and understandings of suffering, unsuffering, and agency in people’s lives, this chapter attends to a particular theology that is essential to Lutherans, a theology of the cross. A Lutheran historical perspective on a theology of the cross is offered to assist with interpreting what a Lutheran theology of the cross offers to an understanding of suffering, unsuffering, and agency. After providing this historical basis, I introduce feminist Lutheran and pastoral theological

³⁵ In the course of and following the interviews, participants commented on how rare it is for the opportunity for theological reflection with someone else about their own experiences, actions, and choices, and that the interviews/conversations provided them with an experience of reflection, discovery, realization, and/or affirmation.

perspectives on Luther's theology of the cross to amplify further possibilities for how the theology of the cross can address suffering, contribute to increasing agency, and bring about unsuffering. The voices and experiences of the clergy women interviewed have shaped my engagement of the theology of the cross from these multiple perspectives, thus I return to their narratives to learn how their perspectives on a theology of the cross contributes to their constructions of agency. With these theological perspectives in mind, I conclude the chapter by presenting initial thoughts on constructing a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross.

A Lutheran Historical Perspective of a Theology of the Cross

Douglas John Hall, a non-Lutheran who is ordained in the United Church of Canada and is an emeritus professor of theology at McGill University in Montreal, has been a contemporary challenger to Lutherans to (re)engage our historical roots in a theology of the cross and its relevance in the world today. Hall (1989; 2003a) characterizes the theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*) as a “thin tradition”—unknown, “neglected,” and “rejected” (p. 23; p. 23). This might be a surprising characterization to those who claim the name and theology of “Luther,” yet according to Hall (2005), it is a warranted claim in a “success-driven society” where Luther's theology appears so “out of sync” with culture and church (pp. 470-471). Misinterpreted over the years, co-opted by some substitutionary atonement theologies, and viewed as unpopular in a world that seeks glory and exploitative power and avoids suffering and shared power, the theology of the cross easily can be pushed aside. To do so, however, is to neglect taking seriously the human situation and God's affirmation of life.

Martin Luther first gives language to the theology of the cross (influenced by his reading of scripture, specifically Paul's writings) in what is known as the “Heidelberg Disputation.” As a monk in the Augustinian order, Luther is summoned to Heidelberg for the meeting of the

General Chapter in 1518 to make a defense of his theology. This summons is in response to Luther's posting of the "Ninety-Five Theses" in which he charges the Catholic Church, his own faith tradition, with abusing its power and authority and misrepresenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people it serves (Lull, 2005, p. 40). Surrounded in conflict, Luther states the following theological theses of note:

19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20].
20. He [*sic*] deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.
21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.
22. That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.
24. Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worse manner. (as cited in Lull, 2005, pp. 48-49)³⁶

In these theological theses, Luther is defining what informs and constructs his theology of the cross, which develops out of a particular context. It is important to reflect briefly on Luther's social location and how his own life as well as the theological milieu of his time influence his theology of the cross.

³⁶ I acknowledge the gender specific language used throughout Luther's works and do not change his language in direct quotations.

Luther was German, of the peasant class, grew up in a stern family environment, and became a Catholic monk and a doctor of theology, beginning to teach at the age of 22 at the University of Wittenberg.³⁷ As a teacher, Luther contributed much time to his preparation for courses which included numerous written lectures that reveal his theological thought developing long before his public theological statements at Heidelberg (Pauck, 1961, p. xviii). In 1515, Luther taught a course on the book of Romans where he discovered his theological breakthrough and what became known as his doctrine of “justification by faith”: “both faith and justification are the work of God, a free gift to sinners” (Gonzalez, 1985, p. 19).³⁸

Luther’s discovery of grace relieved his weary soul from searching for ways to make himself acceptable to a distant and judgmental God and put Luther in direct conflict with the Catholic Church, because his discoveries of grace and God’s direct, intimate involvement with God’s people challenged the Catholic Church on its claim to the sole right to mediate God to the people. In essence, Luther confronted the Catholic Church of his day on its assumption that it could mediate God and on its practices that hold the potential to exploit people and God. He especially confronted the practices of the church that exploit suffering by needing suffering in order for the church to maintain its “authority,” which was actually unchecked and unquestioned privileged power. Luther’s own faith struggle to find God in the midst of life, his discovery in scripture that humans are already acceptable to God, and his experience of a church whose theological practice reveals a God who demands payment for forgiveness and humans who are utterly dependent on their own ability to make payment to God, form the basis of his understanding of “justification by grace” and his argument against such a theology of glory

³⁷ Martin Luther did not remain a monk. He eventually married and became a father.

³⁸ In the Lutheran tradition “justification by grace through faith” is known as “the article by which the church stands or falls.”

(*theologia gloriae*). Up to this point, a theology of glory had been an unquestioned norm in his tradition. In the “Heidelberg Disputation,” Luther defines a “new” norm for faith--a theology of the cross. Luther’s theology of the cross also will define him as a theologian of dialectic as will become evident in exploring his theology.

The theology of the cross is a paradox, a reversal, an inversion of assumption thus revealing the challenge and futility of explaining it. Its intent is not to define God or to collude with human assumptions and expectations of who God is or where God should be. The cross “mediates” the revelation of God which, consistent with Luther’s paradoxical understanding of the cross, is both hidden and revealed (McGrath, 1985, p. 167). In Luther’s words: “Man hides his own things, in order to conceal them; God hides his own things, in order to reveal them” (McGrath, 1985, p. 167). God is hidden in the cross not so that humanity is unable to find God, but so that humanity *can* encounter God. To Luther, the paradox of the cross is that God is found in “his opposite” and shows that “he is God precisely in the fact that he is mighty in weakness, glorious in lowliness, living and life-giving in death” (Althaus, 1966, p. 32 & p. 34).

A theology of *glory* expects to find God only in unilateral power, glory, and eternal perfection, divorcing God from human experience. A theology of the *cross* makes the claim that God is found in human experiences of injustice, oppression, and suffering, the last places humans expect to find a powerful God. Such an embrace of human experience by God subverts human experience and expectations of God and God’s power, turning a person from her experience of glory or of being judged to the paradox of the cross and the promise of Christ’s unconditional love. For Luther, the “cross” is both a location and an on-going event; it is where God and human experience intersect; it is the reality that God meets humanity in suffering and death as well as in life and resurrection.

When Luther was summoned to Heidelberg to give a defense of his theology, “he expected to be condemned and burned as a heretic” (Gonzalez, 1985, p. 23). To many, Luther is a heretic; to others he is a reformer. A visionary of his time, Luther identifies with his tradition, but to some his questioning is a betrayal of his tradition. Throughout his trials, Luther remains committed to his study and use of Scripture, which is *the* defining norm of all his theological work. His theological studies, however, are not done in isolation. He engages other theologians (Augustine is a significant influence) and is influenced by the nominalist tradition (of William of Ockham) and by mysticism (Ngien, 1995, p. 19). He engages the thought and ideas of history and of his time, embracing all that might help him adequately understand Scripture, and in this engagement, he attempts to clarify what he believes and why. His conviction that the church’s tradition and beliefs must be applicable to and honest about real life is one of his greatest gifts to theology and to the church: “Doctrine must serve life, not life doctrine” (Hall, 2003a, p. 28). The theology of the cross is one of these gifts.

Luther’s desire to make sense of the on-going and creative tension of faith and life are reflected in his methodology and writings, where he demonstrates the value of paradox and dialectic, particularly in his articulation of a theology of the cross. Some say that Luther’s theology of the cross is a systematic theology, a prescribed linear set of assumptions about God; however, Luther himself may have thought that too limiting of God. Hall (1989) suggests that Luther’s theology of the cross is not a systematic theology but a “theological and faith posture” which is oriented to the cross of Jesus (p. 24 & p. 26).³⁹ In his most recent book, *Waiting for Gospel*, Hall (2012) characterizes the theology of the cross as a “spirit and method that one

³⁹ Gerhard Forde (1997) states that Luther does not write “a” or “the” theology of the cross but rather writes “an account of what those who have been smitten and raised up through the event of the cross *do*” (p. xii).

brings to all one's reflections on all the various areas and facets of Christian faith and life" (p. 80). By proposing that a faith posture and a theological perspective oriented to the cross need to be revived in a world consumed by a *theology of glory* and in denial of pain, suffering, and darkness, Hall (1995) brings Luther's *theologia crucis* into the contemporary conversation (p. 424).

Hall (2003) suggests that in today's vernacular, "glory" is best articulated as "triumphalism," which is "the tendency in all strongly held worldviews, whether religious or secular, to present themselves as full and complete accounts of reality" (p. 17). A theology of glory seeks to claim that it can name, image, explain, and define God, that God is in the "obvious," and that God is "plain" to see if only one looks in the right place, right tradition, performs the right gender, chooses to do what is "right," and so on. A theology of glory "sees God everywhere present" and seeks relationship to God through human "works," whether that be through "ethical achievements" or through direct "knowledge" (von Loewenich, 1976, p. 20). Thus, a theology of glory is based on what the world values—might, majesty, achievement, knowledge, success, the expectation to prevail, and the power to control.

Knowing these values tempt humanity to look for God where God cannot be, God seeks to find humanity where God actually is—in proximity to and within human experience. God chooses to make God's self visible by concealment "in the things [humans] regard as the counterpart of the divine," their own "nature, weakness, and foolishness" and in the cross of Christ (von Loewenich, 1975, p. 21). The cross is where "God meets his human creatures where they are, in the shadow of death," and where God "reveals the fullness of God's love" (Kolb, 2002, pp. 449-450; Hall, 2003a, pp. 82-83). Humans no longer need to be lifted out of, be shamed by or apologize for being human, because the theology of the cross "clears the focus on

human life”: humanity no longer needs to prove itself worthy of God’s notice since humanity cannot be understood apart from God (Kolb, 2002, p. 453; Hall, 2003a, p. 91 & p. 93).

A theology of *glory* requires separating God’s suffering from human suffering, but a theology of the *cross* acknowledges that God does not remove God’s self from the reality of suffering but suffers *with* humanity. The emphasis of the theology of the cross is *not* on suffering, or on a God who chooses to use divine power to send Jesus to death so that humans can live, or on a God who separates God’s self from relationship to Jesus or humans. The emphasis of a theology of the cross *is* on a relational God who goes to great length to maintain relationship and who subverts human expectations of power (as control) by choosing to embrace human suffering and not exempting God’s self from it. This understanding of a theology of the cross is rationale for why some theologians claim that Luther’s theology of the cross is not a theology of atonement and why others claim it reflects various theories of atonement (Solberg, 2006, p. 139; Althaus, 1966, p. 222).

Atonement theology addresses the question of “what happened” in the cross event and encompasses God’s/Jesus’ work of redemption of God’s creation. Various theories of atonement exist of which Gustaf Aulén (1969) delineates three dominant theories: 1) the classic, or *Christus Victor* model;⁴⁰ 2) Anselm’s substitutionary satisfaction model; and 3) Abelard’s subjective model. The predominant atonement theologies that have become so embedded in Western and Protestant theologies are satisfaction or substitutionary satisfaction and penal substitutionary that became prominent with the Protestant Reformers (Kolb, 2009, p. 118; Hall, 2000, p. 414). Although I can see elements of the predominant atonement theologies in Luther’s theology and his language, I lean toward siding with theologians who believe Luther may not

⁴⁰ Theodore Jennings, Jr. (2009) refers to this first theory as the “Greco-Lutheran ransom theory,” which he also denotes as Aulén’s “preferred” theory (p. 217.)

have had one (or any) systematized doctrine of atonement but chose to employ multiple images and metaphors to communicate the unified work of God in Christ and the situation of the human before God (Kolb, 2009, p. 118-120). Below, I briefly will discuss two differing views of atonement theories interpreted to be present in Luther's theology of the cross, comment on feminist Lutheran theologians' engagement with atonement theology in Luther, and articulate my own relational understanding of atonement.

In his book, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Paul Althaus (1966) writes: "Luther, like Anselm, views Christ's work in terms of satisfaction. Christ must bring a satisfaction to God for our sins" (p. 202). God's grace is freely given to sinners, but also this grace is only received or "paid for" through Christ's "satisfying" God's righteousness or fulfilling of the law (Althaus, 1966, p. 203). Althaus classifies Luther's view of Christ's work as "satisfaction," and he also utilizes Luther's own term for God/Christ's action, which is the "wonderful exchange" whereby Jesus "takes upon himself all men's debts and guilt before God. He achieves that satisfaction which men were not able to produce for themselves. He is driven to this by his love; and his love is God's love and mercy toward sinners" (Althaus, 1966, pp. 202-203). The key word is "satisfaction" or fulfillment that happens through *both* Christ's taking on the suffering and punishment of God's wrath on our behalf *and* Christ's acting out of deep love of God and neighbor (Althaus, 1966, p. 203).

I would agree with Althaus' interpretation of the "both/and" dynamic here, and I believe it distinguishes Luther's theology of the cross from a classic ransom view of atonement. However, I think it also is important to note that the "both/and" action of Christ interpreted by Luther helps to temper the "paid for" language often present in Anselm's satisfaction theory when "satisfaction" is primarily identified as "substitution." Luther takes seriously all of what

Christ does and chooses to do on humans' behalf and does not risk making Jesus into a transactional object or "payment" to God for human sin, as that would deny the relational aspect of God to God's creation and risk portraying salvation as a human achievement, or work, rather than a gift of God's grace.

Althaus' depiction of how Luther interprets Christ's work varies from Gustaf Aulén's description. In his classic book, *Christus Victor*, Aulén (1969) writes: "Luther stands out in the history of Christian doctrine as the man who expressed the classic idea of the Atonement with greater power than any before him" (p. 121). The "classic idea" views Atonement "as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ—*Christus Victor*—fights against and triumphs over the evils of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself" (Aulén, 1969, p. 4). In this view of atonement, God in Christ not only conquers the "powers of evil" but uses these very powers to carry out and bring about God's will (Aulén, 1969, p. 5). I can see how Aulén draws this conclusion as Luther certainly does use the language of "devil" and "powers of evil," and Luther does believe that God overcomes both. Luther's *Christus Victor* overcomes both out of love and in (and for the sake of) relationship to God's creation, not simply to be a one-time "super hero."

From beginning to end, from death to resurrection, God is directly involved and responsible for reconciliation with God's creation. This is what Aulén (1969) believes as the difference between the *Christus Victor* model of atonement and the Anselmian model: "from first to last [Atonement is] a work of God Himself, a *continuous* Divine work" (p. 5). The Anselmian model, Aulén (1969) states, is a "discontinuous" Divine work; although it originates in God's will, it is "in its carrying-out, an offering made to God by Christ as man and on man's behalf" (p. 5). I agree with Aulén that the *continuous* work accomplished is God's work and

accomplished by God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is where Aulén's point is resonant with Luther's understanding of justification, which is crucial for comprehending Luther's theology of the cross.

For Luther, God is clearly an active agent at every level in reconciling God's creation to God. Believing that humans are and always will be sinners (albeit "justified" sinners--*simul justus et peccator*), God "humbles" humans in order that they might see their need for God and their need to receive from God that which humans need the most to live and cannot obtain themselves--God's righteousness and forgiveness of sins (Thompson, 2004, pp. 9-10). McGrath (1985) writes: "For Luther, Jesus Christ is the righteousness of God, revealing at one and the same time God's condemnation of sin and remedy for it" (p. 21). Because of Jesus, humans' reconciliation and relationship with God is possible. The emphasis is on God's agency, that "[God] does all things" to bring God's people to God, not on what humans can or have to do" (as cited in Anthony, 2010, p. 79). There is no human "work" that can "earn" God's forgiveness, righteousness, or reconciliation. Thus Aulén's (1969) justification for why Luther does not subscribe to the Anselmian theory of atonement: "that the work of God in the Atonement is interrupted by an offering made to God from man's side, is radically opposed to that which is the very center of Luther's thought—namely, that there is no way by which man may go to God other than the way which God Himself has made in becoming man" (p. 121).

Althaus (1966) does concede that Luther's theology ultimately reflects and unifies both Aulén's classic (*Christus Victor*) model and a Latin (Anselmian) model of atonement, again hinting that Luther does not have a systematic or one particular understanding of atonement (pp. 222-223). Aulén's types of atonement are the most common types represented if not "'mixed' in the work of any particular theologian" (Jennings, Jr., 2009, p. 217). I provide Althaus and

Aulén's interpretations because they present the two most argued views of the types of atonement theology present in Luther's theology of the cross, and these differing views demonstrate that choosing to lift up particular aspects of atonement theology in Luther's theology depends on which aspects of Luther's theology one chooses to amplify.

Feminist Lutheran theologian Deanna Thompson (2004) states: "Luther remained relatively unconcerned with a systematic articulation of the what and how of God's saving work through Christ" (p.25). Thompson (2004) notes that even though Luther does not systematically articulate "the what and how of God's saving work through Christ," Luther does believe that "Christ's death on the cross carried salvific meaning" (p. 25). Thompson is the only feminist Lutheran theologian (whose work is utilized in this project) who goes as far as identifying and briefly expanding on Luther's view of what happens in the cross event as resonant with Aulén's *Christus Victor* model and what value that might have. According to Thompson (2004), the relevance of the classic model is that: 1) Christ's victory makes possible "human freedom from bondage to sin, death, and the law," and 2) the image of Christ's victory allows Luther to "reinstat[e] the resurrection as intrinsically important to the work of Christ, whereas medieval theories stressing sacrifice or satisfaction remained limited to Good Friday as the primary or even sole locus of Christ's redemptive work" (p. 26). Luther understands that Christ's cross *and* resurrection make Christian freedom possible and provide a template for how the Christian faith is lived—"by constant movement from cross to resurrection and back again" (Thompson, 2004, p. 26).

It is interesting to note that feminist Lutheran theologians Thompson and Kathryn Kleinhans do engage atonement, yet they engage it to reimage it in relational terms that they find consistent with Luther's theology of the cross--Thompson uses the metaphor of friendship, and

Kleinhans redefines “union” and its use in Luther’s “happy exchange” or marriage metaphor. Mary Solberg and pastoral theologian Sharon Thornton agree that Luther’s theology of the cross is not an atonement theology and that a theology of the cross actually critiques the concept of atonement theology. Their research interests are less focused on how humanity is “saved” and more on how to address the current suffering of humanity in our midst. Thornton and all feminist Lutheran theologians cited in this project are highly aware of the feminist critiques of atonement theology and the violence some views of atonement theology can incite.

