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“We are all the decline”: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Presbyterian Clergywomen’s Talk About Denominational Decline

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“WE ARE ALL THE DECLINE”
A Mixed Methods Analysis of Presbyterian Clergywomen’s
Talk About Denominational Decline

by

MIRIAM R. SHELTON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Psychology to satisfy the dissertation
requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

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Miriam R. Shelton

Advisors: Professors Joseph Glick (deceased), Anna Stetsenko

In this study, I have used social representation theory and discursive methods to explore developmental challenges posed to the clergy by the social changes brought about in the loss of membership and resources in one mainline denomination. Analyzing the interviews of 37 Presbyterian clergywomen, I document a Presbyterian social representation of decline, the core of which aligned with a report on decline issued by the PCUSA (GATF, 1991), and is shaped by themata of death versus liveliness, moving versus stagnation, growth versus decline and decline as good versus as bad. An evolution since 1991 can be seen in this social representation in the significance given to diversity.

A subgroup in the sample, identified by their concern for inclusivity along lines of racial, gender and sexual identification, minimized the decline as an issue for the “white” church. Differences were also found in the way that pastors, exposed and unexposed to recent decline in their own congregations, composed their fields of representation. Though there was no difference found in their identification of causes or resulting demands, exposed pastors included more concrete descriptions of the symptoms and effects of decline. Furthermore, the types of narratives that they composed contained more unfavorable self-positions and stories with sharp articulations that bent toward unfavorable and pessimistic positions. Gender concerns also
informed many clergywomen’s representation of decline, in particular regarding the availability of pastoral positions and the nature of sacrifices they may be called upon to make. The dilemma of demonstrating agency, but not aggressive ambition, on the one hand, or accepting dismissive positioning, on the other, was seen to be conveyed by alluding to one’s calling.

The process of representation is thus found to interlace social identification with personal development. Evidence points to positioning occurring in the articulations between action and evaluative clauses, as a site of development. Personal development is understood to be indicated by the complex, multiphasic understanding of denominational change and its implicated influence on pastors as workers and on their relationships with others. Development under such circumstances involves courage, and was marked by moral choices negotiated between commitment to ideology and personal experience. One mediator is the narrative processing of troubling experience, juggling unfavorable and pessimistic positions, even at the cost of delaying coherent resolution. The study advocates for an ethic of authenticity in negotiating self-sacrifice in service to the community, rather than as protection of the church as institution.
Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful for having had the late Dr. Joseph Glick as my advisor and mentor throughout the years in which this dissertation gestated and took shape. His wisdom, guidance and infinite patience were fundamental in molding my understanding of both adult development and research. I will always treasure the friendship that emerged as I began the transition from student to colleague. His death was a personal loss.

Professor Anna Stetsenko’s steadfast insistence on the unity of personal and cultural development inspired my selection of this topic for study. Stepping is after Joe Glick’s death, she saw my process through to the end, weaving in stronger threads of meaning and values. Professor Colette Daiute helped to corral my scattered thinking and improve the focus and theoretical integrity of the project. A class with Professor Patricia Brooks on language awoke my interest in its pervasive influence in psychological processes. Professor John Broughton, of Teachers College, Columbia University, introduced me to the complexities of adult development and inspired me to pursue further studies. Their theoretical and pragmatic sensibility and commitment has encouraged me through the long process of realizing this study.

I owe gratitude also to the participants in this study, who constructively shared their time and their stories, and willingly submitted to having their talk analyzed. This project would not have been meaningful without their generosity.

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Miriam R. Shelton
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Chapter One

Introduction and Theoretical Perspectives

The rapid pace of change in contemporary American society has resulted in upheavals in the workplace, forcing institutions, employers and workers alike to make major adaptations in their conceptions and practices of labor, and in their relationships to one another. Given the emphasis on work as a means of defining personal value, such changes can have powerful psychological effects on individual workers (Garrett-Peters, 2009). The present investigation studies the impact of institutional change on members of the clergy profession, specifically, Presbyterian clergywomen. It explores their processes of conceptual understanding and strategic use of cultural means as occasions for development.

The Decline of the Presbyterian Church

Mainline Protestantism\(^1\) in the United States has, during the past five decades, undergone a significant shift in its role in American society, with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)\(^2\) experiencing steady declines in membership, financial resources and social status. While the evidence of deteriorating conditions in the church as institution is readily available (Research Services, 2008, 2013), the impact of this decline on the clergy, whom it affects directly, and for whom it may well present a personal as well as professional crisis, has not been widely studied. Career outlooks for continuous, full-time employment for clergy workers are increasingly uncertain, especially for female clergy, who are still gaining footing on the way to full job parity with their male counterparts (Chang, 2005; Research Services, 2008). The denominational

\(^1\) The mainline churches include the American Baptist, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Presbyterian (U.S.A.) and United Methodist denominations.

\(^2\) Hereafter, PCUSA.
institution, in which they have worked so assiduously to achieve equality, appears to be disappearing under their feet.

The changes in the PCUSA have been dramatic. Forty percent of churches are unable to support a full-time pastor, with 16 percent relying on lay or temporary leaders to stay open (Research Services, 2008). Many churches have closed, as national membership has fallen from a high of over four and a half million in 1968 to just under two million by 2012, a decline of approximately 60% (Research Services, 2013). Trends suggest that membership numbers will plummet even faster in the coming decade, as families abandon the church at ever-earlier points in the family cycle.

Child baptisms declined by 50% from 1992 to 2010, and confirmations, which usually take place between ages ten and twelve, have declined by 41% during the same period. These rates are much higher than the total membership drop over that period, suggesting that families with young children are the ones becoming less active (Marcum, 2011). No presbytery has been untouched, though there are geographic differences in the rates of decline. Frick (2009, September 18), an official in the national organization, declared the membership decline to be “the number one issue our church faces. If we don't address that, all our other ministries and activities are moot as they can't survive long-term.”

The clergy profession invites the deepest levels of personal commitment for several reasons, foremost among them its claim to speak for God. In addition, the lingering effects, even among Protestants, of once-traditional expectations of poverty and celibacy, and the fishbowl visibility of their private or family lives, make unusual demands on clergy. Though clergy are in

---

3 Presbyteries are the most local level of formal geographic networks of churches and clergy in the denomination. As administrative bodies, they approve all contracts between pastors and churches.
some ways unique, the present study posits that they respond to the rolling crisis engendered by the decline of the church with discursive adaptations similar to those found in other helping professions working in institutional contexts, including doctors (Iedema, Dengeling, Braithwaite, & White, 2004), nurses (Gibson, 2013), lawyers (Kuhn, 2009) and educators (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002). At the same time, some discursive responses that are intrinsic to the language of clergy alone will also be explored.

The present study employs a mixed-methods approach, applying a developmental approach to social representation theory, and using the techniques of discursive psychology to explore how clergywomen use cultural linguistic tools to find and give personal and professional significance to the changing nature of the church. Social representations are “organizing principles of symbolic relationships between individuals and groups. . . who share common views about a social issue” (Doise, 2001, pp. 98-99).

I investigate (1) how clergywomen represent the Presbyterian decline, its causes, expression and personal demands within the constraints of their professional authority and responsibility; (2) how religious symbols and tools, such as the insertion of talk about their divine calling, contributes to this process of meaning-making; and (3) how narration illumines developmental processes and the ongoing concerns about positioning and subjectivity in the dialogic, contested and open-ended nature of representations of change in the context of American religious work.

**Developmental Perspective**

Adult development involves agentic engagement with evolving changes in the cultural, historical and material environment, and is constituted through social activity within cultural surroundings (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004).
Bronfenbrenner explains this succinctly:

Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended, differentiated and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 27).

Applied to clergywomen, development would involve gaining deeper and broader understanding of their social world and becoming more effective resources for their parishioners and the community within the constraints presented by changes in religious belief and practice. Interacting with their congregation, denomination and society, they agentically shape their own future, together with that of the church, reflecting on the personal costs and benefits of this engagement.

Such development, deeply affected as it is by experience and interpersonal dynamics, inevitably involves language (Bakhtin, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Daiute, 2010; Stetsenko, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). The discourse of clergywomen is one location where evidence of the “differentiation, articulation and hierarchical integration” of developmental processes (Werner, 1957, p. 126) can be observed. New insights, increasingly subtle discrimination, and more flexible and creative thinking and functioning emerge from dialogue, which is understood as the site of development from constructive and cultural-historical perspectives alike.

One path for development through discourse lies in the very search for deeper understanding, in the pursuit of which conceptualizations of a particular object, such as decline transforms the mind itself, with thinking becoming more systematic, and representations more sophisticated (Tomasello, 1999). The process of meaning-making, so central to development
(Bruner, 1990), cannot unfold without moving from social interactions to personal levels of meaning (Vygotsky, 1978) by finding reflexive distance (Glick, 2013).

The conception of personal growth occurring within and along with culture follows from Vygotsky’s (1978) core assertions about the primacy of social interactions for development of higher psychological functions, and about the mediation of that process by cultural artifacts serving as tools and symbols for increasingly complex cognition and action. As people internalize language rules and practices, they in turn communicate more effectively with others. In formulating the ideas being communicated, people are in dialogue with specific interlocutors and, more generally, with culture. This process leads to refining ideas, opinions and attitudes. Thinking thus becomes differentiated from action and organized in more complex ways (Glick, 1983, 2013; Werner, 1957), shaping representations. This process is inescapably mediated by language and communication. As Vygotsky explained:

The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. In that process, the relation of thought to word undergoes changes that themselves may be regarded as development in the functional sense (Vygotsky 1986, p. 218).

Inner speech itself is constituted in the process of ongoing cultural participation through the use of words and representations infused with personal meaning, emotion and creative reflection. In the course of cycles of social exchange, the person develops and culture is enriched. Thus, development is a creative process that goes well beyond mimicry of cultural stimuli.

This perspective on language and discourse is apt for the present research study, as the linguistic practices used by pastors in talking about the Presbyterian decline are the same ones through which they aim to educate, inspire, and lead their congregation, and also their own
careers and styles. As clergywomen adopt typical Presbyterian language for talking about the
decline, implicit social representations become a means through which to think about, talk about
and act upon that decline they see happening around them. Additionally, developmental theory
facilitates inquiry into how subgroups of pastors express divergent concerns around the meaning
of decline, and what elements of language are constitutive of those subgroups and indexical to
the issues that divide them.

The development theories described above predict that the quotidian interactions of
pastoring a congregation would lead a clergywoman’s activity and language to be tailored
specifically to the congregational contexts that are being affected by change. This in turn would
influence her conceptualization of that change in the interview context. Conceptions of decline
expand to explain those causes, qualities, and demands experienced in one’s local work
setting. As a result, decline would be expected to be represented with more nuance and specific
detail the deeper the pastor’s exposure to decline processes is.

A pastor does not simply react to these cultural and social changes and realities; she also
participates in, contributes to and influences them, both personally and in her professional
positions. Put another way, “Societal change depends on what is persuasive to people, [who]
interweave their perceptions and needs as they interact with others in the circumstances where
they find themselves in their everyday realities, where they develop ‘new material’ from unique
perspectives in history” (Daiute, 2010, p. 13). The pastors in the present study are thus not mere
passive recipients of change in the church but are conceptualized as also being agents of change.

Development leads to understanding and also to action. As a response to demands,
pastors construct multiple and flexible ways of interacting, representing the decline to different
constituencies. These different situations not only require the clergywoman to represent common
issues variously, but also to reflect from alternating perspectives, make choices, and present her pastoral authority in new and distinct ways, which spurs further development.

Language and speech are always directed. Bakhtin and his associates emphasize the essential role of the dialogical partner, even in thought: “There can be no such thing as an abstract addressee, a man unto himself, so to speak . . . Each person’s inner world and thought has its stabilized social audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values, and so on are fashioned” (Voloshinov, 1929/1973, p. 85). Though in today’s world the social audience may not be as stable as Voloshinov suggests, it stands to reason that when people speak they address not only the person at hand, but also an imagined audience: for our pastor, it might perhaps be a member of her congregation, a blog she just read, or a particularly forceful idea from a seminary professor years ago. Dialogues weave multiple threads of ideas and addressees present or absent, shaping more pointed rhetorical arguments (Billig, 1989; Billig et al., 1988).

Moreover, dialogue constitutes a perpetual chain of ideas across time, in which any utterance participates in multiple dialogical activity that answers ideas that have been argued before and anticipates others that will follow (Bakhtin, 1981). These points are echoed in Billig’s (1989) and Myers’s (2004) emphasis on the pervasiveness of rhetoric in talk, which is always directed at the position of another, usually opposite, argument. Such intentional receptivity to interlocutors or perspectives with which one does not already agree shapes development: “Our ideological development is . . . an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 345–346). Such a valuation of engagement with opposition is supported by research that found that the greatest levels of ambivalence about an object produced the greatest amount
of dialogue (Abbey & Valsiner, 2005). As the current study is based on interviews, only those present—the interviewer and focus group members—are identifiable as interlocutors, and yet the thrust of the arguments about decline are taken to respond to multiple ongoing threads of dialogue with which we continue to interact in the background (Bakhtin, 1981).

Among those being addressed are partners in previous conversations, whom one has heard using language and imagery in relation to particular objects, collectively shaping social representations. The powerful role of dialogue in development is especially interesting to researchers when differences in representation are experienced as occurring not only between groups of people, but also between the different social positions and responsibilities that a single person may occupy. For example, the subjectivity of motherhood engages women in ongoing dialogue between opposing attitudes toward MMR vaccination (Provencher, 2011), and the choice of organ donation evokes not only the life-giving function, but death and mutilation as well (Moloney, Hall, & Walker, 2005). Similarly, immigrants to the United Kingdom express divergent views of British culture when assimilation is considered as an expansion or as a loss of self (Andreouli, 2010). Coming to increasingly complex understandings of such dilemmas constitutes development (Werner, 1957). The present study explores such processes, as clergywomen engage in dialogue between the normative elements of doctrinal ideology and the functional demands of their own parish, as the effects of decline are experienced.

The present study takes the position that adult development also has a moral dimension. As in the examples above of mothers deciding whether or not to vaccinate their children, and of family members consenting or not to organ donation, the resultant cognitive polyphasia, as dialogical perspectives are known in social representation theory, is bound to choices that collectively have an impact on the whole of society. Along these lines, Presbyterians, as a
religious group, broadly promote reflection and collaboration on issues of ultimate concern (Tillich, 1957; Constitution of the PCUSA, Part I, 2007). This view of human life as charged with the responsibility of working for the common good is congruent with the Vygotskian tradition in which individual development and participation in social progress are taken to be reciprocal; indeed, they constitute a single social activity (Lave, 1996; Stetsenko, 2012, 2013; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004).

This moral dimension is enacted in the present study’s interview conversations, where the speakers exercise their discursive power in composing responses from the perspective of their ideological standpoint in such a way that preserves goodwill in the interaction and manages their self-presentation (Goffman, 1959), all in a transient interaction. Development, which results in greater complexity of understanding and in activity applying this understanding as persons envision their future and act in concert with their personal “moral projects” (Taylor, 1989), is part of a larger effort toward communal progress. The present study adopts the research assumptions of cultural psychology, that research is itself a social practice undertaken as a “transformative activist endeavor” (Stetsenko, 2013), committed to seeking clearer understanding of human development and promoting human equality and well-being.

**Theoretical and Methodological Approaches**

**Social representation theory.** Social representation theory explores how social concepts develop in human communities, anchored in familiar cultural images, narratives and generalizations (Moscovici & Vignaux, 2000); collectively these elements are known as fields of representation. Steeped in ideological sentiment and values, social representations establish collective attitudes and practices, and serve to guide both thought and language, so that the ideas being represented circulate and gain credibility and acceptance. As they are increasingly used by
members of a group, they take on a sense of being obviously true, and are repeated as taken-for-granted shared knowledge.

Social representations develop around matters of controversy and debate, as people appeal to a view of an object that accords with other values and perspectives of the group, in order to make sense of and act upon an emergent social reality. The reflection and communication entailed may serve polemical or emancipatory aims, arguing on behalf of a social position (Moscovici, 1961/2008). Social representations are thus able to “capture the dynamic processes of change and transformation in the representations which circulate in the modern world” (Duveen, 2007, p. 543), contributing to both personal and societal development.

Although core themes of social representations typically have some stability over time, as seen, for example in those regarding gender (O’Connor & Joffe, 2014), they are nonetheless used as cultural tools that are open to continuous emergence as people draw on familiar tropes and images and alter them slightly to make a subtle point or to carry a familiar point further. Social representations thus become loci for human transformation.

This makes them especially suitable for study of social change. Representations show how a group positions itself in relation to events and relevant processes regarding which action may be needed (Provencher, 2011). As Marková (2003) suggests, social representations are phenomena of change rather than stability, catching the evolution of beliefs or understandings of social phenomena, such as the overall decline in participation in American religious institutions.

The present study explores the extent to which there are similarities across the participants’ individual fields of representation and discursive tactics that would indicate the existence of a shared Presbyterian representation of decline among clergywomen, one that would be evident in both the discursive tactics used and the content of the representations. Furthermore,
even though female pastors constitute but one subset of a group, Presbyterian clergy, that is affected by declining work conditions, it is possible that this subset may itself contain subgroups, women whose standpoints toward the church differ enough, or whose experiences of declining conditions are different enough from one another, to cause them to compose subtly distinct representations of what the decline means to them.

Although social representations by definition refer to similarities across a sample, any one person has differing epistemological perspectives (Wagner, Duveen, Verma, & Themel, 2000, p. 304). This coexistence of multiple social representational positions within a population, known as cognitive polyphasia (Moscovici, 1961/2008), points to multiple frames of reference and group membership for any given individual, and is congruent with a syncretistic view of development, in which different forms of thought coexist, rather than being replaced by emerging advanced forms of thought (Werner, 1957). Polyphasia is characterized by different types of logic, degrees of expressivity, and levels of self/world differentiation that persist as parallel and simultaneous modes fulfilling different functions (Jovchelovitch, 2007), and can be understood as normative in development (Franklin, 2000).

Consonant with this view, pastors, when considering the meaning of the decline in their churches and denomination, engage multiple perspectives of contemporary culture. Each of these inform the pastors’ talk of the decline. Most prominent in this mix of perspectives, though, is that of their religious ideology, and their standing as ordained proponents of that ideology and of the church as institution. The functional ways in which clergy juxtapose these perspectives in their explication of the decline form the core focus of this study.

**Discursive approaches.** Discursive perspectives view psychological phenomena, such as thinking, attitudes and emotions, as emergent in the social interactions of everyday life (Harré
Language is understood as a central psychological, symbolic and mediational tool, one that organizes human experience and shapes thought, interpretation and reflection, and is an aid in carrying out human communal life (Vygotsky, 1978). Even private speech contributes to this activity:

Speech and action are part of one and the same complex psychological function, directed toward the solution of the problem at hand. The more complex the action demanded by the situation and the less direct its solution, the greater the importance played by speech in the operation as a whole (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 25).

Language analysis is particularly useful in studies involving religious leaders, as speech and narrative are also core religious resources, mediating much private and public practice of religion (Day, 1993), as Wuthnow states:

The sheer prevalence of talk in social life . . . is perhaps especially true of religion, where talk ranges from sermons to congregational meetings and from conversion stories and testimonials to religious rhetoric in political campaigns and reports of miraculous healings. As these instances suggest, religious discourse is clearly a social practice—patterned by the social institutions in which it is learned and in which it is practiced, explicitly taught, and implicitly modeled so that practitioners adhere to commonly accepted rules governing the practice, internalized so that these rules often do not require conscious deliberation, and yet observable in the structure and content of discourse itself (2011, p. 7).

Discursive approaches in psychological research are also congruent with the view of religion as “a set of cultural resources” at the disposal of an “imaginary community” (Campany, 2012). Imaginary community refers to the sense that members of a large organization, such as
the PCUSA, imagine shared unity and coherence (Anderson, 1991). Rather than there being an “essence” binding the PCUSA members into a coherent unity, it is the expectation that others share their beliefs and understanding of the denomination that creates among members, lay and clergy alike, the sense of coherence. Avoiding the suggestion of dominance implied in Foucault’s (1977, 1986) theory, Campany suggests that people agentically pick and choose which elements from the available religious tradition will inform their personal practice, weaving them into the fabric of their personal faith (Campany, 2012).

All psychological phenomena are seen as mediated by the rules of language (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010; Swidler, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978), and are therefore dependent on the speaker’s linguistic skill, their “relative moral standing in the community,” and on the narrative features of discourse (Harré & Gillett, 1994, p.27). Discursive psychology deprioritizes the cognitive approaches to psychology in favor of even transiently-enacted linguistic expressions of psychological attributes. At its core, discursive psychology is concerned with the “action orientation and reality-constructing features of discourse” (Kent & Potter, 2014, p. 300) and their communicative effectiveness, rather than with measures of how true or correct talk may be.

Wittgenstein (1953) understood language to follow rules in the ways that games do, allowing communication to seem easily understandable, while also being flexible enough to permit imaginative and creative expression. Furthermore, he believed that religious language, in particular, constituted its own game, with a set of rules that create a type of shorthand communication for insiders, but which might confound outsiders. The idea of “action,” as used in discursive psychology, includes Wittgenstein’s idea of language games and Austin’s (1962) “doing things with words,” while also allowing for flexible, personal use in the many linguistic ways that the wide range of “practical, technical and interpersonal tasks” that are part of daily
living can be accomplished (Potter & Edwards, 1999). In discursive psychology, opinions and categories are therefore posited as constituted in the process of managing these acts in the moment of talking.

Analysis based on close reading of transcripts explores the meanings created in the blended aims of maintaining interpersonal relationships and one’s own public standing as a moral person at any given moment in the ongoing interaction, with shared understanding awakened by use of familiar language (Goffman, 1959; Potter, Edwards, & Wetherell, 1993). As a result, the present study does not interpret the statements of the participants as permanent or comprehensive opinions either about the church, the decline, or even themselves; instead, their statements are taken as demonstrations of reflective and unreflective dialogue in the setting of an interview. In other talk settings, or in response to other questions, these same participants may be expected to present themselves and the conditions of their work differently.

Discursive analysis thus tracks social speech rather than inner speech (Vygotsky, 1978). It interprets how language is used as a tool, documenting the variability and contradiction in speech, and draws attention to personal motives as they appear in the talk (Wetherell, 1998), with the aim of pointing out the meanings that are constructed in these processes. These methods aid understanding of adult development in the context of social and institutional change, which is the substantive emphasis of this dissertation.

Because of its strong constructionist standpoint, discursive psychology is vulnerable to the critique that in its very effort to avoid reductionism, it appears to reduce the fullness of a person’s life to a transient effect of language, or to “seeing psychological persons as fictitious products of our social, especially linguistic, practices and nothing more” (Martin, 2010, p. 221). These claims are rejected by discursive theorists:
Clearly language, or discourse, is not all that there is in the world, not all that psychology and society are made of, and not the same thing as experience, or reality, or feelings, or knowledge . . . but it is the primary work of language to make all those 'other' phenomena accountable (Edwards, 2006, p. 42).

Nonetheless, an understanding of the limitations of discursive analysis is important to the present study. Certainly, there is more to the experience of social, religious, and institutional change than the participants can state in words; furthermore, there is also meaning in what gets left unspoken, and there are levels of personal meaning that remain inaccessible to analysis. Thus, no claim can be made for the finality of meaning or interpretation of data collected.

I address these limitations by applying multiple levels of analyses from the discursive repertoire in order to collectively present data about the impact of institutional change on the clergy members as persons and workers. Among the discursive acts explored in this study, I give particular emphasis to the role of narratives and religious language. The study of language is channeled through social representation theory, which is concerned with the social propagation of ideas, and whose analysis of necessity focuses not only on how language is used, but also on what it communicates.

In addition, I also supplement a predominately qualitative approach with quantitative analysis, which, though contrary to the basic epistemological assumptions of discursive psychology, is intended to add rigor and to find associations not as evident through a solely discursive approach. The quantitative analyses provide a complementary validity to those methods proper to qualitative data and analyses (Altheide & Johnson, 2013; Brannen, 2005).

**Code-switching and the sense of calling.** Religious language, particularly when referring to one’s sense of calling, indexes the pastor’s authority as a leader of the church and
serves as a flexible and meaningful discursive gesture through which clergywomen claim rights and responsibilities pertaining to that authority (Christopherson, 1994). Though “the call” may be experienced as a spiritual dialogue, to wit, “the honest testimony of our heart that we accept the office offered to us, not from ambition or avarice, or any other unlawful motive, but from a sincere fear of God and an ardent zeal for the edification of the Church” (Calvin, 1536/1999, p. 654), determining what will be a pastor’s moral center of concern or project, it is also social, and is in constant play throughout her ongoing dialogue with her congregation, the denomination, and society at large. It is also a factor in dialogue about theoretical and practical issues regarding the pursuit of a career (Christopherson, 1994), a dialogue that may be becoming more overt and oppositional as decline becomes more extensive across the denomination and fewer pastoral positions become available, many of which will offer less than full-time pay.

**Narrative theory.** In narratives, or stories (in the present study the terms are used interchangeably), characters are composed, positioned and interpreted in the process of reporting events (Bamberg, 1997, 2004; Bruner, 1990). Positioning is a discursive, narrative action, “whereby selves are located in conversations as. . . coherent participants in jointly produced story-lines” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.48). Positioning processes are used in the study of narratives to move beyond treating a story as a direct reproduction of an event, and indicate the agentic accomplishment of interactive as well as communicative actions having the purpose of balancing one’s moral standing while presenting a veridical account.

As applied to the present study, positioning contributes to representing the decline, showing the pastor in the narrative world of culturally-familiar types such as the heroic or the victimized character. It is in this interplay between events, oneself as actor, and the object, that representational and dynamic meaning is created in a transitioning world, such as the church in
decline. The results reflect on the skills of the speakers, their moral standing in the immediate setting, and the nature of unfolding story lines (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999a)

**Integration of theoretical approaches.** Positioning and social representation are both conceptual ways to highlight social processes. Davies and Harré (1990) specified the reciprocal nature of social positioning, and Bamberg (1997) posited a distinct level of positioning that addresses the immediate dialogical audience. Social representations are cultural historical products that socially map the speaker with each use. Positioning and social representations are thus complementary sites where lives, ideas, attitudes, and relationships develop.

Wortham (2000) noted considerable overlap in the meaning of the two processes, but suggested that positioning is more explicitly interactive and transactional, and open to being contested. Furthermore, different representational perspectives contribute unique dimensions to the understanding of the object. In the case of history, representations of events reveal procedural and sequential processes, whereas representations of characters focus on moral cultural values (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Similarly, positioning and representation are expected to contribute complementary elements to the understanding of decline.

Discursive psychology and the theory of social representation, are both social constructionist theories, and as such, both emphasize activity and linguistic practice over mental states. Even so, practitioners of the former claim to hold to these standards of constructionism more consistently in both methods and conceptualization. They argue, among other complaints, that limiting research to the study of natural talk is superior than using elicited talk, such as using interviews, because it permits a more finely-tuned description of the emergent meaning of the talk and its psychological implications (Billig, 1988; Potter & Edwards, 1999). In a review of the ongoing, but largely one-sided, debate, De Rosa (2006) concludes that the approaches are
fundamentally similar, as they both focus on linguistic action, affirmation of emergent meaning, while rejecting positivistic research methods. She concludes that the critique misconstrues social representations as static phenomena. I take De Rosa’s view as justification for combining, in the present study, the different levels of analysis offered by each theoretical approach, in pursuit of greater understanding of the meanings compose in interview talk. My approach is to identify the fields of representational themes, as well as conduct a discursive analysis of selected excerpts to explore the local emergence of meaning in each interview.

**Summary**

This dissertation presents a discussion of how Presbyterian clergywomen represent the decline in their denomination, and how their representations are grounded in their personal experiences and their commitment to live out their calling, situated in a religious-historical moment that may limit the attainment of their goals. The study explores the cultural repertoire used by clergywomen in talk about work as women gain greater parity in pastoral positions, even as the decline in church participation and membership is changing both individual congregations and the denomination as a whole.

The analysis used in the study focuses on the talk as collected in individual and group interviews. Three aspects of language use are explored in depth: (1) how they represent their work conditions; (2) the deployment of religious language referring to their calling to address career concerns; and (3) narrative positioning. Through these processes, it is expected that relevant aspects of the participants’ developmental adaptations to changing work environments will be seen.

**Personal standpoint.** I approached this study from the standpoint of a social scientist and with a commitment to psychology and research as transformational tools. I bring to this project
also an insider perspective as a Presbyterian clergywoman. Having focused my work outside the parish setting, I have not been personally affected by, nor do I take a position on, the dynamics that are the focus of this study. I took a cultural historical approach to the study of religion, following Belzen (2010) and Zittoun (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013; Dahinden & Zittoun, 2013). My personal beliefs are broadly liberal and feminist, consonant with both humanist and religious traditions. This standpoint undoubtedly informed my methods, probes and analysis in direct and indirect ways that are intended to be transparently evident in this dissertation. These positions were not necessarily shared by the participants.

Lietz, Langer, and Furman (2006) have illustrated how both insider and outsider identity positions afford research benefits and difficulties, insight and biases. As an insider, I chose to study clergywomen as workers, and to highlight the vulnerability of such work in light of institutional and social change. The insider identity helped me decipher meaning in the mix of ways of talking, and seek, sympathetically, for where they located the points of tension in their professional lives, as well as identify the threads of development in their stories. It also contributed to taking a position of care toward the aims of the participants, as they did toward me and my research endeavor.

Bias can also negatively impact research, which I took several steps to avoid. Firstly, I did not inquire into or analyze the theological or denominational politics of the participants and my findings did not divide into such categories. I also used a second, atheist, reader for all my coding processes, so that inadvertent assumptions or misevaluations might be identified and challenged. Thirdly, I consulted with colleagues from many fields of expertise about my methods and findings throughout the process.
Chapter Two

Literature Review: The Changing Conditions of Work

Introduction: Social Change and Development

Changes occurring in the PCUSA, and decline in participation in religious organizations more generally, are reflective of broader cultural shifts taking place in American society, impacting political, social and cultural institutions and their products and processes (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). Though in ways that may not be readily apparent, such change results from the collective actions of individuals:

“Social change is . . . not something that happens to people nor is it brought about in some extraneous form from outside themselves . . . . to which they merely have to adapt. Instead, society, together with all of its dynamics and changes, only exists as a process created by people who constantly reenact and expand their social bonds as they strive to achieve their goals” (Stetsenko, 2002, p. 152).

Thus, social change can be understood as a reciprocal partner in human development. Although individual cultural transformations may vary in pace and degree, and may at times seem to pass unnoticed, people inevitably function within a world that is constantly changing. They do not merely adapt to their world and society in systemic ways, but actively engage in making that world better, in the moment, according to their worldview (Stetsenko, 2012). This understanding seems especially pertinent to the study of people in the helping professions, to whom making the world a better place is taken as a calling.

Research into the developmental impact of social and cultural change has taken several approaches. Quantitative studies with large samples identified discrete coping responses to the
work challenges and demands brought about by major political changes ensuing from the unification of Germany. They found that people were concerned about job loss, deteriorating work environments, and uncertainty in career planning (Pinquart, Silbereisen, & Körner, 2009; Silbereisen, Pinquart, Reitzle, Tomasik, Fabel, & Grumer, 2006; Tomasik & Silbereisen, 2009), as well as the inability to gauge success (Brown, 2002). These are all worries likely to be powerfully felt by American clergywomen as well, in the face of change. As one experienced pastor observed, “You work really hard, and put out your best work, but over and over, you end up feeling like a failure” (L. Martin⁴, personal communication, March 27, 2012).

One particular challenge to the study of change is that social changes often do not affect people in a direct way, or all people equally (Saxe, 2014; Silbereisen et al., 2006). “Within any culture there are marked variations, in age, in experience, in social position, in relation to change internal to and external to the cultural group” (Glick, 2013, p. 214). Following dramatic political change in Europe, those individuals who experienced the greatest demands also most readily engaged the emerging opportunities presented by political realignment (Pinquart et al., 2009), in ways that spurred personal development. Similar findings emerged from studies of rural children in times of crisis and change (Conger & Elder, 1994; Elder, 1974).

Studies of adolescents growing up after the Yugoslavian civil war likewise found that differences in the narratives the youth wrote were dependent on particularities of the post-war culture in which they lived. In their writings, the youth “oriented to those circumstances in ways suggesting agency,” yet differences among their socio-political, historical and economic situations were nonetheless reflected in the types of narratives they composed (Daiute, 2010, p. 226; Daiute & Lucić, 2009). These consistent findings suggest that clergywomen as well may be

⁴ A pseudonym.
expected to show variation in the meaning that the decline has for them.

Specific language features also vary in meaning according to the cultural setting. In a neighborhood club, language switching indicated the acceptance of immigrants in a community (Cashman, 2005), whereas in a family it highlighted the different norms operating between generations (Zhu, 2008). The present study explores the contexts that shape differences and the way that these are reflected in language, while recognizing that a given gesture and a given word may mean different things in different settings.

Differences among church types, for example, can have significant implications for work practices of clergy, as indicated in the first major study of the mainline decline (Walrath, 1979). Though they may share Presbyterian polity and traditions, individual churches can have very different prospects, and make substantially different demands on their pastors, especially as their surrounding communities and American society, generally, change over time. The nature of a pastor’s work, and thus the path of her development, follows from her specific work setting and its affordances, constraints and evolving demands, which are considered in this study as they relate to how the pastors represent the decline.

The clergy in the PCUSA stands to gain much by being prepared for future change, and by being self-reflective about how they engage cultural resources in responding to it. Ebbenwein, Krieshok, Ulven, & Prosser (2004) found that workers who anticipated career change and made realistic plans, even at a time when their jobs appeared to be secure, cited better experiences of transition after job loss, and perceived themselves to be coping better, compared to those who ignored signs of impending change or reacted unrealistically to it.

The Changing World of Professional Employment

Although the particular shifting turf on which clergywomen are struggling to gain jobs of
equal status with men may be uniquely theirs, they are not alone in working on unsteady ground.
Increasingly, careers of men and women alike are being described as “boundaryless,” marked by high mobility, horizontal moves, and the crossing of organizational and professional borders (Newman, 2011). These conditions place a heavy burden on career management, as demonstrated by the concept of the “protean career,” which orients toward a self-directed and values-driven worker (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Here, the individual, rather than the organization he or she works for, is seen as solely responsible for career success, however disorderly and unpredictable its pursuit may be (Arthur, 1994).

In theory, this individualization offers greater flexibility for women to match their career progression more precisely to their own needs, values, family stage, and personal aspirations (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Betz, 2005; Cabrera, 2009), but the benefits of such autonomy (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999) are pitted against increased career insecurity, a constant “threat to the continuity of one’s employability or to the quality of subsequent employment” (Colakoglu, 2011, p. 48), and the prospect of uncertain and fragmented careers (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007).

Research on other professions contributes to understanding the situation of clergywomen. In many fields, the traditional understanding of professionalism itself has been transformed, as a wide range of institutions aim to extract uniform services from workers by instituting a range of standard practices that leave little room for the exercise of individual professional judgment (Adler & Kwon, 2013; Aldridge & Evetts, 2003; Hughes, 2013). Though such standards are not likely to be imposed on Presbyterian clergy by way of denomination-wide administrative regulations, pastors of churches experiencing decline are likely to find themselves increasingly pressured to conform to expectations of what will be attractive to their congregants.
Studies of professional workers show that they often turn to traditional ideology and the language of professionalism to discuss the changes they experience, and even to counter new management paradigms imposed upon them. In the field of education, for example, new policies have created a crisis for many teachers (Woodhouse & Cochrane, 2010). They talk about the loss of opportunity to exercise professional judgment in the classroom as being stripped of their professional identity (Kirk & Wall, 2010): “It’s almost like telling us to change our personalities. If you say to somebody, ‘you can’t do that anymore’ after 24 years of teaching, it is completely and utterly demoralizing. This is so alien to the way we work” (Woods & Jeffries, 2002, p. 96). Elsewhere, a teacher says, “You know if you take this [professional status] away, not all the money in the world will make him feel content with his job” (Riseborough, 1981, p. 15). In these examples, teachers use their representation of professionalism to shape an argument against shifting work policies and conditions (MacLure, 1993).

In academia, the evolving nature of the university, where teaching is increasingly “sold” as a commodity to students who approach their education as consumers, was studied by Benwell and Stokoe (2002) through close analysis of teacher-student conversations. They found that teachers and students alike were orienting authority in their interaction in ways that reflect this new representation of teaching. For example, in an English tutoring session, students were unapologetic in declaring that they had not read a text assigned for the day, and could be heard, on audiotape, giggling while the teacher adjusted his lesson plan to students unfamiliar with the subject matter (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002). It is the language used, including the multiple hesitations of the teacher, and the absence of any talk of penalty, the researchers argue, that indicates the extent of change. Narrative methods have also been applied to changes to university policy, indicating the different positions created to narrate the process from perspectives of
academics, administrators and support staff (Garcia & Hardy, 2007).

Two studies (Iedema et al., 2004; Thomas & Hewitt, 2011) take as their subject the discourse strategies of doctors placed in management positions who were tasked with overseeing the implementation of new clinical practices that would limit their professional authority. In the first of these studies, the doctor-administrators alternated between the “old talk” of clinical values and the “new talk” of resource efficiency, and constructed a third “hybrid talk,” which helped to disguise the essential incompatibility of the two approaches and discourses. Expert tacticians, the doctors constructed a discursive patchwork of three ways of talk, sometimes including all three within a single utterance (Iedema et al., 2004). In the second study, the doctor-administrators selectively adopted aspects of the new administrative language that nevertheless preserved the professional authority of the doctors (Thomas & Hewitt, 2011). In both of these examples, the language used is presented as the central point of adaptation to change even as it maintains the speaker’s social position.

A study of nurses showed that the degree to which they adopted institutional “enterprising discourse” varied according to the area of the hospital in which the subjects worked (Gibson, 2013). The “enterprise discourse” established by management through mission statements and job descriptions was weakest in wards in which there was a tight network of nurses’ interactions with patients and their family members, and greater collaboration among the health care team. The study concluded that “discourses circulate and interconnect differently in different spaces” (Gibson, 2013, p. 99).

In these examples, language can be seen to be a means by which the actors exercise agency. In developmental terms, agency is described as “how people react to, deal with, and actively shape, through their own engagements with the demands of life, the rapidly changing
realities of their world” (Stetsenko, 2013, p. 9). For Elder, “individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances” (Elder, 1998, p.4), in agentic ways that involve both proven skills and the imagination to adapt these skills to new situations (Emirbayer & Mische 1998). It would stand to reason that the points of developmental pressure for clergywomen would also be the places that show discursive variation, as clergy discuss the types of relationships afforded by their environments in light of the evolving nature of church and religion in the 21st century.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a Work Environment

The Presbyterian decline. As previously noted, the PCUSA has experienced substantial reductions in membership that have decimated some individual congregations and eroded the institution’s social and political influence. Wenger’s (1998) study of learning in organizations would suggest that the well-being of the clergy may be seen as central to the survival of the denomination, which in turn implies that deeper understanding of pastors as workers should be a highly desirable goal for those interested in the health of the institution.

Clergy well-being, in terms of the effects of stress (Wells, 2012; Wells, Probst, McKeown, Mitchem, & Whiejong, 2012) and burnout (Grosch & Olsen, 2000), has been the focus of research and concern. These issues have been studied largely as inhering in the professional work itself, rather than reflecting changing conditions of that work, or how the pastors themselves construe these difficulties and demands, though there have been some notable exceptions (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012) that aim to identify contextual effects. More sensitive are the analyses of pastors’ political talk and the factors associated with the freedom to speak publicly about political issues, with support from the denomination and congregations (Neiheisel & Djupe, 2009). However, there has been minimal study of the denominational
decline from the perspective of pastors, of the meanings the changes caused by decline may have for clergy, or of how clergy learn from and adapt to change.

**Women in the clergy.** The shrinking of the general membership has been concurrent with the increasing presence of women in the clergy. Since their first ordinations in 1956, women have been progressively closing the gap in gender parity (Research Services, 2007). Indeed, in the introductory statement presenting the statistical report for 2009, the increased presence of women in senior, solo and co-pastor positions is described explicitly as a counterbalance to the overall decline in membership (Research Services, 2010). Yet, even as their collective advancement has proceeded, women clergy have encountered challenges to professional success. From the beginning, women were often employed in small or dying congregations, largely consisting of older people living in poor communities (Zikmund, Lummis, & Chang, 1998). To be sure, they sometimes reported enjoying and even thriving in these placements (Nesbitt, 1997), despite the inequitable treatment of clergywomen in the hiring process.

