When “a haircut is not just a haircut”: The Embodied Deconversions of Former Pentecostal and Holiness Women

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Abstract

Women of Pentecostal and Holiness belief traditions are known for embodying their faith through a set of dress standards which prevent women from cutting their hair, prohibit any form of pants, jewelry, or makeup, and require they adopt various forms of "modest" attire. While there has been significant scholarship on the social and personal significance of women's religious dress among church members, there is little to no information about how former Pentecostal and Holiness women perceive these dress standards. Furthermore, while scholars have explored the concept of deconversion, specifically as told through narrative from a more general vantage point, there is not much work which considers the role of the body within these narratives. Thus, this MA thesis seeks to address this gap in literature by studying the role of embodiment within the deconversion narratives of former Pentecostal and Holiness women. To accomplish this goal, I interviewed a total of 11 women who deconverted from churches with dress standards. These interviews highlight a specific phenomenon I term as "dress deconversion," in which women leave former dress standards. My findings suggest that dress deconversion is interconnected with but distinct from traditional deconversion and is experienced by women in a variety of ways. Overall, women tended to utilize their dress and bodily presentations to mediate outside expectations, deconstruct religious beliefs, assert new identities, and erase past identities. These results are crucial to contextualizing women's embodied deconversion experiences and may offer valuable insight into the relationships between the body, female empowerment, and faith. I argue that the dress deconversions I explore in this thesis may challenge existing ideas about not only Pentecostal and Holiness deconversions, but also the ways in which women access power through their bodies.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I was 21 years old, a senior in college, the first time I cut my hair. I remember standing in front of my bathroom mirror, holding a pair of scissors that I'd stolen from my roommate's drawer and staring at the girl in front of me. Her hair, brown with golden accents, fell in sheets down the front of her body, the split ends fanning out on top of the counter. In the overhead fluorescence, it had lost its usual warmth and had turned a dull, lifeless brass. I opened the scissors, their jaws releasing reluctantly with a small sigh, and was suddenly reminded of the last time my hair had seen scissors, when I'd got gum stuck in my hair as a seven-year-old. It had been a huge wad buried just beneath the nape of my neck that my mother and I had fought with for what felt like hours. After she'd attempted to rip it out piece by piece and I had tearfully begged her to stop, my mother had finally taken out her craft scissors. "Are you sure?" I had asked. "Won't Jesus be mad?" As a seven-year-old, growing up in a small Pentecostal church in Mississippi, I'd heard from dozens of sweaty preachers that it was wrong for women to cut their hair. Since all of the women in my family abided by this and had done so for three generations, there was never a doubt in my mind about whether this was true. "This is an emergency." my mother told me, "They didn't have gum back in Jesus's time. He will understand."

I carefully pulled a piece of my hair from around my face and tucked it between the blades of the scissors. *Would Jesus understand this*? The question hit me like a sledgehammer, and yet, I wasn't sure who was asking it. Was it my mother, who used her craft scissors to sew up the splits in my skirts? Was it the preachers I'd dutifully listened to, who pounded their fists against the pulpit and screamed their virtue into sweaty microphones. Was it the strange men that approached me in the produce aisle of Walmart to tell me how much men like long hair, as if I'd grown it specifically for them. Or was it me? That seven-year little girl who had been so

captivated by her grandmother's floor length hair, who had wrapped her own hair around her bedpost and imagined herself as Rapunzel. Whoever's question it was, I didn't have an answer. I only knew that I needed a way to express the conflict I was experiencing with my church and religious beliefs. *I'm sorry*, I thought**,** to my mother, and my grandmother, and my great grandmother, and most of all to that seven-year-old girl. The scissors snapped shut, and when I opened my eyes, a ribbon of dead hair lay curled in the sink.

Six years later, while conducting an interview with Margaret (a former member of the Pentecostal church) in preparation for this thesis, I heard her say the following statement: "If you've been in the Pentecostal church, you know… a haircut is *not* just a haircut." I thought of myself, crying over a few pieces of cut hair so hard I couldn't breathe, and I did know. For Pentecostal and Holiness women, our bodies carry meaning in highly unique and profound ways. Through a series of religious dress guidelines known by church members as "holiness standards," the female body speaks: covered knees and collar bones, legs draped in skirts, hips and breasts hidden beneath loose fabric, hair uncut, sculpted into intricate updos and baptized in hairspray, all tell a story about the body's religious and personal identity. While the specific rules and expectations of these standards differ across organizations and churches, the most common ones– which were also taught in my home church – prevent women from cutting their hair, prohibit any form of pants, jewelry, or makeup, and require they adopt "modest" attire, such as knee length skirts or dresses, high necklines, and long sleeves (UPCI 1997).

Collectively, these dress guidelines represent a shared culture, a group identity that unites both the female and male members of this conservative religious community (Lawless 1988; Lawless 1986). Thus, women's bodies are not just subject to the rhetoric of their community, but actually become rhetoric themselves. The idea that bodies enact rhetoric corporeally is nothing

new, as scholars have often asserted the body as an active agent in constructing rhetorical meaning and shaping the surrounding world (Crosswhite 1996). However, this embodied rhetoric is arguably more visible and deliberate for Pentecostal and Holiness women as their body and its rhetoric represents a crucial aspect of faith identity not only for them but their entire community. As I once heard a preacher say, "women carry the Pentecostal church with them. Into shopping malls, and their schools, and their jobs. They see you, they see the church, and they see Him." Through their bodies' visual separation from mainstream fashion, the Pentecostal and Holiness women become walking extensions of their churches. Based on research from religious scholars and my own experiences in the church, this embodied separation allows their bodies' to evangelize the Pentecostal faith by silently commenting on the "immodesty" of mainstream society (Lawless 1993; Phillip 2012).

For the individual woman, Pentecostal and Holiness dress carries more specific implications as a manifestation of the woman's loyalty to her church, her level of spiritual holiness, and in some cases her salvation. While there is significant scholarship on the embodied dress practices of active female members of Pentecostal and Holiness churches (Lawless 1988; Scott 1994; Scott 1986; Phillip 2012) – most notably, Elaine J. Lawless who explores Pentecostal dress through a critical lens (Lawless 1993) – there is limited information about women who have left these belief traditions, or to use the term coined by Barbour (1994) "deconversion" (p. 3). Of the scholarship which does exist about Pentecostal deconversion, authors agree that the process of leaving these conservative religious communities is a transformative experience for the individual and impacts their identity in both enlightening and traumatic ways (Mantisen 2020). Yet scholars rarely consider what it must be like to navigate this transition as a woman whose body has been made a physical representation of her spirituality, to disentangle not only

her spiritual beliefs, but to disentangle her body from these beliefs. Therefore, this thesis will focus on this physical disentanglement, which I will refer to as "dress deconversion," or the ways that women leave their former Pentecostal or Holiness dress standards. More specifically, I aim to examine this phenomenon and its implications by exploring the deconversion narratives of former Pentecostal and Holiness women and studying the role of embodiment within their stories.

Before delving into the context of this project, it is first crucial that I define the key terms I will use throughout my research, as many of them are highly nuanced in both explicit and implicit meaning. The term "deconversion," for example, which I briefly defined above, explicitly refers to leaving or rejecting faith. However, while some scholars use this term to refer to a more general loss of faith (Conolly), other scholars acknowledge that deconversion can occur on a more individualized level in which one may deconvert from one faith to another. While I employ both definitions of deconversion in this thesis, I will primarily use it specifically in regards to leaving the Pentecostal faith as only two of my participants chose to leave religion as a whole, whereas nine transitioned into other Christian denominations. Additionally, the terms "deconstruct," and "detangle," which I will use interchangeably, refers to the ways in which my participants grappled with and critically examined their religious beliefs. However, there is a certain amount of nuance within these terms that requires recognition. Scholars agree that the term deconstruction originates from Jacques Derrida (1982), a postmodern philosopher, who centered deconstruction theory upon questioning traditional binaries. Crucial to this theory was the ability to not only identify beliefs ingrained within Western culture, but to challenge them and eventually reconstruct new beliefs.

More recently, specifically around the start of the 21st century, deconstruction has been applied to religious faith and has become a prominent theme within the "exvangelical" movement, or individuals that have left Evangelicalism as a whole. As Christian author A. J. Swoboda (2021) states, theological deconstruction refers to a "painful journey of questioning, critiquing, and reevaluating previous faith commitments" (p. 9). However, many Christians have pushed back against this term, arguing that its association with "exvangelicals" has characterized it as exclusively anti-Christian. Most recently and notably, Jill Duggar Vuolo, former star of the reality TV show *19 Kids and Counting,* released her book *Becoming Free Indeed,* which details her journey leaving her former legalistic church. In this book she argues that the term "disentangle" is a better representation of her experience. According to her, deconstruction "rips everything… down to the studs," without the intention of rebuilding, whereas disentangling aims to separate the positive and negative aspects of faith. Vuola goes on to explain that for her, disentangling meant reexamining the fundamentalist teaching she grew up believing within the larger context of Evangelical Christianity. Thus, a key characteristic of disentanglement is that this process remains within a Christian and biblical context, whereas deconstruction can extend beyond Christian values. It is also important to note that several of my participants in this project seemed to be aware of the nuanced connotations of these terms based on their use of the term disentangle rather than deconstruct. One participant even corrected herself after using "deconstruct" and explained that she preferred the term "disentangle." Although I mostly use these terms interchangeably, it is important to note the context and connotations surrounding these terms in order to fully understand the nuanced ways my participants experienced both deconstruction and disengagement when leaving their belief tradition.

Although I began to pursue this research topic during the fall semester of 2022, in many ways, this thesis began three years ago, during my undergraduate capstone research project. While I was just beginning to think critically about the practices I grew up with, I was still very much aligned with the Pentecostal church. Thus, I wanted to explore my community through an equally analytical and complementary lens so that I might justify some of the conflicts I was experiencing in my own life while still reinforcing my community's ideals. To accomplish this goal, I interviewed Pentecostal women from my home church, asking specifically about how they felt the dress standards had affected their identity. What I found were stories, told by the women who lived them and embodied them in every aspect of their beings. What I found was rhetoric in its most alive and formative state, rhetoric that leapt off of the page, rhetoric that didn't just communicate my participants' stories but became the bodies I was communicating about. By interviewing Pentecostal women, learning about their embodiment, and telling their stories in my capstone project, I realized that bodies, their bodies and my body, *were* rhetorical, that all of our covered knees and elbows, and uncut split ends were constantly communicating with the world around us.

My findings from this undergraduate study suggested that dress not only played a crucial role in Pentecostal women's identity but that this role was primarily empowering with certain limitations: while my participants described feeling tremendous pressure both from the outside world and the female members of their church, they generally felt positively about their dress and the religious identity it afforded them. Although this project proved both academically and personally beneficial, I found myself hesitant about the overall positive feedback I received and, as a result, began asking the following question: what would I have found if I had talked to women that were conflicted about the dress standards or had even left the church altogether,

women that I had been warned about in a dozen different sermons due to their "bad influence"? How might their stories change the way the church, scholars, and I myself understood religious conflict?

This question would become ironically autobiographical as my own experiences with religious conflict intensified drastically over the next several months. After a sudden and difficult leadership transition at my home church, I began buckling under the weight of pain, anger, resentment, and a host of other emotional burdens, most of which I had been unconsciously carrying for years. Suddenly, a lifetime of conflict was unraveling itself: all those services I'd participated in from my front pew, all the skirts I had hemmed and layered, all the prayers of repentance I had cried, the scars of self-harm I had inflicted upon myself when those prayers fell flat. For all of the things I'd done to earn my salvation, I had not developed a foundation for my faith beyond my outward appearance. As a result, the dress standards became symbols of control, reminders that no matter how much my inner perceptions of Pentecostalism changed, my dress and hair still identified me as a member of the church. Thus, when I eventually decided to cut my hair at the end of my senior year of undergrad, I was attempting to not only reclaim my body, but to reunite who I was with who my body claimed to be.

Upon moving to Tennessee and entering the Rhetorics, Writing, and Linguistics Graduate Program, I knew I wanted to revisit my previous capstone project for my thesis with one significant difference: this time I would focus on the experiences of women who, like me, had experienced significant conflict with religious dress standards. In doing so, I hoped to again study the rhetoric of my body and the bodies of other Pentecostal women. But this time, I wanted to tell the other side of the narrative, the stories that did not celebrate my home community but actually pushed against it, the stories that I had grown up avoiding and fearing but now found

myself enacting. To accomplish this goal, I decided to take advantage of my own communities and to recruit participants from my personal contacts and the Pentecostal church that I had begun attending. However, I knew that identifying women in the church that was experiencing conflict would be extremely difficult given the sensitive nature of my research topic. To address this issue, I developed a brief survey that would gauge a participant's experiences with dress in a neutral context. My plan was to include a follow up interview option in the survey and to only follow up with those women that indicated they were currently experiencing conflict with the dress standards. After developing this survey (which I will explain in further detail in my methods section), I received approval from the pastor and pastor's wife and then received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee.

However, when I contacted the church's leadership again to begin the recruitment process, I was told that I would not be able to send the survey to the church. Although they gave no explanation for the reversal in their decision, the reality of the situation was clear: I would have to rely exclusively on personal contacts and snowball sampling. However, this method proved extremely effective as one of my contacts was the founder of an online community of Christian women that had either left "legalistic" churches or were transitioning out of them. According to Johnson and VanVonderen (1991), the term "legalism" refers to "religious perfectionism," or the teaching that a believer's salvation is dependent upon their works and performance. Thus, the online community that I found was dedicated to refuting the legalistic teachings they had encountered in various denominations, such as Pentecostal, Holiness, Bible Methodist, and several other small organizations– although most content is aimed specifically at Pentecostal and Holiness teachings. After sending out my survey to these women and reviewing the responses, I realized two crucial things about my participants: 1.) many of them had come

from different organizations (specifically different variations of Pentecostal and Holiness traditions) and had experienced different variations of the dress standards that I'd grown up with, and 2.) everyone that had volunteered to do a follow up interview had already transitioned out of their former church. I quickly realized that my research would need to be adjusted, from exploring the experiences of Pentecostal women conflicted about their dress to women who had deconverted (Barbour 1994) out of their legalistic church. In some ways, this shift may seem arbitrary, but by basing my analysis on stories about deconversion rather than conflict, I encountered a whole new set of experiences and challenges relating to the Pentecostal and Holiness faith. Through these interviews, I discovered that these women had not only embodied their former faith but also their deconversion and that this fact played a crucial role in their narratives.

Although I did not know it at the time, this adjustment in my research focus would not only shape my thesis but would transform my own identity by challenging my faith, my perception of my home culture, and my relationship with friends and family members. I acknowledge this fact because as I tell my participants stories regarding deconversion and dress deconversion, I am also telling my own story. As a participant researcher, it is impossible to separate my identity from this study. Kersetter (2012) affirms this idea when she argues that traditional notions of objective research can limit the insights gained from the work. Instead, she contends that by embracing their identity as a participant researcher, scholars may utilize their insider's perspective and achieve a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter. Thus, my background with the Pentecostal church is crucial to the analysis of my data because it is through my own experiences that I am able to understand the nature and implications of my participants' experiences. However, my identity is also crucial to this thesis due to the ways in which this

work has influenced my perceptions regarding my faith. As my research and analysis changed my perspective, the ways in which I approached and thought about my research also changed. As a result, my identity and the story of how that identity has changed offers significant insight into the nature, goals, and implications of this work.

Based on the above narrative, this thesis will attempt to address the embodiment within women's Pentecostal and Holiness deconversion narrative throughout the following five sections. In Chapter 1, I have begun by introducing my own narrative which has extensively shaped this project, as well as my research goals for this study. Chapter two will present a literature review that traces the history of Pentecostal and Holiness faith traditions beginning in the early 1900's, specifically examining the evolution of dress during this time period. This brief history will allow me to demystify the nuanced backgrounds, doctrines, and dress practices of the Pentecostal and Holiness faith. I will also explore dress as an embodied, social construct, which I will use to contextualize the social and individual implications of religious dress standards. I will conclude Chapter 2 by exploring the concept of "deconversion," specifically as told through narratives, which I will then apply to Pentecostal or Holiness communities. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology I used to design my study, conduct my interviews, and analyze my data. In the following three chapters, I will discuss my findings, which include the findings of my structural analysis in Chapter 4 and thematic analysis in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 will describe the typology I used to represent the different types of embodied deconversion experiences– or "dress deconversion" as I refer to it. Finally, in Chapter 7, I will conclude this study by considering what these narratives tell us about female embodiment and religious trauma.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The concept of Pentecostal and Holiness deconversion, specifically as it applies to dress standards and embodiment, is undeniably a complex and multifaceted area of study. In order to understand the implications of my participants' dress deconversion, it is first necessary to understand the various disciplines within my study and how these disciplines differ and overlap with each other. As I have visualized in the image below, there are four main fields from which my project draws: 1.) religious studies, specifically relating to the Pentecostal and Holiness faith traditions, 2.) embodiment and dress studies, 3.) deconversion studies and 4.) rhetorical studies. Each of these disciplines contextualize this project both individually and collectively. While the first three areas of study provide the foundational ideas upon which I will base my analysis of Pentecostal women's dress deconversion, rhetoric represents the common point between them as it represents a crucial aspect of each discipline. Within Pentecostal and Apostolic churches, rhetoric enforces religious dress standards through traditions and teaching. In scholarship surrounding deconversion, rhetoric is used to narrativize the deconvert's experience leaving their faith. Within embodiment and dress studies, rhetoric becomes the body, communicating the body's identity through fleshly presentations.

Therefore, my goal in this literature review is to build context for these disciplines and demonstrate the ways that rhetoric is threaded through them. First, I will provide a brief history of the Pentecostal and Holiness church, specifically exploring women's role within these traditions, the development of dress standards, and the current role of dress within these belief traditions. Then, in order to demonstrate the relationship between these religious dress standards and women's identity, I will then explore the concept of dress more theoretically as it relates to

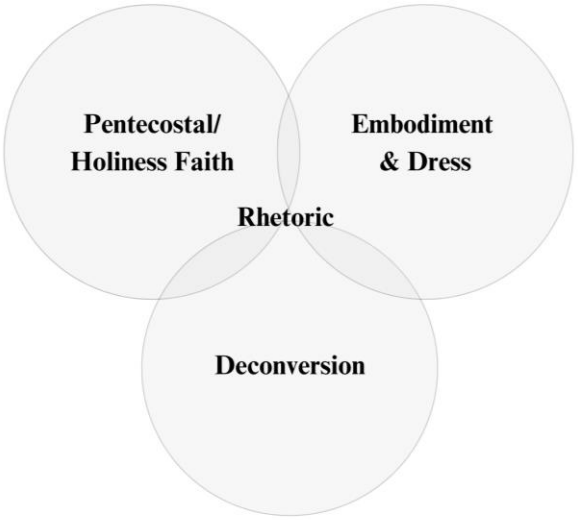


Figure 1: Conceptualization of Relevant Disciplines

embodiment and identity construction. Finally, I will examine existing scholarship surrounding deconversion narratives, specifically as it applies to Pentecostal and Holiness traditions.

The Pentecostal and Holiness Traditions

What is Pentecostalism and Holiness?

To understand the role of embodiment in former Pentecostal and Holiness women's deconversion narratives, it is first necessary to have an understanding of the denominations in question. The origins and development of the Pentecostal and Holiness movements are difficult to trace linearly; in fact, the words "Pentecostal" and "Holiness" are troublesome as they represent an extremely wide range of churches, nuanced doctrines, and histories, including sectors like The Assemblies of God, The Pentecostal Holiness Church, The Church of God, and Apostolic Pentecostalism also known as Oneness Pentecostalism (Synan, 1997; Blumhoffer 1993). In fact, it is worth noting here that at its foundation, the term "Pentecostal" does not necessarily refer to any specific denomination, but rather refers to the Jewish holiday celebrated fifty days after Easter. The word derives its modern connotation from a specific event described in the book of Acts which occurred on Pentecost and describes the Holy Spirit's supernatural descent upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus (Synan, 1997). This event, which would mark the beginning of the early Christian church, came to be known as "The Day of Pentecost." Thus, the term "Pentecostal" generally refers to churches that emphasize supernatural encounters and ecstatic worship as found in the book of Acts. Although my participants originated from various sectors of these groups, I will primarily focus on the formation of Holiness and Classical Pentecostalism, as these groups account for most of the core religious traditions my participants encountered. By exploring the ways in which these groups overlap and differentiate in their

histories, doctrines, and dress guidelines, I will provide a contextual foundation for the teachings and experiences my participants describe in their narratives.

Though the two traditions would eventually become highly related in doctrine and culture, The Holiness Movement outdates Pentecostalism by almost a century. When traced back to its most foundational origin, The Holiness Movement attributes most of its roots to John Wesley and Methodism during the 18th and 19th century. According to scholars, Wesley was a staunch advocate of "entire sanctification," or the idea that through a personal regenerative experience, God cleanses believers of all forms of sin and, thus, allows them to live a truly "holy" lifestyle (Synan, 1997). This doctrine prompted Wesley to write "The Plain Account of Christian Perfectionism," a defense of sanctification notably published in the *Discipline* manual of the early Methodist church that would later become one of the foundational texts for Holiness churches. Although this doctrine would evolve significantly over the next century, it is important to note that both Holiness and Pentecostal dress standards began with Wesley's teachings on "outward holiness," which advocated for plain and modest dress as a symbol of inner sanctification (Lawless, 1998, p. 7).

Through the Second Great Awakening and a series of post-Civil War Holiness revivals, Holiness Associations began to form and gain popularity across Methodism. During the late 1800's, anywhere from one third to one half of the four million American Methodism were committed to the idea of sanctification. However, by the 1890's, many elders of mainstream Methodism had begun to openly oppose the perfectionism of the Holiness Movement, a trend which eventually led to the Methodist church's formal rejection of Holiness in 1894 (Synan, 1997). Thus, at the close of the 19th century, Holiness churches were well established and on their way to becoming a separate denomination.

Although the Holiness movement is still alive today, with an estimated 12 million believers worldwide, there has been a significant decline in fundamental Holiness churches (churches which adhere to the original Wesleyan teachings of religious perfectionism and strict standards of living) since the 20th century. In fact, several religious scholars such as Drury (1994) and Collins (1999) have argued that the Holiness movement is "dead," at least in regards to its organizational identity and influence. These authors cite various contributing factors for this decline, such as doctrinal issues, disjointed leadership, and misplaced emphasis on holiness standards. While these conclusions are likely true of fundamental Holiness organizations, the Wesleyan Holiness influence is nevertheless evident in many Holiness and Pentecostal churches, as well as other independent organizations, most notably Asbury University.

While the origination of Pentecostalism is somewhat debated among historical scholarship, most scholars agree that the Pentecostal tradition evolved from an extreme wing of The Holiness Movement that emphasized entire sanctification through radical, personal experiences and divine healing (Synan 1997; Anderson 2013). However, most modern Pentecostals attribute their origination to the early 1900's Azusa Street Revivals, a series of revivals that took place in Los Angeles, California. The explanation for this debate can be found in the events at Bethel Bible College in Topeka Kansas which led up to these revivals (Blumhoffer 1993). The college's founder Charles Parham, who had left Methodism to preach Holiness ideals (although he did not officially align himself with any specific denomination), instructed his class to pray for a full revelation of the Holy Spirit. According to written accounts, one of Parham's students Agnes Ozman began "speaking in tongues" during one of these meetings, a phenomenon referred to as "glossolalia" by scholars in which a believer speaks in an unknown language (Frodsham; Blumhoffer 1993). Parham claimed this religious experience was

physical proof of a spiritual baptism of the Holy Spirit, a teaching that would shape the identity of early Pentecostalism and define much of its foundational doctrine (Blumhoffer, 1993).

The publicization of these events would spark a movement intent on experiencing this same type of divine sanctification. In 1906, this movement would take center stage in Los Angeles, when William J. Seymore (an African American evangelist and former congregate of Charles Parham) held revival services in a dilapidated, two-story building on Azusa street. From 1906 to 1909, services at the formerly abandoned church would include as many as 1300 attendees, with reports of spontaneous worship, divine healings, and frequent glossolalia. However, as Blumhoffer (1993) describes, the reception of these revivals from established churches including the Holiness Movement were largely negative. Holiness minister Alma White, for instance, wrote *Demons and Tongues* in 1910, a book that vehemently opposed the Pentecostal experience and argued that glossolalia was demonic. As a result, Azusa participants were forced to form their own churches, establishing Pentecostalism as a denomination soon thereafter.

Although Pentecostalism was largely rejected by the Holiness Movement, the Holiness influence in Pentecostal doctrine was undeniable through their shared emphasis on sanctification, personal experience, separation from the surrounding world, and dress standards – in fact, many churches identified themselves equally as both Pentecostal and Holiness, as is still the case with the Pentecostal Holiness organization (Synan 1997). However, there are also significant differences between the two traditions. In addition to the Holiness Movement's rejection of Pentecostalism's glossolalia, many sectors of Pentecostalism deny the trinity, insisting that baptism must be done in "Jesus name" to save the believer. This teaching, which originated at a 1913 camp meeting, not only further differentiated it from its Holiness origins, but also created

significant controversy among the fledgling Pentecostal movement, causing a split between those groups that rejected the oneness teaching –the Assemblies of God church– and those that accepted it – the Apostolic Pentecostal church. The latter organization would go on to become what scholars refer to as "classical Pentecostalism," or the churches which adhere to Wesleyan dress standards and require both oneness and glossolalia for salvation. However, as the Apostolic Pentecostal movement continued to develop during the 20th and 21st century, there would be several more splits over disagreements about dress standards, forming organizations such as United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI), Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ (ALJC), and Worldwide Pentecostal Fellowship (WPF), several of which are reflected in the organizations that my participants identified.

