


8-2014

The Last Remnant: Pentecostal Salvation, Desire, and Queering the Holy Ghost Experience in the Rust Belt

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The Last Remnant: Pentecostal Salvation, Desire, and Queering the Holy Ghost Experience in
the Rust Belt

The Last Remnant: Pentecostal Salvation, Desire, and Queering the Holy Ghost
Experience in the Rust Belt

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

by

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Abstract

Iconoclastic parishioners who gather at a Pentecostal church in Rust-Belt Indiana envision their movement to be the final piece of a reconfigured eschatological prophecy; this is a last-day revival that evangelicals have been anticipating for over two thousand years. Having been estranged by intolerance and misunderstanding of scripture, as the narrative goes, “God’s gay children” are returning to the “Shepherd’s fold.” The predominately white and working-class congregation seeks a redefinition of what it means to be homosexual in the United States: persons not thought of simply for sexual desire but a shared normalcy with other moral Christians. Mainstream Pentecostals demonize the dubious movement as a perversion of the sacred, as evidence that they are living in the End of Days. In this dissertation I explore the innovative ways in which believers negotiate and coalesce their queer and Pentecostal identities as they entertain a spirit world and prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. Amidst the homophobia of mainstream evangelicals and the perceived moral dangers of queer America, the reconciled Pentecostals negotiate identity dissonance as they speak in tongues, cast out devils, become “slain in the Spirit,” and dance as a Holy Ghost mounts their born-again bodies.

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Acknowledgements

I had not planned to go to college until a coworker at a retail job told me I should explore the possibility. This dissertation happened, in part, because of a young woman whose name I cannot even recall. I did not know what a Ph.D. was until I was given the incredible opportunity of attending Berea College, a school devoted entirely to providing a cost-free education to working-class individuals. I am forever grateful to Berea College, which eventually led me to the University of Arkansas for another incredible educational experience.

Dr. JoAnn D'Alisera, I hope that I am able to channel your intuition, brilliance, empathy, passion, strength, and genuine love for humanity and your students. You are a wonderful mentor and friend, and I am forever indebted to you. You have been there for me through some rough times. Thanks for helping to make this dissertation a reality. Dr. Kirstin Erickson, thanks for challenging and inspiring me in your class entitled Performance, Narrative, and Identity. I greatly appreciate the ways in which you have always been a source of encouragement. Dr. Ted Swedenburg, many thanks for offering your Queer Theory course, in which you challenged me to think in new ways and develop an understanding of the material. I greatly appreciate your enthusiasm for this project. A special thanks goes out to The Jerome W. Hughes Humanities Enrichment Award at Berea College for funding a pilot study for this project, as well as thanks to Dean Todd Shields and The Graduate School at the University of Arkansas for believing in my work.

To a few of my friends, Amanda Phillips, Danielle Quales, Hannah Potts, Terry Gosnell, you have been an invaluable strength during this process. To my mentor at Berea College, Dr. Chad Berry, you are an incredible man. Hope Amason, thanks for taking me under your wing and welcoming me to the program.

To my parents, Larry and Mary Jane Noah, I love you more than you know. Both of you have encouraged me to strive for more and to stay true to the human values you helped to instill in me. To my brother, Richard Dellinger, thank you for being a model of intelligence, kindness, and determination. To my sister, Rebecca Noah Tripp, I love you. I realize that the topic of this dissertation, and even my own positionality, may not be palatable, but please know that I have not written it to shame or embarrass those I love. Rather, I have written it as an expression of empathy and a common human love we share for each other, regardless of our differences.

To my friends in the Rust Belt and elsewhere who gracefully allowed me to be a part of your lives, your resilience has inspired me to love more. I have made some incredible friends. Please know that you will always be a part of my heart.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late grandmother, Janet Snyder Eppley (1926-2012), and to queer people in church pews around the world who, with dreams of honesty, struggle to maintain Pentecostal faith.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My research centers on a predominately-LGBT Pentecostal church in the Indiana Rust Belt and the congregation's desire to form a global network of sexually marginal practitioners. I explore the complexities of queering one of the world's fastest growing religions, the way in which believers critique mainstream queer America, and their attempt to achieve inclusivity among their normative, Pentecostal counterparts. In particular, I examine the ways that my informants filter everyday experience through biblical text and their assertion that the spiritual reconciliation of LGBT peoples is a final piece of biblical prophecy. As others have been liberated from the bonds of oppression, the marginal Pentecostals contend that liberation and salvation for the LGBT community is inevitable, despite a sensed opposition. Through reimagined belief and practice, my informants reinvent mainstream Pentecostalism and articulate their understanding of the Bible through the performance of piety in public venues. Believers negotiate belonging amidst the homophobia of mainstream evangelicals and mainstream queer America by accepting a neoconservative religiosity as a means to offset an oppressive and spiritually uncertain existence. As such, the notion that they are engaging in a rearticulated oppression, a mere queer copy of heteronormative faith, is challenged. For LGBT Pentecostals, mirroring heteronormative lives and achieving inclusion in the larger faith is preferred over a lifestyle of queer secularism. Accordingly, heteronormative Pentecostal leaders continue to inspire my informants regardless of the fact that such patriarchs view the inclusive movement as a "doctrine of devils." How these men and women reinterpret biblical text to produce a complex liberation narrative that asserts that queer people are the last remnant of humanity to be reached and reconnected to a gospel that has often, in practice, rejected them, is at the heart of my dissertation.

Why Study a Queer Pentecostal Community?

Queer and gender theorists typically focus on the intricacies of a particular subset of the broader queer community, whether that means working with men who perform on Saturday nights as drag queens or lesbians living on communes in the countryside, for example. Studying life at the intersections of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, straight, however, does not often happen. This ethnographic data offers insight into a religious community in which the entire spectrum of sexual and gender identities are all together in one setting. Not only are LGBT individuals present in this work but also included are straight informants who are queered because of their connection with the marginal church. This analysis should contribute to dismantling an academic tradition that tends to isolate women and men and by doing so often ignores the interconnections and how such communities overlap. The lives that my friends negotiate are counterintuitive to the hypersexual stigmas that have been branded on their existence and, furthermore, are, in part, a reaction to those imposed stigmas. In addition, queer religion is a subject that has only minimally been explored by social scientists, as marginal sex acts are perhaps too often the focus within queer studies. The queering of Pentecostalism, one of the world's fastest growing religions, is a critique that is just beginning to occur and one that will continue to transform the faith. Overall, this ethnographic data should contribute to an interrogation of the assumptions that are made about queer lives, imaginings that typically position queer people as anti-Church.

The Rust Belt and Boystown

Located in the Indiana Rust Belt, Spirit and Truth Ministries¹ is situated in a setting that easily connects the local population to Chicago but also in a place where hay rides during annual fall celebrations are feasible. In this dissertation I have been careful to complicate the dichotomy

of rural/urban and establish that the postindustrial region is neither one nor the other but, rather, a combination of both. I draw from Robert Orsi's ideas of pathways. He explains "...metropolitan regions comprise complex networks of 'pathways' that city people travel in their daily rounds, which connect them with others across the cityscapes (1999:51)." Such connectivity does not only circulate within urbanity but attracts, in the case of Chicago, Hoosier gays and lesbians who venture into Boystown in order to experience a more liberated queer setting, and, while doing so, contribute to the existing mecca. Therefore, given the idea of pathways and my informants' proximity and careful participation in Chicago's queer scene, I have been careful to not cast the righteous few as rural nor urban but as intermediary subjects who fuse these imagined and lived distant worlds.

As John Howard and Brock Thompson have pointed out, although queer people have often fled to cities in a sort of refugee manner, others have adapted to less affirming social conditions, even in the American South (Howard 2001, Thompson 2010). As Scott Herring illustrates, though much of the scholarship and activism has been accomplished in cities and has been urban-focused, it is important to understand that queer life has existed, if not flourished in transgressive ways, in even the most homophobic social landscapes (Herring 2010). As the lines between rural and urban are blurred, making sense of queer Pentecostals in the Indiana Rust Belt also requires interrogating and destabilizing the idea of distinct and separated rural queer lives and urban queer lives in order to reveal a messier reality. As well as negotiating LGBT belonging in Northwest Indiana, Boystown, as a "gayborhood" or "queer ghetto," plays a significant role in the lives of my friends. Perceiving urban concentrations of LGBT people as social ghettos was widely popular during the early days of gay liberation and is a term still applied to such safe spaces. In the 1970s, Walt Wittman wrote: "San Francisco is a refugee camp

for homosexuals. We have fled here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it is so great here, but because it was so bad there” (1972:330). This bustling queer community of Chicago offers my informants a model for liberation, a constant temptation, and a reminder that they must be “set apart” in the End Times.² My friends are spiritually cautious when venturing into Boystown, where temptations abound but, simultaneously, greatly enjoy the freedom it offers. However, as I explain in this dissertation, the practitioners are not necessarily understood in Boystown as evidenced by what happened during their participation in a pride parade. Despite the congregation’s attempt to evangelize during the parade, other LGBT participants did not seem to take interest in queer Pentecostalism.

As explained by Michael Warner, in an era when increasing numbers of queer people strive for normalcy, it is essential to engage with those who may feel that their lives are less stigmatized outside of a gayborhood and more feasible in a place such as Northwest Indiana. This is the case of queer Pentecostalists who sense more of an alignment with neoconservative Christianity than with an expected secular agenda (Warner 2000). Utilizing Boystown as inspiration and a shared identity, my friends are able to construct pious lives away from the lure of the gayborhood. As such, my informants do not necessarily partake in the club life that brings other Hoosier queer people into the city. However, the believers enjoy having an affirming space nearby to do such things as purchasing same-sex wedding cards, which allows them to foster Bible-based commitments. For those queer individuals who have latched onto ideals of family values,³ monogamy, neoconservative religion, End Times awareness, and the norms of a heterodominant society, Northwest Indiana seems to offer a more suitable and spiritually certain condition despite the discomfort of asserting a queer identity in such a place. This story reflects a

larger shift in society and broadening of queer cultural life, as LGBT people continue to assert themselves alongside heterosexuals.

The Postindustrial Environment

Theorists, such as Steven High and Kevin Leicht, have labeled the Rust Belt a postindustrial region (High 2005, Leicht 2007). Inhabitants have been referred to as “postindustrial peasants—a class of people whose indebtedness and economic instability at the hands of elites has rendered them politically powerless, living from one paycheck to the next, one misstep away from economic disaster” (Leicht 2007:128) Being constantly reminded through industrial ruins that blue-collar people were once able to proudly contribute to a country they loved “...is a testament to the inability of working people to control the destructive forces at work in Pittsburg and across North America” (High 2005:1). The middle-class prosperity that once marked the region continues to dwindle, particularly in the face of union busting and the general class warfare being waged on working-class people, including the assaults that the working-poor bring on themselves vis-à-vis an idolized invisible hand of a Laissez-faire system. Of course, another primary factor has been the general “race to the bottom⁴” to find the cheapest labor, despite the human factor. Steven High explains in *Corporate Wasteland*: “By the 1970s, many blue-collar people had come to see themselves as part of the middle class. The higher wages won by unionized workers offered millions of families a home in the suburbs and a broad range of consumer goods. However, this higher standard of material wealth did not change the fact that industrial workers remained vulnerable to economic change. The job losses of the past three decades have undermined people’s faith in this urban and industrial version of the American dream” (2005:3). The Rust Belt and its inhabitants have been forced to re-create their lives in an atmosphere of vanishing industry, as capitalist interests have deemed the region no

longer profitable. Many of the people involved in this story lived through the glory days of the industrialism that defined the region, as most are middle-aged and senior participants. Only a few in the community in which I worked have been able to retain decent paying jobs within local industry, while others are unemployed, retired, looking for work, disabled, or trying to make ends meet by working in service industries.

The deindustrialization of the Indiana Rust Belt has left behind a people who are now being bombarded with the idea that they are lazy and content to simply enjoy their free meals. Such a perception does not factor in the embarrassment, the feelings of worthlessness and guilt that the working poor experience each time they swipe an EBT card or enroll their children in reduced lunch programs. Barbara Ehrenreich goes as far to contend that blue-collar individuals unintentionally give the most charity. They do the most charitable labor, insomuch that their low-wages must be subsidized by the government (2002). Although labor, class, and federal programs have not been the focus of my work, I recognize a transition of dignified working-class people into being wards of the state. Throughout this project, I have been conscious of the ways in which “deindustrialization has been allowed to undermine the American dream in a way that is not easily repaired and that has contributed in profound ways to the spiraling inequality in which the country has found itself,” as Christine Walley illustrates (2013:166). However, I do not want to discount the strength of my friends in the church and others in the region. I hope for this dissertation to reflect the optimism and adaptability of one subset of the population in the Rust Belt.

The resilience here that I explore is not just economic survival but also negotiating safe space in the thick of homophobia. Preying on the “morality” of blue-collar people remains a favorite tactic among those who manipulate the democratic process by distracting voters with

fear, whether it concerns abortion, race, or homophobia. Due to queer people being exploited through carefully-constructed moral panic,⁵ my friends have not only had to professionally adapt to the postindustrial region but also cope with the heightened awareness of homosexuality and subsequent homophobia among working-class people who should have much in common with the believers. In addition, queer Pentecostal faith is an invasion into heterosexual supremacy and remains a daunting task, especially given the distaste for it on both the queer, secular side and on the heteronormative, religious side. To further complicate the nodes of queer and Pentecostal existence, the believers sense a common cause with heteronormative evangelicals on many of the “moral” issues, such as the idea that Israel is usually, by default, blameless due to being “God’s people,” that women should not be in control of their bodies, and a fear of the “Muslim world.” The institution of marriage, which is a rather conservative expectation, has been the problem. In the conflicted and transforming Rust Belt region, a sect of believers have emerged to assert an unexpected, pious presence despite the resistance they encounter. While my friends’ existence is often shocking, and even threatening, to many of their neighbors, the normative values and goals they share reflect the local community more than may be realized.

Theorizing Queer Experiences

Considering that sexuality is a primary organizing principle in my field site, it is essential to provide an academic review of sexuality and gender. Historically speaking, as Jonathan Katz explains, the binary opposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality is a relatively recent “invention” (2004 and 2007). The polarized orientations, engrained into American morality, serve as confirmation for the Other. The masculinity of the gay-bashing hatemonger depends upon the perceived femininity of the “queen,” his gender inversion, which clearly illustrates Judith Butler’s idea that “...the naturalized knowledge of gender operates as a preemptive and

violent circumscription of reality” (2008:xxiv). However, in an earlier state of American homosexuality, the outwardly gay male, then known as a fairy, is said to have had friendlier relations with heterosexual men. In his writings about the emergence of gay life in New York, George Chauncey writes that “one of the reasons fairies were tolerated by tough working-class men and often had remarkably easygoing relations with them was the care they took to confirm rather than question the latter’s manliness” (1994:80). Therefore, homophobia could be interpreted as a continual relegation of women and “the effeminate” to an inferior status in society, those who are thought to only be obsessed with a more superior, male form. In addition, when lesbian women allegedly reject the superior, heterosexual male body, their “deviance” is seen as blasphemous. It is a shared struggle when queer people, particularly effeminate “half-men,” desire to be seen as equals in a patriarchal, heteronormative society. Sexism and its offspring, homophobia, reveal themselves during this struggle.

“Queer⁶” will be employed throughout this research in reference to my informants, primarily self-identifying gays and lesbians, who have been branded by society as unfit for the mainstream Church. The term “queer” is a problematic one, not solely for its historical and present use as a derogatory epithet but also since it combines a diverse array of preferences, experiences, and orientations under one word. Perhaps “queer” perpetrates the notion that sexually marginal persons practice inferior sexualities. The label, however, may also be thought of in a positive light as it complicates all human sexuality. Accordingly, as Nikki Sullivan explains, “...since queer is a positionality rather than an identity in the humanist sense, it is not restricted to gays and lesbians, but can be taken up by anyone who feels marginalised as a result of their sexual practices” (2003:44). I have also used queer as a verb to reference the ways in which the Pentecostals have “queered” Pentecostalism, in order to underscore their active roles

in re-creating the faith for sexually marginal peoples. I use “queering” in reference to the ways in which my informants are transforming a global faith system. “Queering” is not a final state but an ongoing process of adjusting heterodominant norms. Through the process of “queering” Pentecostalism, my friends alter the faith just enough to make it work for their reality. Although “queer” may be troubling to an extent, the term is also a powerful one because of its ability to acknowledge non-normative behaviors that most people, including heterosexuals, practice. For example, a threesome involving two heterosexual women and one heterosexual man is a rather queer arrangement. Does it make the women bisexual? Is a heterosexual man who has a threesome with his wife and another man bisexual? Or what about the straight man who cross-dresses in the bedroom with his wife, and what does that say about the wife? Or, what about a normative wife who turns into a “femdom” when the lights go out? Or, what about the effeminate heterosexual male who is cast as gay because he somehow fails to perform proper masculinity? Finally, is the drunken gay guy who made out with his hag that one night actually bisexual? In all of these examples, the individuals involved are somehow suspect through failing to achieve gender and sexual proscriptions of heterosexual, or even homosexual, normalcy. Thinking in terms of “queerness” complicates the trust placed in such categories. Although I mostly use the term “queer” in this ethnographic account to refer to the categories of LGBT and those who identity as such, the word offers a powerful response from marginal peoples to highlight the frequent non-normative nature of most human sexuality. In addition, the term is less dated than an ever-growing alphabet soup acronym.