Nonetheless, the increased scrutiny and blaming to which female clergy are subjected, regarding the degree of femininity or leadership style that they display (Cody-Rydzewski, 2006; Reedy-Strother, 2011), work against pastoral success and makes their professional lives a constant struggle (Carroll, Hargrove, & Lumis, 1983; Lehman, 2002). This is consonant with a general societal prejudice against agentic women found beyond religious work (Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008). Given this history, female clergywomen may well feel that their gender makes them especially vulnerable to employment difficulties in periods of decline. Adding nuance to this body of research is a study that identified ambivalent attitudes toward gender roles and resistance to feminist positions among clergywomen in several denominations, who operated under benign sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), and a “level of prejudice that would
be considered intolerable in other work environments” (Cody-Rydzewski, 2003, p. 52). Those women justified gender-related pressure by describing their work as a divine calling.

Self-sacrifice is associated not only with working women but with professionalism in general (Bryan-Brown & Dracup, 2003), and with female professionals, in particular, such as nurses (Pask, 2005), social workers (Weinberg, 2014), teachers (De Marzio, 2009), and those in religious vocations (Lester, 1995; Vaccarino & Gerritsen, 2013) in particular, who encounter expectations that they practice self-sacrifice, especially when seeing work as a calling understood in either a religious or secular way (Johnson, 2010; Madden, Bailey & Karr, 2015). Pressure to adopt this stance coexists with the promotion of self-advocacy for clergy (Vaccarino & Gerritsen, 2013).

This combination is problematized in the lack of equality of work opportunity. Although Durkheim recognized the value of deep investment in professional work, advocating that we “contract our horizons, choose a definite task and immerse ourselves in it completely,” and seek worth not in our own value but in the service rendered to society (Durkheim, 1893/1964, p. 407), he also recognized that since such opportunities are not available to all, the view of work as calling is part of an inherently unjust system, not completely overcome by professional ethical standards.

Professional sacrifice is best understood against the descriptions of religious attitudes toward work as a “lack of care of self” (Nietzsche, 1887/1969, p. 134), an attitude echoed later by Foucault (1988). Positive views of self-sacrifice, though, have been theorized in other fields (De Marzio, 2009; Fontaine, 2009; Nistelrooij, 2014; Pask, 2005), in which workers are encouraged to find ways to affirm both generous self-giving and care for oneself.

Statements by former clergywomen regarding the circumstances under which they left
church work reflect the difficulty of disentangling sacrifice from gender and the effects of church decline (Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, 2003). The difficulty of measuring successful pastoral leadership in such situations highlights the need for qualitative research that explores the narrative and discursive patterns of how clergywomen discuss their relationships in ministry and how they position themselves in narratives about work.

**Summary**

Given the increasing rate of change in the denomination, clergywomen can be expected to have multiple, even conflicting, perspectives about their relationship to their profession, their congregation and the culture they are encountering in their work. As members of the clergy, they are authority figures, experts, leaders, and managers expected to be the public face of the institution and the bearers of its ideological message, even as they address the complex needs of their congregations and respond to the competing messages that the surrounding culture presents. As workers, they must face the changes in the daily demands of ministry and uncertainty about job security and career achievement that are created by the continuing decline in church membership.

The effect of the decline in changing the workplace environment of clergywomen has not been previously studied. Clergy’s use of specialized language, their orientation to religious ideology, and their dual roles as both laborers and institutional advocates set them apart within the world of work. Discursive research, though, demonstrates the similarities of developmental aims across the helping professions and the value of discursive methods to uncover the adaptation of workers in institutional settings. Further, the increasingly rapid pace of change in the PCUSA makes it an apt environment in which to study the development of persons, as it unfolds within the changes in their immediate workplaces, institutions, and society at large.
Chapter Three

Literature Review: Cultural Resources

Development is dependent on the availability and quality of cultural resources (Arievitch & Stetsenko, 2000; Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010; Swidler, 1986; Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson, & Psaltis, 2003). People use cultural tools differently, depending on the situations in which they find themselves, typically drawing more widely from them in conditions of change and uncertainty. At such times, the availability and significance of cultural products are more likely to be debated; thus, the use of cultural tools can be a sign of how people experience and respond to change (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010; Swidler, 1986, 2001). Representations, narratives and religious language are all linguistic products and tools used in human reasoning to mediate adaptation to an evolving environment. The present study explores how clergywomen use these instruments to construct meaning and develop their communicative activity within a workplace environment.

Social Representations as Resources

The theory of social representation aims to explain how people create the meaning of novel or complex objects and processes by putting together existing meanings taken from images and metaphors available in one’s social world. Understanding of an object such as the Presbyterian decline emerges from social interaction, even though the way people talk about it may appear to be a longstanding “concrete crystallization” (Zittoun et al., 2003, p. 25). The appropriation of social representations for one’s own communication and action is mediated by such tools and practices as code-switching and story-telling, which are linguistic and symbolic tools used to understand experience, envision future possibilities, and influence environmental conditions (Bruner, 1986; Daiute, 2010, 2012). Directed toward both inner and social dialogue,
language brings forth higher psychological functioning toward social ends (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Social representations as tools for adapting to change.** Social representations develop in order to address a novel situation not yet fully understood. Familiar metaphors, arguments and stories are used to explicate new or troubling objects, even if incompletely (Moscovici, 1961/2008; Markóvá, 2000, 2008; Jovchelovitch, 2007, 2008). These mediational signs aid understanding and communication, but also narrow the scope of what is being considered, such that partial or distorted conceptions may sometimes predominate. For example, Gillespie found that tourists used representations from books and movies to frame their communications about personal experiences in a foreign country (Zittoun et al., 2003); though limited, these characterizations were seen by the tourists as sufficient to their purpose.

In this sense, church decline can be seen as a novel experience, a rupture of the established understanding of church activity and status, which the language of theology is inadequate to describe. As a result, those encountering declining conditions are make sense of them using available tropes, such as declaring that the church is doing something wrong (Kelly, 1972) or pointing to social disaffiliation patterns throughout society (Stone, 1990). Such tactics have been observed in institutions whose traditions of interpretation constrain access to alternative ways of knowing and acting, such as health care systems (Cancian, Contarello, Nencini, & Sarrico, 2006; Flick, Fisher, Schwartz, & Walter, 2002; Gibson, 2013). Like them, the church is an institution with a central mission resting upon hegemonic views of ultimate authority and truth. The present study explores the degree to which talk of the decline is shaped in the dialogic negotiation of those broad denominationally-based ideological ideals and the narrower parish work contexts of the women.

Long-standing hegemonic representations are readily accepted as constituting
commonsense truth, in part because they already embody a dialogical history and vivid imagery. This makes them powerful as discursive tools. An example is seen among Presbyterian bloggers describing the denominational decline using resonant lexical expressions such as “bi-vocational” and “in the wilderness” (Blythe, 2012; Cho, 2012) to conjure up a deep, ongoing history of interactive meaning (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984). These historical meanings are taken up by the bloggers to fashion positions and attendant arguments regarding the decline in polemical ways, either to argue for different interpretations of the demands the decline makes on pastors, or to anchor the uncertainties that it causes in the traditional spiritual language about human nature.

Such meanings appear to be easily understood within the cultural sphere of the bloggers; as a result, arguments that appeal to these meanings need not be spelled out in their entirety. Instead, such expressions implicitly lay out “the relevant context of argumentation—premises, claims and counter-claims” (Wetherell, 1998, para. 44), and carry the assumption that the reader agrees with the writer on how the expression, and the representation it implies, is being used. The more broadly a representation is employed across society, the more ambiguous the references to it may become and yet remain effective as a communication tool (De Rosa, 2006).

**Social representation and identification of subgroups.** In his seminal research on the field of representations of psychoanalysis, Moscovici identified three distinct patterns of representation, as viewed from three different societal perspectives. The Catholic Church’s characterization of psychoanalysis, which he labeled “propagation,” constituted a general approval of those aspects of psychoanalysis that are useful in the pastoral care of individuals, coupled with resistance to aspects of the theory that challenge church authority or doctrine. He understood the Church to actively filter information about psychoanalysis, supportively disseminating that which was consonant with its own ideology, but squelching other aspects of
psychoanalysis that were less congruent with church doctrine (Moscovici, 1961/2008).

This position was contrasted, on the one hand, with what he called the “propaganda” of the Communist Party, which overwhelmingly rejected psychoanalysis as being supportive of bourgeois values, and, on the other hand, with social “diffusion” in secular culture at large, which freely accepted psychoanalysis. Moscovici did not consider such variants in representation to be neutral language differences. He was most concerned with the ways that representations might constrain the talk and communicative spread of the full range of ideas implicit in psychoanalysis (Moscovici, 1961/2008).

The theory of social representation was thus specifically conceived to explore differences in how representations evolve over time as groups with different ideologies and social positions construct them differently. Religious groups have also been identifiable through their representational formulations. For example, liberal political activists described their faith as providing a sense of meaning in their lives, whereas conservative activists attributed to faith their ability to refrain from bad impulses (McAdams & Albaugh, 2008). Their conception of faith influences the choice of causes for which each group advocates in the political realm. Another study showed that representations of sin indexed the degree of people’s religious participation, with those who identified as Evangelical and Catholic Christians more likely to refer to sin as a moral attitude, whereas less religiously-identified participants were more likely to refer to it as a form of behavior (Collares-da-Rocha & Souza, 2008). These examples affirm the aptness of social representations, including that of the decline, for indexing ideological positions.

**Social representations as cognitive polyphasia.** Even within a single group or individual, representations are composed from multiple knowledge sources by engaging in a dialogue between various, even opposite, ways of framing an issue (Billig, 1989; Billig et al.,
These are referred to variously, with subtle differences in meaning, as polyphony by Bakhtin (1981), cognitive polyphasia (Moscovici, 1961/2008), or themâta (Moscovici & Vignaux, 2000). This dialogue may result in an unintegrated hybrid of ideas, within a group or in the representational field of a single individual. For example, people displaced in the Colombian war mixed seemingly incompatible perspectives on divine justice, alternating representations of God as just and as unjust (Dedios Sanguineti, 2015). In many studies of beliefs about health, people called upon both scientific and non-scientific causes of illness (Bibace, Sagarin, & Dyl, 1993; Foster, 2003; Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999; Maurya & Dixit, 2008; Priego-Hernández, 2017; Wagner et al., 2000). This cognitive polyphasia implies a cultural historical emergence of representations, with different situations producing different, coexistent, representational images.

Professional work often requires workers to compose hybrid opinions. Representations of justice (Rochira, 2014) or homelessness (Renedo & Jovchelovitch, 2007) by workers in those fields included both expert and lay representations encountered in the various work settings. This was also the case in the health field (Gibson, 2013; Iedema et al., 2004; Martinussen & Magnussen, 2011; Thomas & Hewitt, 2011). Such discursive patchworks suggest that polyphasia and incongruous representations might also arise from the various work commitments of the clergy, who occupy boundary positions (Wenger, 1998) and dialogue with multiple professional, community and personal groups for whom the decline may have different implications.

Social representations as argument. Moscovici (1988) noted that there are three manners of adherence to representations: hegemonic, emancipatory, and polemic. These reveal how representations can change, thus showing a broadening in conceptualization from his original descriptions of propaganda, diffusion and propagation in earlier research (Moscovici 1961/2008). A hegemonic social representation enjoys unquestioned uniform acceptance and
deep power until people are challenged by experiences or new knowledge, which stimulates conceptual reflection and dialogue. Such dialogue may evolve into novel, emancipatory representations that, while not entirely incompatible with the hegemonic representation, become increasingly meaningful within a subgroup. These emancipatory representations take for granted that there are alternative representations, and may challenge them in playful or ironic terms. Emancipatory representations can turn polemical, and more extreme, however, when arguing against competing representations (Ben-Asher, 2003; Gillespie, 2008; Moscovici, 1988).

An example is that of a group of parents of soldiers in Israel who came to doubt the hegemonic belief in the benevolent care of the government. This doubting gave way to a sense that something needed to be done to protect their children, which produced emancipatory representations of what the soldiers needed. As parents began advocating for better care, they supported their now polemic demands by representing the government as uncaring. Once the government responded with better policies, the parents reverted to the hegemonic representation of government as benign and worthy of trust (Ben Asher, 2003). Other research supports a kind of equilibrium between simultaneous hegemonic and polemical representational use. For instance, in France, the hegemonic representation of wine as a French cultural heritage dominates overall, but in specific interactions, health-promoting polemics advocating the benefits of abstinence are ascendant (Lo Monaco & Guimelli, 2011).

What these studies suggest, as regards the present investigation, is that hegemonic religious and ecclesial ideology can be expected to influence how clergywomen position themselves vis-à-vis the decline. To some extent, full understanding and acceptance of the decline stands in intrinsic competition with ideological beliefs and vocational commitments. The rhetorical use to which relevant representations are applied shapes those themes that communicate best.
Ideology, as used here, is understood as the shared beliefs of a social group, such as a religious institution, which legitimize or resist various power hierarchies and promote some group interests over others (Martínez-Roldán & Malavé, 2004). Ideologies “guide. . . interpretations, discourses and other social practices in a specific social domain, for instance, in race relations” (van Dijk, 1996, p. 8). Clergy are seen as central communicators, teachers and enforcers of their religious ideology and its set of representations of life and the world. As suggested above, to the extent to which this hegemonic representation of clergy is triggered in the dialogue around decline, the latter may be predicted to arouse discomfort and suppress some polyphasia, at least some of the time, much as French national pride suppresses talk about the social problems associated with alcoholism (Lo Monaco & Guimelli, 2011).

The Presbyterian Church has both the ideology of its belief system and an institutionalized ideology established by its governing bodies and documented in the form of its constitution (Constitution, Part I, 2007), and in position and study papers. As examples, concern for gender parity is reflected in a study paper on pay equity for female pastors (Advisory committee, 2008), while another one advocates for racial equality (Initiative team, 1999), and the denomination’s new ordination standards, with earlier prohibitions against LGBT candidates removed, are found in its constitution (Constitution, Part II, 2013, G-2.0104 a, b). These theological claims and their organizational applications are constantly being contested within the denomination.

**Triadic representation and subjectivity.** Representations depend on ideology, but they are also produced in triadic networks, meaning that representing a given object also implicates the conception of two other elements: the self and social relationships (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Marková, 2003; Moscovici, 1972). An example is found in Edwards’s (2007) study of clergy
attitudes toward assisted reproductive technology. The pastors constructed their representations balancing theological, scientific and cultural-historical issues. But their opinions were ultimately shaped by the pragmatic desire to be good pastors, able to offer valuable, well-informed counsel to their parishioners.

This has similarly been shown in how mothers, faced with the fear of causing their own children to have autism, made decisions about vaccination that took into consideration not only scientific and alternative medicine perspectives about the issue, but the meaning of their identity as mothers (Provencher, 2011). One would expect, similarly, that how a pastor refers to the decline will be related to how she sees herself being positioned by the processes unfolding in her own parish, in the local presbytery, and in relations with her peers. As Marková (2003, 2008) and Jovchelovitch (2007) point out, the triad always implicates the power dynamics of social and political relationships.

The triadic nature of representation is highlighted in the positioning efforts of managers following institutional change. The ascendancy of new perspectives brings about change, and places workers in novel positions, which they may accept, resist, or regard with ambivalence. Discursive research tracks these shifts in subjectivity in the language of workers who vary their alignment to changing values and loyalties. This body of research shows how speakers and listeners select, orient to, and construct self-representations in changing conditions, in order to frame new policy as accurate, or not, and to support the authority of the speaker defending or opposing it (Potter & Edwards, 1999).

Managers’ ambivalent allegiance to both the companies they work for and the employees they supervise is visible in competing discourses (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). They often reconstruct their positions and relationships: for example, though in most ways they identify with
company administrators, managers may portray a downsizing of the workforce as being “vital for personnel” (Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009), and represent the loss of some jobs as being to the benefit of the workers who remain (Watson, 2009). Similarly, young lawyers who had been drawn to environmental law through their experience as activists promoting environmental preservation, but who later ended up working for a firm whose clients were primarily large corporations fighting against preservationist laws, made recourse to noble representations of work in general, the specialized work of lawyers in particular, and to collegial work relationships within the firm in order to assert their personal morality and the value of their work (Kuhn, 2009). Such shifts in representation allowed both the managers and lawyers to position themselves positively across diametrically opposed groups. Their efforts to find equilibrium within the triad develops their cognitive polyphasia.

Professionals also adapt their language to cope with changes they oppose. Doctors and nurses were observed to resist administrative regulations that limited their clinical authority and autonomy by discursively maintaining a semblance of acceding to them, even as they flaunted them, in order to preserve a degree of professional independence (Gibson, 2013; Iedema et al., 2004; Martinussen & Magnusson, 2011; Thomas & Hewitt, 2011). In discussions regarding a company merger, professionals who would be affected by looming changes spoke cooperatively in formal negotiations, but in informal conversations among themselves were more resistant to the company plans (Pieterse, Caniëls, & Homan, 2003). In each of these cases, the workers’ social and linguistic skills allowed them to manage the transition in policy while protecting elements of professional judgment that were subjectively important.

In sum, the repertoire of representations that an individual establishes as a frame, within which speech about workplace change is produced, is tied to subjectivity and authority,
contextual goals, relationships, and belief systems. These components are continuously rebalanced through ongoing dialogue. It is just such use of language among clergywomen that the present study aims to capture and reveal as an element contributing to the shaping of the representation of decline.

**Decline as a Social Representation**

The term decline is itself a representation of the decrease in membership, over the course of several decades, in the PCUSA and other mainline churches. It has been in wide use since it appeared in a large study of Protestant churches (Hoge & Roozen, 1979). The term stuck, all the more powerfully over time, because the trend toward smaller and fewer congregations was not reversed. Other sociological and theological studies of the Protestant decline followed (Bass, Johnson, & Roof, 1986; Coalter, Mulder & Weeks, 1990, a, b; Roof, 1993, 2011; Roof & McKinney, 1987), which identified related factors, such as changing social values (Hoge, 2000; Oswald & Leas, 1987; Sample, 1990; Wuthnow, 2007); aversion to change (Schaller, 1989); church conflict (Roof, 2011); decreasing loyalty to denominations (Hoge, 2000; Wuthnow, 1988); disaffiliation of youth and young adults (Jensen Arnett & Arnett Jensen, 2002; Hervieu-Leger, 1993; Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007; Smith & Denton, 2005; Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007; Waters & Bortree, 2012); ineffective religious education, both in church and at home (Benson & Eklin, 1990; Burr, Kuns, Atkins, Bertram, & Sears, 2015; Coalter et al., 1990a); decreasing birth rates (Schaller, 1989; Smith & Kim, 2005); and emphasis on social action at the expense of evangelism (Coalter et al., 1990a; Roozen, 2004). An assessment of then-current knowledge and opinion about the decline was commissioned by the denomination and published along with some recommendations (GATF, 1991). Fuller historical analyses were published later (Hollinger, 2013).
In weblogs on such platforms as Patheos and Christian Century, frequently used by Presbyterian clergy, direct references to decline remain uncommon. Indirect allusions include a report of a church that began holding weddings during the weekly worship service in order to save on electricity expenses that would be incurred by holding weddings as separate events (Hill, 2011, November 3), and a discussion about what constitutes adequate pay for clergy, framed as an estimate of the personal burden on clergy of churches’ limited resources (Blythe, 2012; Hogler, 2012), or as an inherent part of the clergy vocation and calling (Cho, 2012). There has not been, until now, any systematic study of the discursive representations of decline in use among Presbyterian clergy, nor of how persuasive they may be across the professional field.

Direct references to decline in social media suggest a lack of uniform acceptance of the characterization of the church as declining. More common in blog posts are efforts to minimize the perception of the church as being in decline, and to obviate the need for concern about it. These include assertions that decline purifies the church, or that discount talk about decline by describing it as “fretful reports,” “hand-wringing,” and “bemoaning” (Henson, 2012). Other writers problematize the state of the church in the 1950s, the period used as the basis against which decline is usually measured (Holder Rich, 2011), using perspectives supported by historical analysis of the cyclical rise and fall of Protestantism in America (Hudnut-Beumler, 2001). Resistance to acknowledging decline as a valid description of the church has a long ideological history, having been articulated by John Calvin:

Although the melancholy desolation which confronts us on every side may cry that no remnant of the church is left. . . . we are fully convinced that. . . . even if the whole fabric of the world be overthrown, the church could not falter nor fail (quoted in Weeks, 2010, p. 15).
Representations of the church as being in decline bear obvious ideological implications. As with Calvin’s triumphalist representation, in which “decline” is antithetical to the very nature of religious belief, contemporary clergy, too, may present it as something to be disguised or denied when it cannot be overcome or reversed, rather than something to anticipate, investigate, or adapt to. This approach can have negative consequences, as efforts to hide decline have been credited with premature closing of churches with small memberships (Anderson, Martinez, Hoegeman, Adler, & Chaves, 2008).

**Religious Language and “The Call”**

Discursive strategies, such as using social representations or positioning, not only identify how the speaker represents herself personally, but also assert her values or ideology. Primary among the tactical tools available for this purpose is the use of religious language. Religious language, or religious code, draws on a body of language devices that rely on a spiritual basis for their understanding, and derive from a narrative history of the religion and the values and ideology that inhere in its particular spiritual perspective. Just as there is no essential “spiritual self” within human beings (Belzen, 2010), but rather individuals engaged in spiritual practice, so there is nothing that can be called an essential spiritual “language,” with bounded grammatical or linguistic features (Keane, 1997); instead, people make spiritual sense through the functional application of mostly ordinary words and language (Wuthnow, 2010).

Restricted codes, such as religious language, develop in relatively close-knit systems of shared experience, where members have been extensively socialized into orthodox lexical and meaning possibilities. In such contexts, condensed ways of speaking develop, and meaning is often expressed metaphorically, rather than through explicit description (Bernstein, 1971).
Hasan (2002) notes that people mix codes, and do so in different ways, accessing some meanings intuitively and other meanings explicitly, through use of a more precise, elaborated code.

Because religious language essentially expresses an ideological perspective, its insertion into ongoing talk signals a switch to a knowledge base associated with religious creeds. The flexibility of religious language to address cultural issues has been well documented in political speech, as multi-vocal messages may be used to send different messages to different constituents, based on their degree of awareness of the particular implications that inhere in religious metaphors (Albertson, 2014; Calfano, 2009; Kraus, 2009; Neiheisel & Djupe, 2009).

Of particular importance to clergy is the reference to work as a “calling.” While in secular talk the term indicates a sense of importance inherent in certain professional work, and a high level of personal commitment to it (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997), in the religious sense calling has a more specific and developed meaning: it refers quite narrowly to the perception that one’s vocation is divinely derived (Christopherson, 1997; Civish, 2013; Weber, 1905/1956).

The sense of calling is therefore especially meaningful to clergy. More than most other professionals, they appeal to an idealized form of vocation as the motivation for heightened commitment and willingness to make personal sacrifices, and to support their vision of their work as a contribution to the common good (Christopherson, 1997; Goldman, 2005; Peyton & Gatrell, 2013). Communicating a strong sense of call is considered necessary to gain membership in the clergy (Mead, 1983), and contributes to perseverance in the face of suffering, sacrifice and limited signs of success (Greene & Robbins, 2015; Hoge & Wenger, 2005; McDuff, 2001; Miner, Sterland, & Dowson, 2009). The tension between the personal and professional is central to the understanding of calling:
The work of Christian ministers is precariously poised between the ideals of their "call" and the secular demands and rewards of their "career". The conflict over purpose and authority in the ministry is often waged between these two normative boundaries.

Faithfulness in a calling implies a life devoted to service in a community and a level of involvement and dedication to one's work that goes beyond self-interest. A calling is a task set by God with a sense of obligation to work for purposes other than one's own (Christopherson, 1998, p. 219).

The relevance of Christopherson’s point to the decline and the associated scarcity of well-paying clergy jobs is confirmed in a weblog dialogue between a blog writer, Rev. Cho (Cho, 2012,), and a respondent, who is a recent seminary graduate (Hogler, 2012). Both invoke a sense of a divinely-inspired call and “following God” to make opposite arguments about the right to fair wages. Cho highlights the difference between two common uses of the term call within the Presbyterian Church: the first uses the word to refer to the spiritual understanding of one’s vocational commitment as a personal response to divine inspiration, whereas the second alludes to a specific job or job offer and the position that results from it. Cho argues in her blog post that by emphasizing the first use over the second, periods of unemployment, under-employment or erratic employment can be folded into a positive narrative and more gratifying personal positioning:

“…. We need to be careful about [confusing] vocation with [a specific type of] call because we are vulnerable to acquiring an attitude of entitlement. Does eight years [of] ministry mean I am worth [a salary of ] X amount? The fact that I am not getting paid what I think I am worth, does that devalue my sense of call and ministry? Don’t get me
wrong. . . . What I am saying is that we are not entitled to it, and for many, it is [already] the reality of ministry” (Cho, 2012).

Cho’s formulation and the elision of meaning implicit in her codeswitching to the religious sense of calling is challenged by a respondent to her blog who avoids the connotation of “the call,” substituting “justice,” which affords more agency: “I totally agree that it is up to us to figure out how to follow God and do ministry. . . . [but] this is a justice issue. Our preparation for ministry is in fact preparing seminarians and new pastors for a life of being crushed by debt” (Hogler, 2012, February 29).

These writers use religious language as a means of shifting the terms of signification, and in the process, debate over which language code is most valid for clergy to discuss economic matters. Discussions about the use of religious language to shift to a spiritual context to discuss economic and other material concerns are not new:

Religious suffering is, at . . . the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering . . . . the criticism of Heaven turns into the criticism of Earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics (Marx, 1884/1997).

Such debates illustrate the value of looking at religious language beyond its religious function to see how it frames discussions of non-religious aspects of clergy life, such as job and career security. They suggest that the women in the present study might turn to religious language, not only to signal a change to a religious topic, but to permit, for example, the expression of uncertainty in their representational field of decline, or to make a point in a more subtle or implicit way, merging the representation of one’s spiritual commitment into the representation of
material conditions of work. As with any study of discourse and representations, what is most revealing is how they are used to make an argument seem factual (Potter & Edwards, 1999).

From a cultural-historical perspective, register-switching, or codeswitching, understood as non-accidental mixing of elements drawn from two language codes in one communicative event (Gumperz, 1982; Valdés, 1981) for the purpose of shifting the meaning of an interaction, is one of many discursive tools and tactics with which a speaker shapes dialogue, develops reasoning, and participates in cultural activity (Vygotsky, 1978). A hybrid meaning is derived from the dialogue between the language that is “borrowed” and the immediate speech event that stimulates its use, and thus “brings about” that meaning in the moment of use (Williams, 2008).

Though research on clergy speech is limited, focused largely on politeness in business meetings (Pearson, 1988) and the language of sermons (Smith, 1993; Wellman, 2002; Witten, 1992; Wharry, 2003), some data suggest that clergy codeswitch widely, especially in settings outside the church, taking advantage of the technique’s utility for handling ambiguity and the need for ambivalent messaging in relation to different interactants. As one participant in a study of African American pastors who also work as school principals explained, “In the church, I’ll say, ‘We’ve got to save the lost,’ and in the school system, I’ll say, ‘We’ve got to reach the underprivileged.’ It’s the same mission, but different words” (Jones, 2010, p. 67). Chaplains, who routinely negotiate medical, psychological and religious discourses (Norwood, 2006) as they interact with diverse patients, engage in similar practices (Cadge & Sigalow, 2013).

Clergywomen may be expected to make easy reference to theological concepts and spiritual experience in varied situations, through the use of direct or indirect allusion, rich metaphor, and quotations from sacred scripture, hymns, or creeds, according to prescriptions for proper use (Wuthnow, 2011), as fluency in switching between registers can be a mark of
leadership (De Fina, 2007). The clergy’s professional repertoire of language tactics includes skill in weaving together religious and non-religious talk to communicate sense, and in suggesting additional meaning by sprinkling references to their call into conversations that are not explicitly religious.

In the present study, I will study the pragmatic application of religious language, focusing in particular on its relationship to asserting ideological loyalty and how it shapes the representation of decline. Religious language is hypothesized to contain fear and uncertainty, and free the speaker to consider the possibilities available through faith. The pastors’ insertion of religious language into their interview talk, especially in reference to themselves and their sense of call provides a view into how they see the triadic implications of a denominational decline.

**Narrative as Tool**

Representations are frequently composed in the context of narratives, which are structured reports of events told in a sequential, causal manner across time, and in which the description of action and its evaluation are intertwined to construct meaning (Labov & Waletsky, 1967/1997; Bruner, 1990). Most significantly, Bruner suggested that the human mind is inherently polyphasic, with narrative and propositional thinking functioning as “two distinct modes of ordering experience... irreducible to one another” (Bruner, 1990, p.11). The implication is that individuals use narrative to construct meanings in their lives, meanings which “emerge from conflicting and contested cultural sources and practices” (Bhatia, 2011, p. 347).

Narrators exercise interpretive control over challenges and uncertainty, even in situations where change is rapid and ongoing (Daiute & Lucić, 2010; McAdams & Bowman, 2001; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001), by the way that narrative elements are woven together. This suggests that the
act of narrating is an adaptive, developmental process: telling a good story helps to contain, explain, and address the unsettled nature of lives. Such processes are especially challenging when events do not mirror typical narrative scripts (Bruner, 1991; Daiute, 2010, 2011, 2012; Rubin & Berntsen, 2003).

Narrative serves as a window into development by accounting for phenomena that are not yet theorized (Squire, 2012). “When disruptive events challenge narrative stability, storying is intensified, fueled by ‘a profound stirring of basic emotional themes’” (Arciero & Guidano, quoted in Collie & Long, 2005, p. 836). This intensification reflects the flexibility with which even abbreviated narrative structures can interpret the past in ways that support plans for the future (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Mishler, 2006). One of the ways that narratives have been found to influence change has been by “shifting representational realities” (Squire, 2012, p. 54). Two major approaches to analyzing narratives—positioning and structure—combine to shape the analysis offered in the present study.

**Narrative structure.** The seminal structural analysis by Labov & Waletsky (1967/1997), and the work of Bruner (1987, 1990, 1991), provide a framework for understanding the essential components that make narrative so central to human communication. As these writers point out, the alternation between clauses that describe the action of the plot and those that comment on or evaluate it is what accounts for the production of meaning and consciousness. Bruner identified narratives as particularly useful ways to create meaning interactively (1990). Though he initially thought of evaluation as a discursive act that followed the resolution of the plot (Labov & Waletsky, 1967/1997), Labov later identified multiple discursive devises that contribute to the interpretation of the plot interspersed throughout the story, though appearing more frequently toward its end (Labov, 1972).
Evaluation can be woven into narrative in three ways. External evaluation occurs when the narrator steps out of the story to comment on it, while embedded evaluation makes use of such devices as reported speech within the story itself. Even more subtle, internal evaluation involves syntactic elements including intensifiers, comparators or explicatives appended to main clauses of the plot (Labov, 1972). Interpretive content is found to be the most personal part of autobiographical stories (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009) and the locus of motivation and development (Bruner, 1987).

When stories are told in the context of personal interactions, their structure is often abridged (Bamberg, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Labov, 1972; Ochs & Capps, 2001). These “small stories” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) may include no more than “an original state of affairs, an action or an event, and the consequent state of affairs” (Czarniawska, quoted in Dawson & McLean, 2003, p. 222). Despite their brevity, they nonetheless compose order and meaning through assessments woven into the recounting of events.

Regardless of how elaborate the structure of a narrative may be, positioning moves are constituted, sometimes contrary to narrative character types, in the articulation between action and evaluation. These moves position not only the story’s characters, but the narrator also, in the eyes of the audience (Bamberg, 2004; White, 2009). The final evaluation clauses, as the narrator weaves the story back into the interview response, offers a particularly suggestive point at which to make positioning moves, or to reconfigure them, as the narrator confirms that the purpose of inserting the narrative has been accomplished (Labov & Waletsky, 1967/1997).

The meaning of the narrative and the positioning of the narrator are therefore intimately bound. As with the triadic nature of representations, so too does narrative force attention on the person who tells the story, as well as on its subject. This occurs in the balancing of relationships
both within and without the story. How one aligns with events and with a cultural topic has implications for one’s personal standing and relationships. In this sense, the audience, as Bakhtin (1981) and Daiute (2004, 2010) note, is part of the construction of meaning in the narrative, as the narrator’s credibility must continually be established, and tailored to the particular addressee. It is in this light that Pasupathi and Hoyt’s (2009) observation about listeners is understood: “unresponsive listeners inhibit the evolution of self-understanding by telling stories in ways that further unique development” (p. 569).

As Pasupathi & Hoyt (2009) and Daiute (2010, 2011) found for adolescents, and Zittoun et al. (2003) demonstrated for adults as well, composing narratives without cultural models, as happens during rapid social change, requires a more creative use of whatever narrative resources are at hand, and the invention of new ones. They show that resolving communication is a core developmental challenge when facing experiences that rupture predictability. These studies and theories point to narratives as sites of developmental activity, where personal change within cycles of social and institutional change can be investigated. The present study takes as the most fruitful loci for such investigation the points of articulation between action and evaluation clauses, as positioning links story meaning to interactive self-presentation, indicating developmental adaptation to macro-cultural situations such as the decline.

Positioning. Propp’s (1928/1968) recognition that folktales were composed using stock characters, such as heroes and villains, points to how representational icons inform narrative construction. Standard characters are constructed in ways that identify them around key issues of morality and agency. For example, villains and heroines are agentic, but differ in morality; damsels in distress are passive, but good. When standard roles shift, such as when the heroine is
perplexed, or the rescued victim remains distressed, the story may become even more compelling, but must be more carefully told in order to make sense (Bruner, 1991).

Following this tradition, the narrative task is facilitated by the easy availability of narrative types that afford character positions through which the speakers can cast themselves as agentic protagonists fulfilling esteemed social functions (Ochs & Capps, 2001). For example, cancer patients in remission may take up a “restitution” narrative type, or, if treatment proves difficult, may be encouraged to narrate a personal “quest,” in which the illness helps them mature or learn (Frank, 1995). Similarly, women entering forced retirement can present themselves as fulfilling grandmotherly tasks (McVittie, McKinley, & Widdicombe, 2008). Other plot lines, though, make it more difficult to narrate life stories in which one is positioned as a capable and moral character. Cancer patients with unresolved treatment tended to tell their story as “chaos” narratives with neither heroic nor rescued characters (Frank, 1995).

These findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that narratives simply reflect reality – that happy experiences produce happy characters, and unhappy experiences produce pessimistic characters. Instead, these studies conclude that narrative confers a certain zone of positional movement within which characters can be repositioned while maintaining credibility. Illustrating this is Hammack’s (2006) finding that Palestinian youth compose more “contamination” narratives, with a downward spiral, than “silver lining” stories, in comparison with Israeli youth, regardless of the actual range of life opportunities available to them.

As these examples demonstrate, some types of characters are more easily fitted into particular types of plots; repositioning them requires significant compositional effort on the part of the narrator to make the story believable. Those plots that are less congruent with heroic characters may get told in ways that do not qualify as traditional narratives (Dawson & McLean,
2013), complicating the analysis. Researchers also warn of “linguistic incongruence” that stifles narration in circumstances that overwhelm the meaning-making capability of stories, where the incongruous matching of negative action with a positive character strains credibility (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011). This has been documented in cancer patients (Thomas-MacLean, 2004), people living with AIDS (Squire, 2012), and survivors of rape (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011) and incest (Evans & Maines, 1995). In each of these cases, existing representations end up pathologizing the individuals, making life even more difficult (Squire, 2012), and inhibit effective use of narrative positioning and representation. Similarly, Moscovici referred to the creation of a “taboo on talk” that inhibits engagement in speech that challenges or might change hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1961/2008). Pastors of shrinking churches might similarly find it uncomfortable to narrate their interpretation of experiences, or feel it difficult to present themselves in ways that gain them respect.

Rubin and Berntsen (2003) noted that, overall, narratives with happy characters are more common than those with negative ones. Generally, autobiographical narratives become more positive and nuanced through middle age (McAdams et al., 2006), but Fivush (2003), working with children, found that pessimistic narratives of trauma were more cohesive, perhaps reflecting greater ruminative perfecting of these narratives. The interactional context, also, exerts its own force on the ultimate shape of narratives (Daiute, 2010; Frank, 2010; Wortham, 2000). Together, these findings suggest that lived events, narrative resources and the listening audience all contribute to the composition of stories, and help shape the effort invested in creating narrative meanings that defy standard representations.

The analysis of characters in narratives has been subsumed into the theory of positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) in cases of narrative positioning (Bamberg, 1997). Positioning refers to
how a speaker locates herself as a certain type of person in a conceptual field of personal attributions, and thus establishes “a person’s moral or other attributes as a speaker” (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 17). A position is a perspective from, and through which, people find ways to act and speak (Holland et al., 1998), and is thus conceived as the source of a person’s subjectivity and their “orientation . . . to the world about them” (Apter, 2003, p. 15).

Achieved through various speech processes, one’s position or alignment with other speakers shapes a perspective, or frame, from which to make sense of the events told (Goffman, 1981; Wuthnow, 2011, Wortham, 2000), to make sense of oneself (De Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006), and to represent objects (Jovchelovitch, 2008). Research on narrative positioning in the workplace includes studies of how it confers status as a worker (Holmes, 2006), affects collegiality among workers (Löfgren & Karlsson, 2016), and contributes to professional subjectivity (Heinrichsmeier, 2012).

Multiple levels of positioning are possible in narratives, as the narrator is situated in relation to her listeners in the act of telling the story, and, through the interactive dynamics of the telling, in ways that indicate broader alignment with cultural issues (Bamberg, 1997; de Fina 2013). Analyzing the different levels of positions helped to show, in one example, how complex dimensions of lives intertwine (Schnurr, Van de Mieroop, & Zayts, 2014), and in another, the multilayered difficulties immigrants face in mastering English (Zhu, 2008).

Furthermore, story-telling helps shape the meaning of evolving situations (Bruner, 2002; Stockburger, 2008), because its unfinalized nature and sensitivity to contextual changes permits the shifting of positions in each retelling (Mishler, 2006). When narratives are produced as part of conversational accounting processes, they allow open, fluid positioning (Ochs & Capps, 2001), and facilitate attempts at making sense of complex events (Smith & Sparkes, 2009), such
as religious experience (Belzen, 2010).

Within the church, the very idea of decline constitutes an ideological incongruity that is difficult to describe without presenting oneself in an uncomfortable position, for example, as a victim, an incompetent pastor, or a confused narrator. To avoid such negative framing, clergy often need to narrate creatively, so as to account for themselves as ministerial, moral, and successful, and to do so in ways that shape compelling stories of decline that don’t deviate too far from the canon of ministerial stories. In the larger sense, narrating contributes to the representation of the denominational decline by interpreting both typical and unique situations, and by presenting clergywomen enacting their positions as effective professionals, much as do the managers, doctors and nurses noted above (Gibson, 2013; Iedema et al., 2004; Martinussen & Magnussen, 2011; Thomas & Hewitt, 2011).

The present study builds on the history of narrative theory, and furthers the study of narrative work by showing how clergy members compose the more difficult aspects of leading a congregation undergoing decline, a process that potentiates their development. Productive investigation focuses on narrativizing-in-process as it unfolds in the talk of pastors, and on the ways in which they structure tales of work to manage positioning and construct the meanings emerging from working in conditions of decline. The study is also sensitive to claims that representations, positions and narratives might be minimized or even silenced if they were to contradict institutional standpoints and goals.

Summary

Representations, present in the narrative moments of interview talk, and sometimes utilizing religious language as a knowledge or interpretational base, are cultural tools that clergywomen use in order to make sense of ongoing changes in their individual congregations, in
their wider communities, and in their approaches to work and career. These tools aid them in positioning themselves in the interview situation as heroic, and as legitimate pastors, capable of confronting change effectively. Clergy have seldom been the object of study, especially in terms of developmental processes. The present study aims to begin to fill the resultant gap in knowledge, and to contribute to the general understanding of development in work settings.