My own critiques of atonement theology focus on theories of atonement that risk portraying Jesus as a glorified and passive model of suffering that humans are to imitate (satisfaction/substitutionary); God as only wanting justice rather than desiring to be merciful (penal substitutionary); and humans as “interchangeable” to God and not needed (penal substitutionary) (Sölle, 1976, pp. 103-105). I believe that the classic/ransom, the satisfaction/substitutionary, and the penal substitutionary views of atonement can suggest separating Jesus from God and making Jesus into an impersonal “transaction” between God and humans where both parties’ needs are met: God who supposedly wants to forgive now can; humans who are in desperate need of forgiveness are now forgiven (Hall, 2003a, p. 88). Rather than acknowledging “suffering that belongs to our creaturehood,” I believe these models of atonement can produce a contradictory and double binding anthropological claim: humans suffer as “punishment” by God for the human condition of sin while at the same time humans do not experience the suffering they should because the “superman” Jesus already has suffered enough for human sin, thanks to a distant God who is not self-involved with or concerned about humanity (Hall, 1986, p. 133; Sölle, 1976, p. 103).

In contrast, Luther's theology of the cross is inescapably relational, and in the cross Luther sees God's self-involved and unified work in Christ. According to Gerhard Ebeling (1970), "Luther describes the substance of the relationship between God and man as the sole object of theology. Theology . . . is concerned with man who is guilty and lost and God who justifies and saves" (pp. 232-233). God and humans participate in and are both affected by the relationship that is revealed and affirmed in the cross. God not only identifies with humanity but also joins in solidarity with the human experience and in "full participation in the life of the world" (Hall, 1986, p. 108). Ebeling's relational understanding of God and humans' reconciliation is resonant with my Lutheran understanding of "atonement" as "at-one-ment" which happens by God's action of justification to reconcile God's creation to God. It is Luther's relational understanding of "justification by grace" that cautions me against defining Luther's theology of the cross as a traditional theology of atonement, to identify it with one particular theory of atonement or to assume that Luther's focus was on atonement.⁴¹

Peter Schmiechen (2005) observes that Luther's focus was really on "justification by grace" (not atonement) where "by faith we receive all the gifts of Christ through the union of Christ with and in us" (p. 80). This emphasis on God's union with humanity in Christ is reflective of the Finnish interpretation of Luther's teaching on justification. According to Finnish theologian, Tuomo Mannermaa (1998), Luther's doctrine of justification is "a doctrine of real participation or divinization" received through faith, thus God's righteousness is not merely imputed but is imparted to humans (p. 3). Humans participate in Christ through Christ's

⁴¹ Theodore Jennings, Jr., (2009) claims that "if we are to make sense of the cross in our time, we cannot begin with the traditional theories of atonement" as they are contextual to particular times/situations (p. 24). He proposes that "at-one-ment" does attempt to "bridg[e] . . . the gap of human alienation from the divine" (p. 226). This "at-one-ment" acknowledges both Jesus' commitment to life and the conflict that such a commitment entails.

presence in faith. Schmiechen (2005) claims that Luther's theology of justification "moves beyond forgiveness as removal of sin, and liberation as freedom from the [cosmic] powers [that enslave humanity], to the affirmation of a new status before God" (p. 82.) Finnish Lutheran theology would add that justification involves a new status of "participation in" God, which happens in the context of the cross. Christ accepts our weakness and suffering; we accept Christ's gifts and grace. Christ participates in and transforms our lives; we participate in the resurrected life of Christ (Schmiechen, 2005, p. 80). I turn to briefly discuss how we participate in Christ through the cross and the resurrection as well as to discuss God's active making of God's self known to us, our total receptivity before God, and how this receptivity is dialectically related to the freedom of a Christian.

It is in Jesus' life, death, *and* resurrection, that God reveals God's self in the last place humans expect to find God. As McGrath (1985) emphasizes: "A fundamental contention of the *theologia crucis* is not merely that God is known *through* suffering (whether that of Christ or of the individual), but that God *makes himself* known through suffering. For Luther, God is active in this matter, rather than passive, in that suffering and temptation are seen as means by which man is brought to God" (pp. 150-151). This is God's *alien work*--that God's mercy is given in what appears to be its opposite. What humans experience is God's "passive righteousness" through which God offers and humans receive grace and mercy. "Passive" is not understood as humans not responding to God's grace and mercy, but rather descriptive of human's "stance of total receptivity before God, where personal will, private agendas, and desire no longer cloud one's relationship with God" (Thompson, 2004, p. 19). Recognizing their own needs and the grace received and recognizing hope in the midst of despair, humans are able to see beyond

themselves and are able to be “receptive to the needs and wounds of the neighbor” (Thompson, 2004, p. 19).

Luther calls this the “freedom of a Christian”: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (Lull, 2005, p. 393). In faith, humanity trusts God’s grace and mercy shown in Jesus that release humans from only knowing sin and death and a God who demands proof of their worth and fidelity. In faith, humanity finds itself receiving and being transformed by these gifts of unconditional love, knowing God who is love and whose love cannot be contained, and honoring God whom they trust by allowing this love to move in and through them to others (Lull, 2005, pp. 396-397). Just as Christ saw and experienced humanity’s need and suffering in the cross, so does the cross permit humanity to see the needs and suffering of one another.

Luther’s context and life experience, his desire for people to know God and the life-giving power of God’s unconditional love for their lives, and his frustrations with the blatant abuses of power in the Catholic church that were contrary to Scripture led him to his theology of the cross. Luther’s theology of the cross lends itself to and naturally calls for further reform in and beyond the church. Even though Luther himself could not foresee or imagine all the practical implications of his theology for reformation of church and society in his time and in the future, it is his theology of the cross and its reforming possibilities that lay the groundwork for feminist Lutheran theological reconstruction that I now explore.

A Feminist Lutheran Theology of the Cross

In the book, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and The Search for What Saves Us*, Rebecca Ann Parker describes an experience she had as a pastor with a woman named Lucinda, who shows up at Parker’s church office one day wanting to ask her a question

because she's a "woman priest" and as a woman may be better able to understand her "problem." Lucinda's husband was physically abusing her and was now starting to abuse her children (Brock & Parker, 2002, pp. 20-21). Twenty years prior to coming to Parker's office, Lucinda had gone to her priest, who told her to "rejoice in [her] sufferings because they bring [her] closer to Jesus" (Brock & Parker, 2002, p. 21). Lucinda asked Parker, "Tell me, is what the priest told me true?" Parker firmly responded, "It isn't true" (Brock & Parker, 2002, p. 21). Parker then conversationally journeyed with Lucinda as she figured out the steps she needed to take for her and her children to be safe and to live a life free of violence. Parker admired Lucinda for how she was able to speak and act in the midst of suffering. Parker writes, "[Lucinda] let go of a theology that didn't support her life, that kept her in bondage to violence" (Brock & Parker, 2002, p. 22).

Akin to Martin Luther, Lucinda and Parker each echo the other in naming how often theology gets limited and is limiting, affecting one's ability to speak and act in life. These women name how a theology of the cross needs to be expanded beyond atonement and suffering to remembering the cross includes resurrection and hope. They raise the challenge and need for thinking "deeper and broader" or understanding and naming the repercussions of the theology they confess to believe. They revise theology, and their experiences inform their revisions. As Lucinda's experience demonstrates and Parker's book documents her own faith journey, it takes time for women to "dare" to say their revisions out loud, especially when they have been taught through tradition, institution, seminary or by religious leaders what theology "should" be. In addition, these women are very aware of the social, physical, mental, and spiritual consequences of speaking aloud as well as *not* speaking.

Martin Luther, too, was well aware of the consequences of speaking and yet could not help but to speak aloud his challenges to the theology of the Catholic Church, which he believed prevented people from hearing the gospel of God's grace and love in his day. Luther's writings, teaching, and preaching reflect how his own life experience was critical to his understanding of God and to how one comes to know God (Thompson, 2004, p. 17). Luther also "cut to the quick of what held people in bondage, which was preventing them from opening their arms to receive and trust God's love, and to live in accord with it. If this meant unmasking evil that parades as good, then such was the work of theology" (Moe-Lobeda, 2010, pp. 209-210). Although one would not call Luther a "feminist," one can appreciate how his theology of the cross lends itself to feminist theological reflection and reconstruction.

Feminist theology, generally speaking, has become a wide and varied field because of the diversity of women who have spoken up about their experiences of life and their experiences of God, named the contradictions between these, and held out hope that their faith and theology could be relevant to their lives. Women like Valerie Saiving, who begins her 1960 groundbreaking article with the words, "I am a student of theology; I am also a woman," placing her context and experience side by side and asserting that both impact one's interpretation of theology (p. 100). Saiving (1960) "criticize[s] from the viewpoint of feminine experience" how theology shaped by male experience understands "sin" as "pride" or a "will to power" and that "salvation lies in selfless love" (p. 109 & p. 111). Analyzing women's experience of motherhood, Saiving (1960) suggests that women tend to give up too much of themselves, thus sin for women could be defined as "underdeveloped or negation of the self" (p. 109). To summarize in the words of Lutheran theologian, Mary Pellauer (1985), "The theology which

speaks primarily out of the masculine experience actively adds to the oppression of women, for it asserts as salvation what is women's primary experience of sin itself" (p. 22).

As highlighted in Saiving's work and what is now accepted as a basic tenet of feminist theology, one's experience and context are crucial to how one interprets theology. In feminist theology, experiences and contexts of women have: 1) exposed how traditional theology, only interpreted by and in the context of male experience, has contributed and perpetuated the suffering of women, and 2) allowed for the possibility of reconstructing theology that respects and is relevant to women's lives (Johnson, Ross, & Hilbert, 1995, p. 327). Much literature exists in the area of feminist theology, particularly critiquing the "cross event"; however, less literature exists on the topic of a "feminist theology of the cross." For some, "feminist" and "cross" are a contradiction; however, women who are part of a Lutheran confessional tradition and for whom the cross cannot be left behind or explained away and who share feminist commitments have had to raise the question about whether there is a "feminist theology of the cross."

One of the earliest Lutheran female voices to engage the topic of a "feminist theology of the cross" is theologian Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendell, who raised the question about whether the cross can be "resurrected" in feminist theology. She critiques feminist critiques of the cross that narrowly portray God as a sadistic Father, that attempt to "de-crucify" Jesus, that only see the cross as atoning sacrifice (Moltmann-Wendell, 1994, pp. 90-93). Each of these interpretations can restrict God and theology. For Moltmann-Wendell, the passion story cannot be eliminated, yet it also cannot be the whole story. Her feminist theology of the cross involves a cross that is "liberated from one-dimensional male experience and is understood anew from the experiences of many people, above all women," so that the cross can be reclaimed as a "symbol of solidarity,

as the representation of human suffering, . . . and a sign of salvation that we can erect out of death and nothingness and transplant into new spheres” (Moltmann-Wendel, 1994, p. 98).

For the purposes of this project, the work and research of four feminist *Lutheran* theologians--Deanna Thompson, Kathryn Kleinhans, Mary Solberg, and Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir--will be used to specifically look at a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross and how it critiques a historical interpretation of atonement as sacrifice, exposes theology that attempts to silence and oppress women, and insists that the Lutheran tradition can still speak life and hope to women today. I choose these theologians because their research and writing is current; they demonstrate diversity among feminist Lutheran theologians, and they and their work are recognized and respected in Lutheran circles.

Consistent with a Lutheran theology of justification and feminist commitments to relieving the oppression of women, all feminist Lutheran theologians would agree that sacrifice and/or suffering are not required of women or any person in order to be acceptable to God. In fact, Deanna Thompson (2006) asserts: “This is the religious vision Luther experienced and denounced as virtually unbearable” and what the theology of the cross stands against (p. 83). Suffering for the sake of suffering in order to attempt to earn God’s favor would be considered a “work,” which Luther strongly opposed as Luther believed achieving acceptance before God was not only impossible but also not necessary. For Luther, it is God who acts, and it is God who comes to us. As Thompson (2006) states, “Luther reverses the direction of the atonement,” which is a radical shift from medieval theology (p. 86).

In her book, *Crossing the Divide*, Thompson (2004) acknowledges the “divide” between Luther and feminist theologians and that the largest divide to cross is atonement theology and what happens in the cross event (p. xi). She highlights two contributions toward narrowing this

divide. One she refers to is Serene Jones' work in the area of Luther's understanding of justification. Jones' suggests that women need to enter the "drama" of the cross from the side of the resurrection or the "new creation" (Thompson, 2006, p. 82 & p. 84). The cross destroys the self that is full of pride and focused on itself, showing one's need for God, but what if pride and self-focus are not part of the experience or "sin" for women? What if women enter this drama from a place of no sense of self? How then does the "crucifying" cross speak to them? (Jones, 2000, p. 63). Jones (2000) asks, "What might be done to narrate conversion in women's lives more meaningfully?" (p. 63). She suggests that women need to experience God's mercy first and then God's judgment. By this inversion, Luther's doctrine of justification is honored, and "the first word to meet the woman who enters the doctrine of the Christian life is one that constructs her, giving her the center and the substance she needs to become the subject then judged and graciously forgiven" (Jones, 2000, p. 63). Jones (2000) highlights how this inversion increases women's agency, now shaped by their "mission to love God and live in just relation to neighbor," makes women visible in this new space, and allows women to "look ahead, toward an emancipatory future where [their] identity is defined as 'graced'" (p. 64).

Thompson also offers her own idea for shifting the description of atonement in ways that do not contribute to violence against women. She suggests a reimaging of Luther's use of "blessed exchange" or "joyous exchange" to describe what happens in the cross between God and humans. In "The Freedom of a Christian," Luther uses the metaphor of marriage to describe how, "By the wedding ring of faith [Jesus] shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's," and in so doing, Jesus who is without sin, destroys sin and redeems the "poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness" (as cited in Lull, 2005, p. 397). The "harlot" refers to humans and their souls that Jesus saves. Luther's

intent and purpose for using the marriage metaphor is lost in today's culture where this Biblical image becomes problematic when Jesus is portrayed as a righteous male who rescues the lowly, evil female from herself and her sins, thereby making her righteous and acceptable. To Thompson (2004), not only is the metaphor of marriage unhelpful and problematic, but also she believes the description of what happens on the cross is anything but "joyous" and risks glorifying suffering (p. 136).

In place of this marriage metaphor, Thompson (2004) proposes using the model of "friendship" where "God's atoning work for us on the cross is done through Jesus' befriending humanity" (p. 136). Thompson bases this metaphor on Luther's own use of the gospel of John and the specific text, John 15: 13: "No one has greater love than this, than to lay down one's life for one's friends." Thompson (2004) states that the metaphor of friendship best describes Luther's understanding of the "gift character" of God's love and God's action in the cross: "Friends freely choose to be in relation to one another," which she translates as Jesus choosing to lay down his life for humanity, God's beloved creation, and "not paying a debt to God" (p. 136). This is not only extravagant love for others but also presents an image of "agency" that invites agency. Because one has been shown and has experienced love (immensely), one also can choose *to show/act* such love. The image of suffering is also transformed in this new metaphor of friendship. Suffering is part of friendship. It is not having to suffer in order to prove the friendship/love offered; it is realizing that in choosing to love/befriend another, one will experience more deeply pain and suffering as well as joy and life.

Thompson's (2004) reimagining of the marriage metaphor to a relevant image of friendship for our current context is consistent with her understanding that Luther's theology of the cross is an "indirect critique" of atonement theologies (p. 25). She comments that atonement

theories tend to be of little help in the context of one's "real" life when such theories separate God from human experience. For Luther, God was involved in human experience and chose to be. The cross represents this direct involvement. Because the cross engages "real" life, what the cross represents and means and how it is interpreted will vary based on context and from the "vantage point from which one sees the cross" (Trelstad, 2006, p. 4).

Perhaps this is what Kathryn Kleinhans (2010) tries to remind us of in her work where she chooses to "wrestle with the tradition, in order to bring forth a blessing" (p. 128). Whereas Thompson suggests reimagining the "joyous exchange" with its problematic bridegroom/bride language, Kleinhans seeks to redeem the marriage metaphor, looking more closely at its use in Luther's context, and insists that Luther's use of nuptial imagery challenges medieval theology and offers a very new perception of the relationship of God and humans.

Kleinhans notes several new insights on Luther's use of and variation on the language and theology of "union" that challenged medieval theology's understanding. Unions are "effected by faith" and not achieved by human works, a reversal that Luther introduced by stating that it is the bridegroom who seeks out the bride (Kleinhans, 2010, p. 128). The bride enters the relationship without having to change herself, thus, "Purification is the result of union with God in Christ, not its prerequisite" (Kleinhans, 2010, p. 129). Whereas medieval theology identified union with Christ primarily in suffering, Luther describes union with Christ "in his victory over sin, death, and damnation" and employs the descriptive language of "happy or joyous exchange" (Kleinhans, 2010, p. 129).⁴²

⁴² Although Kleinhans interpretation of the "union" metaphor for describing the relationship of humans with God in Christ potentially raises the question of whether her work is related to Tuomo Mannermaa's New Finnish Lutheran theology (which stresses that the righteousness of God that is ours by faith is a real participation in Christ), Kleinhans does not indicate this.

Aware of the various and justified feminist critiques of the marriage metaphor, especially when it is used to portray the bride as a silent and passive recipient of the heroic savior/bridegroom, Kleinhans digs deeper into Luther's writings and brings forth a larger vision of what "union" can entail. She (2010) draws on Luther's sermon, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," to show how Luther imagines a union that is more than "transactional" but is also "transformational" (p. 129). Luther states: "Therefore through the first righteousness arises the voice of the bridegroom who says to the soul, 'I am yours,' but through the second comes the voice of the bride who answers, 'I am yours.' Then the marriage is consummated" (as cited in Lull, 2005, pp. 130-131). Kleinhans (2010) asserts that the marriage "does not negate the individuality of the bride; indeed, it requires it" (p. 129). Both the bride and bridegroom have individuality and agency, and both are given their identity through their relationship with one another and with God. In addition, contrary to most feminist critiques that focus on the state of the bridegroom and bride prior to the "happy exchange," Kleinhans (2010) points out that after the "union," Luther does refer to the marital relationship in more "egalitarian" ways that do push the boundaries of his time (p. 131).