However, it is also important to recognize the problems in reclaiming such powerful language. Although the end goal and critique may be appropriate, are LGBT people accepting and internalizing inferiority by attempting to own the word? As “queer” has been used as an

epithet to ridicule and humiliate LGBT people, primarily gay males, is it easier for lesbians, for example, to reclaim the word, and does it even suit them? Is the word male-centric? Perhaps the word does nothing to destabilize our quaint categories, but it does unveil the reality that normative sexuality is difficult to achieve, is not a static state of being, and is constantly transforming.

Several analyses, such as those written by Bernadette Barton and Tanya Erzen, have considered the queer nature of “ex-gays,” those in transition from homosexual to heterosexual (Barton 2012, Erzen 2006). These projects are quite significant in order to gain an understanding of the ways in which neoconservative evangelicals perceive gender performance as a direct representation of sexual desire. Common among such “ministries” are activities to train effeminate male and butch female bodies to redirect their appropriate masculine and feminine instincts, for example, through sports for men and doing hair and makeup for women. The worldview allows less suspect individuals to pass as straight, as long as they do not act on their deviant desires, and essentially operates off of the notion of gender inversion. Ex-gays, therefore, could also be considered queers, in that they are non-normative and are liminal beings. Over the past few years, these ministries have started to acknowledge the trouble they have when attempting to redirect the “natural” flow of desire, which recently resulted in the ex-gay leader⁷ of the largest ministry in the world admitting that he loves his wife but no longer believes that his homosexuality can be changed (Huffington Post 2013). Such advancements as ex-gay leaders renouncing their ministries are monumental but further problematize and isolate LGBT believers who struggle to exist in the normative environments, because there seems to be less confidence in conversion therapy among neoconservative Christians due to a greater inability to convert the “perverted.”

Apart from the literature addressing the ambiguity of ex-gays, several analyses have also been written to better understand the ways in which suspect individuals have achieved a minimal sense of inclusion in non-affirming, neoconservative environments. The inclusivity is largely due to their usefulness in the church. Douglas Harrison and E. Patrick Johnson, in particular, have explored how queer people, particularly gay men, deflect from their homosexuality by producing church music (Harrison 2012, Johnson 2011). In *Then Sings My Soul*, Harrison contends that as southern gospel singers spend much of their time on the road in same-sex quartets and trios, it is the perfect “beard” for gay men (2012). The same-sex commodore that occurs and the usage of the high-pitched and often effeminate male tenor, for example, provides a righteous outlet for non-normative males and a negotiation for queer space. The atmosphere is, at once, homoerotic and pious. I would add that the profession allows for the suspect to be remotely married and with children, thereby relieving the sexual pressure to perform heterosexuality. In African American⁸ churches, James Tinney explains, the iconic, spirited church music would not exist without a subtle tolerance for male homosexuality (1983). In fact, the reference to subtly labeling a man as gay by calling him “musical” is evidence of a careful integration of the queer male, perhaps exploitatively. Church music is, therefore, a rather queer space, and there remains a wealth of ethnography to be written.

In the field of anthropology, little has been written on the state of queer Christians, particularly neoconservative ones (McQuenny 2009, Shallenberger 1998, Thumma 2005). An anthropological understanding of queer Pentecostalism in the United States has yet to be articulated. The literature on queer religion does help to capture some of the struggle involved with reconciling faith and sexuality (Boellstorff 2005, Gaudio 2009, Shokeid 1995, Yip 1997). These works acknowledge the audacity required to remake dominant faiths. Of the works that

consider queer Christianity, the analyses tend to agree that these Christians, after being ousted from heteronormal faith systems, are more inclined toward religious pluralism. For evangelicals, Scott Thumma explains that his informants were open to reinterpreting other limitations known in dominant, neoconservative Christianity, and “they are less affected by the moral proscriptions against drinking, dancing, [and] sex outside of marriage”(Thumma 2005:80). Contrarily, such compromise does not exist among the LGBT Pentecostals of Spirit and Truth Ministries. Aside from a desire for the normalization of their sexualities, they share a common theology with mainstream neoconservatives and refuse to reject a universal path to the afterlife. In fact, the essence of queered Pentecostalism depends upon keeping up normal appearances and, for the most part, orthodox theology out of a struggle for legitimacy amid straight counterparts.

This reality highlights the tension between inclusivity and exclusivity. The queer Pentecostal worldview may seem sometimes inconsistent or contradictory to the outside, critical eye. The voices, however, in my field site form a rational, cacophonous chorus and dialogue to engage with and react to popular understandings of a queer experience. According to M.M. Bakhtin, such dialogue may be referred to as heteroglossia, which means that “at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of sociological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These ‘languages’ of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying ‘languages’ ” (1981:291). I trust that this analysis will provide insight into the internal logical and the manner in which my informants negotiate their salvations. The presence of the rebellious believers will, no doubt, transform Pentecostalism, resulting in either further isolation or

eventual inclusion of queer subjects into mainstream groups.

The Origins of Pentecostalism and an Imagined Trajectory

Generally speaking, to be Pentecostal is to believe in the idea of God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit/Ghost, entering the believer's body by allowing the gifts of that Spirit to operate (e.g. speaking in tongues, faith healing, loosing those bound by demons, et cetera). Pentecostalism, therefore, is not one particular denomination but a common experience that links many Pentecostal subgroups. To be possessed with the Holy Ghost equalizes believers and allows them to engage with its powers at all times, both in and out of a gathering place, provided that clean and holy lives are maintained. As David Martin notes, "Pentecostalism is a narrative and oral faith, preached in homely language with homely examples by homely people. Believers exercise their gifts by immediate experience on the job, not lengthy instruction in theological colleges, though further training may be offered by biblical institutions" (2013:38). In fact, in alignment with a type of egalitarianism that is central to the Pentecostal spiritual experience, laypeople often distrust clergy who have received higher education and, therefore, possibly tainted with secularism.

A revitalization movement of an imagined, biblical past originated in 1906 at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California. Joe Creech explains that modern Pentecostalism was conceived, and "to Pentecostals Azusa signaled, with all the telltale signs, the full outpouring of God's Latter Rain; it was the culmination of forward movements in a particular time and place that would precipitate world revival and the coming of Christ" (1996:421). Housed in a dilapidating African Methodist Episcopal church, the movement collected a diverse group of adherents. Women, men, children, whites, and African Americans, all yielded to the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Accordingly, as Joel Robbins explains, "this pattern of enthusiastic worship,

relatively unscripted and equalitarian in offering the floor to all those who the Spirit calls, is the one observers would find all over the world by the end of the twentieth century” (2004:120).

William J. Seymour, an African American minister, led the movement in Los Angeles. Born into poverty and racial tensions in the “syncretic environment” of Louisiana to parents who had experienced slavery, Cheryl Sanders contends that “...he was subjected to many formative influences, including the distinctively African worship practices of emancipated Christian slaves still living in the plantation setting and the Louisiana Creole religion, which emphasized supernaturalism and Haitian *voudou*” (1999:27). Influenced by African practices and the Holiness/Methodist traditions, Seymour charismatically combined the approaches to the spirit world in L.A. (MacRobert 1988). The movement catered to those struggling with inequality and injustice. However, as the vision sobered up to the realities of racism in the country, African American and white Pentecostals were segregated.

Pentecostals were further divided into camps of Oneness and Trinitarian (Anderson 2004). Those who subscribe to the Trinity understand that the godhead exists in three separate entities, God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, Oneness Pentecostals believe that God exists in one divine being who is capable of manifesting Himself in the flesh as Jesus, in spirit as the Holy Spirit, and then as God the Father in Heaven. Those at Spirit and Truth Ministries belong to the Oneness camp. They contend that the word “Trinity” is not in the Bible and is only a recent invention. Oneness Pentecostals emphasize “The Name.”⁹ Jesus’ name is particularly important in terms of immersion baptism, as it is believed that one must be baptized in “The Name” to be saved, as opposed to “the titles” or the Trinity spoken over one’s baptism. The difference is as simple as “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” versus “I baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ.” The difference may seem

miniscule from a theological standpoint, but, according to the believers, it is a matter of Heaven or Hell, as the precise imagining of the deities is context-specific. Spirit and Truth Ministries and the growing network of churches originating from the local congregation is said to be the first queered version of Oneness Pentecostalism in the world. The church was founded about fifteen years ago in the basement of the pastors' home and has grown into a complex congregation.

The history of the Pentecostal movement is important to my informants as they attempt to re-create authentic "old-time" religion. They understand their queering of this faith system to be an inevitable component of a prophetic trajectory. The believers play with the Pentecostal origins of equality and insert their own marginal experience in order to produce a new wave of revival. Although marginal for now, the believers envision that their critiques will become popular before the Second Coming.¹⁰

The existence of a queer, Pentecostal identity and performance is built upon resistance to the oppression imposed by mainline churches and the lure of queer America (Goffman 2007, Bauman 1984). My informants "cross borders" as they strive to gain legitimacy in the church world and "save" gay America (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Catering to different audiences, the performance and identity in each setting either emphasizes or de-emphasizes certain commonalities. Among "unsaved" queer people, my informants play up the common experience of the pain inflicted upon gays and lesbians by heterodominant religious groups. With evangelical Christians, however, the believers emphasize gender normativity and stress common causes such as Zionism, a pro-life agenda, and other convictions. The liminal positionality requires a great deal of diplomacy as they construct a comfortable belonging between the binary opposition of saved and unsaved (Turner 2007).

Religious groups are constantly in conflict in order to negotiate doctrine. Therefore, writing about a multi-generational group of neoconservative believers is a difficult undertaking, precisely because of the multifarious interpretations and personal relationships with Christ that believers maintain, particularly when, as an anthropologist, I am interested in lived religion. Accordingly, as Wade Roofe explains, “lived religion might be thought of as involving three crucial aspects: scripts, or sets of symbols that imaginatively explain what the world and life are about; practices, or the means whereby individuals relate to, and locate themselves within, a symbolic frame of reference; and human agency, or the ability of people to actively engage the religious worlds they help to create” (1999:41). Believers often cite Philippians 2:12, which states, “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” This form of agency is certainly practiced in Pentecostal groups, often resulting in a spirit of independence and loosely organized Pentecostal denominations. The passage serves as an equalizer and to promote an egalitarian ethos, but is also known to cause friction in competitive, pious settings. Church members may quote this passage when a challenge to leadership seems necessary or when individuals have their own ideas of what should be done when a specific problem or disagreement arises. In the queer Pentecostal setting, believers have this same resilience and agency. Much of the worldview presented in this analysis reflects that of leadership at Spirit and Truth Ministries and among the wider fellowship of Pentecostals across the United States. Although I listened to hours, and even days, of preaching while in the field, I also made a conscious effort to understand how the faith was being lived. What I learned is that everyone was “working out their own salvations,” despite the official dogma declared from the pulpit.

I bring up the dynamic of agency among believers, often accomplished through gossip, to establish that while this analysis is primarily dependent upon the official dogma of the church

and its leaders, such convictions may not always represent the views of the church body as a whole. For example, there are members of the church who do not subscribe to the idea that one should speak in tongues in order to spend eternity in Heaven. Some believe that the church should not emphasize a Pentecostal identity as much as the Pastors believe to be necessary and contend that denominational boundaries should be minimized. There are those in the church who do not outwardly exhibit charismatic worship and have Baptist or Methodist backgrounds but attend the church because it is an affirming congregation and a support network for the LGBT community in Northwest Indiana. Some use profanity on a regular basis, smoke, get drunk, and have anonymous sex, despite the official stance that church doctrine takes on such activities. I have been careful, therefore, to point out friction within the pious community. It is also important to note the revolving nature of such religious communities like Spirit and Truth Ministries. The membership process in Pentecostal churches is relatively informal, in that individual believers do not sign membership roles or a collective theology. Several members were added to “the fold” and numerous members left the congregation during my year in the Rust Belt.

Christianese

Throughout this text, I have incorporated phrases that are part of a shared Pentecostal and evangelical lexicon, and I have distinguished such phrases with the use of quotation marks. Susan Harding explains: “Once you are saved, the Holy Spirit assumes your voice, speaks through you, and begins to rephrase your life. Listening to the gospel enables you to experience belief, as it were, vicariously. But generative belief, belief that indisputably transfigures you and your reality, belief that becomes you, comes only through speech: speaking is believing” (Harding 2001:60). This sort of dialect is an important component to consider as it represents the ways in which the Word is embodied and utilized to navigate, rationalize, and negotiate daily

life. It also serves to distinguish believers from unbelievers. Those in my field site maintain an especially intimate embodiment of the text, as they have had to work that much harder to arrive at spiritual and religious peace with marginal sexualities being in the way. Being able to navigate the text easily and articulating it in a studied manner is not only a means to harness cultural capital within the community of saints but is also a part of their understood moral obligation to repair colossal damage, considering the incredible misunderstandings of LGBT people in the Christian landscape.

I have included a number of biblical passages throughout this analysis in order to provide my informants' rationale. Unless otherwise noted, I have used the King James Version, as it is the preferred version in my field site. However, the believers are not opposed to studying and quoting from other versions such as the New King James or New Living Translation. While the parishioners adhere to the idea that the Bible is an inerrant and inspired text, they are prone to compare translations, look into the contexts and relationships between writers, and attempt to gain a holistic understanding of the Word. While in one sense they could be classified as literalists, they have also been ostracized due to others' literal interpretations of the text and are, therefore, conscious of the mistakes that have been made. My informants meticulously study the Word, even to the extent of reimagining and investigating the cultural contexts of the time, which is something that liberal Christians are accused of doing too often. The Rust Belt Pentecostals attempt to carve out a space between extreme literalism and progressive Christianity. While they have negotiated inclusivity for sexually marginal people, they also subscribe to the notion that "if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything." Being forced to understand God's perception of his "gay children" has resulted in the believers taking a

less intense stand on certain issues, mainly their own conditions, but the believers have not greatly revised Pentecostal theology in other ways. They remain true to their roots.

There are a few other specifics to be clarified in relation to the Pentecostal dialect they speak. I use the term “saints” in this ethnographic study to reference living and deceased practitioners. Pentecostal tradition does not reserve the use of the word for those who have passed. The pastors frequently refer to the congregation as “saints” and going to Heaven to be with the “saints who have gone on before them.” Therefore, sainthood, according to this tradition, is a work in progress that all believers are eligible to achieve, which reflects a broader Protestant dogma to destabilize hierarchies of spiritual access. I also frequently use “Bro. and Sis.” or “Brother and Sister” to reflect the ways in which my informants refer to each other or denote their names in written form. I also use “Pastor” when referring to the ministers who lead the group. Having lived among the believers for such an extended period of time, referring to the men by their first names even feels awkward for me. Church members at Spirit and Truth Ministries never call them by their first names but as “Pastor,” Pastor David or Michael,” or “the Pastors.” Likewise, when laypeople refer to each other, they almost exclusively use the pronouns “Brother” or “Sister” so-and-so. Utilizing such familial language continually separates the family of saints from those “in the world,” those who are said to not be a part of a Heaven-bound family. Pentecostals often talk about “the world” or “the lost” when referencing non-believers and even those who are non-Pentecostal Christians. For the community of practitioners, a “church family” usually trumps biological relations, in that the members feel closer and seemingly more obligated to those who have “royal blood flowing through their veins,” as a lyric to a familiar song articulates their sense of belonging.

I occasionally refer to my friends as being “charismatic.” Although the connotations may not be evident to those unfamiliar with Pentecostal particulars, the term is a charged one among Pentecostals. I have incorporated the use of “charismatic” in order to stress the necessities of intuition, natural flow, and spontaneity that produce the diverse but universal Pentecostal worship experience. I use the contested term in order to highlight the ways in which conduits carefully guide congregations into “the anointing,” or that visceral experience of Pentecost. Alternatively, as Estrelda Alexander explains, “Charismatic Christianity represents the adoption of Pentecostal spirituality and a growing appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit in enhancing worship and Christian life without acceptance of Pentecostalism’s doctrinal emphasis on tongues as initial evidence” (2011:344). It is alleged among many Oneness Pentecostals that, when it exists, tongues, tongues interpretation, and dancing among Charismatics is faked, or at least planned, practiced, and learned, to an extent. Worship among Charismatics may include a dance team that performs for the congregation during a particular segment of the meeting. Rather, in my field site, dancing is something that may occur at any moment and by any member, should the Holy Ghost urge the believer to move out of their seat and into the aisle for spontaneous expressivity. Therefore, those who are invested in the denominational integrity of the faith often resent the term. I have used the term in a lower-case manner to only stress the spontaneous, emotional journeys believers undertake nearly every service as they produce emotional highs and lows, marked by the guttural expressions of ecstatic dancing and the agony of weeping.

The Queer Pentecostals of the Rust Belt

Those who gather at Spirit and Truth Ministries in the Indiana Rust Belt are predominately white and working class. While several in the congregation are on federal assistance and manage to live a hardscrabble existence, they consider themselves equals before

God. I have also chosen to not emphasize that many in the congregation are poverty stricken out of an attempt to understand Pentecostalism as more than the opium it may be, rather than in a spirit of classism, dismissal, and condescension that, although not necessarily current, does persist. Instead, I seek to know why and in what ways the new faith exists. However, the class complexities of queer Pentecostalism in the Rust Belt are an important component of this study.