**Research Aims and Questions**

The broadest aim of this research project is to explore the impact of the decline of a mainline denomination on clergywomen and on the unfolding of their careers. Following discursive research on change in other professions, I aim to explore how these workers construct and use representations, religious language, and narratives. Furthermore, as decline does not occur equally in all churches, nor is it likely to be experienced and interpreted equally by all pastors, I want to discover what conditions differentiate their language usage.

The following specific questions guide this investigation:

1. Is there a Presbyterian social representation of the denominational decline?
2. Do differences in representing the decline identify subgroups among the Presbyterian clergywomen?
3. How does religious language and, specifically, references to vocational calling, contribute to the representation of decline?
4. What does narrative contribute to the process of representation and its analysis?
5. What evidence is there, if any, of a taboo on communication about the decline?
Chapter Four

Methods

Description of Sample

Fifty-two women were interviewed for this study. Thirty-four met in 11 groups of two to five participants, and an additional 18 were interviewed individually. Twelve of the individual interviews were conducted by phone, and six were done in person. The audio tapes of three group and two individual interviews were lost or undecipherable, and could not be used in the analysis. The final sample consisted of 37 participants: 21 women interviewed in eight groups, and 16 interviewed individually. Of this final sample, 22 (59%) were senior or solo pastors, 13 (35%) were associate pastors, and 2 (5%) were pastoral associates. There were three African American (8%), two Asian (5.5%), two Hispanic (5.5%) and 30 Caucasian women (80%) in the study group. These percentages are close to their proportions in the denomination as a whole. As a group, they had a ten-year median time since ordination and had been in their current or most recent call for an average of 5.28 years, with a range of less than one month to over 25 years.

They attended, between them, eight PCUSA-affiliated seminaries, one Methodist-affiliated Seminary, and four independent seminaries. The mean size of the churches led by the pastors in the study was 328 members, which is higher than the mean size in the denomination in 2012, which was 180 members; the median size in 2012 was 89. Table 4.1 presents the measures of exposure to decline by church size of the sample. The churches represented in the sample show

5 My tape recorder, containing the untranscribed tapes of two recent interviews, was lost. Two recordings from individual interviews were of poor quality, and no transcription was obtained.

6 Senior pastors supervise a staff that includes associate pastors, with defined areas of responsibility in the leadership of a mid-sized or large church. Pastoral associates have a limited, adjunct role in a congregation. “Solo” pastors are the only clergy on a church staff.

7 The exact number of years is withheld to help protect the anonymity of the participants.
much greater stability in finances than in membership.

Table 4.1

*The Sample’s Measures of Exposure to Decline by Church Size*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Characteristics</th>
<th>Membership Stability (\wedge)</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>✡</th>
<th>Financial Stability (\wedge)</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>✡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small (&lt;100)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Sized (100-350)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (&gt;350)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage

\(\wedge\) 18.9 40.5 40.5  
\(\wedge\) 35.3 43.2 21.6

\(\wedge\) The sign \(\wedge\) indicates an increase in membership or financial stability. The = sign indicates that membership or financial stability is holding steady. ✡ indicates a decrease in membership or financial stability. \(\wedge\) Percentage of total number of interviewees (\(N = 37\)).

Seven of the women worked second jobs, primarily as chaplains, or as presbytery staff; for two, these other jobs were their primary sources of revenue, with their parish responsibilities contributing minimally to their incomes. Another ran a private enterprise. Five identified the need to care for their preschool children as their reason for working part-time. Five others referred to having demanding family responsibilities yet maintained full-time employment. Two were recently retired, and one other was collecting a pension while also working as a pastor.

I limited the study to female clergy members for several reasons. Cultural biases lead people to more easily blame women than men for workplace difficulties (Lehman, 2002), which
is likely to be true also in the church. Therefore, women may have unique perceptions about how a denominational decline affects them and influences the trajectories of their careers. In addition, group level processes, such as positioning dynamics, operate differently in mixed-gender groups (Grisoni & Beeby, 2007; Myaskovski, Unikel, & Dew, 2005). Harris’s (2002) finding that women were more willing to talk about some types of work experiences than their male counterparts suggests that the rules that develop in a group for self-disclosure, and for talking about emotions and vulnerability, may vary by gender. Furthermore, while non-sensitive information is readily shared in groups, sensitive data may be avoided when a risk of stigma associated with telling is perceived, though when the sharing is understood as being applied toward solving a common problem, the concern for stigma may be overridden (Wutich, Lant, White, Larson, & Gartin, 2010).

Other uncertainties may pertain more to mixed than to single-gender groups. Female and male pastors may engage in different discursive practices when sharing sensitive material in the context of a focus group, and interpersonal judgements and interactive dynamics may be influenced by gender. As a result, gender could be confounded with other factors relevant to church decline, including the status and meaning of being a clergyperson; this is avoided by restricting the sample to a single gender group. It should be noted, however, that while limiting the data collection to single-gender groups had important benefits, it also resulted in the highlighting of gender without permitting a direct comparison between men’s and women’s experiences, other than through the women’s own opinions and narratives.

**Recruitment**

The participants included women from nine presbyteries in the eastern United States. Recruitment was done almost entirely by email. To identify female clergy, I visited the
presbytery websites, and obtained a list of all the churches therein. I then visited the website of each church that had one, identified those listing female pastors, and contacted the women using the email addresses given on the websites, with the exception of denominational and seminary staff, who might be more likely to proffer “official” views. The clergywomen identified this way were sent a recruitment letter and flyer by electronic mail. In every presbytery there were some churches that did not have websites. I searched presbytery web pages for other contact information for female clergy and was able to reach six women in this way. Three of the women contacted in this fashion agreed to participate.

A cursory examination suggested that churches that did not have websites were more likely to be small churches experiencing the greatest decline, and, disproportionately, were African American congregations. Therefore, my strategy curtailed the participation of some of those whose perspectives most interested me. To make up for this, after reviewing the sample I contacted eight additional clergywomen by other means, such as by telephone, or through social media, to ensure that my sample would include the variety of churches and worshipping communities whose views I hoped to hear. Five of these women agreed to participate, and were interviewed individually.

Of the 211 women to whom recruitment messages were sent, 35 agreed to participate in a focus group interview. Seventeen additional women requested an individual interview. The total response rate was 25%. Nine additional pastors contacted me with the intention of participating, but I was not able to schedule interviews with them. Participation rates varied by presbytery, from a low of 12% to a high of 44%. Five of the women were known to me prior to the research study, from prior work and education settings.

Several factors offer possible explanations for the low response rate and high degree of
variation among the different presbyteries. Some of the email addresses at which I attempted to contact the women may not have been active, or my messages may have been filtered out as junk mail. In addition, although I strove to select centrally-located meeting places, the limited choices I was able to offer for meeting times and places may have made participation inconvenient, especially in geographically large presbyteries and for already-burdened solo and part-time pastors.

Another factor that may have suppressed participation is the topic itself. Decline may have been seen by some as too close to the bone, uncomfortable to address, or reminiscent of painful debates over ordination standards. Also, clergy in churches that were not experiencing a steep decline may not have felt that their experience was relevant. One participant asked me whether pastors of churches that were not declining were welcome to participate. Another one revealed, at the end of the focus group, that her motivation in attending was related to wanting to discern whether the decline had somehow facilitated her rise to a Senior Pastor position at a large church. She hoped that participating in the interview might shed some light on this question.

In the end, the presbyteries with the highest rates of participation were geographically smaller, which shortened the travel distance for participants. They had also experienced the effects of a greater overall rate of decline, across decades, in the form of having churches close down or merge, resulting in decline being considered a shared experience, with less personal stigmatization deriving from it. In the presbytery with the highest rate, one of the participants contacted her colleagues to encourage them to attend.

The presbytery with the lowest participation rate was exceptional in several ways. This presbytery had had difficult debates regarding ordination and a couple of churches had left the denomination to join a new conservative denomination that was forming expressly to oppose
recent policy directions taken by the PCUSA, which may have led to reluctance to discuss church matters with a researcher. Finally, the pastor of the church that hosted the focus group resigned shortly before the date of the interview, delaying the final arrangements for the meeting. As a result, the recruitment letters were sent out with less lead time before the interview. That the timing may have had an adverse effect was indicated by the much higher proportion of replies expressing regret at not being able to participate (45%) than for the other presbyteries (12%).

Many factors may have contributed to a participant’s decision to request an individual rather than a group interview. Constraints of time, geographic distance to the interview site, child-care needs, privacy concerns, and anticipated group social dynamics were likely to have been influential in this choice as well. Job status also may have been a significant consideration. Among those who chose individual interviews, 60% were associate pastors, while 40% were solo pastors or senior pastors. Among those who chose focus groups, the reverse was true: 60% were solo or senior pastors and 40% were in subsidiary roles. This could be a result of tighter time constraints on associate pastors in large, multiple-staff churches, or a desire on the part of solo pastors to have an opportunity to break the usual isolation of their work.

**Methods**

This primarily qualitative study involved individual and group interviews, using open-ended, semi-structured questions and inductive follow-up probing based on the participants’ answers. Semi-structured interviews are “construction sites for knowledge” that obtain “descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.6). The participants’ discourse evolves through the interaction of the interview and becomes a negotiation of meaning both through its content and its interactive structure (Kvale, 2007).
**Group and individual interviews.** The study was initially designed to collect data using focus group methods only, which permit the interaction of participants with each other as well as with the researcher, so that its data lie somewhere between elicited views and real-life talk (Wilkinson, 1999; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2003). Focus groups have been found to be suitable for exploratory, interpretive and phenomenological research questions (Frey & Fontana, 1991), dealing with sensitive, under-investigated topics (Shaha, Wenzel, & Hill, 2011).

In the present study, the mutual regulation through turn-taking, interruptions and challenges that are part of focus group process was expected to afford cooperative construction of understandings of denominational decline, and to facilitate the articulation of both similarities and differences of perspective (Duggleby, 2005; Lehoux, Blake, & Daudelin, 2006). This is beneficial, as it provides more finely-tuned exploration of issues (Barbour, 2007; Duggleby, 2005). There is another concern in focus group settings, though, which is that the opinions of more forceful participants may dominate, silencing other perspectives (Kitzinger, 1995; Stokes & Bergin, 2006), especially in larger groups (Peek & Fothergill, 2009).

Individual interviews were added to the design as a pragmatic concession to potential participants who might not want to participate in a group. The addition of a few individual interviews to a study using focus groups is a fairly common practice, as seen, for example, in Jovchelovitch and Gervais (1999), Lambert and Loiselle (2008) and Sherriff and Coleman (2013). Not only do individual interviews allow more uninterrupted time for each speaker to voice opinions, the interactional influences are also different, in that they are more clearly brought about by the one-way process of inquiry, and by the positional differences between interviewer and interviewee (Mishler, 1986; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000).
Although women have been shown to be more forthcoming in individual interviews than in focus groups (Wilkinson, 1999), there are many factors that can alter that balance, such as a perception that women’s collective contributions are more likely to help solve a problem (Wutich et al., 2010), or that the group may construct data in more interesting ways (Lehoux et al., 2006). The ability of the group to draw out rich personal contributions from the participants is related to their perception of the created context (Greenbaum, 2000).

Studies comparing the quality of data acquired by group and individual interviews have yielded divergent results. The quality of information gathered by focus groups is dependent on familiarity among participants (Seal, Bogart, & Ehrhardt, 1998) and the sense of interest shown by others (Pasupathi, 2001; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). Some studies show that focus groups cover a greater range of themes (Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, & Cieza, 2012; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008), while others found greater range and depth in individual interviews (Fern, 1982; Seal et al., 1998; Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Depending on the topic and group composition, focus groups sometimes produce greater debate and dialogue (Seal et al., 1998; Coté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 2005).

The size of the group also has an impact on the way it functions. Fern (1982) found that an argument is not likely to unfold without the presence of at least four group members, with two advocating each position. Current recommendations for focus group size vary, depending on the type of data wanted, with most suggesting groups of 4 to 12 participants (Kitsinger, 1995; Twohig & Putnam, 2002). Limited research with very small groups suggests that they yield more nuanced perspectives, with groups of two producing greater discourse and confidential data than groups of three (Taylor, de Soto, & Lieb, 1979), suggesting that sensitive topics benefit from limited size (Cote- Arsenault & Morrison-Beardy, 1999). Small groups consisting only of women
were found to be less likely to have a dominant speaker, eliciting more equal amounts of talk from all participants, including the initially quieter ones, and more variations in opinion (Peek & Fothergill, 2009). In the present study, group interviews included four groups of two participants each, three groups of three members, and one of four.

Due to the loss of some of the group data, and the number of people requesting individual interviews, the latter ended up constituting 43% of the total data set, bringing the significance of mixing these methods to greater prominence. Table 4.2 shows the distribution of interviews across the three settings, by exposure to decline.

Table 4.2

*Interview Participation by Interview Setting per Exposure to Decline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure</th>
<th>Interview setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposed</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Exposed</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage⁷</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two participants interviewed in a single session. ³Three or more participants interviewed in a single session. ⁷Percentage of total number of interviewees (N = 37).*

**Interview protocol.** Group interviews were held in churches chosen for their central location in relation to churches pastored by women, for ease of travel. In three presbyteries, two different focus groups were held. In two of those presbyteries, they were both held at the same church, at different times, while in the third they were held at different sites. The individual interviews, of which 11 were conducted by telephone and four in person, were scheduled at
times and places convenient to the participants, and, in the case of face-to-face interviews, at or near their workplaces.

At group meetings, I provided coffee and cookies as the participants arrived. Seating was arranged around a table or on sofas in a parlor room. The participants provided general information about themselves and their churches on a survey form (see Appendix A) as they arrived. I began the meeting by describing the study, then read and discussed the consent form, answered any questions, and obtained the women’s signed consent to participate and to have the interviews recorded. In every group, there was a sense of general familiarity among the women, who were in all cases from the same presbytery, although not everyone had met prior to the interview. In several groups, some of the women had participated together in support groups, presbytery committees, or mentoring groups.

When conducting an interview by phone, I sent the consent form as an attachment to an electronic message, and the women replied with an email statement of consent in a reply message. At the beginning of the phone interview, I reminded the participant that the interview was being audiotaped and obtained their verbal consent to record. In the group or individual interviews conducted in person, I began by explaining the study, answering questions and obtaining signatures on the consent documents. One participant in a phone interview refused to have any direct quotes cited in the dissertation report, and after discussing this for a few moments withdrew from the study.

The following scenario and questions were used to guide these semi-structured interviews. My questions were designed to stimulate the women to talk about their practice of ministry as performed in their specific contexts.
1. I began by speaking of a recent event that had received widespread news coverage (Goodstein, 2012, July 28), then posed a question related to it:

I’ve been reading in the news about the Catholic nuns. They’re being accused of being disobedient. So, Sister Pat Farrell, who is the president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious Association, was interviewed about this and she said that they were confident that what they were doing was appropriate, because, as she said, “We see our job as discerning the signs of the times, and responding appropriately to them,” which is what they were trying to do. So, my first question to you is: when you think of your own work, what do you discern as the signs of the times that you are trying to respond to?

2. How do you respond to those “signs of the times” in your own work?

3. How do you think these things you have mentioned may be related to the decline?

4. How do you measure success?

5. Are there ways in which the decline makes you more cautious, or more bold? For example, what things might you have done in the past, but because of the decline, you are less likely to do now? Or, on the other hand, what things might you do now, that maybe you wouldn’t have done before?

6. To what extent would you say that being a woman has shaped your experience and understanding of the decline?

7. Tell me about your sense of job security and career security.

In addition to these questions, I used a variety of follow-up prompts in response to what the women said, to clarify or to pursue an idea in greater depth.

**Transcription**

I made all the transcriptions from audiotapes by hand. The transcripts, typed single-
spaced within a speech turn and double-spaced between speakers, ranged from eight to 18 pages in length for individual interviews; those of focus groups, from 15 to 23. I used a simple transcription notation system, employing normal punctuation to facilitate reading, as well as using commas, periods and ellipses to indicate the different lengths of pauses. Notes about the transcription, and any descriptions of non-verbal communication, were enclosed in angle brackets (< >). Emphasis was marked by an underline, unless otherwise indicated. Editorial comments were enclosed in brackets [ ].

I assigned pseudonyms to each participant, and when quoting excerpts, edited some of their statements to remove identifying markers, such as names of places, specific events, and turns of phrase, while still aiming to preserve the nuance of the speech.

**Explanation of Analytic Approaches**

The analysis used a variety of language-focused approaches. Taking the institutional changes occasioned by declining church participation as the impetus for development, I examined how the women represented the decline in both declarative speech and in narratives, as they used references to their sense of divine calling, enacted their professional authority, and made sense of the constraints on their exercise of that calling.

**Social representation.** Social representation theory has proven useful for studying changing contexts because it can explore reflective and unreflective speech, capturing changes of which the speaker may be only vaguely aware, and accommodating contradiction (Rose, Efraim, Joffe, Jovchelovitch, & Morant, 1995), as people attempt to make sense of social change in their lives. The method used depends on what aspect of the theory is being investigated. Previous studies used grounded theory (Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999; Provencher, 2011; Rochira, 2014), word association tasks (Moloney et al., 2005), and ethnography and textual analysis
(Jodelet, 1991).

I adopted the three principles devised by Doise, Clémence and Lorenzi-Cioldi (1993), mapping the shared elements of representation across the entire sample, then identifying differences between sub groups, and, finally, identifying the shared experiences or beliefs that anchor those different representational perspectives. My sample was too small to permit the factor analysis and covariance they used to identify the differences. However, discursive methods can reveal the relationship between linguistic expressions and distinct communicative purposes, through contextual analysis (Billig, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 2005; Wiggins & Potter, 2008). These methods have been used to reveal collective change in business settings (Shotter, 2010) and personal change resulting from institutional change (Gibson, 2013; Thomas & Hewitt, 2011; Benwell & Stokoe, 2002).

Shared representational elements were identified by searching in the transcripts for themes identified in a text produced as a result of an official study of the decline (GATF, 1991), in order to show the presence of enduring representational themes. Based on this first step, I then studied the evolution of these themes, presenting one at length.

Common elements can also be discerned in themâta, which are metaphors that both concretely objectify the representation and constitute the binary opposites around which debate is centered. I identified the metaphors by scanning the transcripts for vivid descriptions of decline, as part of constructing the personal fields of representation, and then searched the texts again for their antonyms. Although Moscovici and Vignaux (2000) noted that binary themâta tend toward stereotypes, Billig (1992) suggested that discursive analysis can reveal subtle meanings in how themes are bent to serve the rhetorical needs of the moment. These analyses of shared elements in the representational field that can be called the Presbyterian representation of decline are
presented in chapter five.

I also explored representational differences within the sample. One possible source of difference was hypothesized to be the degree of exposure to the decline. This was identified by information provided by participants at the beginning of the interview.

I applied content analytic methods to extract all the utterances relative to decline by each participant. I used three codes that were conceived as a result of initial readings, and served to both extract utterances and to classify them according to whether they inform causal factors, symptoms and effects, or personal demands of the decline. Charts of these fields of representation were made for each participant, and later correlated with exposure to decline.

One type of difference within the discourse on decline was investigated as anchored in exposure to the decline, as it would suggest greater experience facing its demands. Additional sub-groups were identified by scanning the charts for significant content that was used by smaller numbers of participants. Social representations locate groups in their socio-political world (Howarth, Andreouli & Kessy, 2014), so I searched especially for themes that might have socio-political implications, noting indications of possible anchoring beliefs and experiences, and applying discursive analysis to those sections of transcript making similar arguments. Thus discursive analysis yielded both the representational qualities and also identified the anchoring social-political standpoint. These discursively derived analyses were not subjected to quantitative analysis. They are presented in chapter six.

**Discursive methods.** Discursive methods supplement content and narrative analysis to specify how discursive resources constitute tactical communication to achieve desired interpersonal objectives. The analysis involves careful study of how participants’ use of deictics, pronouns, word choice, word order, and emphatics in transcript excerpts to document how the

Several concepts that guide discursive analysis merit explanation. All conversational language participates in an interactive action, whose effectiveness becomes open to challenge. One possible challenge relates to the extent to which the speaker is seen as having a stake or interest in the version of events she is describing. In order to avoid any claim that she may be distorting reality to present a self-favoring version, the speaker engages in “stake inoculations” (Potter, 1996), gestures that fall under what Goffman (1959) described as “self-presentation” and “image management.” I use these terms interchangeably. Another interpersonal issue explored by discursive analysis is that of accountability, in which the speaker attends to communicate their acceptance or rejection of blame and responsibility (Potter, 1996).

**Religious language.** Religious language was abundant in the transcripts, particularly in the form of references to a divine calling. I took this as evidence that the latter serves a discursive purpose related to the meaning of work, for the clergy (Christopherson, 1994), and may indicate places where the discourse is “open for innovation” (Valsiner, 2013). The religious frame, generally, was seen as able to strengthen a nonreligious argument (Jones, 2010), or change the argument altogether to a different, religiously formulated one. I used discursive analysis to explore how religious language and references to vocational calling were invoked to account for participants’ work situations and their views of the decline. This analysis is presented in chapter seven.

**Narrative analysis.** Initial readings of the transcripts revealed that many of the representations were created in the context of telling a story. That narratives capture the speaker’s interpretations of personal experience and their self-presentation to others has long
been recognized (Bruner, 1987; Sarbin, 1986), making them an appropriate location to explore the representational triad of object, self, and interpersonal relations, and to observe how people position themselves and adjust the meaning of events across time and contexts (Bamberg, 1997; Daiute, 2004, 2010). In times of incoherence, narratives may be produced in greater quantity, and may repair breaches in the narrator’s relationship with her environment (Bruner, 1990, 1991, 2002).

Using Labov & Waletsky’s (1967/1997) structural analysis of narrative clauses, combined with Bamberg’s (1997, 2004) narrative positioning theory, I investigated how participants maneuvered their self-positioning in their stories, to manage their stake and account for their lives. The analysis tests the assertion of Arciero & Guidano (2000) that narratives are stimulated by changing social situations by investigating the correlation between exposure to decline and narrative construction. This analysis is presented in chapter eight.

**Mixed methods.** Although I approached this study using the qualitative epistemology of discursive psychology and social representation theory, I included a quantitative element, thus mixing methods to explore questions that the discursive approach alone could not resolve. Although discursive and quantitative approaches are based on incompatible epistemologies, adding quantitative elements at the point of analysis can maximize the usefulness of the results, validate discursive findings, and facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the confluence of forces that shape the spoken language (Brannen, 2005).

**Summary of analytic methods.** The combined approaches used herein are intended to clarify different aspects of discursive and representational activity, to show how the participants make sense of social change and position themselves against a backdrop of the increasingly limited resources of the PCUSA. The methodological steps employed include: (1) a qualitative
comparison of the participants’ representations of decline to those given in an earlier
denominational text (GATF, 1991), illustrating how some of them have evolved; (2) the
identification of metaphorical themâta that objectify the representations; (3) a quantitative
comparison of the thematic categories of causal factors, effects and symptoms, and personal
demands found in the individual fields of representations with levels of exposure to decline; (4)
an identification of subgroups by associating salient linguistic elements with beliefs and
experiences shared by members of those groups, using discursive analysis; (5) an investigation of
functional and strategic use of religious language referring to divine calling; and (6) a narrative
analysis with a focus on structure and positioning as creators of meaning. Together, these
approaches reveal the polyphasic and triadic nature of representations of decline and illuminate
personal and social development.

Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis varied according to the analytic process. When identifying common
elements of representation, the unit of analysis was the sample as a whole. The findings were not
influenced by which participant voiced a theme. But when identifying differences, the unit of
analysis shifted to the individual participant, regardless of the interview setting. This departure
from the usual practice of taking the entire focus group as the unit of analysis follows Kidd and
Parshall (2000), who suggest using the unit of analysis that best aids understanding of the data.
Focusing on the individual participant allowed a consistent way to analyze data obtained from
both individual and group interviews, and permitted the quantitative calculation of the influence
of exposure to decline on the various categories in the fields of representation and on the
construction of narratives. Finally, when conducting the discursive analysis, though the focus
remained on the individual, the collaborative construction by the interviewer and other focus
group participants said, whether constructive or repressive, was included in the analysis.

**Reliability and inter-rater agreement.** A second reader was given three sets of six (16%) transcripts to read, totaling 18 (48%) of the transcripts, with separate coding instructions for each set, to identify the following: 1) utterances that match one of the themes of decline on a list derived from the task force report (GATF, 1991), 2) instances of religious language related to the call, 3) discrete narrative sections. In addition, the second reader later read all the individual fields of representation charts and refined the classification of themes into causal factors, effects and symptoms, and personal demands. Lastly, the second coder read the tables of narratives for each participants, to identify the level 1 positioning in the narratives as favorable or unfavorable, and to identify narratives showing sharp articulations.

The coding was reviewed after the second reader had coded one interview from each set. Representational themes, utterances and narratives were counted as being the same when at least part of the same section of text was coded by both readers. The differences that related to identifying text emerged either from oversight, or from difficulty marking the boundaries of narratives, especially those that spanned several conversational turns, or when a speaking turn included more than one distinct utterance. Where differences were identified in applying code to selected passages, such as in naming theme categories, identifying subject positions or recognizing sharp articulations, the differences were likely to be the result of subjective assessments of speaker ambivalence. The differences between the two coders were discussed and the coding guidelines were refined to reduce confusion, striving to be uniform in treating similar cases.

When the remaining five transcripts were coded, inter-rater agreement was calculated. All remaining differences were discussed until consensus was reached, prior to calculating the
correlations with exposure for the utterances, positioning and sharp articulation narratives.

I calculated the inter-rater agreement, using the formula for Cohen’s kappa. For coding text that represents one of 11 categories identified from a published text (GATF, 1991) the result was $k = .84$, and for coding the theme categories for the participants’ fields of representation, $k = .71$. The calculated value for agreement of instantiations of “the call” was $k = .91$. The distinctions between vocational and contractual calling were made contextually, by myself.

The narrative analysis also involved three coding steps for which inter-rater agreement was calculated. The values for these coding steps were as follows: for locating discrete narratives, $k = .79$; for coding narrative positioning in the previously identified narratives, $k = .70$; and for identifying narratives with sharp articulations, $k = .61$.

To assure the reliability of my discursive analysis, I strove to focus the analysis on elements that others have identified as loci of meaning (Gee, 2011; Potter, 1996; Schiffrin, 1987), and to describe clearly how I arrived at the interpretations that I made.
Chapter Five

Analysis: A Presbyterian Social Representation of Decline

The theory of social representation was specifically conceived, and continues to be used, for the exploration of the various ways in which conceptualizations of social objects evolve over time, as they are used for communication among people with differing ideology, identity and social position. In the present chapter, my aim is to identify the content of a “Presbyterian” social representation of decline, and to describe how that representation may have evolved over time;

I began the analysis with multiple readings of the transcripts to gain a thorough familiarity with them. I continued to re-read the transcripts often throughout the entire analytic processes so as to keep in mind the entirety of each interview, in order to make sure that interpretations of excerpts remained close to the presentation of the participant taken as a whole.

Comparison of Representational Themes with a Denominational Text

In order to identify and describe a Presbyterian social representation of decline, I mapped representational themes found in the transcripts onto themes presented in a PCUSA document prepared by a task force commissioned to study the decline and to make recommendations concerning denominational growth (GATF, 1991). Using 11 factors identified in that report as related to the Presbyterian decline, and applying them as \textit{a priori} codes, I searched the transcripts for talk related to each of the aforementioned themes, to ascertain how common those themes continue to be in contemporary pastoral speech about decline.

\textbf{Coding.} The 11 factors for which the transcripts were analyzed constitute a condensation of all issues raised in the report. Such condensation was necessary because the report, being the product of a committee, was at times vague and ambiguous in its classification of relevant
I therefore created a new classification, in which all the major factors included in the report are alluded to, though some topics are subdivided and others combined. In the process, I eliminated overlap, and grouped sub-themes in more relevant ways. For example, the report refers to the influence of special groups and to denominational policy addressing political issues. Rather than creating separate codes for these topics, I classified such talk as “diversity” when the policy talk related to LGBTQ persons, or as “balance between evangelism, spirituality and justice,” if the talk addressed any other issue.

The coding was carried out by hand, by reading the transcripts paragraph by paragraph, highlighting sections of text whose content matched any of the 11 themes, and writing in the margin the name of the factor that was matched. Directions for coding each of these themes are given below. The presentation of each category begins with a quotation from the GATF (1991) report showing how that document addresses the theme under consideration. This is followed by the coding directions, and closes with a prototypical example from the transcripts.

1. Diversity. “Failure to respond to demographic changes by reaching out to new or different people accounts for many of the factors in the declining membership of the church” (GATF, 1991, p. 39).

This theme is expressed in any identification of people by race, ethnicity or sexuality, or a general discussion of immigrants or people who are “different,” whether the reference is to members of the church or the broader community. It includes both talk that supports as well as minimizes the concerns and interests of these groups of people. Included in this category is talk about the debate over ordination of LGBTQ persons.

Example of diversity:
A comment was made [in a conversation with two church members] about how “they” liked loud music, and I said, “Well, but what about our members? How did the African Americans in our congregation come to join?” “Well, they were raised in Presbyterian churches in the South, you know. That’s why they still come, rather than go to the more vocal [churches].” So, I don’t know if our [mostly African American] neighborhood would even respond to our outreach effort, or if they would be welcome if they did.

(Rose)

2. Conflict in the church. “Conflict in congregations is a major factor in membership decline” (GATF, 1991, p. 39).

This representational theme was identified by the presence of the word “conflict” in the text, or by a description of conflict among members or between members and the pastor, whether in the speaker’s own or another church. Texts of conflict were double-coded if the topic of the conflict matched another of the themes.

Example of conflict:

But right about that time, the conflict burst with the head-of-staff pastor and a lot of people walked related to that. . . Yeah. So, it was this big ol’ disaster. (Susan)

3. Transfer to other denominations. Responding to concerns that members were transferring to more conservative denominations, the task force concluded, “Presbyterians receive as many or more from other denominations as we lose to other denominations. Our greatest disparity in membership gain/loss lies in the area of the nonaffiliated, where we gain far fewer than we lose” (GATF, 1991, p. 15).

This theme is identified by reference to individuals or entire congregations leaving the denomination, or to a debate over whether to leave or remain. Lexical terms associated with this
topic include “dismissed,” “exiting,” “denominational loyalty,” and “jumping ship.” It was sometimes double-coded as diversity, when those leaving are members of a specific group, or as a generational effect, when the reason for the transfer is clearly paired with talk of a related theme, such as when those who change denominations are college students. However, talk of “leaving” was not coded as transfer unless it explicitly indicated that the persons leaving the church went to another church, rather than having simply stopped participating in any religion. References to entire churches leaving were all counted as transfers, regardless of the language used to describe the process, because they always involved moving to another denomination.

Example of transfer to other denominations:

*There were a couple of churches in our surrounding area that have been dismissed from our presbytery recently. And those people are literally neighbors and cousins, and family friends of members of my congregation. So, I think, even if it’s not spoken of with a lot of fear by the staff at my church, the information that has been distributed by these neighboring congregations and the discussions that were held in their communities has made its way to the people in our congregation, and that impacts people differently.*

(Edwina)

4. Generational effects. “Significant changes in the birth-death ratio among Presbyterians have contributed to membership decline” (GATF, 1991, p. 39).

This theme is identified by citations of age, or stages in the life-course. These include references to adolescents quitting the church after their confirmation, or to church programs geared to different ages, or to age-based comparisons of attitude and preferences regarding religious practice. References to the number of births, deaths, and the proportion of children or elderly people in the congregation are also included in this theme. Such age-related terms as
“children,” “young adults,” “young families,” “retired people,” “baby boomers,” and “millennials” are signs of this theme. Where there is both reference to age and to any other of the items, such as diversity, or joining another denomination, the item is double-coded.

Example of generational effects:

Certainly, people in this church, in the last 20 years, have had fewer children! So, there are fewer children that have been raised in this very traditional church, where the people buried in the cemetery have family members still sitting in the pews. So, you know, I think the general statistical decline, certainly, is mirrored in this congregation. (Dolly)

5. Aversion to change. The report quotes Lyle Schaller as referring to “…congregations perpetuating the past rather than breaking new ground and developing new members.’ His comments underscore the general aversion to change found in all institutions, including Christian congregations” (GATF, 1991, pp. 18-19).

This theme is identified by reference to resistance to change on the part of church members or staff, or to nostalgia for the past. Talk of “fear” of change, being “stuck” and “locked into,” or expressions of opposition to suggestions that change is necessary, or of resistance to specific proposals to do something different or differently, were coded as aversion to change, regardless of the ideological basis for that aversion. When the aversion to change was so severe that it was described as outright conflict, it was also double-coded as conflict in the church.

Example of aversion to change:

What I’m seeing, especially in this church here, is a tenacious wanting to hold on to tradition. We try to put in praise songs, working to make the liturgy more user-friendly, and we usually get told, “No, this isn't who we are.” One of the things we're trying to help
them with, while they look for a new pastor, is to say, "Hey guys, you know you're losing people, you know. You're losing the church. You've got to move on." But it's been a difficult thing. They're locked into “this is who we are and don’t muck with it.” (Sharon)


This theme is expressed through discussion of changes in the neighborhood that may affect church participation. Descriptions of the present conditions or demographics of the community, even without explicitly identifying its previous state, were included in this code.

Example of neighborhood and demographic change:

And before [recent difficulties] they repaired their pipe organ. But this is not a pipe organ community. Look around: this is salsa, and rap, and this is “What a friend we have in Jesus.” They know they need to adjust, but they don't know how. (Harriet)

7. Change in social values. “In a society of changing values, differing viewpoints and lifestyles have led to an indifference to the gospel on the part of many of the unchurched and to an erosion of commitment on the part of many of the churched” (GATF, 1991, p. 37).

This theme is reflected in talk of how members of the church or of society at large express views or behave in ways that are unsupportive of church participation or traditional religious values.

Example of change in social values:

One of the challenges I find for our church staff – and membership as well, but we talk about it more at the staff level – is, I would almost say, the changing relationship of people to their church. It feels like more and more people think of church membership and their involvement in the church as sort of one thing among many things in their lives,
and so, it’s certainly not the central place. I’m not sure it’s even, for a lot of people, in the, you know, top ten things <laughs>; that’s my cynical view. (Grace)

8. Balance between evangelism, spirituality and justice. “Faithfulness to Jesus Christ calls for congregations to commit themselves to the two major mission emphases of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): (a) doing evangelism and developing congregations; and (b) doing justice” (GATF, 1991, p. 38).

This topic involves discussion of what the proper emphasis of church and pastoral effort should be. It often involves ranking some ministry activity as better than others. Religious jargon, such as “winning people,” “relevance,” or “taking the church outdoors,” is used to signal one’s position on these issues. When this theme is described as reflecting differing emphases by age group, it is double coded with “generational effects.” Reports of, or expressing the intention of, engaging in evangelistic, spiritual or justice ministry is included in this category, as are counter opinions on these matters, and references to new ministry developments of all types.

Example of figuring out the balance between evangelism, spirituality and social justice: Everybody who—who’s sort of looking at this shift is saying, “we have to figure out a new paradigm for being a church.” I think it’s about leading people into their faith on a personal level, and leading people to go out of those doors of the church and into the community. (Dolly)

9. Pastors are ill-equipped to meet new demands. “While there is much agreement that effectiveness of ministerial leadership is linked to decline and growth, the data is both subjective and open to interpretation” (GATF, 1991, p. 23).

This theme can be recognized by claims that pastors are unprepared for the job, whether by inclination or by training, or are otherwise unskilled in aspects of pastoring in the
contemporary context. References to inadequate seminary training are included in this code, as are participants’ talk of self-doubt and uncertainty about what the future will demand. In some cases, criticisms of other pastors’ skills, or references to continuing education programs for pastors, are associated with this theme.

Example of ill-equipped pastors:

And my colleague, he’s been there for ten plus years, and he really needs to move on. He had a vision for the church and he ran that out, and now he absolutely has no idea what to do. And so, we’re just, sort of not really moving, don’t have any focus. But he’s not ready to admit that, or say that there’s something wrong, and he has absolutely no intention of giving up his call. But the church desperately needs new leadership. (Norma)

10. Inadequate religious education. “It is evident that lack of Christian nurture in congregations leads to biblical illiteracy, moral relativism, theological ignorance, and evangelical apathy, resulting in (among other things) membership decline.” (GATF, 1991, pp. 35-36).

This theme refers to the education of the laity, rather than of pastors. Lay religious education is differentiated from the next theme, “theological relativism and lack of distinctiveness,” in that the present theme explicitly refers to education or training, or mentions education programs, such as Sunday School. When specific age-related programs are identified, the item is double-coded as a “generational effects.”

Example of inadequate religious education:

I emphasize adult education, which many congregations do not do. . . .OK, my church has 500 members and we have 400 in worship! What is the difference? To focus on the adults so that they’ll bring their children, if they have them. You have to have some quality stuff for the kids; they do investigate that. But have quality discipleship for


11. Theological relativism and lack of distinctiveness. “The claims of Jesus Christ become muted not only to the world at large, but to members of the church who are unsure whether they have any right to recommend their particular faith experience to other people” (GATF, 1991, p. 31).

This theme is marked by talk that describes weakened fidelity to traditional Christian tenets. It refers to people having wrong beliefs or of becoming more secular, or of there being little difference between religious and non-religious people. This may be double coded with “balance between evangelism, spirituality and social justice” if the reference is to being uninterested in evangelism, or belief in general. If the reference is to people of particular age groups, it is double-coded with “generational effects.”

Example of theological relativism:

And there are homeless men joining the church, which is welcoming. I would put my church differently from other mission churches. Our mission really, really, is about Jesus. Some of the other churches here in our denomination have very good first words, like “environment,” . . . “eradicating racism.” But their emphasis isn’t Jesus, so their primary identity isn’t Jesus. It’s something really good, but it’s really different. (Corinne)

Findings regarding matched themes. The data, reflecting allusion to the 11 identified themes, suggests that the elements from the GATF (1991) constitute the core of a hegemonic Presbyterian representation of decline. These themes still have currency among the clergy, as all participants alluded to at least one of them in relation to the decline, with 27 (86 %) participants referring to up to three of the themes, and one mentioning five. Table 5.1 presents the number and percentage of the pastors’ references to the 11 factors.
Table 5.1


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes of Representation</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
<th>%&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Diversity</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Conflict in the church</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Transfer to other denominations</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Generational effects (includes birth-to-death ratio)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Aversion to change</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Neighborhood changes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Change in social values</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Balance between evangelism, spirituality and justice efforts</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Pastors not equipped to meet new demands</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Inadequate religious education, (children and adults)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Theological relativism (includes lack of distinctiveness)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of total number of interviewees (N = 37) employing each representational theme.
This first level of analysis identified the current use of these items from the GATF (1991) and acknowledges their diffusion among Presbyterian clergy. Whereas the report summarizes the views of expert sociologists and theologians studying the decline, the clergywomen’s use of those categories demonstrates that these themes have become nuggets of social knowledge (Moscovici 1961/2008) that, taken together, permit quite varied compositions of decline, as deeper levels of analysis show.

**Themâta of Designations of Decline**

Representations are objectified in themâta, or binary pairs of opposites (Moloney et al., 2005; Moscovici, 1961/2008). I scanned each participant’s table of fields of representation, described in chapter six, for metaphors of decline images and identifying dramatic descriptions that I found repeated across interviews. I then returned to the transcripts seeking evidence of their antonyms. Four themâta were thus identified, the interpretations of which are as follows:

**Death versus liveliness.** The most dramatic descriptions of decline were composed using references to death and dying. Thirteen (35%) participants made use of these terms. A designation of a church as “dying” portrays the speaker as being clear-eyed and realistic about decline. The designation is inherently emotional and vivid, more so than talk of “closing” churches, which was used by only three participants. The use of “death” and its synonyms to describe the decline of individual churches or of the denomination accomplished two distinct communicative effects, one related to the closing of churches and the other to the invocation of the possibility of hope.

**Realistic metaphor and literal reality.** The first purpose of employing death as a descriptor was to assert just how drastic decline has been, and how difficult were the decisions it posed to pastors and to the ongoing ministry of their churches, even as they tried to limit their
personal accountability. It was most commonly applied by pastors of churches that had strong, lengthy and undeniable evidence of decline. It was also often conflated with the actual deaths of members.