The marriage metaphor is a radical shift in thinking about who Christ is. Fully divine and fully human, this Christ enters into human relationship with the believer, establishing a "unique" relationship, a relationship that no church institution or person should presume to be able to establish (Kleinhans, 2010, p. 130). Kleinhans (2010) concludes that Luther's use of a marriage union to represent the relationship of Christ and believers directly challenged the hierarchy of the medieval church, and that Luther's assertion that no one should ever claim the power or ability to represent Christ should prevent an androcentric interpretation of this metaphor (p. 130). The metaphor of "marriage union" also has the potential to challenge a theology of glory and redefine

suffering. In relationship, people do suffer, but this suffering is not a “command” to suffer; rather, it is the “consequence of union: when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers” (Kleinhans, 2010, p. 131).

The “union” metaphor is a profound shift in understanding how God relates to humanity, especially when it portrays God not in a position of power but in a position of weakness, even suffering with humanity. Such an understanding of God and relationship to God exposes theologies of glory that attempt to name and see God in places of majesty and power rather than in “real” life experience and attempt to deny the relatedness of God to God’s creation. As Luther states in his “Ninety-Five Theses,” “a theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is” (as cited in Lull, 2005, pp. 48-49). A theologian of the cross trusts that God is in the last place he/she expects God to be. Such trust allows one to “see” differently, to look for God in places that no one wants to look, to see God in the suffering he/she and/or others are experiencing. Such vision allows one to expose and name that which attempts to harm, silence, and oppress.

Lutheran theologian Mary Solberg may call this vision an ability to “know” differently, and she would advocate that such knowing “compels” one to act in ways that prevent such harm to self and others. In her book, *Compelling Knowledge*, Solberg (1997) utilizes feminist epistemologies and Luther’s theology of the cross to construct an “epistemology of the cross” (p. 16). This construction evolves out of her own experience of working with a church in El Salvador in the early 1980’s, when El Salvador was experiencing civil war. She describes the challenge of seeing the daily living of people who were experiencing extreme hardship, suffering, and death and knowing that she, “a white and privileged North American,” would have the opportunity to leave this place. Of course, Solberg (1997) could have returned to life in the

United States and lived “as if” she did not see such suffering, “as if” she could not do anything about their situation, “as if” she was not implicated in it, but she chose “to find a way to live, knowing what [she] knew” (pp. xi-xii).

In the spirit of the honesty of the cross, Solberg (2006) is direct in her assertions that Luther’s theology of the cross is not about doctrines of atonement or salvation, nor should one be consumed with worrying about *how* one is saved, but rather, “as justified sinners, how we live should be all that matters to us” p. 139). Solberg (2006) cites Luther’s emphatic belief that life is lived in both the presence of God (*coram Deo*) and the world (*coram mundo*), thus theology is done in the midst of both these contexts and with the awareness that “relationship” with God shapes how we live (p. 140 & p. 143). The “cross” is what makes us honest about how and where we live; the cross “describes what is real in human experience”; the cross reveals that our experience and what we know of / about ourselves, God, and other are limited (Solberg, 2006, p. 145). To pretend otherwise is to make the theology of the cross into a theology of glory.

Because the cross shapes what we can and do know, Solberg (1997) offers a feminist proposal of an *epistemology of the cross* that interrogates power, experience, objectivity, and accountability (p. 109). Similar to feminist theology, an epistemology of the cross engages power critically and with suspicion. It queries knowledge claims by those in positions of power who benefit and increase their power from maintaining certain knowledge as “truth” and identifies who does not benefit but suffers because of these “truth” claims (Solberg, 1997, pp. 111-112). The starting point of an epistemology of the cross is “lived experience,” real life in its embodied and material circumstances which affect and limit our interpretation of experience. Recognizing the particularity of experience, an epistemology of the cross acknowledges multiple perspectives, thus “objectivity” cannot be achieved but is considered a tool of control. In

addition, an epistemology of the cross does not seek objectivity *because* of its subjective starting point--the foot of the cross. Solberg (1997) writes:

To stand there is not to claim or even to seek the objectivity positive science treasures, nor is it to content itself with the necessary relativization of objectivity as science has defined it. Instead, an epistemology of the cross seeks “to be *with* the victims . . . [where it becomes possible to come to know] . . . that it is not the poor who are a problem to the rich, but the rich who are a problem to the poor.” (pp. 116-117)

From this new perspective, one can choose or not choose to “know” differently. An epistemology of the cross “requires awareness” of this choice to know; it exposes our relatedness to one another as subjects *and* objects, and it shows how we are “implicated” in one another’s lives (Solberg, 1997, pp. 122-123). Solberg (2006) says, “To see this is to accept accountability for who we are and what we know. It generates, finally, a *transformative accountability*, enabling and encouraging change toward justice” (p. 149).

Solberg’s (2006) epistemology of the cross is a “movement” between various parts: 1) *disillusionment*; 2) *epistemological conversion*; and 3) *responsive accountability* (pp. 150-153). Part one includes “*coming to know*,” which can be gradual or instantaneous. It is realizing, seeing, hearing whatever we have not or have not *had* to realize, see or hear before. It can be and often is a paradigm shift in one’s way of thinking, challenging one’s sense of “truth,” “objectivity,” and meaning. What we encounter quickly convicts us of our limitations, involves us in others’ pain, and makes us so disillusioned that we would rather not “know” it. But, as Solberg (2006) reminds, “Cross-oriented knowing considers such disillusionment a gift. . . . The cross, after all, is the *last* place human beings like us would expect to see God, and yet - if Luther is right - that is precisely where God reveals Godself to eyes of faith” (p. 151).

Part 2, *epistemological conversion*, is the point at which one “crosses the line,” the point “between seeing what is going on and acknowledging relationship, involvement, even implication in it” (Solberg, 1997, p. 131). This is the point where one knows *how* she knows and the perspective from which she knows. Recognizing her own limited and particular perspective, she not only can recognize that there are multiple perspectives beyond hers, but also that she is accountable for her perspective and that her perspective directly impacts the lives and living of others. This awareness of one’s implication in others’ lives “converts” or provokes a person to change, to no longer pretend she and her actions exist in isolation.

Such conversion invites *responsive accountability* or “knowing oneself compelled to act” (Solberg, 2006, p. 152). Once a person experiences disillusionment and crosses the line to a new awareness, one cannot help but to name the reality before her or as Solberg (2006) cites Luther’s words about a theologian of the cross: one “calls the thing what it actually is” (p. 152). When one can see and name reality, one can enter into it more deeply, and recognize the need, if not feel “compelled,” to respond and to act “*with* and *on* behalf of the neighbors(s) with whom one now stands” (Solberg, 2006, p. 153).

Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir (2010), a Lutheran theologian from Iceland, might say that her construction of a feminist Lutheran theology of the cross contributes to increasing women’s agency in the midst of situations of suffering because her construction “proclaims Jesus as a divine co-sufferer who brings good news to the poor and oppressed and as such can be a source of healing and empowerment for suffering people” (p. 4). Guðmundsdóttir (2010) seeks to retrieve a theology of the cross for feminist theology, and just as the other feminist Lutheran theologians referenced, Guðmundsdóttir, too, acknowledges that the cross cannot be retrieved in

any helpful way without confessing the violence and suffering it has caused women and without attending to the possibilities of such suffering being repeated or perpetuated (p. 5).

For Guðmundsdóttir, the cross is an important tool for talking about and addressing women's pain and suffering because of God's own capacity to suffer. This Luther was clear about as his theology of the cross "is rooted in the idea of the finite being capable of sharing in the nature of the infinite" (Guðmundsdóttir, 2010, p. 132). If the person hanging on the cross is not God, what difference does the cross make? The two natures (human and divine) are united in one person, Jesus, thus on the cross not only does the human nature of Christ suffer but also the divine (Guðmundsdóttir, 2010, p. 133). This is not what humans expect of God, yet when theology begins from the standpoint of the cross, human expectations and assumptions are just that, human. Guðmundsdóttir (2010) writes:

By presenting God known through suffering and dying, a cross-centered theology reveals how the crucified and hidden God is the God whose strength lies hidden behind apparent weakness and whose wisdom lies hidden behind apparent folly. For women who have suffered . . . the cross can therefore become a hopeful sign, representing God's solidarity as well as freedom from all suffering and pain. (pp. 129-130)

Guðmundsdóttir (2010) proposes that the cross offers a powerful testimony to a God whose presence with women in the midst of suffering is more than "an act of passive solidarity, but an *active compassion*" (p. 140). Guðmundsdóttir (2010) asserts, "It is indeed God's identification (the *passive* aspect of the cross), together with God's active transformation of suffering and death (the *active* aspect of the cross), that sustains a feminist theology of the cross" (p. 142). Guðmundsdóttir expands on this by stating that it is the "passive" aspect of the cross that "reassures" women that they are not alone in their suffering, that God is right alongside.

The “active” aspect of the cross “gives them courage to stand up and resist” as well as hope that God can transform their suffering (Guðmundsdóttir, 2010, p. 142). I am assuming that Guðmundsdóttir’s understanding of how the cross can be a resource for women relies and depends on interpreting the cross and resurrection *together*. Without the resurrection, it would seem that Guðmundsdóttir’s feminist theology of the cross would be challenged to be retrieved as a theology of hope.

A consistent belief among feminist Lutheran theologians --Deanna Thompson, Kathryn Kleinhans, Mary Solberg, and Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir--is that the Lutheran tradition can still speak hope and life to women and their experiences today. Because of their feminist commitments to alleviating the suffering of women (and all people), each of them strongly critiques any use of the theology of the cross that would inflict suffering, and each offers, directly or indirectly, her own vision of “unsuffering” women, and each believes that such unsuffering can happen within the Lutheran tradition. Thompson offers a re-imagining of atonement theology as “friendship”; Kleinhans revises Luther’s use of the marriage union; Solberg develops an epistemology of the cross, and Guðmundsdóttir proposes a vision of God’s active compassion with women. Each of these Lutheran theologians offers her voice and ideas (among the voices and ideas of many others) in the Lutheran spirit of on-going revision and reform. Although not Lutheran, a feminist voice that is now invited into this conversation on the theology of the cross is pastoral theologian, Sharon Thornton.

A Pastoral Theology of the Cross

“Suffering” is the starting point for Thornton’s *pastoral theology of the cross*. Because the cross does not ignore suffering nor “camouflage, minimize, or distort” it, the cross “can offer a response to the cry ‘I’m hurting’ by taking it seriously” (Thornton, 2002, p. 3). Thornton

utilizes the theology of the cross (drawing on Luther, Dorothee Sölle, and Douglas John Hall's interpretations) in pastoral theology for the specific purpose of how it embraces the depths of suffering, exposes injustice and our complicity in it, transforms suffering through solidarity, and engenders hope.⁴³ Utilizing a theology of the cross, Thornton (2002) shifts the pastoral image of Jesus as "shepherd" to "Suffering Righteous One"; redefines the traditional "functions" of pastoral care (guiding, healing, sustaining, and reconciliation) as pastoral and communal "practices" of solidarity and justice making, and revives the function/practice of "reconciliation" as more than an attempt to appease two parties in disagreement, but as a radical awareness and altering of power in relationship at individual and communal levels for the sake of justice (pp. 122-123 & p. 174).

Thornton's (2002) interpretation of the theology of the cross includes the understanding that the cross is "political"; one does not just respond to suffering with compassion; one "takes a side" explicitly with those who are hurting and chooses to make a difference (p. 67). As the theology of the cross draws God into human experience and activity, so does it draw humans into God's experience and activity. God and humans embrace and share reality, including injustice, oppression, and suffering, thus this embrace is not a naïve or passive engagement with reality but is a "political" engagement (Hall, 1989, p. 31; Hall, 2003b, p. 183). Because the theology of the cross "calls the thing what it actually is," it unmask power; therefore, the use and abuse of power cannot be ignored (Lull, 2005, p. 49). As Hall (1986) states: "The theology of the cross

⁴³ Whereas feminist Lutheran theologians are invested in the Lutheran tradition being a viable tradition that can still speak to women today, Thornton (who is not Lutheran) is utilizing one aspect of the Lutheran tradition, a theology of the cross, as a particular theology to address suffering.

does not intend simply to discard the metaphor of power, but it does want to transform it” (p. 105).⁴⁴

The intent of a concept of a political cross is not to divide people but to urge people toward relationship. The implication of a concept of a political cross is that the message is dependent on the context into which it speaks. To those who abuse power and perpetuate injustice and harm, the cross represents judgment, requires a “relinquishment of power and control,” and some form of restitution (Thornton, 2002, p. 116). To those who suffer and feel powerless, the political cross reveals the political, ideological, economical, social, and cultural conditions in which their suffering is created and perpetuated, offering them the freedom to no longer “internalize” their suffering as an individual problem (Thornton, 2002, p. 117). This “externalizing” reveals to all the reality of suffering before them and to see that suffering binds them to one another.

In a theology of the cross, Jesus does not use power to avoid suffering. Jesus uses power to engage suffering, to “bear witness” to human suffering, to participate in it, and to transform it. Through Jesus, God uses God’s power to go where there is no power--this is a grand reversal (Thornton, 2002, p. 160). Power is immediately transformed when God joins human experience, inverting and confounding the world’s expectations of power by claiming weakness and suffering as part of the experience of God and by promising to remain present in the last place where one might expect God to be -- in human pain and in human need.

⁴⁴ Like Luther, Thornton values that the theology of the cross exposes and unmask power. Luther’s use of the theology of the cross challenged and exposed the abuses of power by the Catholic Church and clearly portrayed God on the side of the suffering. Thornton utilizes the theology of the cross to expose abuse of power and suffering in *all* contexts, portrays God on the side of the suffering, and insists that we who see the abuse/suffering not only stand with those who are suffering, but we choose to act in ways to do something about the suffering. Thornton takes Luther’s theology of the cross into a larger arena and develops and expands Luther’s social and ethical concerns.

Going where there is no power is what I believe Thornton (2002) identifies as the ability to “bear witness,” which is more than seeing suffering; it is being impacted by it, being “moved” by it, in such a way that one experiences compassion and the confronting questions of “Who is on the cross?” and “Why is he or she there?” (p. 116). A theology of glory would direct and distract one’s attention away from seeing suffering. A theology of the cross calls one to see the suffering head-on, to see the actual faces of those who suffer, to listen to their voices, and to permit what one sees and hears to challenge and critique oneself by asking: “How have I contributed to putting (and keeping) this person on the cross?”

These are not questions asked from a distance but from within relationship and with the understanding that all of God’s creation is connected. Thornton (2002) states that a political theology of the cross “elimina[tes] the option of the observer -- the disinterested observer or even the interested observer -- by insisting on the necessity of becoming involved, even if it poses certain ambiguities and risks” (p. 127). Such involvement will include suffering and suffering *with*, a suffering that is descriptive of our human situation, not prescriptive. An observer can see and hear suffering, but only seeing and hearing are not sufficient for relieving suffering.

Thornton (2002) believes that the theology of the cross “sees and responds to suffering in its depth” and because it does, it “offers something in itself that contributes to the alleviation of that suffering” (p. 23). Thornton (2002) is not just trying to construct theology and pastoral practices to alleviate suffering; she believes that a God who hangs on the cross and suffers in solidarity with the world’s suffering means that there is something to learn from suffering and that there can be “value” in suffering (p. 103). Suffering discloses reality, and the cross helps us see and name it. In “naming” and “doing” something about the reality before us, there is hope. A theology of glory shows us the illusion that life can be free of suffering — even while

someone else “must” bear or is bearing it. A theology of glory fosters no hope but only “apathy” and greed” (Thornton, 2002, p. 103).

Dorothee Sölle states that the person who has experienced and knows suffering is the one who is and can work to alleviate it, who can see the other and his/her suffering, who suffers in order that he/she and others may be “more human” (as cited in Thornton, 2002, p. 103). This kind of “active suffering” is what begins “transforming” suffering; one *sees* the other in pain, *stays* alongside *in respectful silence*, *waits with a willingness to hear* the other’s pain and lament, and *believes* and *accepts* the other’s words (and experience) when they are ready to come. For the one who suffers or has suffered, this experience with another who can bear witness to his/her suffering does not discourage or render the suffering one helpless, but rather it “engenders courage in the face of adversity, hope for something different, and actions for positive change” (Thornton, 2002, pp. 105-106).

Thornton (2002) asserts that it is this “active suffering” or “shared suffering” that links the personal and political (p. 105). When suffering is shared, it becomes a powerful communal witness to reality, challenging unjust power systems and making suffering visible, and a means to organization and action that seeks to change that which is causing or perpetuating the suffering (Thornton, 2002, p. 106). Thornton (2002) writes, “. . . [T]he transformation of powerlessness into active suffering is the power of love. Love is people accepting reality and transforming it” (p. 106). Active suffering involves solidarity and justice-making, which is what happened on the cross. Thornton (2002) claims that Jesus suffers for justice. Such an act “offers a vision of human possibilities and a hope for humanizing even our suffering” (p. 138). In the cross, we not only identify God as being in solidarity with us, but also we identify with Christ’s/God’s suffering. Such identification moves us to act in solidarity with others.

In “On the Councils and the Church—Part III (1539),” Martin Luther says suffering is one of the seven marks identifying the church: “The holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross” or suffering (Luther as cited in Lull, 2005, p. 374). This suffering is not chosen by one to be a “work.” This suffering is part of the cross, and what one willingly endures when one “steadfastly adhere[s] to Christ and God’s word,” which is both the source and comfort of the suffering (Luther as cited in Lull, 2005, p. 374). Following Christ and God’s Word promises to be challenging and complicated in ways one does not and cannot expect. Following Christ and God’s Word also promises that one is not alone or swallowed up by these challenges and complications that will include suffering (Strohl, 2003, p. 151-152).

Thornton (2002) uses Luther’s theology of the cross because she believes that in the cross “the pain of God interprets human suffering,” thus, the cross has the ability to address human suffering and offer hope (p. 4). She also believes it can both critique and transform the field of pastoral theology. Like Lutheran theologian Mary Solberg, Thornton is not caught up in discussing whether Luther’s theology of the cross is a theory of atonement (she does not believe it is) nor is she interested in exploring how it is that humanity is “saved.” Thornton is concerned about real life and those who are suffering in real life and how suffering can be addressed. Acknowledging that Luther did not intentionally create a social ethic for his theology nor anticipate the political effect his theology could have outside the church, Thornton (2002) does not hesitate to move his theology into this arena (p. 86). She maintains that because Luther did not develop his theology in these directions, the theology of the cross “can promote private individualism and other-worldly piety” (Thornton, 2002, p. 87). In other words, a theology of

the cross can quickly evolve into a theology of glory when the cross is understood as “an object of sentimentality” rather than “knowing God in suffering” (Thornton, 2002, pp. 86-87).