Accordingly:

Historically, social classes have often been viewed as collectivities determined in economic terms. Yet class defined in this way too often overlooks the other forms of individual and collective identity, like race and sexuality, that powerfully shape who we are and that affect in powerful ways how class comes to be lived in our daily lives. It also downplays the cultural worlds through which give our lives meaning. Yet a concept of class that focuses too exclusively on how we distinguish among ourselves based on culture, ethnicity, and identity—without sufficient grounding within those economic relations of inequality that shape our life trajectories—causes the concept of class to lose the critical edge that makes it a potent tool for social analysis (Walley 2013:167-8).

The complexity of the global religion, and now in its queer form, is much too complicated and diverse to be reduced to a working-class religion, as much of the literature regarding Pentecostalism has often posited. As I remain mindful of class dynamics, I feel that I must also respect the fact that inequality is said to not be a reality among the practitioners, as all are equal when filled with the Holy Ghost. This supernatural force acts as an equalizer of complex variables, such as race, class, and gender. While the congregation in which I worked is not particularly racially diverse, I have utilized several sources that address Holy Ghost experiences in African American settings, particularly in relation to a similar spontaneous nature of Spirit-filled worship. I have incorporated such literature to not conflate multifarious religious experiences but to acknowledge the idealized sameness of the Spirit as it navigates the globe in both heterosexual and homosexual environments. I have explored gender for the obvious reason that it is a complex organizing principle for sexually marginal Pentecostals. It is important point

out the fact that the primary congregation I immersed myself in was male led and, therefore, male dominated. Within the wider fellowship of affirming, Oneness Pentecostals, female preachers and even transgendered preachers are a part of leadership. These individuals are also invited to minister at Spirit and Truth from time-to-time.

In chapter one, I discuss the conundrum of conducting fieldwork as one who was raised in Pentecostal churches. I explain how I became useful in my field site and was cast in a musical role, despite the inner conflict that ensued. Chapter two provides an analysis of the ways in which believers negotiate the Word, as they attempt to reconcile faith and sexuality. In chapter three, I explore the role that the Holy Ghost plays among queer Pentecostals, in particular the ways in which the believers have unleashed the power of the Spirit to minister to all people. Dating, marriage, and relationships are the subjects discussed in chapter four. In particular, I focus on the ways in which my informants engage in a complex re-creation of family values. Chapter five addresses gender at Spirit and Truth Ministries, especially how the believers stress the idea that there is neither male nor female in the Spirit and have used this rationale to make sense of their existence. Lastly, in chapter six, I conclude with the overarching theme of this dissertation, the idea that my friends see the reconciliation of faith and sexuality among displaced believers to be a final piece of biblical prophecy. Overall, I contend that the ethnographic data presented in this text challenges unilineal indications of progress and hegemonic notions of equality, as the believers are one fragment of a fractured queer community who sense more of an allegiance with the Church than with an illusory queer family/nation/community. I acknowledge the internalized homophobia at my field site and, therefore, the success of anti-gay rhetoric in a society with many visions of what should be come of LGBT people. I point out that it is important to carefully distinguish between imposed

homophobia from the individual agency of LGBT people and their emerging queer, conservative movements.

This text is the first anthropological account of queer Pentecostalism among predominately white and working-class practitioners in the United States. My informants sense an unlikely alliance with mainline believers who oppose and oppress them. They remain patient and trust that inclusion among heteronormative ranks will eventually happen. Those who I learned to love as my friends often say they have not “thrown the baby out with the bath water,” as other LGBT Christian groups have done. Perseverance and the ability to not compromise their faith is an important part of their identity and pride, as the theme to a recent church conference proclaimed “S.T.A.N.D.—Stand Tall and Never Deviate.” The counterintuitive existence of LGBT Pentecostal believers is a complicated narrative of marginal people challenging religious regimes that attempt to keep them out of an imagined Heaven, and I trust that I have done them justice.

The Piano Bench: Fieldwork and Pentecost

“Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.”
Psalms 150:4-6 KJV

Chapter Two

In our Pentecostal churches, homosexuality is thought to be an evil spirit one possesses that must be expelled. My informants and I have spent hours crying during what are called “altar calls,” in which the butch men of God would beckon us forward after their suit coats and ties had long been removed and sweat soaked through white dress shirts following sermons about some lake of fire. The butch females and effeminate males were the immediate recipients of the alpha male anointing their foreheads with olive oil before urgently yelling at the devil to “loose the queers.” He would continue to place both sweaty palms on the deviant’s head, shaking the poor soul as he made contact with and engaged in warfare with the devil. Every church lady, hair spun into buns, joined in with hands placed on the backs of those to be miraculously delivered. The sisters cried, spoke in tongues, and exhaustingly pleaded directly with God and Satan in a heartfelt manner. Some of the macho laymen would join the supernatural battle too. Often the abominable sin was left unmentionable as an amoral body swayed under the pressure of an entire army of “prayer warriors.” Believers knew the queers among them. Once outed in such a way, the damage done to the “bound” individual’s ego was irreparable. Most of us either ran away, or we hid behind pews, pianos, organs, drums, and even pulpits without peace. “Confessing one to another”¹¹ placed the queer on a watch list for the “saved and sanctified” to remain watchful¹² for indications of effeminacy or masculinity, depending on of one’s gender. The misunderstanding, often one coming from a misguided place of love and concern, has taken the lives of many, caused individuals to marry and hide behind an opposite sex partner and offspring, crushed the hearts of praying mommas and preaching daddies, and resulted in countless “abominations”¹³ wandering in a lonely world in fear of the afterlife. My informants and I share this experience; they also did time in the altars. I do not intend to demonize the believers who have long been mocked for the homophobia and other understandings. Rather, I am concerned with the

innovative and creative response of ousted LGBT believers remaking Pentecostal faith in a counterintuitive fashion.

In order to understand the intimate relationship that I have with my informants and subsequent ethnographic data, which undoubtedly has an effect on my analysis, allow me to situate myself within this anthropological endeavor. Growing up in Mount Airy, North Carolina, better known as the inspiration for Mayberry and Andy Griffith's hometown, the Pentecostal religious experience was life to my family. We were working-class people and still are. Pentecostal women maintained the convention of not wearing pants, jewelry, makeup, and not cutting their hair, or their "glory," as it is referred to. For the men, the rules allowed us to blend into a society a bit more easily. We could not wear shorts, take off our shirts in public, or grow out our hair, all fairly easy rules to uphold. Growing up being told that gays and lesbians were abominations, often referred to as "queers" in the literalist pulpit, I sickened myself with something I tried to change for years. I repented every night before crawling into bed and asked God for another day to live before drifting off to sleep, hoping that just maybe I would wake up with "natural" desires the next day. The imagery of Hell and the persecution of Christians in the Last Days haunted my lively imagination, including my dreams. I knew that the Rapture¹⁴ could happen at any moment. I was not ready for that considering my "inversion." Despite the agony that I put myself through during my teen years, the promised deliverance never came, unfortunately, despite the fact that homosexuals were promised peace from the sadistic demons that stubbornly resided in our bodies. It was a miserable experience, but I do not blame the ignorance on the good intentions of believers.

Early on, when I was around ten years old, our little church needed a piano player, since the pastor's son, who had been playing, was leaving for college. The believers gathered around

and prayed over my hands so that I could take his place. I had no previous musical knowledge, but before long, by mimicking the sounds around me, I helped to provide music for intense services in which fervent believers fell onto the floor, ran around the church, travailed through tears for “lost” children, exorcised homosexuals, and responded to a number of emotionally-demanding needs. Along with a drummer and bass guitarist, I played every service. I do not remember meetings lasting less than a couple of hours. The few believers did not feel spiritually released to leave the humble gathering places in various textile mill towns until their spirits were fed and they “broke through,” experiencing ecstasy. During winter, the primary church we attended reeked of burning kerosene that attempted to warm worshippers and defray heating costs for a mostly poor congregation. Being involved in music, I found a pretty innovative way to leave as I was becoming aware that I was a Hell-bound queer, and once embarrassing, homoerotic evidence was discovered in my bedroom, like the archive of Target circulars with only the men’s underwear pictures valued. I landed a job singing baritone and playing piano for a southern gospel quartet, a traditional genre of music that is popular in Bible Belt arenas. At seventeen, in Little Rock, Arkansas, I imagined abominable acts while making music in every Baptist church in Texas and elsewhere. I decided I had better attend college before getting found out so that I would have something to fall back on when I lost my job in southern gospel music. My full-time work in the industry was short-lived as I discovered direction at a local community college among other curious, blue-collar minds, the kind of people I still feel most comfortable around. For several years I was able to completely immerse myself in academic subjects insomuch that I suppressed the pain of Pentecostalism and the music I loved and started to gain a new perspective on religious experience.

Working toward a dissertation topic, I knew that I wanted to explore Pentecostalism, to try and understand something that always, in a sense, felt incredibly foreign to me. I contemplated working with serpent handlers in Appalachia but decided to explore a previously unstudied community through an anthropological lens. I found Spirit and Truth Ministries of Northwest Indiana, a predominantly LGBT Pentecostal church, on YouTube. I was thrilled to discover the church's page. The group was engaged in charismatic worship without fear of proclaiming what most Pentecostals would label "a doctrine of devils," belonging to a litany of End Time signs they have long been ticking off of a strategic exit strategy. I spent several conflicted nights studying those videos. I became captivated by the irony of it all, enjoying the journey out of displacement from the mainstream church into re-creating faith with inclusivity and liberation at the core. I was curious what their lives were like, how the believers managed relationships, how they felt about the End Time, how they negotiated belonging between the gay community and church world, how they reasoned with the biblical passages that demonize them, and why they insisted upon Pentecostal salvation and experience. I was not sure what made the practitioners insist on modifying a faith system that may never include them.

We come from the same strata of society and have experienced the same sorts of rejection and displacement. They survived and now rejoice in their liberating truth that Jesus has always welcomed LGBT believers. As a close friend in the field told me, deliverance, for her, was not being delivered from homosexuality but from the oppression of the mainstream church, being free to worship honestly before God. We all went through the frightening realization that our sexualities did not satisfy the expectations of our cultural realities, not just sects that worship together a couple of times a week but networks of humanity so intricately connected that to be displaced and unwelcome means creating a whole new world for oneself, starting over.

Homophobia in the outside world simply adds another layer of contingent belonging,¹⁵ meaning the ways in which social and political belonging are dependent upon the exclusion of certain bodies and practices (Cohen, Garcia, Cook, and Purdie-Vaughns 2011).

However, considering my personal history and subsequent baggage, I was not sure that I could even do this project justice. I was a bit angry with the Church.¹⁶ Even my own struggle to maintain peaceful relationships within my family made me hesitant about pursuing such a topic. Perhaps I was a bit jaded, and I knew that I would have to open my mind to clearly and fairly make sense of the stories and lives that were entrusted into my care. Despite these reservations, I went ahead and made initial contact and visited Spirit and Truth Ministries during an annual conference. The week of the convention was a moment of conflict for me. I sat through most services viscerally moved by what I was seeing and feeling; many first-timers did the same. Everything came flooding back to me, all of the stuff that I had suppressed for many years. The songs they were singing were the same ones that I used to sing, the fervency of the preaching disturbed me just the same, and the embrace of church people and the sense of spiritual community was a familiar feeling, a painful one but an energy seemingly infused with love. Following that visit, I was nervous about going back into the field after they had agreed to host me for a year.

Fearing self-righteousness, crushing dogma, and isolation made me hesitant about the return. I had run from faith for several years and was afraid that being around neoconservative belief would bring back the guilt, the insecurity that plagued the first part of my life. For the years I grew up in the church, the only exit strategy from temporal existence was not available to those who transgress sexual norms; now, a Heavenly opportunity presented itself, which further complicated the experience. Despite being disoriented, eternal security was now accessible.

Through the exhausting but enlivening disorientation that is fieldwork, I forced myself to deal with an internal struggle in order to understand their persistence and connected with my informants on an intimate level based on the shared experience of exclusion we have both experienced upon coming out of the closet in the Church and elsewhere. While I fell in love with my friends in the Heartland and their love for God, at times I just wanted all of us to be freed, liberated from the fright of Hell and the lure of a potential reward in an imagined paradise; my informants taught me they had already found their liberation, perhaps a freedom greater than my own.

Within a couple of weeks of being at the church, my informants became familiar with my history in the gospel quartet and asked me to sing and play a song. An email to the entire church was sent that week to announce I would be helping with music during my stay. Despite the emphasis I had placed on my role as a researcher, it seemed that it was trumped by my usefulness to the church on a practical level. I freaked out when I read the email, which made me out to be the new music director. While with the congregation, I was left to produce all of the music for several Sunday morning services a couple of times, which left me feeling quite uneasy about my influence and personal identity within the community of believers. When I had musical leadership at Spirit and Truth, I consciously led the members in songs that emphasized positive, unadulterated emotions of love, happiness, and thankfulness in order to resolve a brewing, internal conflict. I tried to avoid singing about judgment or Jesus being the only way to Heaven, because such lyrics felt dishonest and unethical to me. One song we sang together on a Sunday morning states, "I am blessed, everyday that I live, I am blessed. When I wake up in the morning until I lay my head to rest, I am blessed." I chose such generic but wholesome lyrics to resolve the dilemma I felt while sitting on that piano bench during fieldwork. Of course, I played right

along with the band during those moments when practitioners sang about a Pentecostal fire that burns in the soul. The fire they speak of is the energy and transcendence felt when they tap into the spiritual realm, one that empowers the “saints” to accomplish most anything. Folk Pentecostal music is the soundtrack to such behavior as it emotionally drives and manipulates supernatural contact. Since I spent my childhood making this music, I knew the popular Pentecostals numbers, the kind of music to invoke enough excitement to produce “leaping for joy,” “victory marches,” and all-out dancing before the Lord. I am also familiar with the ones designed to create moments of calming emotion and even weeping as congregants were in constant dedication to Christ. During those periods of consecration, the lyrics I chose were about one’s love and devotion to a higher power, the desire to be a vessel for blessings to flow through humanity, and various standards. There were many moments during fieldwork when I held back tears as I sat at the piano. It was painful.

Having a certain competency, my friends put me to work in order to fill a void in the music department, which allowed them to cast me in a particular role that was useful and non-threatening (D’Alisera 2004:31). It was as if my familiarity with the music and my “native-ness” cleansed the fact that I was there to do anthropology. I was not seen as a threat and my presence was made palatable. As it turned out, the piano bench was the safest place for me during a year in the Rust Belt. I did not have to speak in tongues there, dance, do victory marches, and pray with believers as they experienced the ecstasy of the Holy Ghost, but it was a vantage point to absorb the complexities of sexual and religious reconciliation, moments of joy and pain. Originally, I just wanted to sit in the stackable chairs and just take it all in. However, I learned that my friends needed to make sense of my awkward existence; I felt useful and, therefore, less suspect in my field site. The piano was the needed buffer to negate any anxiety surrounding my

ambiguous, temporary position. Despite not wanting to participate in such an influential way, making music was the most natural role for me in the field. In addition to being at the piano and in the place where my friends wanted me to be, I am not sure that I would have been trusted without our shared backgrounds, a shared heritage that anticipated Hell for most of our lives.

William Leap and Ellen Lewin explain that “choosing to study a topic defined as ‘homosexual’ almost means that others will suspect one of being gay and very likely regard one’s work as tainted by personal concerns,” I will be clear that my personal concerns for choosing the church as a research site were twofold: I was pursuing personal religious peace and engaging in academic inquiry into the lived religion of queer Pentecostals, a relatively unexplored world in anthropology (1996:11). As part of the larger family of ethnographers, according to Anthony Cohen, “it would not be contentious to suggest that many anthropologists are motivated by a personal problematic as well as by mere intellectual curiosity” (2007:109). My problematic is not fueled by a desire to criticize mainline Pentecostalism but to explain why and how queer Pentecostals are creating their own understandings of the supernatural.

I write with respect that I maintain for the spiritual confidence of so many worldwide but am troubled by the hardships of queer people in Pentecostal and other churches around the world, particularly the youth. Accordingly, as Paul Farmer illustrates, “...we should not be embarrassed as anthropologists or sociologists or historians—as people who have been trained in scholarship—or apologize for our activism, or for being part of a movement. Looking back at the classic and successful movements—the movement for civil rights, the movement for women’s rights, and the abolition movement in England and the US—one can mark their strategy: they wrote books” (2009:188). Hopefully Howard Zinn’s idea will apply to this work, which claims that “sometimes just telling people about something that they do not know about is an important

thing to do, because that alone may move them to a greater consciousness and even into action” (2009:18). If there is an activist bent to this text, perhaps this investment will at least allow insight into an unseen realm of queer religious conservatism and what such a worldview means for American religion and equality, and, ultimately, help contribute to an understanding of the struggle involved to be LGBT and believe in Jesus. Perhaps the complex struggle of LGBT people to maintain transparency and faith will be better understood rather than simply dismissed or ignored.

Since those who study religion often appear suspect within academia, particularly the intentions and a certain anxiety concerning “native” anthropology, I will satisfy popular curiosity and write transparently about my engagement with informants as one who grew up sleeping under Pentecostal pews with a preaching daddy and praying momma. Perhaps I am just overly sensitive to what often appears as a certain form of academic regulation of objective, scientific inquiry. Of course, withstanding such pressure, I would not write any other way. As Kevin O’Neill, an anthropologist who works with Guatemalan Pentecostals, explains, “...no one ever asks my colleagues who study poverty whether they are poor, though I am asked often, and with much seriousness, to outline the bounds of my faith” (2010:XXVI). Despite the unusual, mostly unspoken, demands placed on those who study religion, I include my history as a means of interrogating my positionality and relations to those in the field. Being raised within the faith system and being a gay man provided nearly immediate entrée into the fellowship.

I guess you could say that I am a native anthropologist. In Kirin Narayan’s words, “those who are anthropologists in the usual sense of word are thought to study Others whose alien cultural worlds they must come to know. Those who diverse as ‘native,’ ‘indigenous,’ or ‘insider,’ anthropologists are believed to write about their own cultures from a position of

intimate affinity” (1993:671). That is the label I would be given, I suppose, although the cognitive dissonance involved in the case does not allow me to feel like a native. I felt like an anthropologist growing up in the homophobic, Pentecostal church world. Will Roscoe writes: “Gay men and lesbians [LGBT people as a whole] are participant-observers in heterosexual culture, whether in the field or at home. They survive by being sensitive to all borders—whether social, conventions or rules of discourse” (1996:204). Although I was familiar with the expressions of my field site, I never really felt like a native. In fact, the term makes some native anthropologists cringe, as “the paradigm that polarizes ‘native’ anthropologists and ‘real’ anthropologists stems from the colonial setting in which the discipline of anthropology was forged: the days in which natives were genuine natives (whether they liked it or not) and the observer’s objectivity in scientific study of Other societies posed no problem” (Narayan 1993:672). It seems more accurate to realize the problems of this term and gauge whether it reflects the realities of the days and climate in which we study, because “instead of the paradigm emphasizing a dichotomy between outsider/insider or observer/observed, I propose that at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications...the loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux” (Narayan 1993:671). I occasionally reflected on this idea of native anthropology while in the field, particularly when I would be sitting in the audience or playing the piano while my queer “family” danced in the Spirit and spoke in tongues. One of anthropology’s great matriarchs, Hortense Powdermaker, danced in Melanesia, as she so eloquently described: “I forgot myself and was one of the dancers. Under the full moon and for the brief time of the dance, I ceased to be an anthropologist from a modern society. I danced. When it was over I realized that, for this short period, I had been emotionally part of the rite.

Then out came my notebook” (Powdermaker 2007:67). Is there a certain liberty, particularly in religious settings, that “non-native” anthropologists are allowed that would cause the ordinary “native” anthropologist to slip out of the problematic, scientific, and well-interrogated but persisting requirement of objectivity? If I were to get too close to the fire, would I no longer be doing legitimate anthropology? As JoAnn D’Alisera explains, with participant-observation “always being connected by a hyphen, this term implies that one or the other of its two components is not sufficient to do ‘real’ anthropology. Just to participate and not observe is to ‘go native.’ Going native, according to the dominant anthropological view, is to lose the scientific edge, the distance, the ability to observe that one needs to truly understand the society one studies” (2004:33). I cannot help but wonder if there was a certain freedom that Ms. Powdermaker sensed that I, on the other hand, was too uptight and afraid to realize. Or, perhaps I did realize it and my role of being cast as a musician overstepped the bounds of the participant-observer duality. Although the familiarity of such spiritual productions and my related oppression as a queer individual likely facilitated incorporation into the community, would not a native be up there around the altar competently dancing, too, or falling out in the Spirit? As Narayan beautifully articulates, the reality is more complex. Furthermore, there is a spectrum of intimacy along which the native anthropologists among us identify and embody the productions being explored. Perhaps the dichotomy between insider and outsider, in reality, is only a divisive, territorial, and defensive imagining that serves to separate us as anthropologists when we should be able to approach any human condition with empathy, fairness, and a goal of fostering mutual understanding among our human family.

Being a working-class guy, I believe the meaningful stories we share, as social scientists, should be accessible. I sense a struggle familiar to other mobile academics such as Mary Capello,

Carolyn Law, and Christine Overall. For the most part, this sentiment is unconscious but is likely there to address the encroaching frustration "...I feel as I devote myself to helping the privileged become more privileged while I feel hopelessly unable to affect the quality of my relatives lives" (Cappello 1995:133). In some ways, academia remains an uncomfortable crossing for me, not as much because of my own insecurities but because of the classism within academia itself. It is much easier to just try and "pass," but doing so invalidates one's authenticity and relevance. This positionality has been articulated by various working-class individuals who have crept into higher education, as in the statement "we must buy into academia in order to get out of the working class, but in doing so we also buy into the denigration of our origins and the preservation of class inequities. In the end, it seems the price of successful escape is to be intellectually and socially 'nowhere at home' " (Overall 1995:219). Furthermore, "while one can appear to be a native in an adopted land, one is always haunted by voices from the other side of the border...persons feeling out of place in both worlds" (Law 1995:7). While struggling to exist in vastly different worlds can be difficult, versatility across the human spectrum provides insight into the problems we address. I write for those who have been displaced by the church, to better situate progressive agendas, to stimulate rebellious mainline believers, and, in Ruth Behar's words, "...I took up the pen for the same reason all anthropologists do: because we care passionately about the worlds that others inhabit and not just about our own small worlds" (2009:115). Since inquiry is often funded with public dollars, I maintain the conviction that the public should be able to access and even enjoy academic analyses.

During fieldwork, I often experienced an uneasy feeling about my writing and what I would eventually make of time with people I began to see as family, not because of collective sexual marginality but due to more complex empathetic and protective instincts I experienced,

not patronization but appreciation. At times, I was not sure that I would be able to write given our intimacy. As clear as I tried to communicate my intentions and justification for my presence, I occasionally felt that some of the congregants did not understand what I was doing, or even the meaning of a dissertation. The pastor, a bold visionary with an unmatched determination, singlehandedly led the group and allowed me into the community, thus exposing the rest of the circle to my inquiry. Board-run congregations would have required for my interest to be presented to the people before proceeding. Nonetheless, the believers embraced my purpose and trusted their leader. We loved one another: the faithful few called me “brother” and I referred to them as “brothers and sisters,” terms of endearment and eternal relationships in evangelical environments. My last church meeting was on a Wednesday evening. We gathered around the front for prayer as we always did before Bible study and Pastor told the members that it would be my last. It was an emotional moment. Pulling out of the gravel lot, I felt heartbreak but also freedom. Despite beginning to feel at home, I was ready to leave the field. It was difficult, however, to pack my few belongings and say my goodbyes to a group that felt like my family. I did not know if they felt used or not, but I told them that I thought I would make them proud. I will forever be grateful for the believers’ trust in me, along with the patience and zeal for me to experience healing. I never fell out in the Spirit,¹⁷ joined in their victory marches, or danced in the Spirit. For that reason, I hope that they do not see their patience and agenda for my reconciliation as a failed project. I know that such emotional outbursts signify successful return for the congregants, and I hope that my naturally stoic nature in such environments did not make them feel like their own plan failed. Hopefully I do right by my friends with this narrative.

The church that I write about is positioned along a stretch of lonesome highway with wide-open prairie, abruptly piercing the social landscape with a rainbow cross, something

offensive to many in the world. The postindustrial area along lower Lake Michigan resembles the body and spirit of an aged pool boy, used, abandoned without accountability, left with little self-worth, unemployed, and now without a means to fend for himself. He struggles to recover from such a past. The place is not without beauty, however. There are glimmers of hope for a people with a strong worth ethic and land that has been picked over, but seeing the vision takes creative energy. The backdrop is composed of agricultural plains and the remaining industrial factories along the lake, with the likes of Gary nearby. To have a job at an established plant is a pretty good arrangement for a loyal and handy workforce, readily available with a skillset that has been cheapened by globalization and ever-increasing mechanization. With fierce labor competition, good jobs are scarce. My informants work in a variety of occupations but most are blue collar and working, unemployed and looking, or disabled and living on assistance, thus sharing in the employment crisis of working-class America and, in particular, postindustrial environments. A paycheck-to-paycheck reality is the norm here. The town closest to the church has an inviting, eerie feel to it and church members live throughout the area, in various small communities, out in the country, and in-between agricultural areas and seemingly unimportant towns. The skinhead¹⁸ living beside me had an impressive collection of inflammatory, anti-Obama signage. We never talked. Similarly, the streets did not feel safe as unemployed, white youth wandered through a town in which heroin is allegedly the drug of choice. All of this confirmed to me that “we need an anthropology that considers...the homegrown Other” (Fordham 2009:90).

I spent thirteen months with the congregation. I tried my best to hear their stories and what brought various practitioners to a “gay church” on a stretch of seemingly deserted Indiana highway. My common introduction profiled me as a Ph.D. student writing about LGBT

Pentecostalism and as one who grew up in the faith. Resistance to my presence as an anthropologist was not an issue. I never felt unwelcome. The believers loved me, and I greatly loved them

My informants and the ministries involved have been given pseudonyms, and the data gleaned from my field site has been used creatively to further protect the identities of the participants involved. The mostly LGBT Pentecostal congregation I write about consists of approximately fifty to seventy-five congregants, if they are all in the same service. Most of those individuals identify as gay and lesbian, a few as transgendered and bisexual, and the rest are straight allies. I also extended my research to include national meetings of queer Pentecostals, involving affiliates primarily from the southern and Midwestern United States, including Arkansas, Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, West Virginia, Ohio, and Arizona. Conferences are held several times each year to bring together small congregations from various parts of the country. The national meetings were quite gay-focused in rhetoric to promote social healing, while the language used in the local church consciously reduced queer references to allow a comfortable belonging for all. The flocks¹⁹ represented at the meetings mirror Spirit and Truth, spiritually exclusive, relatively small, doctrinally sound, and uninterested in deviating from Pentecostal norms. The resulting creation of such convictions has produced tight-knit, protected communities of believers that work well for fully vested devotees. My ethnographic methods consisted primarily of participant-observation. Structured interviews were not a part of my approach. I politely took notes during the first few months of my time in Indiana but turning to memory for data eliminated barriers. I would journal after church, suppers, and other moments of contact. Studying religious practices demands a special trust in the anthropologist. Being on the platform, although reluctantly at times, required a more intense level of scrutiny than I would have been

under only as an anthropologist in the audience. There were also expectations regarding “the devil’s mouthwash²⁰” and sex, for example, especially because of the music role I was placed in when I first arrived.

The following story concerns the struggle of connecting two worlds, the present one and the one to come, while trying to make sense of sexualities that are deemed an ultimate and abominable sin within the evangelical consciousness. LGBT people are threatening enough to the church just by existing in a secular form, as Sara Diamond explains: “Acceptance of homosexuality, as one possible type of relationship among many, is a logical extension of the feminist idea that gender norms are socially constructed...the unhidden presence of homosexuals in public space...means that everyone has to acknowledge that there are choices to be made about sex roles...sex is frightening because it means losing control” (Diamond 1998:172). For “unsuitable” bodies to queer the Holy Ghost is even more threatening. The worldview of my friends is not a popular form of queer Christianity, as in “gay churches” that are springing up around the world with liberal, inclusive doctrines. The faithful few at Spirit and Truth Ministries understand such environments to be systems that are too secular and overly concerned with the political correctness of diverse faiths to make it past the pearly gates. The believers often refer to such inclusivity as Universalism, despite the Christian milieu. The elite, religious practices of most affirming Christian environments do not satisfy my friends. They crave the liberty needed to throw their arms in the air to praise God and spontaneously follow the Spirit’s lead, even as it redirects the routine of a service. Those in the church see non-Pentecostal environments as too bound by tradition to let the Lord lead in his spontaneous way. Barriers to the Spirit are understood to be such deterrents as incense, time limits, robes, pipe organs, and services that do not veer way from a planned schedule. Worship environments familiar to Episcopalians and

Methodists, for example, are boring to many of my informants, and they do not feel free to worship the Lord in “Spirit and in Truth.” These are the reasons why a righteous few in the Rust Belt and other parts of the country insist on queering a worship experience that is most comfortable for them. While my friends allow themselves to enjoy their natural sexualities and coalesce the orientations with a biblical rationale, the believers make a great deal of sacrifices to separate themselves from the lure of the gay world, from the hypersexual temptations they are thought to engage in anyway. In addition, the devotees are confident enough to think they have spiritually matured more than their mainline counterparts but maintain empathy and patience to aid homophobic Pentecostals in a developmental process.

This analysis should not give the impression that my friends are a bunch of tea-partying fundamentalists, but the pro-life, pro-Israel, and family values convictions found within the group place them into an ambiguous category. The practitioners in Rust-Belt Indiana are confident enough in the truth of reconciliation that they “deny the flesh,” settle down, and prepare for the afterlife, knowing the trumpet is soon to sound. Writing about a congregation is difficult when I must weave together the multifarious interpretations in the group setting, while acknowledging the official, dominant convictions of leadership. I have made a conscious effort to include it all, as I am obligated to do. The journey to find salvation is difficult enough without Sodomitical desire. I certainly would not want my critical analysis and occasional sarcasm to sound disrespectful of a fierce struggle for holistic equality, one that transcends the temporal inequity and diversifies the “Kingdom of God.” The reconciliation of queer believers who have been pushed out of mainline Pentecostal churches and continue to enjoy their Holy Ghost experience and impending salvations, despite being viewed as demonic influence in the Last

Days, is something so meaningful that the righteous gays and lesbians see their revival as a last piece of End Time prophecy.

A People Who Were Once Not a People

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

1 Peter 2:9-10

Chapter Three

An easily missed rainbow cross on the sign is the only noticeable symbol that marks the Pentecostal church as a predominantly-LGBT congregation. Getting to the place of worship, a church I refer to as Spirit and Truth Ministries, involves venturing down a seemingly forgotten highway. The cracked pavement from the severe winter weather and snowplows make the ride a bit jarring. The building used to be a bar before Pastors David and Michael claimed it for the Lord and a twenty-first century inclusive faith. After passing the flea market, gas station, meat cutter, and a few more corn fields, members arrive for worship as they faithfully do several times each week. The simple, cinderblock structure has been converted to a striking house of worship with a good stucco job and white columns that enhance the entrance. Flowerbeds that lift spirits during the few months of warm weather surround the church. A rather large gravel parking lot is ready for revival and desires to be full of souls who are hungry for Truth, but usually only the first couple of rows are filled with expectant attendees. The sizable tract of land also expects a harvest and is ready to house a more expansive sanctuary as soon as the current one is filled to capacity. Perhaps that dream will never come to fruition, however, given the present struggle to fill the stackable chairs, many of which are stored in the Sunday school room in order for the congregation to look more full and thus desirable to newcomers. Inside, believers have all of the elements necessary to channel the Holy Ghost. Tambourines are strewn throughout the sanctuary, and there are drums, a piano, anointing oil, a jolting sound system, and plenty of well-worn Bibles that testify to the studious nature of believers having to reconcile faith and sexuality in a conflicted social landscape.

In this chapter, I introduce Pastors David and Michael and the Hoosier congregation. I focus on the ways in which queer Pentecostals have played with the Word in order to create a comfortable belonging and, subsequently, a liberation narrative. The determined practitioners

have attempted to find themselves in a biblical past, drawing upon such accounts as the Ethiopian Eunuch, Jonathan and David, and Ruth and Naomi. The Rust-Belt Pentecostals, as one set of practitioners, exemplify the ways in which insistent believers, across the spectrum, are constantly reinventing religions. In particular, my informants' struggle highlights the agency of sexually-marginal adherents, regardless of the apparent incongruence, to recreate faith for the future and to repair colossal misunderstandings in the present so that those who follow in their traditions will not have to undergo such social trauma in order to claim spiritual, social, and religious peace. Pastors David and Michael are modern-day Moseses determined to bring about change within Pentecostalism.

A Hammond²¹ organ, which has long been a part of moving Pentecostals into another dimension,²² rumbles at the beginning of every service as Pastor David, a sixty-something year old, flips on the Leslie speaker. He is not only gifted with oratory skills but shares a passion and intuition for church music, a role that he began to play as a boy. Since Pentecostal environments follow the spontaneous flow of the Spirit rather than a scripted program, the responsibility of musicians and singers is to organically take parishioners on a spiritual journey through the emotions of music, so that believers experience the highs and lows of Pentecostal feelings, dancing and crying, in one intricately-woven set. Grey temples, a thick head of salt-and-pepper hair, stylish plastic glasses, and a stern but compassionate aura sets the leader apart. Pastor David, or simply "Pastor," as members defer to him, maintains a certain seriousness when around the House of God. He wants to lead believers into a new spiritual dimension each time they gather, and he desires for the group to receive frequent revelations and visitations from God as he guides the congregants through the text. Pastor has the charisma and influence to have been successful in any profession he could have chosen but decided that his calling was to reconstitute

Pentecostalism for a local congregation and to lead an expanding international network. The Lord burdened his heart with the responsibility, and he could not refuse divine direction, despite how difficult the social costs would be. In a previous life, he pastored a much larger church that was comprised primarily of heterosexuals. He was married and raised lovely children with his wife, until the torment of being closeted caused him to take the risks of honesty. Pastor David decided that transparency, for him, was an essential component of “walking with the Lord.” Living a lie undermined his and his family’s happiness, and, furthermore, threatened his salvation, which is all that matters to him in the end anyway. Pastor David resigned from his position with the prominent church and accepted his natural sexuality, despite the troubles that resulted from being exiled from a membership that he called his brothers and sisters in Christ. This form of fictive kinship, for Pentecostals, is usually closer than biological relations. After he came out, those he had worshipped with and habitually led to an ecstatic state were quick to shun him.

Pastor David has been “on this road with the Lord” for some time now, ever since he was filled with the Holy Ghost as a youth. He was a good church boy, as were many of his current saints, the type of church boys who are likely drawn to the homoeroticism of patriarchal faith and the need to continually offset the learned sinful nature of their existence. In his account of gay and Pentecostal boyhood, Michael Warner explains: “ ‘He walks with me, and he tells me I am his own,’ as we always sang. During this hymn, I would look around to make sure no one noticed that these words were coming, rather too pleasurable, from my mouth. Jesus was my first boyfriend. He loved me, personally, and he told me I was his own. This was very thrilling...” (1997: 228). The sanctioning of same-sex sensuality in the church has drawn many gay men in with its allure and continues to remain a space for expressing a monogamous relationship with a

male god. The culture of ex-gay ministries, as Tanya Erzen explains, also builds upon this homoerotic romance (2006). Admiring the old saints of God from an early age, Pastor David learned the oral traditions of preaching and music by emulating their styles. Although born into a Baptist environment and a family that did not appreciate his association with “holy rollers,”²³ a sort of classist term that was imposed on Pentecostals early on, he decided that the Spirit was the greatest feeling he had ever known and asserted himself, as he continues to do, as a tongues-talking believer. While a young man, he got a taste of spiritual bliss that would determine his career path and guide the rest of his life. Pastor David devoted his life in service to the King, not knowing that his sexuality would later ostracize him, creating a need to recreate theology in order to include “all flesh,” as he points out in the biblical text. He had his own spiritual wilderness to wander through after being exiled from heteronormative churches and was eventually able to reconcile faith and sexuality through a faithful prayer life and further exploration of the Word for answers.

The news of his forming a “gay Pentecostal church” set off a flurry of gossip and moral panic within heterodominant churches on national level. In fact, on one particular Sunday morning, a memory of such gossip from my childhood came flooding back while I was listening to Pastor David preach and pace across the platform in a fiery manner. When I was around fifteen, long before I knew who was being demonized, I remember hearing a preacher tell us from the pulpit that a married pastor came out of the closet and founded a “gay church” with his boyfriend. The audience was stunned, shaking their heads, and I overheard a gentleman in the pew behind me mumble “help us, Lord.” The news was interpreted as a sign that the Second Coming was nigh. While it frightened the congregation, the End Times update also excited them in a sort of sadistic manner, to put it bluntly. “Their bags were packed, and they were ready to

go,”²⁴ as an old church song goes, and these good people were able to celebrate their deserved reward and escape thanks to the eternal doom and suffering of a group of LGBT practitioners who insisted upon a relationship with Jesus. There were many in the church that seemed to enjoy the fantasy of a bunch of “abominations” “gnashing their teeth,”²⁵ as they continue to do, and, in their own strange way, celebrated the idea that such “perversion” was tangible, prophetic evidence occurring within their social landscape. The fact that abominations were tampering with the sacred was confirmation that their dogma was true and functioning properly, as their readings were accurate. Things were supposed to get pretty wicked in the Last Days, and these well meaning people had not really seen anything that dark yet. Through it all, and despite much rebuke, Pastor David found assurance in the Word with affirmation such as “do not call anything impure that God has called clean.”²⁶ He is convinced and seems to never doubt that God intentionally created LGBT children and wants them to spend eternity with him. Rather than demonizing those who do not approve of his message, Pastor David praises God for the revelation he has been given in the Latter Days, one he prays will be revealed to oppressive regimes before the Second Coming.

Some say that Pastor David is a modern-day Moses, appointed by the Creator to lead oppressed LGBT people into spiritual freedom, not just Christian inclusion but an experience that allows marginal subjects to bask in the joys of the Holy Ghost without fearing whether or not it is of God, an anxiety that plagues newcomers until they feel it for themselves. Pastor David is the primary visionary for a congregation that he founded with his partner and a few initial members, at the onset of the twenty-first century, in the basement of their brick home. The group initially gathered to explore the possibility of what the Lord would do when “two or three gathered.”²⁷ They had seen what he could do when just a few gathered among straight

practitioners; God would do the same for his gay children, if their predictions were confirmed in the spirit realm. Equipped with a piano and a keyboard, the believers gathered around to sing praises and ventured into a new type of service in which Pastor David “delivered the Word” and the revolutionaries prayed until something happened. The narrative goes that the saints had some incredible breakthroughs in the spirit realm in their “days of small beginnings.”²⁸ Members reminisce about one brother-in-Christ being miraculously delivered of depression in that basement. He had been abused as a child and carried that trauma into adulthood, but, through “laying on of hands”²⁹ and getting God’s attention, practitioners say they literally saw an oppressive spirit depart from his body. Pastor told me that the man’s entire countenance and form changed during his spiritual deliverance, as he shook the dark force from his body with his arms lifted toward the heavens. Pastor recounts that those who gathered were desperate for a move of God, and the believers were given favor since it is his desire to visit those who greatly yearn for his presence. It is believed that the Holy Ghost does not move among the complacent but only when his followers humbly need his visitation more than anything else. My friends had been through the humbling experience of exile. They had been stripped of their pride through this process, and, therefore, were the ideal candidates for revival that God was looking for in the Last Days.

Pastor David calls the members of his church, those who remain “lost,” and those within both the domestic and international family of LGBT Pentecostals, “God’s gay children.” He and other ministers pace church platforms throughout the country excitedly proclaiming, “We are a people who once were not a people!” These marginal preachers find favor in a verse that is believed to refer prophetically their awakening, one they have found in 1 Peter 2:9-10: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should

shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” The original gays and lesbians who gathered, with bisexual and transgendered believers to come later, had been without spiritual peace for quite some time, after most had been exiled from their churches and wandered through a spiritual wilderness. The religious environments that would welcome the queer bodies did not bode well with their learned style of worship, not to mention the intimidation and the strangeness of the usually highfalutin religious establishments known to be inclusive. My informants could have opted for inclusive Presbyterian, Metropolitan Community Church, or Episcopalian settings, and, although they are grateful for such enlightenment, the environments seem foreign for those who have been called “holy rollers” for a reason. From a basement, Spirit and Truth Ministries has blossomed into an international network of congregations and a new church home for the Indiana congregation.

The successful network of affirming fellowships would not be possible without David’s partner, Pastor Michael. He had not known Pentecost prior to meeting the love of his life. The men now spend much of their lives in their church offices, each decorated with pictures of their grandkids³⁰ and meetings with other religious leaders, such as a particularly cherished one with the late Tammy Faye (Bakker) Messner.³¹ Framed newspaper clippings concerning the controversial fellowship are in the mix. Pastor Michael’s office is a collage of church related responsibilities and his secular career, two worlds that do seem to know each other’s boundaries. Pastor Michael is a handsome gentleman with a wealth of talents that he offers the congregation and the wider fellowship of LGBT Pentecostals. If Pastor David is the visionary, Pastor Michael is a practical man who carries much of the concerns of the congregation with his full head of

grey hair and a brow that attests to his worries. Michael teaches Sunday school passionately, while his partner offers sermons at the main services. During his lessons, it is not uncommon for the Spirit to intervene and cause him to weep and lead the congregation to another dimension. As he responds to the Spirit's lead, Pastor Michael lifts his hands and basks in the presence of God, encouraging others to do the same before continuing with the lesson. Despite the often-casual blue jeans and T-shirt nature of the fellowship, Pastor Michael and his life-partner put on their Sunday best when it is time for worship. Even when most congregants are dressed in casual clothing on Sunday mornings, the pastors show up in suits and ties which, they believe, shows respect for the "house of the Lord"³², and they encourage others to do the same. Pastor Michael's spirit is humble, and the man has the patience of Job. While Pastor David is the theologian who provides structure for the church and the larger fellowship, members often approach Pastor Michael with a various troubles due to his genteel nature. The men's distinct personalities allow for a balanced ministry and marriage. Their work is a labor of love, given that the congregation is not large enough or financially prepared to provide salaries for its leaders. The Pastors continually sacrifice their own resources in order to keep the church afloat, especially during the winter when attendance is down. Church members sacrifice much of their own incomes, too, particularly considering the fact that several members are on fixed incomes. Pastor David envisions a time when he will be able to minister to a larger congregation and a day when his husband will be able to quit his corporate job and devote himself entirely to the work of the Lord.

Michael's life-partner, David, has served as a spiritual mentor ever since he introduced Michael to the Holy Ghost. The men were introduced to each other while out West attending various fellowships in order to find spiritual fulfillment and a church home they could call their

own. Their love story involves two men searching for lifelong companionship and spiritual safety. Both instincts have been fulfilled through one another and Christ. After being excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his social network in Utah, Michael began a new journey. Despite the disruption that sexuality created in his life, he knew that God created him as a gay man and that could not be changed. For Michael, all of his marginal experiences have been a part of God's plan for him to reconcile his faith and sexuality, which allows him to reach others who have experienced similar troubles. Being gay and subsequently barred from the only life he knew was not a choice he would have made on his own. During their initial dates, Pastor David began telling Michael about the power of Pentecost and that the Holy Ghost has been promised to all. While on his spiritual quest, Michael began praying for the supernatural gift, even in affirming churches that did not entertain the classical Pentecostal manifestations of the Holy Ghost. After an intense prayer session around a church altar one night, Michael called his boyfriend, who was working out of state, to tell him the exciting news. He had received the Holy Ghost with speaking in tongues as the evidence. David recalls that he could tell that his lover had received "the real thing," just by the sound of his voice. His tongues were unlike the tongues that are, according to Pentecostal contemporary legend, taught to initiates.

Since Pastor David rejects the popular idea of the Trinity and sees himself as Oneness Pentecostal, the belief that Jesus embodied the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it was necessary for Michael to be "baptized in the lovely name of Jesus." In a preacher friend's swimming pool, the soon-to-be Pastor Michael was baptized by his husband. What was said over the candidate was something to the effect of, "Brother Michael, upon the profession of your faith, I now baptize you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of

the Holy Ghost.” He, no doubt, came out of the water as the Spirit visited the gathered saints and celebrated a Pentecostal’s rite of passage. Michael received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues for the first time later that summer.

For Oneness Pentecostals, the watery ceremony is not simply a symbolic measure; sins are believed to slide off of the submissive body when it is lowered into the water. Growing up, several of us kids would bring an extra change of clothes so that we could play in the baptistery while my aunt cleaned the church. When we asked why the baptistery was so slick, she responded with, “Honey, those are sins.” I am still unsure if she was being serious, but it makes sense according to how Oneness Pentecostals perceive baptism. Regardless of the sins’ severity, the new believer is purified through this process. As Gwen Neville writes, “the transition from having been a nonperson into now being an active social person is symbolically accomplished for the civil realm at the time of delivery, with its attendant rituals of cleaning, dressing, washing, taking footprints, tagging with a bracelet, and making out a birth certificate. The same transition into personhood within a faith community is symbolically accomplished within the ceremony of baptism” (1994:17). Baptism remains part of a three-step salvation process for Oneness Pentecostals, which includes repentance, baptism, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost, evidenced by speaking in tongues. Therefore, while being baptized may only be symbolic of a new identity for many Christians, Oneness Pentecostals believe one must be baptized in order to make it to the pearly gates, which is why they can be witnessed, like Mormons, utilizing several able-bodied men to dunk someone in a wheelchair who cannot walk, for example. Stepping into the water is required for my friends, a symbolic act so meaningful that “...Satan will try his hardest to interfere and prevent a newly converted person from being committed,” Nicole Toulis explains

(1997:146). When LGBT people and straight allies decide to be a part of the church, which is an informal process as far as paperwork is concerned, they are encouraged to be re-baptized if they were not initially baptized “correctly.” Even some of those who “went down in the name” properly when they first started walking with the Lord prior to reconciliation decide to be baptized again, this time by a preacher and a religious community that offers complete affirmation. I witnessed several such re-baptisms while in the field. To some, being dunked by a homophobic preacher and being exiled to wander in a spiritual wilderness makes their initial baptisms seem invalid, and, therefore, prompts them to restart their spiritual lives at Spirit and Truth Ministries where they are fully-integrated church members.

Baptism is a key component of Oneness theology and remains a primary message for my informants. Pentecostals in the Middle American church try not to condemn other Christians to Hell if they have not been baptized in Jesus Name and only baptized according to the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit without actually saying Jesus’ name over the candidate. As Pastor David assures his congregation, entrance into Heaven is ultimately determined by God. However, he encourages attendees to not miss out on the experience. If newcomers have not already been baptized in Jesus Name or have been before but in an exclusive setting, Pastor David usually leads them to the water. Due to their own marginalization, it would almost be incongruent for the believers to condemn others who have not “taken on the Name in water baptism,” which results in the congregation taking a more gentle approach to enforcing this humbling of the self. However, when devoted parishioners are asked to explain the importance of Oneness baptism, they will define it as essential for salvation.

A host of parishioners look up to Pastors David and Michael not only for their spiritual guidance but also for their influence, or “social capital,” among affluent progressives in the

community, especially given the laymen's struggle to seize opportunity. Pastor Michael is popular for his charismatic ability to host enjoyable dinners, and Pastor David is known for his ability to entertain and relate to a wide assortment of people while soliciting support for their ministry, especially when it comes to favorable media coverage and church fundraisers. The men operate as "classy" role models for the congregation, as they are both college graduates, own a spacious home, and have achieved middle-class prosperity. Along with those qualifications, David and Michael are frequent travelers and are able to maneuver diverse environments with ease. The Pastors are also tactful, with a talent for managing a wide assortment of personalities and those from various rungs on the social ladder. The class dynamic is an important factor in their leadership role within the congregation, as it allows the men to assert great influence in the church. The difference, however, does not come without some whispered resentment, especially when the men are traveling out of state during Sunday or midweek services. These self-proclaimed holy men are central to the formation and spread of queer, Oneness Pentecostalism in the Rust Belt and have played a pivotal role in its development in other parts of the country and world. As they carefully guide fringe Pentecostals into an eternal dimension, they intuitively instruct believers to coalesce an LGBT existence with one that radiates the standards of holiness that are a central Pentecostal theme. The pastors empathetically oversee and attempt to attract a damaged segment of the population with their timely gospel. Nothing brings greater happiness to the Pastors than to witness "lost sheep coming home," sheep such as Barb and Trudy.

Sis. Trudy and Sis. Barb live in what locals refer to as an "upscale trailer park" next to Lake Michigan. The lawns are well maintained. There is a pond with park benches, a new playground, virgin speed limit signs yet to be claimed by street artists, and a shared pride among this community of homeowners. Industrial parks begin here and extend into Chicago, including

coal-fired power plants, nearby U.S. Steel, and a variety of abandoned bricked structures with smokestacks that tell the story of a region largely abandoned without any sort of accountability. The women are vital members of Spirit and Truth Ministries, and they can often be found laboring tirelessly for the Lord, even when their work seems to be overlooked or taken for granted. Their dog, Gramps, an aging Chinese pug, is their constant source of entertainment, a creature who seems to fulfill a child's role for a couple whose biological children look upon their relationship with disgust and, for the most part, refuse to associate with their mothers. The women both wear T-shirts and sweatshirts with random pugs on them, and, of course, they have quite a collection of shirts with Bible verses and inspirational sayings in order to shine a light in their mission field. Otherwise, their clothing is nothing fancy; they just like to be comfortable and approachable. Trudy and Barb came out of their closets later in life, after coping for much of their adult years in marriages with pitiful excuses for husbands. I will always remember Sunday afternoons in their singlewide, a peaceful space with southern gospel music playing on the bulky television and a plethora of spiritual figurines placed throughout their home. The two have a no alcohol policy in their trailer, a decision that is left up to the individual members in the church, who can drink it in moderation and preferably only wine or beer. Sis. Trudy makes the best banana pudding, too, and sees hospitality as part of her ministry. Her stoic partner, having grown up in a downhome kind of environment, is quite proud of her delicious fried chicken. Using Colleen McDannell's words, the couple's home provides the platform to perform queer piety, as "it is a domain of purity in a defiling environment a place of empowerment in a disempowering world" (1995:214).

The love story that I am presenting here has weathered familial isolation, pharisaical judgment, and tough economic times in the Rust Belt. Their story is one about not getting by in

America, a new sort of hardscrabble existence on the margins of society and not just about social class. Due to her physical ailments, Sis. Trudy was unable to keep the job she landed as a clerk at a big box retailer after being laid off from the steel mills and so she applied for disability. She was not able to stand for long periods of time and the company offered no alternative, although she had worked at the store for several years. The women struggle to make it in this “corporate wasteland” and do not have the education, skills, or clout to adapt to the changed labor infrastructure of the region (High 2007). In her recent study of postindustrial Chicago, Christine Walley writes about the impacts on such women as well as racial minorities of the region: “As deindustrialization expanded across the country in the 1980s and 1990s, some observers dismissively depicted the loss of heavy-industry jobs as primarily a problem for white men. Such views, however, ignored the sizeable number of women who worked in auto and other industries as well as how the loss of industrial jobs for male family members placed additional, often unwelcome, pressures and responsibilities on women relegated to lower-paying jobs” (2013:157). After having contributed greatly to the industry of the region and trusting that good jobs would remain for quite some time, the pressures of globalization and neoliberal economics have abandoned many workers who live along Lake Michigan. Their experiences are representative of a larger crisis among working-class people of the region who seem to only be getting a little worse off as time goes on.

I bring the portrait of Barb and Trudy to the forefront of this analysis because it highlights a struggle of working-class women in the region, who, in their love for another, get by in a hard-hit part of the country but find worth through their leadership in the church, which, for them, has offset the devaluation of their roles in society. Barb and Trudy are representative of the congregation of LGBT Pentecostals at Spirit and Truth Ministries. Not all are unemployed or on

disability but many are and have nearly been stripped of their blue-collar honor during tough times, as the job security and comfortable existence that built the Rust Belt has since been reduced or vanished for various reasons. As part of their social capital in the community, the women also maintain a great level of respect for their spiritual leaders, Pastors David and Michael. They are a first line of defense when someone in the church begins to criticize the “men of God.” In accordance with their leadership positions and membership expectations, Barb and Trudy continue to give ten percent of their income and additional financial offerings despite the hardships that have burdened them. For individuals such as Barb and Trudy, service in a leadership position within the church provides the necessary influence to maintain “working-class respectability,” despite their economic reality (Duneier 1992).

For such believers, considering the distance involved in being exiled from various religious establishments, reconciling faith and sexuality feels like being born yet again, not just initial born-again experience they found in mainline churches but in the LGBT one as well. Being ingrained with homophobic teachings, negotiating belonging for LGBT Pentecostals is complex process. The joy initially experienced when they met Christ does not remotely compare to the relief sensed when they stand transparently before God. While in the field, I witnessed several “lost sheep” make their way back to the Lord. These moments when “backslidden”³³ LGBT believers made contact with the Spirit once again were ecstatic events. Many cried during their healings, but also usually with incredible smiles, often for entire services or even a series of meetings. A number of these same believers spent hours around the altar simply praying in tongues and making supernatural contact with a force they had deeply missed. Others danced upon the reception of their social healings. After being outed or outing themselves and having their social networks disrupted and quickly filled with “cares of the world,” the believers say

they were ultimately unsatisfied as they lacked the supernatural contact that had once been a life source. For these Pentecostals, it was primarily the distance from the Holy Ghost that left them lonely. Although the Spirit is said to reside in each soul, it is activated within the larger body of believers and then manifests itself in a variety of ways. Holy Ghost contact in one's queer and honest form is immediate affirmation that Jesus loves his gay children; the reconciliation process does, however, not occur without a complex negotiation of scripture, the primary resource for neoconservative adherents. Many have tried to work through the Word on their own prior to joining Spirit and Truth Ministries but did not reach an understanding of their complete acceptance until leaders such as Pastors David and Michael counseled them. The "backslidden" were too polluted with an internalized homophobia that was beat into them by heteronormative teachings. Through the process of reconciliation, most have arrived at the conclusion that "there is neither male nor female in the Spirit," words they have gleaned from Galatians 3:28, and thus Jesus welcomes all of his children. The righteous few, however, are determined to find people just like them in the Good Book.

Finding "family"³⁴ in the Bible is a difficult process, precisely because of the constant transformation of sexuality. Despite the inconvenience, doing so is essential in order for my informant to justify their sexual consciousness but also in order for the believers to feel safe with Jesus, especially considering the deeply personal and individualized relationship that must be maintained. Anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann contends, "It is indeed a striking God, this modern God imagined by so many American evangelicals. Each generation meets God in its own manner. Over the last few decades, this generation of Americans has sought out an intensely personal God, a God who not only cares about your welfare but worries with you about whether to paint the kitchen table" (2012:xv). Due to the requirements of Pentecostals for this form of

intimacy, it is especially important for my friends in the Rust Belt to be assured that He affirms them, and this leads the modern believers to search the scriptures for proof. Martin Duberman addresses the frustrations that such gays and lesbians experience as they feverishly look into the past for others just like them. He states, “told that their sexuality is ‘unnatural,’ gay men and lesbian women seek to find its duplicates in earlier periods of time. But duplicates, of course, can never be found, and the search for them is always doomed to disappointment” (1988:522). The real problem, according to Duberman, are the categories of gay and straight that we “...moderns have quaintly learned to label ourselves” (1988:522). Understanding biblical sexuality through present perceptions of the body and its behaviors is difficult to match up, but that does not stop my friends.

In order to solve the textual dilemma of their marginal sexualities, Pentecostals in the Rust Belt have latched onto the biblical narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch. He is understood to be a converted Jewish man, given that he was on his way to Jerusalem for worship upon his conversion to Christianity. Heteronormative Oneness adherents have celebrated this character since the movement’s inception but have never thought much about the word “eunuch.” Since Oneness Pentecostals insist upon baptism for salvation, the account of the Ethiopian is primarily utilized to stress immediate baptism. However, as a queer subject and an immediately baptized one, the fabulous African man with his royal association as a treasury official for the queen of the Ethiopians is even more useful for LGBT Pentecostals than heteronormative ones. While on his journey, the eunuch of great wealth and status encountered Philip the Apostle. The disciple helped the eunuch understand the sacred text he was reading and, according to Pentecostal lore, told him about the gift of the Holy Spirit and baptized him in nearby water. They look to Acts 8:36-29, which states, “And as they went on their way, they came to a certain water: and the

eunuch said, ‘See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?’ And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water...and when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” Although my informants have embraced this contested character, they can only trust that he was “family” due to the vagueness of the text and the varying definition of eunuch identities throughout history. In a recent study, Sean Burke writes:

The different and sometimes conflicting ways in which ancient discourses gendered eunuchs demonstrate how troubling their ambiguous bodies were for ancient constructions of masculinity. In some discourses, eunuchs are gendered as not-men, effeminate males, or half-men/half-males...in others, eunuchs are gendered as girls, or as beings that have actually changed, or are in the process of changing, from male to female. In still others, eunuchs are gendered as hybrids of male and female, or as neither male nor female. In yet other discourses, eunuchs are defined by the loss of masculinity or manhood, or even the loss of humanity itself (2013:107-8).

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the character, for the purpose of affirming Pentecostalism, he is queer enough. The vague character provides not only an example of salvation for a queered individual but, in particular, provides biblical support for the notion of someone “gay” can be baptized and filled with the Holy Ghost.

The determined believers have spent a great deal of time examining and celebrating the eunuch, someone who has been glossed over by the larger church world, but it is difficult to be sure precisely what made this man a eunuch. They have located a broader biblical discussion of eunuchs in Matthew 19:12, however, to offset any anxiety: “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it let him receive it.” The part of the passage that resonates in particular with the righteous few is the statement that eunuchs may simply be born that way. The passage is said to offer biblical proof of non-heterosexual existence and,

importantly, fits into wider equality politics that largely hinge upon cry for pity since queer people cannot help being born that way. As Michael Warner writes, "...so many gay people are now desperately hoping that a gay gene can be found. They think they would be more justified if they could show that they had no choice, that neither they nor gay culture in general played any role in shaping their desires" (1999:9). For my friends, the changing role of queered subjects, or eunuchs, proves that homophobia is only a recent "invention," as is the popular theology that isolates them (Katz 2007). Through his divine inspiring of early writers, my friends believe that the Lord deemed the Ethiopian's story be written into the Bible in order for modern eunuchs or LGBT people, the said current equivalent, to locate their positions in a historical context. For those at Spirit and Truth Ministries and the broader fellowship of LGBT Pentecostals, the Ethiopian eunuch offers proof that Jesus did not discriminate when it came to offering salvation and tongues-speaking salvation. The eunuch is their biblical equivalent.

Pious gays and lesbians have found someone in the Bible they believe to be a gay and Spirit-filled believer, but what about same-sex relationships and what about biblical lesbianism? Since the believers have negotiated the notion of holy and monogamous unions for same-sex relationships, it is important, as it is with most everything they do, to find support in the Word. Without a Bible backing, the unions they insist to be equal to opposite-sex partnerships would be unacceptable in the eyes of God, and, to them, that is what matters most. The intent Pentecostals would rather be miserably closeted in the churches of their youth or completely lost in "the world," rather than making all of their theology up to feel good, or having their "ears tickled,"³⁵ as those who disapprove call it. Life or death is in the balance for the marginal believers, and they cannot afford to "miss Heaven."

The questionable love between Jonathan and David serves as biblical evidence that God intended for there to be same-sex relationships, even in the Last Days. Their textual evidence in 2 Samuel 1:26 states, “I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.” According to believers in Indiana, it is indisputable that love passing the love of women for Jonathan and David was a homoerotic one, not just the healthy friendship that homophobic theologians and mainstream interpretations imagine.

Heterodominant perceptions of the relationship tend to utilize the Jonathan and David story as a means to further demonize LGBT people who attempt to queer it, as it is frequently argued that such same-sex dynamics were never meant to be sensualized. In fact, depictions of the men, and even Jesus, have undergone a transformation with increased anxiety concerning homosexuality and the consequential polarization of orientation, as David Morgan explains: “The theme of Jonathan and David’s friendship was widely invoked by advocates of male friendship among schoolboys and young men, but was also hailed as exemplary by Oscar Wilde...as legal and medical concepts of homosexuality became established and Muscular Christianity was embraced by evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic, the iconography of the biblical friendship began to change” (1998:104, Moore 2001). Today’s homophobic regimes claim that the sexualization of the relationship is simply the imposition of a “wicked and perverse generation”³⁶ that attempts to broaden the “straight and narrow”³⁷ path into Heaven. According to the straight-laced, to view the connection in a sexual light speaks to the ways in which social tolerance is attempting to pervert the sacred. In one of the few substantial analyses of the relationship, Tom Horner responds to this claim:

Jonathan was obviously smitten. “But cannot two men be good friends,” someone said to me recently, “without the issue of homosexuality being raised?” Yes, they can. But when

the two men come from a society that for two hundred years had lived in the shadow of the Philistine culture, which accepted homosexuality; when they find themselves in a social context that was thoroughly military in the Eastern sense; when one of them—who is the social superior of the two—publicly makes a display of his love; when the two of them make a lifetime pact openly; when they meet secretly and kiss each other and shed copious tears at parting; when one of them proclaims that his love for the other surpassed his love for women—and all this is present in the David-Jonathan liaison—we have every reason to believe that a homosexual relationship existed (1978:27-8).

For fringe Pentecostals, the Word is quite clear that Jonathan and David were in love, and not in just the wholesome and manly way that the Christian men's movement would have their modern-day disciples believe. As Brian Donovan explains in his analysis of Promise Keepers, such a movement involves an "...attempt to adapt hegemonic masculinity to fit with demands for egalitarianism and male sensitivity within evangelical families, thus reinvesting modern masculinity with renewed vigor" (1998:819-20). Homosexuality is cast as sensitive and weak. Considering the heterodominant role of dominating submissive wives and offspring requires perceptive spiritual leadership, queer sexuality threatens misogynist men who negotiate with "...the proliferation of feminist ideas and practices that have reached various sectors of American Protestantism" (Donovan 1998:819).

Non-normative parishioners latch onto this biblical male love and have, therefore, seized their proof and alleged representation in the Word. As far as women who love women are concerned, however, quite a bit is left to blind faith. There is seemingly less scriptural affirmation for lesbian devotees than for transgenders and transsexuals, considering that the queer Ethiopian is such a versatile character. Men who love men, and even those who began as men, are able to apply their own experiences to the story of the eunuch. For women, however, finding a biblical match is nearly impossible, as if such accounts have been completely written out of biblical history. There is a beautiful scene in the documentary, *A Jihad for Love*, in which female lovers are sitting in a mosque and searching through the Quran for anything that

references them. The young women desperately want to know whether they can justify their existence or rectify it based on what they find in the text. In a sense, they are relieved because the Quran does not have much to say about them, at least not as much to say about female love as it does about male bonds. However, it is clear that the women feel that they have been disappeared from the textual and social histories of their faith. Women in the Pentecostal church sense a similar frustration. The only real potential evidence of biblical lesbianism is the “suspect” relationship between Ruth and Naomi, but this seems to be a stretch, even to some stubborn queer Pentecostals. Most parishioners believe that their love was a highly sensual one, a connection that may have crossed the bounds of a deep familial love, but the evidence in the narrative is admittedly quite ambiguous. The evidence they find is in Ruth 1:16: “And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither though goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: they people shall be my people, and they God my God.” For those who take this narrative as lesbian presence, it is said that the text gives further clues that the two are in a relationship and that Ruth is not a true heterosexual, as her mother in law, Naomi, instructs Ruth on how to seduce a man. If Ruth were heterosexual, some LGBT Christians believe that she would not have needed instruction on this process. A child whom Ruth later had with Boaz was said to be Naomi’s child later in the text. Based on such accounts, some LGBT parishioners contend that biblical lesbianism was apparently not enough of a “problem” to warrant discussion. More broadly, it is said that perhaps any same-sex relations were, in general, not problematic as long as one’s responsibility of biological reproduction was upheld.

For present-day lesbian Pentecostals, an absent discussion of biblical lesbianism is, at once, freeing and oppressive. For such women, the minimal and debatable, textual condemnation

of lesbianism serves as a testament that female love was not problematized in the Word and therefore, should any doubt exist, female love should not be as troubling, as in “men with men working that which is unseemly.”³⁸ From another perspective, it is as if the historical and biblical narrative suggests that female pleasure does not even matter. The latter component to this debate is the oppressive side of the search for lesbian representation and general desexualization of lesbionic love, as if lesbian couples are simply consumed with nothing more than an emotional bond. Furthermore, as if female love was not already ignored in the text to which pious lesbian Pentecostals seek answers, such marginal women of faith have largely been overlooked in most available modern analyses. This may be because of a lack of textual evidence, but I contend it is because of a continued male dominance and misogynistic beliefs even among queered Christianities.

Other biblical affirmation for both men and women the congregation has found is the basic principle that humanity is cast from God’s own image, as Galatians 1:27 states: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” The ambiguous passage could be debated to the extent of contending that God is a hybrid of male and female. For the purposes of LGBT Pentecostals, however, the part they find most useful is that men and women were formed in God’s image, down to human consciousness. Being gay or lesbian is a human experience that all of the members attempted to suppress in themselves. Some members spent most of their lives hiding behind a “straight-acting³⁹” façade, while others came out of the closet in their twenties. Every LGBT individual in the church attempted normative sexuality, and they attempted to “pray the gay away” prior to reaching a breaking point or being found out (Barton 2012). Praying the gay away did not work, even when it included extensive counseling sessions to redirect the supposed natural direction of their

desires. Even giving into heterosexual marriages did not fix them, and some of those marriages were encouraged even after they outed themselves to clergy. The intense prayer sessions in which “spirits,” as they are called in mainline churches, could be released in order for the captive soul to be returned to a heteronormative state also failed. Knowing this, the practitioners realize that God fully understands their existence and intended for there to be LGBT diversity among his creation. The fact of being made in his image has taken the uncertainty out of their non-normative desires, as it is believed that God understands opposite-sex and same-sex desires on a personal level. Since it is said that Jesus experienced every human emotion while on earth, some believe he also knew attraction to the same sex. Such is the imagination and creativity of my informants in the Rust Belt.

In general, coming out of and reinventing the biblical literalist norms of Pentecostalism for a sexually-marginal audience requires careful revision of traditional interpretation but not to the extent that the innovative practitioners undermine the casting of the Bible as an infallible and inerrant guideline for their lives. As with the case of Jonathan and David or Ruth and Naomi, the predominantly LGBT charismatics must acknowledge that sexuality, marriage, and relationships have not always been the same as the cultural present, should the interpretations work in their favor. In the case of Jonathan and David, if the two were sexually involved with one another then, it is thought, there must not have been a social need for such a relationship to be formally recognized, since such a union would not have made economic sense at the time. According to such reasoning, same-sex relationships likely occurred in-and-around heterosexual relationships that protected belongings and lineage. Whereas homosexuals in the present day are expected to pursue desire and the fantasy of love, the reasoning goes that biblical homosexuals existed but would not have partnered simply over sexual gratification.

Reimagined biblical narrative and recent social history have contributed to an impressive and convincing rationale for affirming LGBT Pentecostalism and, in general, inclusive Christianity. The trouble that LGBT Pentecostals pose to heteronormative practitioners is that queer subjects are able to mirror their own stories of oppression from accounts in the Word, narratives that heterodominant leaders instilled in the LGBT subjects through the means of Sunday schools, summer Bible schools, countless sermons and songs. Through this platform of storytelling, LGBT Pentecostals have taken the broader narratives they have been given and inserted their own experience of marginalization. Their meddling demonstrates that “histories are not simply reports of what actually happened in the past; rather, histories are narratives of the past that are told in particular ways to serve some purpose in the present” (Burke 2013:145). The story of Moses and the Israelites, for example, has been used to triumph over the horrors of slavery. LGBT proponents have now used this metanarrative to make sense of God abandoning his gay children, offspring that have been left to wander in spiritual wilderness. I am not contending that the religious and sexual marginalization of my friends is comparable to the demons of slavery; rather, I am noting that LGBT Pentecostals have cited the liberations-in-process of African Americans and women as analogous historical processes. Therefore, despite the disdain that most heteronormative Pentecostals would have for the iconoclastic parishioners at Spirit and Truth Ministries, mainline Pentecostal churches were the training grounds for my informants. As James Bielo explains, “when reading the Bible evangelicals place themselves in some form of ideological relationship with the their sacred text...they establish how they relate to what is being portrayed,” which, coupled with the text’s formable nature and the Pentecostal emphasis on individual experience, makes reinventing the Word a messy but empowering process (2009:60). Queer Pentecostals in the Rust Belt are representative of the uncontrollable

and ever-changing nature of religious experiences, as “new Christian identities are always born in world of existing and competing Christian traditions, and develop in dynamic interaction with them” (Bielo 2011:198). My informants were empowered by heteronormative regimes to play with the text, something that was further enhanced by the existing “persecution complex” present in the evangelical consciousness. The insistent practitioners have filtered their experience of marginalization through this existing persecution complex that anticipates differential treatment for neoconservative evangelicals in the End of Days.

As often happens, oppression eventually gives way to salient liberation narratives, similar to Liisa Malkk’s analysis of Pentecostal Hutu refugees (1995). Without the disgust that believers within the spiritual homelands of my friends maintain for homosexuality, according to their own perception of the Word, the creation of the liberation trajectory of this ethnographic account would have never been invented. It is a rather fanciful narrative, even a prophetic one, proclaiming that God is calling forth LGBT people as a “last remnant.” The definition of “remnant” illustrates their experience: “what is left after a community undergoes a catastrophe” (Freedman 1992:669). The remnants are often thought of as scraps and as worthless, but the revisionists say God has always had a preference for the downtrodden. Using Sherry Ortner’s term, this “key symbol” pervades queer, Pentecostal thought (1973). Believers cite pride as getting in the way of God using his believers in powerful ways and queer revolutionaries claim that pride and closely related intolerance has transformed a once productive heteronormative church world into a complacent environment that is not seeing the “move of God” that marginal LGBT practitioners are experiencing. LGBT Pentecostals have been given the necessary tools to construct their own liberation narrative out of the raw and ambiguous biblical material that has been made available to them, and, through this queer temporality, have been taught how

negotiate and rearticulate scripture by the religious regimes that continue to demonize them.

Have established a queer, scriptural presence, the believers are able to unleash the Holy Ghost in the queer context to include, tongues, tongues interpretation, prophecy, dancing, and healing. In chapter six, I explore in more detail their liberation narrative and, more specifically, the ways in which my informants have queered End Time prophecy.

I Will Pour Out My Spirit Upon All Flesh

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see vision...The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come.”

Joel 2:28-31

Chapter Four

Bro. Scott came to the annual conference at Spirit and Truth Ministries expecting a miracle. He knew that God would heal his body before he left Indiana. The brother had fallen a couple of months prior to the convention and shattered his femur. The event lasted four days. During that time, he sat on the front row with his leg stretched out in a cast. When the anointing would sweep into the sanctuary, he would speak in tongues, lift his arms, and weep in anticipation of what God would be doing for him. The “Heavenly language”⁴⁰ sounded as though he were in a trance, and he could be heard repeating the same syllables over and over, sometimes in an authoritative tone and at other moments in a peaceful whisper that could put infants to sleep. His partner is known to frequently “dance before the Lord,” flamboyantly waving arms in the air and quickly moving his body in a repetitive bowing act. The two men are easily excited when the drums, organ, and piano start up with familiar, up-beat songs about the goodness of the Lord. When Bro. Scott felt the need to stand during parts of the services, he would prop himself up on crutches, with shooting pain showing on his middle-aged face. A committed partner stood next to him, in a similar plaid shirt, feeling his lover’s torment, a physical condition that had begun to affect his job as a machinist back home in Cleveland. The guys had loaded their adopted children into a dated, Pontiac minivan and came to the conference despite the man’s agony. When believers would start to dance in the Spirit or fall out as ministers prayed over them, Scott’s partner and others would try to keep the worshippers from bumping into his leg. The man wanted to be close though, just like the biblical character at the pool of Bethesda.⁴¹ Bro. Scott worshiped as much as anyone that week, and there was an enlivening tiredness that wore on the born-again bodies, as services would last up to five hours. The faithful would sleep a bit and return for morning devotion. They call it “getting fed,”⁴² a time of harvest that enables believers to survive during spiritual famine. The famined land is the present day world in which

the righteous live. In this chapter I argue that LGBT Pentecostals emphasize the importance of intensive supernatural engagement and the attendant subsequent signs, such as healing, in order to feel authenticated in the spirit world and to sense the Spirit through their oppression. Given that heterodominant Pentecostals see the Holy Ghost as a heteronormative domain, my informants work that much harder to produce supernatural experience in the queer community.

Waiting on Heaven while engaging in a social life in which most others do not share the pressing concerns of the practitioners requires one continuously refresh in the Holy Ghost, in a collective effervescence⁴³ that overtakes queer bodies during events like the one in which Bro. Scott was to receive his miracle. Anticipation filled the room as an evangelist with the “gift of healing” asked for those who needed relief from a physical condition to form a line at the altar. Although it is a quintessential practice of Pentecostalism, healing is now a spiritual realm in which many are now afraid to journey, because of the stigma of phony victories and the difficulty of achieving the instantaneous results needed in a revival setting. Sis. Helen is old school, though, and valiantly rejects the hesitation she finds in the present church world.

Although heterosexual and a senior citizen, Sis. Helen says that God revealed to her that he made queer people in his image. Making such a bold claim in the homophobic churches she was once a part of has limited her mission to a queer audience. She does not mind, however, and embraces the opportunity to help repair the spiritual damage that has been imposed on LGBT people. She had preached her heart out that Saturday evening and was sweaty mess by now. Her makeup, particularly the mascara, ran down the sides of her wrinkling face, which she gracefully dabbed with a lacy, purple handkerchief. Unabashedly, Sis. Helen told the congregation that the sick would be healed that night and that doubt has no place in the mind of the believer if s/he is to receive healing. The minister commanded the room with a “holy boldness” that was sure to make

Satan himself afraid. Scott was the first believer in line. He hopped as quickly as he could on those crutches to begin the “prayer line,”⁴⁴ a practice that is the climax of classic Pentecostal revival. Bro. Scott’s healing was obviously going to be a tough one, however, a potential struggle until something miraculously transformed his body.

Sister Helen prayed for Scott first. She laid her wizened hands on his forehead and began a series of prayers, including utterances in unknown tongues. With a group of believers surrounding him, she asked Scott to try and walk after the initial round of prayers. Nothing had changed. He was now bent over from the pain. Doubt was written on his partner’s face. The crew of prayer warriors tried again. Sis. Helen was determined to see victory. The righteous few were expecting her to channel it. The pressure was intense, and there was a sense of embarrassment and disappointment surrounding the ordeal by now, a breaking point that would determine the rest of the evening. Just then, musicians rescued the mood with an uplifting tone of praise. With teeth clenched, the brother handed the crutches to his partner and balanced himself on the shoulders of those who were praying with him. Going home without a healing was not an option for Scott. After the third attempt, a new energy was released in that sanctuary. Bro. Scott motioned for his supporters to step aside as we all looked at him with anticipation, nervously hoping for divine intervention. He took his first few steps without a prop as joy replaced the pain when he picked up his pace. The drummer began to clang on the cymbals and a certain relief was signaled, as if we had all been holding our breath until there was a breakthrough in the spirit realm. Scott ended up running through the church that night. The miracle set the stage for other healings, seen and unseen. For weeks to come, a collection of medical devices displayed under the pulpit testified to the many victories, constantly prompting the faithful to remember how God smiled on the group that summer evening.

Watching believers practice their faith in such a daring manner, in order to demand a healing from God, was incredibly moving. Even some of the cynics in the congregation now went forward for prayer, which was a humbling move of faith, a moment of vulnerability. When I noticed Kevin, a rather catty fellow, sobbing while walking up the aisle, I was afraid for him and his pride. Since he was not an active participant in Pentecostal charisma, I had never seen Kevin emotionally vulnerable before this moment. He was primarily known for his witty commentaries on others' worship, like the time someone ran right into the water cooler while in the Spirit. The brother's "step of faith"⁴⁵ made me nervous for his fragile persona. Sis Helen anointed him with oil as she intuitively placed her hands on each side of his head very calmly. He immediately "fell out in the Spirit." The brother laid on the floor speaking in tongues for several minutes. I had to look away. Despite my own reservations and those of some of my informants that Saturday night, the faithful had "touched Heaven."

The healing service moved the reconciled Pentecostals into a new dimension. A renewed confidence filled the atmosphere at Spirit and Truth following the event. Such miracles were familiar to those who grew up in Pentecostal environments, but the gift was something that had not manifested itself strongly in the affirming church until now. Divine workings were something the believers knew to be possible, but to witness them as a gay and lesbian group made for a glorious time. The healings allowed for tangible and undeniable proof of miraculous interventions in the lives of queer believer and emphasized that Jesus was personally concerned with his LGBT followers. Although the faithful knew it all along, anything was possible now. The healings authenticated their movement.

The dominant homophobia that saturates mainline Pentecostalism had warped the mindset of my informants, resulting in a paralysis that just had not realized instantaneous

healings for LGBT persons. I refer to this state as “spiritual insecurity,” or an embodied struggle to realize equality in the spirit realm. It had been difficult for the LGBT fellowship to re-create the iconic Pentecostal sign, a rather important one considering that “prayer for divine healing is perhaps the most universal characteristic of the many varieties of Pentecostalism and perhaps the main reason for its growth in the developing world” (Anderson 2004:30). The ecstatic manifestations of spiritual interference emerged in tandem and in response to an increasing emphasis being placed on biomedicine and as a result disparate access to it. As Jonathan Baer explains, “the materiality of the culture that gave rise to Pentecostalism received its fullest expression in ‘divine healing’ [as] suffering men and women yearned for the restoration of their broken bodies, and their faith provided it” (2001:735). Considering that healings are part of the benefit package and divine authentication for believers, the signs are something that the queer Pentecostals need to prove that their Holy Ghost is just as real, and the same, as one installed in the bodies of heterodominant practitioners. For sexually marginal believers, it is the state of feeling unworthy to receive blessings in the spirit realm. The displacement of LGBT people told believers that queer adherents were not good enough to step into the next realm of divine interventions. Simply realizing God’s love after years of uncertainty had taken some time and was quite the victory. Most in the reconciled environment were still spending a great deal of energy relearning a hegemonic biblical discourse and reinterpreting the scripture through the liberating view of reconciliation in order to offset internalized homophobia and ensure salvations. The focal point of the iconoclastic theology which posed gays and lesbians dancing about on streets of gold with straight counterparts who have long fantasized about the homosexual’s destiny in Hell was hard enough for the saints at Spirit and Truth to believe. Trusting that Jesus could instantaneously heal LGBT bodies exceeded the practitioners’

expectations. Although the believers had recited scriptural references such as “they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover,”⁴⁶ an abundance of physical manifestations had not been experienced at Spirit and Truth before this night. Healings in the psychological realm of depression and anxiety for example, were commonplace, but people going home without their crutches and hearing aids was a true experience of the supernatural. Despite their frustrations with the gift of healing, the marginal practitioners had not stopped practicing the talent of internalizing the Word, so they were ready to receive. The results were undeniable evidence of God’s affirmation. In his response to the evening, Pastor argued that feeling inferior was the reason for why the believers were so amazed with what God is supposed to be doing on a regular basis. The inferiority complex will not be going away in the near future, at least as long as the congregation continues to be composed of discarded practitioners from mainline sects. The faithful few just have not felt worthy with the oppressive histories from which they have been recovering. Many have lost parents, children, grandchildren, and LGBT friends who consider the persistence at Spirit and Truth to either be demonic or just an alternative oppressive dogma. Internalized homophobia had induced the doubt and fear that had prevented the practitioners from experiencing the radical manifestations up until that point. The insecurity may have not completely vanished but it provided a needed boost of confidence. The night of revival was liberating, freeing the faithful to increase their expectations of what God would be doing for them and provided additional proof that might convince homophobic Pentecostals that a Holy Ghost in the LGBT setting was genuine.

Prior to the conference, the environment had to be purged of sin. A series of intense prayer meetings prepared the believers’ souls to receive from God, the likely reason healings occurred in the first place. The congregation seems to make sense of any lack of supernatural

success with the idea that not only is doubt and fear present but that there is sin in the church, something that was trumped the summer Sis. Helen ministered. This reasoning is part of the overall Pentecostal consciousness. LGBT Pentecostals explain the sin in the Rust Belt as due to mainstream queer influence. Depravity, in the various forms of promiscuity, clubs, alcohol abuse, sugar daddies and sugar babies,⁴⁷ and pornography weakens the supernatural potential among the network of LGBT Pentecostals. My informants make peace with a host of demons. As part of diverse set of spiritual contaminants, pornography is considered one of the greatest threats to the church. The use of cybersex and pornographic material is anonymous and completely discrete and thus a popular concern. Anxiety concerning its use runs quite deep within the evangelical world but remains a fixation in the gay church, particularly for the unmarried. The rationale has it that God will prove himself among those who cry out to him, but he is not free to work when sin is present. According to the vision, the human form is inherently sinful, despite being “set apart.” The fact that God showed up on Saturday was a testament to the labor-intensive spiritual conditioning that had taken place. It is the job of all believers to cleanse and separate themselves from the lure of the temptations. When everyone participates, the church, as a whole, reaps the benefits.

The believers are in a constant state of cleansing in order to create spiritually sanitary environments to foster the divine interventions that define them. The profit found in the spirit realm is not for the sole benefit of the practitioners who eagerly seek after Christ but is an evangelistic tool. My informants say that the lost are looking to the church during troubled times in order to know whether God is real. “The world” expects to see the gifts operating in the church, and successful manifestations are the most convincing evidence the practitioners have to convince the unsaved and dominant Pentecostals, simultaneously, that their Holy Ghost is real.

Non-believers and non-Pentecostal Christians should be able to visit only one service and witness miraculous workings. If the attendees walk away from the meeting without being “touched” by the Spirit, the saints believe they are held accountable for those souls. The expectations my informants maintain about ministry are a tremendous burden on them, only balanced out when they “win souls” and achieve inclusion, one convert at a time. The process is a slow one. Since it is understood that God manifests himself through his followers, the saints are obligated to uphold holiness so that he can prove himself in the Last Days.

Healing is just one of the abilities the believers have located in the Word. There are a total of nine gifts of the Spirit, including the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, diverse tongues, and interpretation of those tongues. Often “women are major carriers of the charismatic elements of the movement, particularly through their powers of healing, prophecy, and ‘powerful prayer’...charismatic virtuosity among women Pentecostal echoes the role of women as healers and shamans, vessels of spirit possession and prophets in many traditional cultures. It is the primary source of women’s spiritual power and a means through which they nudge toward the ‘modernization’ of *de facto* gender roles” (B. Martin 2013:131). While Martin’s notions of “traditional cultures” and “modernization” are problematic, it is worth pointing out that women in various cultural settings utilize charismatic power and virtuosity to negotiate influence in unequal, patriarchal environments. Along with marginalized women, gay men, whether closeted or in a liberated form, also tend to operate as spiritual sensitives within Pentecostalism. Of these gifts, tongues have received the most attention due to what many see as exotic, something that has even quite problematically been cast as belonging to an earlier humanity. Gifts of healing are likely the hardest to manifest, given the faith required by both the receiver and conductor to produce a

tangible manifestation. Therefore, it is somewhat rare to see the talent in action, despite the familiar imagery of healing crusades taking place in tent revivals across the country. Overall, however, to be Pentecostal is to be Spirit-filled, evidenced by speaking in tongues. Grant Wacker, one of the premier experts on global Pentecostalism, explains that the peculiarity of tongues has captured an audience over the last century, too. Perhaps this focus is an unfortunate consequence of strange behavior since "...the richness of Pentecostal culture could not be reduced to tongues any more than the richness of, say, Roman Catholic culture could be reduced to devotion to the Blessed Virgin" (Wacker 2001:41). However, the Heavenly language is the emphasized gift to the believers and is the primary rite of passage. According to the believers, "...baptism by the Holy Spirit is subsequent to a 'clean heart.' The body is a vessel which must be cleansed and maintained before it can be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Toulis 1997:158). I will not transcribe sacred sounds here because of the offensive nature of the script to my informants and also because a few transcriptions could hardly represent the varied nature of the utterances. However, "the experience is self-authenticating, and so real that its reality is beyond question...no wonder it leads to greater dedication and fuller commitment to discipleship and service" (Williams 1984:82). It is said that the Spirit is universal, although the tongues may sound nothing alike. In order to be a fully accepted and saved member, one is expected to speak in tongues at some point for the congregation to witness. After doing so, the believer is then free to operate in the other gifts.

Although everyone engages in the tongues experience, no one really knows what the tongues are saying in the Spirit. Except when the sounds are interpreted on occasion, the gift is simply a prayer language that connects the believer to the spirit realm. Most often, the potential translation is irrelevant. The understanding and definition has evolved since the Holy Spirit was

first witnessed at the turn of the twentieth century in Los Angeles. Valerie Cooper explains, “coming as it did during a period in the United States marked by the expansion of de jure Jim Crow segregation, Azusa Street represented a remarkable—even miraculous—period of religious racial integration that is quite unique in American history, even into the present” (2011:65). The handful of believers, comprised of working-class African Americans and whites, wanted to fully experience the scriptures. Some believed that tongues were perhaps earthly languages meant to aid the enthusiasts in missionization. When an early practitioner felt the urge to be a missionary, others would try to identify the language and the eager one would be sent on his/her way. Pentecostals, as they became known, quickly realized the failed experiment. The prayer language then became a simple means to transport human souls to Heavenly ecstasy. I cite this history in order to point out that the notion of the Holy Ghost has always been contested, including how it should manifest itself and regarding what is authentic Holy Ghost. Over a century later, LGBT Pentecostals insist that the Holy Ghost they manifest is the same one that mainline practitioners claim to enjoy. Since even leading Pentecostals say the Spirit does not know boundaries, it has become a means for queered practitioners to challenge those who dismiss them. However, the Holy Ghost of LGBT people continues to be rejected by heterodominant Pentecostals because it is said that Satan has a replica⁴⁸ of everything holy and this is the reason dancing and music, for instance, became secularized. The abominable are messing with a sacred force, so it is no wonder that mainstream believers find the movement demonic and would rather LGBT persons remain in the clubs of Castro and Boystown than claiming a Holy Ghost experience for themselves.

Tongues interpretation, which conceivably works in tandem with the gift of tongues, is another talent worth mentioning due to its relevance among queer Pentecostals. Interpretation in Pentecostalism could be the most peculiar gift and it has frequently been employed to

spontaneously and divinely solve conflict "...to sanction what hearers wanted to hear, especially when troublemakers threatened to disrupt the smooth operation" (Wacker 2001:83). In addition, since most do not claim to have this gift, pastors have "...undoubtedly nurtured the gift for themselves...as an effective means for regulating the tempo and direction of the service" (Wacker 2001:82). That is not to say, however, that interpretation does not often manifest itself in a seemingly-natural, aggressive, and fiery manner that offers a warning from God himself, which immediately results in the saints spiritually aligning their lives in intense prayer sessions. While Pentecostals do not believe that every time a Spirit-filled believer utters foreign sounds it should be interpreted, it is commonplace for one's expressions to begin taking over the service. As the group tunes in to the dominant voice, believed to be God speaking through the believer, stillness sets in as believers begin to listen and receive. After the message is given through an unknown tongue, it is believed that the interpretation should come forth. The speech is usually gentle but, at other times, is angry. To translate tongues for the entire church is a dangerous but empowering responsibility and it happens on occasion. To stutter or incorrectly articulate a message can be embarrassing for the believer who is operating out of faith. To slip up could get the gifted caught up in a catty, royal realm of gossip. In all seriousness, in most Pentecostal communities there are one or two members who are known to interpret tongues. These practitioners have usually perfected their gift, so to speak. In the Rust Belt, God speaks directly to his queer community of believers through the language. In postindustrial Indiana, the bold practitioners have taken the gift of tongues interpretation with them in their journey of sexual and religious reconciliation, freeing God's voice to speak directly of LGBT concerns. He tells them he approves of the affirming gospel and encourages the marginal believers to spread it. Since Pentecostals regard tongues interpretation as the most sacred voice within the church,

because to do so is to speak on behalf of Jesus. Those who disapprove of the inclusivity being taught at Spirit and Truth are particularly distressed by translations that speak in favor of reconciliation.

While in the pious gathering, I participated in a series of Bible study forums concerning the nine gifts. The studies took place every Wednesday evening when only the most devoted parishioners would gather for a mid-week refreshing in the Spirit. After a few songs in the sanctuary, the believers would put together a few tables to explore the Word. A velvet bag was passed around that usually resulted in a few dollars. During this series, pastor energetically outlined how the charismatic abilities should be practiced in the church, including his theological take and ideas about etiquette surrounding usage in the assembly. For example, when someone feels the urge to prophesy or has a word of knowledge, the practitioner should get the go-ahead from the leader. The insight should then be beneficial to the group and not a means to manipulate with a personal agenda of some sort. As most Pentecostal preachers do, he stressed “decency and order,”⁴⁹ of which the leaders are the proper channels for lay people to practice their gifts. Such control is somewhat incongruent with the flow of the Spirit, as Harvey Cox explains: “spontaneity and order...has raged on in Pentecostalism for a nearly a century now, with splits and divisions the rule rather than the exception, and the struggle sometimes takes the form of a contest between lay people and preachers, with the preachers trying, often in vain, to harness the essentially unharnessable surge of the Spirit” (1993:185). The Spirit can be a chaotic force to reckon with, demanding a constant intuitive exchange between the shepherd and sheep.

In each church setting, gifts are divinely assigned to the particular members. Certain saints become known for their charismatic roles, whether prophet, tongues interpreter, healer, teacher, or discerner. It is the infilling of the Holy Ghost, a power lodged in the believer’s body,

that allows for the believer to gauge progress and self-correction. Receiving the infilling is the beginning of unleashing the ability to engage in miraculous workings, although only a few seem to go beyond simply speaking in unknown tongues. In order to maintain respect for the sacred, often unspoken positions, constant renewal in the Holy Ghost is required. Those who practice the gifts and are not “prayed up”⁵⁰ are not taken seriously, since their salvations may not be current. The Calvinist notion of perseverance of the saints, or “once saved, always saved,” only applies to some evangelicals. For Pentecostals, salvations are a work in progress and require constant maintenance. Technically, the rule is that a believer can be saved but accidentally take the Lord’s name in vain while entering an eternal destiny, for example, and immediately enter the torment of Hell’s flames. The ambiguity creates even more anxiety about the afterlife, because no one can be absolutely certain they will “make Heaven their home.” The eternal implication also results in an intense community watch program.

Believers are taught to frequently “pray through,”⁵¹ meaning pray until s/he senses the power and begins to speak in tongues. The struggle to constantly renew oneself in the Spirit is a familiar concept in the charismatic faith. However, I think the emphasis my informants place on spiritual renewal is quite telling. Queered believers in the Rust Belt are especially concerned with this transcendence. For the many years I have been around Pentecost, I have never witnessed such a fierce struggle and such an emphasis placed on “breaking through”⁵² as I witnessed in Indiana. Pentecostals, in general, worry about the losing the ability to connect in the Spirit, but venturing into ecstasy for the queered believers in particular confirms that spiritual contact can still be made, even with a lover in the room. For the couples to touch Heaven together, while praying in the Spirit, is the ultimate affirmation needed for impending salvations. Believers go through what they call “dry spells” in which the supernatural seems out of touch, all

while seeing others “get a blessing.” As Troy Abell states, “among Holiness-Pentecostals... that emotional experience or ‘feeling’ is a primary goal of worship, perhaps even of religion itself. There are frequent remarks, both in and out of the church setting, establishing the importance of ‘feeling’ God” (Abell 1982:124). In fact, to many saints, the notion of Hell is to be out of touch with God. Pentecostalism, in general, is a religion of feeling the power, especially for those who walk alone. Believers often talk about the anointing, or Spirit present, as being so thick they “could cut it with a knife.” Andrew Chesnut has written about the Spirit in Brazil and beautifully illustrates this mobility in his writing: “the Pentecostal God is not a remote figure to be contemplated in silence but a dynamic force to be experienced by the entire being, both psyche and soma” (1997:93). In a church world in which LGBT practitioners must exhibit faith on the margins, frequent visitations compensate for the spiritual insecurity of being LGBT and Christian, demanding a constant refreshing in the Holy Ghost. Every time the saints tap into the spirit realm, they are affirmed in their unfit bodies. The Holy Ghost, as the great equalizer, is not homophobic and, therefore, is said to not know boundaries.

In addition to regular services and personal prayer, congregants meet once a week for corporate prayer. The saints do not necessarily pray in a unified fashion. Instead, they energetically walk throughout the sanctuary loudly pleading with God to visit them in a moment of heightened gender roles in which men circle the sanctuary waving their arms to Heaven and most women kneel on chairs and altars. Pentecostal prayer meetings are moments in which believers perform their Holy Ghost, including tongues, loud vocalization, and other aggressive tactics to achieve a spiritual climax. The result of the aggressive and passionate struggle is a cacophonous chorus that begs for Heaven’s attention. In the Rust Belt and elsewhere where believers pray in the Spirit, “not only does the actual performance of prayer need to be on point,

but so too does the music, the darkness, the human touch, the hushed tones, and, when visible, the pinched faces” (O’Neill 2010:73). Prayer meetings are key to the End Time revival bound to happen in the LGBT community. The gatherings are also key to local church growth and distinguish between committed and casual Christians. Praying through is labor intensive. The gift of tongues, for example, seems relatively easy to manage from the outside, but the LGBT Pentecostals struggle hard to “break through” in order to allow the Holy Spirit to take control of their bodies. Believers are often exacerbated, sweaty and thirsty, by the end of it all. The power sometimes twirls them or causes the faithful to lose their balance as they fall onto the floor, all while giving up control of their inebriated bodies and over time itself.

Sis. Hazel, a social worker nearing retirement, is one of the straight individuals who comes to Spirit and Truth because of her distaste for the treatment of homosexuals in mainline churches. She also enjoys the fun of Pentecost, all of the dancing, tongue talking, and healing. Her husband, Frank, is a hard-lived man who can fix just about anything. Faded and smudged tattoos tell his story. He is one of those workingmen who usher in the scent of Ivory soap when they put on their Sunday best and joyfully walk into the “house of the Lord.” The rest of the week those guys are covered in grease and whatnot. Hazel brought her husband into Pentecost, enthusiastically telling him how good it feels to just let go of one’s tongue and let the Lord speak. But he has not spoken in tongues yet. He did surprise us all when he danced in the Spirit, though, in something looking akin to Appalachian flat footing. He had a big smile on his face. Frank did not seem to understand that the point of the whole thing was to get lost in the Spirit as he danced, not to look us all in the face during his hootenanny. If he wanted to look like a pro, his eyes would likely be closed, his mouth flung open uttering tongues, and his body would twirl or be doing something unconsciously rhythmic. Frank’s receding and wispy hair would be

flopping around. That is the way it is done, but he was enjoying himself. Frank's dance was quite beautiful in its own original and incompetent way. When the brother starts speaking in tongues on a regular basis, perhaps the faithful will consider the dance more spiritual. The brave couple makes a threatening statement in the small town as they affiliate themselves with a gay church. Those in the community with whom they previously worshipped do not have much to do with Sis. Hazel and Bro. Frank now that they have been "turned over to a reprobate mind." Believing they will be going to Heaven hand-in-hand with the queers has caused them to lose quite a few friends in small-town America. As far as Frank knew though, he was saved, at least until Bible study one night. He did not know that, according to the official doctrine of the church, he would have to speak in the unknown language in order to avert eternal flames. Pastor asked for members who had spoken in tongues to raise their hands while we were gathered around the kitchen table of a family in the church. Frank's hand never went up, and others tried not to notice. To boldly admit that one has not spoken in tongues puts a lot of pressure on the individual. Although some speak in tongues rather loudly, the Heavenly communication is deeply personal to many practitioners. The ambiguous rules and standards for the sound frequently result in self-consciousness about one's prayer language. When believers first open their bodies to receive the Holy Ghost, supporters gather around in order to hear those first utterances of unknown tongues. Frank was next up. "Getting the Holy Ghost"⁵³ happens on the first try for some and takes years for others, so hopefully, for his sake, it will all happen rather quickly. He will fully be one of their own once it happens.

Newcomers eventually adapt to the faith but the believers insisting on Pentecostal practice limits the number of potential converts. The Spirit practices not only isolate the practitioners from affirming Christians but also from many LGBT Christians. The doctrine of

Holy Ghost infilling makes evangelism a bit tough, because the dogma requires newcomers to experience the Spirit, speaking in tongues at minimum, in order to be saved. The dancing, or “shouting” as it is called, places additional pressure that seems to attract a few but deters most. There are those who find all of the tongues speaking and dancing fun but it typically takes years to perfect the gifts. Practitioners who have been in the faith for years have a certain way of dancing, for example, that blends in well without looking foolish. My notes bring one saint to mind, Brenda, an enthusiastic worshipper in the congregation. Without having that certain look to her praise, her somewhat awkward jumping and yelling out loud about the goodness of the Lord did not quite fit in with the suave conference settings. Converts do not necessarily know how to make sense of the stylistic worshipful expressions but, being oblivious to raised eyebrows, attempt to enjoy their own Holy Ghost experience, even when flat footing becomes a chosen form of dancing in the Spirit. Among the believers, there is a competency that only comes with time. While newcomers are praised for their conversions and efforts, only the believers who have been in the faith all of their lives seem to gain any sort of power. It is a sort of re-created class system for a mostly disempowered people, resulting in domination by those who are more middle class and have been in the faith for multiple generations. Those who maintain control at Spirit and Truth and throughout the network of LGBT Pentecostals are typically second and third generation adherents. Speakers and leaders of the national conferences, for example, are usually those who have been born into the faith or converted at an early age to gain the class of the faith, and perhaps they excel the fellowship because of their extreme passions.⁵⁴

While believers imagine church growth and that a larger sanctuary will be built on the vacant field on the property, it is no wonder the congregation stays small. The vision does not

seem to take into account demand for an affirming Pentecostal church in the Heartland. It is difficult to imagine the mega-church filled with straight allies and queer, Holy Ghost filled practitioners, especially knowing that all of those potential converts would have to meet the expectation of speaking in tongues and satisfy the lifestyle standards of righteous dogma. Among the believers, however, a lack of success is attributed to the devil's interference. The faith is quite specialized, at least in this era, but a frequent lack of success simply means the devil is fighting Truth.

Fearing dangerous compromise and out of loyalty to tradition, the faithful insist on Pentecostal identity and practice, despite the small number of congregants. Believers fear encroaching non-denominationalism, universalism, and queer secularism. According to the believers, the faith is not entirely wrong simply because dominant Pentecostal leaders in the world see homosexuality as problematic. After searching for satisfying religiosity in other churches and denominations, Jeff, an HIV-positive brother,⁵⁵ testifies that he finally discovered joy after coming across the Pentecostal religious experience. He suffered from severe depression for many years prior to joining the church. Jeff is one of the most dedicated members in the congregation, always available for prayer meetings and church workdays. With his hands gripping the altar, he travails daily until free of temptation and Satanic oppression. Jeff does not need music, preaching, or even other believers there with him to break through. He creates the same altar space in his doublewide. Jeff says he would not find freedom to worship the way he likes to in other churches. He can be a bit loud sometimes when he gets to praising and knows it would be inappropriate in a lot of congregations. He is a bit rowdy when the Spirit gets to moving on him. A typical Jeff praise would include something in a lispy, deep voice like, "I thank you Lord for being so good to me. God, you have brought me through so many things.

Thank you!!!” Such a proclamation is usually followed by a few syllables of tongues. The brother says his depression was brought on by being gay, HIV-positive, and unwelcome among those he grew up with and, overall, by not feeling spiritually at peace due to the complexities. This uncertainty has been resolved in the Hoosier church. In all of his life stories, he is most passionate about Pentecost, a life-changing faith movement he is not willing to compromise anytime soon. Jeff is most passionate about sharing the free gift of the Holy Ghost. He tries to explain just how good it feels when he speaks in tongues and dances in the Spirit. Unfortunately, he says, most people just do not seem to understand until they feel it for themselves.

The righteous relish in their charismatic milieu of worship, confidently saying they will not trade their faith for generic Christianity, or even worse, encroaching Universalism. As the end of times approach us, it is increasingly important for those at Spirit and Truth to be on the alert for false doctrines and Satanic trickery, the reason the LGBT Pentecostals are marginal within broader Pentecostalism itself. Pentecostals are taught “do not believe every spirit, by try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out in the world.”⁵⁶ Mainline Pentecostals have been able to do just that without even visiting Spirit and Truth. Queer Pentecostals try their hand at it, too, in a world with many paths. According to the many theological leaders within the fellowship, Universalism seems to be the single greatest danger to Truth. Faithful LGBT persons are being warned to not be seduced by the appeal of acceptance, diversity, and human connection present, despite the reality that mainline Pentecostal denominations have made little to no progress in accepting the LGBT groups. Although the crying in the wilderness exists from a theological basis, Universalism remains a point of contention among those in the fellowship. Many see religious inclusivity as dangerous, while others are satisfied in the Pentecostal experience but do not imagine Heaven with just tongue-

talking saints. Given the extreme conditions under which the righteous have survived with faith intact, they understand the importance of valuing other perceptions of eternity but some struggle with the notion that non-Pentecostals will end up in Hell. However, to believe that those of other faiths will experience Heaven would mean compromising the notion that the charismatic experience is the only way, thus jeopardizing Pentecostal exclusivity, doctrine, and experience. Proclaiming that every knee will bow to Jesus one day is quite unpopular and stunning in the gay community, but it is a brash stance the believers take to preserve their spiritual confidence in tradition and ecstatic experience. To resolve the crude judgment, marginal practitioners empathetically want to share the Holy Ghost experience with those of other faiths and non-Pentecostal Christians alike. The optimistic spin on the issue passionately articulates the message that Pentecost is so incredible that God wants all of humanity to experience it. Over the years, having grown up in church, my friends have witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Ghost that has happened around the world, namely the African Continent, Southeast Asia, and in Central and South America. Not only, however, have gays and lesbians been excluded from the gift at home but have been rejected abroad as well. Some international others are now also experiencing the insistence of queer inclusivity as well and reach to Indiana for support and fellowship. The devotees now want to see unadulterated, