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SAVED AND SANCTIFIED: SPACES OF BLACK YOUTH IN TWO ONENESS
PENTECOSTAL STOREFRONT CHURCHES

by

MARCUS K. WOODS

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Dr. Daniel Hart

And approved by

Dr. Daniel Hart

Dr. Lauren Silver

Dr. Joseph Williams

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Saved and Sanctified: Spaces of Black Youth in Two Oneness Pentecostal Storefront

Churches

by MARCUS KEITH WOODS

Dissertation Director:

Dr. Daniel Hart

This dissertation examines the spiritual lives of a group of urban youth in two storefront churches in Trenton, NJ. The youth are all members of Oneness Pentecostal churches. In this work, I examine the lives of youth through the prisms of gender, music, and education. My child-centered approach uses qualitative methods and the words and perspectives of the youth themselves in order to capture the experiences and understanding of spirituality. This project also investigates the role that the young Pentecostals in these churches play in the popularity and growth of Pentecostalism in America.

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Chapter 1

Background and Methodology

It's a lot more to deal with these days than when the older ones were young. It's the same stuff, but it's just out there more. Sex, drugs, partying. Even homosexuality. It's all in youth face. The older generation doesn't get it. They say "it's nothing new under the sun". But the way some things is presented is new. Young people are getting caught up in the internet. These cell phones. It's a whole bunch of stuff that the older ones never had to deal with. It's a new age and you try to hold on to God, but there's a lot out there, man. There's so much more stuff out there" ~Mitchell, 21

Mitchell offered this response when I asked him about what it was like to be a young Pentecostal. His nuanced and layered answer hints at the vibrant Pentecostal identities that are highlighted in this research. Mitchell, like many Pentecostals, considers his spirituality to be at the core of his identity. At the same time, he recognizes that although many Pentecostals share a common core of beliefs, the way that young Pentecostals identify is unique from adult Pentecostals. Mitchell acknowledges that there are generational differences in how Pentecostals construct and present their identities.

The youth in this study are convinced that they face new and unique challenges. Young Pentecostals navigate an existence where they are simultaneously holding on to a conservative theology while at the same time trying to fit 21st century youth identities into their Christian worldview. As a result of the changing urban environment, the youth of this study are constructing new boundaries of Pentecostal identity and redefining modern day Pentecostalism. While some aspects of Pentecostal are rigid and inflexible, youth have managed to modify how it is practiced and defined in their local churches. Some facets of dogma like gender norms and a prohibition of women being ordained are resistant to change. Still, young people are changing how Pentecostals worship and socialize in youth populated spaces such as music and education.

My research with urban Oneness Pentecostals focuses on youth in two storefront churches in Trenton, NJ. Traditionally, storefront churches are those that are housed in former retail establishments. They have been ubiquitous in the urban landscape since the great migration of the early 20th century, when huge numbers of southern blacks moved to northern cities and needed structures to worship in (Sernett, 1997). Historically, they have been centers where poor blacks could find leadership, acceptance, and social services. The Pentecostals in this story consider their religious tradition born out of the American black church.

The flexible use of urban spaces is in some ways a parallel to the way that young Pentecostals are carving out new roles and authority in their local churches. As these church congregations are reimagining how to use former stores, community centers, gyms, etc. for their own use, youth are reimagining spaces of music and education in their churches for their own use as well. For eighteen months, I engaged in fieldwork and I looked at that dynamic interplay between youth and the storefront churches they attend. I attempted to understand the appeal of this brand of Pentecostalism and reasons why youth were willing to modify their identities in order to attend church. What about Pentecostalism draws them in? I also attempted to understand the power of youth and their ability to be agentic beings of change in their local and national church communities. Youth-centered qualitative methods such as youth directed interviews, focus groups, and participant observation helped me to answer these questions (Smith, Lundquist Denton, Faris, & Regnerus, 2002).

Religion and Methodology

The framing of the black church is critical to understanding the lived experiences of the youth at RLCC and Corinth Church. For them, the black church is not merely a group of Christians who happen to be black and attend church together. Instead, the black church acts a social institution is an organization that has had a unique and interesting role in the black community. When I refer to the black church, I am referencing Christian churches that minister to predominantly black congregations in the United States. Many scholars have grouped these types of churches together because these black churches have long been centers of black communities. Black churches have been the birth places of black social groups, schools, and providers of social services. Additionally black churches were centers of leadership and protest during the Civil Rights Movement. While I understand that the black church is a broad term that may be problematic at times, I find its broadness useful in explaining the present traditions at the churches in this study. Using the term allows me to identify churches based off of broad similarities that are common in many predominantly black congregations.

There are numerous scholars who speak to the diversity of African American churches. For many of those scholars, writing about the “black church” in the singular, essentializes the experience of being a black Christian in America (Savage, 2009). Throughout my research, one of my main goals was to speak to the diversity of the individuals who are in predominantly black churches. By no means am I saying that there are universal qualities or attributes that every black Christian or every predominantly black church shares. I draw no sweeping conclusions about Oneness Pentecostals based off of this study of two distinct churches. However, I do use the term “the black church”

sparingly in this opening chapter in order to place the youth and adults at my research sites in a historical context and lineage of black Americans who attend predominantly black churches in urban areas.

Understanding the black church also helps to frame the social and romantic interactions of youth at both churches. Youth at both sites look to the church as a source of close intimate friends, as well romantic partners. Understanding how the black church helps to facilitate friendships and relationships between individuals who share the same cultural and spiritual values helps to illuminate my chapters on marriage as well as the chapter on education. In both of them, one can see how their churches act as the foundation of youths' social networks. With that in mind, the following review of the literature highlights research on the black church in America in regard to the social networks, agency, and /or material objects that the church has provided to its members.

The Black Church

The study of urban Pentecostal parallels the tradition of the black American church. While not all Pentecostals are black, the Pentecostals in this study link their faith to the traditions and histories of the black church. One important topic that is missing in the literature on black youth in churches is the diversity of African American Christians (Eric Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Lincoln, 1963). Even when looking at a particular time period, or geographic location, there is a tendency for scholars to ignore the role that class, education level, and even skin color have played in the formation of black churches (Elisa Keer, 2005). Critically analyzing these religious institutions and

practices is the only way to ensure that voices are not left out just because they were not the loudest or the ones in power

Not only have sociologists stressed the historical importance of the church in the black community, but they have highlighted how the black church has performed a number of services for the black community outside of religious instruction (Zimmerman, 2000). W.E.B. Du Bois' late 19th century analysis of the black church was one of the earliest. Du Bois centered his work on looking at the effect black churches had on the black population. He studied the sociological impact of churches through surveys, historical interviews, and participant observations. He argued that one could not look at the history of churches without looking at how they were hurting and/or helping black people. Their dogmatic practices and concerns were not the most important attributes of churches. In fact, Du Bois plainly states that churches were "social institutions first, religious afterward" (14). A study of the urban church could not be separated from urban development. Du Bois' qualitative analysis is one of the bedrocks of literature on the black church. The notion that the black church acts as much more than a religious institution is one of the central themes of my project.

The religious function that the church fills is not the most important or effective intervention in the lives of black people (Logan & Freeman, 2000). The black church is one of the few institutions in the African American community that is primarily built, financed, and controlled by African Americans. As an institution, "it represents the soul of African American culture" (211) because it has been one of the few places that blacks could congregate away from the gaze of whites. Many blacks attend churches not for religious instruction, but for what they can obtain from the church as an institution

(Brashears & Margaret, 2001). In Brashears' study, as many as 81% of blacks identified themselves as church members, yet only 31% attend church for religious reasons. If historically blacks have not attended church solely for religious reasons, they must be obtaining something else.

Many of the political victories in black America (The Civil Rights Movement, Brown vs. Board of Education, desegregation, black elected politicians, etc.) were only possible through the help of the black church (Pinn A. , 2007, 2002). The church has served as a place where black leaders across denominations and religious lines could meet to discuss political activism. The political progress also had impact for black Christian on a local micro level.

The church provided services to poor, disenfranchised blacks. However, poor blacks were not passive recipients of aid, but played a major role in churches through their participation (Livezey, 2000). Contemporary research has given voice to poor, black church members who are often seen as passive non-actors in scholarly research. The black church stands as an anchor in the black community with no other comparable social institution.

The black church has also served as a social health institution throughout its history (Blank, 2002; Hilton 2009). It has consistently provided provide mental health services and has played a “dominant role as an informal social service provider throughout its history” (1668). Blank found that churches provided a wide range of services that contributed to the psychological wellbeing of blacks.

Most important for this work is to understand the role that youth played in black churches. It is important to understand what youth both bring to and take away from the

church. Youth obtained an education, leadership skills, and social skills from their black churches (Hilton 2009). If the function of the black church is viewed through an educational lens, it becomes apparent that black churches provided urban blacks the opportunity to learn to read and write as well as learn social skills and community building. Although education may not have originally been an explicit function of the early black church, it has been a way for blacks to make sense of the world and create a new societal order in which they are not oppressed.

Solely focusing on adults in the black church overlooks the unique and powerful role that youth in the black church have played throughout its history (Ji & Tameifuna, 2011). Youth who are religious are more civically engaged in their communities, are more likely to show compassion to their neighbors, and believe in social justice (Furrow, King, White, 2004). For highly religious youth, “Everyday morality seems to be rooted in an essential identity rather than being mediated by calculated reason” (20). Because of their faith they felt that their morality was deep and intrinsic to them. (Furrow, King, White, 2004). That sense of morality youth have from being religious also results in them gaining transferable skills and being able to use those skills in their communities. There is a correlation between religiosity and prosocial behavior. Youth who were more engaged in their religious institutions were more likely to attend school, be civically engaged, volunteer, and have healthy relationships with their family and peers.

Lastly, it is imperative to remember that young men and women have had different experiences with the black church, however the voices of women are lacking from the historiography of the black church (Higginbotham 1993). Women have always outnumbered men in the black church so it is surprising that their voices are essentially

absent. In the Baptists church history, there was a mostly middle and upper class group of professional, working women that “attempted to transform behaviors of the “poor, uneducated, and unassimilated” people of the rural south (15). This Baptist movement was a predecessor of the black women’s organization movement. Baptist women were able to stress normative ideas of acceptable behavior that were passed on to working class and poor blacks through their churches.

Additionally, there are researchers who have investigated the role that women played in the Pentecostal movement. Anthea Butler researches women in the Church of God in Christ, one of the largest black Pentecostal organizations in America, and the role of women in that organization and the Pentecostal movement. So there are some studies that have sought to fill in a gap and address the role of women in Pentecostal churches.

This literature helps to put the stories of youth in this dissertation into context. While their lives and stories are interesting and unique, they are not suspended in time. The practices and beliefs of these Pentecostal youth follow a trajectory of black urban Christians.

Specifically, my work highlights the narratives of individuals who are double oppressed. Much of the research on the black church excludes youth and their salient religious identity. At the same time, it excludes the stories of youth from churches in poverty stricken areas. My research pulls those two themes together. Missing from the literature in both childhood studies and religious studies are the stories and perspectives of religious youth who are attending churches in poor cities like Trenton, NJ USA.

Methodology

As a scholar of children, I believe that the spiritual and religious identity formation of young people is a critical part of their lives. Their experiences are important beyond simply how they relate to adults. Youth spirituality in itself is a fascinating and complicated set of processes that are worthy of being studied.

I interviewed eleven youth for this study and these youth live drastically different lives from each other. They range in age from six to thirty-four. I had IRB approval before starting my interviews with youth and other church members. I gave the youth as well as their churches pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. Some of the youth live in poverty-stricken urban Trenton, while others have moved to more affluent suburbs. They come in a variety of complexions, socio-economic groups, and backgrounds. However, their faith unites them. Each week they make the trek to small storefront churches in order to practice their faith, connect with God, and become part of a community with other Christians. At the heart of this project is not only what drives those young people to be practicing Pentecostals, but what are some of the effects that being a young Pentecostal has on their relations with one another, adults in the church, and people outside of the church?

Church Sites

Rock of Love Community Church

My main research site was a small, storefront Pentecostal church in Trenton, NJ. Located next to a night club, it shared a building with a barber shop. The church is made up of half a dozen families and most of the parents of the families grew up in the city of Trenton. The pastor, Elder Kinderson, moved out of the city about 15 years ago with his wife and children to a nearby suburb. Most of his family members are still living in the city.

The social structure of the church is organized into two groups, adult members and young people. The young people are governed by a board called the Armor Bearers Young People Union (A.B.Y.P.U). This arm of the church is centered on organizing church services and social events that are specifically geared for members of the church who are 35 years and under. The pastor's daughter, who is in her late 20s, is the president of the church's A.B.Y.P.U. The local division of the A.B.Y.P.U is governed by a larger regional organization and a statewide version of the organization. The pastor's son is an officer on the larger, state organization. The state and local organizations both have 5-6 people on their leadership boards.

The Rock of Love Community Church has been a storefront church for the past 16 years. The pastor and many of the members came from another Oneness Pentecostal church in Trenton and left together in order to form RLCC. For 15 years, the members of RLCC rented a room in a neighborhood center in an adjacent suburb. In the summer of 2011, the members of RLCC found the building that they are now in. The members of RLCC consider this space to be God's fulfillment of a promise. Years of renting in the

center and not being able to personalize the space made the members desperate for their own building.

Corinth Church

Corinth Church is another small Pentecostal church in Trenton, NJ. Corinth Church and RLCC are both members of the same national Pentecostal organization. The church is located about 2 miles away from RLCC. The pastor of Corinth is in his 40s and a father of three. He too was born and raised in Trenton, NJ, but moved out of the city about five years ago. The pastor, Elder Vicks, shares family ties with the Elder Kinderson from RLCC. Elder Vick married one of Elder Kinderson's younger sisters, making them brothers-in law. Additionally, he and his wife formerly attended the same church as Elder Kinderson. They studied under the same pastor. (This denomination of Pentecostalism stresses the importance of apprenticing under an established pastor, rather than a degree in divinity or theology).

The members of both churches are connected through family and friendship. Many of the members previously attended the larger church in Trenton where Elder Kinderson and Elder Vick were both trained. The national organization stresses partnership and unity, but there is tension between leaders of both churches at times. Elder Vick has suggested that both small churches merge and become one larger church. However, disagreements about who would be the leader of a unified church stopped the discussion of unification. For the most part, both churches serve working class and

middle class black Pentecostals in Trenton and its surrounding suburbs. The membership at both churches is entirely made up of African Americans.

Before starting my observations, I used the following research questions to guide my research:

What do urban youth gain from Pentecostalism in storefront churches?

I wanted to find out why these specific youth are attending these particular religious institutions. I found that the reasons for attendance were varied, complex and connected. I discovered that youth gained skills, friendships and relationships in the churches of which they were members (Smith, 2003). Christian Smith says that this is because “the idea is that American religious congregations can provide relatively dense networks of relational ties within which youth are embedded” (260). Through answering this question, I told the story of the characteristics of youth as well as the benefits of membership at a storefront church. By answering this question, I contribute to scholarship that views religious youth as beings of agency. I discovered that many youth left other churches and their families in order to obtain a deeper sense of spirituality from their churches and pastors. By questioning what they gained, I was able to frame my project with the perspective that youth were actively seeking skills and resources from Pentecostalism, and not merely participating because their parents or families were. In fact, several of these youth attended church while their families were not religious.

How do youth construct an identity that is distinct from both adult Pentecostals and other black urban youth in their neighborhoods?

When Pentecostal Youth talk about the sacrifices they make in order to be regular members of the church, it is often much more nuanced and detailed than adult church-

goers think. Youth walk a narrow line where they give up enough of themselves to create a separation between themselves and non-Christian youth. Research shows that adolescents make a conscious choice to give up aspects of their behaviors and personalities that are out of line with the religious institutions that they attend (Good & Willoughby, 2008). At the same time, youth do not give up so much that they are completely disconnected from non-religious peers (Bramadat, 2000). In order to construct an identity as Pentecostal, youth walk a fine line as both Pentecostal and as young people. I was interested in observing the ways that youth construct an identity where they view themselves as similar and/or different from adults and in what contexts they felt that way. I used the interviews of both adults and youth and investigated any real or imagined lines of demarcation between youth and adults. I also investigated the border zone between youth-hood and adulthood and found that the boundaries were not always defined and easily articulated.

What role do youth play in Pentecostalism's popularity?

How are youth conceived in relation to the survival and momentum of Pentecostalism?

At the least, they are the reason that Pentecostalism is able to grow. Many of the recruitment activities were centered on youth at the church. The three focal points of the dissertation (marriage, education, and music) were all ways to recruit, retain, and train youth. Marriage is used as a foundation by which more youth can be brought into the church. Education and music were a way of culturally reproducing. Specifically, I was interested in the qualities that young people brought with them to the church and putting that into a context with what adults wanted youth to bring to the church? I aimed to discover if the way that young people were practicing and changing their faith at these

two local churches contributing to growth on an individual church level (Brodwin, 2003). I hypothesized that there may be a disconnect between the perspectives of youth and adult Pentecostals. Youth focused on the interesting ways that they worship and new traditions that they brought in regard to education. Adults and leadership focused more on the skills and energy that youth brought and how that fits into the existing framework of the Pentecostal church.

In order to answer these questions, I needed to ground my research in a theory that would highlight the narratives of Pentecostal youth and make sense of their everyday practices. After preliminary findings, I choose to pair the classical theory of Michel de Certeau (Certeau, 1984) with the more contemporary theories of Nikki Jones (Jones 2009) in order to shed light on the stories of youth at RLCC and Corinth Church.

Theoretical Framework

This project is partly rooted in the theories of Michel de Certeau. In one of his seminal works, *The Practice of Every Day Life*, de Certeau suggests looking at the smaller, everyday choices that an individual makes, rather than focusing on isolated, larger events (Certeau, 1984). By changing his/her vantage point, a researcher can be exposed to interesting processes that might otherwise be ignored. Once we as researchers accomplish that task the goal of a more robust understanding “will be achieved if every day practices of operating or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity” (xi). The obscure background that de Certeau refers to is actually the important and foundational part of people’s experiences. Only by

highlighting and exposing everyday practices can I understand the larger structural context in which young storefront Pentecostals are making decisions.

De Certeau further highlights this point in his metaphor of walking in New York City. He argues that from the top of the Empire State Building, NYC looks orderly. The traffic all goes in correct directions and the streets are calm. It is only by going to the street level that one can see acts of disorder and agency. People are walking on grass, jaywalking, and going in wrong directions. From the high view, “Surveys of routes miss what was: the act itself of passing by. The operation of walking... that is the activity of passers-by is transformed into points that draw a totalizing and reversible line” (97). This seems to me to be the perfect metaphor for my study of youth. From a distance, it may appear as if their actions are all accommodating to a faith that suppresses their individuality. Once I used de Certeau's paradigm, I got closer to the ground and saw the acts of agency and subversion that youth are engaged in. Like pedestrians making their own rules on the city streets of NYC, Pentecostal youth are making their own rules in the pews and pulpits of storefront Pentecostal churches. In one sense the youth in this study are actors navigating the streets, nooks, and crannies of their world and finding spaces to follow, invert, and break rules. At other times, youth actively reinforce the notion of structured, orderly churches where individuals behave “appropriately.” More often than not, youth move back and forth between the two perspectives, making their experiences complex, fluid, and dynamic.

It was only through the street level approach that I could understand and examine the nuances of identity that are being displayed at any moment. Gestures, song selections, choices of titles, conversations with other youth then become examples of one

falling in line with or breaking out of the expectations of behavior and conduct for Pentecostal youth. I believe that a lot of the agency that youth employ is overlooked unless a scholar recognizes the multiple perspectives of youth and attempts to examine their research participant from a number of angles.

Sociologist Nikki Jones provides a useful framework for viewing the behaviors and actions of black Pentecostal youth. Jones' work centered on young black girls in Philadelphia. She remarks that those youth were often described in ways that made them seem strange or exotic. Jones approaches all of her research subjects as individuals who are making choices that serve an intended purpose, but that purpose may be specific to the setting in which they find themselves. She makes a conscious effort to explain how the violent choices of the youth make sense in the context of the youths' environments, even though researchers have traditionally considered those behaviors as inherently strange and abnormal. Jones argues that when some ethnographers research marginalized groups, that they "begin from a point of ignorance instead of from a point of understanding and commonality" and "have the effect of making others under study more unintelligible than they ever really were" (Jones, 2009). Jones' approach requires a researcher to be reflexive in admitting that there is very little that he/she knows about participants and that even the framework for a research project can be built upon incorrect assumptions and characterizations. For me, I had to constantly be reflexive and look for examples and patterns that were contrary to what I would have expected (Rios, 2011; Smith, 1990; Collins, 1990).

The theoretical framework for this project informed how I went about collecting and analyzing the data through my observations and interviews. I spent three months

from October 2011 to January 2012 doing preliminary research at RLCC and Corinth Church. In that time, I explained my research questions and project to the pastors at both churches, Elder Kinderson and Elder Vick, in order to get permission and endorsement from the rest of the church congregations. Elder Kinderson and Elder Vick were enthusiastic that I was centering my work on Pentecostalism and excited and supportive that I had chosen their churches as my research sites. At RLCC, I was also able to explain my research to members during a Sunday morning service. Therefore, the congregation at RLCC was able to more concretely understand the work that I was doing. Both pastors were gatekeepers who I believed helped to motivate congregants to participate in interviews. Since I am a Pentecostal believer, both pastors frequently reminded members that by supporting me, they were supporting a fellow believer. Additionally, both pastors framed my research in a way that unless congregants were open for interviews, I would not be able to successfully write my dissertation and graduate.

I was a participant observer at both sites, but at RLCC I was much more engaged as a participant. As a regular member for 16 years, there were roles and responsibilities that I had in regard to leading worship, collecting/counting offering, and helping out with communion. Being a member of the church allowed me to have access to members, church records, and business meetings that an outsider would not have had. My kinship and friendship ties with members of both churches created an atmosphere where participants were comfortable chatting with me about their personal feelings about the church, and their own faith. Beyond interviews, members allowed me access into their homes and personal lives. These responsibilities came at the expense of my research occasionally, because I see myself as a Christian first, and a researcher second. When

there was tension between my role as a church member and as a researcher, I typically deferred to my church status. My thinking was that this research is temporary, but my spiritual life is at the core of who I am. To put it second to research, would be putting my schooling above God. For instance, in very emotional points of worship or sermons, I would stop writing because I was so invested in what was going on.

Being a member of the churches was both a benefit and an obstacle. As a member for over sixteen years, I understood the way that service was run. I understood the dogma and doctrine of Pentecostalism as well as the cultural practices. I also had the trust of members and leadership so they were willing to open up to me about their experiences as members. The caveat is that members had a hard time separating my role as a member from my role as a researcher. I was often chided for taking field notes and asking questions. I regularly got told to “Put the notebook down and enjoy service” or asked, “What are you writing in that book? [Field notebook]”. The process of submitting a proposal, doing research, analyzing data, and presenting it were foreign concepts to members of my local church, where no one else had a college degree. I was confronted with comments like, “Why is it taking you so long?” and “just write faster”.

The participant observation part of my research lasted 18 months. During my 18 months of research, I regularly attended services at RLCC at least three times a month. I was also present for young people's meetings, young people's services, and services that occurred during the week. In order to remain as reflexive as possible, I also regularly attended a second church, Corinth Church at least once a month. Observing services at Corinth Church allowed me to see if behaviors, norms, and spirituality at RLCC were unique or if there were similarities with other Oneness Pentecostal youth.

My idea to do research occurred after a serendipitous trip to see friends at Corinth Church. I had completed about six weeks of participant observations at RLCC at the time. As I sat through the Sunday school lesson there, I realized that although Corinth used the same Sunday school books as RLCC, the organization of the classes and the way that Sunday school ran was different from RLCC. At Corinth Church, the Sunday school leader followed the script of the book, while Sunday school leaders at RLCC went away from the book and ran class in a more free and explorative way. Additionally the way that the participants engage in prayer is very different at Corinth. Those two incidents made me realize that I was doing myself a disservice by only observing the church that I regularly attend. What I realized was that actions and behaviors that I thought were common parts of the Pentecostal tradition were in fact unique to each church. My sixteen years at RLCC had caused many distinct behaviors and traditions to become normalized. This realization encouraged my decision to broaden my research project and include Corinth church as a second research site. Also, adding a field site would mean that I could get more stories from more youth. Additionally, regularly trips to Corinth would force me to reflect on what I considered to be everyday practices that were actually specific and unique ones.

Additionally, what I realized was that actions and behaviors that I thought were common parts of the Pentecostal tradition were in fact unique to each church. While I use the term “Pentecostal” at numerous points to describe trends associated with these churches, I am very aware that the movement is very large, very diverse, and my use of the term often applies specifically to the congregations at RLCC and Corinth Church, and not necessarily to all of Pentecostalism.

I spent one Sunday a month at Corinth Church, or two, if there were five Sundays in a particular month. I attended youth services at Corinth in addition to general services. I invited the young people at Corinth church to the youth services at RLCC. I also made sure to attend any combined services at Corinth or RLCC.

The interviews themselves happened over the span of about one year. I conducted focused interviews that lasted from 30-45 minutes. These interviews were open-ended. I interviewed all of the regularly attending young people at RLCC and Corinth Church. In order to give a context to the stories and lives of young people, I conducted interviews with adult members as well. At both churches I interviewed pastors and youth leaders. I interviewed five people who worked with and/or are directly involved with youth in the church and engaged in hundreds of hours of participant observations. I audio-recorded and then transcribed these interviews. I used ATLAS-TI software to code and analyze my interviews and field notes.

I started conducting my interviews at the midpoint of my observations. As I started my analyzing process, I conducted follow up interviews with seven participants. Because of time and distance constraints and for their convenience, these follow ups were done through phone calls and emails. I also supplemented the information I received through interviews and participant observations with an analysis of literature from both churches. I analyzed their weekly programs, their Sunday school books, and any literature that was handed out by anyone in or from the church. The literature was especially helpful in understanding the dogma and doctrine surrounding education programs at both churches. Lastly, I analyzed some websites and social networking sites of churches and members. Social networking sites allowed me to see if the display of

Pentecostalism that was portrayed in interviews and during church services changed drastically across contexts. I looked at church members' Facebook pages, the Facebook pages of each church's youth association, the national web page, and the pages of some of the auxiliaries. The result was that I was able to tap into the stories and experiences from the perspectives of the youth themselves. In order to really understand the complexities of young Pentecostal identities, I needed to "observe" youth in contexts outside of the gaze of adults. In some ways, social media, especially private pages, were a way to see how youth present themselves to other youth. I was able to place those stories into a context by accessing the perspectives and stories of adult gatekeepers in the church.

Reflexivity

I root my understanding of reflexivity in the work of Joseph Maxwell. When Maxwell writes about reflexivity he identifies it as the relationships that exist between the researcher and the participants. Reflexivity is not something done once, because the researcher's relationship with participants is restructured through ongoing contact and stronger personal relationships (Maxwell, 2004). Reflexivity includes the researcher thinking about how he is never separate from the world of his research, but part of that world, even if only as a temporary visitor. Whether it is addressed by itself in an appendix, included in a separate methodology section, or is infused throughout the text, reflexivity must be addressed by contemporary ethnographers (Anderson, 2006; Reed-Danahay, 1997). I was frequently engaged in activities of reflection during this process. Sometimes I was questioned by youth, like Javon, who told me that I was not a young

person and so I would not be able to understand youth. Other times, while typing up field notes and transcribing interviews, I had enough distance from my observations to realize that I was making assumptions. Lastly, my committee, as outsiders to urban Oneness Pentecostalism, was crucial in forcing me to acknowledge and deal with the insider/outsider tension.

My positioning as an ethnographer and researcher played an important role in the construction of the narrative and research project (Clifford, 2003). After all, it is “the ethnographer who in the end assumes an executive, editorial position”. This process involved the intentional and unintentional manipulation of voices (James, 2007). Additionally “authenticity implies authority, reliability, and trustworthiness” and it can “imply universality, encouraging a view that the voice of the child can speak on behalf of the many different, other voices, which might- if allowed to speak-describe rather different children's lives”(James 265). Although, I am an insider as part of the Pentecostal faith and a member of one of the churches, I was an outside when it came to being a young person in the eyes of young children.

While I attempted to highlight the voices and perspectives of youth, that action is rife with assumptions, tension, and complications. Even the notion of finding the "voice" of youth implies that there is some essential singular narrative of the youth in this study. I do not believe that there is a question of whether or not the researcher changes the social environment that he is in. The question is *how* does the researcher affect the environment and did he take this shifts into account when doing his research. In my research I was a youth worker at the church, so I was able to call youth together or even suggest or organize youth services and events.

There were many tensions in my writing because of my closeness to the youth at RLCC and Corinth. It is evident throughout, even in the very pronouns I used. When describing Oneness Pentecostals and their beliefs, I often switched back and forth between first and third person. I left the inconsistent use of first and third person as an example of the extreme difficulty in seeing myself as an objective researcher. Good auto-ethnography extends beyond the isolated individual. It makes connections between the researcher and the world that he has immersed himself in (Anderson, 2006). I believe that this task was easy for me. I did not have to force a connection between myself and the world in which I conducted my research. It was my world. The difficulty was in recording my accounts without being overly sentimental, judgmental, or trying the impossible task of being objective. In my role as president of the Sunday school, it is my personal responsibility to ensure that youth are being given instruction. I have expectations of how I think Pentecostal youth should act and behave. I would get annoyed and judgmental about aspects of youth spirituality that they detailed to me. I had to take a step away from my research and not take the opinions of youth personally. I used examples of earlier 20th century anthropologists to attempt to write a narrative that was not judgmental or trivialized the experiences of my research partners (Mead, 2001; Goffman, 1959).

Likewise, I had to make sure that I viewed the youth's stories as legitimate and valuable examples of spirituality. When Gerald, who was 16 at the time, told me that he didn't need to learn anything about God from older people in the churches because "it was all in the Bible", I initially wrote him off as immature and cocky. After reading the description that I wrote of him, I realized that he wasn't cocky, but he believed in the

ability of God to speak to him the same way that He speaks to adults. What Gerald was saying was that God will teach him through the Bible and that he does not necessarily need people to explain God.

My intention to be open and vulnerable was one that I continued to wrestle with through my entire project. I was often torn between how much of my insights and writing I should allow research partners to be privy with (Cozart, 2010). The questions of how much information to give about my research and the final project were complicated by my status as a member of the church (Ellis, 2007). Several members told me that they thought I was doing a biography of the church. I told them honestly that this was an analysis of the church. I know that many of the members of both churches will read this dissertation. I erred on the side of caution when trying to decide if I was telling too much personal information about a youth. One should be as honest as possible with the individuals that you are doing research with (Ellis, 2007). I went with the advice that I should “Assume everyone in your story will read it...I tell them they don't own their story... That their story is also other people's stories” (25). I treated my research partners as knowledgeable stakeholders in this work and I was honest and forthright.

Perhaps one of the most important issues to take into account is what Martin Buber describes as relational ethics. Buber’s definition of ethics extends to being “true to one’s character and responsible for one’s actions and their consequences on others” (55). The participants in this project are my friends, my loved ones, and spiritual family. Because of that, my code of ethics was tied to my own moral code. For instance, I was told a story about an abortion that one of the youth had. It was a compelling story that would have added to my chapter on sex and gender. However, giving anything more than

cursory details would have exposed the identity of the young women to any church member who read this dissertation. I worried that my attempt to write a compelling narrative would embarrass her and she could suffer socially. In cases like this, I left those stories out.

The challenge of being constantly reflexive about my insider/outsider status is woven throughout the entire dissertation. Some of the data includes my own experiences and language. I did not officially count my own narrative as a data source in my count of eleven youth, but it most definitely is. I revisited the tension of my status in every chapter. Now that I have placed the youth and my research methodology into context, I will discuss the history and the major practices and beliefs of Pentecostalism and some ways that it is uniquely practiced in Trenton, NJ.

The Pentecostal Church in Trenton, New Jersey

Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is a movement in the Christian faith that has swept not only the nation, but the world. The movement, which was started only about one hundred years ago, now represents 5-12% of the Christians in the United States (Smith, 2011). Only two other Christian denominations in America have more followers. Even more astonishing is the growth of Pentecostalism outside of America. With over 500 million followers globally, Pentecostalism is the 3rd largest community of Christians in the world behind Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox. (Stephens, 2010). While many Christian denominations in America are in decline, Pentecostalism continues to attract and retain young people and their families. What are some of the reasons for this amazing growth;

especially among youth? In this project, I will investigate how that popularity plays out in the everyday experiences of particular youth located in Trenton NJ in the U.S. I will investigate that reasons that some youth of color are attracted to the Pentecostal tradition.

Many Pentecostals link their faith's current incarnation to a revival that happened on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906. A revival led by William Seymour resulted in hundreds of Christians "speaking in tongues" and declaring that God's spirit had come back to earth in the form of the Holy Ghost. Seymour was black, and at the time Pentecostal Churches were often more racially integrated than other religious traditions. However, this was already changing by the time Pentecostal denominations were forming. Pentecostals claim that their interpretation of the Bible and their understanding of Jesus is the same as the first century church that is mentioned in the New Testament Bible. Grant Wacker explains that Pentecostalism has the amazing ability to be pragmatic and primitive at the same time (Wacker, 1995). He states that Pentecostalism is primitive because the faith harkens back to the first century church. Primitivism "denotes believers' yearning to be guided solely by God's Spirit in every aspect of their lives, however great or small" and that primitivism is "not so much an upward reach for transcendence as a downward or even backward quest for the infinitely pure and powerful fount of being itself" (12). Pentecostals have one eye looking back to the pure beginnings of the Christian church that Jesus Christ established. The two churches in this study exhibit the primitive aspect of Pentecostalism by harkening back to a unified and holy first century church.

On the other hand, Pentecostalism is pragmatic because "at the end of the day Pentecostals proved remarkable willing to work within the social and cultural

expectations of the church” (13). So while harkening back to an ideal past on one hand, Pentecostalism is adaptable and forward thinking in order to survive and recruit new members all over the world. While reflecting back to an ideal first century church, the Pentecostals in this study must be resourceful enough to adapt their practice of Pentecostalism so that it fits into a 21st century framework. Church Facebook pages, sermons on YouTube, Instagram accounts, open mic nights, and dramatic performances are some of the examples of how both churches use present day culture in order to broadcast services and dogma, as well as recruit new members.

Speaking in tongues as a sign of salvation is one of the bedrocks of salvation at both churches. Speaking in tongues is the production of speech-like syllables. It is a sign of God's Holy Spirit being here on earth. Pentecostals believe that it is a miraculous gift from God. They believe that speaking in tongues can either be a previously unlearned language, or a spiritual language that one uses to communicate with God. Elder Kinderson, the pastor of one of the research sites has said several times, "*You have to pray speaking in tongues sometimes. Your spirit knows what you need from God even when you don't*".

Speaking in tongues can occur during any point of the service by any member. However, during emotionally charged parts of the service, like prayer, praise and worship, or the sermon, the speaking in tongues can be louder and more extreme. Pentecostals use the scriptures of Acts 2:1-4 as a justification for their emphasis for speaking in tongues. Members and church leadership constantly speak about the importance of speaking in tongues and how it "*isn't just for them back then [the first century church], it's for us here and today*". In the belief structures of these two specific

churches, without speaking in tongues, one cannot be sure that the Spirit of God is inside herself.

The actual lineage of Pentecostalism is not as new as Pentecostals would like to believe. The roots of Pentecostalism can be traced back to the first century church. The current practice of Pentecostalism is a continuation of Wesleyan holiness (Wacker, 1995). John Wesley's holiness stressed that it was possible for individuals to live free from sin (actions that are against God's will that causes a rupture in the relationship between an individual and God), because of the transformative power of having a personal relationship with God. Central to holiness beliefs are the two works of grace. The first work of grace is that an individual receives salvation once they accept Christ as their savior and recognize Him as the Son of God and the salvation of humanity. The second work of grace is that because of the relationship with Christ, an individual will not **want** to commit sin. They may be tempted and give in to sin, but if they have truly accepted God into their lives, they will feel guilty about that sin. Members at both churches refer to the second act of grace colloquially as "sanctification" or "being sanctified".

Oneness Pentecostals reject that God is present in three persons and that those three forms are distinct. The Pentecostals that I research believe that there is one God who is *manifested* in many different ways. Three of those ways are as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. While many Christians baptize in the name of "the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost", Oneness Pentecostals baptize in the name of Jesus alone. Many other Evangelical Christians believe that faith in Jesus Christ and repentance of sins are the actions needed for salvation. Oneness's Pentecostals believe that in addition to faith in

Jesus and repentance of sins, one must also be baptized in Jesus' name and accept the receiving of the Holy Ghost through glossolalia or speaking in tongues.