Delores, the pastor of a smaller church, used the metaphor of death to illustrate her ambivalence over how far to encourage the ongoing activity of her congregation. Although most participants considered engagement in community mission as a sign of lively faith, Delores, who had overseen mergers and the demise of churches before, revealed that helping a congregation discern when it is time to face closing is not an easy or comfortable responsibility for a pastor. She used the story of a member’s death to illustrate how she has come to doubt the benefits of some of the activity of her congregation, activity that she had previously endorsed. Although she avoided using the word “death” explicitly in relation to the church, the idea was implied by the parallel story of a member’s death that she used as an example. Specifically, she questioned her own ability to discern whether death represents a negative or a positive path forward for her church:

Delores: I just officiated at the funeral service of a woman who passed in our church. She was 99 years old. It was two years that she was in this process of dying. And the last thing that her power-of-attorney said to me before she passed, was, “Well, I think we’re going to give her a feeding tube.”

Sharon: Oh, dear. Oh, dear!

Delores: And you know, the image that came to me was that here I’ve been, as an interim pastor, I’ve been trying to give a feeding tube to this church, and they don’t want to eat. And they’re old, I mean 80’s, 90’s; Esther was 99. I’m a spring chicken! <long pause> It is so hard.
Sharon: *They are serving, not just surviving* [referring to the church’s soup kitchen, that Delores had described a few minutes earlier].

Delores: “*They’re tired. After this last problem we had with the building, they’re really tired.*”

Delores uses this dramatic narrative to indicate a change of mind about whether preserving a church is always the best solution to decline. Sharon, another member of the focus group, protests, but Delores does not accept any easy way out. The determination of when a congregation has declined to the point that it should close is a matter not only of collective will, but also of resources, and Delores had earlier alluded to difficulties with both lying ahead. By placing the discussion within the context of offering pastoral care, she can be frank in describing the condition of her congregation while simultaneously positioning herself as a wise and caring, but realistic, spiritual leader.

Another pastor, Robin, attributed the decline to the outdated attitudes of aging members of her church, rather than to their physical frailty:

*Especially as they’re getting older, the older members typically are still operating within that realm [of expecting scholarly preaching] and they don’t want anything that fusses with their personal walk with God. . . . And all that is creating havoc in our denomination, which I think is why many, many churches are dying and mine is one of them.*

Later in the interview, Robin expands on the image of death vs. life:

*If the church is going to survive, the way the church is now has to die for something new to happen. And the people can’t rally around that at all. The consultant we hired said that many, many of the older folks said they would just as soon see the church die, rather than*
have to go through the discomfort and the difficulty of being different from what they already are. They don’t have the energy for it, so it’s hard to get that blood out of a turnip. . . . a lot of transformation is a cultural issue, and this culture here: there’s no life. There’s really no life. . . . So, I’m going to recommend to them. . . that we admit that we’re in the grandfather years of the church and work to— and come up with some ways of celebrating the history and all the church has done, and go out with grace.

For Robin, membership numbers alone do not necessarily portend institutional survival or failure; on paper, at least, her congregation is well above the average size for the denomination. By positing death as a necessary precursor to resurrection, and the attitudinal signs of decline as the inevitable end of the life cycle of her congregation, Robin can sidestep the sense of personal failure that overseeing the “going out” of a congregation might provoke, and position herself as a wise leader.

But language choice might also have unexpected consequences, as seen in the ease with which Robin moves from using dying to refer to her elderly congregation’s stubborn resistance to change, to talk of “going out.” The image of death is not only seen in how she characterizes the church; it is also becoming, perhaps prematurely, the prevailing representation of how she relates to it, leading her to work toward an actual, not a metaphorical, death. This is contrasted with Theresa’s view, which suggests that expecting death blinds one to the life that is present and growing against all odds:

“You know, those things everybody talks about and claps for, might not be mattering as much, in the grand scheme of things, as the little stuff that’s going on, those shoots that are sprouting up from the ground in places where deadness was expected.” (Theresa)
Among the most explicit references to death was Susan’s: “You know, the denomination may be dying, but these people are dying and they’re dying faster, even, than their friends in other churches,” she said, describing a loss of ten percent of her congregation to death, though in the end, the loss was balanced by the acquisition of new members. This, however, does not alter her perception of decline:

If you ask the average person, you would think we had lost fifty people, more than we had gained, because they don’t feel it. They feel the losses. And they know they have that person over there, but people aren’t interchangeable like that. Their friend of fifty years is still gone. Um. So, the times for us are to manage this grief. (Susan)

A pastor of a very small church, Rose, pointed out how older members’ focus on death can contribute to decline, if they dominate the church board’s decision-making. “An elder told me, he just, he wanted to make sure the church would still be there for his funeral. Which I fully understand. If they want anything beyond that, then we’ve all gotta work on it.”

Talk of decline, even when avoiding the word “death,” was fraught with anticipatory personal grief, whether for the death of friends, or for one’s own ultimate death, or for the prospect of the church no longer existing. As Rose explained, referring to a group from another church that closed and who recently joined her church:

Rose: You go from 750 to 15, or whatever they ended up with, that’s very sad. And so, they’ve been through that, and so, some of this, some of this sadness and all that people have about, ah, you know, how long will we be here?

Interviewer: Uh, you’re saying, uh, in the sense of being elderly and uh, also in terms of how long the church can endure?
Rose: Right, right. And you know I try, in terms of being creative in sermons, you know, focusing on the bigger picture, and ah, and using each day, and so forth. Ah, bringing it down to those practical terms. It’s all, truly, that any of us have.

Though talk of death was one of the most common icons in the data, it was often treated less as a matter of realistic description of the church and more often as a dramatic gesture. Nonetheless, given that talk of the death of a church by a clergy member is generally seen as bordering on the sacrilegious, its use was carefully plotted and often paradoxical. Those who used this metaphor also took pains to assert their ideological orthodoxy, saying, as Penny did: “I see institutional forms dying but the gospel growing and changing, and still being powerful, but not quite in the successful corporate mainline way.” They combined talk of death with taking up positions that defended them from any semblance of heretical doubt.

**Death as background versus foreground.** The second use of the image of death was to provide a dark backdrop against which to project bright signs of life, however small:

> We’re shrinking, and our average attendance is 25 right now. But, for the past couple of years the giving is up; one family basically gave my salary. So, on the one hand, you’d think we’re dying, and we may be, but it doesn’t feel that way. Also, we baptized more babies in the last year than in my first twelve years combined. (Celia)

In this example, Celia uses “dying,” and lists evidential elements of serious decline, to create contrast with certain small changes that alter the communal outlook, opposing hope to the stark negativity of death. Her example stops short of saying either that the tide is turning or naming the hope as false. The avoidance of a definitive stance toward change is not unusual in the face of non-linear change, and has also been seen in other fields (Blewitt, 2010).

In the following excerpt, Paula uses “death” and similar metaphors, including “dry up
and fly away,” to mock, by exaggeration, the worry of others, and to problematize any representation of decline without exploring the contextual activity. “You put two dying organizations together and what do you have?” she says, referring to the 1978 reunion of northern and southern Presbyterian denominations. For her, abstract concern about decline is self-fulfilling and counterproductive. Paula expands her thesis:

*The predictions of the demise of the Presbyterian Church have been there for decades.*

*So, you know, it’s not my church; it’s God’s church. Let’s just keep going, then. Who cares if the “Presbyterian Church” survives or not? God doesn’t worry about that. He wants us to thrive! This idea that, “If we don’t turn this thing around, people are going to jump ship,” I’m like: “So what? The church is not going to dry up and fly away as long as we thrive.”* (Paula)

For Paula, neither “demise” nor “dry up” carries significance or poses a threat; these terms will prove self-fulfilling, one way or the other, without her input. She minimizes the threat of death in two ways: first, by identifying with the divine perspective, and dismissing decline by positing indifference to frantic survival efforts; and secondly, by employing the language of youth, who are often accused of jumping the church ship. Introducing her opinion as a quotation, she set it off vividly by prefacing it with “I’m like,” an expression typically used by young people (Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999), which aligns her with the younger generation’s perspective and also allows her to express her indignation and impatience as freely as youth might do.

**Growth versus decline.** The most direct opposite of decline, in this context, is “growth,” a term already present in the title of the denominational committee tasked to study decline, “The General Assembly Council Task Force on Church Membership Growth” (GATF, 1991). Growth was used by 11 (30 %) of the participants to indicate the goal of increasing the size of the church.
Another 12 (32%) pastors used “grow” to refer to interior and personal qualitative change in spiritual attitudes. Even when used to indicate numerical size the spiritual connotation of these words remained an important background meaning. As with the combination of the metaphorical and real meanings of death, so too did the pastors tend to ambiguously blend the spiritual and the statistical meanings of growth and decline. A statement by Grace illustrates how they are inseparable, in response to the question, “How do you measure success?”:

There’s two sorts of things: it’s like, OK, if we’re doing something, do we feel like this, was this a good experience, and did the people who participated, were they engaged, did they, um, grow spiritually? Were they challenged? Was I challenged? I think the other angle of it is, “How much participation did we have in something?” Did it feel like the amount of participation matched the effort that went into it? And participation can range from “people showed up” to “we had leaders” or that kind of thing, so there’s a qualitative and a quantitative. I guess I think I tend to lean a little more on the qualitative end. I think other people sometimes lean more on the quantitative, um, but it’s a mix.

(Grace)

For several speakers, spiritual growth counteracted the numerical decline. For example, Ruth explained, “We grew the church from 200 to 50,” referring to the white flight after the church was first integrated, in the 1960’s. The dramatic decline in membership meant to her that those who remained or joined during that time had more commitment to racial justice, and represented moral growth, which in Ruth’s view is a more authentically Christian value than size. Or, as another pastor suggested, “When you decide to be open and affirming [of sexual diversity], that does not spell mega-growth,” thus avoiding the negative judgments that might otherwise accompany the lack of numerical growth.
Other speakers also framed growth in ways that maximized its significance. In the next example, an exaggerated position is set up as a contrasting background. Anne’s church owes its financial stability to a recent large donation from a wealthy member. But by setting up the idealistic “exponential” growth as the point of comparison, the status of her church as merely holding steady was presented as strong enough. “Our numbers haven’t fluctuated much: 510-525. While we have not grown exponentially, we haven’t declined either.”

For Rose, strategies for growth constitute an argument against the inevitability of “decline,” which she uses to counter the claims of colleagues that she was hired just to “close the door,” even while portraying her congregation as minuscule, and representing her parishioners as closed-minded. “My major challenge is trying to encourage the congregation to see that we can do some new things, and we can reach out and, and grow!”

It was fear itself, more than small size or financial straits, that Rose believed could destroy a church. As an example, she cited her board’s priority of saving money at the expense of outreach, as they chose not to spend on improvements that would make the building more comfortable or attractive to potential new members.

For other participants, growth is an immunizing agent against the effects and even knowledge of decline. Following a focus group question about the personal impact of working in a time of decline, Angie claims an excused ignorance:

\[ That \] \textit{question} \textit{does not apply to me, because we are not declining; our finances are growing every year.} \textit{(Angie)}

Nonetheless, further analysis reveals that decline affects the work, expectations, and demands made on pastors of all types of churches, regardless of their degree of direct exposure to it. Elsewhere in the interview, Angie admitted the cost at which her church achieved that growth:
“We’re a big tent,” she explained, which accepts as members people with an unusually wide range of beliefs, many of which are only marginally consonant with Presbyterianism.

In another example, Brenda, who is not an installed pastor, used “growing” to achieve an indirect aim. After noting that her work contract does not include the provision of health insurance and other benefits that an installed pastor is entitled to, she cites the growth of her church to excuse it from accountability for her situation, adding: “Being a growing church with a lot of people who are not Presbyterian, they do not even know what ‘installed’ means.” The stigma of her low status is minimized by the fact that the large number of new members do not realize that she, the only female pastor, is underpaid. The expanding nature of the membership body disguises and excuses her inferior status, which in turn shapes her representation of her congregation’s growth. Her lexical choices set her own decision to not contest the improper contract within a morally defensible context. Together, these illustrations show that the labels of growth and decline fulfil multiple interactive functions.

**Movement and change versus stagnation.** Fourteen participants (38%) described the opposite of decline as a form of movement. Their talk included phrases such as “move along,” “move into the future,” and “move forward.” The natural obverse of moving, though, is not declining, but staying still, or stagnating. The idea of stagnation was alluded to in the report of the task force (GATF, 1991) as “aversion to change.” This opposition shifts the nature of decline from being a matter of numerical change to a qualitative one of static disorientation and even resistance.

Participants’ reports of failure to move ranged from the trivial, such as refusing to serve

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8 An installed pastor enjoys tenure and a better benefits package than temporary pastors.
store-bought cookies at the coffee hour, to the crucial, such as explaining the members’ lack of involvement in the ministry activity of the church. Theresa, below, expressed this oppositional theme, setting up the relationship between movement and decline as analogous to being actively involved in meaningful mission activity versus sitting around:

*I just… I think that we’re just . . . so . . . balled up [about the decline], um, and I just think, you know, Jesus said, “If you’re gonna sit around and worry about yourself all the time, you’re gonna lose your damn life.” And those who are willing to say, “What the heck, let’s, let’s go care for the world again”— I don’t know a single church that gives its heart and soul to mission, and, uh, you know, that, that, um, you know, maybe it’s not going to be a large church, but, you know, I just, I don’t know, I think… I think the, the Spirit is there when we’re doing what we were put on earth as Christians to do. (Theresa)

A close reading of the text reveals that Theresa hesitated after the enthusiastic phrase “a church that give its heart and soul to mission,” possibly because the words that might logically be expected to follow are “that is in decline,” or “that has died.” But the history of recent decades suggests otherwise, as decline and even closure, sometimes happens despite a church’s engagement with the needs of a community. In any case, she made a quick switch in phrasing, that is potentially inclusive of small and even slowly-declining congregations. Being “in mission” brings an essential, active movement to a congregation that is yet another measure of what is essential to and attractive in a church. Use of such terms bypasses the growth-decline opposition altogether. For these women, throwing one’s heart and soul into the mission of the church is meaningful as an end in itself, and more important than any effect it may have on numerical measures of institutional stability.
Other participants applied “moving” to address attempts to change the structure of worship (Sharon), to alter the worship space in order to afford a more contemporary style (Betty), or to become intentionally multicultural (Ruth, Karen, Monica). Still others understood any change at all as boding well for the future of the church, as the following excerpt illustrates:

*I don't feel particularly threatened by the decline, [or] because these churches are shrinking. Because, it’s probably, it’s probably net-net in terms of good and bad. But as long as we are changing, whether it’s up or down, that is good, because staying too long in one form is not healthy, I think.* (Joan)

Without invoking any specific theological basis, Joan, who pastors a church that is experiencing a slow rebirth after losing its property and nearly all of its members, advocated for change because it encourages engagement. She saw change of any kind as the natural antidote to the stagnation that results from resistance to change, or from settling into rote traditions. Inherent in her view is the understanding that ongoing movement and activity are in and of themselves life-giving forces. Many participants appear to agree with her: aversion to change was cited by 32% of the sample as a causal factor of decline (see Table 5.1).

**Decline as positive versus negative.** Closely related to the movement versus stagnation themâta was talk arguing that the decline should be valued, or at least not explicitly devalued. Its opposite, concern for, or fear of decline as a harmful and stigmatizing process, is evident implicitly in how Dee, for example, ascribed a reduced financial condition to increased maturity, as the church stopped drawing from its endowment to meet payroll demands, even though that approach resulted in her position being eliminated. As she describes it,

“Mine is not a church in decline. We... you know... it is a church where they are beginning to look more honestly at their budget and talk about money, which has been a
huge accomplishment.” (Dee)

Rose declares that “there is a place for small churches,” though she admits that many of them, though not her own, should close. Mary points out that churches that specialize in working with disadvantaged groups should not be judged for their lack of stability, but should instead be encouraged by their destabilization:

*This beautiful passage in the Book of Order about “reformed and always reforming,” and that the church will “risk its life just like Christ did.”*9 I mean, like, that’s really cool! So, we should drive ourselves into the ground to see what might come. So, I don’t have any sentimentality around the denomination. (Mary)

Still others pointed out that much of Christian practice is tired and no longer fulfills its intended spiritual function, creating a situation that clamors for change. For example, Joyce complains:

*I hate our emphasis on “the Word”, that the most important part of the service is somebody getting up there and saying ‘this is the word of God.’ Excuse me! people can read now! It’s not like we’re in biblical times when only the priests could read. How do you stand up there and you have to be the expert? I love the interactive part where the person preaches and then the congregation talks back. I love that! This is a dialogue together with the world. Today it’s my turn up here, tomorrow it might be yours. You know, I love that, because that’s much more empowering. And yeah, throw your

9 The wording in the Book of Order is: “The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life” (Constitution of the PCUSA, Part II, 2013, F1.0301).
questions up here, but no, people don’t want, some people don’t want that kind of responsibility.

And Angie goes so far as to suggest that,

The church is declining to make room for something bigger and better. I think we’ve shortchanged ourselves by putting it in a particular mold. That mold doesn’t work anymore, it’s outdated.

Such representational constructs presenting decline not only as not bad, but sometimes as facilitating desired results and conditions, were used by 16 (43%) of the participants. These constructs are important as descriptors of the cognitive polyphasia and polyphonic conversations of the participants, in which they considered multiple types of knowledge and perspectives.

**Summary of themâta.** A number of different terms to describe the existential state of the PCUSA emerged in the course of this study, illustrating how the various sources of ambivalence toward the representation of a church that is “in decline.” In particular, the fraught association of the concept with death is an anticipatory representation that is inherently an affront to the ideological commitments of clergywomen. The application of these associated concepts both highlights the dramatic condition of continually-reduced membership numbers and allows the communication of more hopeful conceptualizations of processes that are, at prima facie, experienced as negative. For some of the participants, the fear and stigma of decline are transformed by language embracing the very condition that stands as a threat to their identity, pointing to how new visions of the church may emerge from the processes of decline. These visions emerged in the language chosen as antonyms for decline, terms such as “growth” and “movement,” which represent a dynamic quality of church advocated by many of the participants. These concepts, along with “embrace the future,” “be responsible,” “be hopeful,”
and other constructions found in the data, coexist as dimensions of cognitive polyphasia, deepening the meaning of decline.

The differences between the metaphors bear meaning. “Growth” was replete with hegemonic moral connotations, and often served as a semantic barrier (Gillespie, 2008) against genuine dialogue, not only with alternative representations but with the phenomenon of decline as well. This coincided with “growing” being used to indicate an achieved status, with its process left unanalyzed and unproblematized. On the other hand, “movement” maintained its semantic meaning of activity, engagement and process. An active church, especially if open to its environment, is seen as impervious to decline, no matter the state of its membership or finances. Moreover, “movement” conferred dignity, even when the activity might in the end prove futile. For the most part, this movement-stagnation binary pair was used to create an emancipatory representation of change in the church; in some cases, however, it enabled implicit blaming of the churches in decline for bringing on their own fate, even though elsewhere the larger sociological forces at work in causing decline were acknowledged. “Death,” had connotations associated with grief in a way similar to actual physical death, and the two were often mentioned together. Some connotations were polemical, and could be deployed either against the denial of decline, or against what are seen as heretical practices that have destroyed the life of the church.

**Evolving Views of Diversity**

In order to explore the evolution of a representation, after coding the transcripts for references to the task force report (GATF, 1991), I investigated the content of what participants said about the themes. The theme they referred to most frequently was diversity, despite there being no interview question that addressed it directly. This theme, in which I include talk about
race, ethnicity and LGBTQ people, was more fully developed in the interview data than in the report.

The report obliquely suggests that homogeneity is damaging to the church, observing that “as geographical areas change in population, local churches tend to perpetuate ministries designed for, and effective among, earlier populations, thus failing to attract new populations” (GATF, 1991, p. 19), and affirming that “the church is committed to inclusiveness through participation” (p. 58). To bring about diverse participation in established Presbyterian churches the recommendation was made that cross-cultural evangelism classes be offered as continuing education to experienced pastors (p. 57). Nonetheless, inclusiveness in the report was predominantly phrased in terms of founding and developing new churches for immigrants. “The racial ethnic population of the United States will [increase] in the twenty-first century, affording the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) a significant opportunity for membership growth by sponsoring and supporting church development among racial ethnic and new immigrant groups” (p. 40).

The women in the present study, in contrast, indicated that diversity is a local issue, with more participants (16) citing the integration of their individual congregation than referring to separate race- or language-based churches (12). Moreover, they brought a nuanced and multivalent perspective to talk about integration, noting not only the value but also the difficulty and conflict that inhere in the process of creating multicultural congregations, whereas the statements in the report regarding non-white majority and culturally-diverse churches were short and less nuanced (GATF, 1991). Furthermore, in addition to the 21 participants (57%) who referred to race or ethnicity, 17 (46%) explicitly addressed sexual orientation as the focus of diversity in congregations.

Pastors described how diversity contributed to the liveliness, vision and spirituality of
their churches. As examples, they cited how a congregation welcomed a single pregnant woman more enthusiastically than had been anticipated; how a choir awkwardly added gospel songs to their repertoire, in an effort to adapt to the changing neighborhood; how devoted immigrants revitalized an otherwise dying congregation; and how a white rural church enthusiastically opened its heart to a transplanted inner-city Black teenager. Despite most participants accepting the integration of congregations in an increasingly diverse society as normal, and some pastors actively engaging in outreach to the different populations in their communities, eight participants described diversity as a factor that potentiated conflict and decline as well as growth. The following excerpt presents such a conflict as welcome:

*My church could be more diverse and we don’t have Hispanics. I know that there are enclaves of Hispanic communities that are hidden, invisible to us. I mentioned to our worship committee that we need to think more about what it means to be multicultural and not just interracial. There is a difference, and do we want to take that step, do we want to go there yet, is it time yet? Because there have been tensions uh, uh, between some of our African American and [other] lay leaders, in ways that I don’t want to name yet, because I don’t think we’re ready to name, to name these things, yet. But I love that; I love that! Those are the problems that I would rather have! But there’s (oh, God!) “we’ve got to pave the parking lot” and “we have to install a Starbucks and an escalator in our building!”* <laughter> (Penny)

This example portrays ambivalence about race. Penny positions herself as someone who longs for greater integration and values the process, both personally (an aspect on which she elaborates later) and for the sake of the church. Nevertheless, she waits for an ideal level of stability to be reached before engaging those conversations about race, perhaps because she
anticipates they will also occasion tension and friction.

Six pastors mentioned the added demands of managing the theological and social conservativism of their immigrant Presbyterians. One claimed that the conservative positions she has taken in Presbytery meetings did not reflect her personal attitudes but were simply expedient, taken to avoid alienating her immigrant constituency, who might be opposed to the progressive positions of the presbytery. Another specifically described the resistance of immigrant members to spatial alterations in the building sanctuary that would facilitate the more informal worship styles that were being advocated to attract younger visitors. A third admitted that some immigrants had left after realizing how liberal her church is. This much was predicted by the task force, which explicitly advocated tolerance of immigrants’ attitudes as part of the process of welcoming them into the American church, recommending that “they be accorded time to accommodate themselves to the provisions of our Constitution” (GATF, 1991, p.59).

In the worst cases, pastors told stories of resistance in their congregations to the very people who were helping to vitalize the mission of the church, resulting in a painful and superficial integration. Two examples follow:

We have some Ghanaians and some from Cameroon. And they make up the church as well, and that is an interesting dynamic because the European-American folks, they separated themselves from the Africans and we had like two different groups within the church. To begin with, in the coffee hour in the fellowship hall, the Africans would be all together at one end, and the white folks at the other end, and so the time, you know, was cultural—<pause>

Interviewer: Just doing the cultural integration was hard?
Robin: Exactly! Yes, that has a lot to do with age, and as churches are becoming more culturally diverse, that is another wedge that drives the people who have been in the church into hanging on for dear life and trying to keep everything they've got in the same way that it was. (Robin).

They had some kind of a sale one time, a yard sale, and invited all the neighbors [in a community that is now largely African American] to have tables, and so forth. And it began to rain and they had to move into the church. And they did move in—to the fellowship hall, I guess. But there were several of the leaders of the church... making sotto voce comments about, “We didn’t want them in the church, bla, bla, bla.” And they never did anything again. (Rose)

Such dilemmas of integration are magnified as the meaning of “diversity” expands to include sexual diversity. Decisions of entire churches to leave the PCUSA for more conservative, less integrated denominations, rather than address the inherent tension of social diversity, were being made during the period that the interviews were being conducted, as the role of LGBTQ persons in the church remained a divisive issue. Even those who remain in and defend the denomination did not all agree that this integration was worth the cost in division and decline:

If you’re going to ask me about the Presbyterian issues, this traditional congregation [where I serve], they look at the denomination, they look at me, like, “are you kidding me? This[11] is what you’re interested in? These are the things that matter to you? Because they don’t matter to us at all!” So, ah, I think there are people in the church who would

[10] I withhold the pseudonyms when presenting direct quotes about this topic to protect some of the speakers, whose identity I could not otherwise hide.

attribute the decline to the direction that the denomination has gone, the emphases the denomination has gone down, um.

Two pastors narrated the circumstances around their coming out to their congregation in support of the ordination of LGBTQ persons as occasions of significant risk-taking. The importance of the issue becomes evident in how the pastor in the following excerpt explains the relationship between inclusion of LGBTQ persons and the decline:

Pastor: Well, the denomination has voted to ordain active homosexuals. Seems like it’s all we talk about, what comes to the presbytery. Ah, and for me, my summation of it is that the church and society are perfectly aligned, perfectly attuned and by my interpretation of scripture, it shouldn’t be that way.

Interviewer: Could you give an example of this in your ministry?

Pastor: Our presbytery meetings have become so polarized, and any topic where we have to vote on, these issues are in the middle. Some of those debates are just painful.

Interviewer: Do you experience this also in your congregation?

Pastor: I experience them in my congregation because the church is shrinking. It’s irrelevant. Nobody needs the church, I mean.

For this pastor of an urban congregation, the issue of ordaining LGBTQ candidates to the ministry is meaningful at multiple levels of ideology and practice. Although she reported being close to the gay members of her own congregation, she constructs sexual diversity as a threat to the core moral claims of Christianity, and argued that this, in turn, weakens the church, not only because it alienates people who are opposed to the social acceptance of homosexuality, but also by diminishing the moral voice of the church in the community.
Her concerns echo traditional debates about which moral issues are inherently religious. The task force, in discussing social changes suggests that the Presbyterian Church has abandoned not only its opposition to alcohol, dancing, and card-playing, but also its support of “traditional norms governing sexuality and family relations,” and warns that

“If the church responds by revising the cost of discipleship downward (as mainline churches have tended to do in the 20th century), the process will inevitably lead to a point where the benefits of membership in the church will be too small to offset the costs of institutional involvement itself” (Johnson, quoted in GATF, 1991, p. 28).

A very different argument about the cultural power of the church was put forth by a pastor on the opposite side of the debate, who suggested that integrating the church along both racial and sexual identities helps it grow:

*My church has about 150 members, and it is very diverse. . . . You don’t get members in the old ways; you attract by what you are doing. It’s a justice issue. There are now a significant percentage of members who are LGBTQ families, as well as African American. It’s become a vibrant congregation, it’s become full of energy. But I feel depleted! This kind of ministry takes its toll.*

These opposite views on the consequences of abandoning the prohibition against ordaining LGBTQ people use different theological grounds, one promoting differentiation from “the world,” the other being a call to embrace that “world.” Such different theological arguments for grounding the church’s role as an agent of social change have been documented previously (McAdams & Albaugh, 2008).

Without doubt, the relationship between decline and the denominational position on gays in the church is complex. One pastor described a pragmatic approach:
There are congregations coming to us saying, “Now that the rules are gone, we’re ready to be welcoming, and our churches are kind of dying, and we think that this might help with evangelism. So, can you help us do this?” So, we’re going in to congregations and saying, “The gays are not going to be your savior, but if you’re serious about this, let’s talk about ways that you can be faithful in this.”

Another pastor indicated that the manner in which the debate about gay ordination was handled by the senior pastor caused more people to leave her church than the issue itself:

Actually, we have had the quantitative decline of members. A lot of that happened for us around Amendment 10-A\textsuperscript{12} two years ago. In my specific context there was also a wave of leaving around the lack of leadership, in terms of the conversation around that issue in our congregation [more so] than there was around that particular issue. . . . People were looking to the senior pastor to offer a position and to offer guidance to people, and were frustrated <pause> I think as a pastor, I think I would call them, or go to lunch with them and talk about, “Tell me what your concerns are,” “Do you have questions about scripture?” and that wasn’t done. . . . There were people on the council who did not agree with 10-A, but, ah, after several conversations and after thoughtful discernment, they voted to stay in the denomination.

For the women in the sample, the complex impact of changing policy appeared to echo local presbytery debates more than denomination-wide rules. Both dimensions shaped their representation of the impact of the new policy on churches’ potential for growth or decline.

\textsuperscript{12} Amendment 10-A to the rules of order of the PCUSA eliminated the proscription against gays being ordained to ministry, and left the determination of qualification for ordination up to individual presbyteries (Young, 2010)
Talk of diversity, usually framed in terms of welcoming congregants who differ by race, social class, sexual or theological orientation, was clothed in both optimistic and pessimistic terms for individual congregations and the denomination at large, consonant with the “yes-but” discourse identified by Bell and Hartmann (2007), who found that even articulate participants found it difficult to discuss coherently both the positive aims of diversity and issues of inequality. The present sample recognized how diversity both aids and hinders efforts to resist decline in far more nuanced ways than the views offered in the task force report. Frequently addressed by the participants, diversity is the representational theme that has most changed over time, and rather than coalescing into a unified theme of church decline, it remains a point of impassioned debate, a symbol of both growth and decline.
Chapter Six

Analysis: Fields of Representation and Subgroups

Social representations are composed from a field of representational themes and their binary pairs (themâta) that stimulate and respond to social, emotional and attitudinal tension (Moscovici, 1961/2008). Each participant’s representations are woven from multiple strands of social knowledge, images, personal experience and emotions, as well as arguments from multiple dialogic encounters and social positions (Jovchelovitch, 2008; Wagner & Hays, 2005). Representations are composed, then, with a hybrid, rather than unitary, quality.

Analysis of participants’ fields of representation entails examination of the content of their interviews, while observing how each representation is anchored in and occasioned through the talk. To this end, I composed a table of utterances about the decline for each participant, in order to understand how each clergywoman uniquely constructed its meaning. From this initial coding process of representational themes, an analysis of differences and similarities across the participants was undertaken.

Coding Utterances for the Personal Fields of Representation

I read through the transcripts carefully, scrutinizing each paragraph and sometimes each sentence, to extract all the statements that related to the decline, including those going beyond the themes identified in Table 5.1. During the initial readings, as I tried to distinguish talk that was about the decline from talk that was not, I noted that when participants talked about the decline, they were talking about one of three aspects of the decline: its causes, descriptions of the effects or symptoms of decline, or about the increasing demands on pastors that result from declining conditions. I used these three dimensions of the decline to code all the transcripts,
creating a table for each participant that summarized and classified each representational utterance as one of these three theme categories. The tables are found in Appendix A. Although some entries preserve the original language of the speaker, most were somewhat abstracted for the sake of brevity, clarity, and to protect the identity of the participants. Utterances made at different points in the interview with nearly identical representational meanings were consolidated.

The themes in each category were counted. In order to count as equivalent the talk by pastors who were exposed and those not exposed to decline, I included talk that countered the decline, and marked them as counter examples. In the category of causal factors, a counter example might present an action that prevented decline; in the category of effects and symptoms, it might be a declaration of growth; in the category of personal demands, it might indicate a lightening of workload.

Specific coding instructions for each of the three dimensions of decline talk follow.

**Causal factors.** To be classified as a statement about causal factors, an utterance must respond to at least one of the following two questions: “Does it offer an explanation of why there may be a decline in a given congregation or in the denomination as a whole?” “Does it locate possible causes of decline in church practice, pastoral practice, or in society at large?” In order to be coded as a causal factor of the decline, the utterance must identify an issue or process that has resulted or could result in people or congregations decreasing their participation in the church or denomination, or in a church experiencing a loss of stability in membership or finances. For example:

*Retired people move to the area and say, “I don’t want to go to church,” and they don’t want to be plugged into 15 committees.* (Juanita)
Effects and symptoms. An utterance is coded as constituting a statement of effects and symptoms of the decline if it answers the following question: “Does this speaking turn directly or indirectly describe the conditions of a church in decline, or illustrate the consequences that ensue from decline in a congregation or in the denomination?” In order to be coded as an effect or symptom of decline, an utterance must describe the reality of decline encountered by the pastor in her work. When the temporal order is identified, the effect must follow, not precede the decline. For example:

“I do think we’ll be smaller, with far fewer resources. And this whole building issue, now. I do think the building issue is huge. At least for a church like ours. I think ... one of the signs of the times I see is having to let go of our physical spaces in some form or another, whether it’s renting the building out now, or going to home groups.” (Penny)

Personal demands. Demands are understood as stressors that elicit responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) related to both the degree of pressure they exert and one’s personal competences (Lawton & Nahemow, 1972). An utterance is coded as constituting a statement of personal demands caused by the decline if it answers either of the following questions: “Does this statement describe the impact of decline on the pastor’s work, health or attitude about working?” “Does it describe any type of job or career insecurity stemming from the decline?” This dimension is different from that of effects and symptoms in that it must focus on personal issues of time, effort or attention directly affecting the pastor. Matters related to hiring, being an employee of the church, or to one’s career were always coded as demands, regardless of the degree of abstraction with which they were presented, or whether the decline was explicitly referenced. Example:

I never wanted to be an administrator. I went into ministry with a personal sense of call
to chaplaincy, then came here as an associate . . . and now [as solo pastor] I’m responsible for whether the sexton put in enough hours, which I can hardly care about.

Or [people say to me]: “You know, there were not enough paper towels in the bathroom.” [I want to say]: “Well... get the paper towels!” Is it really my problem? You know, in a small church, where the staff is me and part-time people, and everybody beyond that is a volunteer, I’m the one who has to know stuff. I designed the renovation of the choir loft! Do I know anything about this? No! (Susan)

To maintain rigor in this coding process, I read the transcripts and reviewed the list of themes repeatedly, approaching the texts again and again, at intervals of several weeks, adding, combining, and deleting items on the tables, until no new or duplicate themes were identified, no changes in the wording of a theme appeared necessary, and the codes were judged to have been applied consistently across transcripts. When making alterations, I wrote down the explanations for these decisions, to have them available when a similar situation was encountered. At this point, I compared the results with a second reader, who had also read and coded five transcripts alone, using the process described above.

Both readers read all the fields of representation and identified cases where an utterance appeared to include more than one theme or where there was lack of clarity about how they should be classified. When the speaker appeared to be addressing more than one topic of classification, they were double-coded, to avoid simplifying the communicative message of the participants. Differences between coders were resolved by discussion. Points of discrepancy most often concerned the boundaries between separate themes and how each theme was summarized. Where a speaker’s ambivalence was detected, the utterance was divided so that each perspective constituted an utterance in itself.
Findings Regarding Sub-groups.

The participants’ fields of representation were examined to identify patterns of responses that might reveal subgroups within the overall class category of clergywoman. According to Moscovici (1961/2008, p. 28), “a group is defined on the basis of a bundle of presuppositions which give a preferential weight to a certain number of criteria.” I identified subgroups through repeated readings of the transcripts and tables, as I looked for similar content or images within the participants’ fields of representation that might signal commonalities suggestive of a distinct standpoint.

Social representations are, by nature, contested so the presence of subgroups was anticipated. It was further predicted, based on Moscovici (1961/2008) and Doise, Clémence and Lorenzi-Cioldi (1993), that the subgroups would be based on shared experience and beliefs. I thus searched, for patterns in how sets of themes were discussed, how arguments were formulated in relation to them, religious and ideological views that were projected, and the social and political implications that the decline might have for the participants. In other words, the members of subgroups were expected to have in common elements of the representational triad, as the decline would arouse similar elements of subjectivity and power issues affecting their status in the PCUSA.

Exposure to decline. Exposure to decline was readily identified as a relevant experience that might shape representations of decline. It was determined from responses given on the Personal Information Form (see Appendix A) at the beginning of the interviews. Participants who indicated that the stability of their current church had decreased in either membership or finances over the past five years were classified as exposed to decline, whereas those who reported either stability or increase in both areas were classified as non-exposed. The small
sample precluded making a finer classification.

I calculated correlations between exposure to the decline and each of the types of utterances. Consistent with the findings shown in chapter five, there was no correlation between exposure and the number of utterances about causes of the decline, as many of the topics addressed in the task force’s study related to the causes of the decline and how it might be avoided, though the participants included many new causal factors.

A within-subject ratio of the number of utterances of effects and symptoms to the number of utterances of causal factors was calculated for each participant. A ratio was used because participants differed widely in the number of total utterances they produced. This ratio was found to be significantly associated with exposure to decline \((t = .451, \text{ at } p = .005)\). This finding was not surprising, as the interview questions inquired explicitly about personal and local experience.

A correlation calculated between the ratio of utterances of demands to the number of utterances of causal factors found no significant difference based on exposure. This finding was not surprising, as answers to an interview question inquiring directly about concerns over job and career security, confirmed that awareness and concern about fewer job opportunities is widespread and affects pastors of both large and small churches. As it was, only two non-retired pastors explicitly voiced unqualified confidence in their ability to gain future employment.

A qualitative analysis of the individual fields of representation confirms the felt need for constant work to fight against any loss of members on the part of pastors of unexposed churches, who consequently report high job demands similar to those who work in exposed churches. Four women reported that stability of their churches’ finances was achieved by reducing contractual benefits, or by eliminating entirely contracts with associate pastors. Brenda’s part-time position feels less marginal to her now that the other associate clergy have also been reduced to part-time
status. Rose’s previous temporary position was in the process of being shifted to a permanent one when it was suddenly eliminated altogether. Betty was hired to innovate worship, but finds she is also expected to fulfil the role of a generalist associate pastor. These examples, drawn from pastors who said their churches, some quite large, were not exposed to decline, emphasize the heightened levels of demand that are experienced in order to stave it off.

Similarly, talk about the inadequacy of their church’s pool of volunteers was distributed across both groups, with five of the eight who lament shrinking volunteer effort being pastors of churches not exposed to decline, including the following two pastors:

“With fewer people, I think recruiting people to help with leadership is challenging. We have some very good people who have helped consistently, ah, but it doesn’t feel like a big enough pool, so that we’re also worried about burning out those people who are consistent.” (Grace)

I know how the church works. The majority of the work should be done by elders. And then the other side, the pastor’s side, is equipping people for ministry. I’m pretty clear about that, but sometimes that doesn’t translate. So, we’ve had to deal with, especially in the smaller church, the pastor doing everything. So, I’ve learned how to buff floors; I’ve googled everything. (Karen)

This suggests that a drop in the amount of volunteering may be one of the earliest signs of decline. Other possible early signs described included less frequent attendance by members, less empathy on the part of younger members for suffering people, and an aging membership.

The stability or growth of an unexposed church is thus seen as the result of strategic activity requiring great effort, even in large churches:
We revamped our new member class. I guess we placed our expectations of the new members much higher, what we expected of their attendance in the new classes, mandatory classes and so forth, and if you can’t attend the class, you can’t become a member. What we have observed is that, within the last three years, the people who have been a part of those classes and have become members of the church, um, I would say 80-85% are regular worship attenders and are engaged elsewhere in the life of the church beyond worship. So, while we haven’t taken in tons of people, the people who have joined, you know, have demonstrated a level of commitment that people who joined previously didn’t necessarily show or have. (Anne)

Narratives such as this one indicate that even churches not immediately affected by significant decline work mightily to build a bulwark against it. They also suggest differences in managing positioning in the interview, especially as it concerns how talk and activity in the larger churches is geared toward maintaining momentum in the direction of growth or stability (Provencher, 2011).

Together, these findings show that representations of causes and demands on clergy form a largely common aspect of the representation of decline. But the women who were exposed to decline constructed their representations with much more elaboration of the effects and consequences than those not exposed to decline, and this was not balanced by the reports by unexposed pastors describing their efforts to stave off decline. The lower number of direct examples of utterances of effects and symptoms of the decline seen among the pastors of non-exposed churches may be related less to the absence of exposure per se, and more to such factors as a different way of talking, or to what they choose to share. The fields of representation of decline are nonetheless found to be constituted differently according to recent exposure to
decline in the pastor’s church, confirming observations elsewhere that opinions are accounted for
with the aid of locally available knowledge (Provencher, 2011).

**Concern for racial justice.** Race was examined as a source of ideological positioning
that influenced the extent to which people represented the decline as an accurate descriptor of the
current state of the PCUSA. Of the seven women of color in the sample, three explicitly
described the decline as an issue peculiar to white churches. Two others minimized the
significance of decline as determining the success of their congregations. Another suggested that
it is a mistake to judge the strength of a church by its ability to resist decline. Instead, she saw the
decline as a qualitative matter, emphasizing young adults’ disappointment with church traditions
and their search for more authentic contexts for spiritual development. In addition, white pastors
who worked with multicultural congregations pointed to the ineluctable need to address race
relations as a core mission of the church, to ensure the future of the denomination. The following
excerpt illustrates this standpoint for representing decline:

> We come from this perspective: Black people should have left the PCUSA a long time
> ago. We weren’t welcomed, respected, weren’t wanted. . . Bottoms\textsuperscript{13} went to General
> Assembly and had to eat in the kitchen with the help. So why would we stay inside the
denomination? So, people are leaving the denomination so easily now [because of
> Amendment 10-A]. . . that’s an interesting take on things. (Karen)

In Karen’s assessment, bemoaning decline is something that white churches do to protest
their loss of power. She contrasts it with how Black churches have traditionally responded to
their historical marginalization with greater faithfulness. This view was further supported by her

\textsuperscript{13} Lawrence Bottoms was the first African American moderator of the General Assembly of the
Southern church (PCUS) when, in 1974, it met at the Montreat Presbyterian Conference Center.
telling a story of an elderly member of her church who was able to change his negative attitude toward a lesbian couple in the congregation, after an initial struggle, and welcomed the couple’s new baby. If the oldest people in her church can adapt, she points out, the argument of those leaving the denomination because they find it impossible to accept sexual diversity loses whatever legitimacy it may claim.

While Black churches may indeed be in the minority among those leaving for more conservative denominations, membership in what the PCUSA calls “racial-ethnic” churches, those in which there is no white majority, has been falling, though at a slower rate than that of white churches (Marcum, 2010). Karen, though, is making a political, rather than a statistical, argument, and develops it, in the excerpt cited above, using a series of historical complaints about racial segregation that build up to two clauses beginning with “so,” both of which invite the listener to draw his or her own inference (Schiffrin, 1987) first, about African American Presbyterians, and second, about the mostly Caucasian conservatives who are leaving the denomination because of disagreement over policies regarding homosexual pastors. By setting up the argument in this way, she lines up an implicit comparison between the two groups, without ever needing to explicitly voice overt criticism.

Lydia, another African American pastor making a generally similar point, also uses a sentence beginning with “so,” but in her case with the aim of layering background information to set the scene for a quotation, perhaps from a recent sermon or board meeting, in which she contrasts those who have the courage to persevere with the “others” who leave the church. This highlights her optimistic stance toward the potential of minority churches:

You have to recognize that among minorities, certain classes, it isn’t... it is not declining.

Now, the people who come to us are unchurched, but they left Christian homes, either
predominantly Catholic for the Hispanic, or, ah, Protestant for the Blacks. So, they have some tangential relationship and understanding; not a deep one. But the church was a positive for them. . . Ah, now, how, how committed they are going to be, how willing they are to turn their lives over. And I keep saying to them, “You are the church. You are the church…. the rest, the rest of the community may be pulling away. The other classes may be playing golf, or, you know, doing other things, but you are going to be the foundation, and that’s why this—what you and we are doing together—is so important. (Lydia)

As Lydia’s church has a specialized ministry to persons with addictions, its community has not been affected in the same way as others by cultural shifts away from religiosity. Indeed, she suggested elsewhere in the interview that the main limit to growth is the shortage of volunteers among the congregation. Nonetheless, her allusion to those who prefer to golf indicates that the decline is known and understood, even in this special-interest congregation, as a behavior attributed to the upper classes.

Lydia’s church, and Karen’s, cited above, have historically been aided by considerable grants from larger churches. Inner-city churches such as theirs experience the current of decline in a secondary manner, as less support is forthcoming from the denomination and wealthier sister churches. This is especially noticeable during an economic downturn, or when churches who offered support exit the denomination. Karen’s and Lydia’s open-armed outreach results in increasing attendance, but the new members are often people without well-paying jobs, who have little in the way of funds to support the congregation’s mission, limiting their church’s ability to be self-supporting, no matter how large the congregation.

Faye works with a new church that has solid membership numbers but struggled to attain the presbytery’s endorsement because of its difficulty, as a church of mostly blue-collar
immigrant workers, in reaching the financial stability demanded by the presbytery. Although several families left after the PCUSA revoked the prohibitions against ordaining gay members to clergy status, Faye saw these dropouts as stemming from personal exigencies rather than as signs of a broader decline:

_The decline? Bueno, sí_ <pause> _it is felt among the Anglo churches. . . . In my state, all congregations are becoming multicultural, very gradually. There are tons of immigrants, but the pastor has to be open-minded. For example, [another pastor] invites [immigrant] people to become members of his church, and then puts them in positions of authority. The [Anglo members] don’t want to accept that they are [becoming a] multicultural [church], but more than half of their members are now immigrants._ (Faye)

Alicia avoids the central topic of decline, defining the primary issue for her congregation as one of empowerment, both in facing life as immigrants and as church leaders:

_I think because we are an immigrant church, so the immigration situation in the county is one of those signs of the times; and another, inside the church, is knowing how to empower them as leaders of church. Sometimes it seems like their self-esteem is low because of the immigration situation, that is my idea, and so many of them don’t feel capable. And so, we are struggling with that as well as how to show the faith. How to show the faith through the actions and leadership as Christians._ (Alicia)

Alicia’s attitude reflects her priorities for ministry, and what she senses as the greatest needs among her congregation. It is also important to note that Presbyterians make up a tiny minority (<1 %) of the Hispanic population, though religious affiliation is fluid. Decline is not a salient concern in already-small churches, even though the number of Hispanics self-identifying as non-religious has doubled across the past two decades (Navarro-Rivera, Kosmin, & Keysar, 2010).
Ruth, white and now retired, pastored one of the first churches to racially integrate in her state, a step that was initially met with a sharp reduction in membership. But over recent decades the membership has rebounded, and now surpasses its previous level, an unusual achievement in times of general decline. This evolution confirms her sense that a commitment to multiculturalism is a measure of a more important kind of growth, one that would have been impossible had the church maintained established racist attitudes. Ruth constructs a different meaning of church, but also a different understanding of success:

So, if the church does not embrace [multiculturalism], it will die! Those of us who are trying to embrace it are not dying. . . . And so, in this presbytery, instead of trying to help the churches, they have “emergent” churches, they have “redeveloped” churches, and they always have a different name for it. But it’s always that it’s directed at whites, so <sigh> that’s not helpful. (Ruth)

All of these women describe decline as a social construction, and they posit more radical racial integration and cultural transformation as the central, urgently-needed focus for a church that is worthy of enduring over time.

For other participants, the pastors of majority-white congregations, racial integration is often a delicate matter, requiring a rebalancing of church activity and of social and theological representations. These concerns are familiar to Monica, whose church has remained steady in numbers, and has perhaps grown in confidence, precisely because she has broken through the fears evoked by integration. She acknowledges that it is the constant influx of non-white immigrants that has prevented her church from experiencing a decline, and she actively cultivates their integration into the life of her congregation. After some initial hesitation, she also stepped up efforts to welcome gay couples. In her words:
At the beginning, I kept a low profile about the gay issue because Asians tend to be more conservative, and what happens is that they start coming and then they realize how liberal we are and then they sometimes leave. So now we have a gay couple that have started coming to church. So, before [they came], it was just theoretical, but now it’s real. . . . It’s something I brought up, but I felt I had to be careful because many immigrants are behind where the rest of the congregation is on that. You know, if you want the immigrants, you have to be careful, but very clear about what we believe, but you don’t want to push it in their face all the time. (Monica)

A few pastors reported encountering resistance to integration on the part of members, which further precipitates decline by preventing the natural growth of an urban neighborhood church. Rose’s story is representative:

[My church] is a mixture of Black Americans, and, ah, traditional Caucasians that are set in their ways. And then we have this Angolan contingency, where the patriarch makes sure that his daughters and grandchildren are there every Sunday. . . . The [Caucasian] elders that I adore, and who adore me, verged, the wife verged on a racist comment, mainly attributing this or that race to not dressing appropriately. . . . And we are, as I said, the church is in a predominantly African American neighborhood. (Rose)

Although many churches are, de facto, becoming multicultural, few actively encourage this development by “embracing what is there,” as Ruth and others would recommend. The most recent report of the National Congregational Study (Chaves & Anderson, 2014) notes that 80 percent of American churches remain overwhelmingly single-race. For Presbyterians as a whole, total non-white membership was predicted to reach as high as 10 percent in 2014 (Marcum, 2010).
These examples, taken as a whole, point to a different quality of “decline” being represented by clergywomen of color and those who minister in a multicultural environment. They do not view the past as a more desirable condition than the present, and they see the goal as still lying ahead. Social conditions that alter the perception of religion in the population at large offer both opportunities and barriers to expanding the meaning of being a church. Consequently, the present concerns over decline could either constitute a context in which Presbyterians of color experience racial oppression, or be seen as opening a door to a different relationship between them and the predominantly white denomination. The representation communicated by the women of color is emancipatory in texture, as it includes hope and possibility, and accepts that others construe decline differently, based on their standpoint. But it is also polemical, in that it is positioned squarely against the racial context in which decline has historically taken its meaning.

Tracking the triadic levels of representation, this group is seen to invoke racial identity and to highlighting their limited power in shaping the general narrative of decline, by pointing out the marginalization of issues of interest to multicultural ministries and congregations of color as the PCUSA responds to the decline. Karen described her evolving understanding of the conflicts that destabilized her church, which led her to see the decline as centered in matters of race and class rather than religion:

*It’s always a daunting task not to lead with gender or race, but rather my own humanity, and that used to be a huge struggle when I went to the church where I’m serving now, which was a dozen years ago. We have since overcome some of these things but, at times, I could not even differentiate what was the hang-up. Was it the race? the gender piece? And they look the same when it comes to oppressive language and things of that nature.*
And I remember at times saying that, “If I were a guy—you wouldn’t dare talk to me this way. You wouldn’t dare say that.” But I think that 12 years later, the thing we’re probably dealing with most is the shrinking middle class. (Karen)

For all the women of color, the improvement of racial relations on both the denominational and individual church level is essential to the future of the PCUSA. For them, any discussion of decline must inevitably be viewed through the prism of race, such that the decline’s effect on the identity, strength and cultural power of the PCUSA pales in comparison with the positions the denomination takes, and the practices in which it engages, regarding race. Evidence for this understanding is offered in the explicit statements minimizing the decline as a central concern of the Black or Hispanic church. Evidence is also found in white pastors’ reports of the tension that arises in predominantly white churches when they attempt to integrate the membership, only to encounter barriers of racism raised by the parishioners. Thus, while for nearly all participants integration is philosophically or theologically necessary, for some it is also pragmatically so, and urgently needed in a time of decline.

Gender. Including only women in the study precluded making comparisons with representations by male clergy. Nonetheless, the influence of gender was understood by exploring how participants referenced it. Sixteen participants indexed gender prior to any interview question addressing it, and only four participants made no reference to it at all. The ease with which most engaged the topic may suggest that it is already a part of common sense thinking about their professional work or about the decline, though some preceded or followed the recounting of even dramatic instances of gendered discrimination with an apologetic hedge, such as Norma’s “I don’t get the gender stuff very often, but—”.

Gender was often addressed in relation to talk of work opportunities. While Susan posited
that better, tall-steeple jobs are becoming available to women, others insisted that the likelihood of women ending up in less desirable positions is still the norm. Susan, Angie and Dee, in the same focus group, voiced these concerns:

\[ I \text{ have wondered sometimes if the overall decline of the denomination might have actually made it easier for women to get calls as men move to do other things [giggles]. I don’t know, but as some of the . . . as some of the more prestigious things start to open to women, I’d like to think it’s just because people are becoming more accepting, but I have wondered if that may not be the whole story. (Susan) } \]

There was concern, though not explicitly stated, about whether to attribute the inferior quality of employment opportunities for women to individual factors or to the structures of the church and society, or both. The following three examples demonstrate somewhat different standpoints on the matter.

Angie suggested that the women themselves bear some blame for accepting low-paying positions:

\[ \text{Yes, there are a lot of positions that are opening up to women, but a lot of them are at churches that are already floundering, y’know? And, for instance, we are always taking jobs that pay less, whether we want to admit it or not, you know. (Angie)} \]

Dee suggested that at this point in history most, if not all, women will experience difficulties with work at some point in their careers:

\[ \text{And so, I have not had to fight like other women have had to fight, so that gives me a little bit of extra grace. So that when a situation happens, I think, “I probably was due,” just because I have listened and am aware of how many other women have really struggled to find their place and find their own voice, and that has not been my experience. (Dee)} \]
The specific structural problems addressed by Grace concern the types of positions available to women:

Certainly, in this area, I see a lot of women associate pastors, but I also see a lot of women who do interim work, and I think for some of them, that is their calling, but I think for others, that is the reality of the decline, the reality of what’s available. (Grace)

Corinne saw an ongoing failure by the Presbytery to support female clergy, less at the point of finding work than in times of crisis:

This is just my experience, so I recognize that the narrative is limited, but my feeling, my personal experience, what I’m hearing from my girlfriends, is that unless you have sort of set yourself out there in the Presbytery as [interested in a senior pastor position] you get ignored! . . . When there was unbelievable drama going on in our church, nobody contacted me. I have a girlfriend [who is an Associate Pastor] . . . who had unbelievable drama going on in her church; she reached out to the Presbytery and no one responded to her. And it’s the South, and to a certain extent, a “good-ol’-boy’s” club. (Corinne)

The inherent paradox that the decline provides women more opportunities to pastor churches that men might turn down, while simultaneously reducing those opportunities as churches close, was alluded to by 10 (27%) participants. Penny voiced a growing fear that women might lose the near-parity they had reached:

I talk to my female colleagues. . . . and with these declining, with the decline, will churches fall back on that male model, the male senior pastor? (Penny)

Even when women are able to find positions, the role is taken to be tougher for them:

My head of staff was a woman. And, ah, if she had been a man, she would not have had as hard a year. Because she came in and walked into the financial pieces that had to be
dealt with, and she did it firmly. Uh, men pushed back in the congregation, and it was a rocky first year. And if she had been a man, they would have done what she said and would have followed, and it would be an easier time. (Dee)

The women also considered adopting a self-sacrificial role. In the following two excerpts from Penny’s interview, she considers, with some ambivalence, what the proper stance for women in the decline should be:

Penny: So, I went to a meeting about a year ago, and that’s all we were talking about: the future of the church, the future of the church. And there was another female pastor and I who were on the same — She and I were thinking, because of all these young ministers who can’t find jobs, is it our re—/

Celia: //Job to retire and give them your jobs?

Penny: Yeah! Right! We were wondering if we should step aside and find something else to do in order for these young people to come in. And we were told, “you’re crazy to think that way, so stop it!” <laughs>

The collaborative process stayed her “crazy” thinking, but a year later she was still not completely removed from it, though she was no longer considering resigning from her job. As she described the changes that may lie ahead for her as the church shrinks and changes, Penny posited her identity as a woman as a significant factor in determining her options:

And [the decline] really is an identity thing for me. Because I’m thinking, “I’m vested in my pension, I’m used to the salary I have, and I wonder if, as a woman— for me, my identity as a woman is: I might have to morph into something else, and it might include not being in the Board of Pensions, full-time salary, or pastor.” (Penny)

Penny was not the only one considering self-sacrifice as a way to manage her part in the church’s
decline. Dee found herself in the awkward position of having to advocate for the validity of a move to have her position eliminated, and, in the excerpt below, Corinne, as well, relates how it was that she came to suggest that she herself be laid off at a council meeting:

> We were under a lot of pressure from the Presbytery and from the interim pastor, and I saw that the discussion wasn’t going to go in that direction [that I would have preferred]. So I said, “This is a decision you’ll have to make. I don’t want to leave, but you’ll need to create a space for the new staff, which means you’ll have to get rid of two of us.” And ultimately, that is what the Session voted to do. So, tearfully—just awful—(Corinne)

Celia, too, finding herself at such a crossroads, took a similar tack, one which involved highlighting her gender. The outcome, however, was quite different:

> At a session meeting once—I hadn’t been in the church that long—but we knew we were shrinking even then. I don’t remember what we were struggling with, but I remember saying, “It’s my opinion that women [pastors] don’t attract lots of people. Young charismatic men do.” And so I told them, “You need to be able to tell me if you think I need to go. Because this is not going to happen with me.” And there was dead silence. And finally, one of the elders said, “Oh, well, our former pastor was a young guy and everybody hated him! <Laughs> So, they have loved me. (Celia)

In these and similar stories from other participants, when clergywomen speak of sacrifice they often speak of the loss of employment, whereas Johnson (2010), interviewing 23 mostly Presbyterian male and female clergy, found abundant talk of sacrifice referring to demanding schedules, work with difficult people, dealing with death, and the intense scrutiny of even private life, but did not find references to either membership decline or job sacrifice.

As these excerpts demonstrate, representations of gender were well-integrated into these
women’s representations of decline. Their common-sense interpretations posited a number of mechanisms that bound gender to decline, addressed from a variety of standpoints regarding the position of women in society; although the speakers shared a desire for professional success, they were not all feminists. Despite their different views, the sense that the decline posed both opportunity and threat seemed to be common to all.

The abundance of references to gender indicate how strongly it is integrated into the women’s representation of decline. Generally, though, talk of gender did not carry the moral weight that was observed in the talk about race. Despite the suffering evident in many of the women’s stories, attaining gender equality was not represented as being as important to the future of the church as the decline, though two participants acknowledge that the current status of clergywomen would be unacceptable to many women outside the church:

*There are comments people will make in church that they wouldn’t make in other places. You know, I had someone make a comment like, “I didn’t expect a woman to preach a sermon that good.” There’s not that in other fields. My friends that aren’t in ministry can’t believe that people still make comments like that. And so, the thought of being in some other environment where being young and female is not a novelty, even though it’s not as much of a novelty now as it has been, is appealing. (Emily)*

*I think it’s a point of great shame, when I am talking to my unchurched friends or those other-faiths, or no-faith colleagues and friends, is this: even in the most progressive denominations, that we don’t have gender parity. And are not really all that interested in achieving it, in a lot of ways. Some of my friends are horrified at what is going on. I mean not only is the church technologically behind by decades but also behind in some other*
key ways, such as equality and justice issues. And I think those gender things, the first wave, we hold it out there as a banner. . . . Pay equity and working on what it means to be just in the world and then re-struggling with it. What does it mean to be leaders of congregations, denominations that aren't necessarily interested in that? And your saying it, that just puts you at risk. (Carmen)

Most of the participants constructed gendered work conditions as an unavoidable, though deplorable, matter of course. Few reported participating in activity to promote gender parity or other problems particular to women. These findings are consonant with research by Yancey & Kim (2008), who found that even in multicultural churches, socio-economic inclusiveness, but not gender equality, was commonly supported, and concluded that the traditional view of gender roles is a particularly stable representation (Duveen, 2001; O’Connor & Joffe, 2014)

Conclusions

To summarize, the clergywomen’s representational fields support the existence of a Presbyterian representation of decline, developed in a triadic reciprocal dialogue with self-positioning as professional on one side and social influence suffused by ideology on the other. Differences in degree to which aspects of decline are called upon for representational purposes were associated with levels of exposure to decline. Participants who expressed a prevailing interest in racial equality and ministry with communities of color, whether around issues of immigration, poverty, or discrimination in the church, were identified as a subgroup with different understandings of the relative importance of the decline, based on holding different views on the aims and functions of the church. Lastly, career concerns related to the decline tended to blend with gender concerns (Cummings & Latta, 2010; LaRue, 2005; Madden, Bailey, & Kerr, 2015; Schweitzer & Knudson, 2014).
Chapter Seven

Analysis: The Call

Career development is often seen as the product of a dialectic between workers and their social contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2000), as people exert agentic effort amid the constraints and affordances of their work cultures (Forrier, Sels, & Stynem, 2009). For clergy members, there is a spiritual dimension of vocation that adds complexity to the meaning of choice and commitment in career development. Using discursive analysis of transcripts in which the participants referred to their sense of spiritual calling, I explored the intersection between agency, calling and institutional constraints.

Those sections dealing with vocational calling constituted a small part of the many instantiations of religious language or religious code, and were treated as codeswitching, the intentional invocation of an alternate meaning system in the midst of rational speech. The choice to analyze religious code as examples of codeswitching was supported by the transcripts themselves. That the women understood what they were doing as switching codes when they used religious language was evidenced by their use of discourse markers to monitor the integration of the alternate code into the ongoing interview talk, a process discussed by Hlavac (2011). Theresa and Rose, for example, hedged codeswitching to religious language with repeated uses of “you know,” “uh”, and hesitations. Paula, more explicitly, capped a religious statement on one occasion with, “and I’m naïve enough to believe it,” before returning to the interview code, and another time stopped herself, saying, “Well, I’m preaching now.” Edwina began to use religious language, and then interrupted herself, saying, “And that’s part of what I see as being fruitful in our Christian— well, in understanding and using scripture as a source and
resource.” Joan admitted that she was intentionally avoiding the use of metaphysical language. These tactics suggest that the women recognized the interview genre as one in which rational-scientific, rather than religious, code was normative, and reserved use of religious code to accomplish specific communicative acts.

I present these findings as ten case studies, analyzing the excerpts containing the talk of calling, but also other talk in the same interview to present these women as agentic, overall, in the interview. I investigated the discursive function of references to their calling, and related them to the individual and collective meaning being created of work in the context of decline. Six of these women were interviewed individually, and the other four were in focus groups.

Coding

Having identified a high number of allusions to the call in my initial transcript readings, I searched the transcripts specifically, using the search function of the word processing program, for the word “call.” A distinction was then made between those uses of call that refer to the spiritual experience of a divine election to engage in ministry, on the one hand, and to the contractual job offer by a church, on the other (Christopherson 1994). The latter were not taken as instantiations of religious language, but as ecclesiastical jargon that does not involve codeswitching. The sense of spiritual calling was most often signaled by use of the formulation “the call,” or “my call,” whereas a job offer was either non-specific (“a call,”) or else very specific (“this call”). The intended use was also identified contextually. There was only one example that seemed ambiguous, and it was eliminated. In addition, I read the transcripts closely again, identifying sections alluding to a sense of divine calling without using those words.

Findings

There were 72 instances that referred to call in the spiritual sense. Discursive analysis
revealed that these references fell into four types, characterized primarily by their grammatical elements, such as use of the active or passive voice, or the use of gerunds and present participles. The four types were the active construction of call, the passive construction of call, eager response to the call, and expressions of doubt framed by a sense of providence and call. Discursive analysis revealed that these grammatical modes served distinct communicative purposes. References to call, regardless of type, contributed to the negotiation of the speaker’s pastoral subjectivity in relation to the challenges faced in either finding work or claiming authority in work situations. The four types emphasized subtly different arguments and positions, as will be illustrated in the examples below.

**Active construction of call.** The active description of call was used most often to describe the specific area of ministry with which the speaker identifies her call. Examples include: “I found my calling,” “my calling was to preach,” and “my call is pastoral.” “Feeling” or “recognizing” a call was also classified as active, as were traditional call narratives describing how the speaker first came to discern her divine call. Eight women referred to their call experience in this way, early in the interview, as a way to introduce themselves.

When found later in the interview, expressions of active call were used to establish the context of a larger narrative, such as how the speaker ended up in her present church position. Active descriptions of call established the authority of subsequent talk, and was typically accomplished in a matter-of-fact manner. The active description thus signals agency on the part of the clergywomen, as contrasted, below, with the helplessness of encountering decline:

“In this area, I see a lot of women associate pastors, but I also see a lot of women who do interim work, and I think for some of them that is their calling,¹⁴ but I think for others

¹⁴ Underlines in this chapter indicate religious code
that is the reality of the decline. The reality of what's available. (Grace)

Grace’s concern is important, as research has found that lack of an explicit sense of calling to the particular work at hand can diminish both the enjoyment of work and the personal meaning that it affords (Feldman & Ng, 2010; Reedy-Strother, 2011).

**Passive construction of call.** Those who shape a passive stance toward the call assert that their careers unfolded, and their opportunities arose, not through their own efforts, but by virtue of divine will and activity. This construction shifts responsibility in order to minimize personal ambition. As examples, I present below the cases of Brenda and Lydia, who portray ministry in communities that limit their opportunities for advancement, and those of Robin and Kathleen, who position themselves as personally ambivalent about their career moves.

Brenda’s identity as theologically conservative and Lydia’s African American context both constrain the semblance of agentic strivings. They use a passive allusion to call to deflect accusations of being driven by what might be seen as unseemly personal ambition. The call must be patently unsought, not pursued but found—“thrown in her lap,” as Brenda put it.

**Brenda.** Although Brenda describes herself as capable of, and ready for, a senior position, she knows that offers of such jobs are likely to be nearly non-existent, as many of the more conservative churches are uninclined to call a woman pastor. They are now fewer in number, moreover, as many have left the denomination in protest against recent progressive policies. Brenda’s expression of agentic career “know-how” (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) may be limited in its transferability to another position by her conservative identification. Her talk reveals an understanding of the political forces within the denomination that augur against success in applying for the positions in which she might excell.

I present two sections of the interview with Brenda, separated in the interview by a few
minutes. The first one includes her agentic, positive framing of her qualifications for a senior pastor position; the second, responding to a follow-up probe, establishes a passive position created by a code switch, to account for the unlikelihood that such a position would materialize. In essence, she establishes a context such that if no church extends a job offer, she can take it as a spiritual sign that her divine calling lies elsewhere. In this way, she represents herself as agentic without having to support that claim by evidence of agentic activity. The two excerpts show the difference in how she discusses her job prospects when measured, first, by her achieved skills and, second, by her anticipations of future influences:

Interviewer: *Where do you feel that you have room to exercise creativity in your position?*

Brenda: *If the sky is the limit, if I were able to be full-time and looking for a job now, I would be looking for a head of staff position, preaching regularly . . . . I would like to more fully develop that, as I think I have gifts in that area. . . . I've always worked in bigger churches; I understand the complexities of it, compared to people in smaller churches. I'm able to develop some of that already, because I supervise two full-time people.*

A few minutes later:

Interviewer: *And if there were a possibility of moving out-of-state, how do you think of your career unfolding?*

Brenda: *We would not move if we were in a position where I would have to work. We would only move for a job for my husband that would allow me to not have to work. That doesn't mean that I wouldn't look for that down the line, or that if God threw something in my lap, that I wouldn't take it.*
The family dynamics that Brenda presents are not unusual. Several of the women in the study, irrespective of their social or theological leanings, acknowledged that they were dependent on their husband’s salary to maintain a middle-class living standard, in statements such as, “Even with my two jobs, I could not afford to live in this area, except for my husband’s income.” Many voiced this constraint in criticism of their compensation levels, or to illustrate the effects of ongoing decline. Though Brenda explains elsewhere that she is under-compensated for her work, in this excerpt she describes the need for her husband to earn a higher salary as a unique constraint on her job search. This is consistent with Cody-Rydzewski’s (2007) observation of traditional gender norms constraining pastoral leadership among clergywomen in Southern states. Reedy-Strother (2011), though, found wide variance in how families of Methodist clergywomen in Kentucky balanced the demands of each partner’s work.

Brenda’s reference to God throwing a job in her lap illustrates just how slim the market is for women in senior positions within the conservative network; it also allows her a gracious way to avoid self-advocacy, turning instead to a statement of faith. To that end, Brenda uses her family constraints to frame her likely tepid pursuit of career development, shifting to both religious code and a passive construction to express the improbability of overtly seeking or reaching her goal, despite her pastoral experience and skills.

**Lydia.** Lydia’s agency is presented in a clearly articulated set of goals and strategies for her specialized church. Although some constraints, such as the constant need to recruit more volunteers, come from the nature of her particular ministerial focus, Lydia here emphasizes a form of public opinion that would castigate her for even seeking successful employment as a pastor. She turns to the same linguistic strategy used by Brenda, positioning herself passively toward the call. Following a question about how she saw her career unfolding, she says:
I really had no goal . . . There was a big struggle going on [in seminary] over women in ministry, and a lot of arguing about were we really just a group of lesbians who intended to move out all the men . . . I was so happy to finally find my place and my role, where I probably should have been all along. And that this was my calling and that I was just open to whatever and wherever I was led. But it had to be divine, a divine leading and a divine call and that wherever I was, wherever a door was open, that this was where I was supposed to be and that my job was just to do whatever I was called to do. I knew about the stained-glass ceiling. I knew that as an older person, and as a person who had had a career in public life, that, ah, that there was a certain part of the community that had reservations about me, [who thought] that maybe I had some ulterior motive in what I was doing. So, I never expected to be in a tall-steeple church.

Lydia identifies formidable social resistance to her professional advancement, including from her male peers and former associates, and pointedly describes her job search as barely a search at all.

The passive stance toward the call is accomplished through redundancy, the repetition of ideas for emphasis (Bazzanella, 2011; Fetzer, 2011). In this excerpt, repetition of the words “divine” (“it had to be divine, a divine leading and a divine call”) and “wherever” (“wherever I was led . . . wherever I was, wherever a door was open”), and the three references to call (“my calling . . . a divine call . . . what I was called to do”) give Lydia’s talk a melodic, preacherly quality. They also minimize her ambition, which is seen by some as suspect. In summary, Lydia’s multiple hedging statements portray her as humble, while simultaneously piling up indicators of authority, a contradictory combination of positions that allows her to exercise authority without directly claiming any.

These pastors’ statements answer challenges to their right to practice ministry. Despite
using passive formulations, these are not passive women. I argue here that they are agentic women intentionally composing their talk to facilitate the discursive action they intend. Robin and Kathleen have more secure job positions than Brenda and Lydia, but they use the passive construction for reasons having to do with the misgivings with which they look on some of their job-related decisions. Still, in a time when jobs are hard to find, and colleagues remain unemployed, even their less-than-ideal situations are described as providential.

Robin. Robin describes her constraints in ministry as originating primarily from within her congregation of elderly people who resist change. Over and against their inactivity, she presents herself as agentic, implementing necessary changes before the church’s funds are used up, and engaging in multiple outreach efforts to the point of self-sacrifice:

*I’ve been working 70, 80 hours a week, which is probably why I’ve been so sick, doing two sermons, two services every week, you know. I’m frenetically trying to do everything: meeting people and inviting people to come, hanging out in places of the community to meet people who are new.* (Robin)

Despite her intense energy output, Robin’s confidence is undermined, as she describes constraints both global and personal:

*It’s a scary time for clergy. The denomination is dying, slowly dying, and church isn’t going to be what church is now. And what’s going to give? We’re getting it from the bottom up and top down and it smashes into you. You always think about what you could have done differently. That’s reality. I don’t know if you’d be a good pastor if you didn’t do that. But with the decline, that exacerbates it. . . I worry: did I make it worse?*

In the balance between agency and constraint, Robin positions herself as nearly overwhelmed, without having accomplished many of the changes that her hard work was intended to bring
about. It is against this background that Robin turns to religious code, referring to the process of calling without using that term. In so doing, she presents her difficulties as inevitable, and even divinely intended:

*I’m a person that God has used in churches that are really struggling. And so, my, my tenure in churches has not been very long, except for [one]. I’ve been sent to churches where there’s been clergy misconduct, to those kinds of churches.*

A few minutes later, though, she redefines her agentic standpoint, accepting greater responsibility for behavior that involved choices on her part.

*There’ve been times when I’ve gotten mad with God, because of the positions that have opened up to me. But I’m the one who said yes to them. I didn’t know what I was getting into. It really angers me. Colleagues have said, “We can’t believe you’re still in ministry” because of some of this, and I can’t either, on some days.*

Referring to “places that have opened up to me” rather than to which she has been sent, Robin recalibrates her narrative about calling, identifying social rather than divine forces at work, and for herself, a shift from passive to shared activity.

*Kathleen.* Like Robin, Kathleen presents herself as agentically invested in hard work, a position she constructs in the interview through multiple examples of being guided by thoughtful pastoral authority and determined preparation. Nonetheless, she applies a passive stance to a religious accounting for her safe job, about which she admits to feeling some ambivalence:

*I guess, in my mind, what career security means is two things: one, is having another skill and maybe volunteer coordinating is that skill, or counseling, or teaching. Or, just being the most phenomenal minister I can be, so that I am the best candidate in a call*"15

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15 This use of “call” is synonymous with “job offer.”
process. Those are the two ways that I think about what I can do to guarantee job security. (Kathleen)

In a subsequent response to a question about how the decline impacts her career, however, she downplays the effect of hard work and attributes her success to divine guidance and call:

*I have friends from seminary who were not able to find a call and had to take different paths, so I recognize that that might be the place for me, next. But, so far in my life, I feel that God has pulled me along and that's my calling.* (Kathleen)

When probed, Kathleen partitions the uncertainty about her career, using codeswitching to override the tension between fear and hope:

*I just believe that [concerns about the future] exist as a bubble of fear in my brain. I also think there is a bubble of faith in my brain that balances against the fear and that— I don't know if it's naïve to say this, but I do: it's always in retrospect that I see, and then it's almost crystal-clear. I do trust that God is very much part of the call to this church. I trust, I have complete trust in God about whatever step is next. It's a matter of starting to talk to God about what's next.*

In the excerpts cited, and throughout the interview, Kathleen describes a systematic approach to skill development in several areas, a clear mastery of career “knowing how.” At her present position in a highly-regarded large church, which can be expected to significantly increase her “knowing who” quotient (see DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), Kathleen seems to be accumulating the ingredients of a successful career, and thus might be expected to express more hope about the future than most participants. Nonetheless, she maintains a realistic view of the

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16 Idem
constraints on the current job market, and juggles this with her ideological position about her calling. The switch to religious code and invocation of divine activity succeed in tilting the balance toward hope.

Aware of the constraints they face, these four women, and others as well who use a passive formulation of calling, attribute their success to divine will, while simultaneously working hard, thus embodying the Calvinist work ethic (Weber, 1905/1956).

**Eager response to the call.** A third group of women turned the focus toward their own response to the call. These instances occur in narratives about significant constraints on their freedom to fully exercise ministry. In articulating the desire and commitment to fulfill the duties of their calling, participants used gerunds and present participles in such phrases as “responding to the call” and “being faithful to the call.”

Rather than presenting themselves as passive or hesitant, these formulations position the speakers as having done all that is in their power to do. Thus, any failure to live out the calling is to be seen as located not in themselves, nor in divine will, but in the historical-cultural context in which they live and work. These agentic affirmations of response use the call as evidence to firmly claim the right to present themselves as clergy members and to practice their vocation, relying on their ready response as justification.

The examples of this strategy support the contention that references to call are used to invoke the authority that it confers, as it “fuses the expertise of reflective leadership with sacramental presence” (Carroll, 1991, p. 202), thereby increasing pastoral authority. The challenges that elicit these formulations are not easily surmountable, and cannot be disposed of by the passive route. Although the arguments are levelled toward mostly implicit adversaries, they nevertheless index personal discrimination on the basis of gender, race, sexuality or age.
Gretta. As an acknowledged lesbian pastor, Gretta has faced criticism and threats. Even after official restrictions on ordaining gays were eased, she continued to find it difficult to be hired as a church pastor:

*I looked! I wanted to be a parish pastor and get away from the non-profit work. That’s when I joined in the start of a new congregation. I was being pegged as an administrator, even though many of the skills I learned are perfect for the church setting.*

Gretta’s experience is not unusual. Studies show that even churches that purport to support gay members nonetheless limit their participation, even in the most accepting congregations and denominations (Ammerman, 1997; Chaves, 1997; Moon, 2004; Wilcox, Chaves, & Franz, 2004; Whitehead, 2013). Given her experience, it is not surprising that Gretta resists attributing her difficulties to the decline. Instead, she is hopeful for the future of the church. The constraints are presented as personal, and using the construct of response, she presents herself as above reproach:

*I was being told that I was being disobedient*\(^{17}\)* by responding to my call, by being ordained, by trying to be ordained at all! So, I, you know, see my willingness and excitement about doing same-sex marriages as much less about obedience or disobedience and much more about being faithful to my vows of ordination. So, our*\(^{18}\)* vows can contradict each other, depending on what you are doing in the world. And that’s to be determined over the long haul. And I don’t think in the short haul I am doing service to the gospel by denying the privilege of marriage to people.*

Gretta appeals to the call to legitimize and affirm her right to be a pastor, and resist the rejections

\(^{17}\) A reference to the interview question regarding American nuns accused of disobedience.

\(^{18}\) A reference to people she has previously described as taking opposite views of ordination.
coming from multiple directions. Because calls are traditionally considered private and personal, such affirmations are usually unassailable. But in her case, a simple active declaration of calling might be challenged. By turning to response formulations, such as “responding to my call,” and “being faithful to my vows of ordination,” Gretta disarms the accusations against her by emphasizing what is most easily evidenced: the sincere willingness of her response.

Three other participants spoke of faithfulness in the same way, as their stance toward work. It was also found in other research, indicating selfless service. “Faithfulness in a calling implies a life devoted to service in a community and a level of involvement and dedication to one’s work that goes beyond self-interest” (Christopherson, 1994, p. 219). Gretta’s emphasis on the inner quality of the call requires her to acknowledge, in turn, that those who oppose her can claim a similar obedience to their calling. She readily admits that some dilemmas can only be discerned in retrospect, leaving the resolution of the inherent paradox to future understandings.

**Faye.** Faye presents advocacy for immigrants and for female clergy as an integral part of her ministry. She presents the dilemmas generally faced by Hispanic women pastors, celebrating their willingness to make personal sacrifices, while deploiring the low-paying jobs that are available to them. In doing this, she applies the language of response to the call, in order to position the women as worthy of fair wages.

In her view, the problems the women tolerate are not of their own making, and their acceptance of unjust work conditions should not be used against them. Instead, aided by the eager response formulation, Faye positions these clergywomen as above reproach, framing their actions and responses to a material and political dilemma as responding to a divine call:

> The signs of the times are that they are changing and the Hispanics have to respond, tienen que responder, to women’s ministry. The men won’t accept a part-time job offer,
but the women do. The Hispanic churches can’t afford a full-time package, so the ones who are applying to the positions are women. And it is sad, también, porque we have to take these positions that the men don’t want, because they don’t offer a full package. But there are women who affirm their call and respond. Because it’s hard, still, to accept as equal the ministry of women. The signs of the times are changing and the time is of God; it does not belong to us, and in light of that, we have to respond.

Faye’s analysis of the constraints on women’s work is interwoven with the affirmation of call and the toleration of unacceptable salary packages, but she asserts this mix as temporarily necessary to getting around sexist attitudes. Her analysis places class and politics, not the decline, as the source of the dilemma. Responsibility for ministry is shared by the pastor and laity together: those who extend a job offer and the women who accept it.

The difficulty of achieving parity in pay for women is not unique to the church, and the widespread advantage held by men in negotiating pay packages has been well documented (Bowles & Babcock, 2007; Stevens, Baretta, & Gist, 1993). The particular delicacy of these negotiations for clergywomen is that salary is a major site where the conditions created by decline are negotiated, and hanging over such discussions is the fact that churches close down when they get to the point where they can no longer afford a pastor. An essential conundrum is thus set up, as the decline pits the welfare of the individual pastor and her family against the survival of the church, upon which the pastor herself ultimately depends.

Women of color may be especially vulnerable to pressure to accept reduced paychecks, as Lydia, cited above, and Carmen, below, also claim. Faye suggests that clergywomen rise to the occasion, accepting the opportunities that come their way, regardless of the constraints, financial and otherwise. Her observation is congruent with findings that female clergy, like their
male counterparts, value respect for professionalism in their work (Mueller & McDuff, 2004), and find as much or more satisfaction in it (McDuff, 2001).

The decline is implicated in Faye’s talk of career only in terms of her concern to demonstrate effective ministry and gain the respect of those who might someday hire her. As a result, when a church to which she had offered significant help was considering following its pastor in leaving the denomination, she took the initiative to confront her colleague:

“You go, but don’t take the congregation with you. Think about it.” It would have reflected on me, too, if that church left. Fortunately, things settled down, but we lost a good-sized number of people. (Faye)

In terms of career, she demonstrates similar agency and confidence:

*There is uncertainty about the future of the church, so I could go to work at a non-profit or another agency using different skills. But my call is pastoral, to be in a church, even a small one. I’ve discovered an advantage to being bilingual, now that I know how the structures work, that gives me security. With my resumé now, I could be hired in an Anglo church. I figured out what you need to get those jobs: aprender la politica, learn the politics. The structure of the church is polity, not programática. Let them do the work and you, escuchar y apoyar, listen and support. Being bilingual and understanding the Presbyterian system gives me career security. (Faye)*

Faye’s aims are integrated: supporting her own career, advocating for Hispanic churches and for the free immigration of their members, and for the equal access of female clergy to fair work opportunities—these are all interrelated, expressed in both action and discourse. The use of active response formulations aids her in building her argument.

*Carmen.* Carmen has significant experience on a large staff, supervising a complex
ministry, and also as pastoral associate of a small, struggling congregation. This provides the standpoint from which she levels a strong critique at outworn church practices that contribute to decline. But Carmen finds herself walled off by the combined constraints of race, gender, class and geography:

This is something I knew for a while, but it’s interesting having it confirmed recently by someone in this particular presbytery, saying, “You do know that, given your demographics, it’s going to be incredibly difficult for you to find a call in this region of the country, especially in a senior or solo pastor position?” And I think that’s a reality for me. My demographics as a woman, as a minority [Asian] woman, I think all of that plays in. And I’m not in a position to be able to move geographically, right now. And so, what does that mean for me to be able to be faithful to my sense of call? (Carmen)

As Carmen quotes the presbytery official’s warning to expect racial discrimination, she appears to accept the validity of what she is told: “that’s a reality for me,” she observes. Such a response is understandable, given that only 33% of Asian clergywomen are employed in congregations, compared to 56% of their Hispanic, 52% of their White, and 41% of their Black female colleagues (I. Smith-Williams,19 personal communication, September 16, 2013).

Nonetheless, Carmen’s question about how she can be faithful to her call serves as a rhetorical swivel point. Though phrased as a question, it invokes a theological, not geographic, standard for what is taken to be the current “reality,” and provokes consideration of what one has the right to expect to be available, even in times of decline, regardless of one’s race and gender.

One way to understand the code switch in her question, is to analyze its binary contradictory message: at one level, it affirms the status quo by formulating the question, yet, on

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19 In the office of Research Services, PCUSA.
another level, by using the participle phrase (“be able to be faithful”), she also enacts a protest against the current conditions, a frequent use of codeswitching (Su, 2009). Such bivalent meaning is characteristic as well of reported speech, which Carmen also applies in this segment. With these discursive tactics, Carmen can simultaneously take the standpoint of accepting and protesting her “reality” (see Clark & Gerrig, 1990; Myers, 1999; Su, 2009; Tannen, 1995), according to the response she receives from others in her focus group.

Carmen continues, presenting a second major constraint on her work:

More recently we’ve seen a lot of congregations that are calling people out of retirement to come and serve in their interim positions. It’s a club. There are a lot of us who are excited and passionate to work, and the churches are saying, “No, we’ll go with the folks that are already retired; bring them back.”

Here, Carmen suggests that the difficulties she faces in securing her next pastoral position are part of a further problem of the denomination, as insidious as decline and race-consciousness. In contrast to Gretta, though, Carmen invokes collective, institutional responsibility for the acquiescence to exclusionary practices. She likens the church to racist, elitist clubs. Under these conditions, Carmen straightforwardly admits to limited possibilities of advancement.

In the next excerpt, she addresses the inadequacy of established minimum compensation standards. In the process of her argument, like Gretta, who acknowledged that calls and vows may differ, Carmen notes that language of faithfulness is sometimes used when a long view of justice might be called for:

Well, at which point is that some sort of faithfulness to a call, and when is that about boundaries that sets up a really bad precedent for the person that follows you? Because, even if you can afford to do that [work for less than the minimum], maybe the next person
can’t. I certainly have seen, in this presbytery, churches where the previous pastors have been independently wealthy, and that sets an incredibly bad precedent for the people who follow them.

Carmen shows how one’s level of financial security alters the perception of both calling and sacrifice, and goes on to challenge a systemic tradition that accepts low pay and makes positions unequally available: “And so, what will the denomination, what will the presbyteries be willing to do in support of, on behalf of clergy who are saying, ‘No’ [to the low compensation packages]?”

By confronting the constraints on her career development, Carmen points out how deciding these matters on a case-by-case basis sets up a domino effect, not fully evident until a subsequent pastor is hired. Class differences, like racial exclusion, become more evident over time and across parallel situations. In defending her right to work, Carmen determinedly maintains a stance toward the call, usually understood to be individual and private, as a social and collective process, where all should be held accountable for the response.

Betty. Betty works at a church whose membership she reports as holding steady, in part, because she has taken an unusual approach to member care and the counting of membership. In keeping with TeSelle’s observation (quoted in GATF, 1991, p. 34) that many people who no longer attend church nonetheless describe themselves as Presbyterians, Betty has intentionally stayed in touch with many of these not very active “members”:

Because membership is loose, in our minds, if our kids have soccer, or if we have other things going on, we may go to the 6 o’clock service at the non-denominational church down the street. Now, the Presbyterian Church is our church, where we baptized our kids and got married, and in our mind, that’s where our loyalty is. . . . This is fundamentally
what drives us in a million more directions than we’re already in. . . . When we go to a soccer game. . . I’m there to build my relationship with you, to meet you where you are, because I know you’re not there every Sunday, and the only time you see me shouldn’t be when you’re in the hospital or on your deathbed. (Betty)

This approach, though supported in theory, makes Betty vulnerable to much criticism. In the interview, she first takes up the idea of her call in relation to a question about success, and uses a present participle as a way to corroborate just how constraining the criticism has become:

Success is interesting, but I see it as remaining faithful to the call, despite the resistance or the criticisms, or the comments that people make that are so incredibly unbelievable that you can’t believe they just said that to you as a woman, as a person, as a human being, as a pastor—but you press on.

In the next excerpt, in which Betty describes her difficulty in landing her present job, she again refers to her call in a way that emphasizes her response. She does this to momentarily align with another focus group member, who has interrupted her narrative. The digression to her calling affirms her collegial identity. But Betty does not allow this turn in the conversation to impede her frank talk about the consequences of the decline on her career:

Betty: When I left [my previous church], I knew I was in for a long haul, that the times had shifted, the times had changed. So, luckily for me, I was a single person, so I was able to, you know, blow it out of the water okay. So yeah, I would have loved to stay in that city, I had served in four churches in the area, I owned a home. That’s not reality. I had to expand my search. And having done that, it still took two years to get a call. In the two years, I only had two churches go to a final interview. . . . I couldn’t believe it! And so, I got the call here, and people said, “Oh, you chose us!” and I thought, “Not!” [so I
“Ahhh, well, you chose me!”

Sharon: God chose.

Betty: And God knew what he was doing, because it happens to be a fabulous fit. God’s blessings are upon us when we follow his call. But would I, in a thousand and one years, envision that I would end up in a suburb so far away from home? Never.

Sharon’s interruption reflects a traditional view that surprise is an inherent characteristic of the divine call. While this is fitting for Sharon, who has travelled widely as an interim pastor, it also suggests discomfort with talk of decline, and an opposition between spiritual talk about one’s calling and talk of the material and historical dimensions of careers. A sense of taboo is implied in the invitation to shift into religious code. Betty, though, will not be dissuaded. She continues,

That’s how I always thought, that by the time I was in my 40’s I’d have my own church, as a head of staff, or interim. And then, marriage and children and then as a pastoral associate. I have another 25 years before I retire. But do I worry about those 25 years? Despite what the scriptures say, I do have some worries. How will that pan out? . . . I see my peers, my colleagues and friends, graduating and looking, and calls not happening to anyone, anywhere.

As did Faye, Gretta and Carmen, Betty also emphasizes her response to the call to protest powerful, debilitating impediments to ministry. She understands these impediments to be social and historical, not spiritual, in nature. Although the first three cases might lead one to believe that these problems only occur to those who have “different” social identities, the inclusion of Betty, who is white, middle class and traditional, demonstrates that the “difficulties” do not reside in the persons affected but are “signs of the times,” to wit, of the decline.

**Doubt framed by providence.** The formulation of doubting the call is identified in cases
where the speaker refers to the call as divine, and even miraculous in some way, but also expresses doubt about its validity or relevance. In all, there were 14 instances featuring spiritual doubt. Nine of them were paired with a statement of faith that dispelled or counterbalanced the doubt, suffering, or uncertainty previously articulated. Such a construction permitted the speaker to juxtapose two essentially opposite arguments, informed by the differing epistemologies of religious code and rational code, thus establishing cognitive polyphasia. Three cases are presented here.

**Edwina.** In her first pastoral job out of seminary, Edwina has been impacted by negative feedback from leaders in the church:

*But somebody with influence in the church that I know went to the pastor and said something along the lines of “Don’t put this person in the pulpit that much, at least in the beginning.” This, for my own good, you know, twisted it around, to “Don’t throw this person to the wolves,” or something like that.*

Given the struggle to establish her authority in this, her first pastoral setting, Edwina has wondered about her fit with this setting and even the clergy role in general.

*Yeah, I think it has made me question my own call to ministry, even. Um, but I feel like at the end of the day, or at the end of the week, especially—often, at least on Sunday, when I stand before the congregation, once the people have actually gathered, it’s like, “No, God has called me to this place, to these people, to this time, to love them and to share His love.” And so, even though I question my call to ministry, that isn’t, that hasn’t been the final word.*

Edwina uses redundancy in this passage as she moves from a stock phrase, “at the end of the day,” to a vivid, specific instance in which her sense of her call reasserts itself. Whether this
is a case of intentional redundancy used to increase communicative power, or unintentional redundancy inherent in the improvisation of an interview setting (Bazzanella, 2011), her construction illustrates well the narrow specificity of the occasion that can produce reassurance. Stuck in an ill-fitting setting that she describes as not respecting or responding to her ministry efforts, Edwina speaks of her call as a source of strength, though in ways that are but tenuously reassuring.

The types of career moves that might satisfy her ambitions have also narrowed, as Edwina indicates, later, that her preference for “being involved not in the declining end, but in the end that is being birthed” may be difficult to fund in a presbytery whose resources are depleted after several churches left to join a more conservative denomination. “Unfortunately,” she says, “sometimes money for benevolence and mission are the things that are cut first, when congregations need to find where to cut the budget.”

Karen. In the same group as Edwina, Karen attributes her agency to her training and to having weathered storms early in her current pastorate. The constraints on her work are clear and are rooted in the decline of the neighborhood and of the presbytery in which her church is located, as well as in various “movable parts” in the nature of her congregation. Karen uses a variety of leadership techniques to help the church adapt to changes in membership, financial security and the availability of volunteers.

To hold them accountable for what they say is new: “You said you would nurture and support this baby at their baptism. Why aren’t you teaching a Sunday School class? How dare you not?” <laughs> And now, because it’s a little more pressing, I’m a little more bold, hopefully without hurting anybody’s feelings.
In the excerpt below, Karen constructs a statement about assurance in her work by placing two religious statements as bookends to a narrative of pain and doubt. This approach locates a troubling episode early in her pastoral work with this congregation within a larger narrative of divine providence:

*I have been—the Lord was wise in my first position being in children’s work, so that my introduction to ministry was not quite so intense. This one was. This job challenged my faith, my call, and my theological stance, and everything. And I was ready to put it all behind me, because church people can be mean. Fortunately, God has provided.*

Here, Karen’s uncertainties are bracketed by two statements of divine wisdom and providence that counterbalance her own readiness to give up. From the safety of bookended stability, Karen describes the deeply challenging quality of her work. Later on, she describes her problematic situation as based on the inherent difficulties of church work, magnified by the inadequacy of attempting a lateral move. Bracketing narrative with assertions of divine faithfulness allows Karen to talk more negatively about aspects of work without seeming to position herself as a quitter or a failure.

**Emily.** Emily’s multivalent allusions to the call are produced within an interview replete with evidence of successful, creative new ministries, progressive children’s programs, and sensitive guidance of adult faith development. Perhaps most telling is her increasing assertiveness in her relationship with the senior pastor. The following excerpt is in response to a question about taking risks:

*I’ve been here long enough that there is some trust in relations where, when I have some sense of there is some expectation of me in a setting, where if it doesn’t feel true to who I am and my call as pastor, I’m becoming more comfortable pushing back on that. And*
hopefully, explaining it in a compassionate way, “why,” not just, you know, talking with the intent to be defiant. But I think, especially in the first year, there’s that sense of tiptoeing around, and having a sense of “this is what this congregation, or this particular person, is expecting of me, how can I fulfill that?” and I do that really well. But I’ve also been able to present a faithful pastor like I would like to be or that I feel God was calling me to be for that congregation.

The active description of call in the excerpt above shapes a traditional use of calling as guiding a life’s work, in combination with high ethical standards. The call frees her to be agentic, breaking free of the constraints of traditional gender and age role. Regarding her career prospects, she replies with confidence congruent with her skills, but introduces doubt about the desirability of pastoral work:

So, I’m going to be candid. I don’t worry. . . . I think I have the gifts for ministry and if I were to want to find another call, I could do that. There would be a church that would call me. I’ve struggled with—I think it’s just a part of the process—I’m having to figure out my pastoral identity as a young woman.... And so, the thought of being in some other environment where being young and female is not a novelty, even though it’s not as much of a novelty now as it has been, that makes [leaving the church environment] appealing. Later, Emily portrays the sense of call as a burden that complicates career planning in light of the ongoing denominational decline, rather than as conveying subjectivity, security, and confidence.

I feel that—the church just feels lethargic to me. I wouldn’t say for me, personally, where I love the Presbyterian Church and I grew up in the Presbyterian Church, and this is

20 The underline indicates an example of religious code, but one that does not index the call.
21 This use of “call” is synonymous with “job offer.”
where I feel God called me to serve. But, I don’t see myself serving long term. I’m not pursuing anything else at the moment, but I think I have felt the need to be realistic about where the church is headed, and do I need to be a part of that? And one of the blessings and the curses of seminary is that you’re talking about your job in theological terms and sometimes it feels it’s nice to be able to say, “You know, I just want to walk away from it.” Framing it in that theological way gives it a lot more weight, and I don’t want to sound like I don’t value that, because I do.

Emily refers to “talking about your job in theological terms” rather than “talking about your call,” resisting the urge to slip into religious language. That one of the most qualified young pastors in the sample shows ambivalence toward continuing in her career path despite early success is itself a sign of the decline. She chooses the ambiguous phrase, “where the church is headed” to address her concerns, leaving unclear whether she refers to the decline in general, the tension over gay leadership, or the specific frustrations of working with those whose faith has become routine, all topics she has addressed in the interview.

Conclusions

The women in these cases used four call formulations to establish their belonging and authority as clergywomen in the face of perceived threats, such as failure to be hired in the jobs they think they deserve, or to be paid adequately, or to have their work and voice respected, among other concerns. Though the difficulties they encountered were not always presented as resulting directly from the decline, they are framed as complicated by it. As the stability of the church continues to erode, jobs become harder to find, and sacrifice is often called for. In talking of these problematic processes, turning to their religious worldview and applying its language, the clergy avoid taking up the fatalistic position that their experience might otherwise invite.
The appeal to a divine call in talk that navigated between agency and constraint allowed
the women to interweave ideological loyalty with pastoral subjectivity and authority. The
participants deployed each of the formulations of call in consistent ways to account for their
lives, protesting the barriers to the full exercise of their profession, resisting accepting blame for
the social challenges they face by aligning themselves unassailably with divine will.
Addressing interlocutors present and not present, pastors use code switching and reported
speech, as these tactics lend themselves to addressing difficult topics (Benwell, 2012; Buttny,
1997; Myers, 1999; Su, 2009).
Constraints on the freedom to exercise ministry were presented as based on race, gender
and sexual orientation, sometimes in combination with, and at other times independent of,
decline. References to call provide an ideologically strong, though not explicitly feminist,
protest against the lack of agency, authority and opportunity that these women face. All the
formulations constitute pastoral authority and subjectivity. The passive construction of call, the
eager response to the call, and doubt framed by providence also tactically address some difficult
realities, including the effects of the Presbyterian decline. The cases presented in depth were
chosen as the clearest and fullest representatives of each type, it should be noted that there were
no instances that contradicted this description of the types of references to call, and the
discursive functions that each type facilitates.
Chapter Eight  
Analysis: Narrative Structure and Positioning

The clergywomen used narratives to represent their world of work in vivid ways that illustrate its challenges and tensions. The analysis focuses on identifying the subject positions taken in the embedded narratives. I relied primarily upon Labov & Waletskey (1968) for analyzing structure, informed also by Bruner (1990), Gergen (2009) and Dawson and McLean (2013), and drew from Bamberg (1997), De Fina (2013), Deppermann (2013a, b) and Harré and van Langenhove (1999b) for guidance in analyzing positioning. The product of positioning is most often considered to be the construction of narrative identity (Bamberg, 1997), but, following Deppermann (2013a, b), this analysis is applied to see how positions and the narratives as a whole are deployed in the service of constructing the meaning of working in a changing institution.

Coding

**Identifying narrative sections.** The first task was to identify the narrative sections within the overall interview talk. Although Labov identified several component features of narrative structure (the abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution and coda), he also suggested that a minimum of “two clauses, which are temporally ordered” (Labov, 2006, p. 208) are enough to constitute narrative. Narratives embedded in interviews have limited structure, observed to consist, at times, of no more than orientation and evaluation clauses, with little in the way of plot or action (de Fina, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2006). Despite Dawson and McLean’s (2013) insistence on the importance of ongoing and prospective stories for the analysis of change, I selected for analysis only those narratives in which the speaker described action as
having taken place in the past. These narratives contained a minimum of one clause in past tense, plus at least one additional clause that continued the action or described a consequence of the first clause. Included were excerpts in which the first clause established a context and the second described what happened to it over time. A story completely embedded within another narrative was not counted independently but was taken as part of the larger story. Similarly, a sequence of discrete episodes about the same topic, strung together with one concluding evaluation, was coded as a single story. Interview interactions were found to exert pressure on narrative, but did not always serve as boundaries, as some stories spread across multiple interactions.

**Coding positions.** The second step involved coding the position of the participant in autobiographical narratives. Mindful of methodological criticism leveled against Davies and Harré’s (1990) claiming that the positions they assigned were arbitrarily imposed upon the text (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), I simplified the attribution of positions by limiting the focus to self-positioning only. I also limited the position categories to just two, favorable and unfavorable. This approach accords with extensive study of life narratives, in which many factors were examined, but ultimately only the upward slope (redemption) or downward slope (contamination) of the story were used as primary classifications (McAdams et al., 2001), and with an analysis of social representations of famous persons, which identified only two factors, a positive and a negative valence (Liu et al., 2005).

As suggested by Gabriel (2000) and Dawson and McLean (2013), I began the coding by charting the narratives of each participant. For each narrative, I briefly summarized the plot and wrote out the salient evaluation clauses, especially those at the end of the narrative (Labov & Waletsky, 1967/1997). I illustrated the flow and coherence of the story with simple graphic lines, based on Gergen’s (2009) diagrams of narrative types. An arrow pointing upward (↗) was used
to represent a plot in which events unfold from an unfavorable to a favorable positioning, while one pointing downward (\(\downarrow\)) indicated a narrative that leads to a poor outcome for the protagonist, and unfavorable positioning. A horizontal arrow (\(\rightarrow\)) placed high identified a story in which the favorable positioning of the protagonist is established early and remains the same throughout the narrative; when placed low, it represented an unvaryingly unfavorable position. Angled arrows (\(\uparrow, \downarrow\)) indicated a sudden turn, while a zigzag pattern (\(\uparrow\downarrow\)) indicated multiple turns.

The charts served to facilitate and document the coding of self-positioning. I followed Bamberg (1997, 2004) and De Fina (2013) in making a distinction between three levels of positioning: level 1, within the plot; level 2 vis-à-vis the interview situation; and level 3, in relation to a cultural theme, which in this case I chose to be optimism or pessimism regarding the decline. Even though the analysis focuses on level 1, I nonetheless went through the process of identifying level 2 and level 3 for each narrative, because making the distinctions helped clarify level 1, and in some cases, especially when they departed from the norms, the multiple levels of positioning aided my understanding of the function of the story in the interview.

To code level 1 positioning, I tracked two of the elements identified by Harré and van Langenhove (1999b, p. 62), focusing on whether the author claims or rejects agency and responsibility, and how the past event is evaluated. To code the favorability of self-positioning, I posed the following questions: “Do her actions in the story present her as a capable and moral actor?” “Do the events shed a favorable light on the narrator’s character in the story or not?”

A favorable position is created by asserting the narrator’s own agency or through fortuitous help from others, which either results in a positive outcome, or is assessed as favorable in the story’s evaluation. Typical actions in these stories may include success in an endeavor, making social connections, solving a problem, or personal growth. An unfavorable position is
established when an effort results in failure, rejection or isolation, or a problem is not resolved or worsens. A pessimistic evaluation of the event or action also enacts an unfavorable position.

The initial coding based on the plot outcome was confirmed by the identification of specific discursive tactics in action and evaluation clauses by which the positioning was accomplished. An agentic story whose plot ended on a positive note clearly positioned the narrator-protagonist favorably, while a story of unfortunate events self-positioned the narrator unfavorably. Agency by the pastor was not sufficient to assert a favorable position if the action was unsuccessful. Stories that were not autobiographic, or in which the narrator was passive, or which did not reveal discursive evidence of positioning, were marked as “not positioned.” If there were multiple positions I coded the position that occurs last in the story. After coding, I calculated a paired, two-tailed correlation between position and exposure to decline.

Level 2 positioning is created in the service of local impression management (Goffman, 1959) and uses rhetorical devices that have the effect of legitimizing one’s activity or attitudes in order to avoid undermining one’s interactive status. I identified level 2 positioning by posing the question, “How does the participant come across in telling this story?” “What specific things does she say to attempt to come across well?” Any device that presented the speaker as a capable, faithful, or reflective pastor, even when level 1 was unfavorable, constituted a favorable level 2 position. Level 2 was overwhelmingly favorable throughout the data, and was not subjected to further analysis unless it was useful for the discursive analyses.

Analysis of level 3 positioning involved answering the question of whether the narrator took an optimistic or pessimistic position toward the church’s future. Harré and van Langenhove (1999b) identify this as the level in which one’s standpoint is revealed. In the clearest cases, this position flowed from the storyline, but in many cases level 3 needed to be coded on the basis of
other talk in the interview referring to the story. Considering Hall’s (2004) observation that level 3 is inherently unreliable, I marked the narrative as “unclear” at level 3 if I could not discursively locate where the position was being taken, or identify it clearly. I include level 3 in the discursive analyses where it is helpful.

**Examples of positioning.** I illustrate my approach by presenting examples of favorable and unfavorable positions. In the first one, Kathleen recounts a successful collaboration with a friend. In the second, she describes the awkwardness of talking with parents about the religious practice of adult children.

_Favorable positioning._ The following story was told following a probe asking Kathleen to elaborate a claim she had made earlier about social media:

> I graduated from seminary a couple of years ago, and I have two other clergymen whom I was classmates with, and they are both working with youth in cities nearby. So, one of them was also going to the youth conference at Montreat, and we decided to join together to go, so our youth got to know each other. And I think because of Facebook, and cellphones, some of the youth have kept in touch with each other way more than they would have [otherwise]. (Kathleen)

In this narrative, Kathleen’s successful collaboration, and the deeper connections among the youth that it facilitated, positions herself favorably at level 1 and at level 2, by showing herself to be a sensitive pastor, positively inclined toward the role of social media in the lives of the adolescents under her care. Collaboration and friendship bonds, inherently optimistic in nature, are not cited as a deterrent to decline. As a result, level 3 is coded as “unclear.”

_Unfavorable positioning._ In the next narrative, Katherine knowingly presents herself in an unfavorable position to illustrate how the decline causes changes in the relationships between
I can think of a very specific parent, who—she has a son in his late 20s, and a son that’s in ninth-grade. And her older son had a very powerful experience [in church] as a teenager, and the best man at his wedding was a church friend. So, she wants very much for her younger son to have that same experience. What’s interesting to me, and what I can't point out to her (I’m too uncomfortable to point out to her) is that her older son is not in church. So, in my first two years, I never saw him in church until his grandmother died. (Kathleen)

The unfavorable positioning in this narrative, which occurs in the pastor’s hesitation to speak to the mother about the older son’s religious practice, is seen at level 1. It also appears at level 2, as the parenthetical evaluation localizes the cause in her discomfort. However, level 2 analysis must also consider the clause “what is interesting to me,” which exerts a favorable influence on positioning at level 2, as she is knowingly presenting this case as relevant to decline, despite enacting hesitance in the story. The pessimistic level 3 positioning occurs outside of the plot. Kathleen describes a capitulation to social forces that transcend even the best ministry efforts, and the best-intentioned parents.

This example illustrates particularly well how positioning contributes to describing the decline, because elsewhere in the interview Kathleen has repeatedly presented herself as competent and authoritative in her pastoral relationships. She can therefore afford to permit a confession of hesitation to unfavorably shade the level 2 position, thus strengthening the positioning force at level 3. This narrative is not about personal attributes such as shyness, but about the interactive dilemma that changing American religious culture creates for her: diminishing church participation is becoming more common, and thus unchallengeable in a
pastoral conversation, but is not yet so tolerable that it can be frankly acknowledged. Kathleen takes a story of a concerned mother and uses it to highlight how this family is enacting a commonly observed multi-generational erosion of church participation.

**Coding sharp articulations.** The positioning at the three levels generally work in tandem to produce their rich overall representation of pastoring in the context of church decline. However, I found some stories among the narratives that made their case by presenting an incongruous, abrupt shift. In mature narration, stories flow smoothly across the articulations, with the evaluative clauses supporting the action in such a way as to make the conclusions appear self-evident. But the stories referenced here present a sharp discontinuity, creating incoherence and inconsistent positions emerging between action and evaluation clauses, or between two evaluation clauses.

Coherence refers to how a story “makes sense to a naïve listener—not just in terms of understanding when, where, and what event took place, but also with respect to understanding the meaning of that event to the narrator” (Reese, Haden, Baker-Ward, Bauer, Fivush and Ornstein, 2011, p. 425). Issues of coherence and rupture are increasingly being studied (Bülow, & Hydén, 2003; Hydén & Brockmeier, 2008), as theorists realize that coherence is important, but differ on what its implications are. These differences result in coding systems being developed to measure coherence factors for each theoretical foci (Adler, Waters, Poh, & Seits (2013). One of these, Baerger & McAdams (1999), largely based on Labov (1972), codes four factors: 1) “orientation,” which evaluates the adequacy of the context provided; 2) “structure,” which measures the logical sequence unfolding over time; 3) “affect,” which addresses how understandably emotions are communicated; and 4) “integration” which measures how well contradictions and inconsistencies get resolved, and how well individual episodes coordinate
with larger life themes and meaning.

Though their coding scheme was too complex to yield accurate scores for the small, embedded narratives of the present study, these factors help explain the function and locus of incoherence in the narratives. Bruner (1991) has asserted that countering expectations increases the “tellability” of a story, at the risk of its verisimilitude, but he leaves unaddressed the extent to which abrupt storytelling may be intentional and effective communication.

To identify stories with such sharp articulations, I began by reviewing the graphic illustrations in the narrative tables and located those in which sharp-angled graphic symbols had been used. I then reread those narratives to identify whether those graphic symbols indicate points of reader confusion, using the coding system of Baerger and McAdams (1999) as a guide, even though numerical codes could not be applied. I corroborated the coding by examining how the turn in meaning was provoked in the action and evaluative features. Those narratives in which a new, contrasting meaning is created are deemed to constitute sharply articulated narratives.

Hollway (2009), though aiming at a different understanding of narration, treated contrasts as significant data. The present analysis, like hers, takes advantage of the analyst’s own confused reactions to the events being narrated, such as having difficulty understanding, needing multiple readings to grasp the sequence of events and their meaning, and being surprised in ways that lead to questioning the narrative.

Coding which way an articulation bent—whether toward a more optimistic or pessimistic view of the decline—was made on the basis of the narrative content rather than on any tactic therein.

An example:
I travelled to Columbia Seminary, back and forth, for two years and got a Doctor of Ministry degree in family ministry, and have a lot of ideas about things to do. . . .

<provides several examples and elaborates on her doctoral project>. . . . Family ministry, especially to mothers, is something I’ve been interested in and I enjoy.

I’m not doing any of it in the church because I don’t have the time. I’m burned out.

(Sunny)

Sunny positions herself positively, as the story unfolds, by her interest and growing expertise, evidenced in the elaboration of project ideas in an area that will help her respond to a perceived need. Her passion is seen in the animated quality of her speech and the elaboration with which she develops her ideas. The fluid narration affirms her authority on the subject, positioning her favorably at level 2. The expectation of success is undone, though, in the end, as she suddenly announces that nothing is being implemented currently. The narrative bends suddenly toward an unfavorable position, as she presents herself as someone who cannot carry through on her best ideas, and as pessimistic regarding the decline, as her demands prevent her from doing those projects that are most interesting. The confession, “I’m burned out” protects her level 2 position as capable.

Quantitative statistical tests were conducted, comparing the participants’ exposure to the decline to the ratio of favorable to unfavorable level 1 positions, and also to the direction in which the sharp articulations bent. To more closely approximate normal distribution for the numbers of sharp articulations, which ranged from zero to four, I transformed the data by adding a constant .02 to each participant’s raw data, and computed a log transformation prior to calculating the Pearson’s correlation.

Findings
**Level 1 narrative positions.** All but one participant told at least one story in which they were favorably positioned, and all but one produced at least one in which they were unfavorably positioned, challenging the claim that personality shapes the types of narratives one tells (McAdams & Albaugh, 2008). The frequencies of level 1 favorable and unfavorable subject positions and of sharp articulations are presented in Table 8.1. A significant moderate negative correlation was found between level 1 favorable positions and exposure to decline: \( r(36) = -0.388, p = .019 \). It should be noted, however, that favorable positioning predominated overall, consistent with expectations (Pals, 2006b; Reese et al., 2011).

**Table 8.1**

*Level 1 Positioning and Sharp Articulations in Narratives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number of Narratives</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exposed</td>
<td>Unexposed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>0-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No level 1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>231</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Sharp Articulations</th>
<th>Exposed</th>
<th>Unexposed</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favorably bent</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorably bent</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
That favorable positioning was more frequent among the unexposed pastors is consistent with findings elsewhere. Such patterns have been attributed to the use of dominant narrative models (McAdams, 2005), to positioning as a dimension of coherence (Reese et al., 2011), and to effective narrative processing of emotionally-laden experiences and memories (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002; Mansfield, McLean, & Lilgendahl, 2010; Pals, 2006a; Reese et al., 2011; Rubin & Berntsen, 2003; Talarico, Berntsen, & Rubin, 2009), which allows an event to be told in a way that produces a favorable position. The need to manage level 2 positioning may also have stimulated the telling of types of narratives that most easily support a favorable expression.

The ability to narratively control positioning is well documented. Even adolescents have been found to effectively use fiction and non-fiction narrations to mediate developmental processing of experiences of change and violence in different ways, yielding, overall, hopeful narratives and favorable positions in their autobiographical stories (Daiute, 2010, 2011). Therefore, it is the number of narratives with unfavorable level 1 positions among the exposed pastors that merit the most careful consideration. Even where balanced by favorable level 2 positions, these stories reflect both the types of experience-near questions that guided the interview and the willingness of participants to express their perspectives.

**Sharp articulations.** I identified 71 narratives with sharp articulations. No direct relation was found between exposure to decline and the quantity of sharp articulations produced, nor the number of sharp articulations that bent toward a favorable position. However, exposed pastors were moderately more likely than unexposed pastors to produce sharply-articulated narratives that bent toward unfavorable, pessimistic positions: \( r(36) = .364, p = .027 \). Those pastors who worked in churches that had seen decline were more likely to construct narratives that present
difficult events even at the risk of an awkward construction, and even if this sometimes resulted in an unfavorable level 2 position. Sharp articulations that bent to a favorable, optimistic position, on the other hand, generally bolstered the favorability of level 2 positioning.

I present as examples five sharply articulated stories, selected for their clarity, to illustrate ways that sharp articulation moves functioned in the interview. The stories below make room for ambivalence, illustrate the twists of narrative required to maintain favorable positions in relation to negative experiences, and, ultimately, enact the realities of constructing ministry with decreasing resources.

**Highlighting paradox.** This occurred when a favorably-positioning narrative was given an additional coda that brought along a different perspective on the events, creating, in the end, a mixed attitude toward the narrative events, evinced in the final words of the telling.

In the following story, Mary describes her efforts to be straightforward about what she regards as essential work benefits:

*I was told to negotiate the maternity leave with the salary package when we came. That is the going—the wisdom is to do it then, because then you’re stuck there. A lot of churches wouldn’t do it. My current church wouldn’t do it. They said, “That’s a personnel issue.” So they wouldn’t. They said: “The search committee is not authorized to negotiate something like maternity leave.” I said: “But you can negotiate sabbaticals!” I think that definitely needs to change. I think that definitely needs to change, because it puts you at a disadvantage. And the search committee is like, “But will you love us enough that you’ll come no matter what?”* (Mary)

In this narrative, Mary positions herself as agentic in that she plans ahead and asserts her wishes during the negotiation of her contract. Had she ended the narrative with “that definitely
has to change,” this confident, agentic quality would have dominated the story and justified the active position she was enacting. By adding the coda “and the search committee is like, ‘But will you love us enough that you’ll come, no matter what?’” Mary indicates a deeper dilemmatic aspect of the job search. The effort changes her level 1 position from assertive to defeated negotiator. Level 3 is implicit: because of the limited job market, she doesn’t have the luxury to turn down the offer, and loving the people who rebuffed her efforts will be demanded of her. In Baerger & McAdams’s (1999) model, the lack of coherence is caused by a lack of integration with her overall focus on agency and intentionality; her stance is undone by the failure of her negotiation.

Labov (1972) suggested that quotations within narratives constitute evaluation clauses. The example above, and many others in the present data, accords with Alaoui (2014), who found that in conversational anecdotes, such quotes, known as reported speech, may dominate the action and its resolution, working through the tensions, ambivalent attitudes, and building meaning, or indirectly evaluating characters. According to Jones and Schieffelin (2009, p. 78), reported speech “introduces vividly enacted voicings of the speech, thought, and demeanor of different personae. By enquoting [they] dramatize moral situations.” Such an effect is seen as Mary lodges a moral judgment against the search committee. Although she succeeds in heightening her moral ground in the focus group, by reporting the words she remembers from the search committee, her concession simultaneously surrenders her agency. Given the prevailing competitive job market and the needs of her family, she accepts their offer.

**Juggling to maintain a favorable positioning.** In the next example, Joan discusses the difficult choices inherent in choosing to accept a job offer:

*And even in the context of this Presbytery, and I’m somebody who’s had the benefit of*
having had a career, and being a little older, so I’m maybe a little less vulnerable than I was twenty years ago, in some ways, and knowing a few people—even with all of that: horrible! You self-doubt and, “Oh, what have I done?” and “Oh, my God! I have a family!” and I was ambivalent right down to the wire. And now. . . ok, now I sort of have my head above water, but is this the new normal? I’m talking a quarter, a quarter of what I was making, because that’s just the reality of it. And I wouldn’t change it for all the tea in China, but on the other hand, does it have to be that way? (Joan)

In this example, we see the narrative work exerted to preserve the speaker’s sense of professional and ideological normativity. Although her narrative focuses on the difficulty of securing a fair position, in the end Joan expresses a deep commitment: “I wouldn’t change it for all the tea in China.” With that statement she marks herself as a committed clergywoman, even as she confronts her financial dilemma, and questions whether ministry has become a high-skill, low-wage profession. The sharp articulation (“I wouldn’t change it for all the tea…”), inserted as an aside, mutes the effect of her critique of the hiring system, lest it be considered unseemly in light of her calling. Van den Berg (2004) observed that contradictions in the discourse of research interviews may be related to the juxtaposition of different narrative goals, among which second-level positioning, and impression-management stand out.

Learning as positioning strategy. Sharp articulations may shift a narrative about a troublesome event toward a positive position by reframing an awkward or difficult experience as a learning one. An example follows:

[At the end of the council] meeting, I prayed for [each of the elders] and I missed [one person]. And she called me at nine o’clock that night and her speech was slurred, and she was raking me out, and I was so apologetic and, “Oh I didn’t mean to, I’ll pray for
you now,” and we prayed on the phone . . . And Monday . . . she came and started the whole thing over. She had not remembered, and I said, “Yes! When you called, you—” She looked at me, and she didn’t remember she had called me. And that’s how I learned about alcoholism and your short-term memory. (Celia)

The rapid flow of 11 clauses linked with the conjunction “and” illustrate how, despite her active role, the pastor is decidedly unable to gain any control of an awkward situation, until the final clause, “and that’s how I learned about alcoholism and your short-term memory.” As the action unfolds, Celia has no success in calming the elder’s concern. In the final evaluation, though, she repairs the narrative as a favorable learning event.

There were 15 narratives in which a statement about “learning” or “figuring out” was used to close a story in which the level 1 position was unfavorable, confirming the assessment of learning as a tactic for stake inoculation (Van den Berg, 2004). The abrupt link to the “learning” clause in this example, combined with an equally abrupt shift in the speaker’s emotional tone, support this interpretation. Beyond impression management, stories of interpersonal conflict are associated with learning and insight (Thorne, McLean & Lawrence, 2004), and are told more often, beginning within a day of the event (Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot & Boca, 1991).

Level 2 positioning is central to the meaning of stories that focus on learning. The episodes chosen for narration appear to be selected because they present examples of challenges related to the decline. In the example above, Celia has been describing the makeup of her congregation that now sits in a seedy downtown neighborhood. That she has alcoholic members even on her board is presented as intrinsic to the decay of the church, along with its neighborhood. However, this openness leaves the speaker exposed in a not altogether flattering story, a position that requires neutralization easily accomplished by learning from the event. This
analysis is supported by the fact that most of these stories are of events that occurred well in the past, compared to the more spontaneous narration of recent events that dominated the interviews, and had likely been the subject of reflection and learning across time.

**Vortex time reference.** The next excerpt, in addition to exemplifying a sharp articulation, illustrates the use of vortex time in narration, which “converges several different reasons and events into one single point, a catastrophe” (Bülow & Hydén, 2003, p.79), and also shows the importance of structural coherence, including the temporal logic of unfolding events (Baerger & McAdams, 1999) In this story, Betty explains her congregation’s slow progress toward fully establishing a contemporary worship service:

*So, we have two services, one that they call contemporary, one traditional, and they hired me to bring back the contemporary service. And we’ve been on that trajectory, slowly. This is a congregation that’s diverse because of our geographic location [lists different constituencies in the congregation]. . . And I mean, it's fabulous! We have a gospel choir, and our traditional choir. . . It's just great. . . But it is slow. So, we have found that in moving that contemporary service, the trajectory has been to put up flat screens, to set up the contemporary service by having multimedia in the service. So, we spent the last two years during sermons showing those [visual aids] that went with the sermon, putting the music up on the screen. So, when the screens come, those who have the inner turmoil have arrived. (Betty)*

Early in the narrative, Betty alternates the action of preparing the worship space with extended evaluation clauses describing the stakeholders in the congregation, whom she cheerfully affirms. But the final clause, “those who have the inner turmoil have arrived,” is incongruent with the praise she has heaped on the diverse membership groups and the overall
process she narrated. The sharp articulation is set up by the evaluations interspersed in the story that minimize the obstacles as merely examples of “slow” progress. Rather than building up the causes of her dilemma, Betty describes the resisting constituencies as “great!” and “fabulous!” Only in examining the transcript does it become clear that the complicating action in the plot is, in fact, the contentiousness of church members, rather than the practical elements of altering the physical space. Since open criticism of lay members would seem unprofessional, Betty sacrifices the cogency of her story for positioning herself as an understanding and supportive pastor.

The sharp articulation is not the sole point of awkward storytelling. Betty also uses the pronoun “we” to refer to different and even ambiguous individuals. The first use: “we have two services” is inclusive of the whole church. But the pronoun in “we have found that in moving that contemporary service…” more likely refers to her own thoughts and observations, while “we spent the last two years…” does not specify the strength of support for the project. How isolated she may be in the church culture remains vague, despite being significant to the narrative.

Time is also out of chronological order in Betty’s narrative. Having begun the narrative in standard sequential order, she places the climax of events in what seems to be early in the two-year period she cites. Hanging the projection screens is described as the moment of greatest contention, though the “slow” progress she cites may not refer to how long it took to get them hung, but to the slow rate of acceptance by the congregation of each element implemented. The confusion of time sequence and causes converge into a vortex of loss of control, overwhelming responsibility and dismayed possibility, underlined and brought together in the unexpected final clause, “those who have the inner turmoil have arrived.”

The awkward structure results from Betty’s effort to manage her position at each step: she must establish herself as a cheerfully supportive pastor even as she positions the members as
causing her difficulties. As a result, when it is time to establish the nature of her problem, which is the members’ reluctance to accept the changes she implements, she must do so in the context of having just praised them. Using “and” and “so” to link out-of-sequence clauses, Betty smooths the narrative flow that belies the mounting resistance to her plan.

Though Betty’s efforts fell short, her aim is understandable, and indeed, one would expect a good pastor to be an expert at presenting difficulties in the best light possible. Undoubtedly, Betty would not have progressed this far in her career were she not able to do this. Thus, Betty’s narrative is not merely a report of stymied efforts, but is also a revealing account of her tangled efforts to talk about everything that is going on, at a time when the outcome of her project and the state of her career are still uncertain. In time, she may be able to tell this story with more finesse. As Mishler (2006) noted, one important feature of narratives is the ease with which they can be revised and retold.

**Improvised reflection.** That sharp articulations are an indication that a narrative’s construction is still being refined is suggested even more strongly by the following story. Joyce tells it in response to others in the focus group who advocate for greater public expression of belief to counteract the changing status of Christianity. Referring to her own congregation, Joyce describes the opposite problem: they use religious talk too easily, without enough reflection. The events are fresh, and Joyce herself seems to be evaluating them as she composes the story:

> At the Bible study last night, they use that language, that’s how they think, that’s how they approach the Bible, some of them – I’m still learning, but they’re still... There’s a member of the Bible study who lives at a rescue mission, [he’s] in recovery. And he “shared” there, and they talked to him like, two of them, like he’s gonna need a conversion! “Don’t worry brother, just have faith in Jesus,” and “Devil’s trying you.”
So, they don’t have a problem talking like that, but again, it’s from that us-them, we are-you aren’t perspective. So, they’re exactly the type of church that we dissected when I was at seminary, and are continuing to be, and that’s why they’re declining, because they’re stuck. I mean, I graduated over 30 years ago. . . ! So, they need to understand that “the church” is not them solely anymore, if it ever was. That— that young man in his rescue mission is the church. **He is the church!** He doesn’t say it the way they want him to say it, and they take it out on him. (Joyce)

Joyce distances herself from the other focus group members by suggesting that religious talk can easily be used to create boundaries, separating an “in” group from those who use a different language code to talk about their struggles, in this case a man who uses the twelve-step language of Alcoholics Anonymous groups in a church meeting.

The plot of Joyce’s narrative is made up entirely of an abbreviated description of an exchange among the attendees of a small group. The evaluation clauses set up, layer by layer, a contrast with the talk in the action clauses. The parishioners’ religious talk is represented as ineffective, for which the decline is cited as proof. Though her peers in the focus group might consider the same talk as supportive encouragement of a troubled visitor, Joyce first describes it as oppositional (“us-them,” “we are-you aren’t”) and then as combative (“they take it out on him”). I coded this as a sharp articulation because the announcement, “[He] is the church, he is the church!” is unexpected, and remains incompletely explained, though it works to flip even more radically the insider-outsider roles necessary to bring meaning to the church’s future.

Though her opinions are bluntly presented, Joyce’s own positioning, a favorable level 2, is performed by showing that she does the theological work, evaluating her new church by the progressive standards of her seminary. She thus positions herself as a forward-thinking interim
pastor. This is accomplished by means of a digression to her seminary-taught representation of “church,” which anchors her argument that a visitor struggling with addiction constitutes what authentic “church” dialogue should be about. Joyce’s argument is not against the lay members, per se, but differentiates between his sharing, which is healthy, and theirs, which contributes to decline by marginalizing ordinary struggling people.

In addition, to reduce the threat of being placed in an unfavorable level 2 position for not having intervened in the interaction she describes, Joyce describes herself as a learner, new in her role as interim pastor, even though she was leading the group study. She makes the story not about her, thus mitigating her vulnerability to criticism. However, uncertainty and contextual pressure increase the need for hedging maneuvers to protect one’s moral standing (Czerwionka, 2012). Despite establishing her theological credentials, the improvised, incomplete representation of church dilutes the authority of her voice.

Structurally, the sharp articulation in Joyce’s story is an example of a narrative in which the construction has not yet attained clarity and coherence. While narrating an event from just a few hours prior, Joyce puts together her theory of the decline, to wit, that it stems not merely from society’s changing attitudes toward the metaphysical, but from the church’s failure to change its attitudes toward what is fully human, as well. The narrative is awkward because its meaning gradually takes shape as the story unfolds, and the spontaneous exclamation, “he is the church” is not immediately comprehensible as cogent. The narrative structure confuses her meaning as well as framing it.

To summarize, narratives with sharp articulations are those stories in which a degree of coherence is sacrificed for a more immediate communicative priority. Among the communicative priorities most relevant to the purpose of the present study, are those related to
the decline. The possibly problematic consequences of not fully addressing the demands that the decline places on clergy are suggested by research that points to narratives as developmental processes where negative emotions resulting from experiences can be processed, and coherent positivity toward the future may be achieved (Pals, 2006a). Pals suggests that transformational emotional processing and coherence contribute independently to development and maturity, whereas Gergen & Gergen (2011) and McAdams (2005) go further, and downplay the importance of coherence. All of this together suggests that even in today’s saturated world, the developmental balance favors transformational processing over protecting one’s own situated vulnerability; this is seen in the data, in that those pastors exposed to decline expend less urgent effort to achieve coherence than those unexposed to it. Overall, the number of stories that include complex transformational processing constitute a small percentage of the total, precluding the drawing of more definitive conclusions.

Conclusions

Analyses of interviewee’s narratives revealed particular, subtle elements of how the women were constructing decline. The narrative way of communication allowed them to illustrate deeper interactive and emotionally impactful dimensions of decline, and, particularly, to convey tentative and ambivalent attitudes toward it. Narratives allowed them to go beyond the dominant Presbyterian social representation. Furthermore, short codas, often made as a side comment about the pastoring life, revealed the grit of the decline, without going so far as to assert declaratively a theory of decline.

Though most positioning in the narratives was favorable, as would be expected in stories told by confident, competent professionals, the narratives sometimes laid bare the double-talk of reported speech, the twists of sharp articulations that talking about the decline demands in order
to permit the speaker to maintain a favorable position across the duration of a research interview. The sharp articulations, present in 12% of the narratives, allowed improvised, ambivalent, and mixed attitudes to permeate the participants’ representations of decline and of themselves working in the midst of the phenomenon. Their use also highlights how narrating decline situates the speaker at its fulcrum: judiciously-selected story elements can stimulate thinking about the decline, but full disclosure comes with a risk of lost standing and authority. Those who had most experienced the decline were more willing to take that risk.

These findings suggest that exposure to decline softened the prioritizing of favorable positioning over frank talk about the concrete description of situations where decline is felt. Stated another way, the analysis exposed that a degree of courage may be required to fully narrate one’s exposure to the process of church decline. Interviewees hazarded frank assertions and descriptions of decline, even when the result was an unfavorable position at level 1 or even level 2, and used sharp articulations that countered the tendency to prioritize landing in a favorable self-position, demonstrating how narratives addressed the social and personal dimensions of the transitions of decline, and were thus useful tools in the course of development.
Chapter Nine
Discussion and Conclusions

Overview

In this study, I have used social representation theory and discursive methods to explore developmental challenges posed to the clergy by social change brought about by the loss of membership and resources in one mainline denomination. I document a Presbyterian social representation of decline, the core of which aligned with a report on decline issued by the PCUSA (GATF, 1991). One way in which the representation has evolved since 1991 is in the more explicit and extensive way that diversity is conceptualized. Consonant with this, a subgroup in the sample was identified based on its concern for justice issues regarding inclusivity along lines of racial, gender and sexual identification. Distinct differences in the way that exposed and unexposed pastors compose their fields of representation, and the types of narratives that they compose, establish them as subgroups. The discursive analysis also suggests that concern about gender parity may inform many clergywomen’s representation of decline, in particular regarding the availability of pastoral positions and the nature of sacrifices they may be called upon to make.

Representation is found to be both a process and a product whose evolution interlaces with personal development. The findings shape a view of human development within those processes, found in the way that themêta, themes, narratives and religious language are appropriated and combined to construct utterances and narratives that shape a speaker’s own thinking and action.
Discussion of Findings

**Representation of church and decline.** The findings suggest the continuing dominance of themes addressed in the GATF (1991) report in how people talk about the decline. They also show, in the women’s narratives, the benefits and challenges presented by the effort to lead congregations that mirror the increasing diversity of their communities. Though but marginal and obliquely-described topics in the task force report, in the present study they constitute the topic addressed by the greatest number of participants. References to race and sexual orientation, taken together, signaled sensitivity to the demands of integration that proved relevant to the discussion of decline.

Objectifying the social representation of decline were four themâta. That of “death versusliveliness” had the potential drawback, already evident in the stories told by the participants, of becoming self-fulfilling. A policy dialogue, reported by participants from different presbyteries, appears to center around which churches qualify as “dying,” and should therefore be encouraged to close rather than drain presbytery resources. Another themâta, “movement versus stagnation,” allowed thoughtful reflection and hopeful discourse to emerge, while still addressing some core dynamics that were seen as causing membership loss. The third pair, “growth versus decline,” had the advantage of being the vehicle for direct claims of decline or the absence of it.

One of the most disputed aspects of representing decline revolved around the lack of agreement on what are the institutional implications of the decline, which is captured in the fourth themâta of “decline as positive versus negative.” This question is not new, having been debated in Coalter et al. (1990a). The task force itself addressed the issue, concluding that “faithfulness to Jesus Christ in a particular congregational setting may lead to membership growth or decline, or may maintain the current membership level” (GATF, 1991, p. 38).
Participants in the present study also differed in the meanings they attributed to the consequences of membership loss, and created several distinct positions toward the decline.

One overall position, that of accepting the decline, was associated with several standpoints and motivations; these were not always congruent among themselves. They ranged from pastors’ positive memories of growing up in a small, more intimate church, to associating any change with a degree of healthy reform, and equating decline with purging the church of superficial gloss. This stance tended to prize variety of viewpoints and structure among local congregations, and to value diverse understandings of the functions of the church. Also contributing to the acceptance of decline was the view that the PCUSA, as a socio-cultural institution, was inevitably bound up in historical cycles of growth and decline, patterns which were sometimes magnified by the long endurance of church buildings themselves (see Hudnut-Beumler, 1983; and Coalter, Mulder & Weeks, 1990b, for historical overviews).

The emancipatory representations (Moscovici, 1988; Ben-Asher, 2003) shaped by this perspective gave preference to some elements of the Presbyterian tradition as being worthy of promotion, including a representation of the church as an activity that includes service on behalf of others, rather than as an institution needing support, or using up the energy of its members. This service was sometimes described idealistically as thriving under conditions of scarcity and opposition. The decline, understood from this stance, was minimized as a meaningful measure of a church when compared with its ethical responsibility, independent of its size or social status. Thus, conversation about decline was sometimes shrugged off in favor of talk focused on justice.

Decline was also seen from the opposite perspective, as a destructive process that should be resisted. Pastors of small churches offered examples of the dysfunctional organizational dynamics to which shrinking congregations are particularly vulnerable, such as closing ranks
against newcomers, consolidation of power within an entrenched group, and the paralyzing
effects of fear. The reduced support provided by large, moneved churches, or their departure to
other denominations, was viewed as a threat to the meaningful ministry to disadvantaged
communities that is undertaken by small churches, work which might be devalued in a climate of
decline, or even flounder without the financial backing of larger sister churches.

These practical perspectives were juxtaposed with others, more clearly ideological, which
tended to shift the conversation away from descriptions of decline to talk of that which was
thriving in the church, opposing decline less by argument than by posing simple
counterexamples. From this standpoint, the decline is a small, overemphasized dimension within
the overall life of the church. Decline was also sometimes described as something that happens
to some churches and not others, dismissing the loss posed to the denomination as a whole.

Adding to these polar views was evidence of the non-linear processes of decline and
growth, as pastors described congregations seeming to be near their end as nonetheless engaged
in meaningful ministry. Similarly, a pastor might describe a large, thriving church as already
dead. Such paradoxes of decline were cited by pastors of churches of different sizes and
exposure to it, and suggest an evolutionary thread in the representation of the decline. Engaged
in cognitive polyphasia, most participants represented the decline in both accepting and resistant
ways across their interviews, discursively constituting the conditions of their work, aware that
they will be among the most personally affected by whatever comes. Notably, both standpoints
had reasons to minimize direct and frank talk about the decline, though for opposite reasons.

**A taboo on communication.** The present study was conceived around a question about
the limited nature of public debate on the issue of the decline, beyond the dominant polemic
concerning the ordination standards regarding sexuality. This latter controversy appeared to be
shielding the church from open discussion about an ongoing avenue of change in the PCUSA. Might people be hesitant to discuss the decline openly? The question appeared to be validated in the interviews, in which the initial questions elicited more stereotypical applications of social representations of decline, though overall, a wide range of talk was provided by exposed and unexposed participants alike.

Careful management of talk about difficult matters is not unique to this group of workers. Moscovici (1961/2008, p. 52) had identified a “taboo” on open communication that leads to the diffusion of ideas, and Daiute (2011) found young narrators making choices about what not to say. I found three strategies being deployed in ways that deflected difficult dialogue. First, as discussed in chapter eight, participants used narrative evaluation and positioning to frame stories in a way that shielded them from a full accounting for the events being told. Second, the pastors told stories in which they were not featured as protagonists, thus reducing their personal exposure to criticism. Such language tactics have been found elsewhere, with vulnerability and risk addressed in relation to other characters, rather than oneself (Daiute, Eisenberg, & Vasconcellos, 2015; Daiute, Todorova, & Kovács-Cerović, 2015) or framed as fiction rather than autobiography (Daiute, 2004, 2011, 2012). The third tactical move involved using religious language, as described in chapters seven and eight, to assert either the transcendence of the speaker’s personal faith or of the enduring power of the Christian ideology, in order to balance their talk.

Switching to religious language either placed past events or the future outside the range of human control, or assured providential care over it, an ideological tactic that automatically trumped any fear of decline. When used in this manner, the religious language appeared to work against “transformational processing,” which contributes toward maturity and well-being. As Pals
(2006a, b) found, coherence that comes without reflective exploration of emotions may result in “self-distancing,” despite making some contribution to well-being (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). More extensive processing of multiple perspectives and negative emotions prior to reaching a coherent and hopeful resolution has been found to be associated with better outcomes and greater measures of maturity (King & Patterson, 2000; King & Raspin, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2010; Pals, 2006a; Pasupathi, Fivush, & Hernández-Martínez, 2016; Reese et al., 2011). The situated nature of narration, though, precludes offering a formula for predicting outcomes from story-telling (Banks & Salmon, 2013).

The particular placement of the religious language made a difference in its effect. When it was introduced at the beginning of a speaking turn, or when initiating a narrative, it tended to facilitate the speaker’s opening up about difficult topics. Though the sample was too small for quantitative evaluation, the discursive analysis suggested that complexity in the talk increased when it was prefaced, rather than followed, by hedging moves involving religious assertions. Religious language used in the orientation to talk facilitated dialogue, and permitted the discussion of aspects of decline that might be said to contradict those religious affirmations. Asserting their faith credentials at the outset freed speakers to go on to describe, with less inhibition, overt decline in concrete ways. Thus, theological affirmations and religious language provided a hedge permitting freer talk for some pastors, whereas for those who inserted religious language later in a narrative, it did the opposite, interrupting progression toward deeper analysis.

The tension between adequate communication and protection of one’s vulnerability within the interview setting derives both from the nature of research interviews, in which it is the interviewer who initiates and frames the questions, and from the stigma associated with leading a church or denomination that is visibly declining. This stigma was inferred in the positioning
efforts intended to avoid it. Previous research has found that stigma hampers discourse
(Hammack et al., 2009; McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011; Squire, 2012; Thomas-MacLean,
2004), resulting in silence rather than in effective dialogue (Fivush, 2010).

In some focus groups, the example of one participant sharing her struggles related to the
decline helped others to open up also. The initiating participants were, in nearly every case,
pastors of churches that had been exposed to clear decline over a long period, and who thus
seemed to have become less inhibited by whatever stigma might attach to them. They also
tolerated figuring awkwardly in some of their own narratives, although they still created
favorable self-presentations across the interview as a whole.

Going against the natural inclination to protect one’s self-presentation has been found to
be a function of age (Rice & Pasupathi, 2010), with emergent adults engaged in more repair
work when narrating a self-discrepant autobiographical event than older ones. Exposed pastors,
regardless of age, appear to expend less effort to manage level 2 positions when speaking of
decline, perhaps because they have made peace with its personal implications.

These pastors spoke of decline as a legitimate, though unwelcome, description of their
own churches and the denomination as a whole. They were more willing to discuss its
paradoxical qualities, as they more freely and complexly composed representational themes of
decline. Discursive analysis revealed that there were no participants, though, who spoke of
decline carelessly, or who failed to monitor their self-presentation. Together, the narratives
suggest that the church might more profitably take a propagation strategy rather than the
hegemonic propagandist approach, and adopt a less defensive stance toward discussion of the
decline.

This is not to say that the pastors of stable, non-declining churches made lesser
contributions to the study. Many had well-formulated theologies of decline, and articulated theories of it in ways consonant with Presbyterian ideology; such formulations were sometimes reported as being the products of staff discussions. These pastors also described very specific, often successful, activity that was undertaken intentionally to avoid talk of decline.

If a taboo on communication may be said to have been in play, it related less to the quantity of talk, and more to giving priority to coherence as a form of favorable self-presentation over working through negative emotions. This might not be a necessary tradeoff, according to Pals’s (2006a) findings that both goals can be achieved through parallel processes. The care in talking, though, affirms the relevance of the addressee (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986; Daiute, 2010, 2011) to what is said, and of the positions from which one speaks (Zittoun et al., 2003). Self-censure is often indicative of social maturity, a skill expected to be much practiced among the clergy, and not to be confused with a taboo.

In sum, the present study did not identify an explicit institutionally-driven taboo on talking of the decline, though the data found restraint pointing to an inadequate agentic repertoire for working out the meaning of experiences of decline. Open conversation contributes to the diffusion and natural evolution of understanding, but requires abundant opportunities for interaction in which tentative emancipatory, or even polemic, perspectives can safely enter dialogue. Speech does not simply verbalize existing realities, but “always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable” (Bahktin, 1986, p. 119), so that change comes about more effectively by means of ongoing, unfettered interpersonal dialogue. Such processes of diffusion require effort. “Complex stories require people—individuals, groups, and communities—to work hard to avoid losing complexity and oversimplifying” (Pasupathi et al., 2012, p. 50). With decline being associated with negative
futures for clergy and the institution as a whole, a reluctance to expend the required effort may be understandable, but could contribute to the least desirable future coming about.

**Identified subgroups.** Aside from the broad representational positions, the study identified groups that constructed representations in distinct ways, shaped by exposure to decline, by concern for racial integration and equality, and by gender. Exposure to decline was found to shape representation in two specific ways: pastors exposed to decline included more concrete description of the effects and nature of decline than those who were not directly exposed. Exposure also shaped the narratives of decline. Pastors of exposed churches composed more narratives in which they were unfavorably positioned, and their narratives with sharp articulations were more likely than those of the unexposed pastors to bend from favorable toward unfavorable or pessimistic positions.

Because unfavorable positioning at any level poses a challenge to personal status and authority, the risks associated with exposure were not found merely in the demands of working with shrinking resources, though there was abundant evidence of this. The exposed pastors’ talk suggests that it may be difficult to represent the full measure of change occasioned by decline without imperiling one’s self presentation. Thus, I considered the choices made to speak frankly of decline to constitute acts of courage that aid the development of wisdom as moral professional leaders.

Another subgroup, made up of pastors who advocate for racial and sexual integration, was distinguished by a repudiation of the central importance of the decline. What characterized their representational standpoint was not denial that churches are losing membership, financial security, or community status; indeed, their statements were embedded in their recognition of those changes. Their representation was anchored in advocacy for a more open dialogue about
the meaning and purposes of the Presbyterian church in light of continuing racism both inside the church and in American society at large, and in a commitment to raise concern over what it means for local presbyteries to offer decreasing support for ministries that fight injustice. In the view of these pastors, talk of decline is meaningless unless it includes a reconsideration of the core values and meaning of being Presbyterian.

As all of the participants were women, gender was not technically a subgroup of the sample. However, there were indications suggesting that many expected some type of (often unspecified) interaction between gender and decline. Nearly all the women told at least one story of gender-related bias, harassment, or discrimination, though they were divided on the issue of whether gender limited the exercise of their calling, and on whether they felt that gender was a determining factor in the decline. No systematic differentiation among these attitudes was attempted, though it bears saying that the women working in the South often stated that they felt that discrimination in terms of race, gender and sexuality was more overt in their geographic area than in others. Nonetheless, the belief that women will be disproportionately affected by the continuing decline introduced gender themes as a distinctive representation of decline.

A striking discursive gesture was identified in the way some participants alluded to their calling as a tool to modify their presentation of agency, using different grammatical formulations. These were deployed to manage dilemmas of agency, minimizing accusations of ambition, on the one hand, and helplessness on the other. The strongest formulations indicate increasingly serious challenges to the full exercise of the calling that they claim, most of which were described as minimizing their pastoral authority, based on race, gender and sexuality. The subtlety of these practices suggests that female pastors expect that self-advocacy based on justice arguments alone may meet resistance, or may be dismissed as unseemly. Appealing to the
unassailable divine call provides a safe ground from which to discursively address such problems.

**Representation and power.** The variety of opinions and positions produced in the course of the interviews and making up cognitive polyphasia are more than a collection of interchangeable attitudes, they constitute a “harbinger of conflict,” because representation is, in practice, rife with the politics of power (Moscovici, 1961/2008, p. 52). Although the meaning of decline was contested, it did not rise to the level of a polemic. For the most part, though, the sample conceptualized emancipatory (Ben-Asher, 2003; Moscovici, 1988) relationships between the church and society. At a more superficial level, emancipatory themes addressed innovations that might make the church more congenial to contemporary families, ranging from altering worship styles to reconfiguring the building itself. More profoundly, emancipatory representations reconfigured the hierarchy of what is important to the PCUSA. They prioritized spiritual development, a focus on mission and justice, and community service over institutional stability. Underlying the emancipatory views was the begrudging toleration of the decline of Christianity, and a tacit acceptance that the decline further erodes the dominant status of Presbyterians in American society. In that light, emancipatory themes expressed the hope for alternative positive positions for the denomination.

Where a budding polemic stance might have been most expected was in relation to the economics of religious work. There was nearly unanimous agreement that the PCUSA cannot guarantee job security or career advancement. Exposed and unexposed participants alike spoke of careers becoming ever harder to build in a redefined church. In only a few interviews were creative and novel designs for clergy compensation methods discussed, though only tentatively.
Although they understood their situations to be systemically unfair, most of the women seemed to treat career issues as a personal problem to be coped with privately, rather than as a shared challenge to be resolved collectively, confirming both Cody-Rydzewski’s (2006, 2007) and Chang’s (2005) findings. Indeed, the narratives of self-sacrifice suggest that the dual positions that clergywomen occupy as both spokespersons for the church and as workers in the church are likely to be uncomfortably juxtaposed with the impact of the decline. As Christopherson’s (1994) study of both male and female clergy found, devotion to calling and pursuit of career goals can be incompatible impulses, and often place pastors and their families in awkward relationships to their own security.

Reflections on Human Development

Social representation theory, though central to this study, was not originally considered to be a theory of personal development. Diffusion, propagation and propaganda are not linear stages for personal change, but are instead phenomena of social change. Nonetheless, the present study demonstrates the dynamic processes of representation, which Moscovici (1961/2008) understood as mediating not only how people communicate but also what they want to convey, and what consequences they hope to bring about. Further, the data confirmed how representation implicates the self in its triadic dynamic processes, therefore constructs the self in the act of conceptualizing the object.

Discourse and development. The discursive approaches taken in this study have located the evidence for development in language. The effective and creative use of social representations to address specific locally-meaningful situations was amply demonstrated as mature skills that continue to adapt in line with the new demands posed by ongoing changes. Supporting predictions of the hierarchical organization of knowledge (Werner, 1957; Franklin,
representations were sometimes used in fairly stereotypical ways, especially early in the interviews, and more creatively as the interviews proceeded. Stimulated by the social interactions, richer conceptualizations of the decline unfolded both for individuals and for the groups, although more simplistic meanings were applied when appropriate. The most advanced development discourse was found as the pastors found ways to coordinate multiple areas of concern, talking about ideological commitments in ways that legitimized and affirmed their service even as their resources were dwindling, so that activity, cognition and discourse were integrated.

Evidence also points to the positioning occurring in the articulations between action and evaluative clauses as a site of development. Pastors exposed to decline composed significantly more narratives in which they were positioned unfavorably than did unexposed pastors, and when their narratives a sharp shift in direction, were more likely to shift from a favorable to an unfavorable and pessimistic position and outcome. The developmental significance of these findings is that the narratives were being used not only to communicate with others, but also signal engagement with the speaker’s own intentions in the midst of narrating as action and evaluative clauses are strung together in evolving meaning.

The most advanced development was seen as occurring in the narration of events that have not yet been fully interpreted. Participants applied representational themes to relevant, often very recent, experiences, so that the interview served the double purpose of figuring out the meaning of recent events while contributing to the interview task. Participants thus integrated abstract elements of decline with concrete details in their lives, nimbly managing multiple social motivation vectors, and taking care to avoid saying something that might take social, emotional and linguistic effort to repair later on.
Morality and development. It was in speaking of things that mattered most to the participants that the pressures of differentiation and integration became most visible. For example, when Celia explains how she breaks some traditions but upholds others, or when Paula tells of confronting a committee interviewing her for a job but letting her elders take the lead in major projects in her own church, and when Kathleen describes her bubble of faith and her bubble of fear they are each drawing distinctions in line with deeply felt philosophies of ministry. These inner debates, emerging from participation in the research interview, constitute meaningful development, as they engage their ideology in reaching toward a wished-for future.

Statements of religious ideology were used in the interviews not only as identity markers, but enabled the pastors to strategize those goals that might be achievable in conditions of decline. The tension between the professional responsibility to adhere to the church’s essential tradition, and the need to move beyond it in order to discern where reform is called for was tangible in most interviews, and is here identified as a prime locus of professional development. The opposing concepts inherent in themâta also create tension that can stimulate development, because they demand that choices, that are implicitly moral, be made regarding which of the polar opposites to emphasize at a given moment, or which aspect of a social representation to preserve as central and which to abandon or alter.

This study thus leads to the conclusion that development is centrally, not peripherally, moral and ideological. That clergywomen, using their restricted discourse of religion (Foucault, 1977), were ideological in explaining the reasons why they accepted and rejected particular representational themes, hardly needs saying. But ideology perfuses all representational triads, and autobiographical narratives involve choice (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Sarbin, 1995). Social positioning likewise includes selecting those rights and responsibilities that will be accepted in
each alignment (Andreouli, 2010; Davies & Harré, 1990). Thus, it is not the apparent belief system of the person doing the representational work, or the nature of the particular object being represented, that bring ideology to the fore; it is the very processes of representing and narrating that do so.

Developmental discernment may occur mid-narrative, for example, and therefore result in sharp articulations, or may come about gradually, mid-conversation, in the give and take of constructing explanations that may reach back to draw on elements of a seminary education, for example, or that may have evolved slowly over the course of a career. Similar ideological negotiation is also involved when deciding to use an interview about the decline to make a point about something else that matters even more, such as race or gender.

What is revealed here is that what is developing is not just the pastors’ understanding of decline in the abstract, or of the concrete challenges it presents. In choosing their language and actions, the participants are also evolving a sense of the commitments it calls forth in them, as they consider what risks they are prepared to take, and decide the depth at which to discuss the issue. Against this ideological context, each transient linguistic choice has developmental implications that are formed as it is reiterated and translated into other types of action. For example, choosing to describe a disheartened congregation as “dying” may eventually lead to the church’s closure, as the linguistic metaphor becomes a model for subsequent judgements and strategic behavior.

Though not always described as moral, such choices are legitimate objects of research on the coordination of language and action (Bruner, 1990, 2002; Daiute, 2011, 2012; Mishler, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Development thus takes place in relation to each person’s standpoint, and is constrained by those cultures in which the person moves. The shape that development takes
depends on each person’s contextual “moral project” (Taylor, 1989), which in turn influences the sense of what constitutes a good and just life, and contributes to the conceptualization of a just community. For the clergywoman, that project is infused with Christian ideology, though she may be aware that this ideology is less meaningful to Americans now than it was a generation ago. It also reflects the Presbyterian commitment to ongoing reformation, which for this group of pastors includes creating the means for greater inclusivity and equality.

According to Foucault (1977, 1986), agency and autonomy, whether directed toward the care of oneself or the care of others, develops within constraints posed by the external dominance of institutions and the inner power of one’s own standards of self-discipline. Implicit in the awareness of the struggle between these is the understanding that no ideology’s power is always benevolent (see Daiute, 2011). The representational themâta that surround clergy carry implications that will benefit some pastors and congregations over others, or support insiders more than those who reject religion. Developmentally significant choices are continually made and remade, without access to full knowledge, in cycles of ceding to and resisting personal and social powers. Power is thus always integral to development, whether this is conceived as personal or as collective. Adopting and recalibrating one’s standpoint across time means to consider which hegemonic values to support, when to imagine and construct emancipation, and how to draw effective polemical descriptions of a reality that needs to change.

Negotiating the multiple sources of power is thus as crucial to development as negotiating the language with which the challenges of decline will be addressed. The present findings confirm that resistance to hegemonic representations comes at a price, evidenced in the constant monitoring of level 2 positioning in the interviews. What is usually at risk in most
choices is no more than status and esteem, though some of the lesbian participants reported having been at risk of losing their ordination.

The present study confirms that in adulthood development often has courage and wisdom as catalysts and byproducts. This implies that the developmental reach will be farther in those engagements that involve taking the greatest risk on behalf of what is seen as promoting the good of both community and self, than it would be for activity that unreflectively appropriates given representations, even though the latter may also constitute developmental mastery (Ingold & Hallam, 2007). The study also confirms the unity of individual and institutional development: each discernment and choice made by the clergywoman constructs not only her life, but also her church, and, less visibly, society at large, and serves to illustrate the unity of personal and social development (Stetsenko, 2012, 2013; Stetsenko & Areivitch, 2004).

**Sacrifice and development.** The data included widespread talk of self-sacrifice among the pastors. Compared with studies of sacrifice talk among other professionals and other studies of the clergy, where sacrifice is considered to be an integral dimension of their calling (Baines, Charlesworth, Cunningham, & Dassinger, 2012; De Marzio, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Pask, 2005), participants in the present study spoke of sacrifice with resentment rather than pride.

In describing the conditions of work in churches that are losing members, pastors alluded to congregations that are needier, poorer, and more elderly. Their hard work would have seemed more acceptable, they posit, had it been met by collaboration, which was less forthcoming in depressed congregations, in which much effort is expended to resolve trivial problems aggravated by internal conflicts, or by fear and grief.

The narratives of self-sacrifice, however, did not emerge mostly in relation to caring for the congregation. Instead, the most dramatic narratives involved sacrifice directed toward the
church as institution: several pastors considered giving up their positions and even offered to do so, one accepted a career in post-sexual-abuse situations, and another took a job without benefits. None of these women described the sacrifices they made as benefitting parishioners. Instead, in direct and indirect ways, they constructed their self-sacrifice as responding to the need to protect the Presbyterian Church as institution.

Furthermore, the clergywomen told most stories of sacrifice as constituting unchosen choices. The sacrificial moves were not narrated as enactments of love and devotion, but as the most dignified way to position themselves as agentic in contexts of constraint or exclusion, taking up what was sometimes the very opposite of what they actually wanted. As exceptions to these, however, stand the references to the divine call. Though each grammatical construction was found to shape a different meaning, discourse of call made available to the clergy a way to protest the limits placed on their ability to work, limits that were not claimed as a voluntary sacrifice, but were instead described as standing in opposition to divine will.

A broader cultural rejection of notions of both sacrifice and calling in American society was possibly influential in the pastors’ talk. In a study of change in American culture, Bellah et al. (1985) observed that even though their interviewees were evidently generous,

Our respondents had difficulty when they sought a language in which to articulate their reasons for commitments that went beyond the self. These confusions were particularly clear when they discussed problems of sacrifice and obligation. . . they were troubled by the ideal of self-denial the term ‘sacrifice’ implied (pp. 109-110).

They go on to say that in some cases, “too much of the purely contractual structure of the economic and bureaucratic world is becoming an ideological model for personal life” (p. 126). This perspective was in play in a focus group in which one pastor was pressured by others to
reject requests for personal aid by immigrant members, advocating that she develop stronger personal boundaries, even though the pastor insisted that there were inadequate community services to supplement what she did. Against such diminished views of sacrifice, writers from other professions advocate a more integrated perspective.

Writers from the fields of nursing (Pask, 2005) and teaching (De Marzio, 2009) embrace Platonic ideals of love and of the superiority of care of vulnerable others over care of self as an integral dimension of their calling and professional training. At the minimum, this approach renders the sacrifice more meaningful, a perspective echoed in Cho’s (2012, 2014) acceptance of unusual and poorly-paid pastoral jobs. A more measured approach is taken by Valentine-Maher (2008), who constructs a balanced view of professional love, and van Nistelrooij (2014), who suggests identifying elements of reciprocity even among the neediest recipients of care.

Fontaine (2009) goes even further, abandoning Plato’s idealism altogether as a model for teachers. Instead, he sets forth Heidegger’s (1962) concept of *eigentlichkeit* as a better model. Often translated as “authenticity,” the term implies responsibility, or owning up to and caring deeply about one’s self in the present as well as in one’s future possibilities. By shifting away from an automatic assumption of obligation, this approach avoids the opposition between the self and the objects of one’s care. In its place is concern for the life one is constructing and for the person one is becoming.

These philosophical conceptualizations of professional investment in work provide what may be a more developmentally useful standard for those working with limited support and resources. They come closer to Foucault (1986), who saw critical awareness of the constraints under which one lives as the greatest approximation of self-care. Understanding the balance
between agency and demands contributes to development, as it allows the clergywomen to be selective in navigating work choices even in the midst of change.

Developmental theory, to the extent that it privileges processes that contribute to human equality and justice, involves individuals “moving beyond the status quo . . . changing themselves in fundamental ways while, in the process, becoming individually unique and gaining knowledge about themselves and the world” (Stetsenko, 2013, p. 13), within the ties that bind them to colleagues and other people in the same changing society. From this standpoint, the decline offers both opportunity for and constraint of clergywomen’s development. To the extent that they chose to forego favorable self-presentation in favor of presenting the more dilemmatic side of truth, some women engaged in the diffusion processes that contribute to personal and institutional development (Moscovici, 1961/2008).

**Reflections on the Interview Setting**

The individual interview setting differed in several ways from that of the group interviews. For one, it afforded the participant more privacy and time, resulting in longer narratives. The transcripts indicate my more frequent use of interjections such as “uh-huh,” “mm-hm,” and “right,” in the phone interviews, which could have been taken as affirmations of the content of what was being said. I also pursued more follow-up probes in the individual interviews.

Groups of two were more likely to show greater alignment between the participants, expressed in the telling of similar stories that ratify each other (Bromberg, 2012). Stories that positioned the speaker either as bold or as burned out usually emerged where there was reason to expect that they would be received sympathetically. In all interview settings, talk was co-constructed among participants and interviewer, confirming the dialogical production of
representations in contextualized interaction (Wagner, Mecha, & Carvalho, 2008). That representations were being constructed in the flow of achieving the aims of the immediate interaction, among which positioning was but one element, was abundantly evident.

Wherever possible, the analysis included exploration of the power of the interviewer’s participation in the production of the interviewees’ language and its meaning, following the tradition of discursive psychology (Billig, 1992; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Johnson, 2006; Sarangi, 2003). I became more aware of this power as interviewer while analyzing participants’ responses to follow-up probes. In some cases, participants simply clarified a statement or provided additional information. But in other cases, the effect was deeper: they reflected more profoundly on a topic, re-narrated an event within a different frame, or resisted the implication that the way they had constructed an answer was not being accepted. This analysis showed that such probes, even more than the interview’s open-ended questions, deeply co-construct what follows.

This discovery poses an ethical dilemma for research, because a probe may implicitly communicate that a given carefully constructed response is somehow inadequate. No matter how gently made, or how innocuous the question may seem, it interrupts the collaboration intended, and denies the participant agency to formulate their response to a question in their own way, with all the implications prized by discursive psychology. Having said this, I also recognize that the interview probes were productive, eliciting more complex or more relevant information.

The recruitment letter (Appendix C) identified my degree in divinity, and in introducing myself at the beginning of each interview, I identified as both graduate student in psychology and a Presbyterian clergywoman. As a result, some participants positioned me as outsider and others as insider, evident in how much Presbyterian jargon and process they used and also what
they chose to explain to me. These positioning moves toward me constituted transient relational points that shaped their responses. It was evident that participants tried to find ways to align with or contest what they saw as the standpoint behind my questions.

In this regard, the differences in the interactive positioning of individual and focus group interviews were telling. Positioning in focus groups was more carefully managed, as participants handled their interactions with me and with peers simultaneously. Though they might not know all the other members of the group personally, peers might, at some future point, be on local committees with power to determine grants, roles and reputation, by contrast, the privacy of an individual interview afforded more safety to produce non-typical opinions. Though I concur with assertions that interview-produced data is essentially different from naturally occurring conversation (Potter & Hepburn, 2005), I found it to equally afford opportunity for level 2 local positioning and judged it to be valid for my analysis.

**Values and Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research**

As far as I have been able to ascertain, this is the first study of the effects of the Presbyterian decline from the perspective of the clergy. Mapping group differences based on their discourse, rather than on predetermined social dichotomies, such as racial identity, or liberal and conservative theology, helped to identify the concerns and commitments that gave rise to these differences. The results could be applied to support the clergy and also to promote stronger collaborations among them around efforts to pastor effectively in times or places where the church is declining.

Though the sample was small, I intentionally recruited pastors of color so as to ensure that their presence in the sample was in the same proportion to their numbers in the denomination at large. That their views would form the core, but not the entirety, of a distinct
representational standpoint toward the decline was unexpected. It points to the need to listen for the distinctiveness and clarity of views on many other issues of church life and social reality that emerges from communities of color. The extent of discussion overall that focused on race and diversity highlighted both the degree of integration in the churches and the need for ongoing work to be done to make that integration functional, organic, and just. Behind the celebration of diversity there was nevertheless much concern over racism within the church, in particular as expressed in the reluctance to call women of color to majority-white congregations, and in the limited career expectations and low pay rates that women of color in particular can expect.

The practice of sacrifice by professionals to ensure excellence is commendable, and clearly tied to their sense of calling. Had the interview questions addressed matters related to the clergy family, though, a different type of sacrifice would likely have emerged. The dilemma of sacrifice has to do with whether it is fairly compensated and fairly borne, and, in this study, is related to the precariousness of careers. It is this point that confounds those views that consider decline to be an acceptable or even a positive development: the increasing number of specialized workers are finding a decreasing number of positions available for them.

That the narratives often told of sacrifices that did not improve ministry to individuals suggests that the idea of professional sacrifice may be perverted to protect the denomination rather than provide a higher quality of professional services. Furthermore, the study points out that there are concerns that women, generally, and women of color, particularly, may disproportionately be among those making such sacrifices. These concerns deserve further study, and the most vulnerable clergypersons deserve institutional support.

The mixed methods approach aided the investigation of meaning-making, though the analysis it entailed was more complex. The identification of sharp articulations permitted the
analysis to go beyond descriptive findings, and suggests a locus and mechanism of situated development. Whether this method can be replicated or prove useful for application to other investigations of change will need to be determined by further study. To the extent that it reveals signs of complex narration, the method might well contribute to other streams of study.

Because psychological discussion of the decline is limited, clergy members have been left to their own devices to face a systemic challenge as though it were individually created and only privately relevant. This difficulty may be related to the still-inadequate social repertoire of representational themes and discursive grammar around which pastors can frame their experiences and concerns, or discuss matters of power and authority that shape their lives as members of the clergy. The presence of a rich, varied repertoire of representation is vitally important to the construction of meanings for the types of experiences these women will have if, as expected, the decline continues. Decision-making and planning at the personal and professional levels are dependent on having tools to recognize and assess ongoing change, and to learn how to position oneself in relation to continuous flux while still maintaining a favorable stance as a professional.

Several strengths and weaknesses of the study design are worth noting. I began the study from a standpoint, based on a review of the PCUSA website and blogs by Presbyterian pastors, that considered the decline to be real but largely understudied, even within the denomination, to the detriment of clergy, who were thus hampered in their ability to make realistic career plans, and were left to flounder alone in dealing with what is better conceived as a systemic process. This position shaped the questions I asked and the data I gathered.

A more neutral position toward representation would have resulted in a quite different study. More direct questions inquiring about the participants’ thoughts concerning the changes,
rather than about their experience with it, would have produced data that might have been easier to analyze as direct evidence of attitudes, but might have obscured the contextual effects on talk. My method thus had its own validity, as I strove to encourage the participants to balance the social representations against their experience. Any method of study constrains the knowledge it gathers; that said, I have striven in this dissertation to analyze the data in ways that provide a rich understanding of the concerted evolution of individuals and institution, even as the process suggested ways in which the data might have been gathered differently.

Another element of personal bias is that at the stage of planning the study, it appeared that representations of the Presbyterian decline were dominated by attitudes about whether LGBTQ persons should be given positions of power and authority in the church, while other stressors on church and society were being ignored or discounted, despite their possibly having a much more enduring effect. I therefore designed the interview protocol and carried out the interviews with the intention of capturing what was being missed in the representational field, to the point that I shifted the concentration of a focus group when it became “bogged down” in talk about the theological and presbytery debates on the ethics of homosexuality.

During the analysis, though, I realized that this decision had skewed the accuracy of the picture of the overall field of representation that I would be able to draw from my data. Though the findings validated the goal of looking at the full range of causative and resultant factors, my data inaccurately minimizes the real weight that attitudes toward the debates over the ordination of LGBTQ persons carry in the representations of the decline held by Presbyterian clergy.

It was during the analytic process that I became more aware that my standpoint also operated as a bias, and so I strove to interpret the data in a manner affording equal respect to the multiple perspectives posed by the women. But research is a whole fabric, and having cut it one
way at the start, it is likely to yield results that mostly fit with its original design. All research findings are socially and politically positioned, and my standpoint both afforded and constrained the findings.

The study benefitted from its open-ended method, but, at the same time, was limited by it in the scope of its practical conclusions. In order to stimulate rich qualitative responses, especially given the exploratory nature of the study, the interview questions were designed to elicit a wide range of attitudes toward the decline, expressed in a variety of ways. This approach came at a cost, in that the conclusions that can be drawn from a semi-structured interview have less generalizability than those obtained from a more standardized and structured elicitation of opinions or narratives. Similar complications emerged from mixing individual and group interviews, as the co-construction of meaning and talk is predictably different in each context. On the positive side, the study benefitted from the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, yielding greater insight than either method could afford alone, even though they proceed from different epistemological assumptions.

The fairly low response rate raises questions about the effects of self-selection on the findings. The small sample size also limited the power of the statistical findings, increasing the possibility that chance alone might be responsible for any results thus identified. The co-construction combined with a small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings.

In addition, the study included pastors of all ages and experience, which may have confounded the findings, especially those involving narratives, as Rice & Pasupathy (2010) found that older women attend less to the management of self in narratives than do their younger counterparts. I did not ask the participants their ages, but estimate that older and younger pastors
were equally distributed between the exposed and unexposed groups. Nonetheless, some of the most articulate of the exposed participants discussed being near or at retirement age.

Finally, I note that during the time that the study was being conducted, a shift occurred that sped up the process of decline in the PCUSA. When the study was being designed, decline was understood to refer mostly to individual churchgoers abandoning the church or participating less actively. However, over the period of data collection, entire churches began leaving the denomination to join more conservative denominations as a result of the PCUSA’s lifting of its blanket prohibition against the ordination of LGBTQ candidates. This introduced a new, different representation of decline that was ascendant in the interviews that took place in presbyteries that had already lost member churches.

Recommendations for future studies of clergy attitudes would include the use of a larger sample and a more structured question format to permit greater initiative on the part of participants to compose their answers and choose what to share, and also to increase the generalization of findings. Asking directly about their views about the decline might have elicited not only different thought processes but also different modes of discourse, such as including more assertions and fewer narratives.

Alternatively, greater understanding of the processes of social change is likely to be gained from a narrower focus on those persons who are most exposed to it, who are “breathing” the decline, as one participant put it. Such an approach might obtain a closer reading of both the institutional change processes and the shifting ways that workers aim to cope with them. In addition, longitudinal approaches would allow a comparison of data at different points in time and could more carefully calibrate the mechanisms and results of evolving discourse, narratives and representation, generally.
The study of development embedded in work, institutional, and ideological settings is complex, but permits a deeper exploration of the mechanisms and motivations of development and of the forces arrayed against it. Research that further refines the methods of analyzing development without cutting its cultural mooring will improve our understanding of people in every field of work. In terms of the workers investigated in the present study, further research would provide insight into how to support clergy and their shrinking churches, and enhance our understanding of their sometimes surprising lives.
Appendix A

Participant and Church Information Form

Year you graduated from seminary: __________ year of ordination: _______

What seminary did you attend? ______________________________________

How long have you been in your present call? __________________________

Is this a full-time ___ or a part-time ___ call? (check one)

Is this a permanent ____ or a temporary ____ call? (check one)

If part-time, do you have other employment to supply your income?
_________________________________________________________________

Are you currently seeking a call ____?

What is the current membership of your church? _________________?

Would you say your church congregation is generally_______________?

  Traditional          Abreast of the times          Avant garde

Please circle the term that most closely describes the direction of change in your church.

“Over the past five years, my church has been __________ in membership.”

  Increasing          Holding steady          Decreasing

“Over the past five years, my church has been__________ in financial stability.”

  Increasing          Holding steady          Decreasing

“In the past five years, the cultural and social class makeup of my congregation has______.”

  Changed a lot          Changed somewhat          Changed very little
### Appendix B

**Participants’ Fields of Representation**

#### Table B.1

*Alicia’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Our difficulties are not about decline, per se, but we are small and not growing.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I can’t do as much as church needs. I put a lot of pressure on myself to do more.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>There were several ways in which I felt that seminary did not adequately prepare me for ministry: how to teach through a sermon, mediate conflict, help the board reach a decision.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The PCUSA does not understand the dynamics and needs of Hispanic congregations, so we do not get the support and training that we need.</td>
<td>Effects and symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The Hispanic community has so few resources that it falls on pastors to offer legal or health advice and help that offer both opportunity for evangelism, but take time away from developing the church institution.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.2

*Angie’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The church is declining in order to develop into something better.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The church has been called back to the margins of society, where it began.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>“We preach the resurrection; we’ve been called to live it.” The financial rewards for being clergy are changing. We need courageous clergypersons.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>History shows cycles in the religious sentiment in American society. We are currently at the low point of a longer cycle.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>“I am not in a troubled church; our church is growing and the budget is growing.”</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>A seminary sent a letter to students, saying that they should expect part-time work.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>We’re Presbyterian, but we are a very big tent, we even have some members who are charismatic, almost like Vineyards.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.3

*Anne’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Young members’ insensitivity to others’ needs is a sign of decline.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Financial stability was achieved through a single wealthy member’s generous donation.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The pastors’ emphasis on theology countered the board’s demand that pastor increase outreach to increase sources of income and stability.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The people who join the church now are more involved than was true in the past because higher standards were included in the orientation new members.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A heightened sense of entitlement among young people, even those who were raised in religious families, erodes spirituality.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Retirement provides opportunities to do interim ministry, as churches seek affordable pastoral services.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Some people who have left the church joined other denominations; others stopped attending church altogether.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>When churches leave the denomination, it is usually because a pastor, not members, has initiated the move.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I know of one member who designated his offerings because he was concerned about the denomination’s priorities.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.4

Betty’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>We changed the way we count membership in order to keep the numbers up.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Members attend church less, requiring more effort to maintain pastoral relationships with them outside the church. Church is no longer just Sunday morning.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>People attend multiple churches according to convenience, yet identify as Presbyterian.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Increasing resistance to public talking about religion almost amounts to persecution of Christians, especially in Northeast.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Job description is in flux due to limited staff and people’s changing connections to the church.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Different constituencies within church must negotiate mutually-exclusive liturgical preferences.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Church architecture and space are not congruent with the variety of activities, worship styles and age groups.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Concern about membership numbers and decline shifts attention away from the primary mission of the church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>With limited resources, church preferred to make a sizeable donation to a mission project instead of improving the heating and air conditioning, which impacts staff most.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>It no longer seems realistic to expect to have my own church by the time I’m 40.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Each generation unconsciously shapes the religious attitudes of the next generation. millennials’ faith is a product of Baby Boomer’s religious attitudes.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Immigrants are among those most bound to older traditions.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Took a long time to get a new job, despite long experience.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.5

*Brenda’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Providing a place for new “contemporary worship” stimulates growth by providing meaningful worship for those who can’t relate to some traditions.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Our church is not declining. We grew during an interim period.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>God has provided work for me at every stage of my developing family’s life.</td>
<td>Personal demands (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The dominance of religion in society has declined. For example, HIPPA hampers pastors’ access to members who are hospitalized.</td>
<td>Causal factors Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The pastoral staff now includes more part-time workers; some get no benefits.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>We are shifting the responsibility for and locus of the religious education of children from the church Sunday School to families.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>In preaching and teaching, we assume that visitors know nothing about Christianity or religious language.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Some of the pastors are active in denominational politics to stem the decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>As church declines, youth flounder without guidance, and end up in mental health facilities more often than previously.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Stability and theological grounding prevent decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>There are fewer jobs at my level of potential.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>We have a higher percentage of members volunteering than most Presbyterian churches.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.6

**Carmen’s Field of Representations of Decline (Exposed)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Older pastors are resistant to a new vision of church for the post Christendom world.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Churches close or merge when they can no longer afford to pay a pastor or are otherwise not sustainable.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The church is behind technologically.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The church is behind on gender justice issues. So how do we say to society, “We’re really working for you?”</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My former, suburban, congregation was just beginning to turn downwards, but it was still large enough that you wouldn’t notice a decline for several years.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Decline is related to ecclesiology, to what we think it means to be “church,” and to what are we trying to preserve.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The church no longer seems to be the best place for young adults to dig deep, explore their doubts, and ask questions about God, or to formulate God in a different way.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Young adults build community among secular friends; they don't need a “church” to experience a sense of belonging.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>People are busy; they don't have time for programs and activity that is meaningless or irrelevant to their lives and work.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Financial mis-management alienates people from investing in the church as an institution.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>College student seek churches that are youth-centered, where their friends are, rather than being Presbyterian.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The Presbyterian church in a college town catered to the faculty with intellectual sermons, so the students went to the evangelical church, even though they had intended to stay Presbyterian.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The interim period was helpful. It was forced by the presbytery but helped the church to reflect on member loss.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Competition among the staff and leaders played a role in how the decline unfolded in my congregation.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>The presbytery sometimes shuts down churches without investigating what might be best in each particular case.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Despite having a strong sense of call, I doubt that I will find full-time parish ministry as a female, ethnic minority pastor.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Churches are hiring retired or wealthy clergy who will accept a nominal salary, making it harder for the rest of us.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Reversing a decline, even in early stages, takes a lot of energy by staff, which is often hard to come by.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>With decline, there is a greater need for pastors to be wily and understand how power functions in the church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>PCUSA is not comfortable with evangelism, so promotes service projects with little theological reflection.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Pastors reassure members, saying that everything will be OK, when it’s not realistic to promise that. Sometimes confrontation and challenge are more pastoral.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.7

*Celia’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The lack of separation of church from the values of secular culture makes the church irrelevant and thus ripe for decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>“We are shrinking, nobody visits.”</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>People in the 1950’s went to church for the wrong reasons.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>“I’m not afraid for the gospel.”</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Renting the building for non-church activities provides both income and vitality.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Here’s a paradox within the overall decline: Giving is up, and we had more baptisms last year than in all the previous 12 years.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>People leave for many reasons, not all related to “the decline;” one man left because he’s mad at his brother.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I gave up my sabbatical when one large family moved away, because this constituted too great a decrease at one time.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Acceptance of the gay lifestyle by the church has eroded essential Christian morality.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The polarizing fights at presbytery meetings over homosexuality is destroying the presbytery. It’s painful.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I achieved job security at the cost of ministry. I am the receptionist and the plumber, but don't have time do ministry.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>The church’s attitude toward the world has changed. We allowed serving wine at a community event.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>They chose not to replace the organist.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Decline is good if marginalization helps the church to recover its purpose.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Members don’t want to move forward.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I’ve been burned out for ten years.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Members are more likely to blame a female than a male pastor for declining attendance.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Gossip is especially toxic in a declining church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>It’s a buyer’s market. At my age, as a conservative woman, I don’t expect to get another call.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Decline results in unexpected alliances across theological perspectives.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.8

Corinne’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The striving for power and domination by individual pastors affects the patterns of decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Churches are laying off pastoral staff.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The elders agreed to increase their personal donations to church in order to meet the budgetary commitments.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Conservative women pastors are especially likely to accept a job for which they are overqualified because challenging jobs are increasingly limited as fewer conservative churches remain in the denomination.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms; Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My church is growing because it accepts all people as equal members.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.9

*Dee’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Financial decline resulted because of the death of a benefactor and the community around the church is less wealthy.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Many people have never experienced inspiring worship, feeding prejudice against religion.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>My position has been eliminated, as part of the financial adjustments after a major donor died.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Preparing the congregation for my departure is emotionally taxing, but has strengthened the church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Church has become more financially responsible, learning to live within their means.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Members will take on the work previously done by associate pastor.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Some members suggested that I stay on a part-time contract, but they did not seem to consider how much less work could be done.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.10

*Delores’ Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Crime in the inner-city neighborhood is demoralizing to members; the decline of the church and of the neighborhood are both reflections of the hopelessness of the local young people.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Pastor’s efforts to make ministry relevant to the problems and needs of the neighborhood youth are resisted by elderly members, who prefer their traditions.</td>
<td>Effects and symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Develop creative use of space to increase energy efficiency of old buildings and provide income.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Efforts to sell the building heighten feelings of attachment to it, making the decline harder to cope with.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Mourning is sometimes accompanied by dependency and manipulation of pastor.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>A declined church in declined neighborhood providing multiple services and programs for educational, health and mental health needs. Members and pastor work harder.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Maybe we need to let the church die a natural death, rather than try to prop up our ministry projects.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Members need the pastor to help them face reality, but also want their lifelong commitment to the church to be respected and supported.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Personal criticism is disheartening when one is trying to manage the problems of decline, including a crumbling building.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The pastor status distinctions of interim, installed, stated supply, temporary pastor are meaningless in declining churches.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.11

*Dolly’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Neighborhood change affects church, usually for the worse.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Sunday services are not where religion is experienced in America today.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The church has declined because it has not learned how to adequately market itself in a consumer culture.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Families definitely have fewer children than they did before.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Members attribute the decline to the liberal direction that denomination has taken.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>There are too many applicants for too few church jobs.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Jobs at the national denominational office, which would normally be the next step for experienced pastors, are also shrinking.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>There are fewer well-paying jobs; most churches offer entry-level salaries for solo-pastor positions.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Seminary graduates do not have the technical skills needed for successful parish pastoring. Their misconceptions, lead to early failure, despite eagerness.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Churches focus too much on serving their own members, and not enough on reaching out to the larger community.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>What keeps people committed to the church now is developing their spiritual life, not prophetic challenges.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.12

*Edwina’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Even in the Bible Belt and among church-goers, there is inadequate knowledge about the Bible &amp; faith and their application to real life.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The debates in other churches about leaving the denomination affect our congregation because those members talk to our members, using deception.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Material that I see distributed in support of leaving the denomination contains a lot of misinformation and causes confusion among our members.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Participation in church programs, especially Sunday School, is declining, even among the most active members. There is overall, less sense of being a partner in church programs.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>We have two full-time pastors for the first time since reunion.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>There is now less grant money for new church developments.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Church growth has not kept pace with the growth of the community.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I was lucky to be called by a church near where my husband works.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>In the Southern church, having respect for others humanity, gender, race, on just a basic level is not taught or expected. It drives away those who are rejected, and I have experienced this even as a pastor.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Thematic Content</td>
<td>Theme Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Many adults approach religion as an identity habit. It’s hard to engage them in self-reflection.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Youth seem to prefer entertainment-oriented worship without deep engagement with the content.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Youth ask meaningful questions if engage them.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Children apply the lessons presented at church when they get home.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Our presbytery lost several churches.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Some members left our church, but mainly because of the way the debate over gay ordination was handled.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>“I don't see myself working long-term in the church, given where it is heading.” I am not worried about getting another pastoral position. If I wanted to leave here, there would be a church that would recognize my skills and call me.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Faced with the tensions of decline, some pastors lack vision, and fail to lead the dialogue around controversial issues.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Novel ways to approach spiritual awareness, such as through an art group, are thriving but still marginal.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>My non-church friends can’t believe that People are surprised to find young women capable of being spiritual leaders.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The PCUSA seems lethargic to me.</td>
<td>Effects and symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>The structures of the church are stuck. People chair committees for too long.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>There is a large proportion of older members</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table B.13*

*Emily’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*
Table B.14

*Faye’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I talked another pastor into staying in the denomination.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Middle-class Hispanic members are more likely to leave the denomination than lower-class ones, because they keep up more with the issues in the news.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Women claiming their authority, whatever the cost, contributes to church growth, not decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter argument)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Multicultural congregations have more vitality. “Decline” comes from resisting what is different and new.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>“Decline” is a phenomenon of Anglo churches, only.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Hispanic churches are growing, but they require more members to reach financial security.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter argument)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B.15

*Grace’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Many cultural events compete with church for time and commitment, especially in metropolitan areas.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>There are fewer “church people” who prioritize church activities in their lives, and even they participate less than before.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Practical factors, such as city traffic congestion, limit attendance at midweek programs.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Pastors have to lower program expectations without resenting members for not being more involved.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Programs are now shorter-term, smaller, and Sunday-only, but not fewer in number.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Programs are more staff-intensive. Pastors must be nimble, and shift from one program to another as interest and resources shift.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>There are fewer volunteers, so they are more at risk of burnout.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>“I am less ambitious now than I used to be.”</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>With decline, success becomes less about the quantity of participants and more about the quality of engagement of those who do participate.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Pastors are laid off and must accept any job they can find, including those for which they may not be well suited.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>‘The job search was harder than I expected. I put out my application and no one responded.’</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Small churches cannot afford the high minimum wage for pastors in this presbytery, and some have to close.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table B.16**

*Gretta’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Competing views of decline and of ministry will ultimately be determined over time.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>My congregation is linked with another church, where the decline is very evident.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>After Amendment B, prohibiting gays in ordained ministry was removed, some people took the attitude that we “won” and they “lost” and so they took their marbles and left; a lot of conservatives have left the denomination.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Our congregation aims to give people, who had previously been turned away by the church, a place of healing, so there is hope, and excitement and hunger for more.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Churches that are dying ask for help doing evangelism with gays. I tell them that gays are not going to save them.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Numbers matter, but not alone. For instance, when what we do touches people and helps them know God, it matters less how large attendance is.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I find us being scared that our churches are dying, but not doing anything about it.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Churches aren’t doing “programs” anymore; we lack volunteers, plus today’s kids are too busy. Ministry focuses more on personal relationships.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I wasn’t doing marriages, at first. But I realized how important they are to people.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>It’s better to leave people hungry for more, than to leave them sated or bored.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Thematic Content</td>
<td>Theme Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The neighborhood has changed quickly. There is a lot of poverty. Next door is a halfway house for people with limited ability.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>They spent a lot to repair their organ, but this is a salsa and rap community now, not a pipe organ community.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The choir is adapting slowly to the low-brow community around church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Families are changing and my church’s attitude toward non-traditional families is changing as they struggle for new members.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Standard criteria of success include the number of children involved, and the degree of financial pledging by members. But in this increasingly poor community these do not assure financial stability.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>In my first presbytery, I was part of a group of five women all in full-time positions. Within five years, all had left, gone to part-time or interim jobs.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I was astonished by how long I went without a position. I never dreamed I wouldn’t be swooped up.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Thematic Content</td>
<td>Theme Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>An ecumenical organization that I was involved with has less Presbyterian presence than before.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Potential jobs are scarce.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Several churches in the presbytery have joined other denominations because they are very conservative.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I believe the church’s unique message of liberation is still valid, if only we applied it, so I don’t consider the decline as the problem.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example) Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.19

*Joan’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>It is very hard to get jobs. Even though I was older and more experienced than my classmates and had a helping network, getting my first job was a horrible process.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Churches do not have the finances to back up their creative ideas.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The arts are creative ways to communicate spiritual issues meaningfully.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The denomination and its seminaries do little to help clergy candidates find placements.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Many types of institutions are experiencing reduced affiliation. It is short-sighted to suggest that this is somehow unique to the church.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>People need more, not less, professional religious support to face the transcendent questions of modern life.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>A creative approach to the making of careers can expand opportunities for clergy.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Churches need to change, and decline may be part of that. Staying too long in one form is not healthy.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>In today’s urban setting, a single location is not adequate for a neighborhood church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I have one person in each age group, requiring me to prepare a lot of programs for what is a small congregation.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>We aim to be inclusive of cultural and identity groups without stereotyping them.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.20

 Joyce’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Dichotomies such as “us-them,” and “inside- outside” are killing the church.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Power games in a shrunken church chase out good, innovative pastors, and shut out new members.</td>
<td>Causal factors, Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Tight family and friendship ties in a shrunken church may alienate new people from coming, as subtly rejecting visitors.</td>
<td>Causal factors, Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Merging is not the answer. A weak church plus a weak church equals a weak church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>A single congregant’s vision developed into a ministry and brought renewed vitality to a dying church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Pastors need to protect personal boundaries, despite temptation (and manipulation) to work harder and more.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The black church is ambivalent about gays but is less likely to leave over ordination standards.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example), Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Technology helps reach beyond those who attend church, though need to target each age group differently.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example), Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>There is an over-reliance on preaching and top-down transmission of faith.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Part-time work has consequences on retirement planning.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Some members stop attending during interim period, claiming to be waiting for the real pastor, but that changes their relation and commitment to the church and their faith.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.21

Juanita’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Retired and elderly people disengage from church because they don’t want to get drawn in to committee work.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The church hired me because they could paid me less than a male pastor. They were ashamed of this evidence of decline.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms, Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The same people were on all the committees; eventually, we were able to restructure and eliminated all committees.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Children whose parents dropped them off for Sunday School, and did not themselves attend church, are not actively religious now as adults.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Neighborhood blight and fear of social integration contribute to decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Decline results from habitually saying “no” to proposals for new ministry projects and change, even to be able to do better outreach.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The large size of churches in the 1950s was not always a sign of religious devotion.</td>
<td>Causal factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>We have been invited to join with another church to begin ministry to immigrants, something we could not do alone.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Churches use the low minimum salary as an excuse to pay less.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I bought the church a typewriter and then a computer to make my work easier.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The congregation thinks of itself as friendly, but they are not welcoming.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>There is always hope. A former church revitalized following a building project that everyone got behind. They found the money, and later continued to identify mission they could in it.</td>
<td>Causal factors, counter argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I hesitated to come out in support of gays, until forced to. But it did not have the effect I was fearing. The congregation was able to open its arms to a young homosexual man in the community.</td>
<td>Causal factors, counter argument</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.22

*Karen’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>At root, the decline is a theological matter.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>African Americans remained in the church, despite racism, but white churches leave when they disagree with policies. Some people can adapt to progressive changes easier than others.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The pastor ends up doing most of the work, because there are not enough volunteers with time to help out.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Human need (and sin) are our job security.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Despite the overall surplus of ministers, in some specialized areas, there are not enough pastors.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Partnership among churches to support work in poor communities is disappearing.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>People expect the church to fit around their schedule.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>We are a culture of consumers, which affects people’s expectations of church.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Decline calls for greater commitment by members.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Poor and unemployed members contribute, but add little to the financial stability of the church.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The decline of poor churches, in particular, is related to city economics and zoning.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Youth we see were not raised in a Christian home, attending church. This makes education more crucial and urgent.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Preaching is central to the worship and growth of the church.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>The skills a pastor needs keep expanding as the church and society change.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.23

*Kathleen’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Competing claims on time dilute the religious commitment of youth.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Youth don’t keep the commitments they make. It means nothing to make a promise. There are no negative consequences.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Social media facilitate, but also interrupt, young people’s religious participation.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Even church families do not regularly attend church.</td>
<td>Causal factors Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Most youth drop out soon after confirmation. Our reputation exceeds our success at raising committed church members.</td>
<td>Causal factors Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The participation of young people from other churches in our programs masks the overall decline in church involvement.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Some youth enjoy the service orientation and ethical content of church activities, but unashamedly reject the religious and spiritual dimension.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Some youth show evidence of faith development and commitment to religion.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The youth are bored in worship.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Youth show little interest in investing the effort to create more appealing and meaningful worship services.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Some fellow alumni have not found work.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Pastor is careful in challenging youth to increase commitment, because of the possibility of the youth leaving altogether.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Being program driven provides structure but detracts from building relationships and making room for the Holy Spirit.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Pastors feel pressured by parents to develop faith of their children in an age of secularism.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.24

Lisa’s *Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Trying to “protect” the church from decline is counterproductive. The church should be fearless.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Jobs are tied to divine calling, so as long as God is calling me, there will always be ways to respond to the call.</td>
<td>Personal demands (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Decline is related to older members not wanting to move forward.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The “business model” has led the church down counterproductive paths.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The “coffee hour” no longer serves to attract people to church. One needs to go out and meet people where they are.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I heard a story about how a friendship between two clergymen in a bar led to the founding of a multicultural church. That is the opposite of decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.25

*Lydia’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Among the lower classes and marginalized populations the church is not declining. It has a positive aura.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>What limits us is the number of volunteers. The potential is limitless.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>We rent out our space for parties and weddings and AA groups, to break even.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>My former church was a merger of two churches that resented needing to merge. My work was to get the two groups to value each other.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Efforts to collaborate with several other declining churches, to maximize our limited resources, failed because of differing visions, and competition among clergy.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The presbytery values our ministry, but gives no financial support; there are a few churches that contribute financially.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The ministry of female pastors is bound up in the decline, because whatever is broken or dysfunctional, or in need of repair, that’s where women are sent as pastors.</td>
<td>Personal demands.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.26

*Mary’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>“We’re all the decline.” Pastors train to be orators, but that [19th century] culture no longer exists.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>We leave seminary expecting success in ministry to be easier to achieve than it is.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Presbyterian worship is too word-based; tradition inhibits spontaneity in spirituality, and more visual communication.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The church should run itself into the ground; risk its life, instead of trying to preserve itself as an institution.</td>
<td>Causal factors, Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Members welcomed focusing spirituality on parenting, as a novel practice, but did not change their demands on clergy mothers.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms, Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>We’re competing with cafes and gardens.</td>
<td>Causal factors, Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>People are not coming to you, so you have to go outside the walls. We tried a soccer team.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Volunteerism is essential to the health of the church, but it is declining in some areas of the country more than others.</td>
<td>Causal factors, Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I renew myself outside the Presbyterian environment. Presbyterians are too wordy and not spiritual enough.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.27

Monica’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Prejudice against Christians silences them in the public arena.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Evangelical jargon feeds negative views of Christianity as close-minded, homophobic and judgmental.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>My church is not declining. We are a lively, mission-oriented community church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Welcoming new community population groups (immigrants and gays) into the church prevented decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Membership numbers obscure the ongoing participation of those who move away but stay connected online.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Pastors use unorthodox maneuvers to secure positions amid a sense of job scarcity.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Willingness to change keeps church alive.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Focus on community mission often comes at the expense of personal spirituality.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Pastor is like the mother of the church; they’re competing for your attention. Especially in small congregation, there is an expectation of tighter relationships.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Fear of alienating members made me tread lightly on controversial issues such as homosexuality.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>A clique can prevent growth; I dissolved it by giving greater voice to other voices.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Creative worship is essential.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.28

*Norma’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Members do not want to “embrace the way forward” even when opportunities present themselves. They have distorted rosy memories of how things were in the past.</td>
<td>Causal factors Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Change occurs at a different pace in different places. Small town churches may feel less pressure to change than urban ones.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>There were 1000 college students at Montreat camp last week. The church is not dying!</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>There’s not as much denominational loyalty as there used to be.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Evolving conceptions of “church” create some new opportunities, while losing others.</td>
<td>Causal factors Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The skills that pastors need to have are also changing. Keeping up with these is a challenge.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Young adults prefer to give money to Habitat, or a soup kitchen, rather than to pay off the church mortgage and light bills.</td>
<td>Causal factors Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Youth are engaged when they can question and think, but not all churches facilitate that.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Some members are starting to consider changes in the church, but most can’t think outside of the standard framework of Sunday School and 11:00 o’clock Sunday worship.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>We’re not declining, but we’re not doing anything radical; we make the tiniest of changes that maintain the status quo.</td>
<td>Causal factors Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Because of the economy, and fear of the job market, people stay in calls too long; they’re afraid to move on when their vision runs out and they’re not sure what to do.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms Effects &amp; symptoms Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>People do not notice a slow decline; they blame the ushers for counting wrong, or excuse low attendance as a temporary fluke, even though we’re down over 50 people compared to a year ago.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>We have not lost many members, but people come less frequently, and there’s less energy around things.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. I don't have time to do all the creative things that would improve our programs or envision new ones.  
Personal demands

15. If I step away from pastoring while my children are small, it might be harder to get back in, later.  
Personal demands

16. We don't do a good job of countering the conservative religious message. People are disenchanted with religion, but all they hear is a particular dogma. We’ve lost our prophetic voice.  
Causal factors

17. I had to remind the elders that the minimum salary had increased in the presbytery. They tried to start counting perks, like free admission to the church day care center, into part of my salary to avoid paying me more.  
Effects & symptoms  
Personal demands

19. The presbytery is slow or unwilling to get involved in churches having conflicts, regardless of danger to congregation.  
Causal factors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Nostalgia inhibits necessary institutional evolution.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Much church bureaucratic busyness is counterproductive and leads to spiritual decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The adoption of the “business model” is killing the church.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Financial decline paradoxically increases the practice of faith, which is essential to church growth.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Inadequate adult religious education results in decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Wealthy members manipulate the church by threatening to leave, especially when decline looms.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Predictions of the demise of the church have been made for decades, and themselves contribute to decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>“So what if people jump ship? The church is not going to dry up and fly away if we are thriving.”</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>When the church abandons religious and Biblical language, it loses its own identity.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I may need to take a cut in pay with my next church, because there are fewer large churches.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I interviewed at a church that was protecting a multi-million endowment and it was dying!</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Training leaders is key to growth.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>The turf protection that occurs in committees is counter to ministry.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Fear is what keeps churches from moving forward.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B.30

*Penny’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The end of the dominance Christianity in American culture led to the decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Visitors come, but do not join.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Decline means giving something up: the beautiful building or the variety of programs.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I use less theological language to communicate to contemporary sensibilities.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Fear of decline might lead churches to revert to mostly hiring male pastors.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I thought I could pick my path, but I can’t. My application has been posted with little response. I may need to change goals.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Conflicts develop among the lay church leaders over how to respond to the decline.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Some people wanted to stop talking about “Jesus” because it may alienate some people.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>When members waffle over how to respond to the decline, it increases my anxiety more than the conflict alone.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>There is generational tension in the presbytery, over urban ministry, but I trust the younger pastors to find their way.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Independent, evangelical neighborhood churches are visibly thriving.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>The gospel is growing. I am not afraid for the gospel.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Maintenance of old buildings (institutional preservation) consumes too many resources and contributes to decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>It may be time for me to resign and let the church settle into being a small, pastoral, not programmatic, church.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.31

Robin’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>My congregation, as the whole denomination, has had a loss of spirituality.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Racism in the church prevents growth.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Members self-segregate by race.</td>
<td>Causal effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>In the past, adherence to tradition preserved the church, but now it inhibits necessary change, and contributes to decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The community, associated with a college nearby, is generally “anti-religious,” even church-goers are “too intellectual.”</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Members, who hired the pastor in order to bring about change, now resist it and feel criticized by the changes she proposes.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Institutions have a normal life cycle; mine is in its final stage.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Some guilt is inevitable for a pastor, as both decline and growth cause some painful adjustments for members.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Members are elderly and prefer making financial donations to participating in soup kitchen and other mission projects.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Passive-aggressive attitudes of members makes pastoral care difficult.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The church location on a dead-end street and the shabby state of its building are uninviting. Outdoor events have not dispelled this effect.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I’m getting burned out, I prepare two sermons, do all the outreach, prepare the training and educational programs.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.32

*Rose’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>People leave the church because of interpersonal conflicts and power cliques which get stronger as church gets smaller.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>We are burdened by our buildings, and the expense of maintaining them.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>We rent out portions of our property to six groups.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The treasurer called the family of a deceased member and asked them to honor his pledge. She also makes sure that homebound members continue to give.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Elderly members’ commitment primarily reflects their own needs; they mainly want the church to survive for their funerals. Their poor health of members limits their participation in outreach efforts.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Decline exposes and magnifies the effects of the dominance of a few members.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Decline in large churches is less visible than in small ones, in part because of their large endowments.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Job opportunities are limited in presbyteries where many churches have closed and others have reduced the size of their staff.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Fear of spending money leads to unwise decisions. They fret over the postage to mail newsletters or to repair the heating system.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Members reluctant to welcome people visiting from the racially-mixed neighborhood around the church.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>A declining congregation has multiple sources of grief.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Engaging in mission stimulates life and gives meaning to congregation, evident in how the evangelical immigrant groups that rent from us are growing.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>In order to contribute to growth, the congregation, not only the pastor, must have a vision and work toward it.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. The coach suggested that I take an entrepreneurial approach toward the church, because I have some ideas of ways to reverse the decline.  
   **Personal demands**

15. Mergers don’t work well. Most of the members from the other church that merged with ours are gone.  
   **Causal factors**

14. There is a tendency to focus on what we don’t have.  
   **Effects & symptoms**
Table B.33

*Ruth’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>There are fewer creative jobs and less creative funding, especially for urban churches.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Seminaries are dishonest about what the job market is and will be in the near future.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Our presbytery just closes churches when they get below a certain financial status. There is no more aid or partnering.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Decline is related to racial integration; churches not engaging who is around them. Churches that embrace integration are not declining.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Community transitions affect churches. We are losing some members because taxes are rising in the neighborhood.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Community gardens and coffee shops are where “community” happens, but they are not as good as churches at challenging racial attitudes.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Moral growth sometimes comes with numerical decline.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The presbytery practices self-deception when representing unemployed pastors as “at large” members.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Female clergy are more likely to be underpaid and to lose their jobs as declining churches are closed. I took many jobs for no money, or little money.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Sharon’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I’ve tried to make the liturgy more user-friendly, but the members are inflexible. They say, “No, this is not who we are.”</td>
<td>Causal factors, Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>They’re losing people, losing the church because they are too liberal.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>What are we doing putting ourselves in pews, not looking at each other? This is not a 21st Century church.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>“I had to hold their hand to include “Jesus” or “God” in their Mission Statement. There has to be something in there that says it’s a Christian church.”</td>
<td>Causal factors, Effects &amp; symptoms, Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>They don’t have the joy of being a Christian.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>During the summer, we moved into the more intimate, air-conditioned chapel, but in the fall, they insisted on moving back into the too-large sanctuary.</td>
<td>Causal factors, Effects and symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Old buildings are problematic, and building use is problematic and show greater concern for the building itself than the activity within them.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The congregation is becoming more multicultural.</td>
<td>Causal factors, (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Limited sense of mission in community and beyond. All they do is have a pantry and soup kitchen.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Members focus obsessively on the past.</td>
<td>Causal factors, Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Nostalgia for a former pastor.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Poor power-sharing dynamics between pastor and lay leaders eventually show negative consequences.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.35

*Sunny’s Representational Field of Decline (Exposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Once a church starts declining, those who stay are the most needy ones, who are least able to attract new people.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Our building looks shabby and unattractive, we can’t currently afford to update it.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Young families visit, but do not see anyone like themselves in the congregation, so they do not return.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am burned out. Because I’m a solo pastor I don’t have time to develop the programs that I most care about, or to grieve personal losses.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The previous pastor had a weird theology, and many people left when he retired.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I feel stuck at this church because I’ve done the research, and my salary is better than I could get elsewhere.</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Loneliness is difficult for a solo pastor, beyond the matter of the quantity of work that falls on her. “There is a reason why Jesus sent out the disciples two by two.”</td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The ever-fewer volunteers are insecure; I have to revise a lot of what they do.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Thematic Content</td>
<td>Theme Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Twenty percent of members of my church died in the past couple of years.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Younger families are joining the church and making its culture more flexible.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The new, younger, members attend less often and give less generously, thus provide less stability than the older members.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>In an aging congregation, grief over friends’ deaths magnifies the sense of decline.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Members agreed to new outreach projects for homeless, even at the point of greatest decline and instability.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>When we had more staff, the work-load was shared. As solo pastor I wear most hats.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Women as senior pastors of “high-steeple churches” reflects a loss of social prestige of church, as well as acceptance of women.</td>
<td>Causal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(counter example)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.37

*Theresa’s Representational Field of Decline (Unexposed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Theme Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Denominational-level worry and hand-wringing is not effective.</td>
<td>Effects &amp; symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Engagement in local issues keeps church involvement meaningful and relevant to community needs.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Quality preaching and leadership contributes to church growth.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Unapologetic use of religious language contributes to church growth.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Awakening concern and recruiting people to the service of others is a core task of the church and preserves its validity across time.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>A church that is doing what it was put here to do, is not going to die, though it may not be large.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>God’s concern is wherever people are struggling for justice. That’s what enlivens the church.</td>
<td>Causal factors (counter example)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear

My name is Miriam Shelton, and I am a doctoral student in Developmental Psychology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. I am contacting you because of your position as a current or recent pastor of a Presbyterian church. I would like to ask you to consider participating in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation.

The study explores how the reported membership decline in mainline churches affects women pastors: how they approach their work, how they consider their vocation and how they manage their careers. The purpose of my study is to better understand the development of women in the workplace, in particular how they adapt to changing circumstances at work.

I will be assembling a series of focus groups of four to eight Presbyterian clergywomen who are either currently serving as pastors, or who have pastored churches within the past five years, to discuss these issues. These groups will last two hours.

Focus groups are planned in your presbytery at the following places and times:

Date:          Date:
Time:          Time:
Place:         Place:

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at mshelton@gc.cuny.edu, and indicate which of these meetings you prefer to attend, or if you would like to know more about the study. Please provide information on how I can contact you by email or telephone.

If you would like to participate, but you cannot meet at one of these times for a group discussion, I can arrange an individual phone interview.

Please share this information with other qualified women.

Sincerely,

Miriam Shelton, M. Div.
Graduate Center
City University of New York
References


Fetzer, A. (2011). ‘I think this is I mean perhaps this is too erm too tough a view of the world but I often think…’ Redundancy as a contextualization device. *Language Sciences, 33*(2), 255-267.