Although Thornton (2002) does not talk about Luther’s understanding of grace directly, she refers to it in her understanding that those who suffer are exactly those “who are able to stand in God’s presence” (p. 66). She interprets Luther’s theology of the cross, consistent with Luther, on the critique of suffering as “works” or a theology of glory if it is believed that human suffering is required in order to know a suffering God.⁴⁵ For Thornton, it is radical that God is “active” in suffering and chooses to be, and that God acts/suffers in Jesus, who Thornton clearly states, goes to the cross for the sake of justice and solidarity. This Jesus is “agential,” his cross political. He “lived doing the risky business of incarnating love and doing justice. That makes his life a sign and his death a challenge toward the ‘eradication of sins,’ injustice and lovelessness in the world” (Thornton, 2002, pp. 73-74).

Such an agential Jesus calls us to use our agency as well, but does Thornton’s Jesus raise questions about the limits/boundaries of human agency? Thornton is consistent with Luther in understanding that a theology of the cross critiques our human inclination to assume the wisdom and power of God. Thornton’s pastoral theology of the cross does not “increase” our agency nor lessen our agency, but it does strikingly call attention to the agency we do have and compels us to be aware of how we are exercising it. Lutheran theologian Mary Solberg (2002) writes:

We Lutherans take the way we do theology seriously, sometimes more seriously than we take the way we live. Adamant about the centrality of justification by faith through grace, we sometimes verge on a perverse kind of theological works-righteousness.

⁴⁵ Thornton believes that a theology of the cross is not an atonement theology and that a theology of the cross critiques atonement doctrine that sees Jesus paying a price or doing a work in his suffering.

Outside the theological arena, we suddenly become reticent, shy about noticing the practical, political consequences of our theology on the world we live in. (p. 44)

Thornton and her pastoral theology of the cross challenge Lutherans to “walk the talk,” to act, to recognize that biased love for the suffering will require us to take a side and to make a commitment. In this sense, Thornton’s Jesus -- who does not suffer for suffering’s sake but for justice -- calls us to accountability and to use our freedom and power for loving and serving God and neighbor.

Where Thornton (2002) does place limits on human agency is in her use of the theology of the cross to critique the field of pastoral care, whose history has placed great attention on “human potential” and “individual” care, largely due to the field’s over-dependence on psychology and under-attention to theology (p. 8). This way of thinking about human ability not only led individuals to believe they should get better on their own, but also it led practitioners to think they were capable of “healing” people through such practices as “emotional distance” or assuming to be “unbiased” (Thornton, 2002, pp. 126-127). Such ability/agency on the part of the pastoral caregiver is not realistic. Similarly, to assume healing is a “function” or “practice” is to unrealistically credit human agency for that which it cannot do (Thornton, 2002, p. 163). Thornton (2002) writes, “Healing does not come from outside the individual like a kind of application, nor is it drawn up from the inner resources of an individual” (p. 163). The “individual” is unable to heal because healing comes from within relationship or as Thornton (2002) might say, within “just relationships” (p. 163).

“Relationship” is a key concept among all theologians of the cross whose perspectives have been discussed in this chapter, because theologians of the cross understand God to be relational. As noted earlier, Luther claims the object of theology is the relationship between God

and humans, and certainly how this relationship is interpreted shapes how one understands human agency and God's agency (Ebeling, 1970, p. 233).

I have engaged the theology of the cross from Lutheran historical, feminist Lutheran, and pastoral theological perspectives in order to sketch how each of these lead one to understand the relationship between God and humans, a relationship that includes suffering, and how this relationship influences human agency in the midst of suffering. I now turn to the voices and experiences of clergy women interviewed to listen to and identify what perspectives of a theology of the cross are operative in informing their agency.

Clergy Women's Voices: Theological Perspectives⁴⁶

An initial working assumption that I brought to this project was that a theology of the cross would be critical if not essential to ELCA clergy women's theology and their exercising of agency. In this section, I begin with noting a correction to this assumption about the efficacy of the theology of the cross for clergy women participating in this project. I then highlight participants' particular articulations of a theology of the cross from their narratives and suggest what perspectives of a theology of the cross are at work in their interpretations and contributing to their constructions of agency that assist them in finding courage to act. I also briefly note other theologies at work in their narratives but give particular attention to baptismal theology, a consistent theme across the interviews that participants cited as critical to their sense of agency.

As anticipated, all participants were able to engage the term/language of a "theology of the cross" for the purpose of the interviews. Of the clergy women interviewed, a majority claimed a theology of the cross as an essential tenet of their overall theology; however, it was apparent (and surprising to me) that a theology of the cross is *not the central* guiding theology

⁴⁶ In this section, the referenced voices and experiences of clergy women represent only those of the eight ELCA clergy women who participated in the research interviews.

informing their sense of agency or their ability to speak/act, in their particular situations. After I asked participants direct questions about their situations and a theology of the cross, they were able to articulate their interpretations of a theology of the cross and how they thought it had inspired/empowered a sense of agency in their particular situations. It was not evident to them, however, “in the moment” of having to choose to exercise agency that they consciously invoked a theology of the cross to inform their exercising of agency.

As the interviews unfolded and upon further reflection, clergy women interviewed did recognize how a theology of the cross was, perhaps, more connected to their choices to exercise agency than they initially had thought.⁴⁷ The more we talked about a theology of the cross, the more they related a theology of the cross to their experiences of agency, suffering, and unsuffering. Similarly, after further reflection, participants also *strongly* identified that a theology of the cross assisted with making meaning of their situations. The role of a theology of the cross in *making meaning* of their experiences is striking and evident across the interviews and raises questions about “why” a theology of the cross is more helpful or accessible to participants in *making meaning* of their situations of suffering rather than in *taking action* in these situations.

This realization may reinforce a critique of Lutherans offered by feminist Lutheran theologian Mary Solberg who finds that more time is spent talking about theology rather than living it, and more attention is given to getting theology “right” rather than to the implications of it. From theological and narrative counseling points of view, the role of meaning-making is critical and should not be reduced, as it holds the potential to generate agency. For meaning-

⁴⁷ As noted at the beginning of Chapter 5, time and opportunities for intentional theological reflection are rare, yet such reflection is critical for discovering alternative knowledges and creating alternative stories that deepen clergy women’s theological resources for exercising agency.

making to happen, however, there has to be intentional opportunities for reflection. In addition, for agency to be generated, meaning-making has to generate alternative stories of agency and not thicken the story of suffering--which can keep one caught in the story of suffering and keep one from taking action (or not noticing the action one has taken). For some participants, the context of the interviews was the opportunity for reflection *and* meaning-making that assisted in deconstructing (not denying) the story of suffering and reconstructing alternative stories of agency.

Although surprised that the clergy women interviewed did not readily connect a theology of the cross with agency, I did hear articulations of a theology of the cross at work in their experiences and shaping their agency as I continued to ask specific questions about theology. In reviewing their narratives, I identified three tenets of participants' interpretations of a theology of the cross that are integral to their constructions and exercising of agency: 1) *God's presence with one in and through suffering*; 2) Jesus as one who *exercises agency to speak truth*; and 3) The cross *empowers and impels* one to move through and beyond suffering to new life/resurrection. Lutheran historical, feminist Lutheran, and pastoral theological perspectives on the theology of the cross are heard across these views, even if interviewees do not identify these particular perspectives with their own interpretations. I now explore each of these interpretations in the context of participants' narratives to examine how theology is contributing to their constructions of agency and to suggest the various perspectives of a theology of the cross at work in their interpretations.

In examining the theology of the cross as *God's presence with one in and through suffering* as well as empowering one to move through it, Olivia articulates how the theology of the cross is at work her in her situation:

That time was not absence of God, but God deeply present in it and making God's self known in those really hard moments and deep loneliness . . . and bringing [me] through and kind of bringing and carrying life after, but life that is not the same anymore.

(Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011)

Olivia knows the *hidden and revealed* God. Her theology of the cross leads her to expect God to be in the "hard moments and deep loneliness." God is not only present with her in these hard times, but also she expresses the same faith in God's presence with her congregation during a time when the congregation is considering closing its church.

One can hear elements of Guðmundsdóttir's concept of "active compassion" present in Olivia's interpretation. Olivia believes that she is not alone; God is present with/to her. She also believes that God is working to transform the suffering but does not presume to know what that may look like. She wonders if closing the church would be "most faithful" to the ministry and allow the congregation to "give themselves away completely for the sake of something bigger," to allow something new to take wing (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

Olivia's image of the congregation "giving themselves away" hints at the image of "friendship" articulated by Thompson and the "union" described by Kleinhans in their efforts to redeem Luther's "joyous exchange" or marriage metaphors of atonement. Olivia wonders if the congregation can see its relationships beyond the walls of the church and choose to use agency in a way that demonstrates faith active in love toward its neighbors. Even while she is imagining these possibilities in this time of uncertainty, others including the synod office are working at trying to keep the doors of this church open, no matter what, without reflecting on what other possibilities God may have in store. She says:

You know part of it was being able to thoughtfully and faithfully articulate for this very fearful, scared group of people, who loved their church and loved each other, that they were going to be OK . . . that Christ was deeply with them in those moments and would carry them through those things, and [in] some ways remind them that these aren't signs of failure. . . . There was a sense that I could see something bigger . . . and articulate a sense of vision of the church that was different from what they were able to see themselves . . . and not be afraid. (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011)

In developing a pastoral theology of the cross, Thornton (2002) states that a God who chooses to hang on a cross must have something to say and/or teach about suffering/death that is of value for us to know (p. 103). Olivia's experience acknowledges this and that a theology of the cross is teaching these clergy women about agency and exercising agency. Olivia states that a theology of the cross helps her to pay attention to the suffering, to what can be learned in the midst of it, and to not evade suffering but to "choose" what to do with the suffering. She says:

There's something about the theology of the cross that kind of takes suffering from something that happens to us or outside of us but allows us to claim [it] . . . we don't choose [it] . . . very seldom do we choose suffering . . . but we can choose what we do with it. (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011)

In exercising her own agency and choices, she continues to learn about her agency and ability to act in situations of suffering.

Taylor, similarly, adds that a theology of the cross has taught her about the "underneath" and that she's "not too afraid of being down, of pain, and hard things." Her agency is not diminished by suffering. Knowing God is "right down with us" and "with us all the time," Taylor describes herself as "I am weak, but I am strong." In this statement, she highlights how

Luther's theology of human agency as dialectical. She values the paradox of the cross that speaks strength in the midst of weakness and hope in the midst of suffering. God's vulnerability speaks to her and transforms her weakness into strength. (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011)

Both Olivia and Taylor's experiences help to bolster the claim made by Guðmundsdóttir about the "passive" and "active" aspects of the cross. The "passive" aspect "reassures" women that they are not alone in their suffering--God is right alongside. The "active" aspect "gives them courage to stand up and resist" and have hope that God can transform their suffering (Guðmundsdóttir, 2010, p. 142). My concerns with Guðmundsdóttir's "passive" and "active" aspects of the cross is that she seems to expect "God's presence with us" to be enough to initiate agency and does not necessarily consider how women's experiences of suffering may also be urgent instigators of the need to exercise agency or what other resources these clergy women may have and are using to act. The lived experiences of Olivia and Taylor challenge me to see the power of God's presence in suffering as encouraging one's sense of agency (and meaning-making) and at the same time invite my curiosity about what they might have said if we had spent more time discussing how the direness of their situations, not just their theology and what other resources they held, helped to contribute to their agency.

Across the interviews, it was very clear that God's choice to be present in and with God's people in suffering invites participants' agency and informs their understanding of how they are to use their agency. God sees human suffering and shows humanity to see it as well. The vantage point from which a theologian of the cross views life is the foot of the cross. This perspective shapes one's epistemology, as Mary Solberg (2006) points out in her proposal of an epistemology of the cross (p. 109). From this perspective, one sees life in its reality, which

includes seeing one's own and others' suffering, naming one's complicity in her own and others' suffering, and being called to use one's agency differently -- to name evil, to speak truth, to build up one another.

In the cross event, *Jesus is seen as one who exercises agency to speak truth*. Participants understand that for their agency to have authenticity, integrity, and efficacy, it must be used to speak truth, and they look to Jesus as their model of one who is not afraid to use his agency to speak truth. The clergy women interviewed identify truth telling distinctly with the theology of the cross. For Mariah, the ability to state the truth about herself or her situation is crucial to her sense of agency. Stating truth often meets with confrontation and disagreement from others, yet Mariah asserts that stating the truth, "recogniz[ing] things you don't want to recognize," and "be[ing] assertive" are part of the unique call we all have from God. The truth may get one "crucified," yet, according to Mariah, being able to say one's truth aloud and contribute it to the whole "is perhaps an internal resurrection of affirmation of who I am and what I bring" (Mariah, personal communication, August 12, 2011).

Across clergy women's narratives, speaking truth is not an act of agency only used for one's individual benefit, although it may be used to benefit the individual. Speaking truth is part of the responsibility of being created with agency as well as an obligation of and response to relationship with God and also with others. This understanding of agency is resonant with both Thompson and Kleinhans' revisions of Luther's marriage metaphor (or "joyous exchange") for atonement. Thompson and Kleinhans invite a re-imagining of the relationship between God and God's people that helps us recognize that being in relationship not only shapes who we are but how we act. Speaking truth is not a command; it is a choice and a consequence of being in relationship.

For Carol, being able to speak truth of her situation or “be[ing] real with what the reality was before [her],” allows her to also be honest about what is *not* before her. Able to be truthful about her situation, she can both grieve the sadness of cycling through conflict with a senior pastor and recognize it is not going to change. Speaking truth helps her to make decisions to act in the face of the knowledge that she would have to act if her situation was going to change. Carol’s agency is also increased in her situation by remembering what someone had told her at seminary:

Jesus handled conflict in many ways; sometimes he walked away from it; sometimes he hit it head on. To have that proclaimed to me to know my freedom in navigating conflict in a variety of ways -- that was empowering to me, so talking the theology of the cross didn’t mean Jesus was passive, it meant the active love, and that active love is difficult to do. (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011)

It is this “active love” of Jesus that Sharon Thornton’s pastoral theology of the cross evokes. She insists that the cross puts a claim on us to speak the truth about the suffering we see before us and to respond to it. Our truth telling takes the form of “bearing witness” to and with one another and choosing to become involved in another’s pain, which transforms powerlessness into active suffering. Across the interviews, clergy women spoke of Jesus as an active agent or even an *active sufferer*, not a passive victim. An agential Jesus who speaks truth and chooses how and when to exercise his agency invites these clergy women to do the same, empowering them through and beyond their experiences of suffering.

“Speaking truth” is an act of agency that empowers and impels participants to move through and beyond suffering to new life/resurrection. Although clergy women interviewed did not all initially reference or use the word “resurrection” in relation to the theology of the cross,

they did use language that pointed to “resurrection” and connected resurrection to the theology of the cross when asked further questions about it. In the situations of Carol and Mariah (described above), both express how their interpretation of the theology of the cross as “speaking truth” contributed to “new possibilities” for them.

For Carol, a theology of the cross offers comfort to her in her grief, because she can imagine a grieving God who also sees the truth of her experience and understands pain. She says:

[U]nderstanding the pain to which God would go through for all our sakes, I finally felt like I could claim no matter what—suffering, trial, difficult compromising time—that I knew even in the midst there is a new vision; there is a new beginning; there is still a kingdom on earth. (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011)

Mariah’s description of speaking truth as “internal resurrection” (see her quote above) of who she is follows a question to her about whether or not the cross includes *both* death *and* resurrection. In the interview, she admits that she had “not even thought of that [the resurrection piece]” as part of the theology of the cross, which surprised her and was a new realization for her. Putting the resurrection piece with the cross and emphasizing that it is “God [who] is doing the resurrecting,” Mariah realized that she can speak truth in situations and trust that even if the situation turns out for the worse, “God is going to take [me] somewhere else” and that “on the other side of the death, there is life and hope and joy” (Mariah, personal communication, August 12, 2011).

Two clergy women identify the role of liberation theology in their theology/theology of the cross which aids them to critique a theology of the cross that can get “stuck” in death and suffering and forget the resurrection. Bethany says she would not call herself a “liberation

theologian,” yet she is fiercely committed to justice and shaped by the Magnificat, a formative text for liberation theology and what Bethany refers to as a “victory song.” Bethany states, “I’m committed to the victory of love and justice of Jesus Christ, and that happens not on the cross, but through it.” She critiques Lutheran interpretations of the cross that “stop” there and “forget the empty tomb.” She says:

We focus on the suffering. We forget the vindication, to use Isaiah’s language. The life that prevails. Victory is prevailing. It doesn’t mean [to] put somebody else down; it means you prevail. And that to me is what our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection are about . . . that good prevails; that life prevails; that light prevails; that love prevails. And that’s the gospel for me; that’s what it’s all about. (Bethany, personal communication, July 7, 2011)

Influenced by her time and experience with the people of Central America, Nicole describes how she has “melded” liberation theology and the theology of the cross, which shapes her understanding of resurrection as part of the theology of the cross. She states:

I hear some of the pastors that I hang out with at text study who talk about theology of the cross as a theology of God as present in suffering, so don’t worry if you’re suffering because God’s there with you . . . which there is truth to God present in suffering. I also think that the cross is about resurrection . . . I don’t think it can be separated from the redemptive act that God does and the new life that God works out of suffering.