There are about 80 denominations of Oneness Pentecostals around the world and it is estimated that the number of Oneness Pentecostals is more than four million members (van der Maas, 2002). It is important to note that there has been a historic tension between Oneness Pentecostals and Trinitarian Pentecostals. Many Oneness Pentecostals believe that they need to speak in tongues after receiving baptism in order to complete the act of salvation. For many Trinitarians, that step is unnecessary and makes salvation about works, instead of God's grace. Trinitarians believe that focusing on works rather than grace is antithetical to the message of Christ (Blumhofer, 1993). They argue that one cannot do anything to be worthy of Heaven and eternal life. We must all admit that there is nothing that we can do to earn redemption. Instead, we must fully accept that all are unworthy of God's grace and are only saved through His love.

Oneness Pentecostals argue that theirs is not a faith that believes in salvation through works. Instead, speaking in tongues is a sign that God's grace has been completed and that an individual has been sanctified. The divide between Trinitarians and Oneness Pentecostals is so deep that each side considers the other side to be incorrect about the nature of God and has accused the other of heresy or blasphemy (Blumhofer, 1993). The Oneness Pentecostals at RLCC often use the term Apostolic Pentecostals to signify that they are Pentecostals that do not believe in the trinity. They often use the mantra "1 Lord, 1 Faith, 1 Baptism" to describe their oneness philosophy

It is important to note the complexity of experiences in Pentecostalism. Not every Pentecostal believes that speaking in tongues is a sign of salvation and sanctification. In

fact, as many as half of the Pentecostals in America report that that have never spoken in tongues (Wacker G. , 2001) Wacker identifies four commonalities in receiving the gift of speaking in tongues that early Pentecostals experienced. The first was that the individual must have no doubts that they received it. At a recent regional meeting, several members of RLCC and Corinth church explained disappointment that a pastor proclaimed that a young child had received the Holy Ghost and spoke in tongues before the child could proclaim it for himself. Secondly, the member has to seek out the ability to speak in tongues and may not receive it right away. Thirdly, speaking in tongues often occurs with the assistance of someone praying for the individual and “laying” hands on them. Lastly, the atmosphere was important because most people received the Holy Ghost during an occasion when others were also seeking it.

Pentecostals in this study believe that there are countless ways to speak in tongues. The only condition is that the speaker knows that they have spoken in tongues and received the Holy Ghost. One is considered saved when one receives the Holy Ghost and the Holy Ghost comes after speaking in tongues. Once a person receives the Holy Ghost then he is considered a full member of the church. After receiving the Holy Ghost, a person is held up to the standards of a full member when it comes to behaviors, dress, and speech, regardless of their age. Speaking in tongues is both a marker of salvation as well as a part of regular devotions. It is also a form of worship and prayer. While some worship and pray in English, others may speak in tongues at the same time and the leader of prayer or worship will often wait for the speaking in tongues to subside before he or she continues with the program.

Speaking in tongues is a spontaneous and unrehearsed practice. No one is taught what sounds or syllables they should make. As Danielle, one of the young people from this study stated, *“If you could [teach speaking in tongues], that would be a problem. It wouldn’t be real. It would be like everyone was saying it in the same way; you can’t make someone speak in tongues. They have to know it for themselves. You don’t teach people how to speak in tongues”*. Speaking in tongues must be unrehearsed in order to be genuine and from God.

The colloquial term in the church for speaking in tongues and accepting Christ as one’s savior is called being “saved”. This term is used to distinguish Pentecostal believers from non-believers. It also creates a distinction between members in the church. Saved individuals are supposed to speak, dress and behave in a way that shows that they are Godly, and through these particular social norms, saved people distinguish themselves from outsiders and secular society.

Baptism is also crucial to the salvation of Pentecostals at the two research sites. Baptism in Pentecostalism represents a new “spiritual” birth of a person after they have accepted Christ as their savior. Pentecostals use the Scriptures where, *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remissions of sin, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38 KJV) as the justification for baptism. The Apostle Paul goes on to say that *“But when they believed Phillip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ they were baptized, both men and women”* (Acts 8:12 KJV). Both of the churches stress the importance that every individual, regardless of age or gender needs to follow those rules for salvation.

Many Pentecostals take a literal understanding of the Bible. The religious and political beliefs at both churches are conservative. Both congregations believe in upholding a standard of holiness. Specifically, both churches condemn drinking, smoking, and drug use. These Pentecostals are encouraged to refrain from swearing, losing their temper, fighting, and speaking harshly with others. Members also refrain from going to bars, clubs, or even dancing. The Oneness Pentecostal women of this study do not wear pants in the sanctuary, and many refuse to wear anything other than dresses outside of the church as well.

The interpretation of beliefs and doctrine result in Pentecostals having distinct practices. The practices that follow are not always followed by every practicing member. There are of course, individual understandings and Pentecostal identities. However, all of the Pentecostals in this study regularly mentioned the following practices. I have included them for two reasons. First, these practices provide background information to help a reader who has never been exposed to Pentecostalism. Second, these practices were important because they were self-identified practices that many of the youth used to construct a shared identity as Pentecostals in their minds.

Practices of Pentecostals

In addition to baptism, Oneness, and speaking in tongues, there are several other distinctive practices in this form of Pentecostalism. Both churches believe in divine healing. The belief is rooted in the New Testament where Christ healed the physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds of believers. Intertwined with their belief in faith healing is the concept that Pentecostals believe that Christ's main purpose was to alleviate

human suffering. His ability to heal while on earth and to empower others to heal is a reminder of His promise to end suffering. Vernon L. Purdy, a Pentecostal scholar articulates the point clearly when he says, "Because sin leads to human suffering, it was only natural for the Early Church to understand the ministry of Christ as the alleviation of human suffering, since he was God's answer to sin ... The restoration of fellowship with God is the most important thing, but this restoration not only results in spiritual healing but many times in physical healing as well." Sometimes participants claim that their healing was immediate and other times it may be several weeks or even years before someone proclaims that they were healed. Instances of healing are shared with the rest of the church as a testimony to how great God is. Typically, only ordained male members of the church lay hands (Horton, 1994).

The worship at Pentecostal churches is another distinctive feature (Patterson & Rybarczyk, 2007; Duffied & Van Cleave, 2008). Pentecostals describe their faith as being emotional, expressive and full of verbal and physical praise for God. Patterson says that Pentecostal worship is marked by:

"A sense of expectation that isn't always present in other styles of worship: the expectation that the worshipers will meet and connect with God in a real and powerful way. Pentecostal worship reflects this expectation. Between people raising their hands and dancing around, waving flags and shaking tambourines, the constant possibility of a tongues message or an experience of someone prophesying...to potential healing, exorcisms, and other signs from God, expectation is high, and church is often an exciting place for Pentecostal worshipers" (Pentecostal Worship, April)

Each week, congregants walk into the church not knowing exactly what to expect during the service. They have a program, but are open to the idea that members are supposed to follow the will of God. If He wants congregants to skip a part of the service, then members comply. Pentecostals bring up the rhetoric of "quenching the spirit" at

regular intervals at both churches. The term is rooted in the scripture of Thessalonians where church members are taught that none of their actions in church should restrict how God's presence can move in the church. For members today that translates into not letting feelings of hunger thirst, or worries about time, dictate how long the service lasts.

Worship at any service is not complete unless the spirit of God is ushered into the church. Both churches have praise and worship team that leads the members into praises before the pastors come and preach (Carlson, 2013). They are instructed with helping to create an atmosphere where people are focused on God and ready to worship Him and hear a message from the speaker. Pentecostal members are reminded that, "When we fail to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, we are prone to force ourselves. As a result, we have forced singing, forced praying, forced testimonies, forced giving, and forced preaching. How much better it is when the Holy Spirit comes"(Carlson, 2013). The emphasis of the church experience for the Pentecostal is not on the individual alone. The focus is on creating an environment where the entire church feels comfortable and motivated enough to worship.

Research Sites

Trenton, New Jersey

Trenton, the state capital, is the tenth largest city in the state. Like many post-industrial cities in the northeast, the population has decreased, but also become poorer and more ethnically diverse in that last several decades (Census 2000 Profiles of Demographic

Social/Economic/housing Characteristics for Trenton City). With a population of 85,000, the makeup of the city is mostly black and Latino/a. Those two groups make up more than 85% of Trenton's population. Some of the Census' most recent data showed that the average per capital income for residents in the city was \$17,400. Additionally, poverty and child poverty are significant issues in the city of Trenton. A quarter of the city's residents are below the poverty line. Poverty affects youth in Trenton more than any other group. More than a third of city residents under the age of 18 are below the poverty line (New Jersey Resident Population by Municipality; 1930-1990; Census 2000 Profiles of Demographic Social/Economic/housing Characteristics for Trenton City)

The largest employer in the city is the State of New Jersey. Trenton was once a manufacturing hub that offered jobs for many of its residents. Adults in the churches say that jobs became significantly harder to find after the riots of 1968. Prior to the riots, Trenton was a leading manufacturer of rubber, rope, and ceramics (New Jersey- Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990). When current woes come up, older church members reminisce about times when “Trenton had so many jobs that you could quit in the morning and find a job by the afternoon.”

The riots that older members refer to were part of a wave of riots in urban cities after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. In April of 1968, more than 300 people in Trenton were arrested for ransacking, looting, and destruction of property. White flight was the most immediate result in Trenton. North Trenton, which was one of the most affluent sections of the city, has never recovered (Commission, 1968). The event was a turning point not only in the mind of residents who were in Trenton, but it marked an actual shift in the demographics of Trenton. Historian Charles Webster puts it simply:

"The riots killed Trenton" (Mickle 1968). As of 2010, the crime rates in Trenton, New Jersey were almost three times higher than both the national crime rates and the rates for the state of New Jersey (Trenton, NJ Crime and Crime Rate). Due to budgetary cuts, the police force was been cut by a third in 2011 (Zdan, 2011). Crime continues to rise. 2013 saw vigils, protests, and walks by the people of Trenton in order to address issue of violence and homicides in the community. In 2013, Trenton had thirty-two murders. That number surpassed the record high of thirty-one homicides in 2005 (Dzenis, 2013).

Within this urban and declining city, there are two small churches that serve the populations of inner city Trenton and some of its surrounding areas. The churches are located in two of Trenton's most dangerous neighborhoods. Members often hear news of murders, robberies, and other violent crimes that happen within the neighborhoods of the churches. Young men escort women to their cars after a night service to ensure that no one gets robbed or hurt. Additionally, men at both churches listen for strange sounds and investigate the parking lots and surrounding areas of the churches regularly. RLCC has men sit near the entrance to the sanctuary in order to be able to observe individuals who are entering the church.

Despite the often unsafe areas around the churches, the members see their church as both a spiritual and a physical oasis from the dangers of the outside, secular world. Members make their churches as accommodating and welcoming as possible. Because both churches share their structures with other unrelated occupants, creating a space of their own can be difficult. RLCC and Corinth Church are two of many storefront churches in Trenton that are aspiring to leave an imprint on the local community.

Weekly Services

Sunday morning service is the most regularly attended day of service. At RLCC there is one class taught by the assistant pastor, Minister Johnston. While Min. Johnston is teaching, Elder Kinderson sits in his office praying and reviewing his sermon. At Corinth Church, Pastor Vick's assistant pastor teaches class. After Sunday school, both churches have a brief intermission and then have prayer requests. Per Pentecostalism's tenant of healing and answered prayers, this part of the service allows for any member of the church to stand up and ask for prayer for a specific reason.

After prayer request, both churches have their actual prayer. They engage in a group prayer where everyone verbally offers a different prayer. The effect is a chorus of individuals all speaking at the same time. Congregants know that prayer is over through the signaling a minister. To end it, he will start a call and response of a commonly known scripture. Sometimes one or several members will continue to pray even after the minister has finished prayer. In these cases, the minister waits patiently for them or starts a song.

After prayer, a minister will read a scripture and the congregation will follow along, or read in a call and response manner. Next is the praise and worship part of their services. At RLCC, younger members facilitate that part of the service. At Corinth it is facilitated by select women leaders. After the main offering, the person who is preaching delivers sermons. Most of the time the pastors preach, but will occasionally allow ministers in the church to preach or even invite guest preachers from other churches. Afterwards is an altar call, where members walk up to the front of the church and request healing prayer for specific mental and health ailments. There is so no set time for the schedule of the services other than when services start.

National vs. Local

Neither church is autonomous. Both fall under the umbrella of the larger organization, Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ (COOLJC). COOLJC was founded in 1919. The founder, Richard Lawson, opened a single church in New York in 1919. In addition to serving as a place of worship, it was also the hub of his outreach and evangelism. Lawson continued to evangelize and opened churches in the Northeast, the south, and even in the Caribbean and Africa. Today, most of the organization's churches are on the east coast.

The organization has had several important schisms since its founding. The biggest one occurred in the late 1950s and resulted over the issue of women being ordained as ministers, pastors, and higher officers in the organization. The beliefs of the COOLHJC are that Christ never ordained women to be ministers. While they can be in positions and have offices, the position of a minister and higher roles are prohibited for women. There are many versions of what that means and how it plays out in local churches. For the members of RLCC and Corinth church it means that women have the authority to speak, heal, prophesize, encourage, lead and worship, but not from the position of an ordained minister. This results in interesting spatial politics that are present in the church. Women, when they are speaking formally in front of the church, are not permitted to speak from the pulpit. That spot is reserved for ordained men for the most part. There is usually a podium for women and un-ordained men that is smaller and lower compared to the pulpit. The split solidified that COOLJC would in no way endorse female pastors or allow churches to join the organization that did not believe in the prohibition.

The other main reason of the schism was COOLJC's stance on remarriage. In accordance with a biblical understanding of marriage in the 5th chapter of Matthew where Jesus says *"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery"* (Matthew 5:31-32 KJV), the organization believes that members marry once and are not free to marry again until their spouses die. Divorce is permissible when one partner has committed adultery.

The dress of COOLC is extremely conservative. Women who are members of the church are encouraged to wear dresses. They also must wear a hat or some other type of head covering during church services. Men typically wear slacks and a dress shirt or suit. There is a clear distinction between the clothes of younger members and older members. The types of dresses and pants that youth wear can be much more casual. Typically at youth sponsored services, the dress code is casual and young people wear jeans or denim skirts.

COOLJC's structure is extremely vertical. At the top is the presiding apostle. Apostles are the highest ranking positions for men in the organization. The board of presbyters is made up of any ordained minister or elder. In a checks and balances for leadership, the board of presbyters (the lowest group of ordained men) picks the presiding apostle. Elder Kinderson, the pastor of RLCC serves as president of the board of presbyters. Elder Vick serves a secretary of the same board (C.O.O.L.J.C., 2011).

Local churches are organized by larger regions and districts. The groupings are as much a political decision as they are about geography. For instance, Corinth Church and

RLCC are located about two miles from each other. They are both a part of the same diocese. A diocese is a group of churches, usually in the same state, that come together for a weekend of combined services quarterly. The location of the diocese meetings rotates between different churches in the diocese. Despite their close proximity, the churches belong to different districts. Districts are smaller gatherings of churches. There is a much less formal hierarchy when it comes to district meetings.

Leadership positions for those wanting to serve on the diocese or national level are open to any member that is saved, has paid their dues and fees, and has regularly attended national and regional meetings. For many of the positions available, one has to provide proof fees and attendance in national meetings before they can get their pastor's permission and signature in order to be eligible for elections. Most national elections are held once every three years. There is no financial compensation for taking on the added responsibilities of a leadership position. Some auxiliaries provide travel expenses for some officers to attend national meetings.

Both churches are autonomous in the sense that pastors and members can appoint their own officers and design their own schedules and services. However, both churches must report to the national organization. Both churches have fiscal responsibilities to the national organization. Both churches are also supposed to be represented at regional and local meetings. The yearly national convention is where pastors and church leadership in particular are required to conduct national business and meet with national leadership.

National Meetings

There are three national conventions that are held on an annual basis. They are the National Convocation, the National Women's Council, and the National Youth Congress. The National Convocation is intended for all of the members of the organization. It occurs around the last week of July. The meeting runs from Wednesday afternoon until Sunday morning. In addition to being a meeting filled with activities, workshops, and social events, the convention is a time for much of the business of the organization to get completed. Elections are held at national conventions. Large fund-raising initiatives as well as international missions programs are disseminated during the national convention. Additionally, the organizational magazine, *The Contender for the Faith*, is distributed at the convention. The magazine, published annual, lists information about new programs, initiatives, and leadership in the organization.

The convention is held in locations all over the eastern seaboard. Columbia, South Carolina is home to the organization's headquarters as well as the organization's college. However, the practice of continually having the convention there was an unpopular choice for members. Because the convention is held during the summer, many people consider it to be a part of their summer vacation. In the past, conventions have been held in cities such as Baltimore, Detroit, Orlando, Richmond, and Miami.

All of the organization's national auxiliaries meet at the convention, so there are activities for all ages and members. During the day are many speakers and workshops. There is also usually one large concert from a contemporary gospel artist during the convention. Day sessions are much more causal and relaxed than evening sessions. Many members dress casually or in business casual during the day. Every morning, there

is an optional prayer meeting for members that starts at 6:00 AM. The evening sessions resemble a Sunday service. Unlike in the day sessions, the evening service is the only activity that happens at night. Sunday morning is the day that the presiding apostle preaches. He is in his 80s, but still draws in the largest crowds of the convention. He is revered by most of the members of the organization and many credit him with making the organization as successful as it currently is.

While the annual convocation is geared towards members of all ages, the other two annual meetings are not. Any member can attend any of the national conferences. The Youth Congress is the annual meeting that is geared towards youth and young people. C.O.O.L.J.C. defines a young person as anyone who is the age of 35 or under. The Youth Congress is held in April. In a similar fashion to the national convention, the Youth Congress is divided between day and evening sessions. The Youth Congress attempts to appeal to younger audience by focusing on social activities as well as evening services. This particular meeting is filled with day trips, concerts after the evening services, and competitions and sporting events. The evening concerts can often last until 1 or 2 AM.

Music is a focus during Youth Congress. Music is an area of the Pentecostal organization that is reserved for youth. Most of the choirs, musicians, and musical activities are performed by members who fall into the age category of young people. The logistics of organizing so many musical performances is a challenge and songs are distributed through Facebook and email weeks in advance. Members are expected to listen to and start learning songs on their own in preparation for the Youth Congress. At national youth meetings there are unofficial gender boundaries for musicians. Most of

the choir members are women while most of the musicians who are playing accompaniment are men. Choirs and musical groups can be a source of tension because there is a common perception that there are a sizable number of homosexual men in the choirs and homosexuality is seen as an abomination by the Pentecostals in this study.

Youth prepare for the Youth Congress by having services in their local areas during the weeks before the convention. These events are called pre-Congress rallies. For the youth at RLCC and Corinth, they participate in the closest event, which is the NY/NJ pre-Congress rally. Members from all over both states come together to join in worship and socializing. All of the pre-Congress rallies are attempts to get young people excited about the national meeting. E-mail and Facebook have become the popular way for young people to be informed about pre-Congress rallies, national meetings, and local events that occur throughout the year.

Dissertation Outline

As a scholar of children, I am always looking for their voices and experiences. I am disturbed by the overarching assumption that children have no role in church unless they are being helped or serviced (Woodson, 1921). Especially in light of more horizontally organized faiths like Pentecostal Christians, where there is no age or education requirement to membership, surely children must have been present. Were there ways that youth exercised both explicit and implicit power? I use an in-depth critical approach as I look beyond how children are socialized through religion. The relationship between children and churches went and continues to go both ways. Not only are youth affected by churches, but also they are having an effect on churches (Smith, 2005). My research aims to expand the field of religious studies, African

American studies and childhood studies by finding out how young African-American individuals engage with Pentecostalism how they've changed the landscape of Pentecostalism. My research also addresses the dearth of studies focused on Pentecostal youth.

The second chapter of this project looks at how two churches define what it means to be a “young person”, and how this construction has very real consequences for the youth in this study. The definition of youth is very rigid, and because of that rigidity, can cause the powerlessness of some youth at RLCC and Corinth church. Their age classification limits the opportunities that adults allow for them as well as adult expectations for them. The perception of youth at RLC and Corinth is complicated by the Pentecostal subculture, which makes no formal distinction between members of different age groups. This chapter shows examples of how concrete and immutable the definition of young people can be. The powerlessness of youth to redefine or re-imagine the age boundaries of young people can be a frustrating limitation.

Chapter 3 focuses on the road to marriage in the Pentecostal church. With marriage as a goal for most Pentecostal youth, I examine the gender norms of Pentecostal youth. Chapter 3 looks at how women and men in the church are conditioned to fit into inflexible constructions of “appropriate” Christian behavior for their gender. Because those roles are considered divinely given, refusing to follow them is a refusal to fall in line with Pentecostal doctrine. The concept of marriage is a meeting site for gender roles, dress, sexuality, and heterosexuality. Because of church norms, it is almost impossible to push back against these standards and remain in the Pentecostal church. These same

gender norms also help to display who in the church is saved and sanctified and mark those people as different.

Chapter 4 begins to shed light on areas where youth can in fact push back against the construction of youth that they are socialized within. Music is purposely set as a space where youth can congregate and lead. Both pastors, as well as the national organization encourage young men and women to get involved in musical organizations. Music is also considered a context where youth show leadership. In addition to leading in spaces that have been provided for them, young people have created new roles as leaders of worship and praise in their churches. Additionally, some female youth are using their leadership roles in music to reimagine and redefine spatial limitations in their churches.

My last data chapter focuses on the area of education. I look at how religious education inside the church is a way of ensuring that youth are taught about religious doctrine as well as the cultural norms and expectations of Pentecostals. Youth are also going to colleges in large numbers. Higher education has thus become a new aspect of the Pentecostal identity at these two churches. As a result, youth are able to assume authority and power because older members lack the experience to advise youth about college.

I conclude my dissertation by showing that marriage, music, and education act as processes that are intended to transform young Pentecostals into adult Pentecostals and ensure the continued popularity and survival of this new form of Christianity. The heart of this story is the youth's responses to adults' attempts to produce a new generation of Pentecostals that share the religious dogma as well as the cultural values of the older

generation and how some of those values are modified during the process of cultural and religious transmissions.

In the following chapter, I show how the lives of 11 youth fit into this background of Pentecostalism, Trenton, and the black church. I will highlight some of the dynamic personalities and worldviews of youth who have dedicated themselves to the Pentecostal faith. While these stories are not generalizable, they do show insight into how some religious youth make sense of the world and how their religiously salient identities differ from those of the generations before them.

Chapter 2
Defining Youth: Power Relations in Two Pentecostal Churches

"Young people are a lot more experienced than what the older saints think. They know a lot more and have been through a lot more. An older saint may think they haven't, but we have".

~Keisha

Defining Youth

Keisha spoke those words during an interview at Corinth Church in Trenton, NJ. As a twenty-eight year old, in many contexts, she would be considered an adult. However, at RLCC she is categorized as a "young person". The dogma of Pentecostalism states that any member who is saved is considered a child of God and a member of the Pentecostal church. The Bible makes no distinction of salvation based on age. Although the rhetoric of church leaders states that youth and adults are on the same level in the eyes of God, the youth in this study articulated that they have little to no power in their local churches or on the national level. The lack of power can be a cause of tension and frustration between youth and adult members. Young people like Keisha use their conversion stories and personal testimonies in order to show that they are mature in their spirituality. However, according to both youth and adults, part of that spiritual maturation process requires guidance and instructions from older Pentecostals. As a result, no matter how long they have been saved members of the church, youth are seen as spiritually immature and limited in their leadership capabilities.

In this chapter, I will discuss how young people are defined at RLCC and Corinth Church. I will begin by discussing the history of the term "young person" and some of the reasons for why the term has been used. Next, I will discuss how power is given and diminished through the contemporary lived definition of young people. I point to specific

examples of how youth accept and reject the label of “young people” and the advantages of doing so. The fact that youth are being classified in a way they do not agree with is nothing to take lightly (Zackariasson, 2014). The youth in this study considered themselves to be Pentecostals, but have constructed an identity as young adults. Being labeled as young people who are spiritually immature strips them of some of their power and agency and lumps them with young children, despite the fact that these young adults do not believe that they share many characteristics with youth. I end this chapter with a look at how being grouped by age limits some youths’ ability to obtain positions of leadership in their local churches and on a national level.

At RLCC and Corinth Church, members are divided into the categories of young people and adult members. A young person is a member of the church who is thirty-five years of age or younger. Young people are regularly under the watch of adults, who monitor youth for conformity as well as spiritual development. As a result, the youth at RLCC and Corinth Church have difficulty claiming power because of a belief that maturity is correlated with chronological age. Power and age are intertwined at both churches. Overt power, where a participant obtains a position of leadership and the ability to command and/or control is a common conceptualization of power in the churches (Greiner & Schein, 1988). Many youth in the churches struggle with the label of “young people” because the term implies immaturity along with limited status and power compared to adult members. They mention their conversion to Pentecostalism as a justification for why their spirituality should be taken seriously. Even the young people who were born and raised in the church identified the day that they spoke in tongues and became saved as the moment that they took their faith seriously, and thus should be taken

seriously in their position within the church.

In the quote at the beginning of the chapter, Keisha refers to some members as older “saints”. In this type of Pentecostalism, saints are not people who are highly esteemed or spiritual martyrs. Every member of the church, who has spoken in tongues and declared themselves saved, is considered a saint. There is no age or ordination requirement for becoming a saint. Any saved Pentecostal from a child to the elderly is referred to as a saint. Conversely, members who are not Pentecostal and saved are not saints. The term is inclusive of a group that has a special connection to Christ.

When Keisha, like every other individual in the church, spoke in tongues and declared herself saved, she joined one of the most important classes of individuals in the church. Saints are the people who have an intimate relationship with God. Saints are the members who will have eternal life in heaven because they have followed God’s commandments and spoken in tongues. Keisha’s transition to being a saint was signaled in two meaningful ways. The first is that she had to speak in tongues, but also had to declare that she spoke in tongues. In the culture of Pentecostalism, you cannot hear someone else speak in tongues and tell them that they are saved. The individuals must speak for themselves and identify that they have spoken in tongues and is now saved as a result. As a congregation, we have often sat and heard someone speak in tongues, but because they were not able to articulate what had happened to them or confess that they were saved, we do not consider them saved. Salvation is more than the act of speaking in tongues; it is the ability to discern that speaking in tongues is the sign of being saved by God.

After speaking in tongues, Keisha was involved in a public display of her faith

called receiving the Right Hand of Fellowship. After declaring her salvation, Keisha was presented to her congregation after service. She was asked by her pastor if she was saved. She was also probably asked if she wanted to be a member of the church. Keisha was then welcomed into the church through handshakes, hugs and congratulations from her congregation. The event acts as a public display that signals church members should now recognize her as a saved member who will play an active part in the church. Again, there is no age requirement for receiving the right hand of fellowship. I received it when I was eleven years old because that was the age I was saved. In our belief structure, that was the most important marker of salvation. Not my age or experience, but the fact that I spoke in tongues and declared my salvation in front of the congregation.

Thus the conversion stories of youth are very important. It is their marker of when they reached the most important level of spirituality. Most of the youth can identify the day that they were saved and refer to it as their spiritual birthday. I asked Keisha to describe her conversion to Pentecostalism in detail:

Before I became a Christian I use to be a Jehovah Witness. My mom has been a Jehovah Witness for as long as I can remember. She would have the brothers and sisters from the Kingdom Hall come over and have bible study in our home. She would teach me and my sisters about being Jehovah Witnesses but it never really took root in us. As a young girl I remember going to services, bible studies, conventions, and even going door to door witnessing. I wasn't an active participant I would just sit and observe others. When I became a teenager my mom had stop going to the Kingdom Hall and religion wasn't as prevalent in the house. A part of me was relieved because I never really enjoy being a Jehovah Witness. Most of my leisure time was spent hanging out with the kids who lived around my neighborhood. As far as Christianity is concerned, when I was younger, I never really gave it much thought. My sister Rhonda and Danielle [from RLCC] were close friends and Rhonda started going to her church from time to time (and I would come a few times with them but never on a consistent basis). I ended up going to the Church of Trenton when I and Rhonda would take turns babysitting my cousin Mitchell. My aunt worked evenings at Wal-Mart and every Monday Mitchell had youth choir rehearsal at the Church of Trenton. Since we lived right around the corner on Bellevue, we would

walk him to choir rehearsal. Eventually I joined the choir and started coming routinely.

I joined The Church of Trenton when I was 14. God filled me with the Holy Spirit when I was 15. At the same time my mother's [sic] mental illness really started to surface. As much as I loved my mother I didn't liked the woman she became when I entered my teenage years. At that time I didn't realize she was being overtaken by mental illness. When I entered the church Lee and Uncle Clark came into our lives, they helped shed light on what was happening with my mother. Eventually we found out she was dealing with mental illness and we were able to get the help she needed. My mother was able to get her life on track and she manage [sic] to get her associate degree and now she has been working for the past couple of years. I associate my mother's turnaround with God showing her favor and grace. She has gone back to being a Jehovah Witness but my prayer is that she will eventually come in the church and get filled with the Holy Spirit.

I remained in the church because my faith is that kept me strong in dealing with my mother's illness. The only way to cope with the change in my mother was through prayer and reading my bible. God's reassurance that he would never put more on me than I can bear was a constant reminder to keep the faith. There were also young people my age at the church who were all dealing with personal struggles within their own homes and we kind of built up solidarity amongst each other. Coming to church was a place to escape from life's turmoil. As I entered my 20s I did however, run into a bit of a rebellious phase when I was around 23. The Lord showed me that if I continued down the path I was going I was going to end up dead. So I recommitted myself to Christ when I was around 27. During the time I was backsliding, I jeopardized my education; however God allowed many opportunities for me to get back on track and complete my degree. This showed me how much God loves me and how real His forgiveness was in me. He allowed me to finish school even when I didn't deserve it. I got back in right standing with God and when I was 28. I moved from the Church of Trenton to Corinth Church continue my spiritual growth.

In her narrative, Keisha highlights some of the experiences in her life that shows how her spirituality matured and how it remains at the core of who she is. As a young teen, she left the faith of her mother and family. As a child, she made a decision to become Pentecostal because that faith addressed both her spiritual needs and her mental and psychological needs. A large part of Keisha's testimony is the mental illness that her mother suffered from. Keisha describes how she believes that not only did God save Keisha's soul, but He also helped Keisha's mother with her mental illness issues. Keisha

specifically mentions that God's grace covered her mother, even though her mother is not a Pentecostal believer. Keisha articulates that her faith not only brings about a positive change in her own life, but has the power to bring about positive changes in the lives of people around her. She also mentioned the role in finding a community to help support her through her struggles.

Keisha also mentions that her faith has been tested. In her twenties she went through a rebellious phase that involved partying and not regularly attending church. Keisha did not go into detail, but during her rebellious stage, she almost sacrificed her schooling. Since then, Keisha has publically confessed her salvation and devotion to God. She has a wealth of experience when it comes to dealing with a caregiver who is mentally ill, living with a family that is not Pentecostal, and reclaiming her faith after a bout of rebelliousness. Keisha's story and testimony show how she perceives life experiences to have strengthened her faith.

Keisha's testimony also sheds light on a community of young people who are assisting each other with personal and spiritual issues. She explicitly says that "*There were also young people my age at the church who were all dealing with personal struggles within their own homes and we kind of built up solidarity amongst each other. Coming to church was a place to escape from life's turmoil.*" Even as a teenager, Keisha had high levels of spirituality and took her faith seriously. Not only was she concerned about her own spiritual walk and her family's spiritual walk, she was dedicated to the community of young believers. This group, through their belief in Pentecostalism, encouraged each other in the midst of hard times in Trenton. Keisha is extremely spiritual and has been for years, but she believes that her perspective is

devalued by adults and those in power.

At both churches, adults have been defining what it means to be a young person for decades. Michel Foucault states that power is not some object or possession that one holds and takes ownership of. It is not tangible and transferable. For Foucault, power is present in the interactions between groups. He states that power is “*A total structure of actions...it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future. A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities*” (Foucault, 1982).

This is how I frame the interactions and the relationships between members of the churches in this study. Power is demonstrated through more than leadership positions. The relationships between young people and adults at the churches signify unequal power dynamics. One way that power is displayed is through older members having authority, opportunity, and a platform to advise and define younger members. Power is also shown in how members address each other, the clothes that they wear, and even places where members are allowed or prohibited to sit. In these actions, interactions, and reactions, members support and or/critique the dominant power structure in a number of ways.

At the same time, even young people and adults who disagree with the nature of the age categories can still find the category of “young people” useful. In order to appear obedient at times, youth perpetuate power dynamics by using the same terms and definition of young people that adults do. I find the term patronizing when referring to individuals who are in their thirties. Many of them are prosperous in their careers and

even married. It seems somewhat belittling to lump them in with the same age group as high schoolers. On the other hand, I think that the term young people can be useful when referring to the younger generation of Pentecostals who have yet to be in power. Falling in line with the rules allows some youth to be groomed and prepared for leadership roles as well as keeps adults from constantly criticizing them. Conversely, some young people are actively trying to combat the unequal power dynamics and assert themselves as individuals. Those young people challenge adult authority using their own stories and narratives as an example of their maturity and fitness to be leaders in their local churches.

The term “young people” that I use in this dissertation comes from the official policy of the organization that governs both churches, The Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc. (C.O.O.L.J.C). The website of the national Armor Bearer Young People’s Union (A.B.Y.P.U), the group that governs young people on the local, regional, and national level of this church, gives a brief history of how the members of the group have been defined during its history. On its page, the national organization says that “ *Our motto, remember the Lord in the days of thy youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1), emphasizes our ultimate goal of helping each generation grow in relationship with their Savior...Each person is born with special abilities and a unique purpose*” (ABYPU Purpose).

On its history page, the A.B.Y.P.U. talks about the meaningful events that have happened in its past. The page states that:

The Union began with only senior aged young people (18 through 35) but as membership increased it also diversified and the constituency of the union grew to include intermediate groups (teens) and junior groups (children) as well. In the beginning there were only a few A.B.Y.P.U. in the organization and no thought of a national union. However, as the number of members and local unions

multiplied, it became necessary to organize all local unions into a national body

~A.B.Y.P.U. history page

From the A.B.Y.P.U.'s conception, young children were never considered an integral part of the organization. The organization references scriptures that talk about youth having an understanding and knowledge of God. The A.B.Y.P.U. is founded on the Christian tradition of youth like David, Joshua, and Samuel. All three were young boys in the Old Testament who were called by God to do miracles and lead the Israelites. However, it was only in the later decades of the 20th century that children under eighteen were even considered part of the A.B.Y.P.U. Before that point, it was assumed that they would receive guidance, nurturing, and spiritual development as part of their families. On their national webpage, the organization states that the founder of C.O.O.L.J.C. *“seeing greater potential in the young people if given time and freedom to exercise their spiritual gifts and natural talents, organized them into a union and set aside special time for them”* (A.B.Y.P.U. website). So from its inception, youth were given room to grow and develop their individual faith.

At the same time, through rhetoric, youth are told that they have the same amount of power and potential that older members do and are held up to the same standards of appropriate Pentecostal behavior as are adults. Pentecostals are reminded of this fact through church leadership. Elder Clark told the congregation at Corinth Church that *“Whether you’re 12 or 112, one day you’re going to have to stand before God and make an account of what you’ve done. We’re all going to have to answer to Him on that great throne of judgment”*. Youth are given mixed messages. On one hand that they are told that the requirements for salvation are the same regardless of age. On the other hand,

they are not treated as spiritual equals to adults. Conversion stories like Keisha's are examples of a universal method of salvation that all Pentecostals, regardless of age, must go through. However, youths' opportunities to lead are hindered by their status of "young person". While youth and adults go through the same processes, youth are still considered spiritually immature and requiring assistance of adults.

Scholars like Spencer Cahill offer an explanation for why groups construct categories of older youth and younger youth (Cahill, 1990). Cahill argues that young children are seen as extensions of their parents and families. Therefore they need little additional surveillance, programming or attention. The attention focused onto their parents or guardians is considered enough to cover the young children. At the time of my observations, neither church had a Sunday school for young children nor did either church do anything special for children during the Sunday morning service. Young children sat with their parents and received the same sermons and instructions that adults did. Some parents bring books, toys, or electronic devices for youth to entertain themselves with during the services. The fact that neither church has a program for young children during the service supports the belief that young children do not need special programming because they are under the watch of their parents.

It is interesting that in a faith that puts so much emphasis on a conversion process and warns youth that they are held up to the same standards as adults, that there is no class or instruction that speaks specifically to young children. I offer two possible reasons grounded in my observations. The first is that perhaps the youth are seen as too young to understand God. While there is no set age, the congregants believe in God's grace and fairness when he judges. In a Sunday school conversation about aborted babies

or young children who are murdered, the congregation raised questions about what happens to their souls. Minister Johnston stated that, *“All I know is that God is just and fair. We may not know how he does things, but we know that he’s just. Those kids were too young to understand God. I believe that He has a place in heaven for them”*.

Perhaps members of the congregation considered Olivia, the six year old participant, still to be in the age of grace.

The second, more practical reason is because of the space and personnel constraints at both churches. Both churches are small, storefront churches. During my observation period, Olivia was the only small child at RLCC. Church leadership may have seen it as a waste of resources to sacrifice a teacher for one student. Either guess speaks to the fact that young children’s spirituality is not taken as seriously as adults’ despite the universal expectation of salvation for all individuals regardless of age.

At the same time, adolescents, teens and older young people are a source of anxiety because they are physically distant from their parents and caregivers. Outside of the surveillance of adults, older teens embody the fears and anxieties of adults in society. One of Calhill's main arguments is that when young children and older teens engage in the same types of behaviors and activities, those activities are perceived differently by adults. He states that “the very violations of public etiquette that adults often find amusing when committed by younger children are treated as dangerous moral failings when the transgressor is a few years older” (399). In church, the acts of defiance and/or sin that older young people engage in can be perceived as much more of a problem than their younger counterparts. For instance, young people are constantly admonished for checking their cell phones while in church. It is seen as a lack of focus. However, young

children play on phones and tablets during the entire service. Also, when members request prayer requests specifically for youth, those prayers are geared towards youth in their late teens and older.

Adults demonstrate concern through prayer requests. Every Sunday, at least two adult members specifically ask the church to pray for young people. Prayer requests are accompanied with comments like, *“let's pray that youth will be able to stand against their peers”*, *“pray that our young people become bolder when they're around their peers, or “pray that our young people really desire to serve the Lord”*. There are no comparable prayer requests made for older church members as a group. Through prayer requests, youth are reminded that there is a community of older believers who are concerned for the wellbeing of youth as well as making themselves available as spiritual resources. Minister Jones reminds the congregation every time he preaches that, *“We can't do this [Christianity] alone. We got to pray for one another. If I'm weak in something, ya'll got to pray for me. If you're weak in something, I'll pray for you”*.

Secondary to serving as a way for Pentecostals to communicate with God, prayer is a way for Pentecostals to show concern for one another. The attitudes behind the prayer requests suggest that young people at RLCC and Corinth are seen as works in progress. Until youth become full-fledged adults, they are seen as in a precarious and potentially in a dangerous state of being (Wyness, 2000). With a worldview that considers a loss of religious saliency equivalent to the loss of everlasting life, adults feel compelled to help youth during the tumultuous years of their adolescence. Youth responded positively to these types of prayers and often perceived of these prayers as supportive.

Youth occasionally solicit the prayers or adults through their prayer requests

during Sunday morning service. For instance, Danielle has asked that the church “*Remember my best friend in your prayers. She’s moving to Atlanta*” when her friend was leaving Trenton. Likewise, David asked that the church “*Remember me in your prayers. I’m looking for a new job that will give me off on Sunday. Pray that God gives me favor*” when he was working a job that made him work several Sundays a month. I have also asked for prayer from adults in the church when I felt I had exhausted other options and needed the strength of adult members. Young people believe in the power of prayer and the notion adult members who are deeply rooted in their faith can aid young people with their prayers.

Adults are rarely considered in the same light. There is much more of an emphasis placed on chronological age than spiritual age. At RLCC, most of the youth have been saints since they were children. There are adult members who became saints in their 30s or later. Yet, those adults do not receive the same kinds of public displays of worry that youth do. No one makes a blanket prayer request for new believers during any of the prayer requests in the observation period. Yet, they regularly ask prayer for all young people without making a distinction that some of the young people have been members longer than older but newer members. Despite being in church for decades sometimes, young people are seen as being precariously close to slipping away from Pentecostalism and being lost. Through prayers and public displays, older members not only “help” by offering their prayers and support, but they perpetuate the stereotype that youth are spiritually immature.

Youth Rejecting Ascribed Identities

Many of the youth rejected the label of young people in their interviews. However, Alison James makes the point that “childhood and adult identities are relational (James, 2007). Who one can be depends on how the other is defined and understood. Looking at different places...can tell us more about how children and adults are defined in different contexts” (viii). At twenty-seven, many outside of the church consider Danielle to be an adult. She says that she considers herself an adult when she is talking about her job, relationships with friends, and her relationship with younger church members. One of our first exchanges was about how it feels to be a young person in a Pentecostal church.

MW: Alright, I want to switch and talk about young people. How do you feel about being a young person?

Danielle: I don't consider myself a young person. I'm closer to 30. But that's just me.

MW: IF you're not a young person, what are you?

Danielle: I would call myself a young adult.

Lee (Danielle's mother) - COOLJC [the national organization] describes a young person as up to 35.

MW: Why don't you like young person. When people call you a young person, what do you think?

Danielle: I don't know. When people use it, I know. I just don't like it.

Danielle rejects the label of young person in some ways. For her, youth are not one homogenous group. By classifying herself as a young adult, instead of a young person, Danielle is making a distinction between young children, young people, and young adults. Danielle's answer suggests a tension between how young people define themselves and how young people are described by adults in the institution. While Danielle does not articulate a specific reason for her discomfort with the descriptive term, it is clear that she rejects it. The differing reactions to the term “young people” were one

that took me by surprise because I had never heard a young person state discontent with the term in my sixteen years at the church. However, I realized that I had never *asked* any youth their comfort level with the term before this research. I found the theories of researchers like Samantha Punch helpful in being reflexive about my experience as an adult researcher (Punch, 2002). Punch reminds scholars of youth that “As adults we were once children, but soon forget, unlearn and abandon elements of our childhood culture....Adults must strive to abandon the commonly held assumption that adults’ knowledge is superior to that of children”(325). After Danielle’s interview, I became attuned to the tension of the label “young people” and what it may imply for young Pentecostals in her church in terms of diminishing their power.

Danielle, like Keisha has a conversion story as well. Despite being a pastor's daughter and being raised in the church, she also had to make a public display of her faith in front of the church. She mentions being tempted by boys and classmates as part of her story. Despite pressure from peers and the world to abandon her Christian moral values, her conversion story included that she turned away from all of those distractions. While she may stumble and make mistakes she always comes back to her faith. She cannot imagine ever leaving Pentecostalism.

Danielle’s conversion resulted in her changing her physical appearance. Danielle remarked that after she got saved, she stopped wearing jeans and only wears skirts now. Part of her taking her faith seriously was looking and dressing like a saint. Even if that meant that she would be seen as strange and old fashioned by her peers in school, she made the decision that following God was more important than being different. Even though her introduction to Pentecostalism is drastically different than Keisha’s, she can

articulate the day that she became saved and was welcomed into the church.

Danielle's interviews also show some of the disconnect between young people and adults in regards to the larger, national organization. The national organization was not especially important to Danielle's spirituality.

MW: How important is the larger organization COOLJC

Danielle: Not.

MW: What does it do?

Danielle: I don't know. I really don't know. There are different auxiliaries. They're supposed to better people spiritually. You keep going to the same things though.

MW: It doesn't help you?

Danielle: No. And with the young people, you get a word sometimes, but you go back and things are the same.

MW: What could make it better?

Danielle: I don't know.

C.O.O.L.J.C.as a national organization is supposed to provide guidance, support, and information to local churches. This is done through emails, regional meetings, national meetings, and even the college that was started by the national organization. Danielle has started to grow bored with some of the programming offered by the national organization. While those activities may be well-intentioned, they do not interest her because they are the same activities done over and over again. *“And with the young people, you get a word sometimes”*. What Danielle means is that the young people get the Word of God through preaching and teaching. The national organization has the funds and resources to attract famous preachers and have them speak at national sessions. I asked Danielle why she thought that the same activities were done every year. She explained to me that there was a planning session for the convention, but she never went. She said that it was mostly attended by older saints. There is no formal or informal mechanism for youth to reach out to national leaders and express their preferences for

types of services or speakers.

As the daughter of an ordained clergy member, Danielle gets status that most other youth do not.

MW: Speaking of your dad, is there any issue with your dad being a pastor?

Danielle: I don't think so. I look at myself as just a regular person. I don't like that praise or anything.

MW: What kind of praise?

Danielle: People make a big deal and fuss over us.

MW: What else?

Danielle: They feel that we're stuck up.

MW: Why?

Danielle: Because of the protocol. Because of who our parents are.

It is important to note that even when Danielle obtains some power, status, and praise for her connection to her father, she rejects it. Also, her status is directly connected to an adult in her life. Part of Danielle's power and status comes from the fact that her father is her pastor. She gets singled out because of who her father is. Danielle says that she and other children of pastors get attention and recognition "*Because of who are parents are*".

Barrie Thorne (Thorne, 2009) argues that the words that adults use to describe youth construct the time of youth as something temporal, insignificant, and fleeting. For many of the youth in the church, their title as young people implies that they are incomplete beings. Yet Pentecostalism states that all individuals are incomplete without Christ and will not be complete until after they are dead and reunited with Christ in heaven. Youth have far fewer opportunities to confront stereotypes that they are weak in their faith or do not take their faith as seriously as adult members. In pulpits across the country in their organization, ordained, adult men are in a position to speak about definitions, empower, and instruct members on every aspect of their lives. They are also

in a position to confront and or perpetuate misconceptions and stereotypes about themselves in a way that most young people cannot.

As an example, Elder Kinderson has stated in five sermons that some people think that pastors can only be spiritually minded and talk about Godly matters. He says that many people are amazed that he travels, takes his family to the beach, and goes on vacations. He argues that God made a beautiful earth, and that believers should feel no shame in exploring that beauty. The larger issue is not that Pastor Kinderson likes to travel. The issue is that Elder Kinderson has the position and status to confront stereotypes. Elder Kinderson and other ordained men who can take control of the services are provided a public forum that youth like Danielle are not. They are allowed to explain themselves and attack misconceptions about themselves to the congregation.

In the beginning of my interview with Keisha, a 29 year old member of Corinth Church, our conversation centered on Keisha describing what some of the drawbacks to being called a young person. Keisha discussed that the term implies a sense of immaturity and lack of agency for young Pentecostals.

Keisha: *I consider myself a young adult*

MW: *What is it about the term that doesn't fit with you?*

Keisha: *I feel like it's a term that the older people try to control the younger ones*

MW: *A little more info please*

Keisha: *When they say young person, it's their way to label them as not experienced, can't share any advice, or can't really do anything until you get their approval*

MW: *When you're older, will you be like the adults at your church are*

Keisha: *I thought about that and I honestly think that when I'm older and have to deal with young people, I'm going to be more understanding and I think I'm going to try and see a lot more from their perspective*

Like Danielle, Keisha does not like being referred to as a young person. For her, the term labels her as someone who is inexperienced. She spoke about her conversion to

Pentecostalism and explained that she had been in “the world”¹ and had many experiences while there. As mentioned before, Keisha’s frustration is that her experiences and her conversion to Pentecostalism are discounted by adults merely because she is a young person.

In her own words, Keisha articulates that she cannot share advice with other members. Keisha is the vice-president of her church’s A.B.Y.P.U. department. Keisha’s interview points to the notion that she feels as if she is constantly in need of adult approval and is being watched by adults when she says that “*can’t really do anything until you get their [older member’s] approval*”. While oversight from adults might be something that a child would expect, Keisha as a young woman in her late twenties feels as if she is being belittled.

Lastly, Keisha feels a need to change the church in a positive way. Keisha is able to take ownership of the Corinth Church’s future. She already has a stake in what the church will look like. She views the way that youth are being treated as a problem. Keisha recognizes that with her lack of power in the church, there’s little that she can do presently. However, she believes that in the future she will be in a position to help shape Corinth. It is important to note that even though she is the vice president of her church’s A.B.Y.P.U., Keisha is waiting for the opportunity to make meaningful decisions in the church and have adult members listen to and respect her experiences.

Gerald, a member of RLCC, turned 18 during my last month of observations. He

¹ The members of RLCC and Corinth often use the colloquialism of ‘the world’. This term signifies society outside of the Pentecostal church and is usually associated with sin and immoral behavior. Members of both churches also used the word as an adjective to describe actions or behaviors that are outside of the bounds of Pentecostalism. The worldly/Pentecostal binary is often used by both youth and adults. For example, there is worldly music and gospel music.

has attended the church since he was a child. Gerald says that he started attending the church because his parents did, but he is now at an age where he attends because he wants to. Part of his conversion story is that he went from being forced to attend church, to becoming saved and deciding to attend church. That shift means a lot to Gerald. His conceptualization of young people and the expectations for young people differs from Keisha's. Gerald states that he has the freedom to design or run any type of program that he wants to. Gerald believes that he is given free reign because adult leadership wants to see youth taking an active role. He also perceives that he gets some freedom because his father is the church administrator.

***MW:** How much freedom do you have in the church?*

***Gerald:** I can basically do anything if I brought it up to the pastor. I think it's real free 'cause my dad plays a big role*

***MW:** What role does your dad play?*

***Gerald:** He's a minister and an administrator*

When I asked Gerald if he ever proposed a youth service or activity since he was confident that the pastor would back him up, Gerald said no. Even though he claims he has the freedom to design and run church programs, he never has. Few of the young people have. My interview with Gerald, several other youth, and the pastors of the churches points to the notion that youth's participation is very much wanted by pastors and adult leadership, but at times youth participation is not a major focus of Elder Kinderson. Gerald's situation is not mirrored at Corinth Church. The youth at Corinth church have been much more proactive in designing and running programs. While the pastors at both churches offer opportunities for young to take limited leadership roles, the youth at Corinth plan and follow through with youth led services more often than the youth at RLCC. Mitchell makes sure to plan youth services every month as a way to

offer interesting services and also as a way to raise funds for his youth department.

Elder Kinderson frequently stresses that he wants youth's participation in church services. Elder Kinderson also stresses the importance of young people attending Sunday morning services, Friday Evangelical services, and bible study. What Elder Kinderson does *not* do is stress the importance of youth at business meetings. The youth at RLCC are not seen as crucial to the business meetings. When older adult members are unable to attend, Elder Kinderson cancels these meetings. It is important that one does not conflate issues of attendance with issues of power. When Elder Kinderson cancels the meetings, it is often high ranking senior members, both men and women, who cannot attend. Perhaps the reasons for the cancellations are their status as church leaders, and not only their age. Another reason may be that adults bring in more financial resources to the church than younger members. However, age cannot be disentangled from status because there are no trustees in the church under the age of thirty. Additionally, age cannot be disentangled from the financial power of adults.

In my time observing at the church I have seen business meetings cancelled because senior members of the church could not attend. The message implied in that action is their presence is crucial. I personally have never been asked if I was going to attend or not. As a young person, the message that I take away is that senior church members are absolutely necessary, but I am not. Elder Kinderson has had repeated conversations with me about becoming an official, check-signing member of the church. While this will not automatically make me a trustee or another titled position, I will have authority and responsibilities that other youth do not have. It will be interesting to see if at that point I will be considered a necessary member at business meetings.

R. Morgan notes that adult organizations may consult and speak with youth in the organizations, but unless youth's opinions are truly valued, that participation is only surface level (Morgan, 2005). Morgan goes on to argue that many organizations consult with children, but do not make those opinions count by incorporating feedback into the organizations. The youth at RLCC are consulted and valued, but youth often question if their opinions matter. Youth can feel as if their opinions only matter on the surface level. They are not always convinced that their opinions, thoughts, and concerns will have any real impression on church leaders and change the way that the church is organized. Participation and interests are not the same as the full inclusion of youth voices. The lack of a youth on the trustee board or in positions of leadership at either church is certainly proof of the fact that youth's presence seems to be tokenistic.

Youth, in general, do not tithe² or give offerings as consistently as adults. When instructing young people on what kind of services to have, Elder Kinderson often instructs youth that, *“Ya’ll need to have services and invite some older people. Young people will come out to a service, but they don’t give”*. On some levels, there is a connection between the power of church members and their financial giving. Older church members tell of an experience at the national convention years ago where male leadership offended women church members. The women were told to “close their purses” and not give an offering. The impact was felt and the next night, national leadership made an apology to the women of the organization. The ability to give money and financially impact the church can lead to power and respect from church leadership.

Youth are notoriously known for not tithing regularly, or tithing but not giving

² To tithe means to give 10% of one's income to church

offerings in addition to their tithes. Elder Kinderson says that *“If nothing else, you got to tithe. That’s the bare minimum that God is entitled to. That’s scripture”*. During a financial planning seminar that was put on at RLCC during a winter Saturday, many of the young people voiced their financial concerns. In the session, the facilitator mentioned that tithes should be taken out of your check before anything else. Even before bills. When the presenter mentioned giving offerings in addition to tithing, young people like Rhonda mentioned that it takes all that they can in order to tithe and give the bare minimum. Giving offerings on top of that was not a realistic expectation.

I can speak from counting offerings at every service, that offerings at youth services are significantly smaller than traditional services. This is not to say that finances and offerings are the only reasons that youth are considered less mature and less than full members of the church. However, offering and giving are used as an example of spiritual immaturity because it is connected to faith. Elder Kinderson said that *“When you don’t tithe, it means you’re doubting God. He’ll take care of you. I’m not saying to give all your money to the church and not be able to pay bills. But God will take care of you. If you start tithing, he’ll take care of your needs. You got to have the faith. You got to believe”*. It is not their lack of giving that is the root of the problem, but not giving is connected to a lack of faith.

Adults consider other actions of youth to be signs of their spiritual immaturity. Adults discuss how youth are constantly on their cell phones and social media sites as a sign of youth being more focused on social connections than on their relationship with God. Elder Kinderson made social media the subject of one of his sermons in which he stated that *“This social media got these young people. They’re so wrapped up in it. They*

can't put their phones down. They sleep with it. Satan uses that to keep them away from God. Instead of listening to the sermon, they be on their cell phones. Checking and posting". While it is certainly true that young people are on social media and text during services, so do adults. Most of the adult members at RLCC have Facebook pages. Even Shirley, Elder Kinderson's 79 year old mother has one. Yet, the concern for adults who may be addicted to social media is never mentioned. Youth and adults are engaged in the same kinds of behaviors, but it is only seen as spiritual immaturity when it comes to youth. In fact, social media can be very positive for religious youth. Social media and other websites can provide a place for them to have a critical, detached, and rational way to discuss their faith and develop their spiritual identity (Lovhein, 2004). Youth can engage in questions and conversations about their faith in online forums.

My interview with Gerald, like with many of the other youth, exposed a frustration with the way that adult members in the church define young people. Gerald, as evident from the following conversation, does not think that all individuals under the age of 35 should be grouped together.

MW: *Most people refer to you as a young person? How do you feel about that?*

Gerald: *It means I'm younger than the older people in the church.*

MW: *So how old are older people?*

Gerald: *I'd say above 30.*

MW: *So for you, young people is like 0 to 30?*

Gerald: *Nah, I say it starts at 18.*

MW: *So 18-30 are young people. So what are people under 18?*

Gerald: *They're kids.*

MW: *And then over 30 is...*

Gerald: *Old people.*

MW: *So I'd be like an old person?*

Gerald: *You're over 30?*

MW: *I'm over 30.*

Gerald : *(laughter) Well I don't really think it's like 30. It's like, alright, I'll say 40.*

MW: *You can say 30.*

It makes sense that a five year old would seem to be in a different category with a thirty-five year old. However, Gerald does not explain his arbitrary decision for placing an eighteen year old in a different category than a nineteen or twenty year old. Gerald believes in a different categorization of young people than he perceives that adults do. Yet, the fact that Gerald rejects an over-generalized view of young people does not change his lived experience because he is still bound by that definition. Gerald is newly 18. He sees that as a defining moment in which he crossed over from childhood to adulthood. Gerald did not articulate why that age is significant, but he does speak about the differences between children, young people, and old people. Gerald's issue with the binary grouping of young people and adults members is not just that it is inaccurate and generalized. He makes some very large generalizations about age groups himself. His concern is that each of those categories of age has its own strengths and weaknesses. When they are conflated into one large group, then he is lumped together with people who have qualities that he does not want to share.

For instance, Gerald sees young children differently than young people in the church. Gerald says that young children in the church do not understand anything and that they are easily bored. He says that is *“Cuz you don't really understand anything. It's like hard to understand cuz the Bible's not like broken down in kids' terms”*. One reason that Gerald wants to make a clear distinction between himself and children is because he is at a point in his spiritual life where he believes that he understands the Bible. Despite the rhetoric of all Pentecostals who are “saved” being on equal level, Gerald's point of view implies that he believes that the older one gets, the more sophisticated they are in their understanding of God. Gerald's perception is that adults think that someone who is

twelve or thirteen could have the same understanding and appreciation of God and church as individuals in the 18-30 range.

Gerald also critiques adult members. He thinks that they are judgmental and focus on traditions, rather than their faith. During the interview he stresses many times that older members hold on to tradition. Gerald specifically mentions how older members dress. *“They’re always formal. Like, they dress up for everything, even when it’s not a Sunday service. Like the beach or a picnic or something. It could be an informal thing and they’ll dress up because they’ve been told that you always dress up. But like, no one knows why. They just do it”*. He assured me that he would not be like the older members of his church because he is more worried about praying, reading his Bible and his personal walk with God. He does not see the point of holding on to a tradition. Tradition is the root of a lot of tensions between adult members and youth members according to Gerald.

***Gerald:** They [adult members] do stuff just because like it's always been done. They don't think about doing it or why they do it. They do it because someone told them to and now they tell other people to do it too*

Gerald does not want to be included as a member of a group that does not think critically about the religious choices that they make. Through his lack of attendance of youth services, informal dress, and rejection of the church norm of only dating other Pentecostals, Gerald does not seem to be pressured or influenced by the expectations that the church has of young people. He rarely attends church functions that are not on Sunday mornings and does not limit himself to being close friends and associates with other Pentecostals. While many youth stressed that their relationship with others in their churches was one of the strongest representations of their faith, Gerald disagreed. The

connections and community of believers came second to his personal walk with God.

Speaking for Youth in the Church

While youth are subject to the restrictions and definitions that older church members impose, youth find room to navigate and exert their personal agendas. However, even in situations where youth are given a platform, their power and ability to self-describe is limited. One of the prime examples was a youth program held in the winter of 2013. I organized the activity. It was a movie night where I planned a screening of the movie *Jesus Camp*. The movie centers on a group of young Evangelical Christians. The youth in the movie are as young as nine or ten. The movie discusses the summer camp where youth were taught about how to preach, evangelize, and share the Gospel. The movie garnered a lot of criticism in the popular media because many people claimed that the adults working with the youth were indoctrinating them and forcing them to accept adult responsibilities before they were ready (The Seattle Times, 2006).

The event was sponsored by the RLCC A.B.Y.P.U. and we invited the young people from Corinth Church and other local Pentecostal churches. What I wanted to do was to provide a space for the community of youth to come together and discuss their role in the church vs. what adults tell them that their role should be. What actually happened was that the conversation for and about youth was taken over by adult members.

In addition to a large number of young people from both churches, many senior members as well as the pastors of both churches attended. Initially during the discussion of the movie, most of the comments were made by Elder Kinderson, Elder Vick, and

Elder Jones. These three senior leaders monopolized the conversation at first. Other adult members of both churches joined in and offered insights on the role of youth in the Pentecostal Church. The adult conversations centered on the perceived role of adults to protect and guide youth. Many of the youth seemed uncomfortable by that sentiment. They rolled their eyes, raised their hands, and attempted to speak up, but were overpowered by adult conversation. The two pastors of the churches stood up and commanded attention of the room. I found it challenging to provide a space for some of the younger people to express their opinions. The pastors even stopped me, the organizer and moderator of the group, from speaking. Eventually I was able to get the adults in the room to allow young people to speak. I had to put my hands up in the air and actually cut the pastors off and explain that part of reason for this service was to hear what young peoples' perspectives were. Other older members in the audience nodded and agreed with me. Once that happened, some interesting and insightful young people perspectives were brought to the open. Most of the young people had a problem with the construction of youth as innocent and requiring protection. Gwendolyn, a young person in her late twenties exclaimed that,

“Kids these days been through a lot. I work with them on a daily basis. They see a lot more than you think they do. They see what their parents do and they know a lot about the world. They see all that crazy stuff happening. They know about Trenton, trust me. You’re not hiding anything because they done seen it already.”

Gwendolyn directly confronts part of the definition that adults construct for young people. She believes that even young children have an understanding of mature subject matter like poverty, death, and drugs. Gwendolyn works at a nursery school. Her point is that even young children have matured in a way that the older generation does not

understand or acknowledge. Her comment is a warning that adults have underestimated the types of experiences that youth have. Following Gwendolyn's comments, her sister Rhonda also decided to speak to the knowledge that she believes young people have.

"You can't write these kids off. They done been through some stuff. They got a testimony. They seen stuff I haven't even seen. You can't act like kids don't know `nothing. They know a lot".

Rhonda is speaking to a generalized conception of childhood that was being articulated by adults at the movie night. Many of the youth in these churches live in urban Trenton. It is telling that the youth of this study are articulating an image of youth that runs counter to narratives of children being safe, pure, and innocent. Both sisters state plainly that the youth that they know have been exposed to many subjects that adults do not mention. While the adults in the audience listen passively, other youth nod their heads, raised their hands to speak, and substantiate the comments with "Amen's" and "that's rights". It is clear from this episode that many of the young people are on the same page about what they think young children experience these days.

Two weeks after the movie night I talked to Mitchell about why the young people that night were so adamant about their point that youth today are more experienced than adults think. Mitchell explained to me that the excitement was not about the youth in the movie. Rather, their reaction was in response to the belief that adults have that young people do not face many hardships. Mitchell explained to me that *"You know the things that we go through are worse. Or I believe they're worse. I mean they [adult members] might have had some of the things, or they probably did go through some of the stuff. But it's not as harsh as it is now...as detrimental."* Young people like Mitchell can sometimes perceive adult protection as belittling to youth's own sense of agency.

Mitchell believes that he has overcome many hardships on his own and that he has experienced more obstacles than adult church members. Most of the young people viewed themselves as competent and experienced.

Both portrayals of youth are problematic. The adults have superimposed an image of youth as innocent and ignorant to what they consider to be adult experiences. These adults think of themselves as gatekeepers who guard the boundaries of appropriate knowledge (Robinson & Davies, 2008). They see the indoctrination of youth into religious causes like the one in the movie to be a problem because it forces youth to take on adult responsibilities that they are not ready for. Elder Kinderson says that "*You can't force religion on anyone, especially not a child. You instruct them and plant the seed of faith in them. But you can't force anyone. At the end of the day, they're kids*". Young people in the audience on the other hand imagine that many youth have had knowledge of drugs, sex, and alcohol. Neither portrayal of youth helps to liberate and give voice to youth. Both caricatures trap younger youth through simplifying who they are.

What is interesting here is that neither group identifies with the nine to ten year old age group that is portrayed in the *Jesus Camp* documentary. The adults see the "youth" as "children" but the young people in the audience (most in their teens and twenties) see the younger children as another distinctive sub group. Young children are absent from participation in the conversation about youth. There were four youth in the audience who were around the age of twelve or younger. None of those youth spoke about their experiences as being a young child in a Pentecostal church. None of us asked them about their experiences, about whether they were growing up too fast, or if they had been exposed to the sexual and cultural knowledge that older church members claimed.

In short, their participation was not encouraged. Absent in the entire conversation about young children were the actual young children! In retrospect, I could have created a different environment that would have helped to bring out the voices of younger Pentecostals. I could have shown the movie to the children in a small group. The logistics would have been difficult because as mentioned before, there is no time during the Sunday morning service where the kids are by themselves. I would have had to take them out of church in order to do so.

The lack of a significant number of young children's perspectives was a source of tension for me in this project. I wanted to seek those voices, but I just simply could not find them. Because I was unable to obtain interviews with young children, I tried my best to be especially observant of young children during my church observations. This practice provided me with useful data about the religious experiences of very young Pentecostals. In the following chapters I use those observations to highlight how young children are used to reaffirm gender norms. Specifically I will discuss how young boys and young girls are used to perpetuate gender norms and the unequal power structure at both churches.

In Control of Their Own Faith

Independence is especially important and guarded by young women, who are often held by more social constraints than their male counterparts in regards to dress, ordained positions, and leadership opportunities. Saved Pentecostal women cannot be ordained ministers or pastors. They also wear long skirts and keep their heads covered in the sanctuary. Danielle and Keisha have drastically different experiences in their

churches. Danielle is the daughter of a pastor and has always attended church and lives at home with both of her parents. Keisha became a Pentecostal believer in her teens, lives by herself, and has no family members that attend church with her. Despite those differences, both women are uncomfortable with the term that I and others in the church commonly use to describe them.

Keisha was 28 when she decided to leave her previous church that she attended with her sisters and join Corinth Church.

***MW:** Can you tell me some of the reasons you decided to go to Corinth Church [sic]?*

***Keisha:** Um, I felt or I was desiring a need to grow more and I felt like where I was at I wasn't getting what I needed spiritually.*

***MW:** What are some of those things you find at Corinth [sic]?*

***Keisha:** I was looking for more support spiritually. I felt like among my peers, certain individuals wasn't taking their walk as serious and it was kind of discouraging when I came into church looking for a spiritual experience and I felt like I was almost being criticized for being spiritual. So I was. Basically I left to look for support.*

Keisha's answer is an example of how many Pentecostal youth take their personal relationship with Christ very seriously. For youth like Keisha, their faith comes before the friendships that they have developed. Keisha spoke at length about how her faith walk was the most important part of her life. Keisha made a decision to walk away from her friends and family who were not as dedicated to their faith as she was. Within the context of the Pentecostal cosmos, there is the belief that who one associates and is friends with has an amazing amount of influence in a Pentecostal believer's life. Keisha chose Corinth Church because it is more receptive to her spiritual philosophy and being part of a community of dedicated believers was important to her. She longed for a community that could support her faith practice. In Keisha's opinion, the members and leadership at Corinth Church support her desire to be an extremely dedicated and spiritual

young person. Where she felt strange for being a faithful youth at her old church, she feels as if Corinth Church respects her desire to grow spiritually.

Keisha recognizes that all young people are not the same. While she is firmly rooted in her faith and has changed churches because of it, she knows that not everyone does the same. There are nuances to youth's spirituality that she is aware of.

***Keisha:** Um, honestly I think a lot of young people take things for granted. I think that they don't take spirituality serious, but I think they're so used to just being nonchalant that they don't really realize it I guess*

***MW:** As a young person, what makes you take your walk seriously?*

***Keisha:** It would have to be I guess my relationship with God in the past. Um, He's brought me through so many different things I feel like I owe Him the best of me. And I can't give him half heartedness*

Keisha's use of the phrase “young people” implies an immaturity and lack of taking one's faith walk seriously. Keisha's relationship with God is deep and based off of the way that He has provided for her. Keisha is a lifelong resident of inner city Trenton. Her entire life she has been confronted with the problems of a high crime urban city. She says that God has protected her not only spiritually but physically and that she owes Him her life. She puts herself into a different category than the typical young person because of her heightened spirituality. Keisha has had the initiative to choose a different faith community and was willing to be part of a community separate from her family. Per Keisha's interview, not all young people are serious about their faith. Even those who are can profit from being around adults and older church members who support their growth and are willing and able to help young people develop-edit.

Keisha is not the type of young person that many adults in the church imagine when they think about young people. Adults often imagine youth who are struggling

with their faith. Adult Pentecostals speak about, preach to, and pray for a construction of young people who are afraid to take a stand in their faith. Adults often imagine the kind of young person that Keisha felt she needed to separate herself from. Elder Kinderson says that *“Young people today are different. They’re not as serious as we were. They don’t take things seriously”*. That sentiment is echoed in the many prayer requests and announcements where adults ask for prayer for young people because they are susceptible to temptations of the secular world. Yet many of the youth like Keisha add depth and variety to the presentation of Pentecostal youth at RLCC and Corinth Church. Her story also demonstrates the tension surrounding young people. Adults want to watch and guide youth because adults feel a spiritual and natural connection to the youth in their churches. However, that concern can be perceived as stifling and belittling to youth at times.

The construction of juvenile behavior as delinquent occurs both inside the church and outside of the church. Juvenile delinquency has been constructed around ideas of normalcy and appropriate behavior. As a whole, young people have become less rebellious and contrary in the past three decades (Parsons, 2007). He also goes on to say that the belief that youth are delinquent and/or rebellious is a construct. The implication is that youth like Keisha are constructing an identity that protects them from danger in settings outside of the church. Their lived experiences directly contrast the construction that many adult Pentecostals are worried about.

I attended the same church that Keisha did when I was a teenager. At the age of sixteen, I made the decision to attend RLCC because I felt that I could grow there in a way that I could not at my previous church. My reasons were similar to Keisha's. I felt like I was not challenged to grow spiritually. I knew enough to recognize that God

wanted me to grow spiritually. Leaving the faith community that I was used to was a reasonable price to pay for following God. I had to leave my family and my comfort zone. I believe I reached the place I belong, following the path that God had for me. The fact that I was a young person did not diminish the autonomy I was allowed in my own spiritual walk. Neither my parents nor my pastor criticized me for the decision that I made. I was given the room to explore my own options and my own growth.

Most of the youth in the study commented on how they were awarded the space to figure out their own spiritual path. I think it is important to realize the limitations of such a freedom. The youth in this study all went from a Oneness Pentecostal church to another Oneness Pentecostal church in the same town under the same national organization. Kinship and friendship ties made the change in churches go much smoother. Had any of us chosen a non-Pentecostal church, I believe our decisions would have been met with much more criticism from our families and we probably would not have been permitted by our parents to change churches.

Mitchell was sixteen when he started attending Corinth church three years ago. For Mitchell, his spiritual well-being is intricately tied to his mental, physical, and emotional well-being. His faith is so intimately tied to the other aspects of his life that he finds it hard to examine those parts of his life in separation from his spirituality. Mitchell believes that his entire life became better when he made the decision to accept the Holy Ghost in his life. This is perhaps one of the most unique and interesting facets of the spiritual lives of youth in this study. While many scholars find that most American youth are at least somewhat religious, not much of the evidence suggests that American youth have *high* levels of religious participation (Smith, 2009). What separates most of the

youth in this setting from other Christian youth is that they have very high levels of religious participation.

When I asked Mitchell to explain some of the reasons that he now attends Corinth church he plainly told me:

Mitchell: *At the age I went to Corinth Church I was approximately 17. I was just leaving high school, going through prom and graduation and everything. And The Church of Trenton didn't seem like it was for me and I visited Elder Vick's church, which was Corinth Church, and that church felt like that's where I needed to be and I stayed there. That age between high school and you know, once you leave high school the things you have to maintain you know to get a job, school. You know the things you need to know. Just becoming a man.*

MW: *And Elder Vick was helpful with that?*

Mitchell: *Yes He's been very helpful. He's been very prayerful.*

Some very important meanings are conveyed in Mitchell's answer. The first is that even though he was a young person, he had a very clear sense of what he needed in his life in order to develop into a strong and healthy Pentecostal Christian. Secondly, he was bold enough to seek that out for himself. There are many adults in the church who say that youth do not take their faith seriously and that is one of the problems with the church in modern times. Youth like Mitchell belie that stereotype. Here is a young man who knew from a young age how important his faith was and took steps to grow, even though it separated him from his family. Additionally, Elder Vick was active in his prayer and guidance for Mitchell.

All of the youth in this study spoke about being able to approach their pastors. Youth attributed the feeling of closeness and approachability to the small number of people in the churches and the generally close bonds of people who attend storefront churches. Mitchell recognizes the role that he plays in the perception that he is spiritually immature. Mitchell relies on the help and encouragement of older members like Elder

Vick. Mitchell's words demonstrate that he recognizes that he is in need of both spiritual and social support. The spiritual identities of Mitchell and other youth at the churches are fluid and changing. While Mitchell admits needing help from adults during this interview, at a later incident at a national meeting that I will discuss below, Mitchell is frustrated that adult Pentecostals do not recognize his autonomy and maturity.

The Power to Lead

At both churches, when one makes a conscious decision to accept Jesus into one's life and is subsequently filled with the Holy Ghost, then that person becomes a full member of the church. The belief is commonly stated the way that Mitchell explained it to me, "*Once you're old enough to know right and wrong, you're old enough for the Holy Ghost*". Congregants believe that the world is embroiled in the midst of a battle between good and evil. While they believe that good will ultimately win, they must battle against Satan and his attempts to separate them from God. All humans are involved in this battle; no matter how old they are. So on a very basic level, youth are considered the same as adults. In terms of picking a side between good and evil, there is no middle ground or escape because one is young. Youth will be judged for their wrong doings just like adults will. The message to youth is clear. Picking the wrong side will result in an eternity in Hell.

Mitchell says that "*My faith is ...my faith is. I'm stuck to Jesus Christ I owe him. I'm embedded to him because of what he's done for me*". Mitchell finds that his faith does not only include dogmatic practices like praying, worshiping, and reading his bible, but it also entails a very personal relationship with Christ that involves every aspect of his

life. For Mitchell and other Pentecostal youth, their faith is the most important part of their identity. Youth state that it is only through the lens of their faith that the world makes sense. The centrality of their faith to their lives is reinforced through sermons, lessons, Sunday school and bible study. Youth like Kimberly an 18 year old member from RLCC mention that:

Faith and church both are resources that I am going to need to live a stable lifestyle not only for myself but for my children. I was able to grow up having a saved parent to guide me through the roller coaster ride that life takes us through. Faith is not the tangible thing that one can see but without it life is not going to be easy so it is essential that I utilized it. Church is like the gym to health freaks, you don't need it every day but at least some days out of the week to keep you stable.

That being said, spiritual responsibility of youth for their own salvation does not translate into responsibility and leadership roles in church. Youth are excluded from most positions of leadership, except for music and the A.B.Y.P.U. The disconnect between youth being told to embrace Pentecostalism, but not leadership positions in the Pentecostal church, can have negative effects on youth and cause them to be disenfranchised and/or angry about their positions in the church. Mitchell was ordained as a deacon when he was nineteen. He describes that position as “*someone who supports the pastor*” and in regards to the age requirement stated that “*There's no age requirement. Anyone can be one as long as they're saved.*” In May of 2013, Mitchell and I attended a national planning session with some of the ordained men from our churches. The men were separated by their positions during the session and spent the three day session with other members from all over the country who shared their position. This was Mitchell's first time in a national meeting with other deacons. What Mitchell discovered was that most of the other deacons were old and did not respect his youthfulness. He also discovered that there were leadership positions in the deacons union that he could not run

for because he was under thirty years old. Mitchell's enthusiasm for wanting a leadership position was downplayed and playfully mocked by older deacons. They explained that he was too young and inexperienced. They likened his wanting a leadership position to trying to take over the organization.

I was at the same meeting with Mitchell and it was frustrating to see how older members of the organization disregarded the experience and expertise that we might be able to bring. During the first day of the conference most of the senior members said that they were old and tired. They said that they did not want to hold onto the positions that they had. They were ready to give power up to the next generation. Mitchell and I felt encouraged by these claims. It felt good to know that the older generation welcomed us and was prepared to teach and train us for leadership.

On the very next day, the discussion of the election of officers was brought up. It was then that the officers and people in positions of power one by one began to explain that they wanted to keep their positions. Most of the other members seemed to accept this fact and refused to run against incumbent officers. Mitchell and I sat in the back of the room shocked and amazed. Just twenty-four hours ago we had been led to believe that room was opening up for us to take on some responsibility. We were confident that leadership opportunities would be available and that we could gain some power through those positions. Instead, we were now witnessing older church members who were unwilling to relinquish their power. The fact that elections are held only once every three years made the situation seem even direr. We would have to wait at least three years before we could attempt to play an official role in the organization.

Mitchell and I developed a plan to run for offices even though we were pretty

confident we would lose. I whispered to him, “*We're going to nominate each other. Even if we don't win, that's okay. I want them to know that we're here and we're coming for them. If we don't get them now, we'll get those three years from now!*” When looking at the positions that we would run for, Mitchell was interested in treasurer. However, the bylaws of the group said that in order to be president or treasurer, one had to be at least thirty years old. This made no sense to us. What did age have to do with someone's ability to perform a task? If someone had a skill in handling money, wasn't the skill more important than their age? I could understand saying that someone must be in the organization for at least a year. That made sense to us because it equated to having knowledge about the organization and how it is run. But an arbitrary age that excluded Mitchell from certain leadership positions was a disappointment. Not only did it make us angry, but it solidified the fact that adults really did not want youth to take positions of leadership and power. Spiritual maturity was not a factor at all. Mitchell and I have been going to church all our lives. We are educated in Pentecostal doctrine and dogma. Yet, Mitchell cannot run for an office and someone who just joined the church yesterday could. It made me so angry that I spoke up and said:

I just think there needs to be some connection between what we say we want and what we actually want. If we want younger people to be in the organization and take ownership of it, then we can't exclude them from offices. I don't know if this is a conversation for now or later, but maybe we need to look into our bylaws and make sure that they reflect the organization that we want to be.

I am not sure what I expected to happen, but the response from the older members was not supportive or comforting. They laughed at us and told us that we could not understand how to manage money until we were married. They said that the bylaws prohibited Mitchell from running for treasurer. No one addressed my idea to change the

bylaws or the fact that the rhetoric of our organization does not match what was actually happening. It was a disheartening conversation that made Mitchell and I both consider if there was a role for us in the organization. It frustrated me that with my history in the organization, my education, and my passion, all that many of the adults in the room could see was my age.

Mitchell told me that he was considering not coming back to the deacons' meeting in the future. He was frustrated about how the deacons were old and clinging on to power. He stated “*Wait and see. I'm going to be their president one day*”. Youth like Mitchell have a hard time reconciling the rhetoric of the Pentecostal church's belief that no matter the age, all have a spiritual responsibility, because they are locked out of most leadership positions. His lived experience belies the rhetoric that he has been taught. For Mitchell, that could result in him leaving the national organization in the months or years to come.

The scenario was an example of tactics that adult Pentecostals use in order to preserve power. The maintenance of power is predicated on age in order to ensure that youth are properly socialized and prepared to accept full status as adult members of the church (Matthews, 2013). Matthews et al describe the socializing of youth by saying that when adults in a group focus on the development of youth into adults, rather than childhood as a distinct and valuable stage, “children are little more than adults-in waiting-or less-than adults” (147). The young people in this study are not children, but they are a group separated from adults. There is no standard age or experience that liberates youth from young person into adulthood.

I do not believe that the adults in the room intentionally meant to alienate us. I do

not think they realized how seriously we took their words to heart and how their joking and dismissing of us made us feel dejected and unwanted. Even more importantly, I do not think that they realized that their response to us was based off of an incorrect assumption about who we were because of our age. They assumed that we lacked experience for the positions. Both of our pastors, who were also at the national meetings, told us that no one knows who we are yet, so how could we possibly expect to be leaders or get a position so early. Everyone had a reason for why they felt comfortable dismissing us. At the end of the day it was clear to Mitchell and I that the reason for us being overlooked was because we were young. Our age gave adults room to completely dismiss us and tell us that we were not ready yet. Because they are the ones in power making rules, locking us out of positions, and refusing to change the bylaws, we have no recourse. My own personal experience with adult members also resonates with the time spent observing and interviewing other youth. I found out first hand that someone else's idea of who I was had the power to limit what choices I could make in my own life. In a faith that prizes people making their own decisions about their walk with Christ and being as active in the church as possible, I was confused. Ideologies of spiritual responsibility across age groups contradict with lived experiences of power and leadership in the institution. Here we see the distinction between spiritual and institutional power.

Much like with Mitchell, other Pentecostal youth are anxious for their chance to run the church and make decisions. Like youth cultures outside of the church, young people yearn for the space and authority to make decisions about their own lives and influence their communities. At the same time, it seems as if much of the anxiety about

youth separating from the church or developing their own dangerous subculture is inaccurate. Pentecostals youth and other Evangelical denominations have some of the highest retention rates for inter-generational retention in their churches (Smith & Emerson, *American evangelicalism: Embattled and thriving*, 1998). Christian Smith's research shows that "the evangelical tradition features one of the highest inter-generational membership retention rates and a great ability to raise children who do not become theologically liberal or non-religious when they grow up" (48). The fact that youth are not only staying in the Pentecostal church, but looking for leadership positions shows a disconnect between the fears of adults and the realities of youth. There is loud rhetoric in the church about letting youth take over. Elder Kinderson can often be heard saying from the pulpit that he wants young people to be more invested and take control of the church. More than 10 Sunday mornings he has said "*Young people aren't the church of tomorrow. They're today's church*". For quite a few Sundays, I saw Kimberly at RLCC and Xavier at Corinth Church wear pins that said, "I AM the church of TODAY." The pins were large, square, black ones with white lettering on them. The fact that the words "am" and "today" were in capital letters screamed out a not so subtle message. I asked Kimberly about it and she said that she received it at the annual National Youth Summit. It was telling that Kimberly wore this badge not at a Youth Summit meeting, but on a Sunday morning service at her local church. By wearing this badge she was boldly declaring that she was a stakeholder in the church on a local level and that she was prepared to lead. Her choice to wear this pin and invite members to ask her about it implies that youth have awareness that they should have some ownership of the church. When I asked her about why she wore the badge, Kimberly responded that,

The “I AM the church of TODAY” pin means that I am the new generation walking into the new era of church.

With doors to leadership positions locked and stuck in the misconception that youth are immature and unqualified for leadership positions, there is not much that youth can do.

This chapter has focused on how Pentecostalism on the national level has helped to define the categories of youth and adulthood at RLCC and Corinth church. The definitions have had very serious ramifications for the youth and adults who attend the churches. Their age grouping assigns them to certain auxiliaries within the church on the national and local level. Additionally, it prevents many youth from serving in positions of leadership on the national level. From an adult perspective, they want to ensure that young Pentecostals are appropriately trained for when it is time to assume leadership roles. Despite those good intentions, youth can feel as if they are being limited and stunted through the actions of older Pentecostals. Some youth even spoke about their fear of being silenced and punished for activities that are contrary to Pentecostal beliefs.

The definition of a young person is an unchanging and strict one. For decades, Pentecostals under the age of 35 have been considered young people. While the later chapters of the dissertation focus on some areas of flexibility in Pentecostalism, Chapter 3 continues with the theme of strict definitions. In chapter 3, I discuss how marriage and dating serve as a way for youth to learn about the strict gender norms in Oneness Pentecostalism. Refusing to conform to gender norms results in youth either being punished or pushed out of the Pentecostal church. Youth are not able to challenge or disrupt those gender norms. Instead, they are indoctrinated through modeling and Pentecostal doctrine.

Chapter 3: Gender Performativity in the Churches

“There's homosexuals in the church and pastors aren't addressing that. Some churches are just staying quiet. God created woman for man. I think women are beautiful. I have a hard time understanding how a man could be with another man. Two hairy men laying up next to each other. That don't even sound right. There's just something about a woman...A man with a man or a woman with a woman is out of order. I'm not afraid to speak the truth.” ~ Minister Johnston

All of the youth in this study claim to aspire to marry a person of the opposite sex and have children. Their aspiration for a husband or wife is more than just for a companion. That future spouse should be a spiritual partner who strengthens and encourages the individual. Youth frame those relationships in a purely heterosexual context and use the marriages of pastors and ordained leaders as models for how their future marriages should be. It is through the processes of dating and preparing to be married, that youth are educated about strict and inflexible gender roles. The Pentecostals at RLCC and Corinth Church believe that gender roles are divine and must be taught to youth (Brinkerhoff & M., 1984). Women are supposed to show deference to men. Men are instructed to be the heads of households and lead their families. Men and women who do not ascribe to biblically rooted gender roles are seen as “out of order” and “out of God's will”. Not adhering to those rules results in stigmatization and formal punishment by the church. There is no flexibility in these gender norms. This chapter shows how promoting traditional ideas about family, gender, and sexuality allow Pentecostals to preserve and reproduce their faith and culture and ensure that the secular world does not disrupt Pentecostal dogma.

Looking for Love

Young men like Xavier and Peter, two members of Corinth Church, must be mindful of gender roles when they are looking for girlfriends and potential wives. Peter and Xavier use the examples of their pastors as a model for what their future marriage will look like. While many of the youth come from broken families and single parent households, Peter and Xavier's parents are still married and saved. Yet, Xavier mentions the importance of Pastor Kinderson's relationship.

Xavier: I always listened to Elder Kinderson [sic] when he calls out Aunt Lee. He says "my best friend, my girlfriend". That's what I want to be. I want my best friend to be my wife.

Xavier looks to local pastors as an example of the ideal marriage. It is interesting to note the influence and power that the pastors and their wives have on Pentecostal congregations. Pastors and their wives are presented as examples of appropriate relationships between men and women. They are considered the mothers and fathers of the church. Xavier, who has married parents, models an ideal marriage after pastors, instead of his own family. He claims that he wants to model the type of relationship that Elder Kinderson has with Lee Kinderson. Pastors and their wives, who are known colloquially as "first ladies" understand and embrace the fact that they are held up as models of appropriate Pentecostal behavior for young people. In her interview, Lee Kinderson told me:

"When I was young, I never imagined that I would be a pastor's wife. That just wasn't the life that I ever thought I'd have. It's tough sometimes. You have to support the pastor. You have to be courteous and always smiling. You have to be there for the

women in the church because that's not really the place of the pastor... I mean, the pastor is over everyone...but he can't handle some of the issues that are specifically for women. That's where the pastor's wife can step in."

As with most of the other regulations and social norms in these two Pentecostal churches, adult members model behaviors and relationships for youth members to emulate.

Peter and Xavier explained that not only do they want to have a relationship with a girl who is Pentecostal, but she must be a girl who declares herself saved and has spoken in tongues.

MW: *How important is it for you to have a partner that is saved?*

Xavier: *It is very important.*

MW: *Why?*

Xavier: *Because we... I'll speak for myself. Because there comes times in a Christian's life. Especially Pentecostals being saved and filled with the Holy Ghost, there comes times where the devil fights and we can sometimes need encouragement. It's a way of someone being saved and living the same lifestyle you're living. You need that person to lean on to. If you're going to be dating someone, that's who you're giving all your attention to. And you want to be able to give your attention to someone who can encourage. Someone who is able to love you as Christ loves. On the other side, we have fleshly problems. We need someone when one is weak, the other is strong. There ain't no use in the blind leading the blind. We need one another to strengthen one another.*

MW: *So you wouldn't date someone that was not saved?*

Xavier: *I've been tempted. To the point where as though you get so caught up in the physical. They [unsaved girls] nice. They ain't cursing, they ain't drinking, so why not? But then we have to get back to the teachings of Christ. We have to get back and realize that Satan ain't playing. If he can use a distraction of someone unsaved, he'll do that. We have to watch some saved folks too because sometimes unequally yoked [members with different levels of spiritual dedication] don't just mean people outside the church. My spiritual level could be up here and yours could be down here and now we are trying to balance one another and I'm eating meat and you still drinking milk. It's not going to work. It has to be on a balance.*

MW: *How hard is it to find someone who's saved?*

Peter: *If you don't go out and look and just let God show you this is the one for you, it's not hard. But it's going to be hard if you don't seek God first.*

Xavier: *People say, you wait, you wait. I believe that the time we are living in compared to the times of the days of old, marriage is not as sacred as it used to be. It is not as sacred and I believe in this generation that could be a possibility that half of us have to face. Because so far as in someone who has given their virginity and now you're in the position that she has known [had sex with] another man. A lot of young girls who have not been taught in a right way. Now they're laying the comparing*

game. And they could never fully love the way that older women have. They could never given themselves up totally because they've already given it up. We have to look at that some of us have to think this might not happen. So I need to work on me spiritually and naturally. Because for some reason Satan got a major role in this marriage thing. Across the board, half of Christian marriages are getting divorced. Are we going to lead ourselves into that? If it's going to happen, it's going to happen. It's a lot easier to say... But I'm getting to the point where I'm at the crossroads where the Lord is doing so many things in my life, I might not have the time for it when you get serious with God, you don't really have time. I found myself God is doing so many things in me. You can't give no lead way to the enemy. At this moment, I have to fulfill God's purpose.

I highlighted the above exchange because it points to some of the emotions that young Pentecostal men deal with in regards to dating and finding future marriage partners. The small size of the churches makes it hard to find romantic partners. Most young people find partners at other local churches or in national meetings where there are larger groups of young people present.

Xavier and Peter's interview also highlights their thoughts about relationships with young women outside of the Pentecostal church. Oneness Pentecostals reference scriptures where God instructed men to find wives. Women who actively seek husbands can sometimes be seen as outside of appropriate gender roles. Women can pray for a husband, date young men, or talk about a potential mate or desired characteristics of a future mate. However, actively pursuing a young man can be seen as a desperate and unlady like. While Peter and Xavier may complain about their limited options in terms of dating partners, the Church's social mores provide them with more agency in regards to finding a spouse than their female counterparts.

Peter and Xavier believe that having a girlfriend who is saved will create a partnership. Both young men understand that there will be times when they have a physical desire to have sex. Having a saved girlfriend would be helpful in these times. If

things are going too far towards sex, their saved girlfriend will be able to stop them. The opposite is true as well. If she wants to have sex, then Peter or Xavier can stop her. Having a saved girlfriend means both young people will be held accountable and working with each other on sexual purity. While the role of a woman in Pentecostalism may be under a man, both young men and young women are charged with keeping their bodies under control and not committing fornication. While women are granted fewer opportunities for leadership, women are seen as equals in this circumstance of sexual purity.

The interview with Xavier and Peter also sheds light on another phenomena of Pentecostal dating and gender relationships. The idea of casually dating is absent from their conversation. Xavier and Peter only discussed dating in how it leads to marriage. While many young people outside of the Pentecostal community date for fun or in order to get to know a person, youth in this study did not mention casual dating as a desire. Popular opinion in the church is that dating should lead to marriage. Everyone that I interviewed, male and female, made a direct connection between dating and marriage.

Despite youths' desires to marry, church leadership cautions youth against marrying at a young age. Elder Kinderson frequently reflects on how he got married very young, and while he is still married, he warns young people to make sure that they can take care of themselves as an individual before getting married. Elder Kinderson uses his family as an anecdote on the pulpit and states that *“I told my daughter, don't you go with no man and you be completely dependent on him. Have some something of yours, so in case something happen, you can take care of yourself”*. However, marrying and attempting to have children is part of the normalized Pentecostal experience. This is

especially true because many Pentecostal youth want to marry in order to have sex and it not be considered a sin. Minister Johnston summed up a popular sentiment of Pentecostals when he stated during a Sunday school lesson that, *“I just think it’s abnormal for a man to never get married”*. With the expectation of marriage and the lack of options in their own churches, many youth struggle to find acceptable, saved Pentecostal mates in the church.

While waiting for a Pentecostal mate, all of the young people spoke about the difficulty of remaining sexually pure. Additionally, all of the youth expressed that regardless of their past experiences, they were now at a point in their lives where they *desired* to abstain from sex until their marriage.

***Xavier:** One thing you got to understand about God is that we have to realize that God is a spirit. He is here to build up the spirit man. God is not flesh. That's why Adam had Eve. He made her for a purpose because He knew the urges that Adam was going to have. When we talk about God fulfilling the flesh. It kinda don't click to me. Everything I read about God is spirit, but sex is what my flesh want. We always going to have them urges. Paul, I believe everybody wants that point to where they say, Lord, I want a wife. I want someone who is for me. I want that. It's kind of hard seeing that God could keep you. I know that God could keep you, but sexually them urges do come and there's no better thing to turn to than the love of your wife.*

***MW:** I don't think the urge ever goes away. I believe that he will give me enough of the spirit that I can tolerate it.*

***Xavier:** I can speak for me. I don't think, when I talk about marriage, my whole thing is not based on sex. It's not that much of a big deal to me. It's a good thing to be able to have sex with the one you love. But my main thing is someone that I can confide in. Someone that I can just talk to about everything and trust them. We may sometimes look at the marriage thing because we can't control ourselves.*

***MW:** And that's messed a lot of folks up. Getting married while they were young, just to have sex.*

While Xavier and I are both Pentecostals who believe in abstaining from sex until marriage, our understanding of God's role in living up to that standard of purity differs. Even in a small group of Pentecostals, there are diverse opinions about how God works in

the lives of members. Xavier believes that his sexual desires will never go away because they are part of his “flesh”. Members at both churches refer to the flesh as the earthly and physical parts of them. Members divide existence into things of God/spirit (things that are spiritual and eternal) and things of the flesh (things that are earthly, temporal, and will die). The conversation between Xavier and myself is an example of varied ways that youth think about sex and sexuality. Xavier does not believe that the fleshly part of people can be controlled forever. He believes that the way God will solve his desires for sex is through providing him with a wife. Xavier’s view is in direct contrast with my own. I believe that God’s power over the spiritual realm can have a lasting effect on the physical world. Instead of praying for a wife, I pray for the ability to have control over my body. Although our views of the way that God protects and guides us in sexual purity are different, we both believe that purity is important.

At the same time, none of the youth admitted to being virgins. So in spite of the pressure and mandate to stay virgins, it would appear that youth have difficulty actually living out that expectation. Youth like Gerald spoke about sex and sexuality and how being single complicates the notion that one can and should remain sexually pure. They also connected their reasons for abstaining from sex to physical and health dangers, rather than focusing mainly on the spiritual consequences.

My follow-up interview with Gerald was unique in that he was the only male participant whose answers about relationships focused on a more secular perspective. Again, I believe that part of Gerald’s reason for being an outlier is that he is one of the youngest members at Corinth. Despite being the son of a minister, Gerald rarely attends services outside of Sunday morning services. When I asked Gerald about sex, I

anticipated an answer like Peter's and Xavier's where he would focus on God's standard of sexual purity. This was not the case though.

MW: *Do you think your generation of Pentecostals is as concerned about virginity and purity as your parents' generation was?*

Gerald: *I don't think we take it as serious as we should because we have way worse diseases out there and they're easier to catch now.*

Gerald's focus in the conversation was on the physical benefits of abstaining from sex. Gerald marks a clear distinction between the way that young Pentecostals today and the Pentecostals of the generations before conceptualize purity and says that the young are not as concerned with remaining sexually pure as their parents' generations were. He focuses on STDs as his motivation for recommending that Pentecostal youth stay spiritually pure. He does not mention a separation from God as part of his reasoning.

The difference between Gerald and other young men's answers exemplifies some of the fears that adults have about the loss of spirituality in young people. Gerald's understanding of sex and purity is not necessarily connected to an essentialist Pentecostal world-view. The dangers of sex could be avoided by having protected sex. Gerald's point of view does not explicitly embrace the sanctity of marriage or following God's plan as a reason for abstaining from sex until marriage.

Gerald is an outlier in that he is not worried about dating a Pentecostal girl. I specifically asked Gerald how important it was for him to find a saved, Pentecostal young woman to date. Gerald told me that "*It seems almost impossible to find a saved girl. I've been looking for about 7 years haven't seen any I'm physically attracted to. I've never dated inside the church. I've dated multiple girls out of church before. Until I find my type of girl in church I have to do what I have to do.*" Unlike the other young men,

Gerald does not refrain from having a relationship because there are no Pentecostal girls in his area that he is attracted to. Gerald has an idea of what he is looking for and acts on his own behalf, rather than wait for God. Gerald mentions attractiveness as one of the things that he has not found in local Pentecostal young women. Gerald's declaration that "*I have to do what I have to do*" is at odds with the belief that one's will is secondary to God's will. Gerald's words reflect the struggle that youth at RLCC and Corinth church face in reconciling their own personal will, with mandates and orders from older church members and God. Youth were quick to note that although they knew what was right in God's eyes when it came to sexual purity; it was much harder to act in accordance with those beliefs.

The experiences of young women trying to find relationships and husbands contrasts sharply with those of young men. Men, through a literal interpretation of King Solomon's words that "*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD*" (PROVERBS 18:22 KJV), are charged with being the pursuers when it comes to relationships. Young men and women both flirt and find ways to attract each other, but the construction of Pentecostal women encourages females to be passive during dating. Thus their attempts to find a mate have an added layer of complications and frustrations. Not only are there a disproportionately larger number of women in the church, but young women must wait for a man to approach them. While there is no official prohibition on women pursuing men, women are reminded constantly by church leadership and older women in the church that God will send someone to them. Minister Johnston has told the young women in his congregation on several occasions that "*It's okay for a woman to want a man. Just don't go out and find one*". The result is that

young female Pentecostals were frustrated about their lack of ability to find a mate and at times seemed pessimistic about whether or not they would marry.

In her interview, Keisha boldly stated that she is prepared to wait her entire life for God to send a husband. Keisha emphatically told me that *"I have to work on me. Until God sends someone to me, I have to make sure that I'm living the life that I need to live. I have to make sure that I'm saved and holding on"* I asked Keisha how long she envisioned holding out for God to send her a mate. She told me that *"I have to be prepared to wait forever. If there's no one who is saved, then there's no one. I can't compromise. I won't compromise"*. I followed up on this idea of compromise. Keisha said that *"I'm not going to marry someone who's not saved. The Bible says not to be unequally yoked. I know God has someone for me who will be saved and I'm not willing to compromise on this. I'd rather wait for the one that He has sent to me, then to go out on my own and make a mistake."* Keisha's standpoint is that even in matters of love and the heart, a Pentecostal should defer to God's plans.

Danielle mentioned a similar concern and fear about waiting for a Pentecostal male to date and then marry her. Danielle discussed her attraction to unsaved men and described it as a "struggle". Danielle told me that *"My walk isn't perfect. I still fall short. I try to distance myself from things that hinder me. I have struggles with unsaved guys. Guys who are rough at the edges. I start to get tired of it and pray. This last guy, he worked at my job. It was starting to get serious. God answered my prayers, even though I didn't want Him to....and we didn't work out."* Danielle actually sees the breakdown of that relationship with an unsaved man as a blessing from God. Like Keisha, Danielle has

identified that there are not a lot of male options in her church and that she finds guys who are a little rough to be more interesting than the guys at her church.

On the other hand, Danielle recognizes that her desires and wants are secondary to God's will. Danielle sees the lack of sexual purity of young people as a sign that the spiritual state of the world is in decline. Danielle told me that "*I see a lot of young people drifting away from the church. There's lots of violence. A lot of young people are even questioning their sexuality*". When the youth at RLCC and Corinth Church discuss sexual purity, it became a way for youth to mark themselves as different and separate from the secular world. Living in a world that is saturated by sex and sexual innuendos in pop culture, the youth of this study set themselves apart from many other young people in America by aspiring to abstain from sex until marriage.

These young people feel that the sins and challenges that they are dealing with in regards to sex are distinct to their generation. They believe that older Pentecostals did not have to deal with the same struggles and corruption of Pentecostal views that current young people do.

Mitchell described what he sees as the spiritual deterioration of the world in one of our interviews:

Mitchell: Older people always say "I've been there and done that", but things are different now from the way that they were coming up in the world

MW: You say things are different?

Mitchell: Yeah, I would say things are different

MW: How are things different?

Mitchell: You know the things that we go through are worse. Or I believe they're worse. I mean they might have had some of the things, or they probably did go through some of the stuff. But it's not as harsh as it is now...as detrimental.

MW: What are some of these things you're talking about?

Mitchell: As far as the sex, drugs, peer pressure, just the influence that society has on everyday life.

Mitchell believes that he and his peers are confronting a landscape that is drastically different than the one that existed when the older generation of Pentecostals was his age. He believes that there are more temptations and that there is more sex, drugs, and peer pressure than in generations past. Despite what youth like Mitchell may perceive to be a more trying atmosphere than before, he is still expected to aspire to sexual and moral purity. Elder Vick reminds him that “*There is nothing new under the sun*”. Adults say that Christ expects the same purity and sanctification now that he required of the first century church. In their quest for love, young people are expected to stride towards purity and sanctification.

Playing it straight

It is important to note that all of the gender performances in this study are in the context of a hetero-normative relationship. None of the youth identified themselves as anything other than heterosexual. People who do not self-identify as heterosexual are seen as out of the bounds of appropriate Pentecostal behavior and as being afflicted by a spirit of homosexuality (Harris, 2008; Griffin, 2000). The Pentecostals at RLCC and Corinth church believe that homosexuality can be cured because Christ has the power to change the life of a believer. All of the young people in this study imagined their future spouses within the context of heterosexual relationships.

Neither church officially ranks homosexuality as more serious than any other sin. However, known homosexuals typically are not allowed to hold offices, become ordained ministers, or hold leadership positions. There is a distinction made between someone who is a practicing homosexual and someone who is “struggling” with their

sexuality. A practicing homosexual is an individual who defines themselves as homosexual and engages in homosexual activities. Someone who is struggling usually does not describe themselves as gay; he/she abstains from sex, and considers their homosexual attraction to be an affliction of Satan, rather than a part of their being (Pattison & Pattison, 1980; Tinney, 1977). There has been some conversation and disagreement about what that means to the members at RLCC.

Elder Kinderson has stated that once one accepts Christ as their personal savior, speaks in tongues, and is saved, the Spirit of God gives them the power to overcome sin and live a holy life. However, all humans will make mistakes and sin, because none of us can be perfect. Elder Kinderson states that when one becomes saved, they are delivered of sins that might have been bothering them before. For instance, someone who was an alcoholic will have the ability to not drink anymore. However, in a Sunday school lesson in February of 2012, Elder Kinderson stated that one will always struggle with a temptation. *“That’s why it’s important to read your word and stay in prayer. If you’re not careful, Satan will attack you in those weak spots”*. That was a point of disagreement for his wife, Lee. She stated *“I don’t know about that. The Bible says that after receiving the Holy Ghost you’re a new creature and old things are passed away. I think that when you get the Holy Ghost, God delivers you from everything. Yeah, you’re going to sin of course. But I don’t think it’s like you can’t defeat something that you struggle with. The Holy Ghost takes care of that”*.

Elder Kinderson and his wife verbalized the contrasting views of salvation and deliverance that are present in the church. Some Pentecostals, like Elder Kinderson suggests, believe that humans have an Achilles heel and must be diligent in not falling

into temptation in that specific area, since that is where Satan is most likely to attack them. Others believe that all sin is conquerable. However, Pentecostals believe that sin is deadly, wrong, and against God. While there may be some disagreement about what it means to be delivered and saved from homosexuality, the dogma of Oneness Pentecostalism asserts that homosexuality is wrong.

The stigma of homosexuality as a sin against God plays out in both subtle and overt ways for the youth at both churches. No youth even suggested the possibility of finding a same sex mate or sex/relationships between same sex Pentecostals. The Pentecostals in this study refused to even acknowledge that there could be predilections or desires for love or sex outside of a heteronormative context (Robinson & Davies, 2008). What conclusions can be drawn from the absence of same-sex relationships in the church? Both Elder Kinderson and Elder Vick have discussed the notion that homosexuality is a sin during their Sunday sermons. Usually, both pastors discuss homosexuality with other sexual sins like adultery and fornication. In that way, homosexuality is not distinguished as something more atrocious or egregious than other sins. At times though, homosexuality has been cited as something especially offensive to God.

Minister Johnston has been the most vocal ordained minister at either church in his condemnation of homosexuality. He has on a regular occasion used the word “faggot” to describe homosexual men. Both Elder Kinderson and Minister Johnston have referred to lesbians as “dykes”. Toward the end of my observation time at RLCC, Elder Kinderson demonstrated a sense of reflexivity in his approach to homosexuality. He said that the church has a responsibility to tell the truth and stand on the word of God. This

could result in the church appearing as old-fashioned and homophobic by the secular world. At the same time, Elder Kinderson stated that the only way to bring any kind of sinners, even homosexuals, to the truth of God was through love. While Elder Kinderson will continue to preach the Pentecostal stance on homosexuality as an abomination to God, he recognizes that using inflammatory and disrespectful language is not conducive to helping to deliver those individuals from their sin of homosexuality. As far as I can observe Elder Kinderson changed his language in order to be more respectful.

At both churches, there were no young people or adults who were out and open about their homosexuality/bisexuality/pansexuality, etc. There could be many explanations for that. According to the beliefs of Pentecostalism, perhaps those who identified as homosexual are saved from homosexuality and no longer identify as such. Perhaps non-heterosexuals avoid the Pentecostal church because they know that their lifestyle is seen as a sin and an abomination. There could be those who identify as homosexual and keep it hidden or secret for the same reason. I cannot be certain. I believe that future research on Pentecostalism should include those who have considered themselves saved from homosexuality and those who still identify as LGBTQIA. The Pentecostal church's handling and dealing with homosexual members and homosexuality in general is interesting in the context of an American society that seems to be growing more comfortable with homosexuality. Future work on Pentecostal youth needs to focus on marginalized groups inside of the denomination.

The construction of Pentecostals as heterosexual is not negotiable at RLCC and Corinth. It is not possible to be considered a saved Pentecostal there and be engaged in a homosexual relationship. Being a "practicing" homosexual means that one is outside of

the bounds of Pentecostal behavior. Sexuality, like the gender roles, is not a space where young people are allowed to reimagine or reinterpret what it means to be Pentecostals at either church.

Youth in and out of Bounds

Young people at RLCC and Corinth church are distinct in their views of sex, purity, and sexuality from their adult counterparts. From a top-down approach to Pentecostalism, sexual purity is taught by the Church as God's intended way for Pentecostals. A street level approach demonstrates that there are complexities as to how young people view sex and sexuality (Certeau, 1984). This complexity was demonstrated during a Thanksgiving dinner celebration at the Church of Trenton in November of 2012. Members from both RLCC and Corinth were there. The event is held yearly on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. In addition to having a potluck Thanksgiving dinner, there are music, games, and socializing.

Before the games started, I was eating next to Mitchell, Rhonda, and Xavier. Mitchell was running over an idea about a special youth service that he was planning and wanted some feedback. While the three of us were involved in this conversation, it was by no means a private one.

Mitchell: *I'm thinking about having a panel service.*

Rhonda: *What do you mean?*

Mitchell: *I want to get people up there and pose some questions.*

MW: *So would you be asking the panel questions or you want the audience to answer?*

Mitchell: *Like I could start it out in the panel and then throw it to the audience.*

Rhonda: *You need a moderator or something then.*

Mitchell: *You (Marcus) could be the moderator. I might want you on the panel too.*

MW: *Alright, but you know they're [older members] gonna try and take it over.*

Mitchell: *Nah, we won't let them.*

Rhonda: *What are we going to talk about?*

Mitchell: *Everything! Sex, drugs, alcohol, abortion. Let's talk about it all.*

MW: *Yeah, that'll be good. If people really speak their mind,*

Pam (adult youth leader): *What's there to discuss. Abortion is murder. There's no discussion.*

MW: *Right, but the reasons that people have for it. Or like, the struggle whether to have one or not.*

Pam: *Yeah, but it's still wrong. At the end of the day. You know it's wrong. We all know it's wrong. At the end of the conversation, someone needs to say that it's wrong.*

Pam walked away at that point and we continued our conversation in a quieter tone.

While we “knew” that abortion was wrong, we also know that it easier to talk about morality than to live according to a strict Pentecostal moral code. It was very easy for us to just state that premarital sex was wrong. We have been taught that since we were children. We know that abortion should not be an issue since we should not be having sex. However that easy answer ignores the realities of our lived experiences. Young Pentecostals are having sex. They are getting pregnant and having abortions. According to Mitchell, his program would not be an excuse or justification for sin. Instead, it would be a space for youth to express and give voice to some tough issues that they are going through in their lives.

Additionally, our little group understood that these conversations about spirituality and morality were crucial to spiritual growth. We as young people wanted to have a dialogue about holding on to Pentecostal values when we live, work, and go to school in a very secular world. Mitchell brought home that point when he said, *“We got to talk about this kind of stuff [abortions]. It might be wrong, but I know people doing it. We got to talk about it so we know how to deal with it”*. The rest of us nodded in agreement. Thus, one of the main distinctions between young people and adults in regards to sexuality is the desire and willingness to explore sex and sexuality in

discussions. For many Pentecostal adults like Pam, there is no reason to have debates and conversations about taboo, sinful actions. The young people however, see a benefit to exploring those ideas and wrestling with them as a community.

That is not the only example of youth wanting to process and talk about topics of sex and relationships. At RLCC there have been other examples that occurred during Sunday school. In 2012, three of the Sunday school lessons developed into open ended discussions about married life. The married couples in the church explained how they found each other, how they knew they were meant to be together, how they work through financial issues, or how they managed to cohabitate in general. All three lessons ran past the allotted time into Sunday morning service. No one seemed bothered by it. On some occasions when Sunday school is running late, the young people will whisper amongst themselves or roll their eyes because an extended Sunday school can mean that we will be in Sunday morning service a longer amount of time. However, on those three Sundays, the young people were paying attention and participating. Elder Kinderson included young unmarried people into the conversation by asking us what our ideals and preferences about married life were. After one of the lessons Danielle mentioned that we need to have these kinds of conversations more often. After the last lesson David, who was in a serious relationship at the time, said the lesson was great because we discussed things that he needs to know since he imagines marrying his partner. While the conversation took on a different flavor while adults were present because it wasn't as explicit and did not focus on sexual taboos, it is still evident from their own words that youth enjoy and feel it necessary to have conversations about sex, relationships, and marriage

A situation like abortion exposes some of the gender differences in the Pentecostal church. The expectations for young male Pentecostals are drastically different than those for young women. Young people are expected to act within the confines of a pre-determined and divinely inspired code of gender roles. Every one of the youth noted that there is a different standard for appropriate behavior for young Pentecostal women than there is for men. When I talked to the young people, I was not surprised about their emphasis on sexual purity. However, it was interesting to see that much of the responsibility for remaining sexually pure was on young women. Xavier brought up female purity when he was talking about his apprehension and fear of marrying a woman who is not a virgin. Xavier told me that:

People say, you wait, and you wait [for marriage before having sex]. I believe that the time we are living in, compared to the times of the days of old, marriage is not as sacred as it used to be. It is not as sacred and I believe in this generation that could be a possibility that half of us have to face. Because so far as in someone who has given their virginity and now you're in the position that she has known another man. A lot of young girls who have not been taught in a right way. Now they're laying the comparing game. And they could never fully love the way that older women have.

Xavier's thoughts are interesting because he places the consequences for sexual impurity entirely on women. In his response, Xavier tries to articulate how the lack of purity in young people has the potential to ruin future marriages. His worry, angst, and concern are all centered on female lack of purity. When Xavier talks about someone losing their virginity, he starts off by using gender neutral pronouns. However, he quickly settles on the feminine pronouns of "she" and "her". Xavier's conceptualization of sexual impurity only involves females. He does not consider the repercussions or danger of Pentecostal men being sexually impure. Pentecostals of course are not the only group that has placed the burden of virginity and purity on women. Cultures throughout

history have placed the responsibility on women (Yalman, 1963; Ethridge & Arterburn, 2008; Burrus, 1994). Obviously, one of the reasons for that is that women bear the biological repercussions of sex in that paternity can be denied while maternity cannot. Pregnancy is a serious event in the conservative Pentecostal churches of RLCC and Corinth. As stated before, saved Pentecostal youth are held to a higher moral standard than non-Christians or Pentecostals who are not saved. Saved Pentecostals have made the decision to accept Christ as their savior and also have the Holy Ghost. A saved person who has a child out of wedlock because of consensual sex has committed a sexual sin. The traditional consequence of pregnancy out of marriage has been that members are “silenced”, or removed from all official duties in their churches. Typically, these silenced members had to sit in the back of the church. The logic is that members can be stripped of everything except their ability to attend and worship at church, because that is a privilege that only God grants. The justification is that if someone who has an office or a position is allowed to continue in their position when they are living in sin, then the Godliness of the Pentecostal church is compromised. Silencing is up to the discretion of the pastor. There are no set standards or written rules that explicitly state which infractions are worthy of silencing or how long the silencing can last.

I asked some of the youth what it meant to be silenced and what were some of the infractions that could get one silenced.

***Mitchell:** Say if...I'll give you an example. If I was to get someone pregnant or something like that, the pastor would silence me or sit me down for a certain amount of time. And I guess he would say that I shouldn't be actingI can't hold the title anymore. I shouldn't be acting... I'm not representing or upholding the type of position.*

***MW:** Is there a list somewhere of what kinds of things would get you silenced? How do you know what would get you in trouble?*

Mitchell: *Not that I'm aware. I just know that because I've seen it done before.*

Mitchell was not the only participant to link silencing with a sexual sin. All of the reasons for silencing that youth gave me were either sexual sins (fornication, adultery, and homosexuality) or infractions of prescribed gender rules (women preaching, men wearing clothes that are too tight, men with long hair). Though the reasons were all different, the emphasis was on the fact that men and women were outside of gender and/or sex roles. The sin of pre-marital sex resulting in a pregnancy was the most commonly mentioned.

Young people often embrace the guidance and critiques of older adults. Mitchell, Keisha, and Danielle all believed that the guidance they received from their pastors was extremely helpful, not only in a spiritual sense, but in an emotional one as well. At the same time, church leadership and youth view the consequences of out of bounds behavior in two different ways. Elder Kinderson views his way of handling disciplinary issues with young Pentecostals as being loving and graceful. I specifically asked him how he handled young people in his church who do not conform to the expected behaviors of Pentecostalism. He told me:

Elder Kinderson: *You got to teach and embrace them. If they don't come to prayer, you got to embrace them. If they don't come to Bible study, you got to embrace them...here's another thing. Pastors need to change their style of preaching. Here I'm subject to teach. But you got to get it in some kind of way. You can't just preach at people. Sometimes you gotta talk just talk to them. As they mature, they start to realize how important those things are.*

Elder Kinderson perceives himself as a loving pastor. In fact, he often compares his pastoring style to the styles of pastors from generations past. He says that “*They were a lot harsher back then. They would sit you down [silence you] for anything*”. Elder

Kinderson stresses the importance of giving all Pentecostals, especially youth, room to mature. He believes that all of the members of his church should regularly attend church meetings as well as weekly bible study and prayer. He recognizes that there are some members who will not come. Rather than lecture them, he believes that part of the maturation process is that youth will eventually realize that the knowledge and training that they receive in church activities like prayer and bible study will allow them to be confident and strong Pentecostals. While all of the youth spoke about the loving nature of their pastors, youth were also conscious of potential penalties for sinful behaviors.

During a follow up interview with Mitchell, he explained that silencing is one of the consequences for not following the rules of Pentecostalism.

Mitchell: I mean it's your own walk with Christ. At the end of the day can't nobody...they're not supposed to judge you. But uh, it's your relationship with Christ. Not anyone else's.

MW: But in terms of your position, are there consequences for not practicing your faith the way that adults say to practice your faith?

Mitchell: Um... there's a possibility of being silenced or sat down.

Mitchell's words speak to the control that adult leadership can have over young people. The little power that young people have can be stripped away by adults. In addition to sexual activity, Mitchell stated that clothes could also be a point of contention between young people and older Pentecostals.

Mitchell: The things they do, the things they talk about uh. Young people tend to stray more towards society, the things of society. Older people are more are stuck in what it was when they were coming up and they don't stray from anything they've been taught down through the years.

MW: So what are those things exactly? Give me an example about something that young people might view one way and older people view another way.

Mitchell: Like the clothing. Some of the older people might say it's a little more revealing but it's just a trend.

Mitchell believes adults are constantly monitoring youth and have to the power to bring punishments and retribution on youth who do not follow the cultural rules of Pentecostalism. Yet, he does not completely defer to the expectations and wants of older adults. Mitchell and I are both deacons. Traditionally, on communion Sundays, deacons wear black suits. Mitchell and I often joke about how neither of us wears that on communion days. Mitchell will wear black and white, but usually not a suit. I do not follow the color or suit expectations at all. We do not view our dress as being detrimental to our spiritual walk. I think it is something really minor. We both know that adult leadership would prefer us to be in suits. They model what they would like us to wear through their own clothes. However, youth like Mitchell and I are explicitly resisting adult norms. We are not punished or silenced for those infractions. We know that the most that would happen is our pastors would tell us we did not have a choice and that we have to dress a certain way.

Gerald is another young man who links following the rules of Pentecostalism with avoiding consequences like being silenced. I asked Gerald to think of any actions that would result in him suffering some kind of disciplinary actions.

MW: Are there consequences for being out of line.

Gerald: I don't know about now, but they say back then you used to be silenced

MW: How do you think you'd have to dress for someone to sit you down?

Gerald: Um... I'd have to wear really tight pants I guess

Gerald is not able to articulate under what circumstances Pentecostals are silenced these days or what kind of concrete actions could cause him to be silenced. Like Mitchell, he navigates a world of expectations that he does not completely understand.

While he understands that there can be consequences, he is not able to articulate what those specific actions are or where they can be found. Danielle remarked that her father Elder Kinderson is especially strict when it comes to men's clothing. She said that *"People don't really harp on the men the way that they do the women. My dad does though. He talks about men wearing the real tight pants not being appropriate."* So while she perceives that men have an easier time with clothing, there are still clothing norms that men must conform to as well. Elder Kinderson does often speak from the pulpit about how he is upset with the way that many men dress and carry themselves in church. He says that men should dress like men. But like Danielle articulates, young men dressed inappropriately is not seen as a threat to Pentecostalism in the way that women dressed immodestly or inappropriately is; unless that clothing style is linked to homosexuality. I believe that is why men wearing inappropriately tight pants are the only male clothing that Elder Kinderson or Minister Johnston preaches about.

There is a mystique surrounding the act of silencing. While it happens much less in the current generation than in previous ones, none of the young people were able to actually communicate what warrants being silenced. Yet all of them knew that there was a possibility of being stripped of titles and responsibilities if they committed an act that was so egregious that their pastors had to step in. Silencing asserts a discipline effect even though it is not often or consistently implemented. Youth are also aware that silencing occurs mostly with sexual sins. So men like Mitchell, Gerald, and I feel comfortable disregarding the gender norms of dress without a serious fear of silencing. There is a youth subculture where youth know about each other's sexual sins though. Through snapchat, Facebook, and word of mouth, youth are aware that some of their

peers are engaged in sexual activities. Those actions are not broadcast and disobedience to sexual norms are usually kept secret because youth know that to do so would result in silencing or some sort of disciplinary action. Danielle told me that *“I’ve never seen anyone silenced. But I’ve heard about it happening”*. While there may not be a documented list of infractions and consequences, youth were very aware that a potential consequence for sexual impurity or being outside of prescribed gender norms could result in silencing. At times, youth have created a subversive culture where they are aware of the sexual sins and infractions that other young people have committed, but do not report them or gossip about these occurrences to adults. As I mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, I was privy to a lot of information about youth engaging in activities that would result in them being silenced or disciplined. I felt that it would sever too many ties to go into details about those stories. However, youth are very much aware of what types of sexual activities will cause them to be out of bounds of Pentecostal behavior and to either avoid those kinds of actions, or be discrete about what they do.

Signs of Sanctified Girls

At RLCC and Corinth Church, the norms around gender and dress are constructed to draw insider/outsider status and boundaries as well. Those boundaries are marked not only for those inside of the church, but those outside as well. The expectations of Pentecostal femininity are broadcasted to visitors and their children as well. My niece, who is not a regular attending member, visited on a family night during a Friday in the winter of 2011. These nights of games, food, and socializing occurred regularly during my observational period. My niece was looking at old pictures of national conventions

from years past and saw a picture from when Danielle was a young child. She asked why Danielle was in dresses in all of her pictures. One of the older members answered that, “*Danielle had given her life to Christ*”. Lines of demarcation between Pentecostal girls and non-Pentecostal girls were clearly marked through that response. My niece was being told that women who give their lives to Christ wear dresses. While that is true at RLCC, it is not true for every woman in every church. That incident is just one example of how the modest dress of the young Pentecostal women and their refusal to wear pants acts as a marker of salvation and separation from the secular world.

The Pentecostals at both churches invoke the term “sanctification” to describe individuals who are set apart from the world and considered holy. While the conversion experience of Pentecostals is a defining moment in their spiritual life, they believe that speaking in tongues should result in an individual being sanctified and holy. One of the ways that sanctification is shown is through Pentecostal dressing holy. All of the young women spoke about guarding femininity and presenting their bodies as evidence of adherence to Pentecostal norms and marking themselves as set apart from the secular world.

I asked Olivia about what she thought was appropriate to wear to church. As a six year old she was the youngest participant in the study.

MW: How do little girls look when they come to church?

Olivia: Something nice and pretty.

MW: oh yeah? That makes sense. What’s something nice and pretty that you wear to church?

Olivia: Um...like a dress or something. A pretty dress.

MW: Could you wear something else?

Olivia: Um...if you wanted. But it’s got to be pretty. Really pretty.

This short interaction between Olivia and I shows an example of gendered expectations. This informal exchange between the two of us occurred on a pew immediately after a Sunday morning service. Olivia has started to learn that young girls at her church should be pretty. One way to do that is through dresses and other pretty, feminine kinds of clothes. There was no young male counterpart to ask and see if he would speak to the same kinds of things. However, Olivia's ideas of pretty, female clothing is mirrored and reinforced by older young people and adult members in the church. What is important to take away from this exchange is that even as a young child, Olivia understands that women in church should look different than women outside. She states that in church, one must wear something that's "got to be pretty". Olivia has taken note that sanctified women in Pentecostal churches look different than women outside of the church.

Much of the behavior that Olivia is observing is modeled by first ladies. Lee said in a Sunday school discussion that she thinks of herself as a model for the women in the church. She does not yell at or chide women for what they wear. *"I try to live my life as an example. You don't always have to say something. People will see how you conduct yourself and that says a lot"*. When I asked her daughter Danielle if she saw herself as a model that could instruct younger girls on how to dress appropriately, she said, *"I've never had to say anything. I don't think that I would. I don't feel comfortable talking to someone about how they dress. Cuz I be off the wall. That's something a first lady would do. I just don't feel like I'm old enough."* First ladies occupy a special place as instructors of appropriate feminine behavior. Their husbands tend to be older because of the trend of having older men as leaders; first ladies tend to be older as well. So once again, the model of appropriate behavior is modeled by older members to younger

members, reinforcing the idea that older church members are more experienced and knowledgeable than younger ones.

Youth in the church are told that they should look different from the world. Church leadership passes on the message that the Holy Ghost should not just change someone's soul, but it should cause a change in how a person carries themselves. Elder Vick instructs youth not to follow the trends of fashion that are immodest, but instead dress sanctified and stand out from the secular world. Elder Kinderson regularly brings up an example from his own youth where he used to wear tight jeans and an afro. One day a storeowner saw him from the back and called him ma'am. Elder Kinderson stated that this was a sign that his dress was inappropriate. He also mentions how his own pastor admonished him for being saved, but not dressing in a way that "showed" he was saved.

Older women also use dresses and conservative styles in order to mark the line between saved and secular. During a combined youth service, Pam discusses wearing long denim dresses when she is in public. She said *"That's how you know other saved folks. I was In JC Penny's wearing this skirt (points to her long denim dress) shopping for dresses and I saw this other lady looking at the same dresses. I looked at her skirt and she looked at mine. She was white but she looked at me with a smile and she said 'it's so hard to find dresses for us'. I knew exactly what she meant. It's hard finding casual dresses to wear"*. The long denim dresses are the most common and appropriate form of casual wear. The rules of modesty are gender specific. You can see in the picture below, that even at an outside summertime event, the women are all wearing long dresses. Young men like myself are able to wear shorts. The dresses become a clear and distinct

way for the Pentecostal young women at the church to mark themselves as different from unsaved, secular women. Even the young girls are wearing dresses.

Image 1

Keisha, Danielle, and Kimberly discussed how wearing dresses in church was an integral part of their Pentecostal identity. For Danielle, wearing dresses was also central to her identity outside of the church. She mentioned that she used to wear pants, but got rid of all of them after she got saved and only wears dresses and skirts now. She said that God had moved her heart and she did not feel that it was okay to wear pants in or out of the church. All of the women who are saved at both churches wear dresses whenever they are in the church. While there is no official rule against women wearing pants, there is a social taboo. The Oneness Pentecostals root this belief in Old Testament Scriptures that state that “*the woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God*” (Deuteronomy 22:5 KJV). One way that this scripture is interpreted is through the taboo of women wearing pants.

One of the most visible ways of differentiating who is a saved member of the church is by noticing which women wear dresses and which women are wearing pants suits for example. Even in casual functions outside of the church, young Pentecostal women rarely wear pants. At all of the non-church functions that I recorded during my observation, young women wore long denim skirts. This counted as casual wear. The dresses typically come past the knees and normally were closer to the lower calf or ankle, Danielle expressed the sentiment by saying that *“I used to wear jeans. But after I got saved, I really didn’t wear them that much. The Bible says we shouldn’t wear anything that a man does, so I just listen to that. My mom never wears them, so I saw that it was possible to not wear them. Even the dresses I do wear I make sure that they’re decent. Some girls show their bodies off, but for me, I’m just trying to look nice and respectful”*. The Bible scripture in Deuteronomy says nothing specifically about dresses and skirts. Nor does it take into account cultural differences. What if one was from a country where men wore skirts? Would that practice have to be abandoned if the individual converted to the type of Oneness Pentecostalism in this dissertation? The fact that women and men’s clothing norms are defined by western styles of dress seems incompatible with the universal message of salvation that the Pentecostal church broadcasts.

Danielle and Kimberly were two of the young ladies present at the Thanksgiving dinner that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. During that same night, many of the young people (mostly females) were engaged in a conversation about wearing dresses. As a male, I noted in my field notes that I made a conscious effort to stay out of the conversation. I am completely aware that there is a certain amount of privilege extended to me because I am a male (Kimmel & Ferber, 2009). I have more choices and can often

dress more casual than my female counterparts. I have worn jeans and sneakers on many occasions to a Sunday morning service. At both churches, that kind of attire is extremely casual. Additionally, my hair can be unkempt and I do not always respect the social norms or the kinds of dressy attire one should wear on Sunday mornings. I was very much interested in how young Pentecostal females framed their understanding of restrictions for dress and appearance.

That night, Rhonda was discussing how it was not fair that she had to always wear dresses, but that men could wear whatever they wanted. The youth leaders at the church attempted to contradict her by saying that men cannot wear skirts. Rhonda went on to state that what she meant was that men have more freedom to choose what they want to wear and also have more physical freedom when it comes to their choices in attire.

“Sometimes it’s just not practical to wear skirts. I hear what ya’ll be saying. I don’t wear pants because I’m being obedient. But I don’t see a problem with pants. I wouldn’t wear jeans here, but I would wear them outside of church if it wasn’t at a church function”. Most of the young Pentecostal girls in the room agreed or kept silent. It was at this point that Pam retorted: *“You can wear dresses and do anything. I’ve exercised in dresses, rode horses in dresses. Don’t tell me you can’t wear a dress and do things. You may not want to, but you can.”* At this point, I could not remain quiet any longer. I was really interested in the consequences of wearing pants. I know that there is a social stigma to wearing pants in church, but what about pants outside of church. We were not talking about shorts or something revealing. We were discussing long pants. *“So what would happen if you went to pick up one of the girls and they were wearing pants,”* I asked Pam. *“Can they really not wear jeans? What if it’s something that’s not for*

church? What if it's like a movie trip or something?" Pam and her husband Elder Williams, who are the drivers of the church van, said that *"They can't get on the van in pants. I can't make them do anything. But they can't get on the van unless they're dressed in skirts"*. The girls, mostly led by Rhonda continued to discuss how the rule was unfair. Danielle agreed but did not get as loud or frustrated as Rhonda. Danielle said: *"It's so annoying when they say something. I listen, but don't say anything back. I don't change anything"*. Danielle has learned how to push boundaries and exert her independence, but not push so far that she is beyond the realm of appropriate femininity. Danielle wears dresses, which keeps her firmly in gender norms of a Pentecostal woman. However, she wears very high heels and tights with colorful prints or fishnet stockings. Older women wear white or dark stockings with their outfits. Danielle's style keeps her covered and modest, but individual enough so that she does not like the older Pentecostal women at either church. She is still very covered; it is just that she is covered differently.

Danielle does not see the dress requirements for women to be especially oppressive. She mentioned more restrictions than the girls at the Holiday party did. Danielle told me that *"There's a lot. Everything has to be covered up. Everything. Your head must be covered...stockings too. I don't really do that. We don't do the stockings here. But it's not really a problem"*. The head coverings Danielle is referring to are called chapel caps and are worn by saved Pentecostal women at both churches. Women believe that their heads must be covered when they enter the church. Pentecostal women accomplish this through either chapel caps or hats. While women may sometimes forget them, a head covering is always worn during ceremonies like communion. I have seen

women run to the bathroom and cover their heads with paper towels or napkins if they have forgotten some sort of head covering. Below is a picture of a chapel cap.

IMAGE 2

Church hats are typically worn by older women at the churches and younger women tend to wear chapel caps. The chapel caps come in different colors so that women can coordinate them with their outfits. They are sold at all of the national meetings. First ladies and older women who attend in conferences will often bring back chapel caps in different colors and give them to women at the church. Chapel caps are a clear marker of being different from the secular world. Women at both churches say that it is a sign of their sanctification

Modesty is of the utmost importance for young Pentecostal women. Decency must be displayed at all times. Even during the physical worship at services, women must be on guard for their and other women's appearances. When women engage in a very physical and exuberant worship experience, sometimes clothes become disheveled.

Ushers are constantly surveying and watching. If a young woman falls to the floor in worship, an usher will quickly place a sheet or other cloth over the woman so that none of her skin or undergarments will be unintentionally shown. I have been sent to find sheets, towels, or any other covering because young women who were engaged in an expressive prayer and older women were worried about immodesty. The older women also use their bodies to block congregants from seeing a woman whose clothes are disheveled. While modesty is valued among men and women, I have never experienced the same kind of fervor when a man's clothes become disheveled during worship.

The young women are very self-aware about being held up to standards of behavior and dress that their male counterparts are not subject to. Kimberly and I discussed adults' expectations of what young Pentecostal women should behave like. During the conversation, Kimberly told me:

“Young girls within the church are watched way more than guys. It seems like a young girl in church is getting raised to become a missionary and required to wear all white on communion Sunday. Growing up, I would not label myself as being a “girly girl” because I played sports and I had a tomboy exterior. Often times I was told to “sit up straight, don’t slouch” or “cross your legs”. It was like I had to put on a front when I was in church to behave as a young missionary rather than whom I truly was. The boys on the other hand were given a lot of leeway as far as behavior. They were allowed to do whatever they wanted but on top of that they were appointed positions such as adjutants and other responsibilities.”

Kimberly articulates the frustration that young women may feel as a result of critiques they receive that young men do not. The restrictions on wearing pants are just part of a larger issue. In her opinion, girls are held up to a standard of femininity that seems unfair and far more restrictive than the standard for young men. What adds to the frustration is the lack of flexibility in those roles. Because of its first century church roots, Oneness Pentecostalism clings to biblically mandated interpretations of how men

and women should act. Kimberly's critiques are not against the biblical constructions of gender. Her issue is with the Pentecostal church's interpretation and application of those gender roles. There is no biblical mandate that girls have to be trained and raised in a more rigid way than boys. Kimberly, who was clearly frustrated not only about gender roles but about adults' perceptions of youth in general, feels as if she had to pretend in order to receive the approval of her church congregation. Her frustration is with behaviors that are gender neutral, and yet are deemed inappropriate when she does them, because she is a female. Slouching and not sitting straight are not behaviors that are inherently related to gender. Yet, Kimberly feels that she and other young women are criticized for those types of behaviors more than young men are.

It is also important to note that Kimberly is one of the only young people in the study who framed her own actions as a “front”. The way that all of the other young people framed their actions was by saying that they were giving up worldly, secular things in order to focus on their spirituality. While many expressed that living such a life was hard and impossible without Christ, they focused on their desire to become spiritual. Though all of the youth were performing Pentecostalism, Kimberly was the only youth that saw the performance as inauthentic, instead of framing it as an inconvenience necessary to lead a proper, Pentecostal life.

I do not believe that Kimberly is any less religious than the rest of her Pentecostal counterparts. She is young, passionate and willing to express her frustrations about her personal experiences as a young woman in a conservative Pentecostal church. Kimberly was also the only young person who was at the time living away from Trenton. Kimberly is currently in college in Delaware. I believe that the physical and emotional distance

from RLCC has afforded Kimberly the space to think critically about her experiences (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978; Erickson, 1992). The result is an honest, forthright, and somewhat bold description of her experiences in the church. While her perspective and opinion was fruitful for my own understanding of young Pentecostals, her perception of Pentecostals putting on a “front” is a critique on the dominant thinking in Pentecostalism. The members at her church believe in the authenticity of their actions and the power of God in the form of the Holy Ghost, to give them the power and mindset to live morally in an amoral world.

Youth at RLCC and Corinth Church are very much aware that the way they perform gender is crucial to fitting into mainstream Pentecostal culture and being accepted by adult members. More importantly though, performing gender correctly means performing Pentecostalism correctly. As with most of the choices in Pentecostalism, performing gender in an incorrect way not only has consequences like being silenced by their local pastors, but performing gender incorrectly can be a sin that results in one spending their afterlife in hell. In these churches, gender is much more than a personal display of how one feels. Instead, performing gender correctly means falling in line with God’s mandated instructions on how Christians should act.

In the secular world, many of these Pentecostal youth are being told that gender is constructed and fluid. Their traditional view of gender roles can come off as antiquated and outdated. Yet, most of the youth at RLCC and Corinth Church saw this antiquated description as a good thing. It was confirmation that as Pentecostals they were special, different, and separate from the secular world. They clung to an identity that made them somewhat strange to outsiders.

As pragmatic as the Pentecostal church may be, there are still areas where the church lags behind. RLCC and Corinth Church frame gender as a binary. Yet, biologically this is not true. There are many individuals who fall somewhere in between and are intersex. Neither church has addressed that issue or come up with a codified way to approach individuals who are intersex. Because the churches may harken back to their first century roots, it is not adequately addressing the needs or identities of individuals who fall outside of the binary conceptualization of gender.

Young Pentecostals at RLCC and Corinth Church navigate an interesting and slippery path on the way to becoming married, full-fledged Pentecostal members. They must keep themselves sexually pure, or at least present the image that they are seeking to be sexually pure. They also have to guard against premarital pregnancy or suffer the consequences of being silenced. Men deal with the unique responsibility of being the pursuer and aggressors when it comes to dating. However, young women bear the burden of being more tightly constricted by gender norms and expectations in regards to dress and sexual purity. For women at churches, their dress and style is a way to be identified as an exclusive group of Pentecostal women. Additionally, their clothing helps them to mark themselves as saved, Pentecostal, and sanctified.

Gender performance is one of the most rigid and inflexible areas of either church. Gender performance also shows that Pentecostal youth, especially young women, are set apart from the secular world and that the Holy Ghost can give youth the power to live sanctified lives. Youth have more flexibility and freedom in arenas like music and worship. In the following chapter, I discuss how music has become a safe place for youth to mature into Pentecostal leaders. Music also allows youth to be in charge of certain

portions of the Sunday worship. Most importantly, youth have begun to use music to change their churches and the type of music and worship that occurs.

Chapter 4: Transforming the Church through Music

Choir Dress Code

Children obey your parent in the Lord, for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise. Ephesians 6: 1 & 2

Our church fathers and mothers have set a standard for us according to the word of God. This standard sets us apart from the world and most other church organizations. To some of us it seems rigid, but it really is not; matter of fact when you look at the whole picture its really more comfortable, convenient, and easier. If our garments are indisposed, uncomfortable, inappropriate and distracting, we become ineffective in our ministry and all our singing is in vain, because we were vain in our dressing. No one heard us, but they sure did see us. This is not good, Saint's [sic] of God. God has almost always sent the musicians, singers, and praisers first before battle

We must all be on one accord and uniformed as soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ. By this we drive the enemy out and usher in the presence of God through our anointed praise, worship, and thanksgiving by way of singing. By the time the man of God is ready to bring the word we have paved the way as God's anointed choir and the sinner man and woman are ready to give their heart to God, as the Holy Ghost may have already fallen while We've ministered. By this, the people are healed, delivered, encouraged, and set free through the warfare of singing the gospel be selfish and say I can wear what I want or like, but let us all make a sacrifice and be on one accord in our dress as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church [sic]. We are more powerful as one in battle and we are more than conquerors. We are a choir that will not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit of God. So let us glorify God in our presentation and service to Him and His church as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Women's Dress Code (While Ministering)

Watches, Wedding rings, Class rings may be worn

No earrings, necklaces, or anklets

Ladies heads are to be COVERED with Prayer Chapels

Long sleeved at least below the elbow

No sheer or low cut blouses, no dresses Showing cleavage

No sheer, short dresses or skirts, no tight clothing

No front splits or side splits and no high back splits

Clothing must always come below the knees when singing.

Must always wear stocking.

No eye shadow, colored lipstick or colored nail polish

Minimum facial foundation or powder can be worn

No heavy makeup or rouge

Men's Dress Code (While Ministering)
No indisposed fitting suit, shirt, or pants
Be conservative with modest fitting pants
No baggy, hanging, or loose pants
Regular shoes- no sandals and socks must be worn
No earrings, chains, bracelets
Only watches, wedding
Ring, and class rings may be worn (Choir Dress Code, 2012)

The information above was taken from the web page of the national music page of COOLJC, the national Pentecostal organization that oversees RLCC and Corinth Church. It is important to note that the document is very much geared towards youth, even though the national music association does not claim to be for youth only. Yet, the initial quote about youth being obedient to adults it clearly meant for youth. The words tell youth how powerful their ministry as singers can be, while simultaneously explaining that youth need to confirm and regulate themselves in order for that ministry to be effective. This chapter sheds light on the complex role that music plays in the lives of youth at RLCC and Corinth. On one hand, music has been set aside as a place for them to impact their congregations and show the power of Christ. On the other hand, it is a place where bodies can be regulated and youth learn how to conform to the cultural standards of Pentecostalism. In this chapter I will describe the role that music plays in both churches and how music has become a space for youth to establish salient identities as black Pentecostals. Woven throughout the chapter is the special attachment that youth have to worship and music.

Pentecostal Worship

It started as a simple song. The praise and worship team started to sing a fast song about mercy. Immediately, members in the congregation begin to stand up and clap and sing along. It was one of those examples of how worship becomes communal. Everyone started to come together and join in with the four women leading the song. Eventually, the music overpowers their voices. We sing along because we know the song, but if you were new, then you'd be lost in regards to the words. But the emotion could still take over you. To my right, an older member in her 50s begins crying and shouting "hallelujah". Her outburst isn't a distraction, but only adds to the fervor of the moment. I can feel the music in me. The bass and drums are so loud that I can feel their vibrations. But it's nothing like feeling God. Up front, Keisha steps away from her microphone and starts speaking in tongues. It starts a chain reaction. Another praise leader begins to worship God, rather than sing. It doesn't matter; the congregation has picked up the song. Keisha is visibly crying and holds her hands up to the sky. She is saying something unintelligible, her voice and head angled up to the heavens. Next to me Xavier is crying. He is speaking in tongues and thanking Jesus. I feel the music in my bones. I have to put my notebook down. The feeling of God in Corinth Church is infectious. How can I take notes and be a researcher when I can feel the power of God in this sacred place? I remember adding my voice to the chorus of praise in the room. My screams are drowned out by the music. With my eyes closed, I am mostly unaware of what else is going on the room. I can hear a chorus of speaking in tongues. I don't know what the others are saying and they can't understand what I'm saying. But we're all connected by this Spirit. Their praise encourages me and I can't stop. Even when the singing has stopped and the music has trailed off, the church is filled with the sounds of yelling and screaming. While I compose myself, Xavier still shouts and screams. Keisha is still waving her arms to God. I feel at peace. Praising is an emotional release. I feel lighter but drained. What a good time.

Field note- March, 2012

I wrote the preceding field note after a visit to Corinth Church. I often found myself distracted by the emotional fervor of praise at both churches. Worship is both an infectious and powerful experience in Pentecostalism. Pentecostals are told that they should come together in worship. So when one person is praising God, the common reaction is for others to join in. Additionally, praise is often loud and excited. It was as Minister Johnston often reminds congregants, "*When you see others praise, you should*

start praising. Knowing that God has blessed you means that He can bless me. We should be encouraged by what He's done for others, not just for ourselves".

Both youth and adults at Corinth and RLCC engaged in an expressive and emotional form of worship. It is uncommon to hear a choir or groups sing a song and not have members in the audience encourage the singers with "hallelujahs. The Pentecostals in this study try to construct an identity that is distinct from other types of Christians through their worship, which includes speaking in tongues (Glossolalia, 2009). Speaking in tongues is not only a way for them to express their faith and to worship God, but it is a marker of their salvation and acceptance of Jesus Christ. Only after a member professes speaking in tongues are they considered saved and a full-fledged member of the Pentecostal church.

Members are encouraged by church leadership and by each other to physically demonstrate their appreciation and thanks to God. Pentecostals engage in a form of worship which they dub "shouting". While there are many examples of shouting, it often involves an individual dancing and moving their feet either in place or back and forth through the church aisles. The emphasis on physical worship is reinforced by leaders like Elder Kinderson. During many of his sermons, Elder Kinderson reminds the congregation that if the Spirit of God is in them, it should cause a physical reaction. He cannot understand how anyone could think about what God has done in their life and not be moved. He recognizes that many of the older Pentecostals cannot physically "shout". *"If you can't shout, run in place. If you can't run in place, do something. Give Him wave praise or something. There's no way when you think about what God has done that you should just sit. Even if all you can do is wave, you should do something. When I was*

younger I could shout all over the church. Now, sometimes I just do a little dance. But you got to do something". Elder Kinderson is hindered by his age in the ways that he can worship God. He implied that more physical worship is expected of young people because they have the strength to do so.

The members of both churches believe that their shouting and speaking in tongues separates them from other Christian denominations. During praise and worship, Minister Johnston challenges members of the church to reflect on what God has done for them and use the reflection as a motivation for a vocal and emotional worship. Members rally around the construction of Pentecostals as emotional worshippers and use that as a way to create a boundary between Pentecostals and other Christians. In one Sunday morning scene, Minister Johnston reminds the church that members of the congregation have been healed from cancer. He cannot understand why that revelation has not resulted in the church having a powerful and vocal response. He states that "*God cures cancer and you sitting here!? Looking like a Presbyterian! Looking like a Lutheran!*" Minister Johnston reprimands the church for their lack of expressive worship while also demarcating the line between Pentecostals and other Christian traditions. According to Minister Johnston, other denominations are distinctly different from Pentecostals because the members of those congregations sit quietly even in the midst of hearing about the power of God.

Youth at RLCC and Corinth jump, shout, run, fall on the ground, and use their bodies as a way to show that they have been physically moved by the Spirit of God. During his interview, Xavier discussed some of the differences between young people and adults. Xavier said that young people have an "*exuberant praise*". Xavier is known

for being very emotional when he worships. He often breaks down and cries and falls to the floor. In the streets of Trenton, that behavior may be seen as weak, emotional, or even feminine. However, within the walls of Corinth Church his actions are expected and celebrated.

***MW:** So how do young people praise God?*

***Xavier:** I believe it's a lot different when we talk about praise. As young people we have more of exuberance. At Corinth [sic], it's only a couple of us young people and there's older saints. And sometimes ...how we would express ourselves is not how the older ones would express themselves in dealing with worship and praise. We're more exuberant... if we want to hop around, we hop around. If we want to run all over the place. If we want to fall out. We will do that as young people. But when we talk to the elderly, they express their way to God in a different way. It may be silence. It may just be meditation.*

***MW:** So it's not better or worse, it's just different.*

***Xavier:** No, it's just a different way. But in the same token, I believe that some older saints feel as though that they been in this lifestyle too long that they don't have to do the things that we do. Being as, if they have the function of being able to run around or jump, do that to express. Cuz sometimes we need to see that. And as us young people we can get down looking at that different circumstances in the church. If we around here praising and worshipping and doing whatever we need to get God's attention and we look around and see other just sitting there, it could be a down moment.*

In a denomination that is known for being very active and physical, young people have the added responsibility of being even *more* expressive. Xavier's response notes that young people's bodies are physically able to handle more than their adult counterparts. Because of that fact, there is freeness in how young people worship and praise. In Xavier's eyes, young people are not only physical in their prayers, but they are uninhibited as well. According to Xavier, young people have the ability to engage in whatever kind of worship they would like to whenever they want to. Nothing is seen as over the top or too extravagant. Young people have a limitless arsenal of worship styles and strategies to engage in.

Xavier's response also signals that he believes that there is a distinction between young people at Corinth Church and their older counterparts. Xavier identifies the community of Pentecostal believers as a source of strength and support for him. When times in life are stressful, he finds release and comfort in worship. For him worship is a way to get God's attention and ask for the things (spiritual, physical, and emotional) that he needs. He believes that not seeing older members around him worshipping may have negative implications for young people. Young people can feel isolated and downtrodden when adults do not worship.

Older members also have issues with young people and their worship at times. At RLCC, the praise and worship part of service is run entirely by young people. While we often receive compliments and encouragement from older church members, we are also subject to the "advice" of older members. Before almost every Sunday morning service, an older member of the congregation asks prayer for the praise team. Those prayer requests ask God to encourage younger members to be brave and bold. For example, Shirley has offered a prayer request in which she said *"Let's remember our young people. Let's pray that they'll have boldness. Even when they're up there for praise and worship. Pray that they allow themselves to really be used by God"*. Shirley voices the fear that young people may not be as invested in praise and worship as they should be and may be holding back because of their shyness. These fears are presented in a very open and public forum.

Members at both churches use a common metaphor of burning fire in order to describe their worship and musical praise. Most of those metaphors come from two examples in the New Testament scriptures. The first example was spoken by John the

Baptist. John explained that while he was baptizing with actual water, Christians should be baptized with the Holy Spirit of Christ. The bible records *“John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire”*(Luke 3:16 KJV). John’s words are taken to heart by the church members at Corinth and RLCC. The fire baptism that John talks about is demonstrated through members being “on fire” for God and vocally and physically expressing their worship. More importantly, fire is catching. Minister Johnston reminds the congregation that *‘If I’m on fire and you’re dry, I should be able to set you on fire too!’*

The second commonly used scripture of fire not only describes the kind of worship that Pentecostals engage in, but is also the foundation of Pentecostalism. Pentecostals trace the importance of speaking in tongues to a scripture in Acts, which reads *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4 KJV.)* The imagery of fire in this first instance of speaking tongues in The Bible was clearly identified as something expressive and physically moving. This scripture is the justification of members using speaking in tongues as a form of worship and as a marker of salvation.

The Spiritual Aspects of Music

In many circumstances at RLCC and Corinth Church, music acts as a strategy (Certeau, 1984). Music is part of a large formal structure that adults have set aside for youth. In its intended use, music is a place for youth to act as members in training and gain a deeper understanding of Pentecostalism while at the same time being encouraged to avoid the secular world. Minister Johnson has remarked on six Sundays that “*We got to give these young people something to do that’ll keep them in the church*”. Thus, adult leadership is comfortable with letting youth take control over music so that youth will stay engaged in church. Simultaneously, music and worship in both churches are examples of tactics that youth use in order to exert control at their churches. Youth gain power through leadership roles in music.

The two congregations observed are comprised entirely of African Americans. Many of these blacks are working class. Music has been a fundamental part of the black church throughout its history in America (Reed, 2007). Gospel music provides a way for black Christians to make sense of the history of oppression that they have endured in America. For many blacks in America, and for most of the blacks at RLCC and Corinth, that history of oppression has had real life consequences for them. Conversations about racial oppression and discrimination are common place at both churches. Both Elder Kinderson and Elder Vick refer to the tenacity of black Americans and their resiliency in the face of racism. Both men were raised in the 60s and 70s, so the legacy of segregation and discrimination resonates with them.

Pentecostalism and gospel music provide a way for many of the church members to process and overcome the challenges of being black in a poor, high crime, high poverty city like Trenton. Gospel music has the ability to help black Christians focus on the love

of God, rather than the inequality and oppression faced on a daily basis (Harvey). An example of the support that music offers is evident in two particular songs that are regularly sung at both churches.

*"I don't believe He brought me this far"
I just can't give up now
Come too far from where I started from
Nobody told me the road would be easy
I can't believe He brought me this far just to leave me*

*"I'm encouraged"
I'm encourage to walk with Jesus
Oh yes I am. Oh yes I am
I'm encouraged to walk with Jesus
Oh yes I am. Oh yes I am
Through all trials, tribulations
Persecution, I'll be faithful
I'm encouraged to walk with Jesus
Oh yes I am. Oh yes I am,*

Both songs exemplify the theme of perseverance and pressing on that members of the church believe is possible through their Pentecostal faith. In a faith where everything is black or white, gospel music has the potential to not only bring Pentecostals closer to God, but it helps to heal the frustration and heartache of living in a world of injustice and inequality (Darden, 2004). The topic of poverty and racism is not only dealt with in the context of music. Minister Johnston asked the oldest member of the church, Shirley, *"What did your generation need when you were younger?"* She answered that *"We were going through a lot. We were going through poverty, oppression, racism, hate, and the Civil Rights. We were trying to be spiritual at the same time"*. Members, especially the oldest in the church, have stressed that their faith is the only way to stay positive in a society in which blatant racism surrounded them.

The music performed at both churches is best described as urban, contemporary gospel. Gospel music has grown exponentially since its appearance on the American music scene. Christian music, during the 1990s especially, made a huge surge. Sales for Christian music now top classical jazz and new age music (GMA Industry Overview 2008, 2008). However, urban contemporary gospel is marked by its differences from the other subgenres of gospel music. Urban contemporary music traces its roots to the 1970s, but wasn't fully established until the 1980s (Darden, 2004). Urban contemporary gospel music shares the same themes and topics as other gospel music (the message of Christ, perseverance, overcoming struggles), but uses modern music forms. There are often musical similarities to pop and R&B music styles in the worship music at both churches. Both genres of music tend to fall along racial lines (Beam, 1991). Most of the popular artists in the urban contemporary genre are black while most of the popular artists in the contemporary gospel music scene are white artists.

Other types of music are rarely performed and members are unfamiliar with those types of songs. When I perform gospel music at church, it tends to involve songs played on the acoustic guitar or piano. Members often joke that I sing "*those white songs*". Part of a collective Pentecostal identity is centered on the adoption of traditionally black worship and musical styles. Many members do compliment me for the type of music that I play and sing, but they draw attention to the fact that my style is not the usual one that is performed. They have said things like, "*Marcus, you can come in your own way*" when I perform. While members offer support and compliments, it is clear from their statements that music styles that are not urban contemporary gospel are different.

There are other examples of young people stretching the boundaries around music. Several of the songs that Danielle selects to rehearse and sing are ones that are new to the congregation. As a result, she and the young people are adding new songs to the collective library of Pentecostal music. Through worship leaders like Danielle, older songs are phased out of praise and worship and newer songs are then added.

Through music, both youth and adults in the church construct a collective identity as black Pentecostals. Lyrics to songs are not passed out to members or visitors. Songs that are regularly sung are part of a collective memory of songs. At the same time, young people like me can stretch and redefine Pentecostalism by incorporating new styles of music. As I play a different, contemporary style of gospel, those types of songs are incorporated into the group Pentecostal identity. Young people like me are stretching the boundaries of Pentecostalism and changing the way it is practiced, performed, and recognized through music. For instance, at my own church I played a song on the piano by a white Christian artist. Most members did not know the words to the song, but by the end were able to sing along with part of the chorus. I have been requested to play the song at local Pentecostal churches in Trenton. As an individual, I am able to include a song that until I started performing it was outside of the collection of songs at my church. While the song is still not very well known, people still along to the chorus and join in when I play. I helped to expand the repertoire of music in the church. As mentioned in the beginning quote of this chapter, music can become a way for them to learn appropriate Pentecostal behavior. Music teaches Pentecostal youth how to carry themselves and also about some of the gender norms of the organization.

Learning how to be right

Music has traditionally been a place for youth to be funneled in once they accept Christ as their savior and speak in tongues. I asked Elder Kinderson why he thought that so many young people participated in music at his church and other Oneness Pentecostal churches.

MW: Why do you youth come to churches to sing?

Elder Kinderson: Choirs draw people, some like to sing, musicians. Some of them that are in school are learning how to play.

Elder Kinderson sees music as something that helps to draw young people into Pentecostal churches. Elder Kinderson was also vocal about how music acts as a bridge for young people who are in the secular world. He believes that music can draw secular youth into the church. Elder Kinderson's answer highlights one of the ways that youth experience Pentecostalism differently than older church members. Elder Kinderson and the youth at both churches see the same action (youth flocking to music) happening, and yet they perceive the reason for music's popularity in a drastically different way. Youth view music as much more complex than what Elder Kinderson articulates. For them, it is a powerful force that not only draws them to God, but sustains them and allows them to express their love for Christ.

All of the youth in this project were involved in music at both their local churches and some were active in regional and national choirs. Though their reasons for why they were involved in music at their churches were varied, all spoke to the power of music to entertain and define young Pentecostals. Peter is a 19 year old member of Corinth Church. He is also the youngest son of Elder Vick, the pastor.

MW: Why are most of the musicians and singers young people?

Peter: They're trying to step up and take more responsibility in the church. They're listening to what their pastors and parents told them about growing in the church.

They want to take more of a responsibility. The musicians and the singers, they humble themselves, they pray, and fast. When they go to rehearsal, they don't know where that's taking them. It's taking them to a more national level. With the conventions and everything. Most of the people we see now, they are young and learning from their parents or pastors.

Peter's answer demonstrates how music can act on a social level. Music and musical organizations serve as a training ground and a waiting area for young men in this Pentecostal organization. Through choirs, Peter says that his peers "*are young and learning from their parents or pastors*". Even though musical organizations are overwhelmingly filled with and run by youth, Peter's comments show that adults and church leadership are never too far from Pentecostal youth. Peter identifies choirs as a place to learn about the dogma and social rules of Pentecostalism and model adult behavior of pastors and church leadership.

According to Peter, music is also a stepping stone for leadership positions on the national level. Music in the Pentecostal church is intricately connected to commanding power in the church. Youth who are in control of music are in control of worship and praise. Youth can also gain exposure and popularity on the national level if they are dedicated musicians. Their talent in singing or musicianship can result in invitations to perform all over the country.

The undercurrent in Peter's answer is a spiritual maturity and seriousness to his faith. Peter's linking of music, fasting, and spiritual growth is one that occurs often. Fasting is one of the ways the Pentecostals attempt to get God's attentions. By fasting, I am referring to abstaining from certain foods and drinks (Johnson, 2003). While the most common form of fasting is refusing to eat food, there are fasts of television, internet, cell phones, etc. Many of the youth at the churches connect spiritual growth to music and

fasting. For example, Danielle and several of the youth from Corinth Church, RLCC and surrounding churches in Trenton have formed a community choir. They have performed at Both RLCC and Corinth Church. Before many of their concerts, the choir will call for a fast. Through Facebook and social media, the choir invites other young people to join in the fast. Fasting is then transformed into a community activity.

On a Sunday morning sermon about three weeks before the concert at RLCC Minister Johnston said:

You have to recognize that when we're singing and praising for God, we can't just come any old way. He requires us to be holy. God is not going to be in your praise if it's not about Him. And He's definitely not going to be in the midst if you got sin in your life. It's time out for all that. Get your life in order.

The young choir members are not fasting and asking God for a packed concert hall or for their voices to be amazing. The Facebook page of one choir member says that “*We want a breakthrough. We need souls to be saved*”. In addition to fasting, the choir also arranged a daily prayer meeting. I decided to fast with the choir as well, even though I am not a part of it. The youth decided that they would only eat one meal a day. When fasting, youth were supposed to read their bibles and pray so that they could connect with Jesus on a deeper level. Fasting was a way for us as young Pentecostals to get closer to God. The fact that we were doing it as a group gave us some solidarity. In addition to trying to strengthen my own spiritual life, I felt like I was helping to strengthen a community of young Pentecostal believers as well. Our identities as young Pentecostals were more salient than our label as members of a specific church.

The fact that the fast was initiated by the choir speaks to a connection between music, youth, and spiritual dedication and growth. The call to fast comes from young musicians and singers and shows that through music, youth are allowed the freedom to

take their spirituality in their own hands. Often times, fasts are called by pastors and church leaders. These pastors' motivations are rooted in the same idea of trying to motivate their congregations to put their bodies under control so that members can receive blessings from God. Both pastors frequently ask members to fast 1 meal a day in combination with prayer. However, in a case like the one with the community choir, the youth have gone above the heads of any pastor. Youth speak from a position of authority. Their membership in the choir and their dedication to their faith puts them in a position where they can encourage other Pentecostals, but especially youth, to engage in spiritual practices like fasting.

This power is not the same as a pastor's. The choir came together as a group and decided to fast. There was not one person making the decision or enforcing the practice. At the same time, it is an amazing display of how music is allowing youth to claim authority over spiritual matters in an interesting way. Pentecostal youth are not just taking positions of power in local churches as musicians and worship leaders. They are able to unite and reach out to youth from the surrounding area through choirs and other churches in the name of spiritual growth and development. Music acted as a bridge that connected youth from different Oneness Pentecostal churches in Trenton. Through the activities of worship, singing, and praise, youth were given the go ahead to come together in church sanctioned, healthy activity. Through a self-initiated fast, youth show that they are sanctified and concerned about the spiritual well being of themselves and each other.

Peter is not the only youth who sees musical organizations as a training ground for youth. Xavier agrees, but offers a more detailed reason for why music in general is

attractive to young people. Xavier is a 24 year old member of Corinth Church who also plays the drums.

***MW:** Why are most of the musicians and singers young people?*

***Xavier:** I believe that music and the worship leading are more targeted to youth. That's the case because God has a way of focusing. The music is more attractive to the youth. We look at today's music Gospel, R & B, rap, no matter what it is, it goes to the youth. That's one way of music. I believe when I was growing up, it was drums. I couldn't focus on nothing else. It attracted me. That's one thing that the Lord uses with the youth, the music. Satan also uses music to attract the youth. That's one way that he brings us in. Half of the preachers who are older that's now preaching, they had went through that phase. Half of them done played the organ. Half of them done played the drums. It's just a way of getting to the youth. "This is how I am going to pull you. If drums is going to be your aspiration [sic] to bring you in...that's what I'm going to use. If singing is going to be your aspiration, that's what I'm going to use." I think that's why it's more targeted to the youth.*

Xavier's opinions on the appeal of music to young people confirm what Peter said. For young men, being involved in music provides them with a spiritual place to wait and mature. Xavier and Peters' descriptions of musical organization mark choirs and music as a rite of passage for young men who want to be ministers in the future. As discussed in chapter 2, young men are not traditionally given a leadership position until they have matured spiritually and chronologically. Choirs are one of the activities that men can engage in while they're waiting for pastors to tell them that they are ready for leadership positions. Choirs are also an activity that are supported and seen as a positive experience from the perspective of youth and church leadership as well.

Xavier believes that music is much more than just an enjoyable recreational activity for young Pentecostals. Xavier articulates that music is both a blessing and a curse depending on what one uses it for. In musical organizations, youth can be engaged in church based activities, instead of secular ones while they wait for the permission of

their pastors to engage in formal ministry positions. Additionally, music allows some women to gain positions of power and leadership in their local churches.

At the same time, music has the power to distract Pentecostals from God. Youth are told that music and dancing can lead to sin. Going to dances and proms is considered controversial and risqué at both churches. Members who have weddings rarely have a dance floor or any dancing. Music is at the center of much of the apprehension about the salvation of youth. Youth are warned to be wary of music because of its infectious nature. Elder Vick and Elder Kinderson both remind congregants that music has the ability to seep into one's mind. Elder Kinderson speaks frequently about being in department stores and hearing a secular song come on that he likes. Without realizing it, he will hum along and start moving to the beat. He goes on to say that he can get carried away by the secular music without even meaning to. Elder Kinderson must be vigilant and catch himself because he wants to be focused on Godly things rather than secular things. In a contrasting way, Elder Vick has discussed the power of music and how it can change his day in a positive way. During one of his sermons, Elder Vick mentions that he heard a gospel song early in the morning that encouraged him. Throughout the day, when he was feeling sad or low, he focused on his song. The song had the power to turn his day into something positive. Both leaders offer up a suggestion that music is powerful and influential in the lives of Pentecostal because it can infiltrate their hearts and souls.

The struggle to keep oneself under control is a critical lesson that must be learned. Controlling the body can mean everything from not eating when hungry to not swaying to a beat. Youth are conditioned in choirs to regulate and control their bodies. In the case

of fasting; youth are regulating appetite and food. A similar type of regulation is in play in the store incident that Elder Kinderson talks about. His body naturally wants to move along to the music. There is an inclination to hear the groove of a secular song and rock along with it. Yet he stops moving to the music and tunes it out. In a similar way, Peter and other youth are encouraged to regulate their bodies. Perhaps Xavier stated it best when he told me that, *“Fasting is a way to show God that you’re serious. You’re willing to give up something you enjoy or think you need. Even Jesus fasted at times in his ministry. He knew that He had to sacrifice in order to reach a new level in his walk”*. Youth learn that even in a choir, their body is something that needs to be under control.

There are several reasons for why youth emphasized the experience of fasting. Fasting can be a riskier activity for those who are older or have some medical conditions. Many of the members who have sicknesses like diabetes, put restrictions on their fasting. They do not want to risk their physical health through the act of regularly fasting. A disproportionately larger number of older members suffer from diseases like diabetes, so they are not able to control their bodies in the same way that younger people are. In the spring of 2013, Elder Kinderson relayed a message that the leader of the national organization was sick. The man, who is in his early nineties, is an icon in the church. He fell ill after attempting to fast from food completely for several days. Elder Kinderson brought the news up after a Sunday morning service when participants were sitting in the pews, talking causally about the service and what their plans for dinner were. Most of the congregation agreed that the fast was not the wisest choice for the leader to make.

Elder Kinderson: *The presider is not doing too well. They say he was trying to fast and he got sick from it. Pray for the presider ya’ll.*

Minister Johnston: *What Happened?*

Elder Kinderson: *He been tryna fast, and his body just couldn’t handle it I think.*

Mrs. Johnston: *He needs to be careful. He can't be doing all that.*

Shirley: *Yeah, he not no young man anymore.*

Mrs. Johnston: *You have to be careful with food and fasting when you get older.*

Elder Kinderson: *Yeah, they say he hadn't eaten nothing for a few days.*

Shirley: *Nothing?!*

Mrs. Johnston: *See, that's too much. You gonna hurt yourself doing stuff like that. Did he drink water?*

Elder Kinderson: *I'm not sure. But it was too much.*

Shirley: *I know it was.*

Mrs. Johnston: *You gotta be wise about stuff like that. Especially if you're old or sick You gotta take care of yourself.*

Danielle: *I know. When we fast, sometimes I have to eat because of my heart condition.*

Elder Kinderson: *And God understands that. It's about a sacrifice. You don't have to put yourself in danger.*

Bodily control is extremely important to the members of RLCC and Corinth Church. A large part of their faith centers on their belief that the power of the spiritual supersedes that of the natural. At the same time, older Pentecostals recognize the limitations in their own bodies and the havoc that fasting can have on their bodies.

The message of bodily control given to youth is reinforced by adults. This fact is important because it shows that even in spaces where youth are physically away from adults, the rhetoric, instructions, and warnings of adults are always present. Youth are given some freedom when it comes to music. Youth choir rehearsals can happen without the oversight of adults. Youth choirs plan their own schedules and can call for a fast. At the same time, adults are concerned about the spiritual well-being of youth and it is impossible, even in youth spaces, to disentangle the reality that adults are modeling and monitoring appropriate Pentecostal behavior for young people. If the timing or notes are off on the songs during praise and worship, adults may suggest that a rehearsal is needed. Adult congregants will also let youth know if the selection was sung too fast, or they felt that the youth weren't singing loudly enough. In a denomination that relies on

apprenticeship and modeling instead of formal religious education, adults are charged with the responsibility to guide and mentor youth.

The topic of music came up in my interview with eighteen year old Gerald and I asked him about its popularity. His answer pointed to a theological reason for why music is important.

MW: *Why do you think so many young people are interested in music/singing/choirs?*

Gerald: *Well since the devil fell from heaven he was into music, so it's easy for humans to love music. Some people are blessed with gifts and calls and talents from birth or a young age. And some just want to because their family or church pushes them to.*

In the Pentecostal belief structure, Satan was once an angel. Satan committed the first sin in the universe, when he aspired to place his throne higher than God's. Satan was thrown out of heaven and now has become the adversary of God. Gerald's answer reflects the longstanding tradition that is based on scriptures in Ezekiel 28:13, where it is written about Satan that *"the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created"*(KJV). So from his creation, Satan was known for being musical and his body incorporated pipe organs and tambourines in some way. That scripture serves as the root of Gerald's belief that music can be a downfall for young people in the same way that it brought upon Satan's downfall. Gerald's answer, like most of the other responses of youth, shows that youth can see both the danger and blessing in music.

Young women in the churches are also attracted to music and the young women interviewed, articulated that music provides them a way to display their faith and be leaders in their churches. That opportunity for leadership is especially salient in this type of Oneness Pentecostalism, where women are prohibited from being pastors or ordained positions in their churches. Kimberly, Danielle, and Keisha are all worship leaders. The

young women are in charge of helping to pick songs for the service. Worship leaders are given the responsibility of helping to create an atmosphere in the church where the Spirit of God can be ushered in.³ All of the young women take their role as worship leaders seriously.

MW: Why did you start being a worship leader?

Kimberly: I started being a worship leader because I always liked to sing and when I sing I feel free and it's a part of my worship. When I started singing I was nervous because I cared about how I sounded but I realized the significance was to give God praise.

MW: What do you gain from it?

Kimberly: Being a worship leader made me realize the truth behind every word in a gospel song. And singing in church helped me identify my spiritual maturity because the words started to overwhelm me. Rather than being nervous and shy acting I began to close my eyes and worship God.

Kimberly describes how it is not until she is emotionally impacted by worship songs and lyrics that she feels spiritually mature. The emotional aspect of Pentecostalism is crucial to Kimberly feeling that she is on the right path. Kimberly does not highlight being able to understand or comprehend any aspect of her faith. Rather than focus on the rational expression of her faith, Kimberly places an emphasis on feelings.

Kimberly's response confirms what male youth have said about musical groups being a training ground for spiritual maturity. The situation is very different for Kimberly though. Because she is not a male, music and singing are not a transition to any sort of ordained positions or the ability to pastor. Still, music has become a place for Kimberly to work out her own spirituality. Through music, Kimberly has decided that being timid

3

Both churches believe that cohesive, corporal worship is important part of being Pentecostal. Church members are reminded that without every person in the church focusing on Christ, that their worship is inauthentic.

and self-involved are signs of spiritual immaturity. She believes that she has reached a level of spiritual maturity when the opinion of God matters more than the opinions of fellow church members. Another part of Kimberly's maturation process is when her actions are no longer merely emotional. True spiritual maturity happens when a Pentecostal believer is intentional and thoughtful about one's practices. The key to Kimberly's spiritual maturation is music. In her interview, Kimberly does not mention any other positions or church activities that have caused her to grow as much as being a worship leader.

Claiming New Spaces with Music

The Praise and Worship team at RLCC has infrequent and irregular rehearsals. Usually, a member of the group will decide that they all need to start practicing in order to learn new songs. The group will meet for a few weeks, learn a song, and then stop meeting. Rehearsals provide a place for youth to come together and socialize as well. In line with the dogma of Pentecostalism, the praise and worship part of the Sunday morning service is open to all. Any member who has a song or wants to talk about an encounter that demonstrates God's power is encouraged to stand up and share. Members of the congregation encourage that individual with verbal affirmation, hand clapping, shouting, and other forms of worship. While there are occasional testimonies during praise and worship, the majority of it is spent with youth singing worship songs.

The Praise and Worship team of youth at RLCC often complain about Shirley. Shirley is the grandmother of Danielle and David who enjoys singing slower paced, older songs. Most of the young people prefer faster, more exuberant praise and worship

service. Youth see themselves as the guardians of faster paced, emotional form of worship. David, as musician and an organizer for the Praise and Worship team at RLCC, is very concerned about the possible interference from an older member like Shirley. In his early thirties and the son of Elder Kinderson, David is the only young person who can play piano in the contemporary gospel style. David is willing to do whatever it takes in order to ensure that the Praise and Worship team can perform without interruption of their style. Sometimes that means not giving members a chance to suggest songs. David is concerned about the pauses and lapses that occur during the worship part of Sunday morning service. When youth members are not organized and rehearsed, older members like Shirley are given room to add to the worship part of the service. David leads the other youth in preserving musical worship as a youth-centered space through the exclusion of older members like Shirley.

Often when she starts to sing, she is the only person in the congregation who knows the words and the melodies to the songs that she chooses. The youth complain that not only are her songs not well known, but that they mess up the flow of the fast paced, high energy type of songs that youth would like to sing. During a Saturday afternoon rehearsal the youth lament the intrusion of Shirley in their praise and worship routine.

David: *We need to learn new songs. That way Shirley can't take over*

Danielle: *She always sings those slow songs.*

Kimberly: *(laughing) Yeah.*

David: *We got to start practicing songs and just sing them. That way she can't sing and take over!*

Kimberly: *Yeah, 'cause she be messing up the whole flow with those slow songs out of nowhere*

MW: *Yeah, I never know the words.*

Danielle: *You don't know the words to none of the songs though.*

MW: *Fair enough.*

David: We just got to be on point and practice songs and just sing them. Then she won't be able to jump in. If we know what we doing and just keep singing she can't do nothing.

Youth are protective over the praise and worship part of the service, despite it being a time where any member can contribute. One of the staples of Pentecostal worship has been how everyone can be involved and can be led by the Spirit of God to play an active role. Yet, the youth at RLCC are trying to redefine Pentecostal worship. The youth at RLCC are beginning to put limitations on who will participate in the praise and worship part of service. In order to protect their own power, they limit the power of adults like Shirley.

Music and worship have opened up doors to new physical spaces for youth at RLCC. Through music rehearsals they are given ownership over the church and allowed to reinterpret spatial politics of Pentecostalism. All of the young men in the music group have a key to all of the doors in the church, even to Pastor Kinderson's office. When youth need to gather for rehearsals, they do not require the assistance of adults. Youth only need to make sure that there is no other meeting or service scheduled. Adults give young people a respect of space during these meetings or rehearsals. Adults either wait in the back of the church or upstairs if the youth are meeting downstairs. During their meetings and rehearsals, young people can take control of the sanctuary and use it for their own purpose.

One way that space gets reinterpreted is in the sanctuary where rehearsals are held. Typically, during the praise & worship part of the service, the young people are called up and they file towards the front of the church. Most youth sit in the back of the church. There are only about twenty regular attending members at RLCC. Some rows

only have one or two people sitting in them. Youth are discouraged from sitting in the back. Elder Kinderson's wife, Lee, has tried often to get youth to sit in the front of the church. Her argument is that saved Pentecostals should sit in the front of the church. Lee always says this with a smile, but I am never certain if she is joking. On at least five occasions Lee has stated *"You know what Mother Thomas [researcher's grandmother] used to say. Sinners sit in the back 'cause they're afraid of the fire from the altar"*

When the young people go to lead praise and worship they walk onto the pulpit briefly to grab microphones and then come back onto the floor facing the congregation. The exceptions are the two musicians. David the piano player and Gerald the drummer remain on the pulpit because that is where the drums and keyboard are. The drums are in the back of the pulpit behind the rows of chairs. The keyboard is off to the left of the row of chairs. So while those two young men are on the pulpit, it is clear that they are not in the same grouping as any ministers or elders on the pulpit.

This is an important observation because in both of these churches, only ordained men are allowed on the pulpit. The pulpit plays a pivotal role in the Pentecostal church. The physical pulpit illustrates the roles and expectations of ordained men, women, children, and un-ordained men in the Pentecostal church. By allowing certain individuals to sit on and use the pulpit, but forbidding others to even walk on it, Pentecostals reaffirm who has a position of power and privilege in the church. Physically, the men who sit on and preach from the pulpit are higher than the rest of the congregants in the church. They are also higher in terms of position and authority. The pulpit reinforces the notion that there is space that is off-limits to women and youth. In

both churches, the sight of a youth or woman sitting in a pulpit chair is radical and rarely seen.

In order to visualize how music, space, and youth intertwine, one must understand the pulpit set up in both churches. I have included a picture below in order to help illustrate how both churches organize and segregate spaces of ordained men in the church.

IMAGE 3

At the top of the picture is the official pulpit of RLCC. One can see the large podium on the pulpit. That large, mostly immobile structure is where Elder Kinderson and other ordained men preach and speak from. Obscured directly behind the podium is the chair where Elder Kinderson sits. The arrangement reinforces the configuration of power and leadership in the church. The heightened level of the podium signifies a special place of honor for the men on the pulpit. Each pastor sits directly behind the podium during the services that he preaches. He has the space of centrality and honor in the church.

On the floor in front of the pulpit podium to the right you can see the smaller stand that is used. This stand stays on the floor and is easy to move around the church. That smaller stand is used for members who are not ordained. For example, church announcements are read by women at both churches. Rather than having women stand on the pulpit and read announcements from there, the stands are moved for them. It is not only women who use the stands, but men who are not ordained, no matter how old they are. I have used the stand many times in many different contexts. There are times when I teach Sunday school and I have used the stand on the floor. Additionally, I have led prayers, made announcements, and presented in front of the church. On all of those occasions I have used the small podium.

Through the use of music, rules of space are bended and broken by young people, especially young women. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the specific way that music is defined, used, and manipulated in both churches. Women are not allowed to be ordained in this type of Pentecostalism and men who are not ordained find no reason to go onto the pulpit. Occasionally there may be a man that is not ordained who is on the pulpit in order to pass on a message or grab some offering envelope or something like that. These trips to the pulpit are quick.

The spatial politics of gender play out in interesting ways at both Corinth Church and RLCC. During the summer of 2012, youth and adults from both churches attended the funeral of an older, well-known church member. At her funeral, the pulpit was significantly higher than the floor. There was the typical larger podium for ordained ministers and the regular smaller stand for everyone else. During the funeral, many members spoke about the departed. Women and un-ordained men, whether they were

speaking, singing, or reading cards, knew to use the smaller stand. However, a niece of the departed came from a denomination of Pentecostalism where women were ordained and she was a minister. Xavier, from Corinth Church, was given the role of helping older women up to the stand and walking them down, as well as attending to the needs of ordained men in the pulpit. When the ordained woman came to offer words, she grabbed the microphone from the smaller stand and attempted to walk up to the larger pulpit podium. What ensued were several awkward minutes of her attempting to go to the podium and Xavier guiding her back down to the stand on the floor. She would walk up three steps and Xavier would meet her and gesture towards the stand on the floor. She would then go down and try to get around him on the other side. Xavier would meet her and gesture to the stand again. They played this cat and mouse game for several minutes before the woman relented and used the stand on the floor. However, while at the stand on the floor, she stated explicitly that she was a minister. Through her introduction, the woman was offering an explanation as to why she had spent the past few minutes trying to use the podium.

I use that vignette to demonstrate how important space and gender roles are to maintaining order in both Pentecostal churches. The attempts of a female minister to come onto the pulpit made many in the congregation uncomfortable. However, during their practices youth take control of the pulpit at RLCC. Kimberly and Danielle, the two females in the praise and worship team, practice singing and arranging music from the pulpit. On the surface level it is only two young women singing on a church altar. Yet, for the members of RLCC, her position has significant meaning. The imagery is startling because in no other circumstance have I ever seen a young woman stand at the podium on

the altar. I do not think that Danielle or Kimberly is waging an attack against the spatial politics of gender in the church. Nor do I think that their behavior is a reaction to the limits on placement and mobility that effect young women. At the same time, the episode shows that young people involved in musical worship are not bound by the same rules as everyone else and can be on the pulpit for specific occasions. In the normal Sunday morning service, youth have possession of the front of the church floor only during praise & worship. Ordained men have possession of the pulpit throughout the entire service. Yet at the rehearsals youth can lay claims to areas of the church that they are typically denied access to, if only for a few minutes.

The praise and worship team at Corinth does not get to play around with the boundaries of space in the same way that youth at RLCC do. One of those reasons is because of the physical makeup of the church. The musical instruments at Corinth are not on the pulpit, they are off to the side, on the floor. There is no reason for musicians or singers to be in pulpit. The second reason that space is not challenged in same way at Corinth that it is at RLCC is that youth do not make up a majority of the praise and worship team at Corinth Church. The one regularly attending young female at Corinth Church, Keisha, is on the praise team. All of the young men play instruments. However, most of the praise & worship team at Corinth are older, middle-aged women. That interesting dynamic changes the way that youth experience freedom and space at Corinth when it comes to music. Keisha's experience at Corinth is slightly different because adults are involved in worship at Corinth. It is just not practical for young people to completely run praise and worship at Corinth because there are not enough that regularly attend. Yet, Keisha is still able to wield some power. She, like the other women of the

praise team, is the central focus during the praise and worship part of the service. Music enables her, as a young woman, to exhibit some agency. Earlier in this dissertation I described how Keisha believes that just because she is a young person, adults will not listen to her at times. However, on Sunday morning, all of the adults, youth, and church leadership are focused on her. Music provided that platform. While music does not operate the same way at Corinth Church, it is still giving her a special opportunity to wield some power.

Although Keisha cannot challenge spatial politics through music, she does in fact get to challenge some of the gender roles. Music allows Keisha and the young women from RLCC to exercise control and power during parts of the Sunday morning service. Keisha gets a say in what songs are being selected and performed. Other young people are also empowered by music. Xavier is a young person who is not a member of the praise team at RLCC. Sometimes he accompanies them on the drums. However, on two occasions he started singing a song from the audience. Xavier did not have a microphone or control over the portion of the service. He felt compelled by God to start singing a song. It was a call and response song that Xavier took control of. Xavier used the expectation that youth are inclined to participate in music and the democratic free-flowing atmosphere of the church to take control and change the direction of the worship team by adding his own musical selection.

As a leader of the worship team at RLCC, Danielle gets complete control over the way that worship is regulated and controlled in church on Sunday mornings. She picks the songs and decides how long each song will last. She also has a role in deciding when worship will happen. In a structure where women are denied traditional forms of

leadership and power, the young people at both churches capitalize on the space that they are given. They use it as a way to exert control in one of the most important parts of the Pentecostal service.

One of the most amazing things about the power of music in both churches is the new roles that young women are allowed in because of music. Women outnumber men as church members. At the same time, the leadership in the churches is entirely male because of the prohibition on women being ordained pastors and/or leading churches. There are areas that are specifically relegated to women. Auxiliaries like the Women's Council and the Ministers and Deacons' wives are for women. Yet most of those members who are part of either group tend to be older women. Women have also been presidents of organizations like Sunday Schools and Young People's departments where they have authority and traditional power over their peers, including males. That fact is misleading though. At the end of the day, all the leaders of specific auxiliaries are under the rule and guidance of pastors and regional leaders. All of these leaders are men. At the highest levels of the organization women are in positions of subservience to men.

Music provides a tactic to the strategy of traditional church hierarchy in two important ways for women. Music provides a way for young women to find some room for leadership. Young Pentecostal women are limited by the intersectionality of their identities as youth and as women. Because they are women, a number of positions as ordained ministers and church pastors are closed off to them. Additionally, their youth provides another roadblock to obtaining a position. As discussed in the second chapter, even *men* younger than thirty-five years old find themselves cut off from leadership positions on many of the national levels. Music provides a ways for young women

(because youth are encouraged to join musical organizations and women outnumber men) to assume a role of leadership in their churches.

Also, because musical worship holds such a prominent place in the two churches, its control is important and useful to the youth at both RLCC and Corinth Church. Worship is at the heart of the service at both churches. Both Pentecostal churches are characterized by their free spirited and spontaneous worship. As a result, someone like Danielle wields an amazing amount of power. She singlehandedly directs the flow of worship on every Sunday, youth services, and many of the services during the week. As Elder Kinderson stated, "*Worship in the church is vital. Once you worship God, His spirit continues to be in the sanctuary*". Youth help to prepare the atmosphere for worship. That act is incredibly important for Pentecostals.

Danielle's authority is reinforced every Sunday by Minister Johnston. The two demonstrate it through their exchange in which each one takes control over a portion of the service. Each Sunday, Minister Johnston guides the congregation through prayer requests, prayer, and morning service. He gives the congregants a warning when church is about to start. Minister Johnston is essentially the master of ceremonies or the guide during the service that gives others the permission to speak. His physical position standing at the big podium on the pulpit further reaffirms the control over the service that he has. He stands at the front of the church for all of the parts of the service that he leads. It is only when he is temporarily giving up space (and thus power, because the two are interconnected) that he leaves his central position standing at the front of the church. It is at this point where Danielle is able to assume control (Soja, 1989).

When Minister Johnston turns over the service to Danielle, he does it in a formal way that illustrates both strategies and tactics that allow youth, but especially Danielle, to assume a physical and metaphysical space of control over a part of the service. Each week, Minister Johnston does some variation of the same conversation. Johnston tells the congregants that *“Let’s have the praise and worship team come lead us in worship”*. That is the strategy of providing youth with an area of the service that was specifically set apart for them. All in the church understand the time for praise and worship is relegated specifically for youth. In that role, Danielle and the other youth are able to walk into the specific role that is outlined for them.

There are also much more subtle displays of how Danielle assumes power during the Sunday morning service. Employing tactics is often subversive and passive (Certeau, 1984). Tactics do not necessarily have to be a conscious, full out attack against the structure. When Elder Kinderson Minister Johnston introduces the praise leaders, Danielle is the first of the young people to get up. She leads the procession of youth to the front of the room. Her initiative and first place in the line, demonstrate her dominance and control over the praise leader team. During the period where youth are in control of the service, Danielle is in control of the youth.

Danielle demonstrates tactics of leadership in other ways as well. When the young praise leaders stand in front of the congregation, they look to Danielle. While all of the youth know the words and melodies to the songs that Danielle will sing, very rarely does one of them suggest a song to sing. Danielle starts the songs and sings the lead solo parts on most of the call and response songs. She single handedly directs the flow of the service. All eyes, adult and youth, look for her to guide them in the worship

part of the service. While the congregants claim that God is the focus of their worship, Danielle acts as the human focal point during the service. With only a quick introduction and a walk to the front of the church, Danielle takes over the helm of control in the church on a regular base every Sunday.

In order to confirm her claim of power on a Sunday, Danielle intentionally and specifically returns the power to Minister Johnston. Every week, Danielle states some variation of “*We’re going to turn the service back into the hands of Minister Johnston [sic]*”. Her simple phrase is embedded with quite a bit of meaning and symbolism. Danielle affirms that individual members are put in control of the service. Danielle also claims control of the service. There is no way that she could return the power and control back to Minister Johnston unless she had it in the first place. As a member of the praise team, I can confirm that her use of the word “we’re” is purely ceremonial. None of the rest of us claims control or leadership over the service. She is the individual with power, so she is the only one who can give it away. Secondly, no one else can give power away, because Danielle is the only young person who can stop the praise and worship part of the service. Danielle gives the power over when she has made the decision that there have been enough songs, praises, or testimonies given.

Danielle’s power, like every other Pentecostal member who receives power, is trumped by the power of God though. As previously stated, Danielle selects most of the songs that are sung. However, there are rare occasions when other members of the praise team select a song or lead them. This is because the individual feels compelled by God to offer their own suggestion for a song or to lead the solo of a song. The implications for

these disruptions are that God's power and control over a service is more important than any individual's claim to power.

The fluidity of power is evident in a scenario that has happened twice and involves myself. One of the songs that the praise team has learned is one in which I sing the solo. During the song, I direct the praise team. Thus, when I am leading the song, I am the individual in control and exhibiting power. The team has only done the song a couple of times. However, on two occasions, Minister Johnston has requested to hear that song. On both occasions, Minister Johnston has told the praise team to sing the song before Danielle has given control of the service back over to him. At first glance, it would appear that Minister Johnston has usurped Danielle's power. However, Minister Johnston leads with an apology and a variation of the phrase, "*Sorry, but God laid this on my heart*". In one sentence, Minister Johnston seeks the forgiveness of the praise team, but also proclaims that it was not his own decision, but one that God wanted him to do. While that performance is short, it is significant. Minister Johnston's words show respect and deference to the fact that youth are in control of the service at the moment.

The microphone plays pivotal role in the display of power in the church. The microphone, like the podium represents a visual display of control. When the youth take over the worship part of the service, they all file up to the front of the church and each grabs a microphone. Minister Johnston then places his microphone in the stand. After praise and worship is done, Danielle once again moves first and leads the worship team in returning their microphones (Green & Pearlan, 1985).

Youth also used music and music education as a way to take over the physical space of the church. The youth at RLCC had two large events during the 2012 where

they co-opted the space in the church. The first occasion was when the youth department sponsored a concert. They invited the community choir that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. Danielle was a member of the choir. The youth at RLCC were able to offer their church as a location to have practices as well as have the concert. The youth at RLCC were then able to raise an offering the night of the concert and use that for future activities at the church.

The young people were very protective of their service. They ran everything including the scripture reading, being the MC, raising the offering, and all other aspects of the service. Elder Kinderson and Minister Johnston sat in the congregation and allowed the youth to have complete control over the service. The only part that Elder Kinderson contributed to was final remarks and the benediction. Despite it being their service and being in control, the youth of RLCC still maintained the seating patterns of a typical service. The young people from RLCC, and other churches as well, congregated towards the back of the church while older members sat in the front of the sanctuary.

Music acts on multiple levels at RLCC and Corinth Church. First and foremost, music acts as an integral part of worship. Like many other black churches, these black Pentecostals place an emphasis on music and expressive praise and worship. The music that youth and praise and worship teams perform at both churches is urban, contemporary gospel. Secondly, music provides a space for youth to socialize in and also be socialized about appropriate Pentecostal behavior. Through music, youth learn to put their bodies under control in order to grow spiritually. Music acts as a waiting place for many young men on their way to higher, ordained positions. Lastly, music is one way for youth to claim traditional positions of power. For women, music can be a tool in gaining power.

Through music, several of the young women in this study were able to exert their authority over the service. Because music is a centrally important part of the Pentecostal experience and young women are more represented in choirs and as worship leaders, young women take center stage in the church often. Some young women like Danielle and Kimberly use music to defy the spatial politics of gender. At the same time, music is a tool for recruitment and used to retain youth and keep them interested in the church,

Youth can act within the existing structure to impact the Sunday morning service, thus Pentecostalism. While the space of music is much more flexible than gender or sexuality, it still has clear boundaries because music is a part of the church that seems to have been created and reserved for youth. However, it is not the only place that youth are congregated in and assume leadership roles. In the next chapter I discuss how formal education as well as Sunday school education is providing young Pentecostals a way to challenge adult constructions of a Pentecostal identity. Youth's involvement is different than music because while music is an area that has been set aside for them, youth are claiming new spaces of leadership in the realm of education.

Chapter 5

The New Frontier: Youth as Education (al) Experts

“You got to have some sort of education these days. People with a Bachelors [degree] are fighting for jobs. You gotta get some kind of training or you won’t find a job” ~ Elder Kinderson

“You got to be careful when you have a bunch of degrees. It’s easy to get puffed up. I see all these ministers who know Greek and Hebrew. They use big words and try to impress people. But if the people don’t understand what you’re saying, then what’s the point?” ~Elder Kinderson

“You [Marcus] got to give a presentation about college. You know more about it then they do. They ain’t never been to college. They can’t talk about this stuff. You can. Anything you think young people should know about getting a college education. I think that would be good” ~Mitchell

The three quotes above highlight some of the complexities and contradictions of being a young person at a Pentecostal church. As Elder Kinderson mentions in the first quote, a college degree has become necessary if an individual wants to find a job that can provide for oneself and one’s future family. The youth at RLCC and Corinth, like youth across the country, are told that a college education is the key needed to open the door to a middle class stability. However, youth are frequently reminded by church leadership that although obtaining a degree is a good thing, Godly knowledge is more important than secular knowledge.

I intentionally picked two somewhat contrasting quotes by Elder Kinderson to call attention to contradictions in the messages that youth are told about knowledge. In his first quote Eder Kinderson stresses the importance of college degrees and formal education. However, later, he cautions against being conceited or obnoxious because of one’s education. Even with religious education, young Pentecostals must be conscious of

remaining humble and understanding that God's knowledge is far superior to their own, and that an individual's academic success is only possible because of God.

Many youth must navigate college without the experiential knowledge of adults to guide and instruct them. Most of the youth are first generation college students. Youth must therefore look inward for guidance in the college process as well as for models of a salient Pentecostal college student identity. In this specific case, other youth are used as models and sources of guidance rather than church leadership or adults. With the absence of an adult perspective, youth like me who have obtained advanced degrees are given a platform to advise and instruct other young people. It is important to note that being an expert in a secular field or on the college process does not mean one is given any official power or responsibility by church leadership because of it. Even youth like myself are encouraged to attend Sunday Schools and other educational programs in the church so that we can be instructed in religious doctrine. It is also important to note that college can indeed be a time where some youth fall astray and stop attending church regularly or identifying as Pentecostals.

Many of the lessons about life, religion, and youth's individual roles are provided to youth through Sunday school. Sunday school at RLCC and Corinth Church act as an incubator for Pentecostal youth to grow and develop into adults who will continue to practice Pentecostalism both dogmatically and culturally. Youth are instructed from a very young age about the responsibility of falling in line with the rules, roles, and regulations of Pentecostalism. In Sunday schools, youth are taught about the distinct characteristics of Pentecostalism and about the importance of speaking in tongues and being saved. Sunday school reinforces instructions given in sermons about how to live

sanctified and holy lives. It is in Sunday school that youth are taught about universal tenants of Christianity, like the divinity of Christ and His promise of salvation. However, Sunday school is also a place for youth to learn distinctly Oneness Pentecostal songs, dogma, and theology. Additionally, Sunday school explains their role and place in their local churches, on the national level, and within Pentecostalism in general. Sunday school also reinforces the notions of holiness, conversion, and modesty that are expressed in the Pentecostal culture.

In formal and informal education programs in the church, youth are separated by gender. Young men receive a uniquely focused education that is withheld from young women at Corinth Church and RLCC. By separating young men in a special class, church leadership reinforces the unequal power dynamics between males and females and perpetuates the divine belief that young men have the responsibility of leading both their households and the church.

Using their college experience, some youth are able to modify the definition of urban black Pentecostalism. Whereas in the past, formal higher education was seen only as a threat to the conservative nature of Pentecostalism, educated youth are reconciling their identity as a conservative Pentecostal with the secular education they often receive while away from their local faith communities. It is noteworthy how education acts in two contrasting ways at the churches. Through church education programs, youth are reminded that they need to be knowledgeable about God and His method of Salvation before anything else. On the other hand, degrees and secular education has caused many of the youth to be experts outside of the church and role models for other youth in the church. Attending colleges far from their faith communities has also caused some youth

to stop attending RLCC. Through youth, the definition of what it means to be a Pentecostal has expanded. Youth in the church have broadened the definition of urban Pentecostalism by incorporating identities of college educated into their conceptualization of Pentecostalism.

Sunday School Spaces

Sunday schools in America have their beginnings in Rhode Island in the 1790s (Stafford, 1990). After the Second Great Awakening, Christian denominations like the Baptists attempted to standardize their Sunday school education curriculum (Ahlstrom, 2004). Those early Sunday schools offered “the illiterate, urban poor a basic education- reading and writing- with the Bible as a textbook” (30). The Baptists used Sunday school as a way to introduce new members and youth to the church experience. During the 1800s, four out of every five new members went through Sunday school in order to be introduced to the church (Sunday School Movement, 1990). Sunday schools have been an important part of charismatic and evangelical religions as a way to both educate youth in general and to introduce them to church policies.

The original American Sunday schools looked quite different than the ones that occur at Pentecostal churches like Corinth and RLCC. The original Sunday school was set up in order to provide youth with reading and writing skills as well as the skill set to understand the Bible. Sunday school was important for youth because many of them were not afforded the luxury of going to school during the week because they had to work on family farms and in the household (Davies, 1996). A disproportionate number

of those youth who were not in school were black and/or poor (Palladino, 1996). Sunday schools provided a way for some of those youth to learn basic literacy and skills.

In Sunday school at RLCC and Corinth Church, youth are engaged in sophisticated conversations about society, race, and Christianity. Leadership at both churches has a broader focus than simply teaching a specific religious doctrine or dogma. Sunday school offers an opportunity for young people to learn about the world but also provides an alternative value system to the ones found in their neighborhoods. In order to address not only the spiritual needs of youth but also provide an education that is practical and useful outside of church walls, both churches find it necessary to alter their techniques of Sunday school from a traditional model where one teacher instructs the children, to a model where students and teachers are engaged in conversations with each other about their faith

In one of my earliest field notes I wrote about a discussion that the church had on the role of youth. Elder Kinderson asked what rights youth have. An older member in the church called out *“They have to the right to obey”*. I rolled my eyes and Kimberly and Danielle smirked at my reaction. Elder Kinderson laughed in response to the comment. As with many of the hypothetical questions that are thrown out to the Congregation, this one led to a lengthy conversation. We ended up talking about respect for adults. The majority of the church, both youth and adults, agreed that youth have a responsibility to respect adults and defer to adult authority in the church. I stressed that I believe that respect goes both ways and that both youth and adults must earn respect. I said that I don’t respect anyone solely because of their age. I was out on my own because most of the congregation did not agree with me. However I was still allowed to express

my opinion. Elder Kinderson eventually ended the conversation by drawing the congregation's attention to Bible scriptures that instruct children to obey and respect their parents. I was given the freedom and opportunity to speak a perspective that was dissenting from others in the class. I had the freedom to challenge the dominant way of thinking. That freedom is limited in the end though by Elder Kinderson. In many of these Sunday school conversations, there is a right answer according to biblical scriptures. So while Sunday school can go on and different perspectives are told, RLCC ends theological arguments with scripture that decide which side of an argument is wrong or right.

Non-theological discussions can go on longer because there is no religious doctrine to decide who is wrong or right. For instance, there was a discussion about obeying the laws of the land during Sunday school. Many in the congregation, including Elder Kinderson, said that it was our responsibility to obey the rules and the laws. Mrs. Johnston challenged that notion by saying that slavery and segregation would never have ended if blacks followed the laws of the land. She said that when rules are unjust, we should not follow them. What followed was an amicable back and forth between Mrs. Johnston and several members of the church. She, like me in the previous example, had a platform to speak her mind even when it contradicted popular opinion and the opinion of Elder Kinderson.

During Sunday school, youth and older members are encouraged to question church leadership. Both Minister Johnston and Elder Kinderson state that questions and challenges are fine, as long as they are done in a respectful manor. Elder Kinderson has mentioned to the congregation on several occasions that "*there's a time and place for*

everything though. The middle of a Sunday morning service ain't the time for it. You got to be respectful of the man of God". Both men say that they welcome challenges and questions. Minister Johnston says *"I can learn something from you. We can all learn from each other"* and Elder Kinderson said that *"I'm constantly reading and learning. There's always more to know"*. Both men welcome questions, however there is a time and place for those questions and challenges. Sunday school at RLCC acts as one of the places where members can and do feel comfortable challenging church leadership in some ways.

Both churches use a Sunday school book from a company called *Pentecostal Publishing*. The books are made especially for Oneness Pentecostals. The lessons provide a Christian perspective, but also go deep into Pentecostal doctrine and dogma. Both churches dedicate the hour before Sunday morning service to Sunday school and use adult male leaders to teach. Pastors at RLCC and Corinth occasionally teach Sunday school, but normally the pastors use the time during Sunday school to prepare their sermon for the morning. Sunday school is much more casual and less attended than Sunday morning service at both churches. At Corinth Church, the teacher reads a significant portion of the lesson. He then explains the passages. There are occasions for members to join in and add to the discussion. There is participation from members, but that participation is limited.

Sunday school at RLCC is more participatory. Minister Johnston often starts with the lesson in the book, but then will improvise and add to it. He will create hypothetical questions based off of the passages in the Sunday school book. Often he will ask each member of the church to respond in front of the congregation in turn. In one instance

Minister Johnston asked the church “*Are God and Jesus the same person?*” In this doctrine of Oneness Pentecostalism, it is a common and indisputable fact that God and Christ are one being, who exist in two different forms. Yet, the congregation was uncomfortable by the question. We thought that maybe this was a trick question and there was a deeper meaning that we were not getting. Some of us thought that Minister Johnston himself must have been confused and thought that God was not the same as Jesus, or else why would he have asked the question? We all answered the question with a hesitant “yes” or an “*I don’t know*”. I could tell that I was not the only person struggling with what was going on. Seated on the pew with me were Danielle and David. We all looked at each other with a questioning look. No one in the congregation that day answered with a strong declarative answer. David said “*Based on what I know, I believe that they are the same person. I mean, that’s what we always say*”. Danielle also hesitantly answered, “*Yeah, I guess I agree with David. I’ve always thought that they were the same person. That’s why we pray in Jesus’ name. Because Jesus is God*”. All of the saints in the classroom qualified our answers with “I think” or “I guess”. Elder Johnston smiled at our answers but would not give a hint to as if we were correct or missing the question. The three unsaved class members flat out answered “I don’t know”. There was a tension in the room as we all looked to the next person to answer. Elder Johnston went from the front of the room to the back so we all waited for the last person in the back of the room to answer. The incident sticks out in my head because none of us gave a declarative answer where we sounded sure or confident. After asking each one of us for our answer, Minister Johnston told us that “*Ya’ll know this. Jesus was God in the flesh. I just did that to see how confident ya’ll were. You know this stuff, so*

you got to be confident in your answer.” Minister Johnston was right. I did know that. All of us, being members of a Oneness church, had been taught time and time again that Christ was God. Minister Johnston’s point was made. None of us, even those who had been saints for decades, answered in a way that displayed our confidence. No one gave a declarative “yes”. At RLCC, Sunday school is not where members are expected to sit and be passive recipients of knowledge. In addition to being a place where members can dialogue and engage with each other, it is also a training ground for being able to confidently express the tenants of Oneness Pentecostalism to people unfamiliar with Pentecostal doctrine.

Minister Johnston often “tests” the members of RLCC in this way. He quizzes all the members by asking direct questions. Sunday school is meant to provide a place for youth and adults to make sure that they understand the foundational tenants of Oneness Pentecostalism. Minister Johnston says *"You got to know the Word. People are going to challenge you and you need to be able to know what to say back to them. You got to know the Word"*. Minister Johnston is concerned about the threat of an attack against the faith of his fellow church members. While both churches cover topics especially geared to Pentecostals, RLCC has more of an open feel to it while Corinth church operates like more of a typical Sunday school. My observations during Sunday school at Corinth church were based almost completely off of the book. The Elder there gives an in-depth reading of the Sunday school book. There are questions and participation, but those questions are based off of questions that come straight from the text. One member reads each section of the lesson out loud and then questions in the book are posed to everyone. Rarely is the reading interrupted by leaders like it is at RLCC. Because Corinth Church

follows the lesson more closely, that Sunday school typically ends on time and allows the members to eat and socialize between Sunday school and morning service. The members of RLCC sacrifice a real break between Sunday school and Sunday morning service because of their more free flowing approach to Sunday school.

At RLCC and Corinth Church, youth and their families are encouraged to attend Sunday school regularly. Yet, neither church had a specific curriculum or program for young children at the time of this research. All of the youth, even the toddlers and young children, are put into class together with adults. One of the reasons for this is that the very young children at RLCC and Corinth are irregular in their attendance and also often arrive towards the end of or after Sunday school has finished. Neither church separates Sunday school classes or bible study classes by age.

Sunday school is taught by ministers at both churches. The authority to teach is not based on formal training in education. The instructors at both churches are volunteers who are selected by their pastors for their character and their dedication to the church, rather than on their expertise in education and/or biblical knowledge. I have no degree in theology, and yet I regularly teach Sunday school to the adults of the church. Neither of the churches in this study requires Sunday school teachers to attend a special class, demonstrate Biblical knowledge or have teaching experience outside of the church. A desire to teach and approval from a pastor is all that is necessary.

Sunday school education in churches is crucial to ensuring that the younger generation of Pentecostals will stay involved in the church. Connections at church education programs have been correlated to individuals growing in their faith and being regularly attending members as adults (Stafford, 1990). A report conducted by the Lilly

Endowment found that “Of all the areas of congregational life we examined, involvement in an effective Christian education program has the strongest ties to a person’s growth in faith” (29). It would appear that in order to have congregants grow in their spirituality, churches must invest time and energy in their education programs. That reality is actualized in the form of several youth that have went away to attend a college and have now stopped attending church or attend irregularly.

At both research sites, Sunday school is not as well attended as Sunday morning service. Tim Stafford makes an interesting argument about the way that modern Sunday schools are run and the reasons for their lack of popularity. He claims that Sunday schools are not as popular now as they were in generations past, because they do not really address the needs of children in congregations (Stafford, 1990). Stafford states that Sunday schools are “mainly reactive. The interest is based less on enthusiasm from children than on fear of the demise of the family” (32). Stafford implies that Sunday schools now focus on keeping families intact, rather than on the needs and interests of youth. Perhaps, the lack of youth Sunday school participation at Corinth and RLCC are because youth perceive that many of the incentives for adults engaging and providing programs for youth are motivated by fear of youth deserting the church. Perhaps one of the reasons for the lack of enthusiasm about Sunday school is that youth can recognize the ulterior motives of adults. Some youth see adults’ concern about Sunday school as another example of adults’ lack of confidence with the spiritual choices that young Pentecostals make.

At the same time, adults’ concerns and church leaderships’ placing an emphasis on the importance of Sunday school and the education of youth is not unwarranted.

Studies show that youth who regularly attend Sunday school are significantly more likely to attend and be part of a church as adults (Nelsen, 1988). With that in mind, Elder Kinderson and Elder Vick approach Sunday school as a place to plant seeds of religiosity into young Pentecostals. Both pastors regularly quote the scripture that says “*Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he shall not depart from it*” (Proverbs 22:6 KJV). For adult leadership, reaching out to Pentecostals while they are young is imperative to saving them. Young Pentecostals represent not just the actual lives of young people in a specific church; they embody the fear and the hope of this Christian movement (Castañeda, 2002).

Elder Vick and Elder Kinderson use Pentecostalism to confront a cultural landscape that is drastically different than the one from their own childhoods. Both pastors spoke about how the world has become less moral and the influence of the church is waning in this generation. In fact, their fears of a dwindling Christian influence in black America are true. Religion has much less of an impact on this generation of African Americans than it has had in the past (Sernett, 1997). African Americans describe themselves as having lower levels of spirituality than in the past. The change in American spirituality has been explained as a result of migration patterns rather than spirituality (Paris, 1982). In the rural southern past, churches were often focal points of black communities. They were centers of education, social activities, and political activity. During the Great Migration, many blacks left these rural areas for northern cities like Chicago and Detroit. Dense populations and a large number of churches all in the city changed churches from being central points of the neighborhoods. In the rural past, Pentecostal churches could impose their view of the world on the communities that

they were located in. In the current age, where churches do not play the same educational and social role as they did in the early 1900s or rural south, black churches do not have as much influence. One of the ways that Elder Vick and Elder Kinderson attempt to spread the influence of the church is through their youth education programs.

The power of Sunday school at RLCC is that it not only teaches youth about Pentecostalism and keeps them in protected spaces, but Sunday school helps to acclimate youth to Pentecostal culture and behaviors. Sunday school topics at both churches act as a prompt for interesting and diverse topics about Pentecostalism, youth, culture, etc. The topics during my observation time ranged from “What is the role of the black church” to “Do married couples have to listen to gospel music when having sex”. During the conversation on sex and gospel music, the married couples were split on how they felt. One part of the church felt that sex between a married man and woman was an act of worship, so gospel music should be played. The other side of the argument states that sex as not an act of worship, and could be sometimes be purely physical without the focus being on the other person, let alone God.

The conversation on music and sex provided another opportunity to see how members at RLCC are able to disagree and challenge Elder Kinderson. Elder Kinderson explained that he does not always listen to gospel music because there’s no way that you can see it as an act of worship. Yes, God declared that marriage is a holy union and that it is acceptable for married couples to have sex. However he did not think that sex between married couples gives glory to God, which is one of the definitions of worship. Minister Johnston stressed that when he had sex with his wife, it was a spiritual act because God had bound he and Mrs. Johnston together. Most of the members of the

church agreed with Elder Kinderson, but Minister and Mrs. Johnston were adamant in their view. The challenge to Elder Kinderson's viewpoints was not met with annoyance or any negative reaction by him. Although there was no general consensus at the end of the debate, both sides were able to express themselves and the logic behind their opinions. It is interesting to note that none of the young people, who were all unmarried, participated in the conversation. Even I, who am usually very vocal, kept silent. I cannot speak for anyone else, but I felt awkward talking about sex when as an unmarried Pentecostal, I am not supposed to be having sex. I thought it would be inappropriate to say anything on the subject. All in all, the debate was amicable. In that particular instance, there were no aside voices, yelling, or emotional outburst. That is not always the case though. Sometimes challenges to lessons or leadership can result in emotional outbursts. At RLCC conversations can get so heated or interesting, that they run into the time of Sunday morning worship. Kimberly was at the center of one of those heated conversations in the fall of 2012.

The topic of the Sunday school lesson was about obedience. The class started with the entire church reading about a lesson on Abraham and how he was obedient to God and was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. However, by the end of the class Kimberly was crying and the entire church was emotional

What started off as regular Sunday school lesson today really escalated. I'm still mad and upset about it, but I'm not sure if I'm allowed to be. We were talking about obedience. Most of the congregation seemed to be into it. Kimberly raised her hand at one point behind me. She and Danielle were sitting next to each other. I was a little surprised because Kimberly doesn't talk too often. She asked something to the effect of "Who should we be obedient to though? Because people say some things to me that they want me to follow, but it doesn't come from God, so I don't know if I should listen". Elder Kinderson asked her for an example and she said that people often judge her because she doesn't dress the right way. She doesn't wear white on communion Sunday like all of the other women do. But that's not biblical so she

doesn't feel like she has to do it. Elder Kinderson started to get a little defensive. He said that obedience to the pastor is a mandate from God. However, "I've never said anything to you about wearing white. All I can do is model what I want you all to do. I can't force obedience". I jumped in and explained that this wasn't what Kimberly was saying. I can definitely identify with her. I don't wear a black suit on communion Sunday either. People definitely judge me for it. So I'm with Kimberly on this one. I don't think dressing this way is going to keep me out of heaven. Lee Kinderson and Shirley Kinderson joined in the conversation and said that they didn't understand how Christians don't have a problem wearing unfirms at work, but it's a problem when they come to church. Kimberly continued to try and explain that the mandate for clothes wasn't biblical, so why should she do it.

By this point, I realized that Kimberly's frustration wasn't about the clothes but about being judged for her appearance. It made my heart so heavy to hear the emotion in her voice. Elder Kinderson kept saying that "You can't say people in the church judge you. I never judge you". I got emotional and told him "You're not the church though. I've definitely had people make fun of me because of my hair, my clothes, and my beard. There's definitely a sense of how you should look and it's not Biblical. For me, I shrug it off. I'm grown and I do what I want regardless of what people say. But Kimberly is young. She's already dealing with pressure about looks and body image; she shouldn't have to deal with it here.

I didn't want to turn around and look at Kimberly behind me. The only person nodding their head and agreeing with me was Mrs. Johnston. Elder Kinderson and I both got emotional and heated trying to prove our points. Kimberly ran into the bathroom and Danielle followed her. You could hear Kimberly crying through the door. Lee Kinderson intervened and put the discussion to an end and said that we all needed to calm down.

We dismissed Sunday school and Lee spoke to the entire church and stated that she never intentionally meant to alienate anyone because of their clothes or hair. Shirley stood up and agreed. By this time, Kimberly had come out of the bathroom. Many members of the church came up to me and Kimberly and hugged us and asked if we were okay. I felt really frustrated because many of those members were the same ones who had mocked my appearance. In the end, we all came together for church, but I don't know if anything got resolved.

While there are numerous interesting themes from that Sunday school lesson about dress, obedience, and disconnect between youth and adults, the point that I want to express is that Sunday school went over about forty-five minutes that day. Yet, no one

wanted to cut it short. The conversation was too heated and too emotional to. I believe that the relaxed atmosphere of Sunday school at RLCC definitely contributed to having such an emotionally charged lesson. If we were a church that strictly followed a Sunday school book, then there would not have been an opportunity for the lesson to go into such a raw place that was more about Pentecostal culture than it was about doctrine or theology.

The leadership at RLCC finds the teaching in Sunday school so important, that in my 18 months observing at RLCC, there were 13 times when morning service was sacrificed for Sunday school. On those occasions, the ministers in charge remarked that they felt that it was important to teach and they had been led by the spirit of God to extend Sunday school. Elder Kinderson has said *“I feel like sometimes it’s important to teach. Sometimes I got to teach to you all. There are things that you all need to know”*. Likewise, Minister Johnston has said at the end of Sunday school when it was time for service to start *“Let’s keep going with this. This is important stuff. I don’t want to cut it off”*. Neither church feels compelled to follow the printed schedule of service. They *“Go wherever the Spirit leads us”*. In fact, some on the congregation members prefer being taught over listening to preaching. Shirley, Elder Kinderson’s mother said to Elder Kinderson, *“I love to hear you teach. I like hearing you preach too, but I tell you all the time, I love to hear you teach”*. By talking through issues during Sunday school, congregants can help answer each other’s questions and strengthen each other. The pastors consider sermons as a way to provide a different kind of educational experience than Sunday school. Sermons are emotional displays where members listen to the pastors. Sunday school provides a place where congregants can discuss and interact with

knowledgeable church leadership and even challenge church leadership on doctrinal or cultural debates.

Informal Education

Black Men Stand up

For young men in urban areas, Pentecostalism can act as a tool used to fight against the economic and social hardships that they face in their lives. The informal education that young men get at both churches is extremely different from their female counterparts. According to the beliefs of members at RLCC and Corinth Church, the male is the leader of the church and the family. Pentecostals reference the passage of First Corinthians that states that “*But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God*” (1 Corinthians 11:3 KJV). Much of Elder Kinderson’s and Elder Vick’s advice to the young people in their churches centers on how young men should conduct themselves.

Elder Kinderson and Elder Vick both have special education programs for the young men at their churches. On one level, the programs provide young men with information that is important for them as young male Pentecostals. On a deeper level, the education provides young Pentecostal men with an alternate trajectory, framework, and role models than the ones that they typically see in their urban communities. Both pastors, as well as many of the members of the church, recognize that many of the young men live in female led households. Their fathers may be completely out of the picture and

there may be a dearth of positive male role models in the house or in the community.

Both pastors see themselves as spiritual leaders, but also as fathers of the congregation.

Elder Vick has a special Sunday school for the young men at his church. During one of my last observation visits, Mitchell told me to make sure that I got to church early at 10:30AM, because there was a new men's class that had started. Throughout my research, I was helped by people like Mitchell—members who understood my focus and the importance of everyday phenomena of being Pentecostal. They clued me in to important observational data like this Sunday school class. Without Mitchell I would have never observed what wound up being one of my most enlightening and data-rich experiences at Corinth Church.

The morning of the class, I got to Corinth promptly at 10:00 AM. I walked into the church, and one of the elders was in the middle of a Sunday school lesson. I said hello to everyone and then walked across the sanctuary to look in the kitchen area to see if the young men were there. Elder Vick was in his office waiting for the young men. I sat in the large Sunday school class in the sanctuary for about fifteen minutes until Xavier and Peter arrived together. I followed them into the kitchen and we greeted each other and started a Sunday school class with Elder Vick. In another five minutes or so, Mitchell arrived.

The kitchen at Corinth Church is a small, cramped area. Elder Vick arranges the chairs so that the young men sit against the wall and he sits in a chair opposite them. The four of us are all considered young people and Deacons, but our styles and appearances could not have been more different. I was dressed in khaki pants with a polo shirt that was not tucked in. Peter and Xavier both wore jeans with dress shoes, a dress shirt

tucked in to their jeans, and a tie and sports coat. Mitchell wore dress pants, dress shirt, tie, and a sweater. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the style of appropriate dress for Pentecostal men is more flexible than what is considered appropriate for young women. However, all of our styles were acceptable for a Sunday morning service.

Elder Vick started off by asking *“What are some concerns that you as men have? Whatever those concerns are, the answers are in the Word of God. If you can’t think of a question right now, when you do, write it down and bring it back”*. Elder Vick has addressed the emotional and psychological needs of his youth, as well as their spiritual ones. A class like the one Elder Vick has allows for a conversation for young men to address the intersectionality of their identities as young, black, and Pentecostal. Elder Vick started many of his questions with the phrase, “So how can you as young black men” and referencing that we might have specific needs and concerns. Elder Vick asked us how we could have a positive impact in Trenton and what are some of the issues that we see young black men outside of the church dealing with. He kept emphasizing that we had a unique perspective as young black male Pentecostals,

In the beginning of the class he stated that he wanted to have this class because there are things that we as young men in the church needed to know and there wasn’t time to teach it when we were with everyone else. Being saved and refraining from dancing, drinking, sex, and other similar behaviors can be an alienating experience that makes saved Pentecostals feel like outsiders in a secular world. The class also helps to give validation to a lifestyle that is drastically different than that of peers their age.

Trenton is notoriously known for being a dangerous city with plenty of violent crimes. On one level, Elder Vick’s class helps young men to learn more about their role

in the Pentecostal church and in their specific local churches. His class helps young men in other ways as well. The youth are taught concepts of unity and working with other men. I believe that the ability to communicate and work with other men is a transferable skill that can be useful for young men at the church, in the streets, as well as in their professional life (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Plichta, 2004; Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993). Youth's ability to settle disputes and work well with others can help young men to avoid confrontational situations that could have deadly ramifications. Wanting to guide and instruct young men spiritually and even emotionally is one of the bedrocks of Pentecostalism. Through efforts like this Sunday school, adults continue to reinforce the concept of apprenticeship and relational learning of Pentecostalism rather than the very formally structured and strict education found in other Christian denominations. While at the same time, adults attempt to empower youth by developing the spiritual and social skill sets of youth. Most of the pastors' individualize attention was focused on that of young men. Young men are empowered as future leaders of the church and set up higher on the church hierarchy through the special education that they receive.

Protecting the Family

Elder Vick believes that men should be protectors of and leaders of their households. His expectation for young men as leaders of the family was explicitly demonstrated on a Sunday visit to Corinth church in April of 2012. It had been an especially lively service. Youth and adults all over the church had been emotional in shouting praises, dancing, waving their hands, and crying. Towards the end of the

service, Elder Vick engaged in the part of the service that is called the altar call. During the altar call, individuals in the congregation form a line and are prayed for by the pastor and other ordained men in the church. Church members have oil poured on their heads and the man praying for them physically puts his hands on the head of the member who is asking for prayer. The colloquial term for this is called “laying hands.” Typically, a member will volunteer to stand in line. Occasionally the ordained man in charge of altar call will say that he was moved by God to pray for a member who has not gotten into the line. Sometimes the pastor has insider knowledge about a physical or spiritual ailment that a member is suffering from. Maybe the ordained minister has personal insight or was led through God to go and pray for someone.

On this particular day, the altar call was finished and everyone had sat down. However, Elder Vick remained standing up with the microphone in his hand. Elder Vick did not return to the pulpit when he was done praying, as he usually would. To the left of him was a woman, Meg, who intermittently attends the church. She had several young children with her. One was a young boy who was probably around the age of five or six. He was the oldest child in the group. There was another male toddler and two toddler girls. Throughout the service the youth had been minor distractions. They were playing and jumping around and making noise. Their noises often went unnoticed because they occurred during lively parts of the service. During the sermon and altar calls, the noise of the children was more noticeable. Both churches consider altar call and the sermon to be two of the most important parts of the services. Walking and movement are limited during those two parts of the service. Church bulletins remind members that entering and leaving the sanctuary during those parts of the service are prohibited.

After the altar call, the congregation was mostly quiet. From the pulpit, Elder Vick looked in the direction of the mother and the children who were noticeably noisy. The mother had already gone into the prayer line. Elder Vick looked directly at the older male child and said to him:

“I’m going to pray for you young man. Do you love your mom? [The child nodded yes]. Well then you have to look out for her. When you get older you got to make sure that you take care of her. You’re going to be the man of the house. She’s going to need you. Do you think you can do that, son? [The child nods yes again] Ok then. You need to listen to her. When she tells you to do something, you need to obey, son. [Elder Vick begins praying]. Lord, protect this young man. Guide his steps so that he walks in the way that you would want him to do...Keep him safe from the dangers out there. Make him obedient and listen to his mother. Most of all Lord save him. Save his soul and let him be an example to other young men out there.”

The vignette served as a nexus point for expectations of youth, black men, and Pentecostals. Elder Vick could have prayed for the young boy privately like he prayed for everyone else. Yet, he prayed for the boy from the pulpit using the microphone. The prayer then became a public performance for Elder Vick that served as a reminder from Elder Vick that it is imperative that youth listen to their parents and are guided by the adults in their lives. Elder Vick reminds the child that it is his responsibility to make sure that he is obedient to his mother. Elder Vick also reinforces the notion discussed in Chapter 2, that adults are put into a position where they must teach young people about the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Through the public prayer performance, the power structure of older Pentecostals being in charge of younger Pentecostals is supported. The incident also highlights the privilege of being a male in the church. The boy is taught that he is going to have to take care of his mother. Elder Vick, through his position, commands attention of the room and then instructs the young man that his responsibility is to listen to his mother. It is through performances like these that

Pentecostals leadership is trying to encourage the steady growth of Pentecostalism.

Youth, as receivers of culture and doctrine, are trained from a very young age to perpetuate the cultural norms of the church, including the gendered power structure.

Even before youth are saved and official members of the church, they are embedded with responsibilities and/or power depending on their gender.

Even though the child is far too young to be in a position to physically protect his mother, Elder Vick feels it necessary to remind the child of this responsibility. The child's position is fluid and flexible. On the one hand, he is reminded that his mother has more power and authority than he does. That is the reason for Elder Vick stressing the young child should defer to his mother through listening to her. In the same breath, Elder Vick charges the young boy with the responsibility that he must protect his mother and take care of her. Thus the male Pentecostal childhood is taught two contrasting ideas at once. On the one hand, the boy represents the child's place as under an adult, especially the child's caretaker. On the other hand, the boy represents the authority that men are given over women. So at some point, the fact that this child is a man will be more meaningful than the fact that he is a child. In the Pentecostal church, he will have to navigate the line between being a child who is subservient to his mother and a being a young male child who has been entrusted with the protection and care of his mother.

I do not know if anyone else was struck by the seemingly contradictory instructions that the child was given. Based on their faces and body language, it seemed as if the words were just another part of a lively service. The child did not regularly attend Corinth Church, nor did I think that he would be able to process and articulate to me the tension of the instructions that he was given. The tension that I felt spoke to the

different kinds of expectations and requirements of Pentecostal living that are transmitted to youth.

Elder Vick's performance of prayer over the young boy is in line with the type of instructions and guidance that he gives to older young men on a weekly basis. The gesture is meant to be literal and symbolic at the same time. Of course Elder Vick wants the young man and his mother to hear him, or he would not be speaking to them using the microphone. At the same time, there is no guarantee that the young child comprehends the responsibilities that he has just been given. Nor is there any certainty that he will remember these words from Elder Vick, especially since the child is not a regularly attending member. The message does indeed serve a purpose. Within a few lines, Elder Vick reaffirms the belief that youth have a responsibility to listen and obey their parents. He simultaneously affirms that young men in the church need to be prepped and are expected to be leaders in their families.

Males, even young boys in the Pentecostal church, are vested with power and responsibility. They are seen as the future leaders of both their churches and their homes. In order to fully prepare for that future role, young men are subjected to more training and receive more time and personal attention from their pastors and church leadership.

Education is the key

Post-secondary education can be an area of tension for many of the youth at Corinth and RLCC. In the cosmos of Pentecostalism, God's knowledge is superior to

secular knowledge. Elder Kinderson reiterated that fact during a morning service in fall of 2011. Kinderson's sermon centered on the importance of humility in serving Christ. He warned church members to be wary of the degrees and certifications that they obtain, because worldly knowledge can obscure the importance of Jesus Christ. Elder Kinderson's perspective on education extends beyond just secular schools. After the comment about obtaining degrees, Elder Kinderson states that "*It doesn't matter if you went to seminary and can speak Greek and Hebrew. You're supposed to break down the Word of God so that everyone can understand it*". He remarks that in the old days, pastors did not even necessarily know how to read. A church member would read a scripture and then the pastor would preach a sermon based off of what he heard. The idea was that someone who was spiritually grounded could be inspired by God, no matter what his educational level was because their academic qualifications are useless anyway unless God inspires them. Elder Kinderson has said that he does not resent secular education any more than he does religious education. Elder Kinderson frequently encourages the members of RLCC to read their Bibles on their own so that they will know if they hear someone say something incorrect. He often turns Sunday school into a discussion time where any member can throw out questions, challenges, clarifications, etc in regards to what they have learned at RLCC or on their own. However, he does want his congregation to be aware that the knowledge of God and knowledge given by God supersedes all other kinds of knowledge.

At the same time, formal education can be a spot of power negotiation for young people. Programs focused on secular education are a new phenomenon at RLCC and Corinth because formal post-secondary education is a new experience for many of the

individuals at the church. Most regularly attending members do not have a college degree. I was the first person at RLCC to obtain a bachelor's degree. At Corinth church, most of the young people in the church are in the process of earning a degree, some type of certificate, or have already obtained one.

Education is considered a necessity for independence. More youth are attending colleges than the generations before them, so the college experience has now become a separation between many youth and older members. Black youth in particular are increasingly attending colleges. From 1996 to 2012, college enrollment amongst blacks grew seventy-two percent (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Adults in the church recognize that they are not the experts in this area of remaining saved while away at college, because many adults lack the specific experience of being saved college students away at school. I mentioned this sentiment during a Sunday school lesson. Elder Kinderson said, *“That’s why we need this. We need to talk about this kind of stuff. Sunday morning just isn’t enough time for it. I’d love to see the young people put on a service or bring in speakers. It could edify the whole church”*. Elder Kinderson recognizes the fact that when it comes to providing detailed and specific knowledge about college, that he and other adults are not as qualified as some young people. While adults can impart information about spirituality in general, many have not had the lived experience of being a Pentecostal college student. When I do presentations on college or education, I am always greeted afterwards by young people who say that they appreciate my honesty and candor. I speak about the temptations and challenges of being saved at college and how I both resisted and welcomed sinful behaviors during my time at school. That simply is

not a perspective that youth can obtain from many of the older members in their churches.

At the same time, college can be a time where youth leave the church; even youth who seem deeply entrenched in their church. Minister Johnston's oldest son, Joshua Johnston was a regularly attending member during his high school years. A couple years after graduating, he left to attend school in Virginia. Since then, Joshua's attendance is irregular even when he was back in the area. I reached out to Joshua several times over the course of this project through phone, email, and Facebook. For reasons unknown to me, Joshua did not want to cooperate. The threat of losing members, especially young ones, is very real for both churches. The fact that the churches are both small, means that every departed member is noticeable. The pastors' Sundays school classes as well as their warning of separation from Oneness Pentecostalism during college years has implications not only for the member who has fallen away from the church, but also for the church as a local organization.

Elder Kinderson's view that Godly knowledge is superior to secular knowledge is shared by other adults in the church and this causes tension for young people like me who have become highly educated in a secular field. Minister Johnson echoes the sentiments of Elder Kinderson. During one of his sermons in the winter of 2012 he states that "*When men get an education they get all puffed up. I don't want to be all deep and educated [adopting a mock academic tone]. I want to stay humble so God can use me*". Minister Jones went on to say, "*That's why I like Marcus so much. He doesn't sit there and tell you about his degrees. He's not trying to impress us*". In my field notes I wrote:

"Lee [the pastor's wife] turns back to me and jokingly states that he must have me confused with someone else. I smile back and am genuinely amused. I think it's good that he can joke with me. It helps me to not take myself so seriously. It's a little awkward when Minister Jones uses me as an example though. It kind of puts me on the spotlight and I feel like that's what I should be trying to avoid. Sometimes I just think they don't get it. You can be educated and still love God. I'm in school because God allowed me to be, not because I'm smart. It's got nothing to do with me. Education and science don't always have to fight with the Church. Field note excerpt (December 9, 2012)

The rhetoric of Pentecostalism is that serving anything other than God is to exalt that object as an idol. Elder Vick has referenced the scripture Mark 6:38 in which Jesus Christ asks “*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*” (Mark 6:38, KJV). In a denomination where every act is literally a step towards God or away from Him, even the college experience is a contested space where youths' spiritual lives hang in the balance.

For young people like me, church members' thoughts about schooling can be rife with contradictions. I cannot help but to feel as if these messages of humility are directed towards me. That makes sense in the context of the roots of both urban black churches. Both of them have a working class background. Elder Vick and Elder Kinderson both worked under the same pastor, another black pastor with humble Southern roots. It does not make sense to preach to either congregation in theological academic language. That comes across as arrogant and out of touch. In order to effectively minister to the population at both churches, one needs to be practical and understandable.

At the same time, both churches take pride in the fact that I am getting a doctorate degree. When I am being introduced at church functions, people lead in with the fact that I am getting a doctorate. Also, my degree has put me in the position of “expert,”

concerning education processes at both churches. I am often asked questions about how to apply to colleges, how youth can do well once they are in college, paper writing, scholarships, grants, funding, and looking for jobs after college is over. Adults' apprehension and concern about higher education has created an opportunity for young people like me to become "experts" and exert limited agency as experts in this field. Many of the adults at both churches reiterate that "*You're there [college] to get an education, not to party*". While that might be the ideal, youth away at school navigate a landscape where their religious and/or world view may be challenged and/or changed because of experiences in the classroom or with non-Pentecostal friends. Adults can offer advice about staying celibate, staying away from alcohol and drug, and maintaining a Pentecostal lifestyle, but most adults are not able to assist with specific strategies for how youth can handle being both Pentecostal and college students. Young people look to other youth for guidance.

Education has thus become an area where youth can employ tactics and exert control in the church. I describe that process as a tactic because it is not a space that was originally set up for youth to be leaders and experts of knowledge in the church. Yet, young people were able to construct a role as education experts in the church. Young people like Mitchell see an opportunity to capitalize on unoccupied space in their churches and plan their own services centered on information that they thought was relevant to them. Not only are youth taking advantage of an opportunity to plan and lead a service, but they are also showing adults that youth have particular interests that may not be shared by adults.

College creates an opportunity for youth to physically and spiritually step away from the church. Because youth away at school are away from their church homes and surrounded by other secular young people, adults believe that college can be a time for youth to fall into activities like drinking, drugs, and sex. Adults fear that without adult supervision and regular church attendance, youth may find it hard to concentrate on spiritual matters. Kimberly is an 18 year-old member from RLCC who is attending college in Delaware. Kimberly is the subject of regular prayers and concerns. Almost half of the Sunday morning church services that I attended included prayer requests for Kimberly because she was away at school. Lee says things like “*Keep Kimberly in your prayers while she's away at school. That God will keep her and protect her*”. When Kimberly comes home to visit, she is greeted with much enthusiasm. When she is slow to rejoin the praise team, Shirley yells out jokingly “*You get back on your post*”. Shirley is reminding Kimberly that she is missed but also has responsibilities to the church and to the other young people.

For Kimberly's part, she finds the concern for her spiritual well-being at school to be unwarranted.

MW: *How does being saved affect your college experience?*

Kimberly: *Decision making in college is not as tough as I thought it would be. Since I'm saved there are things that I would have never second thoughts about because I know where I stand in my walk with Christ. Drinking and partying come with the territory in college but the more saints told me to be “careful” the more I wanted to prove to them and myself that I could handle myself. I have been asked to drink and smoke but my decisions and answers remained the same and because I was not raised to partake in those things. Therefore, it was never a problem for me to simply say no. When church members told me to be careful it was almost like they had no faith in me that I would come back, a saved young adult. It's hard to not be insulted because most of them know how I was raised and it make me feel like I should party since that is what is expected.*

Kimberly's view of the concerns and worries of older members is a sign of the disconnect between youth and adults when it comes to college. Older members of the church see themselves as providing guidance and help to youth. They are concerned about the well-being of youth who are away at college. While none of the adults at Corinth or RLCC went away to college, they understand some of the distractions and temptations of being a young Pentecostal. Adults constantly share with young people that they were tempted and struggled with Pentecostalism when they were younger. They vaguely talk about struggles with alcohol, drugs, and sex. However, adults rarely share the details of those struggles. Elder Kinderson states that *“The spirituality. It was stronger in that day. [When he was a young person]... it was more serious. And I believe if I had gotten deeper in the spirituality I wouldn't have made the mistakes I did.”*

Not all youth see interactions with the secular world and having friends who are not Pentecostal, as a problem. Mitchell was very concerned about how older members judge him when he is not surrounded by church friends or in church. He says that, *“Just because you're not in church doesn't mean that you're doing something wrong. That you're out there running around and guys are running around with women doing drugs”*. All of the youth recognized that Pentecostals are different from other Christians and non-believers, but few vocalized that they thought that the secular world was very dangerous or damaging. Mitchell goes on to say that *“You can do bad in Trenton. You don't even have to go far away. If you want to do bad stuff, then you can do it here”*. However, the adults at RLCC and Corinth believe that the spirituality of youth can be impacted by their physical distance from their faith community. Adults like Lee have told youth who want to go out of state or far away to school that *“You don't need to be that far away”*. When

I was considering my own graduate school career, I thought of going to school in NYC or Maryland. Members from RLCC and the Church of Trenton told me that they thought it would be to my spiritual detriment if I went to a college where I could not attend RLCC regularly. I was cautioned against thinking that secular knowledge was greater than Godly knowledge. I was also reminded that time away from my local, faith based community could make it easier to become less spiritual.

Despite their belief that God is omnipresent and that they are vested with power through the Holy Ghost, many adult members are apprehensive about youth leaving their faith communities in order to obtain a secular education. It appears that Elder Kinderson does not aim to belittle college youth like Kimberly. Elder Kinderson's concern is rooted in his own disappointment with the spiritual choices that he made while a youth. Elder Kinderson said during his interview that although he was saved and called to the ministry at a young age, there were times when he was resistant to God's call. He procrastinated in being very dedicated as a young person. Elder Kinderson's own personal history combined with his thoughts that the world is a dangerous place where "*young people are being taken out of way to soon*" results in him worrying about the spiritual dedication of the youth in his church. Elder Kinderson believes it is his responsibility to look out for those youth spiritually. Kimberly does not see his concern and worry this way. Rather than viewing it as Elder Kinderson's attempt to spare Kimberly from making the same youthful mistakes that he made, Kimberly sees his and other adult's concern as a lack of faith in her ability to stay a dedicated and saved young person while away at school. Older members like Elder Kinderson remain unaware that youth feel frustrated with their concern.

However, Elder Kinderson's worry makes sense and resonated. When Kimberly is home from breaks on college, she visits, but not every Sunday. Unlike Joshua Johnston, she made herself available for this research. Yet, all of her answers speak towards spirituality or Christianity in general. There's nothing explicitly Oneness Pentecostal sounding about any of them. That combined with some of her critiques against RLCC and the national organization make me nervous that perhaps school might be a catalyst for some youth's disengaging with Pentecostalism.

Kimberly's misunderstanding of Elder Kinderson's intentions has important ramifications for her spiritual life. On the one hand, her misunderstanding can result in her isolating herself from adult members and not communicating with them voluntarily. On the other hand, adults' concern may have the opposite reaction than intended. Kimberly states that because people worry that she's out drinking and doing drugs, she sometimes feel like she should just engage in those activities because people already think that she is.

Kimberly's answer also shows a disconnect in how youth and adults define spirituality. When Kimberly discusses the activities that she thinks adults are worried about, she mentions, drinking, smoking, and sex. She is able to speak concretely about her spirituality through those specific activities. Elder Kinderson's definition is much more broad and inclusive.

***MW:** When you say spirituality, what do you mean?*

***Elder Kinderson:** Going to church, but more than just that. A more developed prayer life. They teach in the Word that these things come by fasting and praying. Where you can conquer a lot of the temptations that you are confronted with every day. Reading The Word and really studying it. It's a lot of things*

Elder Kinderson's understanding of spirituality includes the basic tenants of going to church, reading the Bible, praying, and fasting. He is less concerned with the things that Kimberly is doing wrong, then with the many things that she is doing right. Kimberly discusses spirituality in a deficit model (Rossiter, 2010). Being a good Christian means abstaining from activities that are not Christian. Instead of mentioning what spirituality involves one not doing, Elder Kinderson defines spirituality by talking about what a Pentecostal *should* be doing. The differing definitions of spirituality and misunderstanding has resulted in prayer requests and post-secondary education being a contested space for both youth and adults. This is not to downplay the fact that many adults are concerned with abstaining from sinful activities. Church leadership and adults constantly teach about sanctification and the power of the Holy Ghost that allows members to abstain from sin. However, from her statement, Kimberly is solely focused on what non-Christian activities that she does not do, rather than a more holistic outlook where she would also focuses on Pentecostal behaviors that she does do.

MW: What role do you see young people playing in the church?

Elder Kinderson: If they're coming out of their teenage years, I'd like to get them in a role of training because I feel like who's going to take the church on. I just got back from a youth conference meetings and that was something that they were stressing. Training them to take on the role because we're now getting older, um, I'd like to see successors begin trained to step in.

Kimberly and Elder Kinderson both understand the importance of young people to the future of the church. The church will not survive without them. Both are aware of the fact that senior members are getting to a point where they physically cannot or will not be able to continue with the leadership roles that they have now. While Kimberly seems firmly rooted in her identify as a saved college student, she cannot speak for

others. There is one important place where their perspectives are different. Elder Kinderson describes the young people at church as his “successors”. He envisions training them to the point where they can take over. Youth at both RLCC and Corinth feel ready to assume power now. They do not consider themselves to be successors, but the current members of the church.

Kimberly: I am the new generation walking into the new era of church. I feel it means that I have a responsibility to the older doctrine to remember and recognize that old teaching I had growing up to spread over to the new era of churches. The church of today which is the youth has a responsibility to sap up as much truth as possible to be able to stand firm in Christ.

Post-secondary education has started to give youth an area of the church to begin to take control of. Youth are starting to branch out in areas of leadership in their churches that weren't prevalent in previous generations. The youth of RLCC and Corinth church's educational trajectory mirrors those of black youth around the country. More black youth are attending college than ever before (Casselmann, 2014). This new demographic of educated Pentecostal youth finds themselves without a larger number of older Pentecostals to model their college experiences on.

This agency of younger Pentecostals in educational guidance was, exemplified by several types of youth initiated services that both churches have had. In the winter of 2012, Mitchell organized a service for young people that focused on how to make decisions about schooling that fell in line with a Pentecostal world view. I was invited as one of two guest speakers to discuss how I went about making choices about my major, school selection, research topic, etc. I was asked to connect the experience of college to my faith walk. The program became a platform where youth were able to talk about the struggles of being a Christian in college as well as being a black youth from Trenton

trying to navigate obstacles to obtaining a college degree. Despite the fact that my title is one of the lowest in the two churches and that I was outranked by most of the adult men in the audience, I was invited and respected because I have an expertise in education that many others lack. Though it was a youth event, many adults came in order to support the initiative and work that young people are doing both at RLCC and Corinth and at their colleges.

I asked Mitchell about his thought process and why he decided to have this kind of program a few weeks after the event was over.

***MW:** What made you come up with this program idea and have me and Donna speak?*

***Mitchell:** I had you and Donna speak because I felt that there is a need for education in the church or if I may, the church should be educated. I fell as though we shouldn't be so heavenly mind that we're no earthly good.*

***MW:** Why do you think no one has done it before?*

***Mitchell:** I think people probably thought about it but didn't know how to format it.*

Mitchell's view of important knowledge is different from individuals like Elder Kinderson and Minister Jones. While adults speak about the importance of focusing on Godly knowledge, youth like Mitchell see the importance of education in general. I asked Mitchell to further explain his comments and he expressed how invested he was in the lives of youth in Trenton. He told me that blacks in Trenton, especially black male youth, need to be taught about the college application process because they are not getting taught about that in high school. He also thought that they should be taught how to navigate through college socially and culturally once they get there. While the spiritual lives of young people are important, Mitchell recognizes that youth occupy a world where there are very real consequences for having a lack of education. Mitchell

was the product of Trenton's educational system. He has graduated, attends community college, and is running a campaign for a city council position. He knows that there are very few opportunities for young people in Trenton, especially those without an education. Education is a resource that provides an opportunity for youth since his Pentecostal framework prohibits him from stealing, dealing drugs, or a number of other illegal and/or immoral alternatives that he has. Instead of fearing education and worrying that it may have a negative effect on the spiritual lives of youth at Corinth, Mitchell encourages the educating of Pentecostal youth through services like the one he planned in order to give opportunities for young people.

It will be interesting to observe in the decades to come whether youth agency continues to grow in the area of college programming in urban Pentecostal churches. As the college experience becomes more of a cultural norm in the lives of Pentecostals, will older members be able to regain control since they will be college educated? Perhaps I was witnessing a permanent shift in the role that youth play in these two Pentecostal churches. Perhaps from now on, in addition to claiming the space of music, youth will also claim education programs as their own. If Mitchell's program is any indication, some youth will see education as a tactic and use it as a way to claim a unique role in their Pentecostals churches. At the same time, when this current generation of young and educated Pentecostals is grown, they will continue to be the experts in education. Youth are still under the gaze of adults. In a faith centered on apprenticeship, youth will always need some approval from adults and church leadership. It may be a bit presumptuous to think that youth will ever have complete control and authority over an area of the Pentecostal church. So the answers to those questions are beyond the scope of this

research. It is worth noting that future research with Pentecostal youth should identify the changing role of education in their lives and look more closely at how youth reconcile their academic lives and education with their identities as spiritually salient Pentecostals. Surely, some of adults' fears about youth losing their salient Oneness Pentecostal identity while away at school are valid. Additionally research also needs to investigate whether youth or adults will be in control of guiding and helping youth navigate the terrain of college. One thing that is certainly clear is that education within the church is an area where adults can continue to inform and regulate youth in Pentecostal doctrine and culture. By creating specialized classes for young men, church leadership is also able to perpetuate the gendered roles of all youth, but especially the mandate of leadership in the church that is given to men.

Coda: Reflections, Ending Points, and New Beginnings

The members of RLCC and Corinth Church believe that the Pentecostal church is under attack from the secular world. They fear that the prevalence of violent crimes, wars, famines, and recent legislation legalizing gay marriage and marijuana are all signs of the moral decay of the world. However, rather than separate themselves from that immoral world, both churches launch themselves into their local communities with fervor. In their belief structure, they have the truth and it is mandated by God to share that truth with the rest of the world. In the last year, both churches have upped their level of community participation. They have been to neighborhood cookouts, partnered with councilwomen, and given away school supplies to their neighbors. One constant throughout these programs have been the focus on youth.

As this dissertation has shown, youth are at the center of many of the fears, hopes, successes, and anxieties that adult Pentecostals and church leadership have about the successful future of the church. In many ways, youth are driving the church on a local and national level. In regards to the definition of young people, fears and apprehensions about youth are the driving force. Adult leadership wants to ensure that youth are adequately trained in Oneness Pentecostal theology as well as the culture of Pentecostalism in order to ensure the future survival of the faith. While the approach can sometime inhibit the autonomy of young Pentecostals, mentoring and apprenticeship are important in a faith that has very few official benchmarks or education requirements. However, Elders Kinderson and Vick are taking a more democratic approach to youth and leadership in their churches.

There is a shift starting in regards to the amount and levels of responsibilities that are being given to youth at both churches. Since the end of my research time, Elder Kinderson has been pushing his young people into positions and encouraging them to take active roles in the church and the community. In the end of 2014, Elder Kinderson appointed every young person to a position. Some, like myself, were appointed to take over positions that were once held by other people. I am the new president of the young people's association. For others, Elder Kinderson created entirely new positions, even giving some unsaved youth minor jobs and titles. For a new young member, Rasheeda, who arrived after the end of my observation period, Elder Kinderson created a position of civic engagement for her. Other youth were appointed heads of security and audio-visual areas of the church. Elder Kinderson has recognized that some youth really want to be engaged in the running and organization of the church.

Elder Kinderson is starting to feel compelled to use the young men at his church. He said that *"I'm about training men. My pastor made us speak without preparation"*. Elder Kinderson has been randomly choosing young men in the church to lead prayers or offer the benediction. These spontaneous requests force young people to be prepared at all times to be called to the front of the church. The future of Pentecostalism rests on the ability of young people to take over leadership positions and be able to reproduce the informal and formal lessons that they have learned. They are now being given the space to take control over the church in some aspects. There is still a glass ceiling for young people and youth who are not male or ordained. However, the grassroots, horizontal structure of these churches has lent itself to youth like Mitchell, Danielle, and Kimberly organizing their own services and creating opportunities to lead. RLCC has started to

have regular, monthly business meetings and the opinions of young people have been solicited. Corinth Church has bought a new building. It is another storefront church. Mitchell was integral in helping to select the location and is helping Elder Vick with plans to renovate it. Mitchell and I are both working on securing grants so that we can provide school supplies, computer skills, and job trainings for the youth. Danielle has been given a position over the young women in her church. These are the stories that I set out to capture. My look at the lives of eleven youth highlighted their voices and gave insight into some the youth who are involved in this American Pentecostal explosion. Their interactions with their faith draw attention to the strengths and weaknesses of Pentecostalism in their lives. Overall, they found something that they needed and cherished in their churches. Despite the confines of gender and the inability to be in charge, Pentecostalism still drew them to two tiny, storefront churches in two of the worst neighborhoods in Trenton.

Interestingly, I have been added as a trustee member to RLCC. Rasheeda is also going to be on the board. This is the first time in RLCC's history that there have been any young people on the trustee board. Realistically speaking though, I am not confident that my presence on the board is a sign in a shift in the dynamics of the church. I do not think the situation means that RLCC is including youth perspective into decision making. Currently, I am almost 34 years old. I am close to crossing the church's threshold into adulthood. I think that it would be much more meaningful if I was added to the board in my twenties or teens. I think the appointment loses some of its impact because I am so old.

While there is some growth and flexibility in areas at RLCC and Corinth, gender and sexuality are concrete constructions that are unlikely to be changed. So much of Pentecostals doctrine and culture rests on confining very specific conceptualizations of gender and sexuality. Again, youth are part of the driving force of that. Pentecostals have a biblical mandate to train their children in Pentecostalism so that those children will go to heaven. The youth also have the responsibility to marry and have children. Future research in Pentecostalism needs to investigate the lived experiences of individuals who identify as something other than heterosexual. How do these individuals fit their lives within the tight confines of Pentecostal sexuality? Or, is Pentecostalism so adaptable that there are congregations that are supportive and affirming of alternative lifestyles? How then do these different groups relate to each other? The narrative on Pentecostal sexuality also needs to include connections with childbearing, including infertility. With such an emphasis on children and families, what are the repercussions for Pentecostals who cannot have children? Does invitro or surrogacy defy God's order and authority as the giver of life? Is there a worry centered on married couples who chose not to have children. In an ever changing and modernized world, Oneness Pentecostalism will have to wrestle with some of these issues if it is to remain relevant and popular.

One area that the urban Pentecostalism practiced in RLCC and Corinth Church that has remained relevant in is music. Pentecostal youth, like their peers in the secular world, are driving force behind musical trends. Youth at these churches are creating, remixing, and adding to the collective canon of worship songs. Youth are thriving in a space that has been set aside for them. They can add different songs, direct the flow of the worship service, and command space and power in churches. The youth in this study

are similar to Pentecostal youth around the world who have gathered around music (Sylvan, 2002). Music is considered a safe place for youth to congregate around where they can be protected by the oversight of adults. Music also acts as a training ground for youth to be indoctrinated with Pentecostal culture. While the rigid gender roles are not fluid when it comes to marriage and sex, young female Pentecostals are able to use music to change some of the culture surrounding gender in their churches. Youth like Danielle, Kimberly, and Keisha can assume limited amounts of power temporarily through their command of Sunday morning worship. For a denomination that is so focused on worship and praise, that means the young girls can temporarily assume a position of power and privilege.

The future success of this type of urban black Oneness Pentecostalism hinges on the ability of the church to attract and keep youthful members. While both churches are able to attract youth there are plenty of lessons to be learned from how to engage youth. As I stated earlier, I think that both churches need to include youth and youth perspectives a real and valued way of incorporating feedback into the organization. When youth feel as if their opinions and perspectives are seriously considered, they are more likely to be happy and productive members of an organization. Leadership at RLCC and Corinth church does not have any sort of outlet for youth to see that their participation is encouraged and needed.

Of course, in order for that change to occur, it will have to happen on a structural level throughout the organization. Real young people, those in their teens and early 20s, should be groomed for leadership. There is no reason that youth cannot model and be apprentices of older pastors, teachers, missionaries, and other leadership positions so that

youth are able to take on some of them when they are still young. Even if the current age categories definition of young people stays the same, I think that youth can be better incorporated into the decision making and leadership both in local churches and on the national level.

One of the barriers to youth in leadership positions are minimum age restrictions for certain positions. I would suggest that the organization completely rid itself of those minimum age requirements. They do little but ensure that the mean age of leadership is skewed towards the middle aged and elderly. As my research has shown, minimum age restrictions also stop engaged and motivated young people from joining national organizations.

If minimum age restrictions are going to be in place, then I would suggest a maximum age limit as well. Having such a feature would help youth to feel less alienated and less wanted in leadership. More importantly, it would ensure that positions of power could not be exclusively held onto by the elderly.

I could suggest a number of recommendations, but have only included the previous ones because of two main caveats. Firstly, as I have mentioned several times in this dissertation that Pentecostals harken back to an ideal past in regards to their religious dogma. So none of my recommendations go against what these churches consider to be their central tenants. While being inclusive of ordained women leaders may help to reach out to a new population of Pentecostals, that action is not realistic or applicable.

I chose to end on the education chapter because I think that is what was the most promising and interesting part of this project. I think that the backdrop of education exemplifies the sometimes fear that adults have that the young people will not be able to

uphold the Pentecostal tradition, but also the power that youth are finding through education. Education at both churches mirrors the pragmatic/primitive aspects of Pentecostalism. Education on one hand is preparing youth for a world where they can excel and achieve, but education and college culture have the ability to sweep youth away from their moral, sanctified lifestyles. Both churches have special education for the young men in their congregations. Youth are also taking the initiative to guide each other when it comes to educational and life choices. But perhaps most interestingly, youth are using tactics to push their agenda for the church. A lot of this is being facilitated through the help of adults.

Younger members have started attending. RLCC has created a new children's Sunday school class. There are also talks about taking the young children out of the sanctuary during the sermon so that they can be exposed to an age appropriate lessons. There is a shift in the church being brought on by opinions about youth (that they need to be engaged in running the church) and the concerns of youth themselves (the Sunday school lessons are not appropriate and/or engaging). The young people at RLCC and Corinth Church are exercising some implicit power. Their perceived needs and wants are changing the look of Sunday school and Sunday morning services.

I believe the hope and promise that Pentecostalism gives youth is one of the reasons that they are so attracted to it. Yes, youth are watched and surveyed by adults. However, youth Like Danielle, Mitchell, Gerald, Peter, Kimberly, and Xavier all mentioned that they appreciated the concern of pastors and church members. They felt cared for and loved. Youth are also hopeful about a future church where they can lead and take control and do things differently than the past generation.

Youth like Mitchell are poised and ready to take a leadership position in their churches. He believes that youth are distinctly different and progressive and that difference affords youth certain strengths that adults lack. He told me that, *“When you’re young, you think on your feet. You have more ideas. More different things than older people. Older people are stuck in the same thing over and over again that they been through. Younger people are on point. They know more things to do to interact with people. They’re just more energetic. It’s easier to talk to a younger person than an older person. Uh. Older people always say ‘I’ve been there and done that’, but things are different now from the way that they were coming up in the world”* Youth like Mitchell would like to see a shift in the way that Pentecostals recruit and interact with non-Pentecostals. He also acknowledges that they have an energy and vibrancy that older members lack. Mitchell is ready to use his skill set to push Pentecostalism forward in a modern world. Pentecostalism at RLCC and Corinth are constantly changing. It will be so interesting to observe how these slight changes may affect the churches and Pentecostalism decades down the line.

When I reflect on the process of collecting and analyzing this data, I feel both proud and protective of this work, the stories of the youth in it, and my faith in general. I found the words of Grant Wacker summed up some of the range of emotions that I felt during this process (Wacker G. , 2001). As a former Pentecostal who also studies Pentecostals, Wacker states that "In many ways my heart never left home. Pentecostals continue to be my people. I embrace many of their values....To be sure, I cringe when I watch Pentecostal flamethrowers on television. But I grow defensive when outsiders take swipes at the, not because they do not deserve it, but because most outsiders have not

earned the right...I try to see the world through my subjects' eyes...I remain unsure where theirs ends and mine begins" (x). My lines are equally blurred. There were times when writing about the perspectives of the youth at RLCC and Corinth was the same as writing about my own perspective. Our stories merge and mesh and as a result, my voice is entangled with theirs.

At the same time, analyzing Pentecostalism with an academic eye rather than spiritual one has shown some of the holes and gaps in the practice of Pentecostalism. It has been a sobering experience to critically engage with a faith that makes up the core of who I am as a person. I struggled with whether a critique against Pentecostalism was an attack against my faith, my own belief structure, and who I am as a person. I'm not sure if I have reconciled my faith and spiritual life with my professional/academic one. Yet this auto-ethnographic endeavor allowed me to look beyond the theology of my faith and observe the way that it is organized and plays out in the lived experiences of young people.

While this work is in no way generalizable, I think that it is powerful and helps to frame my future projects. In the future, I would want to talk with young Pentecostals across the country and see how they are affected by and interact with the processes of marriage, music, and education. Are Pentecostal youth across the country all clamoring for change and leadership in their churches? Is it hope and support that keeps them engaged? Only further research can say.

I end this project with the poignant words of Mitchell. Like most of the youth in this study, he sees change as necessary, process that can infuse and vitality into modern day Pentecostals. As he prepares to be a leader in his church one day, he reminds us that

“Sometimes change is good I guess. Don’t be afraid to change. Don’t think that since we did it this way this time, that something’s gonna happen...I just think change can be good.”

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Marcus Woods, Doctoral Candidate
 Rutgers University Department of Childhood Studies
 405/407 Cooper Street
 Camden, NJ 08102
 609-751-1084 cell
 E-mail:marcus.k.woods@gmail.com

EDUCATION

- PhD May 2015, Rutgers University
 Department of Childhood Studies, Camden, NJ
 Dissertation Title: "In This World, but Not of It: Identity Negotiations of Pentecostal Youth in Storefront Churches
 Chair: Daniel Hart, Ph.D.
- MPA 2009, Rutgers University, Department of Public Policy & Administration
 Camden, NJ
 Pi Alpha Alpha honor society
- BA 2003 Mcdaniel College, Westminster, MD
 Major: English

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Religious youth: Spiritual Development, religious identity, religious capital, urban youth, identity formation
 Qualitative Methodology: Reflexivity, Auto-ethnography, validity

TEACHING INTERESTS

Research Methods: Qualitative Methods, Program Evaluation
 African American Religions: Pentecostalism, Urbanization and Religion, the Occult

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- 2013-Present Graduate Researcher at the Walter Rand Institute of Politics
- Assist with evaluation of the Amache Mentoring Program
 - Perform literature reviews, data collections, and comparative analysis using SPSS software
 - Perform descriptive and reliability analysis
 - Conduct and analyze qualitative data

- 2012-2013 Graduate Research Assistant
Rutgers University Department of Childhood Studies
Supervisor: Robin Stevens, Ph.D.
Provided research assistance with the EPIC Camden survey (a survey of black and Hispanic youth life choices)
Organized participant schedules for surveys, code interviews
Completed literature review for Epic Camden paper
- 2010-2012 Graduate Research Assistant
Rutgers University Department of Childhood Studies
Supervisor, Daniel Hart, Ph.D.
Provide research assistance with neighborhood coding project and Neighborhood child saturation project
- 2008-2009 Graduate Research Assistant
Rutgers University Department of Public policy & Administration
Supervisor: Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Ph.D.
Created a curriculum centered on character educations, organized an academic advisement system, worked on college prep initiatives

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Summer 2015 Instructor for Urban Education
Rutgers University, Department of Childhood Studies, Camden, N
- Summer 2014 Instructor for Introduction to Childhood Studies
Rutgers University, Department of Childhood Studies, Camden, NJ
- Spring 2014 Instructor for Introduction to Childhood Studies
Rutgers University, Department of Childhood Studies, Camden, NJ
- Fall 2013 Instructor for Introduction to Childhood Studies
Rutgers University, Department of Childhood Studies, Camden, NJ
- Fall 2013 Teaching Assistant for Literatures of Islam, Judaism, Christianity
Rutgers University, Department of English, Camden, NJ
- Fall 2012 Teaching Assistant for Child Well Being
Rutgers University, Department of Childhood Studies, Camden, NJ
Mentor: Robin Stevens, Ph.D

- Spring 2012 Teaching Assistant for Intro to Psychology
Rutgers University, Department of Psychology, Camden, NJ
Mentor: Daniel Hart, Ph.D.
- Fall 2012 Teaching Assistant for Intro to Psychology
Rutgers University, Department of Psychology, Camden, NJ
Mentor: Daniel Hart, Ph.D

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2009-2010 Truancy Case Manager
Carson Valley Children's Aid Philadelphia, PA
- 2006-2010 Youth counselor (behavioral modification)
Center for Family Guidance, Trenton, NJ
- 2004-2006 Community outreach worker/Collaborative teacher (unpaid)
US Peace Corps, Khon Kaen, Thailand

PUBLICATIONS

"Defining Youth: Spiritual Maturity/Immaturity in a Storefront Church." *The Journal of Childhood and Religion*. (Submitted for Initial Review)

PRESENTATIONS

Woods, M (2014) "Investigating Childhood Studies from a Graduate Student Perspective" Presented at the Childhood Studies Pedagogy Workshop, Milton Keynes UK

Woods, M (2014) "Lines of Demarcation: Controlling the Borders of Gender in Oneness Pentecostalism" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association, Chicago, Session chair

Woods, M (2013) "I'll Tell You Who You Are: The Negotiating of Youth Identity in Pentecostal Storefront Churches" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Popular Culture Association

Woods, M. (2013) "The Subversive Critique of Racism in the Poetry of Phyllis Wheatley" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association,

Washington, DC Session chair

Woods, M. (2012) "In the World but Not of It: Identify performance in Pentecostal churches". Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association, Boston, MA

Woods, M. (2011) "I'm Me Because You're you: What It Means to be 'From Camden'". Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. Montreal, QC, Canada

Woods, M. (2011) "I'm Not Black, I'm Catholic: Racial Performance of Haitian-American Catholics". Paper present at the annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association. San Antonio, TX

GUEST LECTURES

"Sexuality and Youth" Guest Lecture for "Introduction to Psychology" (Dr. Daniel Hart). Spring 2011

"Qualitative Methodology and Youth" Guest Lecture for "Senior Seminar" (Dr. Daniel Hart). Fall 2011

"Teaching Poetry to Camden Youth" Guest Lecture for "Child Well-Being" (Susan Haas). Spring 2012

"Gendered Spaces in the Pentecostal Church" Guest Lecture for "Gender and Cultures of Childhood" (Martin Woodside). Fall 2013

"Black Youth Spirituality" Guest Lecture at Valley Forge Christian College. Fall 2013

"Ethnographic Research with Youth" Guest Lecturer for "Understanding Children Through Statistics" (Abigail ToddHunter) Spring 2014

PRACTICUM/INTERNSHIP

NJ Department of Children and Families, Office of Educational Support, Trenton NJ

- Developed a bill of rights for students who are in the foster care system
- Created a training presentation on career advisement for caseworkers

AWARDS

2011-2013 Graduate Student Travel Grant
Rutgers University, Department of Childhood Studies

2012-2013 Harold and Reba Martin Fellow
Eagleton institute of Politics, Rutgers University

2012-2103 Civic Engagement Fellow
Rutgers University, Office of Civic Engagement