While both belief traditions have continued to develop in the modern era, Pentecostalism has surpassed the Holiness Movement in regards to worldwide believers and global impact. Pentecostalism—or as author Peter Williams (1989) describes it, "the popular religious movement of the twentieth century" (-- has become one of the fastest-growing religious movements in the world (Williams 1989, Synan 1997). Many reports claim Pentecostalism now consists of roughly 600 million believers (Anderson 2014). However, due to the extremely varied nature of Pentecostalism, this number does not accurately reflect classical (or Apostolic) Pentecostals, of which there is an estimated 92 million (Melton & Miller, 2019).

Therefore, this extensive history is essential in defining what exactly I mean when I use the terms "Pentecostal" and "Holiness." While Pentecostalism includes many organizations that differ from traditional definitions of Pentecostal doctrine and culture, when I use this term, I am specifically referencing "classical Pentecostalism," which primarily includes the UPCI, the ALJC, and the WPF organizations. As previously stated, each of these organizations believe that

glossolalia and "oneness" doctrine is essential for salvation. While some of the churches within these groups disagree about whether dress standards are required for salvation, they all agree that they are a crucial aspect of believers' religious identity, obedience, and gender distinction. On the other hand, when I use the term "Holiness," I am referencing a slightly more nuanced group as this includes churches that are aligned with the Pentecostal doctrine as well as traditional Holiness, also known as "Bible Methodist Holiness." While the former group agrees with many Pentecostal teachings including glossolalia and "oneness," they tend to be more traditional in their teachings on dress than Classical Pentecostals. Bible Methodist Holiness on the other hand is closely related to the original Holiness movement that rejected Pentecostalism in the early 1900's. As a result, this group does not believe in glossolalia or "oneness" and instead advocates for the trinity. Although I will typically use the terms Pentecostal and Holiness together, there are moments when I refer exclusively to Pentecost, particularly in the following sections on dress and deconversion. I have chosen to emphasize my focus on Pentecostalism due to its widespread influence and the fact that a majority of my participants originated from Pentecost.

Women and their dress

To understand how this origin of the Holiness Movement and Pentecostalism contextualizes the current study, it is necessary to examine the role of women and their dress in these communities. As previously stated, most modern Pentecostal and Holiness women are known by a distinct image which includes knee length skirts or dresses, uncut hair, and an absence of makeup and jewelry. However, it is also important to note that in addition to dress standards, many modern Pentecostal women may also experience a marginalized role within their churches. Scholars suggest (Lawless 1988) that the Pentecostal church's extreme emphasis on male leadership often creates the assumption that women are subordinate to male authority.

As a result, Pentecostal women are not typically encouraged to become ministers or pastors, with some notable exceptions across Wesleyan Holiness and Bible Methodist churches (Synan, 1997).

However, this fact is particularly interesting when compared to the movement's history. In stark contrast with this modern Pentecostal women's minimalized role within the church, women's roles during early Holiness and Pentecost were quite empowering and progressive, as women frequently taught, preached and even pastored churches. For example, Alma White, previously mentioned for her extreme criticism of Pentecostalism, was a particularly influential and notable Holiness minister, most widely known for founding the Pillar of Fire Church. As for Pentecostal women, theologian Estrelda Alexander (2012) notes that six of the twelve administrative elders during the Azusa Street revival were women. Many others, such as Julia Hutchins, Lucy Farrow, and Jennie Seymore, would later become women teachers, pastors, and evangelists, thus signaling women's active role in the establishment of both Holiness and Pentecostal traditions (Alexander 2012). However, one of the most prominent examples of female ministerial leadership can be found in the ministry of evangelist and celebrity Aimee McPherson. After embracing Pentecostalism in 1907, McPherson would eventually leave her husband and children to become one of the most publicized Protestant evangelists, known for her powerful preaching style and public healing demonstrations (Blumhoffer, 1993, p. 153-154).

Alexander (2012) further emphasizes the significance of these women when she considers this feminine empowerment in the context of societal norms during the early 1900s. During a time when most women's roles were limited to the domestic spheres of homemaker, wife, and mother, Pentecostal and Holiness women were challenging societal norms by obtaining and holding roles of authority within the church. While women from other faith

traditions were refused ordination, these women were preaching, evangelizing, and spreading their religious message across nations and continents (Alexander 2012). Although this level of empowerment does not reflect the reality that my participants experienced within their churches, it is significant that Pentecostal and Holiness traditions were at one point known for empowering and advancing women not just by the standards of religious communities but by mainstream society as well.

Unfortunately, Pentecostal women would not sustain the level of authority and empowerment they had experienced in the early 1900's. Charles Barfoot and Gerald Sheppard explore this shift through the context of the symbolic function of Pentecostal leadership: while "prophetic" leadership emphasized God's "calling," and attributed to women's ministry, "priestly" leadership required ministers receive ordination from an accredited institution. Around the 1920s the church experienced a shift from a feminine "prophetic" ministry to masculine "priestly" Pentecostalism (Barfoot and Sheppard, 1990). As the movement split into various denominations, the General Council began increasing the restrictions on ministerial ordinations, thus placing less emphasis on the prophetic "calling" that had previously inspired women ministers (Barfoot and Sheppard, 1980, p. 14). The effect of this shift was massive, as women were largely pushed out of ministerial roles and into traditional domestic spheres (Barfoot and Sheppard, 1980 p. 15). As Barr (2021) notes, this reemphasis of women's domestication would affect not just Pentecostalism but most Protestant denominations, through various historical events such as Industrialization and World War II. However, the shift would arguably prove more drastic for Pentecostalism as women went from extreme empowerment to extreme subjugation, as seen through the emergence of heavily restricted dress standards. Based upon these developments, it seems clear that Pentecostal women represent an extremely nuanced role

throughout history. Therefore, because these women tend to evolve in ways that differentiate them from women of other religious traditions, their experiences represent unique insights into the religious enactments of gender and embodiment.

This shift is relevant to the current conversation not only because it contextualizes women's roles in the church but also because it is directly related to the evolution of female dress standards. Although most Holiness and classical Pentecostal women today embody their religious belief through dress standards enforced by the pastor, women in the early 1900's were not attuned to the legality of religious symbolism. Instead, dress was regarded as more of a matter of individual faith rather than the collective identity that it represents in today's churches. Grant Wacker (1984) reflects upon this when he explains that women of early Pentecost wore the secular fashion of their day and were adorned with jewelry and stylish clothing. However, this attitude would quickly shift around 1910-1915, when Pentecostals began adopting "The-Poor-Dress-Gospel" (Wacker, 1984, p. 125), a type of dress style which emphasized plain, unadorned clothing for both men and women. Wacker (1984) and other scholars such as Lawless (1988) and Blumhoffer (1993) theorize that this was likely influenced by the low social class of the fledgling Pentecostal movement, whose constituents were made up mostly of poor, uneducated, and socially marginalized groups. The dress adopted by the tradition reflected this identity by dictating plain dress and disbanding "adornments" like ties and jewelry (Blumhoffer 98). A prime example of such dress can be found in celebrity and Pentecostal evangelist Aimee McPherson who was known for her simplistic, white clerical dress. However, this style of Pentecostal dress was typically adopted on an individual level and did not represent a preconceived set of codes enforced by the broader institution.

It was not until sometime around 1920, notably the same time Pentecostalism began to emphasize "priestly ministry" and to push women into domestic spaces, that the attitudes surrounding dress became increasingly legalistic. Pentecostal bible schools offer a prime example of this, as female dress increasingly became the object of concern and reproach. In his examination of Pentecostal customs, Wacker (1984) cites the Peniel Bible Institute in Dayton Ohio, which required women "not to cut or curl their hair, to forgo cosmetics, and to wear uniforms" (125). Women's deviation from such standards would elicit such admonishments like that of one unnamed writer for the Kansas Apostolic Faith who accused women's "scant attire" of eliciting male attention and thus causing sexual sin (Wacker 125). Similarly, Blumhoffer cites a resolution on female dress adopted by the Pentecostal General Council in 1939 which explicitly condemns, "such unscriptural conduct as the donning of male attire, or the wearing of shorts or slacks, on the part of the lady students in any of our Bible Schools… as being… essentially worldly." Statements such as these would prove incremental in the push for doctrinal and physical conformity and would set precedents on dress and the rhetoric surrounding dress which are still in place today (Blumhoffer 1993).

Although I will return to this specific conversation later on in my literature review to explore the social and rhetorical implications of Pentecostal dress, it is important to note the specific ways in which this historical background informs modern Pentecostal and Holiness dress standards. Critics of Pentecostal dress note the way that modern Pentecostal dress standards are somewhat contradictory, as jewelry is prohibited due to its association with vanity, pride, and worldly values. Yet, hair clips, even those that are decorative and ornate are permitted. I contend, based on my own experiences within the Pentecostal church and on materials and sermons produced through this organization, that this contradiction can be directly attributed to

the traditions surrounding dress standards. In his book "A Call to Modesty: The Holiness of God and the Modesty of His People," 3

(known throughout the UPCI as the organization's superintendent) emphasizes the importance of dress standards to modern believers based on its historical origins:

> The doctrine of modesty is not a new teaching, but is firmly rooted in the history and tradition of the apostolic church. The early Christians understood the importance of modesty in dress and behavior, and they maintained a consistent standard of holiness. This tradition has been passed down through the ages, and we must continue to uphold it in our generation. (p. 21)

Through this excerpt, we see Bernard citing the "consistent standard of holiness" (which is somewhat challenged by the gradual development of dress standards significantly after the movement formed) as justification for modern day adherence to dress standards. This argument suggests that although Pentecostal dress has evolved in other ways, as evident through the inclusion of decorative hair clips and other fashionable items, the core characteristics of dress standards have remained due to the continued history of these standards. As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that the tradition of dress standards are just as crucial to the Pentecostal and Holiness identity as the standards themselves.

The Concept of Dress

Having explored the history of Pentecostal and Holiness faith and dress standards, it is now necessary to explore the ways in which Pentecostal dress deconversion converges with the broader conversation concerning dress as a concept. For the purposes of studying Pentecostal women, the relevance of such a conversation may be best framed through Joanne Entwistle's (2000) assertions that human beings do not just have bodies, they are bodies, and they are

dressed bodies (1). This is clearly an important distinction: by positioning "dressed" as a separate aspect of what we, humans, are, Entwistle makes the assertion that dress is crucial to our being, equally as crucial as our very bodies. Although the concept of dress has been studied across a wide variety of disciplines, it has traditionally been approached as separate from the body. For scholars like Barthes (1964) and Simmel (1904), explorations of dress were mostly limited to the articles of clothing themselves with emphasis on their creative implications rather than their relationship to the body wearing them. However, well known scholars like Mary Douglas (1996) who examines of dress in terms of the social and physical body, have extended dress beyond material ramifications. This conversation has more recently been further explored by emerging scholars like Erica Howard (2020), who explores personal and collective dress symbols, and Margo Maine (2018), who discusses hair as an embodied language. Collectively, these scholars have continuously emphasized the relationship between dress, bodies, and identity, by situating the dressed body within the social world.

To foreground this theoretical scholarship, I first want to establish what exactly I mean when I use the term "dress.", Roach-Higgins, Eicher and Johnson (1995), establish dress as "an assemblage of modifications to the body," including, "a long list of possible direct modifications to the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body as supplements" (7). While this definition is useful in that it considers dress holistically, applying to both physical garments and physical presentations of the body, it assumes that dress must always be active. In this assumption, therefore, it ignores the possibility that an individual's dress may also include what has been intentionally excluded or left unmodified. For example, a Pentecostal woman's choice not to wear make-up or not to cut her hair is as intentional and

personally meaningful to her as the physical presence of tattoos or piercings might be to another woman. Therefore, Pentecostal women's rejection of specific practices is not the absence of dress but rather is part of her dress. Anne Hollander (1993) draws a similar connection in her discussion of the ways in which naked bodies, or for the purposes of this study "unadorned bodies," are shaped by our concepts of dress. In reference to nudity in art, she states, "At any time, the unadorned self has more kinship with its own usual dressed aspect than it has with any undressed human selves in other times and other places." Thus, bodies that break contemporary conventions by being "unadorned" are still operating in the same way that adorned bodies do: they both convey messages of the body's identity, whether it is meant to embrace social norms or to reject them. Within the current study, I will, therefore, define dress more holistically by focusing specifically on its ability to add significant and personal meaning to the body. (Entwistle 2000; Maine 2018; Roach-Higgins, Eicher and Johnson, 1992).

Embodying Dress as a Social Identity

If dress is defined through its relationship to the body and ability to add meaning, it then raises questions about how exactly the dressed body is *embodying* that meaning within society. The word "embodiment" is in and of itself a complex term, as it may refer to the materialization of an abstract idea, the physical presence of something, or the physical inhabitation of a body. Scholar Abby Knoblauch (2012) offers a more precise definition of embodiment by separating "embodiment" into three terms: embodied language, embodied knowledge, and embodied rhetoric. Embodied language refers to the use of metaphors and analogies that reference, intentionally or unintentionally, the physical body, such in the common phrase, "from the bottom of my heart." Embodied knowledge, on the other hand, references a bodily sense of knowing or the ways in which bodies carry intelligence and other forms of consciousness. Finally,

Knoblauch defines embodied rhetoric as the intentional incorporation of embodied knowledge within texts as meaningful forms of communication. While each of these definitions is helpful in delineating the term "embodiment," her description of embodied knowledge can be expounded by Budgeon (2003)'s assertion that embodiment is not just "a way of knowing," but a way of being (p. 4). Budgeon (2003) asserts that embodiment, "can be thought of not as objects, upon which culture writes meanings, but as events that are continually in the process of becoming – as multiplicities that are never just found but are made and remade." Therefore, based on this definition, it becomes clear that embodiment is closely related to not only the body but to the body's dress and the identity that this presentation is communicating. It also becomes clear based on Budgeon (2003) and Knoblauch (2012) that embodiment is clearly rhetorical, as the body takes an active role in communicating and creating meaning.

The idea of embodiment as it applies to the dressed body is further expounded upon by scholarly conversation surrounding the body's social implications. Mary Douglas (1996) offers a particularly intriguing metaphor for this phenomenon by describing the presence of two bodies: the physical and the social body. According to Douglas, the "[physical] body is capable of furnishing a natural system of symbols," symbols which she argues communicates the body's cultural location. As a result, the physical body becomes subject to the social body. She offers the example of smooth versus shaggy hair: while smooth hair is adopted to display the body's compliance with society (such as is the case with lawyers or bankers), shaggy hair represents the body's protest against social norms and is adopted by critiques of society like artists and academics (Douglas 1996). Thus, the presentation of the physical body is dictated by the cultural location and identity the social body is attempting to occupy. This resulting physical

embodiment then affirms our categorized view of society and perpetuates it, thus forming a continuous exchange of meanings between our physical and social beings.

This relationship explains the persistence of religious dress symbols across faith traditions like the Islamic, Jewish, Amish, and (of course) Pentecostal communities. The concept of dress as a religious symbol has been widely explored by researchers as both an oppressive and freely adopted form of personal and collective identification (Howard 2020). The concept is perhaps most notably explored by Raymond Firth (1973) in which he considers religious symbolism through the multifaceted nature of symbols themselves. He asserts that symbols function both publicly and privately, where a private symbol is defined by its personal significance and public symbol by its conveyance to the outside world. Yet, these functions are not always equal: he offers the example of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which although not manifested in dress, is a form of embodied religion. While the symbol of the Sacred Heart represents a public symbol put forth by the Catholic church, its significance to actual believers is greatly varied. Thus, Firth surmises, "The public symbol is a general idea, [and] the private symbol is its working out." When applied to religious dress symbols, specifically those within the Apostolic movement, this explains the conflict between the public's perceptions of dress standards—which are largely negative (Lawless)-- and their significance to Pentecostal believers. This polarization also justifies the current study: if dress symbols operate differently according to the individual believer, ignoring the personal perceptions of female Pentecostals creates a significant gap in our understanding of the functions of dress, symbolism, and Pentecostal culture.

To further illustrate this conversation concerning dress and its representation of social identity, I want to momentarily shift my focus onto one specific aspect of dress, namely the

existence and maintenance of hair. Contrary to clothes or other adornments, hair is unique in that it, "is a biological accessory, a very personal, private thing, growing and changing with his [and her] bodily condition" (Firth 262). Yet this "private" aspect of the body is almost always indicative of public implications (Firth). Raymond Firth (1973) explores the private and public implications of hair, tracing its significance across indigenous cultures and religious traditions. He cites a wide range of cultural examples such as Native American women's use of hair to represent her marital status as well as African American women's use of Afros to symbolize their ethnic identity. He also briefly examines hair as a group demarcate in religion through the hair standards of both Anabaptists and Amish, noting that both sectors have restricted the trimming of the beard and hair "according to the worldly fashions" (Firth 1973).

Although Firth's work is helpful in tracing the extremely varied implications which hair can and does carry, he approaches the work from a masculine point of view (as becomes apparent through his continuous use of "he," "him" pronouns when referring to humankind.) He, therefore, offers little information about hair as an embodied aspect of women's identity. In more recent scholarship, however, Maine (2018) focuses specifically on this relationship, highlighting hair's embodied nature in personified terms: she states, "Hair is another language with its own symbolism and grammar," that speaks of its surrounding culture and time in both collective and individual statements. (112). The metaphor in which hair possesses and communicates its own language is useful in framing the role hair plays in the Pentecostal community. Based on Maine's evaluation of religious practices involving hair, its language is made restrictive, as women are prohibited from controlling its natural growth. Maine (2018) condemns practices like these (although she too does not specifically reference Pentecostal women) for removing women's autonomy over their own bodies. Although most dress scholars like Maine do not

specifically apply concepts of embodiment to Pentecostalism, these conversations are relevant to the current study because they offer theoretical insight into the body's relationship with identity and autonomy.

Pentecostal Dress Culture

Having explored the scholarly conversation surrounding embodiment and dress, I will now return to Pentecostal dress standards in order to examine the ways that embodiment and the social implications of dress apply to the Pentecostal and Holiness church. As previously stated, dress standards represent a unique aspect of embodiment as Pentecostal and Holiness women communicate their beliefs and membership within their religious community through their dress, uncut hair, and an array of other bodily presentations. However, there is a significant divide between the Pentecostal church's justifications of dress standards and most scholars' descriptions of dress standards. Based on several sources published by UPCI superintendent David K. Bernard, it is clear that the Pentecostal church asserts that Pentecostal dress codes can be empowering to women by allowing them to express their faith and collective identity. Bernard also argues in his article " The Theology of Holiness," that modest dress allows women to reject the sexualization of mainstream society. He argues that through this rejection, the female Pentecostal body becomes a site of protection rather than sexual display. The idea that Pentecostal dress adverts sexuality and protects women from society's devaluation is a very popular argument within Pentecostal and Holiness churches. I myself have heard this theme preached across many pulpits and taught in many women's small groups. Other Pentecostal writers such as Hatcher (2017) also support this idea as they consistently describe modest dress in terms of the protection, respect, and dignity it offers women. Comparatively, mainstream forms of dress are implied to devalue women due to their overt sexual nature. However, this idea

has been challenged by scholars due to the sexualization of Pentecostal women which often occurs both within and outside the church. Arlene Sánchez Walsh (2018), for example, argues that despite the church's assertion that Pentecostal dress protects women from sexualization and promotes sexual restraint, male Pentecostal leaders may sexualize female bodies by highlighting the significant temptation they present to men. As a result, there is a clear contradiction between the church leaders' claim that modest dress deemphasizes women's sexuality and their warning of potential for sexual sin (Walsh, 2018).

Other scholars focus their critique of Pentecostal and Holiness dress on the ways in which it can create undue tension between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals. Joel Robbins (2004), for instance, argues that the strict moral standards which Pentecostals promote may often strengthen the disconnect between Pentecostal believers and the surrounding community. Robbins argues that while global Pentecostalism is often able to achieve dualism in certain respects, individual practices such as speaking in tongues and dress ultimately emphasizes the division between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals as such practices may promote Pentecostal's critical perspectives of mainstream society (128). Along these lines, Shauna Scott (1994) explores the ways in which this tension may present itself within Pentecostal churches. Scott's research, which took place during a revival at an Appalachian Pentecostal church, explores a generational shift that took place prior to the revival as many of the female church members began adapting contemporary forms of dress which many elder members of the church deemed immoral. As a result, Scott identifies two main categories used by church leaders to address female congregants: "saintly" (women who continued to adhere to traditional Pentecostal dress) and "sinner" (women who deviated from the standards). As a result of the tension between those who followed the dress standards and those who didn't, the "sinner" women ultimately deconverted

from the Pentecostal church, a decision which Scott characterizes as empowering: the women had, she states, “traveled a long way toward the male pole of the traditional gender spectrum,” a journey which was embodied through their haircuts and fashions. In this way, she suggests that by rejecting Pentecostal dress standards, the women of her study were able to reestablish their own agency, thus characterizing “holiness standards” as the barrier which had previously prevented such empowerment. .

While there are many scholars that discuss both the positive and negative aspects of Pentecostal dress, I want to momentarily focus solely on the work of Elaine J. Lawless. As a prominent folklorist and arguably the leading expert on Pentecostal dress culture, Lawless is one of the only scholars to complete such extensive fieldwork on Pentecostalism, as her work spans Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, and several other southern American states. Thus, her many published texts on Pentecostal women offer significant insight into dress culture and its effect on women. Throughout most of her work, Lawless asserts the extreme nuance of Pentecostal dress, specifically arguing that it acts as both a facilitator of the patriarchy and a form of female empowerment. Through her field work in Midwestern Pentecostal communities, Lawless (1988) continuously admits the domination of men within modern Pentecostalism, which, she explains, has contributed to traditional views of women as domesticated wives and mothers subject to male authority. However, she notes that among women within the movement, dress standards also represent the potential for spiritual authority. She describes the testimony of one young woman, for example, who attributed dress standards with submission to God rather than male leaders. She further explained that by submitting her body completely to God, she was able to supersede the expectations of her husband and other male leaders. This interpretation of dress standards suggests that female empowerment through dress is only made possible through female

community, as women reject the legalism that men interject into dress standards and redefine dress on their own terms.

Furthermore, Lawless (1986) also examines Pentecostal women's hair as a symbol of spiritual authority rather than female submission She suggests that due to the Pentecostal emphasis on scriptures like 1 Corinthians 11:15 which identify women's hair as "her glory," long hair is often a sign of spiritual power (Lawless 1986). This concept is significant as it contradicts dress scholars' assertion that dress codes concerning hair length negates women's autonomy (Maine 2018). Thus, Pentecostal dress practices may provide unique insight into conversations on the relationship between dress codes and women's agency.

However, Lawless also asserts that while dress standards can and often are used by Pentecostal women as a means of empowerment, they can also be used to reject and other those who do not adhere to Pentecostal dress. Similar to Scott (1994), Lawless also points out the ways that the movement's "poor-dress" allows the community to either accept or reject ideologies, communities, and individuals. She states that by denying secular fashion –a sacrifice which the community deems extremely admirable— they essentially are able to comment on the immorality of the surrounding society, which draws clear boundaries between "saints" and "sinners." In this way, Lawless suggests that just as their foremothers rejected the fashion trends of their time, Pentecostal women of the modern church embody a similar relationship which simultaneously communicates their shared identity with other Pentecostal women and their separation from those who do not embody such practices. The rhetoric of both "saint" and "sinner," which is present in both Scott and Lawless's scholarship is significant as it suggests the distinctive role dress plays in the Pentecostal rejection of women who leave the traditional standards.

The final aspect of Pentecostal dress culture and its social implications that I want to point out, is that of the recent emphasis upon women's extravagant fashion (which I have already briefly mentioned but will now expound upon). Marie Griffith (1997), in her work on Evangelical, specifically Pentecostal, women, briefly suggests that despite rejections of secularism, many women are nevertheless drawn to attractive fashion. This trend seems to have further developed within the last several decades. Although there is a limited amount of studies on modern Pentecostal dress, the work of graduate students (also members of the Pentecostal tradition) have found intriguing trends within dress culture . Phillips (2012) studied dress within the Pentecostal sector The Assemblies of God and found that Pentecostal women often find unique ways of negotiating dress standards so that their dress is still modern and fashionable, such as layering outfits that would otherwise be perceived as "immodest." This emphasis on attractive fashion is even further illustrated in Megan Geiger's work (2016). Her field studies explore Pentecostal women at UPCI conferences, such as NAYC (North American Youth Congress) –a biannual youth conference where thousands of young Pentecostals gather for a series of services. She explains that fashion, particularly for women, is a critical aspect of the conference, as women take great pains in choosing, packing, and transporting their very best and "most Pentecostal-looking outfits." This enthusiasm also applies to women's hair as a majority of the women spend a significant amount of time crafting intricate hairstyles for both daytime and nighttime services. The culture Gieger (2016), Phillips (2012), and Griffith (1997) describe is strikingly different from the movement's early deemphasis of stylish dress and subsequent adoption of "poor-dress gospel" (Blumhoffer 1993). Rather than using dress to reject the "world's" obsession of self and the body, as Lawless (1988) attributes to the women she studied, modern Pentecostal culture seems highly focused on the body, even to the point of creating a

subculture of fashion specific to Pentecostal conferences; of course, the qualification of this intense focus on the body is that the body in question must still be deemed "modest" by the Pentecostal doctrine. However, even within the extremely limited studies that do describe this trend, they do not suggest how this modern emphasis on the body and fashion affects Pentecostal women's identity or the traditional "sinner" and "saint" narratives found within traditional Pentecostal culture.

Deconversion Narratives

What is deconversion?

While the historical origins and dress culture of Pentecostal and Holiness traditions provide context for women's experiences within these churches, the concept of deconversion sheds light on the specific transition that the present thesis explores. As John D. Barbour (1994) defines the term in his work *Versions of Deconversions,* "deconversion" refers to the "loss or deprivation of religious faith" (p. 3) Through analyzing literary deconversion stories as narratives, Barbour establishes deconversion narratives as a genre with four key components: 1.) doubt or denial, 2.) moral criticism of the former way of life, 3.) intense emotional pain, and 4.) a rejection of the former community (p. 2) These components tell us several crucial things about the deconversion experience. First, it contradicts much earlier research, primarily conducted during the 70's and 80's, which described leaving religion as an act of teenage rebellion (Wuthnow & Mellinger, 1978; Hunsberger, 1980). Rather, Barbour's conceptualization of deconversion legitimizes it beyond mere disobedience by suggesting that the experience is a multifaceted process, in which an individual moves from the initial experience of doubt, through moral criticisms, and emotional pain, to finally rejecting the former community.

These four components are further expounded upon by Streib et al. (2009) and Streib and Keller (2014) in their extensive work on deconversion. They propose an additional component to Barbour's original four: the loss of religious experience, or "loss of finding meaning or purpose" within the religious tradition, which they argue can occur as early within the deconversion process as doubt. Strieb et al. (2009) similarly uses these components to assert the gradual and complex nature of deconversion, arguing that these characteristics demonstrate "moving out of a state of naivete and taken-for-granted-ness, raising questions, and developing criticism" (23). However, as both Strieb et al. (2009) and Barbour (1994) agree, this process is not necessarily linear, both in how it is experienced and narrativized. For example, an individual may simultaneously experience emotional pain and feelings of doubt just as they may experience feelings of doubt even after rejecting their former community (Strieb and Keller 2004; Streib et al. 2009). Similarly, when narrating deconversion, individuals tend to blend their present and past experiences, often critiquing their former faith through the lens of either their current faith (for the religious) or logical reasoning (for the nonreligious) (Barbour 1994).

There have been numerous studies that have attempted to classify and explain the various types of Deconversion experiences. Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) for example explore the motivations behind deconverts, or "apostates," as they define them, who reject all forms of religion and "switchers" or those that transition to a new belief system. Through a series of self-administered questionnaires, they concluded that nonreligious deconverts tended to experience doubt between the ages of 13 and 14, while religious deconverts experienced it between 15 and 20. They also found that nonreligious deconverts cited "gradual drift into nonbelief" and "hypocrisy" as their major motivations, whereas religious deconverts only cited "hypocrisy" (249). Bromley (1998) on the other hand, groups deconverts based on the religious group they

originated from. He argues that mainstream churches are left by “defectors or deserters,” Charismatic churches by “whistle-blowers,” and new religious groups by “apostates.” However, while many scholars such as Bromley and Brinkerhoff and Mackie paint an arguably negative image of deconverts through their classification, Janet Jacobs explores the deconversions of women from new religious movements, citing manifestations of patriarchy as the motivating factor in their stories. The women in her study were not only given subordinate roles to men but were also pressured into sexual acts with male leadership, thus causing them to leave their faith community.

Jacob’s results are crucial to understanding deconversion narratives because they suggest that deconversion is extremely contextual. That is, a female deconvert may encounter a completely different set of experiences when transitioning out of a church as compared to a male deconvert due to the underlying patriarchal influences within the belief tradition. This same concept may apply to individuals of colors and individuals that come from religious communities of varying levels of legalism. Thus, the religious styles perspective, adapted by Streib et al. (2009), is helpful when approaching deconversion narratives due to its ability to view “religious development as an adaptive, multidimensional process, which is situated in context and which may involve gains and losses throughout a lifespan” (24). This perspective is relevant to the current study as it may allow for a broader understanding of diversity and nuance across women’s stories.

Pentecostal Deconversion and Dress Deconversion

When compared to the scholarship on deconversion, there is limited information about the deconversion experience within Pentecostal churches. In his dissertation, Andrew Connolly (2015) explores Pentecostal deconversion narratives through personal memoirs, novels and short

stories, and celebrities' promotional interviews. He concludes that Pentecostal deconverts tend to adopt a liberal spirituality, concerned with freedom, individuality, and rationality, or neoliberal spirituality, similar to liberalism but with an emphasis on market sensibility. He also found that Pentecostal deconverts tend to portray their former experiences as "educated, modern, and liberal in their approach to religion," while their former faith is characterized as, "oppressive, narrow minded, dogmatic, and most of all, irrational" (15), due to the nature of ecstatic worship. Thus, Connolly's results suggest that Pentecostal deconversions are somewhat radical in nature as individuals position themselves as the antithesis of their former faith due to the legalism they experienced.

While this is certainly true of many deconverts, Mantisen (2020) suggests a more nuanced version of Pentecostal deconversion. Mantisen's study, which examined the deconversion experience within the Finnish Pentecostal Movement, argues that while some individuals may leave Pentecostalism due to oppressive leadership and other manifestations of legalism, others may be predisposed to disconnection due to their calm personality. He explains this further through the experience of his participant Urho:

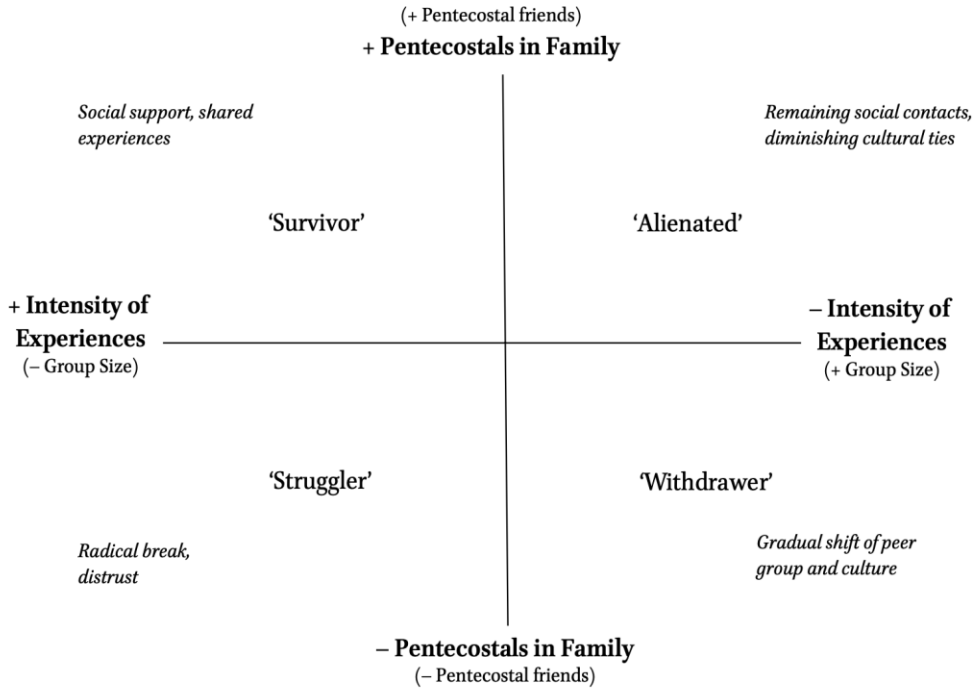
> "[For Urho,] the central features of Pentecostal practices and belief, ecstatic experiences of falling down, speaking in tongues, and worshiping with hands held high presented a culture which he could never relate to. He did not have strong conflicting emotions; the emotional state and its balance just did not resonate with him."

Urho's experience represents a clear difference from the more radical experience identified within Collonny's research, suggesting that for some individuals, deconversion is less of an active choice or moral criticism, and is more of a simple, personal preference.

Mantisen (2020) also suggests his own typology for the differences in deconversion narratives, suggesting four distinct personas: "Survivor," "Alienated," "Struggler," and "Withdrawal" (182). To explain the definition of these terms and the relationship between them, he offers the chart below (pictured in Figure 2) which places the intensity of experiences on the X axis and the number of Pentecostal family or friends (also described as "social support") on the Y axis, as the two major indicators of which type the deconvert represented.

Although Mantisen does not offer much elaboration on the exact meanings of the terms he uses within this typology, he does qualify "intensity of experiences" as the level of severity of personal experiences within the Pentecostal belief tradition. However, he does not explain how he measures this "intensity" within his participants' interviews. He does offer more insight into the "Pentecostals in Family" factor, which he explains correlates with the number of Pentecostal generation and the parents' conversion experience. According to Mantisen, "converted parents tend to have more conservative morals than socialized parents [parents who also grow up Pentecostal], who approach their religion as an inherited culture rather than life-altering experience" (181-182). Mantisen also includes the number of Pentecostal friends in his definition of "social support," arguing that the presence of both Pentecostal friends and family had a positive effect on deconverts' leaving experiences.

Based on this chart, he explains that when individuals experienced intense experiences with sufficient support from friends and family, they identified themselves as "survivors" because they were able to find new communities and acceptance. "Strugglers" on the other hand, had a much more difficult time after their deconversion due to their extreme experiences and lack of support. In contrast, "Alienated" individuals with significant social support and non-intensive experiences retained social relationships with much of their former community but lost



GRAPH 14.1 Types of leavers from Finnish Pentecostalism

Figure 2: Mantisen' (2020) Deconversion Chart

all emotional or spiritual connection. Finally, "Withdrawers" with little social support and non-intensive experiences, described a more gradual shift away from their former community as their relationships and interests began to develop outside of Pentecostalism. While Mantisen's typology for Pentecostal deconversion is helpful in understanding the common tropes among deconverts' experiences, it does not consider the role that gender or the body plays in these troupes. This is also true of Conollly's work as his work examines deconversion narratives holistically and discusses the body as subject to Pentecostal dress standards but does not explain how these standards impact deconversion.

Thus, the current thesis seeks to fill this research gap by studying the role of the body and embodiment within women's deconversion narratives. Through examining women's description of not only their spiritual deconversion but their *dress* deconversion, this study will build upon the typologies presented by Mantisen (2020). It should be noted that when I use the term "spiritual deconversion," I am referring to Barbour's (1994) traditional definition of deconversion, or the leaving of renouncement of a former faith and faith community, and when I use the term "dress deconversion," I am expounding up this definition to specifically note the leaving of renouncement of former dress practices. Thus, by focusing specifically on the concept of dress deconversion, I aim to contextualize the existing conversation surrounding religious deconversion. Additionally, this study will also explore the ways in which women's bodies not only reflect or engage with rhetoric, but *become* rhetoric through their active role in communicating the individual's inner perceptions and conflict of her former faith. Thus, by examining the specific ways that the body plays an active and rhetorical role in leaving a faith tradition and navigating this transition, this study will highlight the ways in which scholarly conversions surrounding rhetoric, embodiment, and deconversion can and often do collide.

Therefore, based on these research goals, my analysis will be guided by three major inquiries: 1.) How do former Pentecostal and Holiness women narrativize their deconversions? 2.) What role does embodiment and the body play within these narratives? 3.)How do women's dress deconversion differ from or overlap with their spiritual deconversion? To answer these research questions, I conducted a research study that consisted of 11 interviews with former Pentecostal or Holiness women on their deconversion narratives which is outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

To answer my research questions, I utilized two methods of data collection: a brief online survey and an in-depth follow-up interview. The responses from my online survey allowed me to recruit participants for my interviews which ultimately became my primary source of data. I analyzed the transcripts, looking specifically at references to dress, the body, and trauma, as well as noting what narrative arcs were emerging across multiple women's interviews. I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in late Fall, and began recruitment near the end of 2022. In the following sections, I provide further detail about my recruitment, participants, interviews, and data analysis.

Recruitment and Surveys

To recruit participants for my follow-up interviews, I developed an anonymous 11 question survey using Google forms. This survey asked general questions about the participant's relationship to and feelings about the Pentecostal church and dress standards. Because this survey was intended to recruit participants for my interviews and was not my primary method of data collection, all questions were multiple choice so that the duration of the survey would be as brief as possible. The questions were generally ordered from least sensitive to most sensitive. The first three questions asked about their history with and current association with the Pentecostal church, while the following six questions asked about their feelings and perceptions of the dress standards. The final question asked about their interest in a follow-up interview. Except for the first and last question which were "yes" or "no", I used the Likert scale. I used this format to gauge the level of agreement to a given statement, from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." I also measured how often they had experienced a particular feeling or event, including an option that indicated they had experienced it in the past but no longer did.

The Likert scale also helped maintain the overall neutrality of the survey by allowing participants to respond positively to questions about Pentecostal dress. This neutral language was particularly important to me when designing my survey because I wanted to ensure that I did not assume or influence a participant's perception of the Pentecostal faith or dress standards in any way. As I previously described in my introduction, although I had originally intended to recruit participants from within the Pentecostal church, I ultimately relied solely on my personal contacts and snowball methodology. Through the recommendation of one of my personal contacts, I was able to gain access to Berean Holiness, an online community of Christians that have either left Pentecostal, Holiness churches or are transitioning out of them. Although the community has a presence on both Instagram and Facebook, my personal contact led me to accessing the group through a Berean Holiness private Facebook group. Ultimately, I sent my survey to several members of this virtual community as well other personal contacts that were not associated with the community. In total, I received 33 responses to my survey, with 20 participants indicating interest in a follow- up interview and providing their contact information. Of the 20 that showed interest, I contacted the first 13 who had also reported feeling conflicted with the dress standards. From the 13 participants who were contacted, 11 responded, and I was able to set up interviews with them.

Interviews

My interviews were semi-structured and were intended to expand upon the responses I received from my survey data. I developed 11 primary questions with several follow-ups that asked participants to explain specific responses and to provide examples that represented that experience. I also asked specific questions not included in the survey, most of which explored their transition out of their former church. I drew from several scholarly works to inform my

interview techniques, including Seidman (2019) who emphasizes listening, encouraging participants to share stories, and establishing a relationship with participants. Seidman's advocacy of narrative driven interviews became extremely relevant to my interviews, as I quickly noticed participants' accounts of their experiences with and transitions out of Pentecostal Holiness churches not only contained individual stories but were stories themselves and followed an overarching narrative structure throughout their entire interview. I also drew from the work of Lori E. Ross. Based on her experience of interviewing women from her own community, Ross (2017) encourages insider-researchers to build rapport with participants through offering empathy grounded in their own experiences. She explains that rather than interfering with the interview's neutrality, researchers who use their identities as "insiders" to validate participants' experiences are able to help them navigate challenging emotions and encourage authentic responses. This strategy proved incredibly helpful to my interviews due to the inherently emotional nature and extreme uniqueness of my participants' experiences.

Prior to each interview, I reviewed their survey responses, and at the start of each interview, I began by asking them to share their histories with the Pentecostal, Holiness church. While I occasionally referred back to my prescribed questions, most of my interviews did not follow this structure. Rather than having to prompt my participants to explain their motivations behind survey responses or details about their transition out of the church, participants addressed these points on their own by relating the story of their experience. Because I had designed my interviews to be semi structured, I welcomed participants' active role in leading the discussion and asked questions that were specific to them in an attempt to clarify or request more detail. I ended the interview by asking the participant to share any final thoughts or experiences related to hair and dress that we had not yet covered as this allowed them to discuss anything that we had

overlooked or that had not initially fit into their narrative. Because most of my participants were not located near me, the interviews were conducted over zoom. The exception was one in person interview that took place at the participant's home. Each interview lasted roughly 1 hour, although the maximum time length was 2 hours.

Participants

As previously mentioned, I interviewed a total of 11 women in my follow up interviews. All 11 women were white and were between their 20's and 50's. 7 of my participants were in their 30's, 1 participant was in her 20's, and two participants were between the ages of 40 and 53. Each woman had significant experience with the traditional Pentecostal, Holiness dress standards, including but not limited to skirts or dresses that come below the knee, sleeve length limitations, restrictions on jewelry and makeup, and rules against hair cutting. Although all of the women had experienced some variation of these standards, the specific guidelines differed widely across my participants even for those who had come from the same organization. Largely because I was unable to recruit from within a church community, each of my participants had already left their former Pentecostal or Holiness church at the time of our interview. However, many of them came from various types of Pentecostal communities. Of the 11 participants, 6 described their former group as Apostolic Pentecostal or Oneness Pentecostal, 4 described their former group as Holiness or Holiness Pentecostal, and 1 described hers as Faith Assemblies, a lesser known denomination that she explained was similar to Holiness but had largely begun to diminish in recent years.

Table 1: Participants' Former and Current Religious Affiliations

Participant	Former Denomination	Current Religious Identity
Florence	Apostolic Pentecostal	Non-denominational
Sierra	Holiness Pentecostal	Various denominations
Lauren	Apostolic Pentecostal (UPCI)	Non-denominational
Krista	Holiness Pentecostal	Non-denominational
Edie	Apostolic Pentecostal (Independent)	Free Will Baptist
Lacey	Apostolic Pentecostal	Nonreligious
Molly	Conservative Holiness	Evangelical Free Church
Lexie	Holiness (Independent)	Assemblies of God
Donna	Faith Assemblies	Non-denominational (Pentecostal)
Margret	Apostolic Pentecostal (WPF)	Southern Baptist

Data Analysis

Upon completion of each interview, I uploaded the zoom or audio recording onto Rev, an online transcription service that utilizes AI technology. Once the transcripts were completed, I compared the file to the original recording, making any needed corrections for accuracy or privacy purposes. Due to the dense, narrative structure of my data, I knew I would need a comprehensive method of analysis that would capture overall findings while still representing individual stories. I, therefore, drew from Riessman's (2008, 2012) work on narrative analysis, specifically her framework for structural and thematic analysis. She explains that thematic analysis is concerned with "what was said," "what are the events told," "what main idea or theme is directly or indirectly stated," and is largely subject to the context of the story itself' rather than a set of prescribed rules. Structural analysis, on the other hand, focuses on "how" the story happens, utilizing conventional elements of narrative– introduction, rising action, climax, resolution, etc.). Riessman (2012) also encourages researchers to use multiple types of analysis since a single method may not authentically capture the story's full content and context. Therefore, based on this framework, I employed both structural and thematic analysis, which I will explain further in the following sections.

Structural Analysis

I began interpreting my data through structural analysis to emphasize the narrative components of my data. As scholars agree, deconversions are not only stories about leaving faith but also contain very specific structural elements. It is also apparent, based in part on the extremely few studies that contain structural analysis of deconversion narratives, that these elements can be difficult to codify within their narrative structure. Therefore, by grounding my subsequent coding in my structural analysis, I was able to prioritize the overall narrative

structure of my data. To accomplish this goal, I used five narrative elements: Inciting Incident, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Denouement. The definitions of these elements which I used based on the content of my data is included in the following chart.

In each interview transcript, I began by identifying the story's climax, or the point at which the participant left her former faith. This tactic allowed me to separate the narrative into two primary sections: pre-deconversion and post-deconversion. I then began working through each narrative chronologically, beginning with the pre-deconversion accounts and sorting the content into either "Exposition" or "Rising Action." I then turned my attention to the post-conversion accounts and identified the "Falling Action" and "Denouement." On the occasion that an event within the narrative overlapped between two elements, I grouped it in the category that it most closely aligned with.

Thematic Analysis: Coding

The next portion of my analysis was based on Riessman's (2012) concept of thematic analysis, which focuses on the themes and concepts within a narrative. However, while Riessman's specific framework typically does not divide data into codes, opting instead to keep the narrative whole, I chose to blend Riessman's methods with traditional coding techniques. In addition to exploring some of these narratives holistically, as I do in Chapter X with four participants, I also decided to inductively code for the common themes and concepts within my transcripts. I examined one transcript at a time, reading it through twice and specifically noting common themes on the second read through. After I had identified the common themes of each transcript, I developed a formal coding schema. I then divided these codes into three general categories: Pre-deconversion (codes that typically occurred before deconversion), Post-

Table 2: Structural Elements

Exposition	Describes how participant came to her former faith and how she felt about her faith pre-conflict
Rising Action	Describes troubling experiences within her community that caused her to doubt or question.
Climax	Describes leaving her faith
Falling Action	Describes the period post-deconversion during which she grapples with her identity and religious perceptions
Denouement	Describes her current perceptions about her former faith and present religious affiliations

deconversion (codes that typically occurred after), and Overarching (codes that occurred equally throughout). A complete copy of my coding schema can be found in Appendix X.

Analysis of Post-Deconversion Embodiment

While my structural and thematic analysis explores how these stories are told and what themes they contain, these methods did not sufficiently answer my research questions because they could not provide a comprehensive representation of participants' experiences with embodiment. Thus, as Riessman (2008, 2012) suggests, I employed a third form of analysis, based on my findings from both structural and thematic analysis, to better identify the specific ways in which my participants experienced embodiment post-deconversion, how they deviated from their former holiness standards, and the effect these experiences had on their identities. To accomplish this goal, I drew from Temuu T. Mantisen's (2020) research on Finnish Pentecostal deconversion. His graph, which I previously described and pictured in my literature review, illustrates how the four types of deconverts he identified in his study correlated with both the amount of social support and intensity of experiences. However, rather than using this graph to represent my participants' experiences with deconverting from their faith community, as Mantisen does, I adapted it to represent my participants' deconversion with their dress standards. To reflect this change, I revised his two indicating factors to outside social support (or the amount of support a participant received outside of their former faith communities) and radical / reactivity (or the participant's level of extreme deviation from her former dress codes). I will explain both of these factors further in Chapter 6. By plotting my participants onto this graph, based largely on the "Falling Action" portion of their narratives, I was able to identify four common troupes: "Assertive Transformation," "Urgent Escape," "Principled Mediation," and

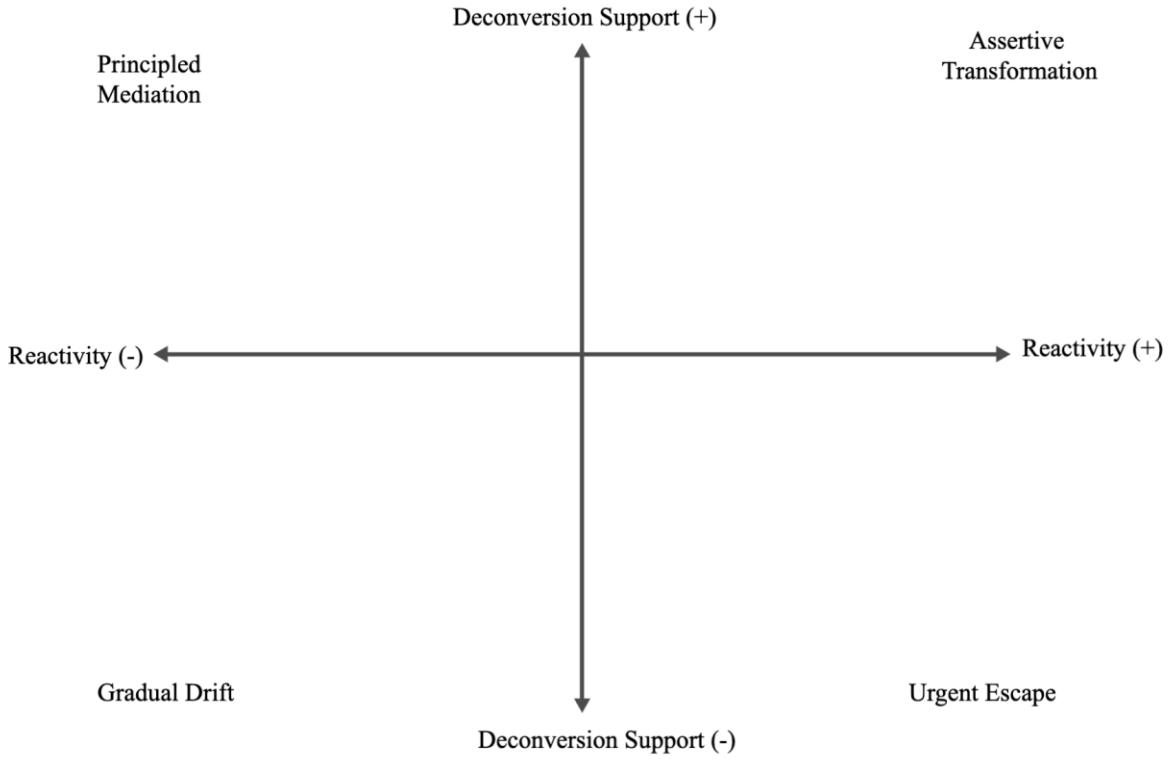


Figure 3: Dress Deconversion Typology Chart (Template)

"Gradual Drift." In order to relate my participants' narratives more holistically, I chose one participant that I felt embodied each of these types and will tell their stories in Chapter 6.

Limitations

It is important to note that this study is limited in several ways, including (though most likely not limited to) the size of my participant pool, the demographics of my participants, and the recruitment of my participants. First, because the purpose of this project is to explore certain aspects of an extremely diverse and extensive religious group, the number of participants that I was able to interview represents the scope of my project and the extent that my findings may apply to the larger group of Pentecostal deconverts. Due to the time constraints of the current work, I limited my study to 11 participants, and although a smaller participant pool did allow me to deeply analyze their experiences, it also limited the scope of my study. While the findings of this study can offer significant insight into trends which *may* occur throughout women's deconversion process, it cannot accurately represent all former Pentecostal or Holiness women's experiences. Secondly, it is important to note that the participants I recruited and interviewed were all white. This demographic is a reflection of my volunteers, as there were no women of color that took part in my survey. As a result, this thesis's findings are undeniably shaped by the ethnic identities of my participants and, thus, cannot account for the experiences of Black, Hispanic, Asian, or other ethnic minorities' experiences deconverting from Pentecostal and Holiness communities.

The final limitation I want to emphasize is in regards to my recruitment process. As I have already noted in my introduction and briefly in my methodology, my original plan to recruit women from within a Pentecostal church ultimately failed as I was not given permission by the church leaders to conduct my study. As a result, my intention of exploring women's experiences

who were currently wrestling with religious conflict within their church communities did come to fruition. Thus, this study focuses on women's past experiences with Pentecostal dress. However, while this shift in my research plan does limit my findings in terms of my original intentions, focusing exclusively on women who had deconverted ultimately proved extremely rewarding, as I was able to explore the entire deconversion narrative from initial membership to finally coming to terms with deconversion. However, it is worth noting that because of this shift, I ended up recruiting most of my participants from Berean Holiness, an online community of women who had left Pentecostalism but were still presently religious. As a result, while 9 of my participants were still Christians, only 2 participants identified themselves as nonreligious. This fact may have influenced the themes that arose from my analysis and my overall results.

Chapter Four: Structural Analysis Findings

In this chapter, I will outline the results of my structural analysis findings, or how my participants constructed their deconversion narratives. This chapter will be divided into five sections comprising the five narrative elements that I used to delineate my participants' stories. Overall, this chapter will examine my participants' stories from a more general overview, rather than relating them individually. This approach will allow me to focus on the overall progression that my participants made throughout their deconversion narratives, and to establish a foundation of initial findings that I will then use to further examine the role of embodiment in the following chapter.

By delineating the structural elements of my participants' stories, I was able to examine their stories chronologically, beginning with their initial introduction or beginnings in their church (Exposition) and ending with their current attitudes towards their former community (Denouement). This helped me trace each narrative thread individually while also examining the ways in which these threads intersected or mirrored each other. Overall, I found that while my participants' stories could be delineated into my five narrative elements, these elements did not naturally occur in chronological order when participants related their experiences. Although participants tended to begin with Exposition by explaining how they came to be within the Pentecostal or Holiness movement, their descriptions of Rising Action experiences occurred throughout the entirety of their interviews. Similarly, participants would often interrupt their narrative at various stages to offer commentary from their current perspective, or descriptions of Denouement. This trend seems to support existing scholarship on deconversion narratives which describe them as extremely complex rhetorical works (Barbour 1994; Connolly 2015).

Exposition: Blind Acceptance

For the purposes of my analysis, I defined Exposition as my participants' earliest, pre-conflict experiences with their faith, including how they or their families originally converted. By far the most common experience, described by 9 of the 11 women, was growing up in the church from birth or a very young age. However, even within this experience, there was differentiation. For example, 5 of the 9 women described growing up in families that were also Pentecostal or Holiness, and in some cases, this shared religious heritage extended for several generations. One notable example of this type of exposition can be found in Anne, who interestingly, begins her narrative not with her own story but with her grandfather's. Her opening statement, "I was a third-generation oneness Pentecostal," is immediately followed up with a mini-narrative that details how both her grandfather and father became Pentecostal pastors. While I will dive much deeper into Anne's story in the following chapter, Anne's exposition suggests that her family's history in Pentecostalism provides the foundation for her own story, even to the point of eclipsing her own early experiences.

Edie, on the other hand, also identifies her grandfather as the pastor of an Apostolic Pentecostal church. However, when providing this history, she also offers insight into her own experiences growing up: "my grandfather's the pastor, so I grew up with it [Pentecostal life] just being the norm, and I probably thought nothing of it as a kid… " Here, Edie associates her early years in Pentecost and even her generational history with a sort of blind acceptance. The implication is that because the Pentecostal church was so intertwined with her and her family's lives, she simply accepted the church and its teachings as part of her reality. Edie also describes a similar experience relating to Pentecostal dress standards when she states, "I don't know that I noticed anything majorly with the dress codes as a kid either, except for maybe that I wasn't

allowed to go to swim parties when my school friends would have those, and that would be annoying because you feel left out." It is important to note that although Edie does describe a negative experience with dress standards during her exposition, her "annoyance" was attributed to being unable to attend pool parties rather than the specific dress guidelines that prevented her from swimming. This association implies that although Edie did identify conflict within her earliest years, she did not use these experiences to question the legitimacy of Pentecostal dress teachings. This blind acceptance of the Pentecostal church and dress, which is explicitly described by 4 other women of similar family history, suggests that women do accept the religious identity and embodiment they inherit. Yet, this early acceptance is more of a neutral reflection of their family's expectations rather than their own knowledgeable and willful decision.

In addition to women who grew up with families in their former faith, 6 of the 11 women described growing up in families that either were not Pentecostal or Holiness, or did not follow the dress standards. In contrast to the women who grew up in the faith, these women chose to become and stay Pentecostal until their deconversion. However, their choice was often predicated upon a desire that the church met or a fear that it created. Florence, for example, describes her experience growing up in an abusive home and attending a Pentecostal church with her grandparents on the weekend:

> I grew up in a really, really bad home… The church was an outlet, even if it didn't always feel inclusive, it wasn't where I was being abused. It wasn't with somebody drinking and screaming and throwing things and punching the wall. So, it was either fit in with them and change to look like them, or stay in this home where I was absolutely miserable.

In this exposition, it becomes evident that as a child, Florence deeply desired an "outlet," or an escape from the abuse she suffered at home. Thus, Florence's choice to attend her grandparents' church over her abusive home is not a reflection of religious desire but of basic self-preservation. Similarly, her description of the dress standard expectations suggests these dress practices were not a matter of personal choice but mandated compliance required for her membership in the community. Thus, the extreme repercussions of not choosing the church or not conforming to the standards caused Florence to accept Pentecostal teachings with as much acquiescence as those who grew up in Pentecostal families

Finally, while Florence's exposition relates a need-based acceptance, Margret describes accepting the Pentecostal teachings largely out of fear. As one of the only two women I interviewed who converted to Pentecostalism as an adult, Margret's story is particularly intriguing. She explains that during her time at community college, when she was experiencing a particularly lonely and difficult time, she encountered a Pentecostal church that offered her community. "… the people were really sweet and friendly," she stated, "So I started going to the services there, and I felt I had found a second family… I would look back on it and say it was a honeymoon period in a way." While this statement would imply a need-based acceptance similar to Florence's, Margret quickly explains that her need for community was also accompanied by her fear of religious wrongdoing and rejection.

> I enjoyed wearing jewelry, But I was like, they're not wearing jewelry. And if I do, I'm the odd man out and I don't want to appear less spiritual. And if they say God says it's wrong, then I'm going to stop doing that as well. So, I just fell in line with all the standards.

Here, we see Margret describe her fears relating to potential sin and social acceptance in such close proximity that they are almost indistinguishable. Her statement, "I don't want to *appear* less spiritual," suggests quite literally that her adoption of Pentecostal dress standards was not a matter of personal religious conviction, but of her perception that appearance communicated spirituality and social acceptance. Therefore, her language does not reflect an informed, active choice but a "falling in line with" or another form of acquiescence.

The fact that nearly all of my participants' described a version of blindly accepting Pentecostal teachings and dress standards within the exposition of their narratives provides interesting insight into Pentecostal deconversion. Based on these expositions, it seems that many Pentecostal deconverts may feel that their conversion was not entirely based on their own, informed beliefs or desires. Of course, this finding does not mean that there are not genuine conversions or personal convictions within Pentecostalism. It also does not mean that those women who do eventually deconvert do not ever genuinely believe the Pentecostal teachings. However, it does suggest that upon reflection, these women are able to examine their former decisions much more critically and can reinterpret their former motivations.

Rising Action- Coming of Age

The second narrative element that I looked for was Rising Action, which I defined as descriptions of doubt or questioning religious teachings as well as troubling experiences that sparked doubt. I defined Rising Action as doubt and conflict because as scholarship on deconversion suggests (Barbour 1994), it is these experiences that directly lead to believers' decision to leave their faith. For most of my participants, this section was the longest portion of their stories both in regards to their actual, lived experiences and their narrativization of these events. Yet, in many ways the Rising Action segments were more unified across my participants

than their Exposition segments. Across nearly all of my 11 participants, experiences of doubt and questioning were described on a continuum of *perceived* intensity. By emphasizing the word perceived, I mean that while women often began their Rising Action accounts with experiences that troubled them to a lesser degree, this choice did not reflect the actual intensity of the experience but of the participants' limited ability to process the experience.

This tendency was particularly true of women that grew up within the Pentecostal or Holiness church. Florence, for example, begins her Rising Action segment by describing the pressure she felt at church camps to dress appropriately: "It was upsetting for me to think that I wasn't doing something right, and I wasn't going to be able to go to that church camp because I didn't have the right clothes. Looking back, I think it's very disturbing that a seven or eight-year-old is upset because they don't have the proper clothes to go to a church camp." While Florence identifies the significance of this experience from her current perspective, we see that her eight-year-old self-interpreted this conflict as a result of her own inadequacy, or something that she "wasn't doing right." This specific experience of self-blaming (which I will explore further in the following section) was also explicitly mentioned by 6 women and implicitly by many more. Thus, similar to my participants' description of blind acceptance in their exposition, it seems that their early experiences of conflict are also defined by a lack of awareness.

However, as women develop physically and, or gain more experiences within the Pentecostal church, this lack of awareness shifts to conscious questioning. Donna, for instance, offers insight into the conflicting nature of this process when she describes her experiences questioning the religious beliefs she grew up with:

> I was questioning my family dynamics. I was questioning religious traditions that were supposed to make me closer to God. There was a lot of conflict. It wasn't a gentle

> process, but it also wasn't born out of a spirit of rebellion if that makes sense. I didn't go through this teenage angst where I walked away from my faith and just trashed everything. It was just more of a coming of age, of looking at things around me and saying, I've been told that the Bible is the standard that we're supposed to uphold, and the Bible doesn't agree with treating women like this, so I'm going to go with scripture on this one.

Donna's description of questioning offers a direct response to many prevailing narratives surrounding deconversion. These perceptions, represented both in church culture and academia, take a negative stance on religious questioning, assuming that "religious defectors" (Wuthnow & Mellinger, 1978) or "apostates," (Roozen, 1980) are most often teenagers rebelling against traditional values. Based on her reference to "a spirit of rebellion" and "teenage angst," Donna is clearly aware of these mistaken assumptions and even uses them to further define her own experiences through juxtaposition. If traditional notions of religious questioning are defined by immature aggression and irrationality, then Donna's experiences embody mature indignation and rationality. Donna further justifies her questioning process by ironically grounding it in the principles of her faith. Because she has been taught to believe in the Bible's authority, she is able to use that authority to challenge the Biblical inconsistencies she identifies in her church.

While Donna is able to critically examine her beliefs through the Bible, many other women described opposition that prevented them from seeking answers to their religious questions. Lacey, for example, references throughout her narrative questions were unacceptable in her community: "You didn't ever question why, you just followed the rules. Keep your head down, do what you're told because if you don't follow these rules, obviously you're not saved." This quote along with two other similar statements were briefly mentioned in her Exposition.

However, Lacey further explains them in her Rising Action when she explains the motivation behind her questions:

> I was about 15, 16. It was around the time I got my first job and I was encountering people that were not Holiness and they would ask questions, they would ask me if I was Amish. Then I would go and say, why *do* we wear dresses all the time? Or skirts? Why can't I wear pants? Because it would be much more modest if I was wearing pants doing a job at the hospital or nursing home. And that was when I learned you don't ask questions because I was told, if you're asking questions like this, obviously you're rebelling in your heart… So, I just shut up. I stopped questioning but my questions never went away. I just quit asking.

It is interesting that, while many women described questioning or bullying by those outside their faith as motivation for their deconversion, Lacey describes it as a type of awakening. Her story suggests that upon encountering others' questions,– possibly for the first time considering the legalism of her home culture– she begins to formulate questions of her own, questions that are then used to besmirch her spirituality and acceptance within the church. It is also significant that although Lacey stopped asking her questions to try and appease her community, her internal conflict with her faith was never resolved. This lack of vocalization due to fear, shame, and pressure of conformity was also described by a majority of my participants to some degree and was always associated with increasing levels of conflict and personal trauma. Therefore, for some Pentecostal or Holiness deconverts, religious questioning may be painful not only due to individual confusion but collective pressure which may cause believers to question in painful silence.

Climax: The Breaking Point

For my participants, the climax of their stories occurred when they finally left their faith both mentally– losing emotional, personal connection (Strieb et al. 2009)– and physically– refraining from services and religious teachings (Barbour 1994). However, these two points of leaving occurred in many different variations across my participants' stories. For some women, these two forms of deconversion occurred simultaneously and were deeply interconnected with each other. Edie, for example, reflects this relationship in her description of why and how she left the Pentecostal faith:

> I was just really questioning why I had ascribed to that [Pentecostal faith]. I felt like if I was participating in it, I was perpetuating it. So, I just slowly stopped participating in those things [Pentecostal dress and services]. And if I didn't want to wear something or make sure it covered my knee, I just didn't anymore. I didn't really put a lot of thought into actively fighting against it. I just was not going to continue perpetuating it.

While Edie had previously described "going back and forth depending on how [she] felt" as a teenager in college, in the above excerpt, she is able to mentally break away from her faith by physically leaving her former dress standards. For Edie, mental and physical deconversion are impossible to separate because she realizes her participation in the church also requires that she perpetuate its ideologies. Because she no longer subscribes to these ideologies, deconversion is the only logical solution. However, it is interesting that despite having grown up Pentecostal, Edie describes her mental and physical deconversion in terms that can be described as emotionally neutral.

While 3 other women explicitly described experiencing mental and physical deconversion simultaneously, Edie's narrative is particularly unique in the fact that she does not

identify one or multiple specific events that triggered this decision. For nearly all of my other participants, descriptions of finally deconverting were paired with individual moments that represented the "final blow" to their religious conflict. Margret, for instance, describes an experience at college when one of her friend's posted a picture of her in sweatpants:

> I was freaking out afterwards. I was like, what if my pastor and his wife see it? Like, oh my gosh, no! But then something caught me, and I was like, wait a minute, who am I really trying to please if I'm so worried about them seeing me playing in the snow in sweatpants? Is it really about pleasing God? And that was, I think, the defining moment where I knew I was going to have to take a step back.

Here, we see Margret critically examining her religious motivations as a result of a specific moment relating to dress. Although Margret described several other conflicting experiences relating to dress and the Pentecostal teaching, they culminate into this specific moment, causing her to recognize the authenticity in her motives and, thus, the legitimacy of her faith. It is interesting that Margret describes "something [catching her]" in the midst of her anxiety, suggesting that though her deconversion was triggered by an event, her specific realization did not originate from a specific, known source but was transcendental in some way. This implication can be further explained through the series of questions she then asks herself, which (as we also saw in Donna's Rising Action) use the core principles of her faith to challenge legalistic teachings. Thus, her deconversion becomes a conversion, as she leaves her old beliefs for a new morally-informed life. This tendency is echoed in Barbour's (1994) work on deconversion narratives in which he argues that deconversions are essentially mirror images of conversion narratives. Thus, it seems reasonable that, just as conversions are often radical and

divinely inspired, that deconversion, at least for Margret, might be of a similar supernatural origin.

Margaret follows up this experience by explaining that because this decision took place away at college where she was distanced from her home church, she was able to deconvert from her community discreetly. She states, “I didn't even ever officially tell my church I left. I just stopped showing up.” Interestingly, this assertion seems to echo Edie’s statement, “if I didn't want to wear something or make sure it covered my knee, I just didn't anymore.” While Margret’s experience differs from Edie’s in its specific and potentially divine origin, we see a similar interdependence between their physical and mental deconversion. In both women’s narratives, their realization about their dress forces them to critically evaluate their community as a whole, causing them to internally disconnect from their faith and mentally deconvert. For Margret and Edie, this internal disconnection creates a “point of no return,” in which physical deconversion occurs almost immediately after as a natural byproduct. It is also interesting that both Margret and Edie deconverted while they were away at college and describe being able to use their new environment to ease and quicken this process. Therefore, it seems that the surrounding context of deconversion, such as age and location, might have a tremendous effect on how deconversion unfolds.

This implication is further substantiated by my participants who described experiencing mental and physical deconversion separately in the Climax portion of their narrative. Anne, for example, whose father is a Pentecostal pastor experienced mental deconversion many years prior to physical deconversion.

> It was a really rough time, and I wanted out as soon as I could get out. So, I ended up staying in the movement until I graduated from art school and I was gone… I knew I wasn't going to live my life that way when I was just like 12. I'm like, this is ridiculous. So… when I left, I left in a big way.

While Anne describes knowing as early as 12 years old that she wanted to leave Pentecostalism, her age and extremely limited resources would prevent her physical deconversion for at least 9 more years. For Anne as well as Edie and Margret, college afforded them the opportunity to act upon their internalized conflict by offering them independence from their former community. However, Anne's experience is unique due to the extended period of time that she had to remain in her community despite her dissatisfaction. The buildup of her internal conflict between her 12-year-old decision to leave and her final escape after college manifests itself in the extremity of her deconversion. This relationship

Although Anne decided to leave Pentecostalism long before most of my participants, her story represents the tendency for women to experience mental deconversion, or internal disconnection, significantly before they physically leave, which was the case for 5 of the 11 women I interviewed. In each of these 5 women's stories, they– like Anne– were deeply intertwined within their faith community when they decided to leave, either due to their age, family relationships, internalized fear, limited resources, or a combination of these factors. This finding is significant because it suggests that for women entrenched within Pentecostal or Holiness traditions, physical deconversion may be more difficult than mental deconversion because women do not have the necessary independence or resources to establish separation from their old faith and to develop new communities. Thus, these women often need an outside catalyst to spark their physical deconversion. Attending college, for example, may provide this

catalyst by offering independence from family and church members. Anne specifically addresses this fact when she admits, “if I had not received a college education and been able to support myself, I don't know that I could have left.” Another common catalyst that my participants identified was issues surrounding their church’s leadership. Lexie, for example, explained that when she finally left at the age of 18, her church “had fallen apart because of leadership issues,” which caused her and several of her friends to start attending another church of a different denomination. Based on Lexie’s and several other participants’ description, issues with church leadership creates a dire enough reason to unite church members which then provides the necessary support for physical deconversion.

Falling Action- Disentangling

Next, I defined my participants’ experiences following their initial exit as Falling Action. These experiences specifically entailed the transitions out of their faith, their disentanglement of former beliefs, and the development of their new lives. This portion of their narratives began with their reactions or responses to church as an institution. While 6 of my participants were able to transition directly into new churches after leaving their Pentecostal or Holiness churches, 5 participants stepped entirely away from church, with 3 participants later returning to churches of different denominations. For the 6 women who transitioned into other denominations, they described their introduction to their new church as spiritual awakenings that completely transformed their concept of God. While these descriptions reflect Barbour’s (1994) assertion that deconversions are mirror images of conversions, my participants’ reactions to their new churches were unique to their former experiences with legalistic teachings about dress. Lacey, for example, describes her first service at her new church in the following excerpt:

> We came back for a Sunday morning, and I just cried through the whole service because it was my first time hearing the message of Grace. Before, everything had been about the dress standards and about how you needed to dress and what you needed to do. About how God saved you, but now the rest is up to you. You're on your own to earn this and keep this. So that Sunday I heard about Grace.

Here, we see that Lacey's emotional reaction to the message of grace is rooted in her former church's emphasis on dress standards. Having grown up in a Conservative Holiness church, Lacey had been taught to embody her spirituality, to earn her salvation through dressing according to her church's standards. Thus, she is able to embrace her new church because they directly counter those previous legalistic teachings. Her description also suggests that for Lacey, attending her new church was instrumental in dealing with the conflict and trauma she had internalized from her former community. This experience was directly mentioned in 3 of the other women who also transitioned to new churches, suggesting that for the women in my study who did decide to join churches after deconverting, the experience effectively allowed them to deconstruct their former beliefs and process their religious trauma.

While all 6 women who transitioned to new churches describe their experiences as extremely positive, they do not directly explain why they chose to transition to a new church rather than leaving religion altogether. According to Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993), this decision has to do with when a believer first begins to doubt their religious beliefs, as their findings suggested that "nonreligious deconverts" tended to experience doubt between the ages of 13 and 14, while "religious deconverts" experienced it between 15 and 20. However, these findings were not reflected in my study as the age of questioning typically did not determine whether my participants transitioned to new churches, left religion, or if they eventually returned

after a period of time. The main factor that did correlate with this decision was the social support of a husband (or occasionally a friend) who attended the new church with them. For example, Krista identifies her husband, who was a minister at a small nondenominational church, several times as "the catalyst" behind her deconversion and subsequent decision to join his church immediately thereafter. While this correlation between my participants' transitions and social support does not represent the only factor that determined whether or not they continued to be religious in the Falling Actions of their narratives, it does offer insight into the relationship between social support and post-deconversion experiences by suggesting that for women who leave Pentecostal or Holiness churches, support from religious partners or friends may have an effect on their continued religiosity.

On the other hand, women who did not transition to a new church often did so due to self-preservation surrounding on-going conflict rather than a complete rejection of religion. Margaret, for example, states that after her deconversion, she was still actively struggling with the traumatic religious teachings from her former community: "afterwards, I was like, God, why won't I ever be enough for you? That's what I thought after leaving." She then shifts to her relationship with church post-deconversion, stating, "I didn't go to any church for a year. Cause I was like, I need to process, and I'm too hurt." At this point in the Falling Action of her narrative, Margret describes finding a new church a year after her deconversion, relating similar experiences of spiritual awakenings and emotional healing as the women who transitioned to churches directly after. Therefore, while her Christian faith, which Margaret identifies as crucial to her identity throughout her narrative, remains deeply important to her after leaving Pentecostalism, her previous religious trauma prevents her from immediately transitioning to a new church. Her description of asking God why she "won't ever be good enough," suggests that

Margaret has internalized a negative concept of not just religion, but of herself. While she is eventually able to fully disentangle these painful beliefs when she joins her new church, Margaret's experience suggests that healing from religious abuse is not exclusive to church. In fact, she suggests that before she can begin to rebuild her religious beliefs in a new church, she must first process her previous experiences on her own terms. This version of Falling Action, in which participants chose not to attend church following their deconversion but then ultimately returned after a period of time, was described by 3 total women, all of which described similar experiences of individual healing and processing.

For 2 women, however, leaving Pentecostalism also meant leaving organized religion as a whole. For Edie, this decision was particularly unique among my participants because although she encountered many of the same troubling experiences that other participants described, she did not internalize them as all of the other women did. Instead, Edie's decision not to participate in organized Christianity reflects her personal moral code:

> I don't necessarily think that the Pentecostal movement is the only way to have a relationship with God or the only type of faith that there is. So, I would say I don't necessarily think that leaving would be a barrier for me towards participating in faith continually. I think the bigger barrier to my faith was seeing things that people call themselves Christian support… I had more issues participating in churches and religions that would support things that I thought were really egregious towards other people. I think I could have easily gone to another church and participated just fine if I felt that it was still in line with my ethos of how to be a good person.

Although Edie's narrative represents the most significant outlier to my results, her experiences are crucial to understanding the wide range of experiences that follow women's Pentecostal and

Holiness deconversions. When asked further about her non-emotional reaction, Edie explained that she had "always been a self-secure person," and admitted that had she been less secure, her experiences in her former church could have led her to question her self-worth. Thus, the fact that Edie has not internalized traumatic experiences related to dress and other legalistic practices of her former church, suggests that in some instances, the context of the situation and even the individual's personality may influence the ways that women react to religious deconversion.

While Edie left organized religion due her personal moral codes rather than internalized religious trauma from Pentecostalism, Molly's Falling Action narrative represents the exact opposite experience. Molly, whose full story I will relate in Chapter 6, identifies herself as "agnostic, maybe even on the edge of atheist," in part because of the extreme teachings surrounding dress, faith, and salvation that she encountered in her Pentecostal church. When explaining the motivation behind her decision to leave Christianity, Molly reflects on the former teachings that she grew up with:

> That is always how it felt. All or nothing. You're either doing it all right or things aren't going to work out because you're not doing something right. That's how it always felt.

She then shifts her narrative to explaining why she ultimately decided to leave religion entirely rather than converting to a different denomination:

> So, when I first left, I definitely went to other churches, and I couldn't do it because it was so ingrained in me that way of thinking… it's either I believe the Bible and I believe the apostolic faith, or I just don't believe the Bible…
>
> And so that level of indoctrination, it's something that I haven't been able to shake. And so, I wasn't able to go to a softer version, you know what I mean?... It was either [Pentecostal] or nothing. And I went with nothing.

Between these two accounts, we see the level of indoctrination that Molly has experienced. Although she has renounced Pentecostalism, she was never able to detach her beliefs about religion from the specific teachings of her former church. Her descriptions of the "all or nothing" narratives of her former church, in which believers either perform their faith perfectly or fail to meet the church's expectations, bleed into her explanation of why she chose to become agnostic. While my participants that did choose to stay Christian were able to reconstruct their religious beliefs to support and align with their post-deconversion life, Molly's is unable to fit any form of religion into her new life because to do so would contradict the most basic foundation of her beliefs, a feat that she admits she was never able to do.

While Molly was the only participant to leave religion for this specific reason, the consequences of Pentecostalism's extreme teachings on salvation were also commented on by several other women, including Florence: "So many Pentecostals walk completely away from God, away from the church. I'll admit I did the same thing. They give nothing else a shot because it was drilled into our heads for so long. It's either this way or no way. It's either Pentecostal or hell." Although Florence did return to religion many years after her deconversion, she is chiefly aware of the challenges extreme Pentecostal teachings present for women post-deconversion. This finding is significant because it offers a more nuanced view into the post-deconversion experiences of women from Pentecostal or Holiness churches. Although the "all of nothing" teaching goes beyond gender specific teachings, it is significant that both Florence and Molly associated dress standards with this teaching at various points in their narratives, such as in Florence's statement, "do this extreme dress standard or do nothing at all." This association suggests that not only do Pentecostal teachings present unique challenges to deconverts'

religiosity as compared to other denominations, but that dress standards may even further complicate these challenges.

In addition to a deconvert's relationship with religion, the Falling Action portion of my participants' narratives also included descriptions of extreme rejections from their former community. In fact, this description was one of the most prevalent issues discussed, occurring in 10 of the 11 women's narratives. Across these 10 women's stories, they most often identified traumatic rejection from their family and friends that ranged from vehement disapproval to complete shunning. Lauren, for example, describes her experience telling her family she was leaving her Pentecostal church.

> I <laugh> told my parents, and they totally freaked out. They are pretty much convinced I'm ruining my life. I'm ruining my kids' lives. And I'm like, we're still going to church. We're just not going to your church. I expected them to be sad. I did not expect them to react so vehemently. And I was like, this right here. This is why people think that the UPCI is a cult… But they're just like, you're quitting church. It's interesting how they see it as me giving up, but in truth, it would actually be so much easier for me to just stay. And I know they'll maybe never understand that,

Lauren's description of her parents' extreme disapproval suggests a significant barrier between Pentecostal parents and their children who deconvert. Her parents' rejection in spite of her insistence that she is still attending church seems to reflect the "all or nothing" dichotomy Molly describes in her Falling Action narrative, which identifies Pentecostalism as the only acceptable form of religion. However, this rejection does not deter Lauren from her decision to deconvert, but rather affirms her negative perception of Pentecostalism and, thus, pushes her farther away. Her final comment which identifies the disparity between what her parents think she is doing–

giving up on religion– versus what she is actually doing– developing her spirituality– illustrates the extreme divide between them and even suggests that it may never be bridged.

This disconnection between parents and their deconverted children is even more extreme for Donna who was completely shunned by her family post-deconversion. She states:

> I've actually been disowned by my family. So yeah, it [deconversion] creates a lot of tension. It creates a lot of issues. But I don't wish myself back at all, in any capacity. Do I wish relationships were healthy and intact? Yes. But to go back to the way things were before, simply to be in those relationships… a hundred percent not worth it. A hundred percent.

Just as Lauren describes her family's rejection as affirming her negative perceptions of Pentecostalism, Donna similarly follows up her description of her family's rejection with adamant support of her decision to deconvert. The fact that Donna explicitly chooses her freedom from her former church over her closest family relationship demonstrates the extreme nature of deconversion from Pentecostal or Holiness belief tradition.

Denouement- Coming to Terms

The final narrative element that I examined in my participants' stories was the denouement, which I defined as descriptions of current perceptions about their new lives and former belief traditions. While each of my participants had extremely different experiences within their Pentecostal or Holiness church and although several identified issues they still currently struggle with relating to their former communities, they all described successfully coming to terms with their deconversion in some way. For several participants, this resolution was described in terms of increased levels of confidence, often specifically relating to their dress and bodies. Florence, for example, described seeing members of her former church in public

while dressed in pants: “Now that I'm older and now that I'm more comfortable in my own skin and more comfortable in my own faith and everything and I see people out, I am not ashamed one bit of going up and hugging somebody…” For Florence and several other participants, increased confidence in themselves and their dress was accompanied by increased satisfaction in their new faith. This tendency would suggest that for the women who did choose to transition to a new belief system, this choice played a consistent and crucial role in their personal as well as spiritual healing.

However, it is important to note that personal healing was not exclusive to continued religiosity, as the women that did not choose to continue their faith still described their current experiences in positive terms. For example, Molly offers the following comparison on her current and former life:

> nothing has changed in my life. I still have good days and I still have bad days and I still strive to be a better person. And the only difference is I don't feel like I'm constantly going to hell and I don't feel like I'm constantly doing something wrong because I know every day that I'm doing the best that I can. So, there's just a lot of freedom for me…

Through this statement, we see that although Molly now identifies as agnostic, she has been able to find freedom on her own terms. Therefore, based on the various ways in which the women were able to resolve their religious trauma and establish new lives, it seems that the Denouement of my participants’ deconversion narratives are extremely nuanced and unique to each individual’s context. It would also suggest a certain amount of resilience among my participants that was not necessarily dependent on an outside source

In addition to their current perceptions and attitudes about their own lives, my participants also discussed their current perceptions about their former community. On one hand,

many of my participants expressed respect and even love for the members of their old churches, such as when Molly admits, “I hate to sound so negative because I think that there are some really good, genuine, beautiful people.” However, these admissions were usually backed up with critical and cautionary qualifiers, such as Molly’s following statement, “Just their way of thinking I think is wrong. And I think it's hurtful.” In one example, Florence reveals her current perceptions of her former community through describing the church to her children. During a fall festival at her former church that she attended with her two young kids, both children began to ask her if they could start attending there:

> [My kids] were like, we like this church, could we come here sometime? And I'm not going to sugarcoat it. I'm not going to put them through what I went through. And I told them, this church believes that in order to go to heaven, you got to wear a skirt every day. you can't cut your hair, you can't have your earrings, you can't wear shorts, you can't wear sleeveless shirts. They really don't like organized sports. And they're like, oh yeah, we don't want to go here. Never mind. And I felt bad because I made it sound horrible, but I also want to protect my kids.

Although Florence had previously described respecting and even embracing the members of her former church, she is also adamant in her wariness of the church as an organization. This fact becomes particularly evident when she describes the need to “protect” her kids, particularly in regards to Pentecostalism’s legalistic teachings about dress. This mention of children and more specifically protecting children from what the deconverted mother went through in her former Pentecostal or Holiness church was referenced in 4 other narratives. Thus, the implication is that while women can and do forgive their former communities, they remain wary of them long after deconversion, particularly when it comes to their own children.

The final trend I identified in the Denouement of my participants' stories was their tendency to express sorrow for those still entrenched in Pentecostal and Holiness churches. Sierra, for example, who converted into Pentecostalism as a 20-year-old, describes her reaction to members of her family that have grown up in a Pentecostal church:

> It makes me sad that my niece and nephews have to listen to that type of oppressive teaching. My niece has problems with her self-esteem to an extent I never ever had myself growing up because I was never underneath that type of scrutiny and criticism.

This reaction of sympathy, reflected across many of my participants' interviews, suggests that while my participants did maintain somewhat of a negative perception of their former church communities in the resolution portion of their narratives, they also experienced empathy for those still within the Pentecostal and Holiness faith. Based on Sierra's description of her younger niece accompanied with several other participants' descriptions of siblings, my findings would suggest that they experienced the most empathy towards family members who they perceived as similar to themselves, at least in terms of their struggles and motives for remaining in the church.

Summary of my Structural Findings and Implications

Ultimately, in this chapter, I have focused on the findings from my structural analysis which has specifically examined the narrative elements that appeared within my participants' stories as well as the implications of each element. Overall, there are several significant ideas that emerge from this chapter and are worth reiterating. First, I found that in the Exposition portion of their narratives, women typically described their earliest experiences with the Pentecostal or Holiness teachings and doctrines as a neutral or need-based acceptance. While neutral acceptances were typically described by women who grew up in a Pentecostal or Holiness family and thus had never known any other way of life, need-based acceptances were

referenced by women that came to the church because of something specific that the church offered them, such as protection or community. This finding is significant since most of my participants did not describe assertively choosing their faith due to their own personal convictions.

In the Rising Action portion of their narratives, women experienced conflicting events or messages through their former church. While many of my participants were unable to accurately assess or process these experiences due to naivety or immaturity, their conscious grappling with doubt and questions grew as they got older. As a result, many of these women's narratives can also be described as a "coming of age" story, an idea that is also referenced in Connolly's (2015) results. Experiences of conflict and doubt from the Rising Action directly led to the Climax portion of the women's stories in which they ultimately left their former faith. It is important to note that for the women in my study, there was often a difference between women mentally deciding to leave their community and their actual, physical deconversion. Due to limited resources, they often described knowing they would eventually leave long before they were able to act on this decision. Furthermore, although several women identified a specific "trigger" moment, most of my participants experienced deconversion as a process, which is also supported by scholarship (Strieb et al. 2009, Barbour 1994)

The Falling Action of the women's stories was characterized by descriptions of disentangling their former beliefs as well as rejection from their former religious community. While descriptions of disentangling were significantly shaped by whether the women chose to remain religious after deconversion, all of my participants experienced some form of rejection regardless of their religious affiliations. These experiences then led to the final portion of their narratives, or the Denouement, in which women described their current perceptions of their

former community. I found that the women had all come to terms with their experiences in some way. However, many of them still maintained a weary aversion to Pentecostalism and Holiness, though they did express sympathy for those (particularly family) still within the church. Overall, these findings support scholarship surrounding religion and, more specifically, Pentecostal deconversion. There are, however, certain aspects of my structural findings that represent a deviation from traditional forms of deconversion. For example, my participants' separation of their mental and physical deconversion was not directly discussed by Mantisen (2020) or Connolly (2015). Furthermore, although scholars do discuss the experience of rejection as a result of deconversion, my participants' descriptions of rejection seemed to be a more prevalent aspect of their stories than is reflected in most scholarship. In Mantisen's (2020) work, for example, two of his four deconversion types represent positive relationships between the deconvert and their former community. Although it is impossible to theorize the exact cause of this deviation, it is significant that most of my participants' descriptions of their rejections were in some way tied to their dress deconversions. I will explore this idea and the role of the body further in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Thematic Findings

In the previous chapter, I explored the structural findings of my analysis, examining relevant trends that emerged through the five narrative elements that my participants used to construct their stories. While examining my participants' stories as combined narratives offers valuable insight into women's dynamic progression through Pentecostal or Holiness deconversion from a more general vantage point, these findings are limited in what they can tell us about specific experiences relating to dress and embodiment. Thus, having explored my participants' deconversion narratives, this chapter will focus on the role that embodiment played in these narratives through the results from my thematic analysis. During this portion of my analysis, I divided the codes I identified into "overarching," occurring equally throughout my interviews, "pre-deconversion" occurring before participants left their church, and "post-deconversion" occurring after they left. This chapter will be divided into

Overarching Codes

Across my 11 interviews, the two most common themes were references to the body and descriptions of trauma. Because these two themes were referenced so often, there were significant variations in both codes, resulting in sub codes that were specific to either the pre-deconversion or post-deconversion segments of my participants' narratives. Although I will address these sub codes more specifically in the following sections, it is important to understand in a general sense how my participants talked about their bodies and their trauma and how these two subjects overlapped.

The Body

I broadly defined references to the body as any mentions of dress standards, fashion, hair, or their physical body itself. Descriptions of dress standards tended to be didactic in nature, in

which participants would run through a list of each standard they previously followed. However, references to fashion, hair and the physical body were much more narrativized and often included themes or experiences not directly related to embodiment (which I return to later on). One aspect of references to the body that I do want to emphasize in this section were descriptions of emotional, embodied reactions or emotional reactions triggered by embodiment. While these instances occasionally overlapped with my other codes, their significance almost exclusively emphasized the role of the body itself within these narratives, which makes these descriptions particularly crucial to understanding my participants' experiences with embodiment. One example of these embodied reactions, which occurred both pre-deconversion and post-deconversion, was participants' descriptions of feeling extremely anxious in church because of their bodies. Molly, for example, describes the experience of cutting her hair and then returning to the Pentecostal church:

> [Pentecostals] really put a lot of stock into that uncut hair. Matter of fact when I got back into church, I struggled with that so bad because in church all I could think about was, oh, people can see my hair is cut. And so, I would feel like I was being judged or talked about or whatever, because I didn't have this glorious, uncut, beautiful hair. And I felt less than because of that.

While Molly attributes this anxiety to her pre-deconversion experiences within the Pentecostal church, Lexie describes a similar reaction to breaking Holiness dress codes even after she left her former community. She relates the time that she attended a special church event through her new church during an exceptionally hot week and didn't pack weather appropriate clothes:

> For some reason I didn't pack enough. I really only had a tank top and shorts, but I hadn't planned on wearing them. It was the first time that I ever wore tank tops in public… and

> it was super, super weird. I have never done it since then, but it was just one of those things. I over-thought the entire time. I was like, oh my gosh, I'm going to mess up some guy's purity. They're going to come get on me because I'm wearing a tank top. It was awful.

For both Molly and Lexie, their fears of being judged due to their physical, nonconformity with Pentecostal dress standards illustrates the way that religious embodiment affected their personal and religious identity. In Molly's description, we see that although she has returned to her Pentecostal faith after a brief time and has wholeheartedly adopted the beliefs once again, she is unable to "uncut" her hair. As a result, she feels that she cannot totally embody the Pentecostal identity and interprets this inability as proof of personal deficiency. Lexie's description, on the other hand, takes place after she has already left her former community, yet her former beliefs about Holiness dress are still very much part of her identity. Thus, her anxieties about being judged do not reflect the actual attitudes of the church she is attending but of the traumatic religious teachings she internalized pre-deconversion. Collectively, these two experiences suggest that women's choice to not embody Pentecostal or Holiness beliefs (even after they deconvert) may negatively affect their self-esteem and religious identity.

The other form of embodied reactions that I identified was in regards to emotional responses with breaking from the dress standards, particularly when women cut their hair. Margret, for example, describes this experience in the following excerpt:

> I was afraid to cut it because of what they had drilled into me… At first, I just let it stay long and just dyed the ends pink just to make it feel a little different even though it was still long. But when I did cut it, that was a moment of panic. I had my mom help me because I was crying and I was so nervous. It's weird. To most people, a haircut is a

> haircut, but after you've been in the Apostolic church, a haircut is not just a haircut. So first, I just trimmed it. And then the second time I was like, mom, cut it to my shoulders. I don't want to have long hair anymore. I'm so done with the memories from the church. And when it was cut to my shoulders, it was such a relief… it gave me a feeling like, okay, I'm finally done with my identity from that church and all the things that they taught me, all the fear. I can start moving on now because that was the last thing that I was afraid to let go of.

The emotional and physical embodiment that Margret describes here is significant for a number of reasons. First it illustrates the slow and painful process of deconstruction that takes place after deconversion. While some of my participants described more sudden, radical breaks, the majority of women experienced deconstruction as a gradual process (as I previously described in the Falling Action section of my structural analysis in Chapter Three). Thus, the various stages that Margret describes in her decision to cut her hair– from first coloring it, trimming it, and then finally cutting it to her shoulders– suggests that the gradual process participants describe when deconstructing their inner perceptions also applies to physically deconstructing the rhetoric of their bodies. Furthermore, as we see in Margret's reaction to cutting her hair, this physical deconstruction is a significant and often highly emotional aspect of deconversion, particularly unique to women from legalistic belief traditions. For Margret, her hair has become a symbol of not just her former church but of who she was within that church. We see this in her decision to dye her hair pink, which she explains is not based on style or personal preference but on her need "to feel different" even though she cannot bring herself to cut it. Then, when she finally does cut her hair short, she explicitly connects this to a personal rebirth: the death of her old identity embodied in her long hair and the birth of who she is now free to become.

Trauma

In addition to references to the body, descriptions of trauma were also an extremely common occurrence within my interviews. While these descriptions were very often interwoven into other codes, particularly with the body and dress, the presence of trauma within my participants' narratives offers insight into the nature of these stories in and of itself. When coding for trauma, I specifically looked for "explicit trauma" –direct usages of the word "trauma" – "implicit trauma" – trauma that is implied by describing intense negative emotions or experiences– and "nonpersonal trauma" – acknowledging or describing the trauma of other people. Across my 11 interviews, the word trauma or some variation of it was used a total of 17 times by 5 different women to describe their deconversion experience. Although most of these five women used these terms expositionally within their interviews, Lauren's usage of "trauma" was particularly interesting as she employed it didactically:

> I feel like spiritual abuse and spiritual trauma is something that has existed forever. But it's something that we've only just now started to really understand and acknowledge. I've heard so many people say "God didn't hurt you, people hurt you." Which, okay, that's true. But… there's a difference between having hurt feelings and having a hurt soul and actual trauma.

Here, Lauren references spiritual abuse and spiritual trauma in order to validate not only her personal experience but the experience of trauma itself. Her purpose in this excerpt then shifts from narrativizing her personal story to informing a broader (unseen) audience about believers' common misconception surrounding church related trauma. While Lauren was the only participant to assume this didactic tone in regards to explicit trauma, this excerpt reflects a broader tendency for my participants to use their traumatic experiences to inform and correct

Pentecostal or Holiness perceptions. This tendency could also be identified as "moral criticism "of former belief communities, which Connolly (2015) and Barbour (1994) both describe within their work on deconversion narratives. However, it is interesting that for my participants these criticisms tended to be explicitly linked to trauma and often even traumatic experiences with embodiment. Such a difference reinforces the idea that the deconversion experiences of Pentecostal women are shaped by traumatic experiences specific to their communities' legalistic teachings, specifically including dress and the body.

This relationship is further supported by the implicit trauma within my participants' narrative. Most commonly, participants implicitly described experiences of trauma through clinical behavior disorders, such as anxiety, panic attacks, and eating disorders. Although these terms were often used to describe specific behaviors rather than a diagnosed disorder, the extremity of the emotional experiences are nonetheless valid. Furthermore, while some instances of implicit trauma were related to more general religious teachings, the majority of them had some sort of connection to the body, dress, or embodiment. In some instances, the connection between implicit trauma and the body were very direct such as Margret's description of her post-deconversion fear:

> … I kept thinking "what if the Apostolics were right? And God doesn't let me into heaven cause I was wearing pants." And so, after leaving I had a lot of anxiety, a lot of panic attacks. It was really hard for me to sleep at night.

Lexie's experience , on the other hand, attributes her eating struggles (that she acknowledges may or may not have been a diagnosable eating disorder) to issues she experienced with dating. However, as we see in the following excerpt, these experiences were significantly intertwined with her religious embodiment:

> [There] had been [a] cycle of guys interested in me because I wore pants. But then the novelty wore off like a kid in a toy store who's like "I want the newest toy, I want the different toy." And then after playing with it for a month or two, they get bored…. That caused a bit of an identity crisis for me… I don't know that I was necessarily bulimic, but I remember being so stressed out all the time that I couldn't eat breakfast without throwing up. I had a hard time eating lunch without feeling nauseous, I would almost gorge myself at dinner.

Here, we see that while Lexie does not explicitly attribute her issues with identity and eating habits to embodiment or dress standards, a connection does exist between these two experiences. As Lexie describes further in the earlier parts of her narratives, she was unique in her Holiness community because she typically did not adhere to the dress guidelines. However, her decision to wear pants caused several Holiness men to assume she was sexually active and to seek out a short-lived relationship with her based on this perception. This experience then causes Lexie profound trauma, as demonstrated by her extreme emotional and physical reaction. It is also significant that her trauma does manifest as an eating disorder (or closely related to it) since disordered eating habits are quite literally embodiments of trauma. While eating disorders were mentioned by only one other participant, these embodied manifestations of trauma, specifically trauma relating to the body, are extremely significant indicators of how deeply interwoven the body and trauma are for former Pentecostal or Holiness women.

Finally, the last pattern I identified when coding for trauma was references to "non-personal trauma" or trauma that belonged to other people besides my participants. While this reference occasionally included people that the participant knew, most often they talked about

"non-personal" trauma in a broad, collective sense. Edie, for example, offers the following commentary:

> I think that it's kind of interesting for me because I don't necessarily have a super traumatized response to it that I know that a lot of people do. I think a lot of people… either they still do [the dress standards] or they absolutely hate it and feel like they've been massively traumatized. But I don't necessarily have that experience… I think I just lucked out by being a super stubborn person

Although Edie explains that she was not necessarily traumatized by her experiences in the Pentecostal church (which she interestingly attributes to the luck of her personality), she is well aware of the traumatic experiences of others, whom she does not name or specify. This awareness would suggest that even women whose deconversions are not emotionally devastating recognize that their experiences are different from more typical traumatic deconversions.

For other participants, non-personal trauma was discussed in relation to social media, and more specifically the Facebook community through which I recruited several of my participants. As I discussed in my methodology, this Facebook group is dedicated to uniting women who have left legalistic churches and offer various resources for deconstructing legalistic teachings. Sierra, for example, references this group when commenting on the trauma other women experience when being rejected by their religious families:

> It's [rejection] very talked about too, especially with social media now. 10 years ago, people weren't as aware of how widespread it is. Are you familiar with [Facebook group]? That's how I see other women's experiences. And it breaks my heart to the fullest extent, all the trauma that people have to go through because of that.

Sierra's assertion that her Facebook community exposes her to other women's experiences offers insight into social media's role in dealing with trauma post-deconversion. As Sierra suggests, social media has become an extremely helpful resource for many women by allowing them to share their trauma, bond with others from similar traumatic backgrounds, and to learn about trauma they may not have experienced themselves. Thus, my participants' descriptions of non-personal trauma, specifically encountered through social media, suggest that the deconversion experience is evolving through online communities as the increased awareness that these communities promote.

Overall, the overarching codes I identified, references to the body and trauma, were highly significant to my participants' deconversion narratives and were deeply interwoven with each other. To comprehensively represent the interdependence of these two themes, I estimate that out of the 154 segments in which my participants talked about the body or embodiment, roughly 93 of them were paired with some sort of reference to trauma. Based on these numbers, 60% of body references were accompanied by traumatic feelings, which would suggest that for my participants, their bodies, their dress, and their hair significantly contributed to their personal trauma and, by extent, deconversion.

Pre-Decoversion Codes

I identified four primary codes during the pre-deconversion portion of my participants' narratives: "camps / conferences," "female enforcement," "gender inequality," and "body shaming." As previously mentioned, these codes often overlap with references to the body and trauma, however, by examining these references as individual codes I will be better able to explore my participants' specific relationship with embodiment and former dress standards.

Camps / Conferences

One of the most common themes in the pre-deconversion portion of my participants' narratives was references to church camps and conferences. They included descriptions of attending church summer camps or regional, national, and local conferences while being part of a Pentecostal or Holiness church. For most participants, these experiences were extremely negative and several cases, even sparked the early stages of the conflict that would eventually lead to their deconversion. Margaret, for example, describes her experience attending a large Pentecostal conference shortly after converting to Pentecostalism in particularly traumatic terms:

> … the conference was really overwhelming and it of course got me really emotional, really passionate, and I got really into it. But one night after service, I was feeling so overwhelmed. And at the time I thought it was an attack from the devil that I was feeling overwhelmed. But now that I'm looking back on it, I'm like, no, I was genuinely overwhelmed. There was a lot going on… So, I ran out of the auditorium and I ran towards the bathroom, and I was panicking because it was just, the music was all over the place and everyone's screaming and it's just crazy…

Margret's description of her experience at the Pentecostal conference references the highly emotive and demonstrative worship that Pentecostalism is known for (Blumhofer1993). In some ways, her negative reaction to the ecstatic worship reflects the results from Connolly's (2015) study which found that Pentecostal deconverts often view the extreme emotionalism of their former community with critical reproach. However, Margret's reaction to this experience is defined by intense emotions of panic and overwhelm rather than analytical critique. Furthermore, her description about previously believing these emotions were "[attacks] from the devil " exemplifies the type of inner conflict that would later contribute to her deconversion. Margret's

tendency to misidentify or mis-blame negative reactions to church related events and teachings– a commonality not just within her narrative, but across many of my participants' stories– only perpetuates Margaret's conflict with her church, thus, making this experience at the conference a significant part of her deconversion story.

While several participants similarly reflected on traumatic reactions to ecstatic worship at camps or conferences, the most often mentioned experience relating to this code was in regards to dress and, more specifically, fashion. This tendency is also true of Margret's story, as she follows up the above excerpt with a description about the dress culture she saw at the conference:

> One thing I noticed is how people dressed in their finest, and there's a lot of headbands and hair clips. And really, in a way, it's flashy because there are really bright, crazy patterns, mismatched patterns… I also went to a lady's conference in Mississippi where I saw it… So, I left those conferences thinking, how is that modest? I mean, they're still covered, but… how is having the flashy patterns and the flashy colors that draw attention to you modest when the point is supposed to be not to draw attention to you… And something else that struck me is how there were a ton of different jewels in the girls' hair, and they would have their hair all piled up with pearls, but I'm like, pearls aren't allowed on our wrists or around our neck. How come it's okay if it's in our hair...But any inconsistency that I noticed at the time, I just brushed it over. It wasn't until later that I, after leaving, then I really started to think through these things and process these things that I had just tucked away in my mind.

In this excerpt, Margret identifies a clear inconsistency between Pentecostal dress culture and the teachings surrounding dress. This inconsistency, which was directly described by 5 other participants, is particularly intriguing considering the historical context of Pentecostal dress

standards. As I previously described in my literature review, research tells us that due to Pentecostalism's close relationship with Holiness movement at its inception, its dress culture reflected the Wesleyan "Plain-Dress-Gospel" of Holiness churches which emphasized plain, unadorned clothing for both men and women (Wacker 1984). This style was further substantiated across Pentecostalism when Bible college adopted formal dress standards aimed particularly at women based on the early Holiness standards (Blumhoffer 1993). While these standards are still part of most modern Pentecostal churches, Margret's experience at church conferences identifies a crucial shift in these standards. While Pentecostal dress maintains many specific standards, such as skirt length requirements and jewelry restrictions, there seems to be a modern emphasis on extravagant fashion. For Margret, who valued modest dress even before converting to Pentecostalism, this emphasis is troubling because it does not align with what she has been taught about modesty both within and outside of her church. Thus, in the above excerpt, we see a clear example of the unique role that dressed bodies play within her deconversion narrative. Although she is not able to identify it at the time, Margret's experiences with Pentecostal dress culture at the conferences she attends contributes to her inner-conflict by creating a very blatant inconsistency between her church's teachings and the lived reality of Pentecostal women.

While several women echoed Margret's reactions to the extravagant fashion they witnessed at church conferences, stories of church camps tended to describe dress in terms of both fashion and strictness. In both cases, these descriptions were typically traumatic. Florence, for example, describes going to junior church camp as a child whose parents were not Pentecostal and, thus, did not own the proper clothes:

> I was told, make sure you have your clothes to meet these standards in order to go to the church camp. It was very upsetting because I was seven, eight years old. I wasn't

> responsible for my wardrobe. I didn't really even have enough clothes to fit those standards. So literally my [grandparents] had to carry me shopping. They went and bought me a couple extra outfits and dresses and things like that because I mean, I was a first grader. We wore shorts and pants to school.

The specific experience of shopping for clothes to meet a camp's standard was also explicitly mentioned in Krista's narrative (in reference to her friend that was not Holiness), which suggests that Florence's experience was not specific to the particular camp she attended. These experiences would suggest that for camps like the ones Florence and Krista identify, dress standards are a very serious requirement, even for children who do not have easy access to clothes deemed appropriate. Additionally, both Florence and Krista stress the negative message that these restrictions communicate to the child in question, which suggests that these experiences contributed to their ultimate deconversion.

Finally, Florence offers one additional experience relating to junior camps that offers insight into Pentecostal hair culture:

> They had one of the ladies doing hair because we did our hair up for the night services. And I think people could tell that I probably wasn't one that always did the standards and that my family wasn't Pentecostal… so she was fixing hair, and I said, can you fix my hair up? Because my mom didn't really fix my hair. I wore it in a ponytail or braided. And she's like, well, if it's long enough I can. And I was nervous that my hair wouldn't be long enough. Because all their hair was super long, and her hair was actually way past the floor… It did end up being long enough, but even at that time I wasn't sure if that was a good enough standard. And, like I said, a seven or eight-year-old should not be worried about how long their hair is,

Florence's experience with fixing her hair at camp reflects a much larger culture surrounding Pentecostal hair. As several scholars have suggested in their research (Lawless, Geiger, Phillips), hair in the Pentecostal church carries significant meaning as it is believed to represent women's "glory." Thus, most Pentecostal churches completely restrict hair cutting. As a result, it is not uncommon for Pentecostal women's hair to be extremely long, even "past the floor" as Florence notes. While this carries spiritual implications, such as in Molly's narrative when she describes women laying their hair on people to pray for them, it also creates a sort of "micro-culture' of Pentecostal hairstyles that intensifies significantly at camps or conferences. Geiger (2016) notes in her field research at a Pentecostal conference that young women– who reportedly only spent five to ten minutes fixing their hair for services at their home church– would typically spend around 30 to 45 minutes arranging their hair into intricate up-dos for a service at an away conference. She also notes that these hairstyles, along with other aspects of their dress, offered women the opportunity to mutually assess each other's spiritual alignment with Holiness beliefs. While Gieger suggests that for the women she observed, elaborate hairstyles were overall very positive experiences, Florence's experiences flip this narrative. Her description of the fear she experienced because of her hair at a church camp suggests that while dress culture at Pentecostal camps or conferences may be a positive, unifying event for women raised in the church and who have the resource to participate in this shared culture, they may be traumatic for women that are unable to conform either due to the length of their hair or their lack of appropriate clothes.

Female Enforcement

The next code I identified was references to women enforcing other women's dress. This reference, which occurred in 7 of my 11 interviews, typically identified older women, often a mother or family member, correcting or commenting on the participants' dress based on

Pentecostal or Holiness dress standards. For both Anne and Donna, this code was described in terms of their difficult relationships with mothers. In both cases, these women explained that growing up, their mothers were constantly policing their dress whereas their fathers held more passive attitudes about the dress standards. Anne, for example, explains that her father, who was a Pentecostal pastor, did not always agree with her mother's strict standards, but would "back her up a lot" anyways out of respect for his wife. Thus, the mother's standards for their daughters' dress was typically never questioned. This family dynamic is further described by Donna who describes a specifically traumatic experience with her mother and dress:

> I had ordered a dress on Etsy, and it was custom made to your body measurements, and it wasn't long enough so [the dressmaker] was going to custom make it. So, it was just at my knees and… it followed your body shape, but it wasn't tight. I remember I was so excited. I had waited for months for the dress to come in. I had saved up for it, and I put it on, and I came downstairs and I walked into the living room and my mom looked at me and said, "you look disgusting. That dress shows your hips, and it looks horrible." And I remember I never put it on again. I donated it to charity. But what was her inherent self-hatred? What was her negative body image that she projected onto me, and what was her religious standard? I don't know if I'll ever know where one stopped and the other started.

In this excerpt, we see a particularly extreme example of female enforcement in which Donna's mother not only critiques her daughter's dress but verbally berates her because of it. Donna's explanation of this experience is particularly interesting because she suggests that this abuse represents not only her mothers' religious standards but her own internalized self-hatred and negative body image. Research shows that negative weight or body related comments from parents, particularly mothers, is often a reflection of generational embodied trauma, since

negative body talk from parents directly affects a child's self-image (Arroyo, Stillion-Southard, and Martz 2022). Thus, by attributing her mother's harsh enforcement of Holiness dress, Donna's experience suggests an interesting relationship between the embodiment of religious beliefs and embodiment of trauma, specifically that the two may be so deeply intertwined they cannot be separated.

Additionally, we see through Lacey's story that the generations of female enforcement often extends beyond one mother-daughter relationship. Lacey explains that her family on both sides was "matriarchal" because her grandmothers held most of the power. Although their roles included policing a variety of behaviors and activities, they were especially concerned with dress. Lacey states: "She [her Grandmother] made sure that everybody was doing what they needed to do to be saved because all of these standards were what your salvation depended upon." It is interesting that because Lacey's grandmother was in charge of dress standards and because their community placed such a strong emphasis on dress, she was also in charge of maintaining her family's salvation, a sacred role that in most conservative religious communities is reserved for male pastors or fathers. This level of power is particularly interesting when compared to scholarship on Pentecostal and Holiness movements that describe the church's marginalization of women (Lawless 1988). Yet, Lacey's (or any other participant's) story does not suggest that women's enforcement of dress standards led to the empowerment of women. In fact, they suggest just the opposite. In this way, Pentecostal and Holiness women occupy a unique role in which they use the power afforded them to enforce dress standards that restrict primarily women. Overall, the tendency for women (rather than men) to enforce the dress of other women demonstrates the nuance of women's experiences within Pentecostal and Holiness churches, and the extremely significant role that dress plays within them.

Gender Inequality

Another common theme I identified was references to gender inequality, specifically between men and women's dress and purity expectations. This code is unique in its frequency as it occurred naturally in all 11 of my interviews. In other words, my participants did not typically address gender inequality as an answer to a question they were asked, but rather brought it up on their own when discussing other related experiences. Typically, my participants' first reference to gender inequality occurred when they described their early experiences questioning dress standards, specifically when it came to visual appearances in modern society. Edie, for example, attributes much of her early conflict with the Pentecostal church to the inconsistencies she identified between men and women's dress:

> … they would say that we're set apart. Someone should be able to look at you and see that you're a Christian. And I can remember asking the unpopular question of, "how do you know that the men are Pentecostal?" Because they look just like everybody else. Why is it only the men who get to be culturally relevant? They're not wandering around in robes looking like a weirdo. That's only the girls. So how is that okay?

Anne's objection to men's ability to blend-in with modern society was echoed across nearly all of my participants' narratives, particularly for the women who grew up Pentecostal or Holiness. In addition to the more general appearance-based objects, several women also voiced frustration for more practical dress related gender inequalities, such as shopping for clothes. Edie, for example, states, "it's difficult to find clothes as a woman that fits these rules, but as a man, you can just go to the store and buy clothes off the rack and wear them." Difficulties shopping for clothes, or being required to extensively layer clothes after buying them in order to meet "clothing inspections" from family members (as Anne describes), are extremely specific

experiences and, in broader contexts outside of Pentecostal or Holiness churches, could easily be considered insignificant. However, for my participants shopping for clothes and other "mundane" activities were shaped by their church's strict rules on women's dress, thus triggering significant religious conflict.

In addition to women's descriptions of specific dress standards and the difficulties those standards caused, my participants also discussed gender inequality in terms of purity culture, or more specifically women's unfair responsibility for men's sexuality. Of course, purity culture is nothing new when it comes to American Christianity, with scholars condemning purity culture for promoting toxic messages surrounding sexuality and enabling patriarchal power dynamics (Barr 2021). However, for the Pentecostal and Holiness women I interviewed, purity culture was typically enforced through their dress standards. Lexie, for example, describes her experiences with purity culture in Holiness communities as a woman that did not strictly follow the dress standards:

> I grew up in fear that inevitably it was going to be my fault for causing a guy to lust after me, even though I was modest. I didn't wear tight clothes. My jeans were never tight. I never behaved provocatively, much less dressed provocatively. However, because I didn't adhere to those standards, it was a constant, well, you're just going to cause someone to do that anyway.

She follows this experience up with a critical commentary that reflects her new beliefs post-deconversion:

> Maybe it's not so much natural as it is taught. Maybe you should teach your daughters to dress modestly, but also teach your sons that girls aren't objects. Help your sons learn self-control, and that they are accountable for their thoughts.

In both excerpts, we see the way in which Pentecostal Holiness dress standards influence and perpetuate toxic ideas surrounding men and women's sexuality. Although these messages are not exclusive to Pentecostal or Holiness churches, Lexie's experience wearing pants in Holiness churches or camps suggests that concepts of modesty and purity in these communities are not primarily determined by traditional markers of feminine sexuality, such as the amount of skin a woman visibly shows, but by specific forms of Pentecostal or Holiness dress, like pants or jewelry, that are not necessarily associated with sexual attraction in mainstream culture. Furthermore, Lexie's follow-up call to action, in which she argues that teachings about modest dress should always be paired with teachings on men's accountability, suggests that for Lexie, modesty itself is not the issue. Instead, the problem lies in Pentecostal or Holiness church's tendency to use extreme dress traditions to unjustly blame women for men's sexuality.

Body Shaming

It is also important to note that for many women in my study, descriptions of unequal dress and the purity culture it promoted were also paired with descriptions of body shaming. Out of my 11 participants, 5 described traumatic experiences relating to fat-phobic comments, or judgements about their bodies. Edie, for example, describes experiences this type of judgment as a young child:

> Even when I was young, I had a lot of curves and so I constantly got feedback about being a hoe or how I was being seductive or I was trying to make people, I don't know, want something from me at age 13 or that I wasn't going to get a good husband someday because my clothes were too tight when I was literally a child.

For Edie, unequal emphasis on women's dress not only promoted toxic purity culture but also child sexualization. Because perceptions of women's bodies in Edie' church were dictated by

toxic purity culture, larger bodies, or bodies with curves, were automatically deemed inherently sexual and thus in danger of causing male lust. We see, therefore, that because Edie's body developed curves at a young age, she became subject to the toxic narratives surrounding female bodies marginally before she was ready to consider sexual dynamics. Ultimately, Edie's (along with several others') descriptions of being shamed for their full-figures and body shapes suggests that in Pentecostal and Holiness churches issues surrounding purity culture, gender inequality, and body shaming are deeply intertwined with dress standards.

This conversation is further extended by Lacey who explicitly discusses the long-term consequences of gender disparities and toxic purity culture that she has dealt with even post-deconversion.

> [T]he message that I received, that I carried with me for years, is that women are dangerous and that we hold the power to make or break people, to cause them to miss heaven, to go to hell. And it's all our fault. It has taken me years of counseling to undo the thinking that what I put on, what I wear, how I dress, is a heavy responsibility, that it could cause a man to drop into hell. And it's not true. It's not true at all.

Lacey's former perception, specifically that "women are dangerous," offers powerful insight into the messages that purity culture ingrains within Pentecostal women. While many women described negative perceptions about women and women's bodies as a result of gender inequality and dress standards, Lacey expresses how deeply these perceptions were ingrained within her, how profoundly they corrupted her concept of self and womanhood, and how difficult it has been to deconstruct those beliefs. Based on the excerpts presented in this section from Lacey, Edie, and Lexie, it seems that issues of unequal dress, purity culture, and body shaming in Pentecostal and Holiness churches may have a cyclical relationship. For example, churches

enforce strict dress codes on women which enable toxic messages surrounding women's purity and men's sexuality. This then leads church members to shame women depending on how their bodies appear sexually to men which churches may try to prevent by enforcing dress standards. Although this cycle may not represent a fixed aspect of all Pentecostal or Holiness culture, my findings suggest that these issues are continually perpetuated by each other, resulting in serious trauma for many deconverted women.

Post-deconversion Codes

While the previous section offers significant insight into the role that dress and embodiment plays in pre-deconversion experiences, my post-deconversion codes describe common themes that came up after women had left. These themes included two codes that I identified as "other religions," and "resources." Similar to my pre-deconversion codes, these themes also overlapped with my overarching codes, particularly in regards to descriptions of dress. However, because participants described these references in specific contexts post-deconversion, I coded these experiences separately in order to gain a better idea of how dress and embodiment shapes women's narratives. It is also important to note that post-deconversion codes typically occurred less frequently than pre-deconversion codes. One explanation for this is that most of my participants' experiences were less nuanced after leaving their churches and tended to follow a more general structure of deconstruction, rejection, and finally resolution, or coming to terms with their experiences. Having already explored these specific structural elements in Chapter 3 of my structural analysis findings, I offer the following two sections as supplemental, thematic codes that occurred within their post-deconversion narrative.

Other Religions

One particularly interesting theme I identified in women's post-deconversion narratives was their tendency to reference other religions, particularly Islam. These references were used to compare their former Pentecostal or Holiness church to in regards to shared legalistic or extreme ideas. It is important to note that, although my participants typically did not distinguish between the various sectors of the Islamic faith, not all Muslims share the legalism that my participants experienced in their Pentecostal communities. However, my participants often drew connections between them, specifically in regards to dress. Anne, for example, describes buying her sister (who was still Pentecostal) skirts after she had already left the church.

> I had asked my sister, who was still stuck at home, what she wanted for her birthday and she said, "I just want some skirts that are not hideous that will pass mom's inspection." So, I spent all day shopping and could not find one single thing that my mom would sign off on that was still reasonably attractive. So, I finally got on a website for modern Muslim women, and lo and behold found all of the things that ticked off mom's checklist. So, I ordered three or four skirts, sent them to Sarah, and a few weeks later my mom called and she said, "I just wanted to say those skirts are so wholesome. They're such high quality." And she's bragging about how wholesome and godly and modest they are, and then I said, "yeah I bought those off of a website from modern Muslim women," and she just stopped. She says, "I wouldn't have bought anything from those people." And I said, "it seems to me that perhaps you have a lot more in common with those people than you do the rest of America. So perhaps you shouldn't knock them."

Anne's experience buying her sister Muslim skirts represents an ironic similarity between Pentecostal and Islamic traditions. As Anne notes previously in her narrative, her mother's

enforcement of dress is particularly strict and includes various “dress inspections” to ensure that all aspects of her daughters’ dress was modest. Yet her initial positive reaction to the skirts that Anne bought, immediately turns to reproach upon learning it is for Muslim women– or, as Anne remembers her mother saying, “those people.” Her reaction, therefore, reflects not only personal critiques of Islam as a faith but her prejudice against Islamic people. Yet, as Anne points out to her mother, her beliefs about dress share remarkable similarities with Islamic teachings. This experience would suggest that for Anne’s mother, acceptable dress is not necessarily determined by a fixed standard of modesty but by her personal ideologies, including anything from Christian ideals to American Patriotism.

On the other hand, Lexie, who was serving as a Christian missionary in South Africa at the time of our interview, offered a particularly interesting perspective of the comparisons between Pentecostal and Islamic traditions. As Lexie describes in her interview, the South African town her and her husband serve is largely dominated by a sector of Islam that imposes various rules and dress restrictions for women. Thus, as a woman who had come from the Holiness tradition, she often compared her experiences in her former church to the strict Islamic teachings that she is surrounded by in South Africa:

> Women are not allowed to pray in the mosque. They're not allowed to pray with the men. They're very much second-class citizens… They aren't allowed to cut their hair. They can only wear dresses. Now that is somewhat starting to change depending on what sect of Islam… But actually, here if women dress in pants, it is considered being a prostitute and an invitation for basically sexual assault. So, in many ways, I do think that the devaluing of women is pretty on par with [Holiness] legalism.

While my other participants based their references to Muslim on second hand knowledge, Lexie's comparisons are significant due to her firsthand experiences with both Holiness and Islamic traditions. Although Lexie does not identify the specific sect of Islam, it is important to note that her description of the extreme inequities between men and women is specific to the South African town that Lexie serves. Rwafa (2016) confirms that extreme Islamic sectors in Africa, particularly fundamentalist groups such as Jihadists, enforce oppressive restrictions against women. However, scholars agree that when women choose to wear hijabs and other forms of religious dress by their own volition, it contributes to individual autonomy and feminine empowerment (Al Wazni 2015).

Resources

The final code I identified in my participants' post-deconversion segments of their narrative was their tendency to mention resources they found after leaving their former community. These resources were unique from references to finding community after deconversion as the resources tended to be very specific tools participants used to deconstruct their beliefs, such as books, videos, or therapy. Lacey, for example, describes finding books through her new church, using them to deconstruct her own beliefs, and then sending them to Holiness family members. For several other participants, post-deconversion resources not only aided their deconstruction, but helped them process trauma relating to their former church and their bodies. Margret, for example, describes experiencing significant anxiety and panic attacks post deconversion due to fears relating to dress standards and salvation but identifies the resources she found as a significant comfort:

> I started really finding resources and diving into different resources that helped me rewire my thinking and my perspective. Because after leaving the church, all I had is what they

> had taught me. I didn't have anywhere else to go. So, during the transition I found this YouTube channel, “Responsible Faith”?... It's this lady who was UPC and she left many years ago, but now she interviews people who either leave UPC or similar groups. So, I started watching her videos, and I was able to relate to them a lot, and that really helped me. And then I also found Berean Holiness and read their articles and watched their videos and that helped me too…. So, I think having some of these tools has helped me deal with the anxiety and panic.

Margret’s description of her initial struggle post-deconversion and her experiences finding supplemental resources offers insight into the value of formal deconstruction after deconversion. As was the case for Margret, many women may feel physically, emotionally, and spiritually lost after deconverting from Pentecostal or Holiness churches due to the level of indoctrination they experienced. For Margret, this indoctrination caused severe anxiety because she still believed (even unconsciously) that Pentecostal teaching was true and that her disobedience, specifically to dress standards, would lead to eternal damnation. Thus, the resources she identifies were instrumental in dispelling that anxiety because they helped her rationally deconstruct her former indoctrination and rebuild new beliefs.

On the other hand, Molly offers insight into the consequences of navigating post-deconversion without resources to aid deconstruction. Molly’s narrative is particularly unique among my interviews because she left the Pentecostal faith twice, once as a young adult and again in her thirties. However, her two experiences with deconversion are extremely different due to the choices she made directly after leaving. For example, in the following excerpt she explains:

> So that first time that I got out, I never did any work to explore my beliefs. I just lived in guilt and terror. I lived thinking that if I die tonight, I'm going to hell. And so, when I came back I really and truly was primed to be right back in… The difference from that time is that now I've done the work. I've gone to therapy and I've asked the questions that I didn't when I was so much younger. And I've been able to decide, "no I actually don't believe that. And this actually doesn't line up for me."

Similar to Margret's narrative, we see Molly also describe feelings of extreme anxiety due to her continued belief in former teachings. As a result, returning to her old Pentecostal church seems like the only option because it offers relief to her religious fears. However, Molly's decision to "[do] the work," specifically to seek out therapy, in the second round of her deconversion allows her the freedom to deconstruct her former beliefs and relieves her emotional distress. Her use of the word "work," is significant because it suggests that deconstruction, even aided by resources, is a challenging process that deconverts must intentionally seek out and choose. Otherwise, they may continue to struggle with extreme emotional conflict and may even risk falling back into their former religious communities as a "last resort" solution.

Summary of my Thematic Findings and Implications

Overall, my analysis from this chapter suggests multiple essential findings. First, based on both the overarching, pre-deconversion, and post-deconversion codes it is apparent that Pentecostal and Holiness women's bodies play a crucial role in their deconversion. This idea is demonstrated through the ways in which embodiment often shapes and informs experiences both before, during, and after women's deconversions. While the emphasis on embodiment is made overtly apparent through the overarching "references to the body" code, its influence can also be traced through many other codes such as "camps and conferences," "gender inequality," "female

enforcement," and "other religions." My findings also show that the body and embodiment is closely related to the trauma that women experience during deconversion. Although the women did discuss embodiment as an empowering experience in their post-deconversion narratives (which I will expound on further in the following chapter), most of the remaining references to the body and embodiment were deeply troubling and had negative effects on women's self-perceptions. This idea suggests that for some Pentecostal and Holiness women who struggle with their faith, the body becomes a physical site for religious trauma.

I also want to emphasize that my participants' descriptions of the body and embodiment were often related to issues relating to gender and sexuality. As demonstrated in the codes, "Female Enforcement" and "Gender Inequality," many of the women's most traumatic experiences with dress were directly tied to their community's toxic purity culture. This emphasis of dangerous female sexuality paired with men's fragile purity is particularly ironic considering most of the narratives within the church that justify dress standards based on their ability to protect women from the sexualization of mainstream society. Scholars have often found this contradiction to be true of most forms of Evangelical purity culture (Barr 2021), however my findings suggest that through the enforcement of Pentecostal dress standards, some women may actually play a role in perpetuating these issues. While it is difficult to determine the exact reasons for this trend, one possible explanation is that because many Pentecostal and Holiness teachings perpetuate women's subordination, women must utilize the only authority afforded to them, the reinforcement of dress standards, to appropriately function within the confines of their faith.

Chapter Six: Embodied Deconversion

Up to this point, I have explored the overall structure of my participants' narratives (Chapter Three) and the more specific themes that occurred within the structures, specifically relating to dress and embodiment (Chapter Four). While both of these chapters are helpful in establishing the role of embodiment in my participants' narratives, they paint an extremely complex and nuanced image of both deconversion and embodiment by attempting to tell several stories at once. Thus, in order to make sense of these extremely diverse experiences and to focus on my participants' stories more individually, I will use this chapter to present the four dress deconversion types that I identified– "Assertive Transformation," "Urgent Escape," "Principled Mediation," and "Resigned Digression" –and explore these types through the narratives of participants who reflect them.

As described in my methodology, I arrived at these four types by plotting my participants onto a graph that I adapted from Mantisen (2020) (as pictured in Figure 3). I placed my participants into one of the four groups according to their descriptions of dress deconversion– how they left their former dress standards, what motivated this decision, and how this decision impacted them post-deconversion. To identify the parameters of these groups I used the two factors that most influenced my participants' embodied deconversion: Deconversion Support(+ -) and Reactivity (+ -). While Mantisen (2020) defined "support" based on the number of Pentecostal friends and family, I found that the primary form of support that impacted my participants' experiences was whether or not they had a deconversion ally, or someone who sympathized with them and supported them through the deconversion process. For five of the six women who had +Deconversion Support, their allies came in the form of a husband, relative, or friend who deconverted alongside them.

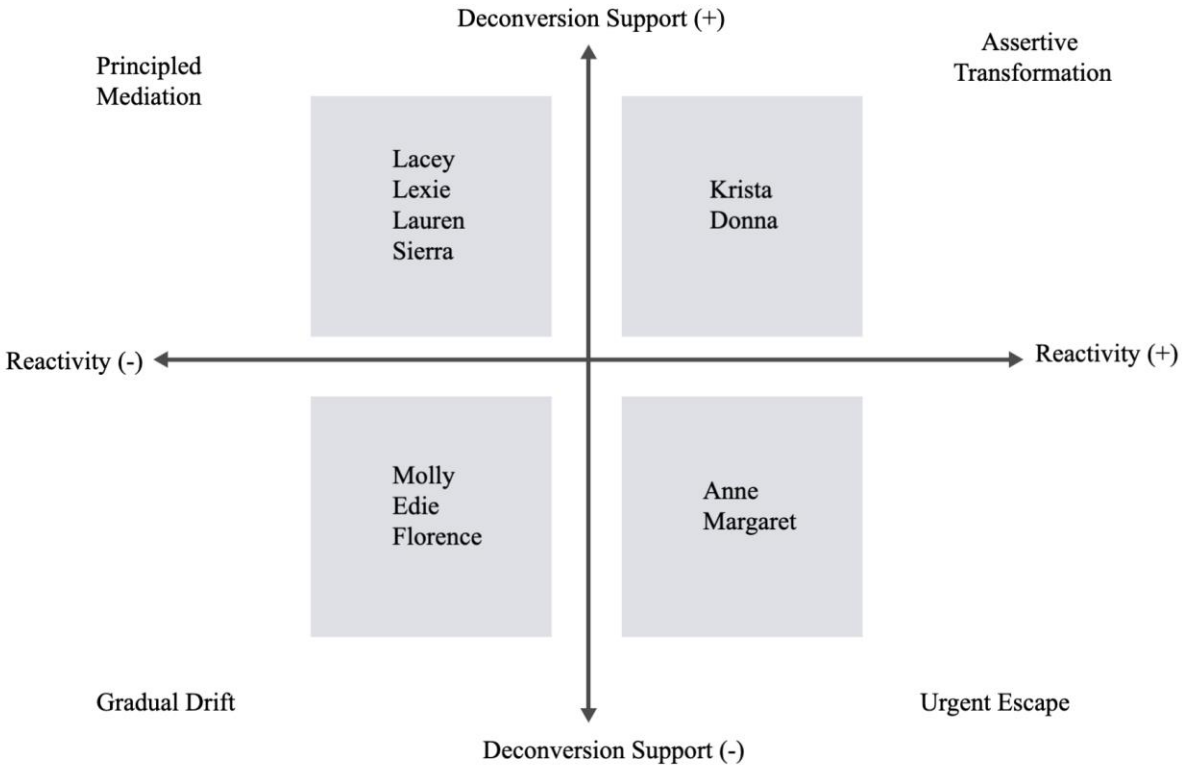


Figure 4: Dress Deconversion Typology Chart

For Krista, on the other hand, although her husband did not deconvert from her belief tradition, she describes him as both initiating her deconversion and supporting her through the process. On the other hand, I use the term "reactivity" to describe how quickly and radically the women left their dress standards. When I use the word radical, I am specifically referring to the style that the women gravitated towards after leaving Pentecostal dress. If they chose styles that they perceived as being opposite of their former dress, such as mohawks, pants, dyed hair, and piercings, this choice signified a more radical, and by extent, reactive dress deconversion.