(Nicole, personal communication, June 9, 2011)

Because of her experience and her study of liberation theology, Nicole believes: “In Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, we also can see a way where God has made a path for us through the suffering and difficulties into a new life in Christ and into a new life in Christ

together.” This path that God has made through suffering calls Nicole to “new life,” to “live in hope and accountability,” and to “exercise agency” personally and as a pastor in helping to lead people through suffering. This path forward shapes how she exercises agency. (Nicole, personal communication, June 9, 2011)

Participants’ narratives highlight that their understanding of a theology of the cross tends to expand and get revised by their experiences and vice versa. For example, a theology of liberation assists two clergy women with being able to better articulate the “resurrection” piece of their theology of the cross which sometimes gets “stuck” in focusing on suffering and death. In the interview with Taylor, she comments on the need to expand our theology and how often people limit their theology and thus limit who Jesus is and can be. In response to a question about whether limiting theology also then limits one’s agency and the ability to speak and act, Taylor responds: “I think so. If you even translate that [theology] into liturgy, shoot, we’re all stuck on atonement all the time. If you ask anybody, ‘Why did Jesus come? Jesus came to save me from my sins.’ Well think a little deeper or a little broader” (Taylor, personal communication, August 10, 2011). Even though some of the clergy women interviewed articulated the language of “Jesus died for our sins,” none of them condoned atonement as sacrifice, which is consistent with other feminist and feminist Lutheran perspectives of a theology of the cross.⁴⁸

Although in the course of the interviews perspectives of how a theology of the cross informed participants’ agency were identified, the primary and immediate response from clergy

⁴⁸ In *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross*, Mark Heim (2006) utilizes René Girard’s scapegoat theory to offer an honest critique of atonement theology, especially atonement as sacrifice. Heim (2006) writes: “We are not reconciled with God and each other by a sacrifice of innocent suffering offered to God. We are reconciled with God because God at the cost of suffering rescued us from bondage to a practice of violent sacrifice that otherwise would keep us estranged, making us enemies of the God who stands with our victims” (p. 320).

women to my question about what theology informs and invites their agency was not a theology of the cross but *baptism*.⁴⁹ Because of the overwhelming influence of this theology in shaping participants' agency, I turn once again to clergy women's narratives and explore the meaning of baptism to them and how they understand baptism in relation to their agency.

Baptism

Baptism speaks to these clergy women in terms of their sense of identity and their sense of call (as part of the priesthood of believers or particularly as ordained pastors). For Carol, her definition of agency is derived from baptism:

[T]he power or the will that comes from self to do those things, and thinking on that, I think agency is God-given in your call . . . when you are baptized in the waters of Christ, you are called a unique child of God with a purpose in God's work for the kingdom, and I believe that's given to me as who I am, and the places to which I'm called are the places in which God grows me. (Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011)

Olivia describes how her theology of baptism helps her make the decision to stay and keep moving in her situation. She states that in baptism we receive "a sense of giftedness," and that because "God has provided us with gifts that we need for a particular place," she was able to sense and trust that she "was right for that place and those people." The promises of baptism give her "a sense of staying power" (Olivia, personal communication, July 7, 2011).

The words of these two clergy women reflect what other clergy women also articulate about their baptismal identity -- a sense of self-worth and ability, a sense of purpose and direction, and a sense of belonging and a need to belong to a larger community. Baptism invites

⁴⁹ Baptism is prominently identified by participants as informing their agency; however, they also reference prayer, Bible stories (such as the Beatitudes, the Magnificat, Miriam on the other side of the Red Sea, the Prophets), and a commitment to justice as informing their constructions and use of agency.

and justifies their agency, and it shapes a vision of suffering (and unsuffering) as being a part of life and living out “call,” baptismal and/or that of ordination. Although “child of God” and “call” language are strongly identified with these clergy women’s understanding of baptism, none of them discuss baptism in Lutheran language of a dying and a rising to new life or connect baptism to a theology of the cross.⁵⁰ Baptism informs and motivates their action in relationship to others and their respect for others who, too, are part of God with gifts and skills to contribute to the whole.

The clergy women interviewed are most articulate in the language and theology of baptism and use it in both a functional and meaningful way to describe their sense of knowing who they are and how/why they exercise agency, not just as pastors but as God’s creation and as part of community. The prevalence of baptismal theology in shaping participants’ agency suggests that baptism is an important resource to further explore, in addition to the narratives and theological perspectives that have been discussed, in constructing a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross to which we now turn.

Steps Toward Integrative Construction

Having integrated participants’ narratives and theological perspectives of the theology of the cross to explore constructions of agency, I now note observations about the various theological perspectives at work in these clergy women’s narratives, suggest some ideas for how feminist Lutheran and pastoral theologies of the cross can add depth to their theological resources, and begin to outline elements of a “feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross” that is further discussed in Chapter 6, “Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Practice.”

⁵⁰ This was a surprising realization to me as I *did* expect the ELCA clergy women interviewed to connect baptism to a theology of the cross. This realization exposes the possibility for constructive theology in this area.

In listening to participants, I hear that their theologies of the cross are shaped by a historical perspective, a critique of atonement theology as sacrifice, liberation and feminist theologies, and even a pastoral theology. What I do not hear in the narratives is a *feminist Lutheran* perspective informing their theology of the cross. Interestingly, none of the clergy women interviewed identified herself as a “feminist” (nor did I ask that question directly); although, elements of feminist theory and feminist theology certainly are evident in participants’ experiences, language, and theologies. One clergy woman did say, “I’ve never been what I would call a feminist. I’m still not a feminist, but I do now understand through that experience how women’s voices and particularly my voice was disregarded” (Wilma, personal communication, June 7, 2011). Having her agency denied and having to find a way to exercise her own agency in spite of the challenges she faced taught her why the language and meaning of “feminist” may be important to other women and for herself.

A question that remains with me after reviewing participants’ narratives and theological perspectives of the cross is “what difference might it make if the words *feminist Lutheran* received more attention from clergy women in terms of their identification, relation, and integration?” The clergy women interviewed are Lutheran, and they may identify as feminists; however, I wonder how many would identify as *feminist Lutheran*? Hearing the challenges they experience in integrating their personal/pastoral/professional identities, I wonder about the opportunity for Lutheran clergy to explore yet another identity. As I noted at the beginning of the section, “A Feminist Lutheran Theology of the Cross,” the feminist Lutheran theologians whose work I have chosen to engage in this project are well-known in Lutheran circles, but perhaps it is more accurate to say that these feminist Lutheran theologians are well-known in Lutheran *academic* circles rather than among ELCA clergy women in parish and specialized

settings. In the feminist Lutheran theology developed by these theologians, I see an invaluable theological resource that is not yet tapped by ELCA clergy women for the potential it holds in assisting them in constructing agency to unsuffer themselves.

For example, the experiences of clergy women interviewed overwhelmingly identify with the feminist Lutheran theology of Guðmundsdóttir (God suffers with us, thus transforming suffering). This is a very traditional understanding of the theology of the cross that often focuses on (or gets “stuck” on) “God suffering with us” more than “God transforming our suffering” (a critique of Nicole’s--see her quote above). Although I did not engage participants in specific questions about atonement theology, and some clergy women did offer a critique of atonement theology that advocates sacrifice, I wonder how exploring Luther’s “joyous exchange” and traditional theologies of atonement alongside feminist Lutheran theology may deepen and expand their understanding of “God suffers with.” Given the importance of relationship/community to these clergy women, I would wonder what they may discover for their own lives and relationships and their theology and practice in Thompson’s re-imagining of atonement theology as “friendship” and in Kleinhaus’ revision of Luther’s use of the marriage “union.”

Participants identify that a theology of the cross teaches them that there is a direct connection between their theology and their actions in daily life (Wilma, personal communication, June 7, 2011). Because of God’s ability to know suffering and to transform it, these clergy women are empowered to be present for, or to bear witness to, those in their midst who are suffering and to use agency in caring for others and “in seeking justice for those who don’t have a voice of their own” (Wilma, personal communication, June 7, 2011). Agency for these clergy women is to be used for the benefit of the whole, and they will exercise agency to go

to places of suffering, oppression, and hopelessness because, consistent with a Lutheran theology of the cross, they trust that God's agency is already active in those very places. In so many ways, these clergy women practice a pastoral theology of the cross but do not call it that. I am curious about how Thornton's pastoral theology of the cross would encourage them to even more boldly claim their theology, their language of agency, and their actions to remove themselves and others from the cross.

Solberg's epistemology of the cross also is a critical resource for seeing and naming pain, oppression, and suffering of women, for helping women to see their own implication in the oppression of themselves and others, and for inviting women to act -- out of the knowledge, experience, and awareness they have. I believe Solberg's epistemology of the cross would give participants a framework and language to describe what they are already doing in order to speak and act in situations of suffering but yet do not "know" or simply have not recognized that this *is* what they are doing and that what they are doing results from a particular way of "knowing."

Overall, I see feminist Lutheran and pastoral theologies of the cross offering ELCA clergy women a broader vocabulary and more expansive images of as well as a greater possibility for connecting their identity and agency with a theology of the cross. Informed by these theologies and participants' experiences, I now offer some tentative ideas about how I see a "feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross" assisting the clergy women interviewed with constructing agency and unsuffering themselves. These ideas will be engaged further in Chapter 6, "Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Practice."

A feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross maintains Luther's dialectical theology of the cross especially in how it understands human agency and God's presence with humanity. Although feminist Lutheran and pastoral theologies place strong emphasis on a

human's ability to act, neither believe that human agency is self-created. The reason human agency *is* taken seriously by these theologies is because it is understood as that which comes from God. Historical and feminist Lutheran theologies of the cross use the concept of "passive righteousness" not to describe humans as "passive" but as recipients of the gifts of God's righteousness, unconditional love, grace, and forgiveness. God is the agent who reaches out (not vice versa) and establishes relationship, and in this relationship humans are *both* utterly dependent upon God *and* completely free to serve God and neighbor.

Feminist Lutheran and pastoral theologies both embrace the paradox of the cross, the hidden and revealed God, that God is where God is least likely expected to be. Clergy women's narratives clearly reflect their expectation that God is and will be with them in suffering, and that a theology of the cross exposes theologies of glory that presume to have knowledge of God outside of suffering. A pastoral theology of the cross also believes in this paradox, understanding that the cross will speak judgment to those who misuse power in ways that contribute to suffering and reveal the cause of harm and offer hope to those who are suffering, so they no longer suffer alone.

Informed by participants' experiences and various perspectives of a theology of the cross, a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross offers three particular insights that are critical to shaping and generating agency: 1) the importance of relationship; 2) attention to experience, meaning-making, *and* action; and 3) awareness of baptismal theology. The importance of relationship is emphasized and embodied by clergy women interviewed for whom relationship shapes and invites agency. A feminist Lutheran pastoral theology addresses this through its reimagining of atonement theology and expectation that we are willing to make a commitment to others. Having lived through their own experiences of agency being denied or minimized, these

clergy women pay attention to their own and others experiences, the immediacy of suffering, and the need to respond to it. A feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross acknowledges this experience as a particular way of knowing that not only allows one to make meaning of her experience but also compels her to act. These clergy women's actions are related to their identity, specifically their baptismal identity. A feminist Lutheran pastoral theology embraces baptismal theology recognizing its vocational implications and formative role in shaping constructions of agency.

A feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross begins to take shape based on participants' particular experiences and various interpretations of a theology of the cross (as well as feminist theory and narrative counseling theory) brought together to address the critical subject of "agency" that can contribute to unsuffering. Luther, too, shaped his theology of the cross based on particular experiences in his particular context and time. He studied scripture and engaged the resources available to him in order to better understand what he believed about scripture, the church, the relationship between God and God's people, and how to live out faith. Most importantly, Luther did not dismiss the importance of human experience and God's valuing of it. He believed that "Doctrine must serve life, not life doctrine" (as cited in Hall, 2003a, p. 28). Building on this legacy, ELCA clergy women are invited to more fully explore their own experiences and voices in the context of a theology of the cross shaped by a "feminist Lutheran pastoral" perspective. Such engagement will require seeking out opportunities for further and deeper theological reflection and will yield increased understanding of the connections between theology and agency.

CHAPTER 6

Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Practice

“I put a [Thanksgiving of Baptism] in the sermon . . . we marked [everyone] with the sign of the cross and said ‘this is a new start’ . . . to be able to act through our baptismal promises . . . that that gift of agency is given through [our] called identity was very empowering and renewing.”
(Carol, personal communication, June 6, 2011)

The question guiding this pastoral theological project is “how does listening to the voices and stories of ELCA clergy women who have experienced suffering and transformational movement toward unsuffering help the field of pastoral theology thicken its theological understanding of agency and help develop practices of care that intentionally invite agency in this movement toward unsuffering?” To address this question, I interviewed eight ELCA clergy women who exercised agency in situations in the church, where they faced attempts by others to deny or minimize their agency, and correlated their experiences with the resources of feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and a theology of the cross, from historical, feminist Lutheran, and pastoral theological perspectives. From this constructive dialogue, a co-construction of agency, from the perspective of a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross, emerges, offering to pastoral theology a new lens through which to see agency and new possibilities for inviting such agency that can contribute to unsuffering.

In this chapter, I review the key themes and contributions that I draw from feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and the theology of the cross to correlate with the experiences of the clergy women interviewed in order to develop a co-construction of agency that unsuffers. Because I discovered in my research interviews that baptismal theology plays a crucial role in the construction of a feminist Lutheran pastoral theological understanding of agency, I tentatively explore a Lutheran understanding of baptism and how I understand these

clergy women to be richly relating baptism to their agency. I conclude with the constructive claim that intentionally connecting baptismal theology and the theology of the cross offers pastoral theology opportunities to further deepen and expand its understanding of agency and to “think otherwise” about generating pastoral theological practice that invites agency and contributes to the unsuffering of all people.⁵¹

Unsuffering Ourselves: Toward a Co-Construction of Agency from the Perspective of a Feminist Lutheran Pastoral Theology of the Cross

My interest in correlating the lived and collective experiences of eight ELCA clergy women with feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and various perspectives of a theology of the cross is for the specific purpose of further amplifying the agency exercised by the clergy women interviewed to unsuffer themselves in situations in the church where others attempt to deny their agency and where, initially, it may appear that they have no agency. The use of these various resources assists in keeping the focus on agency and making “visible” the stories of agency that often get dismissed or are not seen or recognized because of cultural, patriarchal, and theological discourses that are unable to story alternative constructions of agency.

The aim of feminist theory is to pay attention to and to make visible the experiences of women. Feminist theory has been challenged and continues to challenge itself to expand its awareness of the diversity of women and the diversity of their experiences, as recognized in various forms of feminism such as essentialist, liberal, and postmodern. Needing the category of “woman,” essentialist feminism assumes “sameness” in traits and experiences among women, including the experiences of oppression. Liberal feminism advocates for women as “generic”

⁵¹ David Epston (n.d.) says that to “think otherwise” is a strategy he uses to help him think outside of “legitimated,” “outsider,” or “professional” *knowledges* that assume to be the expert voices in people’s lives (pp. 3 & 4).

individuals who seek to be rational human beings with equal rights, thus, missing the particularities of women and the particularities and diversity of their experiences. Postmodern feminism does not acknowledge a category called “women’s experience,” as such a category would deny the multiplicity and particularity of the subject.

Although postmodern feminism risks the dissolution of the subject, it also cautions feminist theory to not deny the complexity of the subject and to pay attention to how the subject is socially, culturally, and linguistically constructed. I chose to draw on feminist theory informed by poststructuralism for this project because of this intentional shift in recognizing the social and linguistic construction of the subject. In church settings and structures, evidence of feminist theory at work is not always apparent, and sometimes feminist theory is resisted. The feminist theory that may be present, and more acceptable, in some church settings and structures (and is prevalent in the ELCA) is shaped by “liberal” feminism. Based on a Modernist and Enlightenment understanding of the individual and power, liberal feminism often cannot see or address the particularities needed in some situations to advance the agency of clergy women, nor is it able to attend to and expose the relationship between discourses, subjectivities, and power. Feminist theory informed by poststructuralism moves beyond liberal feminism and challenges the church context and its theology to be aware and more observant of how this relationship intentionally or unintentionally disadvantages clergy women.

Because of its ability to expose the relationship of language and power and how a subject is shaped by this relationship, feminist theory informed by poststructuralism is able to expose the dominant discourses of patriarchy that are at work in these clergy women’s narratives (in culture and in church) and are constantly trying to shape, define, and limit their identity and agency. Discourses are the ways we talk about our experiences, and, depending on who is talking, certain

discourses are ranked higher than other discourses and become “dominant,” restricting other possible ways of talking about experience. The discourse of patriarchy ranks male (White, heterosexual, educated, etc.) experience “at the top,” and such a discourse plays out in the language of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, etc. This ranking pits certain people’s experiences against other’s experiences, reinforcing binary thinking, where positive characteristics are assigned to one group and negative characteristics to another. Patriarchal discourses intentionally cast doubt upon certain groups of people (in this case, the clergy women interviewed), their experiences, their abilities, and their voices. Such doubt complicates their ability to trust their voices and experiences, as well as their abilities to exercise voice and agency in their lives.

Utilizing feminist theory informed by poststructuralism to engage the narratives of the clergy women interviewed, I was able to identify two categories of obstructions to their agency directly related to patriarchal discourses at work in culture and in the church: 1) conflicting and contradictory personal and professional expectations of women in general and of women in the role of pastor, and 2) conflicting and contradictory expectations of how women should exercise agency, or even if they should exercise agency if it poses a challenge to and/or threatens the status quo. These obstructions are not minor or random experiences for these clergy women in the church. These obstructions contribute to suffering and are directly produced by the discourses we use and the power at work in these discourses to rank experiences and identities. Such discourses attempt to rob these clergy women of their agency by storying their identity and agency “for” and about them. In addition, these categories of obstructions also suggest possible ways in which these patriarchal discourses attempt to story men’s or clergy men’s agency in ways that also are limiting and restrictive.

Feminist theory informed by poststructuralism offers this project the tool of “deconstruction,” which deprives a dominant discourse of its power by exposing it as a particular perspective not a “grand narrative.” As discourses are exposed, one notices the immense resistance to the power of these discourses that these eight clergy women are practicing and have to practice in order to exercise agency in their lives. In their actions of resistance, they are practicing agency in ways that patriarchal discourses cannot possibly story. In a culture and church so infused with patriarchal discourses, this means that much of what these clergy women do to exercise agency goes unnoticed and unstoried by the church, its leaders, its parishioners, and, sadly, even by clergy women themselves.

Interviews with the participants clearly show that they feel the dissonance between their own experiences and the experiences that dominant discourses of patriarchy attempt to prescribe for them. Because of this, I use the critical lens and resource of feminist theory informed by poststructuralism in order to exploit this dissonance as an opportunity to challenge dominant discourses and to pay attention to what it is these clergy women are resisting and to what stories are being told, generated, and resurrected by such resistance. I firmly believe that feminist theory informed by poststructuralism can assist these clergy women (and other people) to see, hear, and question the challenges they face in exercising agency in the church, to understand the role of power in discourse (that is often taken for granted or dismissed), to amplify their own understanding of power that is so strongly connected to identity and integrity, and to aid them in finding new language and in claiming their own language, including their theological language of baptism, to articulate how they construct and exercise agency to unsuffer themselves.

Like feminist theory informed by poststructuralism, narrative counseling theory, informed by social constructionist theory, recognizes the power and role of language in creating

and shaping reality and subjectivity and invites people to identify and deconstruct discourses that hold power over their lives and attempt to deny their agency. Because of my training in narrative counseling theory, I intentionally chose to use the narrative term of “agency” in this project, because it does not have the religious connotations attached to it in the same way that the usual language for “agency” has come to have in the church, such as “having voice” or “empowerment.” I had hoped that new language would offer fresh and different openings for exploring and generating experience about “agency.” Overall, the language of “agency” itself was somewhat helpful to these clergy women as it provided a new frame to look through and view the “familiar” and “taken for granted,” even though I suspect that few will continue using this term.

With deep respect for one’s agency or voice and a solid commitment to increasing one’s sense of agency, narrative counseling theory acknowledges that it is people themselves who have the storytelling rights to their stories. When one has agency, or the ability to take action in one’s life, according to her values, and to speak, one has the ability to create the reality in which she lives or wants to live. “Narrative,” in the narrative counseling theory utilized in this project and influenced by the work of Michael White and David Epston, does not mean “telling” stories *about* one’s life; it means that the act of speaking itself *constitutes* one’s life and one’s identity. Thus, the telling of their stories by the participants themselves is crucial to their agency because it is an *enactment* of their agency. This is why I chose the research method of the interview for this project.

One-on-one interviews allowed for these eight clergy women to engage and tell their stories of exercising agency in the church in detail, reflect on their experiences through intentional questions about agency, revisit and revise their stories/experiences in ways that were

meaningful to them, and discover something new about their experiences, themselves, and their exercising of agency that they had not recognized or thought about before. In this sense, the interviews became more than a “re-telling” of their stories; the interview process became an opportunity to “create” or author their stories of agency in ways that they had not had the opportunity to “story” before. In the interview process itself, participants began to enact and embody the very agency they described. Many of the clergy women interviewed recognized this, or at least felt their agency increased by the opportunity to speak.

I, too, recognized and experienced their agency, adding a different dimension to my role. I was not only an “interviewer” but also a “witness” to their stories and agency. For me, this was an experience of trust that elicited respect for and admiration of these clergy women, who daily continue to exercise agency in the midst of so many on-going attempts to diminish and deny their agency in culture and in the church. As I invited their experiences of agency, so did their experiences of agency invite mine. This experience resonates with Sharon Thornton’s pastoral theological practice of “bearing witness,” which will be discussed later in this chapter. Acknowledging my own experience of the interviews and the impact these interviews had on me and my own sense of agency are critical. From a narrative counseling perspective, the voices and experiences of clergy women interviewed are indeed privileged over my voice and experience as the interviewer; however, as the interviewer, I do not pretend that I am not affected by what I hear or that a neutral hearing of another’s story is possible.

In these interviews, the participants identify multiple discourses at work in culture and in the church that seek to obstruct their agency to tell and construct their own preferred stories of living. Like poststructuralist feminist theory, narrative counseling theory also identifies and deconstructs these harmful discourses; however, narrative counseling theory is more adept at

recognizing that something else is always being reconstructed in the process of deconstruction. I often rely on theology, specifically a theology of the cross, for making the claim that something new is possible in the midst of what only appears to be death, but narrative counseling theory also dares to suggest that there are always new possibilities being generated. Acknowledging that people are always active participants in their lives (even and especially in their resistance to dominant discourses) and are multistoried, narrative counseling theory claims that there are always stories that lie outside of dominant discourses, exposing subcultures that both find ways to keep their alternative stories alive and live their different stories.

Clergy women interviewed are indeed a subculture who keep alternative stories of agency alive and who live these stories. My interest in interviewing ELCA clergy women and in bringing narrative counseling theory into this project was for the purpose of listening to/for these alternative stories that often do not have a place to be told or heard, providing a context for these stories to be constructed, and learning from their insider knowledges. Because of their experiences, these clergy women “know differently” about agency, suffering, and unsuffering. Such knowing is a particular kind of knowing and does not pretend to know “everything.”

My choice to utilize narrative counseling theory for this project also was influenced by narrative’s use of social constructionist theory that recognizes that one’s identity and story are constructed in and through relationship; thus individualistic views of truth and the idea that one person can create meaning for or by herself are challenged. Although the church and its theology value relationship and community, the social constructionist piece of narrative challenges the church and its theology because it allows for the possibility of multiple truth claims to be held at the same time and does not allow the church or its theology to have the final say about what “truth” is. In this sense, I see narrative counseling theory giving the church and

its theology the opportunity to take a critical inventory of how both may be functioning in ways that privilege certain aspects of certain people's experiences, thus, contributing to discourses that attempt to deny the agency of others.

Because narrative counseling theory can allow for multiple stories and versions of truth, it opens space to other ways of knowing and for alternative stories and language to emerge. An alternative story that I see and hear emerging in clergy women's narratives is that of "unsuffering." Unsuffering is a term coined and developed by David Epston and Julie King to describe both the suffering that one experiences as well as one's attempts to influence or minimize the suffering. Unsuffering is not passive and does not dismiss the reality and experience of suffering: unsuffering is a result of exercising agency to undo the suffering. This alternative story of unsuffering is seen most visibly in clergy women's *resistance*.

Narrative informed by social constructionist theory identifies power as something that exists in relationship, not as an entity to be possessed by individuals, and power is both productive and constructive. Narrative recognizes that power exists in every situation. Even when one may feel that she does not have access to the power she would like to exercise, she still has the power to resist participating in forms of power relations. Such resistance may come at a cost for a clergy woman. Such *resistance* often gets labeled (or even diagnosed) by patriarchal and dominant discourses in ways that are unhelpful (and personal) such as calling it "aggression" or "anger." By such labeling, agency can go unnoticed or be dismissed. Again, I utilize narrative counseling theory because it can both allow for multiple stories and versions of truth and open space to suggest that such "resistance" is an alternative story of "exercising agency" and/or of "unsuffering." Alternative stories provide new meaning, and new meaning generates agency.

In the interviews, I learned that the participants' alternative stories of agency were influenced by their theology, particularly baptismal theology.⁵² Although the concept of human agency espoused by narrative counseling theory does not take into account God's role in human agency, narrative welcomes theology as a resource for increasing one's sense of agency in their lives. Because I did assume that theology would play a substantial role in shaping these clergy women's agency, I chose to explore the theology central to Lutheranism—the theology of the cross—from historical, feminist Lutheran, and pastoral theological perspectives. I discovered that a theology of the cross is at work in their lives, but not in the ways I anticipated or to the degree that I expected. True to the theology of the cross, what I thought I would see, I did not. Instead, I heard and learned a lot more than I had imagined.

A Lutheran historical perspective of the theology of the cross understands that in the cross God is both hidden and revealed, and God reveals God's self not in the illusion of power and glory but in the honesty of suffering. God is not distant but relational and present, suffering with humanity, and God is able to use suffering to bring people to God. In the cross event, God is the active agent in bringing about our salvation. Although there are questions about how/if Luther understood his theology of the cross as a theology of atonement, what is imperative to recognize is that Luther understood God to be reaching out to humans in the cross event, not the other way around. Humans have no agency to seek the salvation we need; thus we cannot be agents in our salvation but only recipients of justification and faith, which are God's work and our gift. This "passive righteousness" is the beginning of Christians' freedom--we are released from sin and death; we can be honest about our own needs; we can experience the grace and

⁵² Baptismal theology will be discussed further in the next section "New Learnings and Future Trajectories."

unconditional love we have received, and we can be transformed by God's grace and love that are so plentiful that such gifts cannot help but to move beyond us to others.

The clergy women interviewed live life and faith in the tension of paradoxes in our culture and in the church; thus Luther's dialectic remains a given in their theology and their understanding of agency. However, the dialectical understanding of God's agency and human agency and the relationship between these, as espoused by a traditional and historical theology of the cross, are implied rather than directly articulated by these clergy women. They do not use the language of "passive righteousness," yet they are very aware that they are recipients of God's love and grace, which have a transformative effect on their lives and are the source of their agency and their desire to use their agency in response to such love and grace.

When I directly asked about the influence of a theology of the cross on their agency, these clergy women identified two particular aspects: 1) that they are not alone; in Jesus, God suffers with them and fully knows their human situation; and 2) the cross calls them to be honest about the reality of suffering they see, "to call a thing what it is," or to speak the truth. The reality that God is an active sufferer with humans is essential to the clergy women interviewed because it clearly does offer them comfort, supports them in their suffering and their choices to suffer, incites their agency to suffer with or on behalf of others who are suffering, compels them to speak up and name the injustice of suffering that exists, and speaks hope and life in the midst of despair and death.

Because this project specifically seeks to learn from both the life and theological experiences of these eight Lutheran clergy women, I intentionally explored and engaged a *feminist Lutheran* perspective of the theology of the cross to assist me with listening to the narratives and experiences of the participants and with seeing the possibilities that a feminist

Lutheran perspective could open for participants in how they approach and/or utilize a theology of the cross in their daily lives and work. My engagement with four particular feminist Lutheran theologians affirmed that the Lutheran tradition could still speak hope to women today and call for reformation where needed. Feminist Lutheran theology exposes suffering and theologies of glory that attempt to silence or oppress women, critiques theologies of atonement that require suffering, acknowledges how one's experiences shape one's agency in suffering and unsuffering, and offers a vision of unsuffering.

In the interviews, I clearly heard participants' theological reflections on their experiences and the theology of the cross most definitely resonating with what feminist Lutheran theologian Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir calls "active compassion"--knowing God is with them, they are inspired and compelled to act, and their actions may both cause and reduce suffering for themselves and/or others. Consistent with feminist Lutheran theology, these clergy women would assert that suffering is real and part of life but not required to be acceptable to God. In addition, being inspired and compelled to act, or to exercise agency, is in response to relationship with God. The importance of relationship to the participants is evident across the interviews as well as honored and further honed in the work of feminist Lutheran theologians.

Acknowledging the import placed on relationship by the participants, I drew on the work of feminist Lutheran theologians, Deanna Thompson and Kathryn Kleinhans, who seek to reimagine and revitalize Luther's "joyous exchange." Thompson offers the image of "friendship," and Kleinhans attempts to redeem the "marriage" metaphor used in Luther's understanding of the "joyous exchange." Both theologians and their suggested images highlight the significance of personal relationship and how the experience of relationship is transformational, affecting our interactions with one another. Friendship is a "gift" where both have a choice to freely

participate. Friends who love each other do choose to “lay down their lives for one another.” This is simply what friends do--they choose to love. Kleinhans, too, would emphasize the transformational nature of “union” between two people where suffering is not a “command” but a “consequence” of being united in relationship. When one suffers, so does the other. Thompson and Kleinhans’ images resonate with participants’ articulations of what they are doing when exercising agency. Relationship is essential to the clergy women interviewed. When in relationship, one has a responsibility to the other, not because one “has” to, but because it is simply part of how one responds in and to relationship.

Subjective experiences of relationship (with God and others) and personal experiences of suffering are what compel participants to *act* on their own and/or another’s behalf. Mary Solberg (2006) calls this “transformative accountability,” and she utilizes Luther’s theology of the cross as an epistemology, a particular way of knowing (p. 149). I engage Solberg’s work because her understanding of the cross as an epistemology acknowledges that which clergy women expressed in their interviews: Their experiences shape what they know, and once they “know” what they know, they have to figure out how to live with such knowledge, for good or for worse. Seeing life from the perspective of the cross shapes our knowing: It exposes our limitations; it exposes suffering and pain, and it exposes our indifference and our ability or inability to act. Because participants have experienced life on the underside, they are very aware of suffering and what happens when they and/or others do not act.

This awareness and emphasis on the need to act in the midst of suffering is foundational to Sharon Thornton’s *pastoral theology of the cross*. Thornton’s (2002) pastoral theology of the cross calls us to be active in our response to suffering, to see who is on the cross, to clearly take a

side with those who are hurting, to “bear witness” to one another’s suffering, to help get people off the cross, and to acknowledge our own complicity in what may put people on the cross (p. 118). Thornton’s pastoral theology of the cross takes suffering seriously because it is God who hangs on the cross; thus there is something to learn from suffering, and there is the possibility to see and respond to suffering.

I utilized Thornton’s pastoral theology of the cross in this project because it strongly connects to the experiences of ELCA clergy women interviewed and to their own articulations of a theology of the cross. I suspect this is in part (and obviously) due to Thornton’s use of Luther’s interpretation of a theology of the cross and her use of feminist and liberation theologies that clearly inform her pastoral theology and are present, although not overtly articulated, in participants’ narratives. Like Thornton, participants articulate their understanding of Jesus as an agential Jesus whose active suffering transforms their suffering, who calls them to act and to respond to suffering, whose agency, compassion, and commitment to justice invites the same from them.

In bringing together eight ELCA clergy women’s experiences, feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and a theology of the cross from multiple perspectives, I intentionally chose resources that acknowledge suffering as real, value human agency, and make a commitment to the welfare of women/people, and I anticipated that these resources could inform and challenge each other as well as advance a more complex understanding of agency. As discovered in the narratives of the clergy women interviewed, theology certainly assists them in generating meaning about and language for their experiences and agency in ways that theoretical resources are not always able to provide. A theology of the cross reminds them that if God suffers on the cross then there is something to learn about God, life, and love in suffering, and that their own

experiences of suffering are not dismissed or ignored, but seen and embraced by God. It is this theological understanding of God suffering *with* humanity that calls these clergy women to see and name the suffering before them, to bear witness to others' suffering, and to trust that suffering is not the totality of human experience. There is hope and possibility for something new to unfold.

Theology alone, however, cannot fully assist these clergy women with the critical lenses needed to evaluate and make choices about their experiences and exercising of agency. Even though a theology of the cross "calls a thing what it is" and identifies theologies of glory that intend to oppress women, feminist theory can challenge theology and clergy women to name and be honest about the impact that patriarchal discourses (especially sexism) can have on them and their agency and how embedded sexism and patriarchal discourse are in theology. In turn, theology challenges feminist theory to broaden its view beyond the experiences of women, recognizing that the marginalization of women in church and culture also speaks to the reality of how sin distorts sexuality in ways that impact the agency of all God's people.

Like feminist theory, narrative counseling theory challenges theology to take seriously the lived experiences of clergy women and to not generalize or essentialize their experiences in ways that diminish their diversity, identity, or agency. Narrative places high value on agency and one's ability to exercise agency in her life so that she can author/reauthor her preferred stories/identities. Theology recognizes that human agency is limited and not self-created--agency comes from God, generated in and for the sake of relationship and as a gift of relationship. In narrative, agency can be increased, but theology challenges that sin and brokenness do impact agency, thus one cannot write one's story without suffering being a part of it. From a theological perspective, human agency is limited, yet, as narrative challenges, that is

no excuse for not exercising the agency one does have. Narrative can increase agency by building on the theological understanding that God uses God's agency to free humans to use their agency to serve God and neighbor.

Narrative also encourages and creates opportunities for alternative theological knowledges to emerge. This means that "God suffers with us" does not have to be the only interpretation of a theology of the cross or the only theology identified as informing one's agency. It is in the correlation of narrative, feminist theory, theology of the cross, and participants' stories that I discovered an alternative theological knowledge at work significantly informing and shaping participants' agency—baptismal theology. The predominance of the theme and theology of baptism in the qualitative interviews was striking, opening up an area for further research and exploration that I had not anticipated. It is to this surprising new finding that I now turn.

New Learnings and Future Trajectories

Central to each perspective of the theology of the cross engaged in this project--historical, feminist Lutheran, and pastoral theological--is Luther's understanding of the relationship between God and humanity, where God meets humanity in suffering and death as well as in life and resurrection. God is not distant but directly involved with humanity, initiating relationship and making a commitment to God's creation. The importance of "relationship" for the clergy women interviewed is apparent across all of the interviews and is strongly connected to their relationship to God. The clergy women interviewed, however, articulate this relationship not in the language of a theology of the cross but in the language and the theology of baptism.

It is significant to note that for Luther and for Lutherans, baptism is "the center of the Christian life" (Strohl, 2003, p. 153). In baptism we receive the "divine promise" that "He that

believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Luther, 1943, p. 170).⁵³ There is nothing that we can or have to do to earn salvation. It is God’s gift to us. We simply need to receive it and dare to believe the promise is true, as this promise can only be fulfilled by faith not by works (Luther, 1943, p. 178).

In *The Small Catechism*, Luther writes:

[Baptism] signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God’s presence” (as cited in Tappert, 1959, p. 349).

In baptism the sinful self dies and a new creation comes forth, signifying “full and complete justification” (Luther, 1943, p. 180). Fully justified, this new creation has a new identity formed in relationship to God and as God’s beloved. In interviews with the clergy women, I hear them adamantly claim and relate to this identity.

This strong sense of baptismal identity that participants identify as shaping their worth and agency is articulated as coming from their experience of God’s grace extended in the context of relationship. Feminist theologian, Serene Jones (2000) claims that Luther’s understanding of justification--what happens in the cross event--includes the experience of judgment first and then mercy, which is why she believes Luther’s interpretation of justification is not helpful to women. For Luther, judgment is needed to destroy the self that is full of pride and focused on self, so it can see the need for God. In a culture where women may not experience a sense of self, there may be no self to destroy. For the cross to speak to women, they may need to enter it from the side of mercy, first, and then God’s judgment. Women may need to have a sense of self

⁵³ I acknowledge the gender specific language used throughout Luther’s works and do not change his language in direct quotations.

constructed by God's mercy before they can be subjects or "agents" that can be judged, forgiven, and called into God's mission (Jones, 2000, pp. 61-64).

It appears from the interviews with these eight ELCA clergy women that this perspective of justification—entering from the side of grace and mercy first-- is their experience, and it is referenced in their experience, language, and theology of baptism. In a follow-up conversation after an interview with one clergy woman, she offered an interesting perspective on why she thinks baptismal theology receives more attention by her as a clergy woman than the theology of the cross: "[Baptismal identity] is the only identity given to women in a culture where so much identity is given to men" (Carol, personal communication, June 13, 2011).

It seems, in listening to these clergy women, that having a sense of self constructed by God's mercy is an identity not only worth holding onto but also worth living out. Lutherans call this *vocation*, or living out one's baptism in the world. Luther (1943) writes: "For all our life should be baptism . . . we have been set free from all else and wholly given over to baptism alone, that is, to death and resurrection" (p. 183). From what I hear in the stories and experiences of the clergy women interviewed, I understand that exercising agency to both endure suffering and to hold on to hope *is* living out their baptismal vocation.

In listening to the individual and collective narratives of the clergy women interviewed and in correlating these narratives with feminist theory, narrative counseling theory, and various perspectives of a theology of the cross, alternative knowledges and alternative stories about participants' agency are heard, noticed, and storied. In addition, these various sources contribute to a co-construction of clergy women's agency from the perspective of a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross that includes three particular aspects: 1) agency is anchored in baptismal identity; 2) agency is relational, and 3) agency requires taking seriously one's

experiences, recognizing how these experiences shape one's particular way of knowing and meaning-making, and compel one to act. In the discussion of each of these aspects of clergy women's agency, it is very apparent that baptism is essential to the agency of the clergy women interviewed as it seems to both undergird and inform their agency and is an embodiment and/or enactment of their agency.

Participants articulate that it is in baptism where they receive their God-given identity and agency. Their ability to exercise agency is generated from "who" they are as God's beloved, not by what they "have" to do or be. To these clergy women, baptism *is* described as a "call" and *places* a call upon *who* they are, thus shaping how they live. For them, God's grace and mercy received in baptism are the source of their identity and agency; thus they are not about playing a role prescribed for them by patriarchal discourses. When they experience "gaps" or spaces of contradictions between who they are told they should be and who they know they are as baptized children of God, they are likely to turn to and claim their baptismal identity and their agency shaped by this identity to re-author multiple alternative stories about their identity and agency. It appears that these clergy women use their baptismal identity to deconstruct harmful discourses and assist them in reconstructing their identity and agency. Their agency is creative, and it is has to be in order for them to author alternative stories in a culture and church that so consistently attempt to restrict their identity and agency.

Listening to participants' narratives and their descriptions of baptism, I came to understand that they identify and integrate their baptismal identity with their sense of integrity and authenticity, which also provide them with language and options for creating alternative stories of agency. Their awareness of this integration and the significance of it to them both embolden them to exercise agency and caution them in how they exercise agency. As stated

earlier, their baptismal identity includes a call to live and to use their agency *differently*. These clergy women are mindful not to exercise agency in ways that could take or diminish the agency and/or the identity of others. Having experienced others trying to deny their identity and agency and knowing how destructive that can be, they seek to use their agency to responsibly act in ways that invite agency from others.

These clergy women know well that exercising agency in our culture and church requires trust of their faith in a God who is with them which allows them to “let go” of their agency. This dialectic is most intriguing--exercising agency to let go of agency. This is not a passive experience for these clergy women but an active response to the gift of faith and is associated with a very different understanding of power. This kind of power is not one’s possession but exists in relationship and is negotiated and redefined in relationship. From their experiences of relationship with God and with others, these clergy women have knowledge about relationship that shapes their use of agency, especially in situations of suffering. They trust that Jesus knows their suffering and has the ability to both suffer with them and give them courage to act in and through their suffering. Exercising agency does not require them to sacrifice themselves, others, or their own agency; however, *suffering* can be an act of agency, of love, and a result of relationship. In relationship, agency is exercised for the good of the whole.

Once again this understanding of agency as relational is directly connected to these clergy women’s understanding of baptismal identity, which, for them, is both an individual and a communal identity. They articulate how their baptism compels them to use their agency to name the truth before them, to respect and take seriously their own experiences, to speak their stories, recognizing how their experiences shape a particular way of knowing and assist them with meaning-making which generates agency. Speaking their own stories and acknowledging their

experiences allow them to not only create but also to recognize the alternative stories of agency that they are already living and to reclaim and include missing parts of their lives that somehow have been determined invalid and/or not storied previously. Listening to these clergy women speak about their experiences, I recognized how their truth telling, their ability to function in multiple roles, their need and ability to use agency “behind the scenes,” and their constant resistance to the power of patriarchal discourses at work in their lives are all alternative stories of agency in their lives. In a church and culture infused with dominant discourses of patriarchy, these clergy women have to use their alternative knowledges to generate alternative stories of agency all the time.

The clergy women I interviewed also embodied something I imagined about agency but did not know for sure until I heard them articulate it--their alternative stories often include the belief that they have both a personal and professional responsibility to exercise agency, not only in situations where they experience suffering but also (and especially) in situations where others are experiencing suffering. Their lived experience provides them with “insider knowledge” about what is at stake and what the risks are when they choose or do not choose to exercise agency in situations of suffering. Their baptismal calling compels them to use their agency in ways that clearly side with justice and with those who suffer. To alleviate suffering by bearing witness to another’s story and by being willing participate in the suffering with and on behalf of another, clergy women take a stand and make a commitment. Such a commitment is an act of agency as well as a responsibility of and a response to relationship.

Agency co-constructed from the perspective of a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross is created, expressed, and invited in relationship; attentive to people’s particular experiences and knowledges; mindful of the need for generating meaning and alternative stories;

responsive and willing to bear witness to suffering, and able to commit, to take a stand, and to participate in bringing about unsuffering. For these ELCA clergy women, a Lutheran understanding of baptism strongly infuses their definitions of agency and their exercising of agency. Because they believe their identity and agency are God-given in baptism, living out their baptism is about living out this identity and agency. This construction of agency helps these clergy women to unsuffer themselves.

At the beginning of this project I identified “unsuffering” as a preferred, or alternative, story that I believed participants desired to experience and live. I utilized unsuffering because I anticipated its unfamiliarity to participants and thought it may provide new ways of thinking about suffering and what it is clergy women do when they choose to act in the midst of suffering. I also anticipated its unfamiliarity in Lutheran theology, where the preference is for talking about how God or Jesus “suffers with us,” and I wondered what it would mean if we said God or Jesus “unsuffers with us.”

“Unsuffering” was a new word for the clergy women interviewed; however, in their willingness to engage this word, I learned that it was important that unsuffering not neglect or forget about suffering or risk negating the experience of suffering. Once again, my use of the term is shaped by Julie King who uses unsuffering to describe her experience with anorexia/bulimia because it can “both signify grim resistance and defiance of [anorexia/bulimia] at the same time as a movement toward joy and celebration” (Epston, 2008, p. 1). Unsuffering has to take suffering seriously in order to “undo” the suffering. I define unsuffering as a liberative and agential process by which the one being silenced or denied agency chooses to both name the suffering as real and participate in making choices for “life,” for healing, and increased

power in/over one's life. The process or choice of unsuffering is not a passive experience but active, and may even include the choice *to suffer*.

I learned from the clergy women interviewed that they and I share a similar understanding of unsuffering; however, they do not use the word "unsuffering" to describe their "grim resistance and defiance" *and* "movement toward joy and celebration." Instead, and once again, they are likely to call unsuffering *living out their baptism*. This discovery corrected my assumption about the role of agency in the movement *toward* unsuffering. Unsuffering is not a place that one uses her agency to *arrive at*. The exercising of agency by these clergy women in their various life situations--where they face real risks and consequences for exercising agency--demonstrates their ability to take action in the midst of life where *both* suffering *and* unsuffering are *on-going*.

The movement of agency is *not* in one direction but is an on-going movement *between* suffering and unsuffering. Baptism, from a Lutheran perspective, is a daily dying and rising of self in Christ, helping us to start over again and again with hope in the midst of the challenges of life, in the midst of despair. Baptism is about *both* death *and* resurrection, and so is the cross. Christ's cross and resurrection make Christian freedom possible and provide us with a template for how the Christian faith is lived--"by constant movement from cross to resurrection and back again" (Thompson, 2004, p. 26). For me, this is where participants' understanding of agency most strongly connects with baptism *and* a theology of the cross, yet, surprisingly, this connection is not overtly made, if made at all. I propose the constructive claim that by explicitly joining baptismal theology with a theology of the cross, pastoral theology has opportunities to see and identify agency in ways it has not been able to before, enhance its understanding of

agency, and develop pastoral theological practices that can intentionally invite agency and contribute to unsuffering.

Pastoral Theological Practice that Invites Agency and Contributes to Unsuffering

In this pastoral theological project I have explored theoretical, psychological, and theological resources and the lived experiences of eight ELCA clergy women to co-construct agency from the perspective of a feminist Lutheran pastoral theology of the cross and to discern pastoral theological practice that seeks to invite such agency. Although this project's focus has been on the particular experiences of eight ELCA clergy women, this project's value is not limited to only these eight *ELCA* clergy women, clergy women, or women in general, nor is this project's value presumed to be universally applicable to all people. The experiences of these eight ELCA clergy women do provide a lens through which we see the impact of the abuse of power on and the marginalization of one group of people in a denomination shaped by patriarchy where sin distorts identity and agency. The experiences of such distortion of identity and agency are part of human experience; thus agency is a *human* issue with implications for women and men.

The co-construction of agency (from a feminist Lutheran pastoral theological perspective) that emerged in this project emphasizes that agency is anchored in baptismal identity; requires taking seriously one's experiences, recognizing how these experiences shape one's particular way of knowing and meaning-making and compel one to act, and is relational. What is distinctive about this co-construction is that it grew out of and alongside participants' theological articulations of agency in phrases such as "God suffers *with* us" and "I am a baptized child of God" without seemingly and directly making the connection between a theology of the cross *and* a theology of baptism.

Both a theology of the cross and a theology of baptism are about death *and* resurrection, suffering *and* unsuffering, God's agency *and* human agency. To separate these theologies, or to focus on only one without the other, deprives us of a more complex theological understanding of agency and lessens our ability to enact and invite such agency. I anticipate further work and research in this area, but, for now, I tentatively suggest possible ways in which connecting a theology of the cross and baptismal theology can inform and impact pastoral theological practice that invites agency and contributes to unsuffering. Together, theologies of the cross and baptism can: 1) assist in telling and hearing *both* the stories of suffering *and* the stories unsuffering; 2) expand our understanding of vocation; and 3) amplify the responsibility and the gift of relationship.

In the interviews, clergy women identified their ability to keep exercising agency in moving between suffering and unsuffering (which are both part of daily life) in theological language of "God suffering with them" and "living out their baptism." Their agency appears to be *both* their "grim resistance and defiance" *and* their "movement toward joy and celebration," to paraphrase Julie King (Epston, 2008, p. 1). To recognize, or even anticipate, peoples' "both/and" stories and to acknowledge the agency being exercised in this "both/and" dynamic, one has to double-listen, or listen for *both* the stories of oppression *and* the stories of liberation happening *at the same time*. When both theologies of the cross and baptism are connected and informing pastoral theological practice, we can expect to see, hear, and tell the "both/and" stories of our lives; to name death, life, *and* resurrection; to be surprised that God shows up in all of these places, not just in our suffering, and to discover that when we can appreciate that there are multiple stories happening at once, not just one, then we also can identify and invite variations of agency and expand our definitions of agency.

Being able to acknowledge that people are multi-storied, living both stories of suffering and unsuffering at the same time, expands our understanding of God, others, and ourselves, and impacts how we live out our vocation as subjects/agents of our own lives. For the clergy women interviewed, God's use of God's agency invites their agency and makes possible their ability to live more than one story of who they are. God uses God's agency to reach out to us in pain and suffering, transforming our experience of pain and suffering, and inviting our agency in the midst of it. Likewise, God uses God's agency to reach out to us to extend grace, love, and forgiveness, and we are recipients of these gifts. We do not use or have to use our agency to seek these gifts or our salvation; thus we have freedom to use our agency to live in response to this freedom and these gifts, to live out our vocation of serving God and neighbor.

For the participants in this project, living out their vocation includes the understanding that they are living in response to relationship with God which compels them to use their agency *differently*--for the sake of relationship and for more than their own benefit. From the particular experiences of the clergy women interviewed, we can learn about the importance of self-reflexivity. Learning how we come to speak and to act in certain ways can assist us in contemplating how we want to continue to speak and to act in relationship. This learning expands our understanding of vocation to include not only the awareness that our identity and agency are God-given but also that our identity and agency are socially constructed in a world and a church shaped by patriarchal discourses. When we are aware and mindful of how our agency is constructed and how our choices to exercise agency can impact another, then we are able to invite the agency of others and to respect others' and our own agency and vocation.

The value and importance of relationship and how inequities of agency impact and jeopardize relationship are articulated by the clergy women who participated in this project and

the feminist Lutheran theologians whose work I utilized for this project. Both theologies of the cross and baptism express the gift and “response-ability” of relationship. Acknowledging that cross and baptismal theologies are relational theologies, that people live multiple stories at one time in their daily lives, and that multiple stories of God and themselves expand people’s understanding of agency and vocation, pastoral theological practice itself must expand its own “stories” of self-understanding and practice. In particular, I am most interested in how a theological understanding of relationship as “gift”--that compels one to respond not only “to” another but also “with” another--shifts the focus *from* a traditional understanding of the “caregiver” as the one who offers individual acts of care to the one who is hurting *to* focusing on what the caregiver and the one who is hurting are able to do *together* (Thornton, 2000, p. 69).⁵⁴

Understanding pastoral theological practice as what the caregiver and the one who is hurting are able to do *together* (and not something enacted upon another) is a radical understanding of “mutual relationship” that is suggested by Sharon Thornton (2000) and is part of her construction of a pastoral theology of the cross (p. 65). I find her understanding of “mutual relationship” to be most helpful in not only *reflecting* on how to invite agency but to *actually invite* agency. What I learned from interviews with ELCA clergy women is how important listening, believing and solidarity, and awareness/advocacy are to inviting and increasing agency. Thornton adds to these practices *beholding*, *restoring*, and *interpretation*.

Beholding results from listening and believing and by being “moved” and “touched” by another’s story, recognizing the presence of the holy in it (Thornton, 2000, p. 72). In this holy space, we realize that God beholds us, and we realize our mutual humanity and relation in

⁵⁴ I utilize the term “caregiver” to describe the person identified by the institutional church as having the training and education to “offer” care. This project’s focus on agency has raised the question about what to call the one who is in this trained/educated role, so as not to risk denying the role that the one who is hurting also plays in his/her own care.

beholding one another. Thornton calls this “honor[ing] the complete subjectivity” of the other (p. 74). *Restoring* is about the one who has suffered journeying (with all the challenges it may involve) back into community in her new role as “subject” (Thornton, 2000, p. 74). Thornton (2000) describes this as a “homecoming,” not just for the one who has experienced suffering, but for all for whom relationship is restored by this one’s homecoming (p. 75). *Interpretation* recognizes that a pastoral caregiver always attempts to “interpret” another’s experience, and that such interpretation will never be as complex or complete as the situation or the person being interpreted (Thornton, 2000, p. 75). Thornton (2000), however, nuances interpretation and asserts that this practice is not complete until pastoral caregivers have interpreted themselves (p. 76).

Thornton warns of the constant danger of pastoral caregivers “using” other people’s stories and then trying to put others’ stories in their own words or frameworks. By nuancing “interpretation,” Thornton (2000) shifts the potential (and usual reality) of the relationship of the pastoral caregiver and the one who is hurting from “power over” to “mutual relation,” where interpretation cannot be completed until the pastoral caregiver “makes a connection to [his/her] own position as one who brings back the story” (p. 76). Thornton (2000) further states:

Through a radically mutual relationship with people who are different from us, a clearer understanding of who we are and what we are practicing begins to emerge. Radical mutuality places “us” in a situation of being “other.” If we take empowerment seriously this is where it begins, at the point where mutuality makes “us” other. (p. 76)

Thornton acknowledges that such a position is a vulnerable one for pastoral theologians/caregivers, especially if used to being “experts.” Pastoral theologians/caregivers not only have to acknowledge that they cannot fully know the other or her situation, but also they

have to acknowledge and know their own situations, positions, limitations, and privileges through the eyes of the other, as now their own self-understanding depends on the other (Thornton, 2000, p. 77). In this space, pastoral theologian/caregivers are cautioned not to over-rely on their agency in the practice of care, as care is equally dependent on the other's agency.

I value Thornton's insights on "mutual relation" because it requires and calls forth deep respect for the other and for ourselves as God's creation in relation and is consistent with a feminist Lutheran pastoral theological understanding of agency. Pastoral theological practices that contribute to the co-construction of agency and invite unsuffering are shaped by the "both/and" dynamic and the "both/and" stories that are made possible by joining a theology of the cross and baptismal theology. No longer is care one-directional. Care is that which happens between both the caregiver and the one who is suffering: both are agential subjects who can learn from one another; both are collaborators in care; both are changed in mutual relationship, and the vocations of both are expanded. By participating together, agency is invited and increased, and unsuffering is experienced.

I look forward to continuing research in the areas of theological and experiential connections/disconnections that people make between a theology of the cross, a theology of baptism, and agency. Opportunities to meet individually and collectively with people in the church to reflect on their experiences and insider knowledges of agency (that so often go unheard, unknown, and unstoried) could provide them with opportunities to have their stories/agency witnessed in ways that would further affirm and invite their agency as well as generate new understandings of agency and theology for the church. I not only anticipate that future work in this area will contribute to pastoral theological practice that invites agency and

unsuffering, but also I suspect and hope that the work itself will be an experience of agency and unsuffering for all who choose to participate.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Describe a time when you felt silenced, felt that your experience or opinion didn't get listened to, or felt that your agency was diminished or denied in the church?
 - a. When and how did you know your voice and/or agency were being compromised?
 - b. How did your faith/theology, particularly a theology of the cross, inform/explain/account for what you were experiencing?
2. What was the turning point, or when and how did you know that this situation needed to change for you?
 - a. What did you know or imagine needed to happen?
 - b. How did you prepare yourself to speak/act? What were things you said to yourself or did to help you act?
 - c. What was/were the action(s) you took?
 - d. What faith or religious beliefs guided you and/or helped you act in this situation? As a Lutheran, what role (if any) did the theology of the cross play in guiding and/or assisting you to act in this situation?
3. How/when did you recognize and/or come to know agency throughout this situation?
 - a. What did it look like, sound like, feel like, etc. before, during, and after this situation?
 - b. Has your definition of agency shifted/changed because of your experience and actions? If so, how?
 - c. Has your knowledge--shaped by your family background, local culture, community, educational experiences, other life experiences, and/or faith/religious beliefs-- about how a woman should use agency been challenged, changed, or affirmed by this situation and your decision to act? If so, how?
 - d. Did a theology of the cross help you identify agency and act in this situation as well as make meaning of this experience? If so, how?

4. What difference did/has it made for you to have exercised your voice and/or agency in the situation you've described?
 - a. Has agency taught you something about yourself and your theology, particularly a theology of the cross? If so, what?
 - b. Has your theology, particularly a theology of the cross taught you something about agency? If so, what?
 - c. Has this experience in some way prompted a new or revised understanding of the theology of the cross?
 - d. Looking back, who and what in the church could have helped to invite your agency in this situation?
 - e. How has your experience in this situation and learnings about agency affected/impacted/informed you and your actions as a pastor in inviting agency from women?
5. Was there anything in the course of this interview that surprised you, was a new insight for you, or invited you to think about your situation/experience, agency, or a theology of the cross in a new or different way? If so, what?
6. Has this interview and conversation surfaced any feelings, emotions, or issues that you feel you may need to discuss further? If so, do you have someone with whom you could discuss these things, or would you like me to refer you to a professional resource?

One week following the interview, I will call participants and ask if they have had any further thoughts/reflections about questions #5 and #6.

Appendix B

Potential Participant Questionnaire

Please read, complete, sign, and date this form and return it with consent document in envelope provided.

Name:

Address:

Email:

Phone:

1. Briefly state the nature of the situation/experience about which you are willing to be interviewed?

2. When did this experience take place?

3. Have you had adequate time to process the immediate emotions/concerns of this experience?

4. Please identify who/what what has aided you in processing this experience?

5. Do you feel that you are able to participate in this interview without it causing undue stress or discomfort to yourself?

6. If participating in this interview surfaces any feelings, emotions, or issues that you feel may need to be discussed further, do you have someone with whom you can discuss these things?

And/or would you be open to a referral to a professional resource?

7. Please describe your social and geographical location (race, ethnicity, class, education, where you live, etc.):

8. Please describe the social and geographical location/context in which your particular experience occurred:

Your signature on this form verifies that you are an ordained woman in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America who 1) has experienced [an] attempt[s] to be silenced or denied agency within the church and 2) can identify a particular situation/experience in the church in which your [use of] agency helped you move from suffering to unsuffering.

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Survey of Interviews

Interviewee _____

1. Why is agency/experience/voice of Interviewee being diminished, denied, or silenced in the church?

Yes	No	
		<i>Others'</i> expectations (familial, cultural, religious) of how women should exercise agency <i>in general</i>
		<i>Interviewee's</i> own expectations (familial, cultural, religious) of how women should exercise agency <i>in general</i>
		<i>Others'</i> expectations (familial, cultural, religious) of how women should exercise agency <i>in the church</i>
		<i>Interviewee's</i> own expectations (familial, cultural, religious) of how women should exercise agency <i>in the church</i>
		<i>Interviewee</i> is challenged to integrate and claim pastoral identity and pastoral authority
		<i>Others</i> are challenged to respect pastoral identity and pastoral authority of Interviewee
		Pastoral experience considered "limited" (first call vs. long-term pastorate) <i>by others</i>
		Pastoral experience considered "limited" (first call vs. long-term pastorate) <i>by self</i>
		<i>Male pastoral colleagues</i> unable to listen and/or support Interviewee in pastoral role
		<i>Female pastoral colleagues</i> unable to listen and/or support Interviewee in pastoral role
		<i>Male congregational leaders/members</i> unable to listen and/or support Interviewee in pastoral role
		<i>Female congregational leaders/members</i> unable to listen and/or support Interviewee in pastoral role
		<i>Male synodical leaders</i> unable to listen and/or support Interviewee in pastoral role
		<i>Female synodical leaders</i> unable to listen and/or support Interviewee in pastoral role
		Interviewee's approach to/style of leadership is different from that of congregation or colleagues
		Interviewee's agency challenges others' identity/authority
		Interviewee's agency challenges traditions of congregation
		Interviewee's agency challenges theology/theologies of congregation
		Interviewee's agency challenges sexism and/or other abuses of power
		Interviewee's agency exposes a truth or a secret
		Personal and/or professional boundaries are not respected/observed by congregation or colleagues
		Personal and/or professional boundaries are not respected/observed by Interviewee
		Exhaustion, depression, doubts, and/or fears get in the way
		Other:

2. General questions about diminished/denied agency:

Yes	No	
		Does Interviewee utilize her faith/theological beliefs to explain/account for her experience of diminished agency?
		Does Interviewee utilize her faith/theological beliefs to explain/account for her choice to exercise agency?
		Does Interviewee utilize a theology of the cross to explain/account for her experience of diminished agency?
		Does Interviewee utilize a theology of the cross to explain/account for her choice to exercise agency?

3. Interviewee’s Constructions of Agency

Cite interview line numbers with your responses below.

Agency ...	Direct Reference	Indirect Reference	<i>Necessary</i> to Interviewee’s construction of agency	<i>Peripheral</i> to Interviewee’s construction of agency	Construction of agency is <i>directly</i> informed by Interviewee’s theology	Construction of agency is <i>indirectly</i> informed by Interviewee’s theology
is integral to one’s sense of personal identity, authenticity, integrity, and dignity.						
is having a choice about whether/when to speak and/or act						
is “God-given,” or part of one’s (baptismal) identity or “call.”						
is exercised because of one’s identity and authority as a baptized and “called” child of God.						
is exercised because of one’s identity and authority as an ordained pastor.						

is the power, freedom, and responsibility to speak and act on behalf of one's self.						
is the power, freedom, and responsibility to speak and act on behalf of/with others.						
is exercised purposefully to make a difference or to effect change for the good.						
involves taking responsibility for one's words and actions and expecting others to do so as well.						
is the awareness/recognition of personal boundaries and violation of personal boundaries.						
is exercised within a community for the sake of building up or creating a healthier community/world.						
is exercised by one person (personally or pastorally) has the ability to affirm and invite the agency of others.						

Other constructions:						
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4. General questions about agency:

Yes	No	
		Is Interviewee familiar with term/language of “agency?”
		For the purpose of this interview, can Interviewee engage term/language of “agency” to reflect on her actions/voice?
		Does using the term/language of “agency” open up for Interviewee new understandings about her ability to speak/act? Comments:
		Does Interviewee acknowledge that exercising “agency” contributed to her movement from <i>suffering</i> to <i>unsuffering</i> ? Comment:
		Does Interviewee discover/realize something “new” about “agency” or revise her understanding of it in the course of the interview? Comments:

5. Interviewee’s constructions of a Theology of the Cross

Cite interview line numbers with your responses below.

Theology of the cross . . .	Direct Reference	Indirect Reference	<i>Necessary to Interviewee’s theology of a cross</i>	<i>Peripheral to Interviewee’s theology of a cross</i>	Contributes to Interviewee’s <i>exercising of agency</i> in her situation	Contributes to Interviewee’s <i>meaning-making</i> in her situation
Is God’s presence with one in suffering, offering comfort						
Is God’s presence with one in suffering, offering strength, courage, hope to sustain one in midst of suffering.						
Is God’s presence with one in suffering which offers strength, courage, hope in midst of suffering, increasing one’s sense of agency to speak/act in midst of/out of/through suffering.						
Is about suffering/cross/death only.						
Is about resurrection/empty tomb/life only.						
Is about <i>both</i> suffering/death/cross <i>AND</i> life/resurrection/empty tomb.						
Portrays Jesus as passive sufferer.						
Empowers one to endure suffering.						

Impels one to endure suffering at times.						
Empowers and impels one to move through and beyond suffering to new life/resurrection.						
Other constructions:						

6. General questions about a theology of the cross:

Yes	No	
		Can Interviewee engage term/language of “theology of the cross” for purpose of interview? Comments:
		Is a theology of the cross an essential tenet of Interviewee’s overall theology? Comments:
		Is a theology of the cross <i>the</i> central guiding theology informing Interviewee’s sense of agency, or ability to speak/act in her particular situation? Comments:
		Does Interviewee’s interpretation of a theology of the cross affirm/inspire/empower a sense of agency in her particular situation? Comments:
		Does Interviewee’s interpretation of a theology of the cross assist her in making meaning of her particular situation? Comments:
		Does reflecting on a theology of the cross open up new understandings for interviewee about her ability to speak/act? Comments:

		Has Interviewee revised a theology of the cross for her use/application/meaning-making? Comments:
		Did Interviewee discover/realize something “new” about a “theology of the cross” or revise her understanding of it in the course of the interview? Comments:

7. Which of the following theological/faith beliefs does Interviewee identify as informing her constructions/use of “agency”?

	Yes	No	Line number(s) where referenced
Baptismal theology-created in image of God as unique child of God, gifted by Holy Spirit with abilities/purpose			
Sense of “call” related to ordination, pastoral identity/authority			
Priesthood of all believers – we are all called and gifted as part of the body of Christ			
Sense of justice			
Liberation theology – God is on the side of the oppressed, weak, vulnerable			
Prayer			
Particular Bible stories and/or Biblical themes			

<p>Other theological/faith beliefs informing Interviewee’s sense of “agency”:</p>			
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8. What does agency teach Interviewee about her theology?

Cite interview line numbers with your responses below.

<p>Agency teaches about theology</p>	<p>Direct Reference</p>	<p>Indirect Reference</p>	<p><i>Related to Interviewee’s construction of a theology of the cross</i></p>	<p><i>Not related to Interviewee’s construction of a theology of the cross:</i></p>
<p>By speaking/acting one lives out identity and uses gifts given by God/Holy Spirit in baptism.</p>				
<p>Speaking/acting/using gifts given can effect change – that is positive and for the “good.”</p>				
<p>One can/should use gifts on behalf of one’s self, trusting one is “worthy.”</p>				
<p>One can/should use gifts on behalf/for the sake of one’s community, trusting all God’s people are “worthy.”</p>				
<p>One’s experiences of exercising agency <i>revise</i> one’s understanding/images of and relationship to God.</p>				

One's experiences of exercising agency <i>expand</i> one's understanding/images of and relationship to God.				
One's expanded understanding/images of God increase one's sense of and knowledge about agency.				
That how/why one chooses to speak/act may not "fit" into the theology she has been taught.				
That the church can both <i>be</i> and <i>create</i> a space where agency is affirmed, explored, and respected.				
That the church and various theologies can disregard certain voices/experiences, limiting one's agency and thus limiting the community's agency.				
What else does agency teach Interviewee about her theology?				

9. What does theology teach Interviewee about agency?

Theology teaches about agency ...	Direct Reference	Indirect Reference	<i>Related to</i> Interviewee's construction of a theology of the cross	<i>Not related to</i> Interviewee's construction of a theology of the cross
In baptism one is worthy and gifted, thus who one is, one's gifts, one's voice are to be affirmed and used and are needed.				

In baptism others, too, are worthy and gifted, thus their gifts, voices, agency are needed and are to be affirmed and invited/encouraged.				
There is a connection between one's actions and one's theology in daily life.				
There are parameters, or limits, to one's sense of agency.				
That there are risks and consequences involved in exercising agency.				
One's ability to act in situations of suffering (to change the situation) comes from believing in and clinging to hope/new life/resurrection.				
God's presence with one in suffering empowers one to use agency in circumstances of great challenge to change the situation/relieve the suffering.				
God's presence with one in suffering enables one to choose what one does with the suffering.				
God's presence with one enables her to be present for others and to use her agency in caring for others, especially with/for those who have less power and voice.				

One has a choice of how to define a situation and herself and how to act/respond in a situation.				
Because “we” are called to be the people of God, we are called to use our agency differently – not just for ourselves but for building up one another.				
Because “we” are called to be the people of God, we are called to use our agency to recognize and name “evil” – in ourselves, each other, and the world.				
What else does theology teach Interviewee about agency?				

10. Images of Agency

Which of the following characteristics do Interviewee’s “image(s)” of agency evoke?

X		X	
	Identity		Hope
	Strength		Communal
	Courage		Faith
	Resilience		Creativity
	Possibilities		Growth
	Integration of self (personal/professional/pastoral)		Relational
	Other characteristics (not listed):		

11. How does Interviewee describe “suffering” in her experience of decreased and/or denied agency?

X	Suffering involves:	X	Suffering involves:
	Relying on God for strength so that one can muster the energy and endurance to keep exercising agency		Anger especially at injustice
	Protecting most vulnerable which sometimes means the one causing harm can't be fully exposed or held accountable		One's abilities and/or experiences not being acknowledged and/or trusted
	Frustration		Disappointment in self
	Loneliness		Being stifled or silenced
	Not being heard		Unable to be fully oneself
	Feeling threatened, or not feeling safe		Hopeless
	Not being informed or given access to information		Humiliation/Shame
	Oppression and/or domination by another		Being treated as less-than
	Having to prove oneself		Not being able to trust the synod for support/help
	Feeling “stuck”		Other descriptions of suffering?

12. General questions about “suffering”:

Yes	No	
		Does Interviewee describe “suffering” as a result of her neglecting/denying her own voice/agency?
		Does Interviewee describe “suffering” as a result of others’ neglecting/denying her voice/agency?

	Is “suffering” a result/consequence of Interviewee’s choice to exercise agency in her particular situation? Comments:
	Does Interviewee describe “suffering” as an “active” experience? Comments:
	Does Interviewee describe “suffering” as a “passive” experience? Comments:
	Is Interviewee’s understanding of “suffering” informed by a theology of the cross? Comments:
	Did Interviewee discover/realize something “new” about “suffering” in the course of the interview? Comments:

13. How does Interviewee describe “un-suffering” in her experience of decreased and/or denied agency?

“X”	Unsuffering involves:	“X”	Unsuffering involves:
	Ability to take action in midst of suffering		To trust agency given to one by God and to use it
	Ability to choose how to react to/deal with/move through suffering		Emerging through suffering, or prevailing
	Being heard		Being empowered
	Bringing good out of bad		Resilience and strength
	To know brokenness of world in different way because of having been through it		Liberation, freedom, and joy in claiming one’s identity and integrity

	A shifting in one's self and recognition of strength one didn't know or couldn't claim before		A feeling of solidarity with others
	Joy that comes with recognition of using one's agency for leading/speaking effectively and bringing healing		Sense of peace for one's self and within relationship
	Opposite of suffering, the part of a person not hurting		Naming one's reality, not denying it
	Reversal of suffering		A process of working out of the suffering
	Absence of suffering		Other descriptions (not listed above):

14. General questions about "un-suffering":

Yes	No	
		Is Interviewee familiar with term/language of "un-suffering"?
		Is Interviewee able to engage term/language of "un-suffering" for purpose of interview?
		Does interviewee describe "un-suffering" as an "active" experience? Comments:
		Does interviewee describe "un-suffering" a "passive" experience? Comments:
		Does Interviewee identify movement from "suffering" to "un-suffering" in her particular experience? Comments:
		Does Interviewee identify "un-suffering" as a result/consequence of her choice to exercise agency in her particular situation? Comments:

	Does Interviewee identify “un-suffering” as a result/consequence of others exercising agency in her particular situation? Comments:
	Is Interviewee’s understanding of “un-suffering” informed by a theology of the cross? Comments:
	Did Interviewee discover/realize something “new” about “un-suffering” in the course of the interview? Comments:

15. Who/what invites “agency” from Interviewee?

“X”	Interviewee’s “agency” invited by ...	“X”	Interviewee’s “agency” invited by ...
	Congregational members, leaders, and committees who listen, support, speak up, and challenge the status quo		Communication between church council, members, leaders, and pastor (all people involved) that is honest and direct
	Synod staff who listen, support, communicate with pastor and not undermine voice/authority		Being/working/living in a context where one’s voice is heard and validated
	Synod staff who provide appropriate and multiple resources and is honest about context of congregation pastor is entering		Time and support (of others) through the challenges
	People who “speak up” and who can “challenge”		Male pastoral colleagues and men in leadership positions who speak up and challenge those who attempt to silence women
	Spiritual directors		Female pastoral colleagues and women in leadership positions who speak up, are assertive for other women, and challenge those who attempt to silence women

	Counselors		Not using excuses of “institutional mentality” or “that’s the way things are” (which can keep men and women from acting and recognizing agency)
	Colleagues		Thinking in a “we” mode rather than us/them
	Friends		Recognition of “problems” and a willingness to engage them rather than discount or deny
	Family		Access to information
	Mentors/role models, especially for first call pastors		Knowledge of appropriate resources/theories for different situations, not a “one size fits all” model
	Other ways agency is invited (not listed above):		

16. How does Interviewee invite “agency” from other women?

Interviewee invites “agency” from women by ...	X	Invitation informed by a <i>theology of the cross</i>	Invitation informed by <i>other theologies/faith beliefs?</i>	If informed by other theologies/faith beliefs, please identify.
Respecting fear women have				
Respecting boundaries of women				
Setting boundaries where needed				
Empowering where there’s been disempowerment				

Using authority of pastoral office to advocate, make safe space, etc.				
Listening reflectively; don't jump to conclusions and don't assume you know what's "wrong" with a person				
Learning to listen even BETTER				
Building relationships with women; be mindful of our support to one another and how we women in systems and relationships speak of ourselves				
Giving permission to be "truth-tellers"				
Empowering women to name reality for what it is				
Empowering women to say when something is not their fault, and helping them own what is theirs to own				
Asking women how they're dealing with situations and asking "how do you see God in this?"				
Helping women see things in new ways				

Seeing, affirming, and giving women an opportunity to use their gifts				
Empowering women to explore their “calls”				
Using Serenity Prayer – what can you change? What can’t you? Finding strength in realizing what’s about you and what’s not.				
Preaching sermons that speak to women				
Recognizing that many women are survivors of abuse and need someone safe to talk to; being mindful of how you speak about forgiveness				
Reminding women they have a right to express their opinion and to speak				
Teaching women to speak – how to be assertive and not aggressive				
Respecting anger women have				
Other ways in which Interviewee invites “agency” from women?				

17. Any other “new” realizations Interviewee discovered about agency, theology, themselves, etc. in the course of the interview?

18. Other comments/observations about interview?

Appendix D

Key to Survey of Interviews

- Construction:** What an Interviewee creates/puts together as her definition or understanding of a concept, belief, theology, etc.
- Direct Reference:** Interviewee states claim/reference in her own words.
- Indirect Reference:** Reader interprets reference based on Interviewee's comments in context of interview.
- Necessary:** Central to Interviewee's constructions/understanding/beliefs and stated by Interviewee in context of interview.
- Peripheral:** Not essential yet relevant to and informative of Interviewee's constructions/understanding/beliefs as interpreted by Reader based on Interviewee's statements in context of interview.
- "Contributes to":** Aids/informs/promotes
- "Related to":** Interviewee identifies connection, or Reader interprets connection between two things based on Interviewee's comments in context of interview
- "Not related to":** Interviewee does not identify a connection, or Reader interprets there is no connection between two things based on Interviewee's comments in context of interview

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