Thus, on the Y axis, if participants left their former church with one or more fellow believers, I identified their deconversion support as a positive value, whereas if they left their former church individually, I assigned them a negative value. Similarly, on the X axis, if participants left their former dress standards abruptly and radically, they received a positive value for their reactivity level, and if they left dress standards over a longer period of time, they received a negative value. I did not use the chart to represent my participants on a continuum due to the difficulty in measuring such complex experiences and my own desire not to quantify participants' narratives more than necessary. Thus, participants' order in each group does not represent more or less support or reactivity. It is also important to note that these groups cannot begin to account for all the nuances of my participants' stories nor can they holistically represent each of their deconversion experiences since each narrative is unique to the participant's individual context. However, my aim with these types is not to categorize my participants' entire stories but to identify emergent patterns across their dress deconversions.

Through my participants grouping on this chart, four main types of embodied deconversion emerged. Although I will explore these groups individually in the next section through a participants' narrative that reflects each type, it is important to first understand these

types more generally. I identified the group in the top left of the chart, with negative reactivity and positive support, as 1.) Principled Mediation because women in this group tended to mediate their family's or spouse's expectations through their dress. I use the term "mediation" here to describe the ways in which this group compromised their perceptions of dress with those of their family members and used their dress to bridge the gap between their former communities' teaching and their new lives. Each of the women in this group married men from a denomination with legalistic teachings equal to or even more extreme than their own. Additionally, most of them deconverted alongside their spouses, and together, began attending a new church immediately thereafter. However, due to either their husbands', parents', or in-laws' continued beliefs in Pentecostal or Holiness dress, they often continued their former dress standards to some degree after their deconversion. This continuation lasted varying degrees of time, as Lacey continued the dress standards for two years post-deconversion whereas Lexie and Sierra reported still following certain aspects of the standards at the time of our interview. The motivations for this continuation also differed as Sierra kept certain aspects of the dress standards due to personal conviction, Lacey due solely to her family's preferences, and the remaining two women due to a mix of both[1]. Either as a direct or indirect result of their family's expectations, this group also tended to invest themselves in religious study and research post-deconversion in order to justify their beliefs and dress choices to family members. This religious exploration was both explicitly described, as Lacey does in her narrative, and indirectly reflected through evangelizing current beliefs about dress, as is the case in Lauren's interview.

In both cases, these women's experiences suggest that during their time in the Pentecostal or Holiness tradition, their bodies became physical sites for not only their religious identities, but

[1] Although Sierra cited personal conviction as her motivation, it is important to note that she also described push back from her in-laws regarding her dress.

the identities of their fellow believers, or in their case, family. This tendency is somewhat reflected in scholarship surrounding Pentecostal dress, as Lawless (1994) notes the role women's dress plays in uniting believers in a shared religious identity. However, my findings suggest that for some women, this shared identity may challenge women's bodily autonomy post-deconversion. This issue was evident in my participants' willingness to navigate these expectations and appease their families by essentially "sharing" their bodies, or, in other words, following dress standards (to some degree) after deconverting despite no longer believing these standards.

I identified the second type of embodied deconversion (on the bottom left), which included women who were hesitant to leave dress standards and deconverted by themselves, as a 2.) "Gradual Drift." These women typically described their dress deconversion as a gradual process often characterized by uncertainty and passivity. Additionally, for two of the three women in this group, leaving the dress standards was intertwined with leaving Pentecostalism. Edie, for example, described "going back and forth" throughout college in regards to both her physical attendance in services and her adherence to the dress standards. The one exception to this trend occurred in Florence's narrative in which leaving her community was triggered by a specific event after which she gradually left the dress standards after about a year. However, for all three women, the decision to leave their dress standards was described in terms of rationality and personal comfort. Rather than actively seeking out religious-based answers to justify their decisions, as the women from the "Principled Mediation" group did, these women described slowly drifting away little by little. Thus, after a significant grappling period, their decision to no longer follow the dress was relatively matter-of-fact because they had already lost their emotional connection to the Pentecostal or Holiness church. Furthermore, the women in this

group were unique in that they were the least likely out of all of my participants to continue their religiosity after deconverting; while Florence eventually returned to church years after deconverting, Edie and Molly choose to deconvert from religion entirely.

The third group I identified, with deconversion support and a reactive dress deconversion, was 3.) Assertive Transformation. While "Principled Mediators" and "Gradual Drifters" left their dress standards slowly as a gradual process, women from this group tended to experience dress deconversion much more radically after leaving their church communities. Both Krista and Donna described dressing in a style they perceived as "opposite" to their former Holiness standards, which included clothing such as pants, or short dresses as well as body presentation such as piercings, tattoos, and dyed hair. There was significant variation in the extremity of these women's dress choices, as seen through Donna's adoption of mainstream dress styles (such as pants and pierced ears) versus Krista's adoption of more unconventional forms of dress and body presentations (such as tattoo sleeves, and a mohawk). However, both Donna and Krista describe being confident in leaving their church and dress standards partly because of the new life and communities they were able to build after deconverting. By shifting away from their former dress, they are able to use their dress and bodies to re-identify themselves after their deconversion. Thus, the bodies of the women that I grouped in the "Assertive Transformation" became uniquely rhetorical as they actively created and communicated their new identities.

The final type of embodied deconversion that I identified was 4.) "Urgent Escape," which included women who did not have deconversion support and were reactive in their dress deconversion. Similar to the "Assertive Transformers," these women left their former dress standards almost immediately after leaving their church community and also described this decision as an intentional reflection of their identity. The primary difference between these

groups is that while “Assertive Transformers” described their dress post-deconversion as an opportunity to move forward by crafting a new identity, the “Urgent Escape” women described it as a chance to erase the past. Both Margaret and Anne discussed negative perceptions relating to their former dress and embodied religious symbols, and as a result, could not bring themselves to wear dresses or keep their hair long for years after deconversion. This idea is demonstrated in Margaret’s description of cutting her hair short and feeling a sense of relief, specifically when she states, “I was finally done with my identity from that church and all the things that they taught me.” Thus, while both women did describe moving forward and reidentifying themselves through their dress, their decision to leave the standards were primarily motivated by an intense need to escape their past with the Pentecostal church. It is also important to note that these women described the most physically embodied trauma as compared to the rest of my participants. This embodied trauma manifested itself throughout their dress deconversion, such as when Margret cries while cutting her hair or Anne aversion to dresses because of the trauma they trigger for her. Thus, the bodies of the “Urgent Escape” women served several rhetorical purposes, as they not only created new identities but dismantled past realities and created new identities.

Overall, these four types of embodied deconversion offer significant insight into the role of the body in women’s deconversion narrative. However, I want to reiterate that these types cannot even begin to represent the holistic experience of each woman or account for all of the nuances across their stories. Each woman that I interviewed represents a set of highly unique experiences and thus do not lend themselves to categorization. As a result, there are instances where these women’s narratives challenge and even push against their grouping. For example, although Sierra, who I categorized in the “Principled Mediator” group described pressure from

her family regarding Pentecostal dress, her motive behind following the standards post-deconversion was identified as personal conviction, which challenges the idea that she used her dress to mediate her family's expectations. There were also instances where women could easily fit into multiple categories, such as Donna whose narrative was often similar to those of the "Urgent Escape" group. Thus, this typology does not mean that women only displayed characteristics of the group they are in or that they did not later move towards another group in the later parts of their narrative. Rather, these groups are meant to identify general trends that emerged from my structural and thematic analysis which can explain the roles that embodiment played in women's deconversion narratives.

Narratives

Having generally defined the four types of embodied deconversion that I identified, I will now shift into demonstrating these types through the narratives of four participants: Lexie, Molly, Krista, and Anne. Because the four types I have identified here deal with post-deconversion experiences, I will primarily tell these women's stories beginning with their deconversion from their church community. My aim in including these narratives is to examine my participants' stories more holistically and to better represent and honor their individual voices.

Principled Mediation: Lexie's Story

While Lexie's story represents the "Principled Mediation" type of dress deconversion, she was also unique across my interviews for several reasons. First, she was the only participant who grew up associating with Pentecostal or Holiness communities but typically did not follow the dress standards. She explains in the beginning of her narrative that because her church was an Independent church with "Holiness roots," she grew up wearing skirts to church but was

perfectly comfortable wearing pants in her day to day life. While her parents were accepting of her dress choices, many others in her church and in the stricter Holiness summer camps she attended growing up were not. Over the course of her adolescent and teenage years, Lexie was often criticized, judged, verbally abused, and sexualized by individuals within her church and community because she wore pants. While Lexie described internalizing many of these narratives about her self-worth, narratives that she would have to deconstruct many years later, she also describes her continued dedication to her personal faith, which prompted her to begin formally studying the Bible at the age of 15. This exploration coupled with increasingly conflicting experiences in her home church and then finally leadership issues, ultimately led Lexie, accompanied by a group of her friends, to leave her church at the age of 18. She explains in the following excerpt:

> Our church had fallen apart because of leadership issues. And we just decided to step out. We were done with it. We started going to the other [Assemblies of God] church that was in town and that was really finding an oasis in a desert. That's… the only comparison I can think of. They were so loving and so kind to literally anybody that came into their church and I was like, "this is what church is supposed to be. This is how you help people find Jesus. This is where it's at."

For Lexie, this new church community was crucial in aiding her deconstruction process both with dress and doctrine. She goes on to explain that although she had left her old church, she was extremely hesitant to fully leave Holiness dress standards. Since Lexie had grown up wearing pants in her day-to-day life and skirts to church, this hesitation was primarily demonstrated in her aversion to wearing pants in the services at her new church.

> I grew up only wearing dresses and skirts to church. So, in my mind, because church was kind of a more revered spot, you needed to dress accordingly. When I cut ties, I still wore dresses to church. And I was trying to figure out my motivations for that. Because I had always said that I felt like I shouldn't wear pants in church. But I was trying to figure out if I was just saying that to appease people or if I truly felt convicted.

This section of Lexie's narrative demonstrates the "Principled Mediator" type of deconversion in several ways. The hesitation that Lexie describes directly reflects the gradual process of leaving dress standards that was characteristic of her deconversion type. Her confusion about the nature of this hesitation– specifically whether it comes from personal conviction or outside influences– is also representative of the "Principled Mediator" type, as several other women in this category described their motives for continuing the dress standards as both personal preference and family pressure. For Lexie, concern about her personal convictions and perceptions of "appropriate dress" is further demonstrated through her experience attending a camp for her new church soon after deconverting:

> … the Holy Spirit moved in those services and most of those girls were not wearing holiness standard clothes. They were t-shirts and shorts, tank tops and shorts, pants, skinny jeans and whatever. But they still were very earnest in their praying and worshiping. Kids still got filled with the Holy Ghost. And it was a very good experience. And actually, that was the first time that I ever wore tank tops in public because I was not thinking about the fact that it was in the middle of summer. I brought my jeans and my boots. I thankfully brought some shorts, but I hadn't planned on wearing those every day for all day, everyday use… It was so hot… it was pure torture… But all I had was a tank top, so that's what I had to wear. And it was weird. It was super, super weird. I have

> never done it since then. I over-thought the entire time. I was like, oh my gosh, I'm going to mess up some guy and cause him to lust or whatever. Inevitably, they're going to come get on me because I'm wearing a tank top. It was awful.

Although "Principled Mediators," are characterized by mediating the concerns of their husband and family, Lexie's experiences at this camp demonstrates how women's continued Holiness dress after deconversion can also mediate their own conflict. While Lexie was able to justify the younger attendee's non-holiness dress, she could not accept her own non-holiness dress because she had not deconstructed her perceptions of the female body, social acceptance, and male sexuality. Her fears about causing men to lust or being called out because of "provocative" dress suggests that the indoctrination women experience in Pentecostal or Holiness churches is not exclusive to a building or a church community but can accompany women in entirely different contexts, causing long and difficult deconstruction processes. While these difficulties occurred to some degree across all of my participants' narratives, it was particularly evident in the "Principled Mediator" type because these women embodied this inner struggle through their outward dress.

While Lexie's initial hesitation to leave Holiness dress after converting is clearly a result of her own conflict, she explains that her hesitation since marriage has largely been due to her family's concerns. Through experiences and religious study, Lexie was able to slowly unpack most of her former beliefs about dress. However, she admits that she still tends to wear dresses in the church sanctuary:

> Eventually, I started wearing pants on Wednesday nights, but I never went to the sanctuary. I was in the youth hall and the fellowship hall on Wednesday nights. I never went to the sanctuary. It's super rare that I do it even now.…I'm definitely not saying that

> if I were to wear pants in the sanctuary, that it's a sin. But for me, I don't know. I'm not really super sure. My husband prefers that I don't… he also grew up pretty legalistic.

Although we again get the sense that part of this hesitation is Lexie's personal beliefs, this excerpt also attributes her description of dress choices with her husband's preference. It is important to note, however, that while Lexie references her husband's preference when describing her dress choices, she does not identify him as a source of pressure or conflict. This characterization is also reflected in other "Principled Mediator" types, such as Lacey who continued dress standards consistently for two years due to her husband's preference. While they do not represent a significant source of pressure, their husband's preference for Holiness dress– particularly one who deconverted with his wife– does exacerbate their deconversion process. This tendency also suggests that men who deconvert from Holiness traditions may have an even greater difficulty accepting non-Holiness forms of dress than female deconverts, despite the fact that dress standards are almost exclusively aimed at female dress.

While Lexie briefly mentions her husband's influence on her dress choices, she goes into much greater detail about the pressure she experienced from her in-laws. She explains this pressure first in the context of doing ministry with her husband's parents in Africa:

> Having stepped out of [legalism], it is a little hard being married with my husband's family. They do have a history with legalism… his mom still wears skirts, and I know they were hoping that I would also wear skirts. It's been a little weird to navigate living here [in Africa] with them. But, at the same time doing ministry with them I think, has helped reinforce the fact that I can still be a Christian and wear pants. For a long time while my husband and I were dating, they were very hung up on the fact that I wore pants. And even after we were married, it was kind of an issue.

She then goes on to explain the way that this pressure has and continues to influence her dress choices:

> I do still struggle sometimes with just [finding clothes]. I don't want to make this awkward, but I'm a bigger chested woman, and so either it's very tight here [her chest], or it's huge down here [her waist], and it's like I can't win. So, when it comes to dresses it's very hard for me to find one that I like. Then, a lot of the dresses that I do are often pretty short. So, then it's almost like the math lady meme where I'm like, "okay, if I get this dress, I either have to take it to the tailor and get it lengthened or I have to wear something under it. But I can't always wear leggings with it because"… and it's just like, "is it even worth it? Is it worth all of that stress?" So sometimes I feel like I struggle with walking in freedom because I just really don't want to have this conversation with my in-laws…

The difficulties Lexie still faces when shopping for clothes illustrates the "Principled Mediation" group's tendency to use their dress and bodies to mediate tensions between their personal desires and the expectations of family members. The complexity of finding clothes that meet Holiness standards, which Lexie ironically describes through "the math lady" meme that pictures a woman confused by a series of complex equations, is an extremely nuanced and challenging aspect of Pentecostal and Holiness culture. Thus, the fact that Lexie continues to subject herself to this struggle despite having left her Holiness faith illustrates the significant influence that her in-laws and their Holiness beliefs still have in her day-to-day life. Lexie's association of this struggle with her physical body type reinforces the idea that her body, in addition to dress, is still a source of division within her family, which ultimately becomes her responsibility to resolve.

Gradual Drift- Molly's Story

While Lexie's story demonstrates the "Principled Mediation" type, in which women continue their dress standards after deconversion due to personal conflict and family expectations, Molly's narrative represents the "Gradual Drift" group, or the women whose dress deconversions were characterized by uncertainty and passivity. Molly's story begins with her growing up in a small Pentecostal church in Mississippi, during which, like many of my other participants, she internalized toxic messages about female purity, male sexuality, and her own worth. She explained many times throughout our interview that as a child, she always wanted to be "the good girl," and was constantly striving to earn spiritual fulfillment through prayer and other "good works." However, navigating this constant struggle along with experiencing the hypocrisy of many believers in her church, ultimately led Molly to deconvert from Pentecostalism two separate times.

She explains that her first time leaving occurred when she was 19 due to conflict over a boy in her church. Although this deconversion would only last three years, it also represented many of the "Gradual Drift" type characteristics, specifically in regards to its passivity. Molly explains that although she did begin wearing pants and cutting her hair after leaving the first time, she "never did any work to explore that. [She] just lived in guilt and terror. [She] lived thinking that if [she] died… [she was] going to hell." This experience represents the early stages of the "Gradual Drifter" type, as these women left their former beliefs without actively exploring, deconstructing, or challenging them. Although their motivations for this differed, Molly's experiences suggest that her lack of deconstruction was a result of inaccessibility rather than a lack of motivation. Because Molly experienced such extreme indoctrination and because

she deconverted without support, she simply did not have the resources to untangle these beliefs on her own.

While most "Gradual Drifters" eventually found the resources to unpack their former experiences, Molly's first deconversion process was cut short when she reconverted only three years later. She explains that because she was still wrestling with guilt and shame, she decided to return to Pentecostalism and readapt the dress standards. However, Molly quickly ran into many of the challenges she had struggled with before leaving, such as church members' hypocrisy. For example, she relates the experience of receiving sexually explicit texts from the worship leader, who was sitting on the platform during church, and then describes the message she received from this experience:

> "He [the worship leader] was fine because he looked the part. As long as you looked good on the outside, you followed all the rules that they could see, and you never showed that anything was wrong, there was not much else to it. It was all very surface level."

This experience offers significant insight into the motivations of women whose deconversion aligns with the "Gradual Drift" type. While many of the existing narratives about believers who "drift" away (also referred to as "backsliding by most church members), hold that this phenomenon demonstrates the individual's lack of faith or rebellious spirit, it is interesting that for Molly, this passive drift occurs because of the visual emphasis within Pentecostal culture. In other words, because Pentecostal culture based a believer's value on their physical appearance, it was easier for Molly to avoid her religious conflict which caused her to slowly lose connection to her church.

As a result of this process, Molly left church again when she was 30 and has remained deconverted since then. She explains how this process was not only gradual but was deeply interconnected with her dress:

> Leaving the standards was very gradual because my leaving process was gradual and it was like," do I want to, am I leaving? Am I not? Is this how I feel? What do I feel?" So, I went on vacation with a friend and I wore her pants a couple times. And of course, when you first wear pants after wearing skirts for so many years, you feel weird. <laugh>, so weird.

Lexie's indecision about leaving her church is representative of the "Gradual Drifter" type as most of these women described going back and forth in their deconversions, particularly after significant periods of avoiding or wrestling with religious conflict. Furthermore, her reaction to wearing pants for the first time is significant because it offers insight into gradual dress deconversions. While women who experienced radical changes in dress described more emotional reactions, Molly's aversion to wearing pants for the first time suggests that women may experience embodied reactions to leaving dress standards regardless of how minimal or slow their transition may be.

She then explains how she went from wearing pants on bizarre and rare occasions to wearing them for comfort.

> I was going through all of this struggle with [my kids]. We started having to do court ordered family counseling. It was on Wednesday nights… so I wasn't making it to church on Wednesdays. And it's like I would just wear my pants up to counseling… just something comfy because it was really cold in there, so I'd wear just some cozy pants up. And it was very gradual.

The description of comfort as a motivation for leaving dress standards is particularly representative of the "Gradual Drifter" type. While the other three types were motivated by either religious, family, or identity concerns, the women in Molly's group discussed comfort, practicality, or rationality as their motivators. Initially, this trend might suggest that these women were indifferent to religious dress. While this is somewhat true in Edie's story, both Molly and Florence's narrative suggest otherwise. As we have already seen in Molly's narrative, her deconversion was the result of many years of internalized trauma and conflict, which she was unable to process or deconstruct due to a lack of support and resources. Thus, by the time she began wearing pants, she had already lost her emotional connection to the church and the dress standards. In fact, her "indifference" is arguably a form of self-defense which she uses to protect herself from further trauma.

Molly then explains the deep interconnections between her dress practices and her relationship to the church as a whole:

> As my mindset changed, my clothing habits changed, and as I got a little further away, I would be like, well, I'm going with a friend to a birthday dinner, so I'm going to wear some of this mascara. It was just slowly, gradually. And then one day I was like, "well, I'm not going back to church, so I'm just wearing my pants and makeup and whatever."

As this excerpt suggests, Molly's dress and religious perceptions shared a "cause and effect" relationship, in which both were caused and perpetuated by the other. The tendency for "Gradual Drifters" to experience this interconnection between dress and religious beliefs is significant because it suggests that for some former Pentecostal and Holiness women, their bodies not only embody religious beliefs but play an active role in shaping and deconstructing them as well.

Assertive Transformation- Krista's Story

While both Lexie ("Principled Mediation") and Molly ("Gradual Drift") experienced dress deconversion as a gradual process, the remaining two narratives left the dress standards in more radical ways. Krista, for example, represents this tendency as part of the "Assertive Transformation" group, or women who used their dress post-deconversion to assert their new identity. While Krista's home church did not teach strict Holiness standards, she attended Holiness camps through her church's youth group that did enforce them and, as a result, began following them in her day-to-day life. Similar to Molly's story, Krista explains that her immersion into Holiness culture caused her to internalize toxic ideas about religion, gender roles, and her self-worth: "my thinking was if I wanted to reach the highest possible form of holiness, or my maximum potential as a Christian woman, I had to let go of these worldly things and find a great holiness pastor to marry." She goes on to explain how this pressure created significant trauma in her life and even caused her to develop an eating disorder: "I thought, well, if I fast more than is even required… I'll essentially rank higher. So, I got to where I felt guilty eating." Thus, when Krista began dating a minister at a nondenominational church and attended a bible study with him at the age of 20, she encountered an entirely different form of religion.

As Krista explains in the following excerpt, this experience radically shifted her perception of religion and spiritual expectations:

> I went to the very first small group with him and all the women were in pants. All the women had makeup on… Most of them, my husband included, had never even heard of holiness… And when I left, I said, "I'm leaving [the Holiness church], I'm done." So, for me, he was actually the catalyst that flipped it for me because I'd always been told that either you did [religion] this way or you were just out of the faith altogether. So, all it

> took was someone showing me there are other ways to not only continue to be a believer, but continue to operate in God's kingdom without all the extra scriptural stuff.

Krista's assertion that she no longer wanted to be part of the Holiness faith reflects a very different deconversion experience as compared to the women who left gradually. While Krista's pre-deconversion narrative reflects a similar buildup of religious conflict, her experience at this bible study and support from her then boyfriend allow her to radically transform her beliefs. Her ability to make this sudden transition reinforces the idea that women's deconversions are significantly shaped by their unique contexts, including their access to resources and support systems.

The assertiveness that Krista describes in leaving her former faith is also reflected in her dress choices post-deconversion. While women from the "Principled Mediation" and "Gradual Drift" types tended to leave dress standards slowly, by making one change at a time, the "Assertive Transformation" types, particularly in Krista's case, experienced a "pendulum" effect, in which they immediately gravitated towards styles opposite of Holiness dress. Krista further explains her motivations behind this shift in the following excerpt:

> I do actually question its effect on me even now. For instance, I have a full tattoo sleeve and nose piercings now. So, I had a friend recently that asked me, "do you think a part of you is trying to still rebel a little bit even though you're 31 and nobody cares anymore?" So, there could be a component of that as well. But I think at the time, it was an important part of me moving forward. I definitely think there was a little bit of that need and desire to express myself. So, after I got married, I went through a phase where I shaved both sides of my hair off and dyed the rest purple. Now that I've been completely out for

> almost 15 years, it's one of the first times I've let my hair grow back out because it's actually what I want to do and not what is expected from me.

This excerpt demonstrates two crucial aspects of the "Assertive Transformation" deconversion type: first, Krista physically embodies, specifically through tattoos, piercings, and dyed hair, her inner transformation. The extremity of her physical transformation is significant because, while other women embodied this experience through mainstream forms of dress, Krista chooses to physically illustrate her inner change through more controversial and permanent bodily presentations. Therefore, this embodiment demonstrates how deeply this transformation has affected Krista and how crucial her body is in illustrating this transformation.

Secondly, Krista's description of her dress choices also reflects her deconversion type's tendency to use their bodies when crafting new identities. Krista directly references this when she references her need to "move forward" and to "express herself." Thus, for women in the "Assertive Transformation" group, dress and body presentations were not only a way of outwardly illustrating inner changes, but were also a way of actively building a new persona.

Urgent Escape- Anne's Story

The final type of embodied deconversion that I identified was the "Urgent Escape," which includes women who left dress standards radically and without support. This type's tendency to use dress post-deconversion to erase past identities, is clearly reflected in Anne's narrative. Anne's story is particularly unique among my participants due to the severity of the dress standards she experienced and the extreme effect these standards had on her life. Growing up as a Pentecostal pastor's daughter, Anne was subjected to a litany of dress restrictions. She describes a wide range of related experiences, such as swimming in a floor length denim skirt, sewing up splits in her skirts, avoiding skirts with back pockets, and enduring her mother's daily

"dress inspections" which were meant to ensure her daughter's modesty. For Anne, this constant scrutiny led to significant resentment. She explains: "I knew I wasn't going to live my life that way when I was just like 12… I was always just indignant. I felt very much persecuted for some of the standards." The anger and hurt that Anne uses to characterize her 12-year-old self is crucial to understanding the radicalness of her deconversion and post-deconversion experiences.

Although Anne recognized the toxicity of her environment and decided she would eventually leave at the age of 12, she was not able to act on this decision until she graduated from college at 20 years old. She explains this in the following excerpt:

> So, for a while, I truly believed that I was just never going to be good enough. I absolutely did not believe it was fair or right for women to bear that heavy burden. And I was not going to do it. I really didn't care if it sent me to hell or not. So, I left in a big way. I was kind of a hellion. I went to bars. I drank too much. I refused to go to church.

Thus, because Anne did leave her church in a particularly radical way, her story might traditionally be viewed as an illustration of the "defector," "rebel," or "apostate" that Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) describes. However, when we consider the 12-year-old girl that Anne points to in her narrative, a girl who endured years of toxic purity culture and religious scrutiny, knowing she had no resources, no outside support, no way of leaving, we become exponentially better able to contextualize her radical deconversion.

Anne goes on to apply her reactive deconversion to her dress, explaining that she not only embodied her deconversion through her actions but through her physical body as well:

> The other thing I wanted to say about my identity is that I could not put on a dress for a long time. It felt like a symbol of bondage. And so, I remember I was working in the ER, and someone was talking about going somewhere nice. And they said, "Anne, do you

> wear dresses?" And I said… "only if they're very short." It had to be a dress where no one was ever going to mistake me for a Pentecostal woman. And even today, some of the long maxi dresses have been back in style. And if I wear one, I always overdo it on the jewelry… and in a way I feel like I'm compensating because I don't want anyone to think I'm Pentecostal.

In many ways, this excerpt is similar to the "Assertive Transformation" group because it reflects former Pentecostal women's tendency to physically embody their identities post-deconversion. The main difference between these types of embodiment, as we see Anne demonstrating here, is that the "Urgent Escape" group described their dress choices in terms of negating past identities instead of creating new ones. For example, while Krista described "moving on" and "expressing [her]self" through her dress transformation, Anne describes disliking dresses because she associates them with her past trauma. Thus, based on her narrative, Anne's motivation for wearing new dress styles such as short dresses, pants, and jewelry was primarily to differentiate herself from her traumatic past in the Pentecostal faith.

While this tendency is aimed primarily at the past, it is important to note that Anne is nonetheless able to use this backward-reaching embodiment to eventually assert her new identity. She references her new-found autonomy by comparing her current life with the warnings she received from her former church about the consequences of leaving the faith:

> They tell you, if you ever leave this body, you're going to go straight to the pit hill. You're going to be drug addicted, homeless, shipwrecked. But I woke up one day, I'm like, I've got a good job. I have a wonderful family. I manage my house. I'm missing God in my life, but I'm not, I'm not living on the street.

The fact that Anne was able to build a thoroughly fulfilling life after leaving her church despite describing her dress in terms of an "escape," contextualizes the embodiment experienced by this specific group of women. On one hand, Anne's description of her dress post-deconversion suggests that her embodiment is still somewhat dictated by her former community. For example, her aversion to dresses is not based on her actual fashion preferences but on her reaction to the trauma she experienced in the Pentecostal church. However, as we see in the above excerpt, this reaction clearly does not hinder Anne's long-term autonomy post-deconversion. This finding suggests that women may reclaim power through embodiment in many different ways, even when these choices are not necessarily autonomous in nature.

Summary of my Dress Deconversion Findings and Implications

Based on the four types of dress deconversion and the stories which illustrate these types, it is apparent that for my participants, the body actively performs several different forms of labor. Depending upon the support women experience and the context of their deconversion, women may use their bodies to mediate family's expectation, disentangle beliefs, actively construct new identities, or push back against former experiences. While each of these actions are different in terms of the autonomy they offer women, my findings suggest that each variation reflects the women's individual needs. By using their bodies and dress to navigate the specific challenges within their unique situations, my participants were ultimately empowered through their dress deconversion. This finding is significant because it rejects the idea that Pentecostal and Holiness women's empowerment post-deconversion follows a specific structure but rather is unique to each individual.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

By giving voice to the 11 women's narratives encapsulated within these pages, I have set out to explore the role of embodiment in women's Pentecostal and Holiness deconversions. I have attempted to do this by studying these stories structurally- demonstrating the overarching narrative structures women utilized– and thematically– diving into the common themes relating to the body and trauma. Additionally, I have used these findings to suggest four general types of "dress deconversion" that emerged from these stories in order to encompass the specific ways women utilized the rhetoric of their bodies post-deconversion. My goal in this final chapter is to interweave these threads in order to show the specific implications of studying embodiment within these deconversion narratives. Throughout all of my analysis in the previous three chapters, one very basic idea emerges which connects each story I have described here, and thus bears naming: bodies matter because they are powerful. Anzaldúa states, in her work, that almost all aspects of humanity, from our very souls to the stories we tell, draw their power "from the human body– flesh and bone" (75). While this power can be delineated in many different ways, it must first be understood as rhetorical. As Dolmage (2009) argues, "rhetoric has a body- has *bodies"* (p. 1), meaning that bodies don't just communicate through verbal speech, but rather through their very fleshly existence.

As I have shown throughout my analysis, Pentecostal women embody this rhetoric and the power that it offers them in extremely unique and corporeal ways. Through the dress standards that they adopt in their Pentecostal or Holiness church, their bodies speak: every bodily detail, from their uncut hair to their long dresses, proclaims their religious identity both within and outside their churches. It is important to note that for some women, this embodied rhetoric is empowering. Through my undergraduate capstone research, which focused on the experiences of

women that were actively Pentecostal, I heard story after story about how these women had found joy and self-efficacy through their religious embodiment. In fact, I didn't just hear these stories; I *lived* them. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I spent every Thursday evening watching my mother assemble my grandmother's floor-length hair into an intricate bun and fantasizing about growing my hair out to her length. As a teenager, I spent hours getting ready with my closest friends for Friday night conferences, pinning, tucking, and layering my most fashionable outfits. There is a younger version of me within those years that viewed my religious dress not as a restriction but a representation of the people, community, and culture that I loved. In other words, my outward dress was in harmony with my inner perceptions. This relationship can be better understood through Douglas's description of the "physical body," the body's fleshly, bodily presentation, and the "social body," the identity that the body is attempting to reflect. So, for my younger self and many devoted Pentecostal or Holiness women, we are empowered through our religious dress because our physical bodies and social bodies are aligned by our *own* volition.

However, while some Pentecostal women's bodies tell stories of empowered faith and identity, there are others that tell a very different narrative. As I have attempted to demonstrate through my participants' experiences, deconversion stories often characterize religious dress as disempowering, a "symbol of bondage," deeply traumatic, and a significant contributor to their ultimate deconversion. Rather than enhancing their bodies' inherent power, dress standards dictated their bodily rhetoric through shame-based narratives most often surrounding female purity and male sexuality. As I described in my own narrative at the beginning of my introduction, wrestling internally with religious conflict while still dressing your body according to that faith can feel debilitating. While the messages I had grown up hearing in the Pentecostal

church about women's bodies did not suddenly change during my college years, my perception of them did. Suddenly, I became more critically aware of the ideologies embedded in my church community as well as the ways in which these ideologies were not only morally problematic but were actively harming my self-esteem. As I demonstrated through the findings from my structural analysis, this type of "awakening" was mirrored across every deconversion story that I heard. While it is also reflected in deconversions from many other faith traditions, my findings suggest that inner conflicts and critical perceptions of religious teaching may be particularly traumatic for Pentecostal or Holiness women because it disrupts the balance between their physical and social bodies.

In other words, as women's religious perceptions change, their identities change, which, according to scholars, inevitably affects bodily identity. As Schilling (2004) explains, "our bodily experiences and sensations are closely tied to our subjective sense of self and can provide valuable insight into our changing identities over time." Yet, most often, when Pentecostal or Holiness women begin experiencing these shifts in identity, they are not able to reflect the change in their bodies due to fear, a lack of support, or lack of resources. As a result, their physical bodies become subject to a conceptual, social body– one which visually identifies them as Pentecostal or Holiness– that their friends, family, and communities expect them to embody, but that they themselves no longer identify with. Thus, deconversion becomes a process of not only deconstructing religious beliefs but of personal and bodily restoration.

So, while I have been telling many different narratives throughout this thesis, I have also been telling one, single story. This story belongs to me, to Anne, Molly, Krista, and Lexie, to every woman that I interviewed, and to a million others. It is about using our bodies to reclaim ourselves. For some women, such as those who fall into the "Assertive Transformation" and

"Urgent Escape" group, this reclaiming is extremely visible through dyed hair, mohawks, tattoos, and short dresses, as bodies become canvases for inner transformation. For others, such as those in the "Principled Mediation," and " Gradual Drift" group, it can be almost completely invisible, as these women embody the discomfort, hesitancy, fear belonging to themselves and those around them. If we think about the body as rhetoric and subsequently, consider its physical forms of expression to be "speech," then its lack of expression must be "silence." As Cheryl Glenn (2004) points out, silence is unavoidably rhetorical and, as such, "can deploy power; [or] defer to power" (4). For the women in my study, the silence of their bodies accomplished both simultaneously. While on one hand, their continuation of dress standards deferred to the power of their former community, it also allowed them the space in which to progressively deconstruct their beliefs and gradually build new identities and communities.

In addition to the metaphorical silence that many of my participants embodied, there is also the presence of literal silence deeply embedded within this project. While religious deconverts have traditionally been ignored, silenced, or villainized (Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993), my findings suggest that former Pentecostal and Holiness women may experience these issues as a direct result of their hair and dress post-deconversion. As many of my participants described, women who do deconvert and then express their new identity through bodily representations that do not reflect Pentecostal or Holiness dress, are often rejected because of their dress rather than their inner perceptions of their former faith. Thus, women's bodies are used by their former communities and (historically) scholarship to silence and rewrite their stories after they deconvert. Thus, as Dolmage (2009) states, "it… matters which bodies we align with rhetoric," as this has a direct effect on "who gets to speak, who shapes rhetorical interaction, and how we read bodies" (1-2). By aligning the formerly Pentecostal or Holiness

woman's body with rhetoric and acknowledging the ways that her body *is* rhetoric, we become better able to represent and validate her experiences.

Additionally, this increased understanding may also enable these women to speak for themselves. In fact, this study itself, specifically the way in which I was able and unable to gather my participants, suggests that many former Pentecostal and Holiness women *want* to and even need to share their experiences. As I described in my introduction, while I had originally intended to gather participants from within a Pentecostal church, I was unable to do so and immediately began worrying about how to gather data. Instead, upon finding the Berean Holiness community of former Pentecostal and Holiness women, I ended up with so many participants that I had to decline several requests for follow up interviews. In each of my 11 interviews, I was blown away by how readily they delved into their experiences, how openly they shared deeply personal and traumatic stories with me, and how often they thanked *me* for writing this thesis. While not all former Pentecostal or Holiness women may share this eagerness, my participants' reactions suggest that many deconverted women recognize the value in sharing their stories and may even find strength and support through doing so.

This idea is further supported by the ways in which my participants often identified the online community that 9 of them belonged to as a vital step in healing from their religious trauma. On their website, the leaders of this virtual community explain that in addition to helping former Pentecostal and Holiness women disentangle their beliefs about dress standards, they are also dedicated to connecting them with other women who have, "walked where [they] walk and who will provide compassionate support and encouragement." The idea that bodies have the power to create communities is not exclusive to Pentecostal or Holiness traditions or deconverts from these churches. Rebecca Norris (2001) for example, applies this idea to dance

communities, stating, “this relationship also depends on the development of body competence; thus, the sense of community is directly related to the body and its capacities for learning and communication” (p. 118). Although members of communities such as *Berean Holiness* are not bonded over their body’s dancing capabilities, they are bonded over their bodies’ former dress restrictions. In fact, most of these women are likely well aware of the ways their bodies can identify them as a member of a particular community through their experiences in their former faith. However, the distinctive feature about this online community is that these women use their bodies to build communities through identities that are in direct opposition with their former dress standards. In other words, while this group also connects women through shared embodied experiences, this connection forms as a direct result of leaving the Pentecostal and Holiness faith, which suggests that women do not just physically reclaim their body after deconversion, but also reclaim their bodies’ power to form connections.

While I could easily use other women’s stories to demonstrate the impact of community on deconversion, identity, and embodiment, this thesis would not be complete without addressing the ways that finding such a community has changed my own life. When I began this project in the fall of 2022, I was a member of the Pentecostal church. I attended every service I possibly could. I abided by the dress standards. Despite having cut my hair several years prior and occasionally diverting from the dress standards in small ways, I couldn’t bring myself to completely leave because, as so many of my participants also mentioned in their interviews, Pentecostalism was all I had ever known. Although I knew that pursuing a thesis about women leaving the church I belonged to would be challenging, I convinced myself that I could compartmentalize my inner conflict. By sheer willpower, I could inwardly carry my doubts and

disagreements while my hair and dress professed Pentecostalism, and, in doing so, I could keep my identity and my body separate.

After my first online interview ended and my participant had signed off, I sat, staring at my reflection in the zoom camera. I watched the girl in front of me begin to cry as the realization flooded her face: *I can't do this anymore.* The words erupted in my mind, louder than anything I had ever heard. This time, I knew who had spoken those words, and it wasn't my mother, my grandmother, my friends, or church leaders.

It was *me*.

It was my *body*.

There had never been a difference between the two of us.

As a result of the decision I made that day and have continued to abide by in the months since, this thesis has become an essential part of my deconversion narrative. Through telling these stories and exploring the ways my participants experienced dress deconversion, I have also experienced first-hand why this work matters. By understanding the ways that I have embodied my own deconversion, I have been better able to embrace the highly nuanced experiences that have accompanied my decision to leave. For me, reclaiming my body has meant buying my first set of pants at a thrift store, but it also meant hiding those pants in my closet when my parents came to visit. It has meant joining a new community of women and learning from their experiences, but also visiting my former church and clutching the pew until my knuckles turned white. It has meant struggling and celebrating events that are so mundane they become invisible to almost everyone else.

Thus, at the core of this work is my desire to make the invisible visible. For those who have never experienced Pentecostal or Holiness dress guidelines, I hope to demonstrate the

nuance of dress and embodiment. For active members of the Pentecostal and Holiness church, I aim to challenge existing perceptions surrounding deconversion by emphasizing the ways that these assumptions misrepresent the lived experiences and motivation of deconverts. And for the women who, like me, find themselves within these stories, I want to emphasize that there is power in embodying your truth. I do not pretend that deconversion is a linear process or that this project can resolve the challenges that women face post-deconversion. In fact, my goal is quite the opposite. By naming the ways that women experience embodiment post-deconversion, I hope to show that women's resilience and the resiliency of their bodies does not exist in spite of these difficult situations but because of their ability to embrace and embody even the most challenging parts of their stories.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Recruitment materials

Letter for emailed survey

Hi [insert name],

I hope your week is going well. I'm contacting you in the hopes that you would consider participating in a research study I'm conducting. I am currently pursuing a master's degree at the University of Tennessee, and as part of my degree, I am conducting research on women's perceptions of Pentecostal dress. [I know that you are no longer part of the Pentecostal community, but I would be really interested in learning about your previous experiences with dress standards.] OR (if the individual is still part of the Pentecostal belief tradition), [I would be really interested in learning about your previous or present experiences related to Pentecostal dress.]

Would you consider taking a quick survey about Pentecostal dress standards at the link below? The purpose of this study is to learn about the lived experiences of women that follow or previously followed the religious dress guidelines of the Apostolic Pentecostal church and to better understand how these guidelines affect women's identity. This study is not intended to criticize religious beliefs or to measure your spirituality in any way.

This survey should only take you about 15 minutes and is completely anonymous (unless you indicate interest in a follow-up interview, at which case you will be asked to provide your contact information).

I really appreciate your help, and if you have any questions feel free to let me know.

Sincerely,

Casey Kellogg

[Insert survey link]

Email for all follow up interviews

Hi [insert name],

Thank you for participating in my current research study on women's perceptions of Pentecostal dress standards by completing the survey. At the end of the survey, you indicated that you would be interested in participating in a follow up interview, and I am contacting you to schedule your interview.

This interview should only last between 30 and 60 minutes, and will focus on expanding the answers you provided in your survey, specifically those related to the conflict you've experienced in regards to Pentecostal dress. This interview may be held either in-person (if you are located in the Knoxville TN area) or over Zoom.

Could you write back and let me know when you would be free during the weeks of [insert date range]. Also, please let me know if you would prefer an in-person or online interview so that we may also decide where your interview will take place. I'm looking forward to hearing from you, and feel free to let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Casey Kellogg

Appendix B: Survey and Interview Questions

Survey questions

1. I currently belong to a Pentecostal church that has dress standards for women.

(Yes, I do/ No, I do not)

2. I have been following Pentecostal dress standards for:

(All of my life/Most of my life/Some of my life/Little of my life/ None of my life)

3. I currently follow Pentecostal dress standards

(Strongly Agree/Agree/Somewhat Agree/Somewhat Disagree /Disagree/Strongly Disagree)

4. In general, I feel positive towards Pentecostal dress standards

(Strongly Agree/Agree/Somewhat Agree/Somewhat Disagree /Disagree/Strongly Disagree)

5. I feel confident about my hair and its length

(Strongly Agree/Agree/Somewhat Agree/Somewhat Disagree /Disagree/Strongly Disagree)

6. Pentecostal dress standards positively affect/affected my identity or the way I see myself

(Strongly Agree/Agree/Somewhat Agree/Somewhat Disagree /Disagree/Strongly Disagree)

7. Pentecostal dress standards positively affect/affected my faith.

(Strongly Agree/Agree/Somewhat Agree/Somewhat Disagree /Disagree/Strongly Disagree)

8. I am conflicted about Pentecostal dress standards

(Frequently/Often/Sometimes/Never)

9. I worry about being judged at church because of how I dress

(Frequently/Often/Sometimes/Never/ I have in the past but no longer do)

10. I worry about being judged outside of church because of how I dress

(Frequently/Often/Sometimes/Never/ I have in the past but no longer do)

11. Would you be interested in participating in a follow up interview to further discuss your perceptions of dress standards?

Interview questions

Note: this will be a semi structured interview based on the responses participants gave in their survey. I have included a list of possible follow- up questions. However, these follow-up questions may change in content and order depending upon the answers the participants give. Similarly, some follow up questions only apply to individuals that have left the Pentecostal community and will not be asked to participants that are still a member of the Pentecostal church.

1. Can you tell me about your history with the Apostolic Pentecostal church

Can you explain your history with dress standards?

Did you always follow the dress standards while you were attending the Pentecostal church?

Was there any specific aspect of the dress standards that you don't / didn't follow?

Was there any particular aspect of the dress standards that you continued to follow after you left the church?

2. I'm curious about how you were taught about dress standards. Can you tell me more about that experience?

Overall, was this a positive or negative experience?

Was there any differences between how you were taught about them at church versus at home?

3. In your survey, you described your feelings towards Pentecostal dress standards as X, could you tell me more about why you chose this answer?

4. You answered X to the statement that Pentecostal dress standards positively affected your identity. Could you tell me more about why you choose this answer?

Could you give an example or story of a time dress standards affected your identity in this way?

5. You answered X to the statement that Pentecostal dress standards positively affected your faith. Could you tell me more about why you chose this answer?

Could you give an example or story of a time dress standards affected your faith in this way?

6. You said you felt conflicted about Pentecostal dress standards X. Could you tell me more about the nature of this conflict?

Is there any aspect of dress standards (ex: hair, clothing, jewelry) that caused more conflict than other aspects of the standards?

7. You answered X to worrying about being judged at church because of your dress. Can you tell me more about why you feel this way?

How if, at all, do you feel Pentecostal dress standards affect / affected your role at church?

8. You answered X to worrying about being judged outside of church because of your dress. Can you tell me more about why you feel this way?

9. Can you tell me how you feel about the emphasis on Pentecostal women's dress as compared to Pentecostal men's dress.

Could you give an example or story of a time you noticed this?

10. I noticed you are no longer apart of the Apostolic Pentecostal community. Could you tell me more about what that experience was like?

Did dress standards play a role in this?

11. As you may have guessed, I'm really interested in how the church's intentions with dress standards compare to the actual experiences of women. Do you have any opinions on this?

How do you feel about the role of women in general within the Pentecostal church?

How, if at all, do you feel women's dress standards have influenced that role?

Appendix C:

Structural Coding Chart

Narrative Element	**Theme**	**Example**
Exposition	Blind acceptance- included accepting beliefs and practices out of naivety or need.	Anne: “I probably thought nothing of it as a kid”
Rising Action	Coming of age- included actively questioning aspects of the faith community and wrestling with religious doubt.	Donna: “I was questioning my family dynamics. I was questioning religious traditions… There was a lot of conflict. It wasn't a gentle process.”
Climax	The breaking point- included physically and emotionally leaving the former faith.	Margret: “That was… the defining moment where I knew I was going to have to take a step back.
Falling Action	Disentangling- included grappling with experiences post-deconversion and experiencing rejection from friends and family	Donna: “I've actually been disowned by my family.”
Denouement	Coming to terms- included accepting former experiences and descriptions of present perceptions of former faith communities.	Molly: “I hate to sound so negative because I think that there are some really good, genuine, beautiful people… Just ,their way of thinking I think is wrong.”

Thematic Coding Chart

	Description	Example
Pre-Leaving Codes		
Camps Conferences	References to attending church summer camps or conferences, typically through their former faith.	Florence: "I was told that you have, have your clothes, have to meet these standards in order to go to the church camp. It was very upsetting…"
Female enforcement	References to women enforcing dress standards.	Anne: "my dad was much more open to the thought that a woman could be saved and wear pants. Mom was totally against it."
Gender inequality ● Women's burden	References to unequal expectations for women versus men. ● sub-code describes women as responsible for men's sexual purity	Anne: "I remember feeling just devastated because he's a boy, he can show his knees and wear shorts, but I had to fight this yards of heavy fabric." ● "I was taught that as a woman, I never want to cause a man to desire me and cause him to fall or him to have lustful thoughts or whatever. It all fell on me to protect them."
Body Shaming	References to dating and church teachings or standards on dating.	Krista: "There was a really strong emphasis on dating, which I thought was interesting but coupling and pairing within this holiness apostolic organization was paramount."
Post-Leaving Codes		
Resources outside of the church	References to resources such as videos, books, or podcasts that participants used after deconverting to aid their grappling process.	Molly: "...The difference from that time is that now I've done the work. I've gone to therapy and I've asked the questions that I didn't when I was so much younger."
Islam or other	References to other religions,	Lexie: "I do think that the devaluing of

religions	specifically Islam, and comparison to legalism and dress standards.	women I do think is pretty on par with legalism. I mean honestly, Islam is a legalistic religion. It is very legalistic."
Overarching Codes		
The body ● Physical body ● Dressing the body ● Emphasis on fashion	References to body ● Subcode 1 describe the physical body ● Subcode 2 describes dress and dress standards ● Subcode 3 describes fashion and dress culture	● Lacey: "he said in front of everyone that I was fat and that I needed to be to lose weight because he was sick of buying the fat clothes" ● Molly: "I always said that my shoes were my jewelry… they were my stripper heels." ● Lacey: "Sunday morning, the fashion is on, the guys are wearing suits that are hundreds of dollars. The girls have their Michael Coors and Louis Vuitton bags and all that stuff is everywhere."
Trauma ● Implicit Trauma ● Explicit Trauma ● Traumatic religious teaching ● Non-Personal Trauma	References to trauma or highly negative experiences ● Subcode 1 describes experiences that are traumatic but are not necessarily described as traumatic ● Subcode 2 describes traumatic feelings that are described as trauma or by a similar descriptor ● Subcode 3 describes religious teachings that were extremely hurtful ● Subcode 4 describes trauma of other people, both known and unknown.	● Edie: "it was really frustrating to constantly be pulled aside and have people make comments, or my friends' parents would tell them I was a bad influence" ● Sierra: "I went through a little bit of a trauma there because they did preach and teach about that type of stuff." ● Molly: "that's definitely how I lived. If this week I didn't pray enough, if I did something bad, I was definitely going to hell now." ●

Vita

Casey R Kellogg grew up as a fourth generation Apostolic Pentecostal in Mississippi. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Mississippi College in English Writing before going on to pursue a master's degree at the University of Tennessee in Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics. She plans to continue to teach English Writing classes at UTK following her graduation. She hopes to continuously pursue her passion for teaching and writing both academically and creatively.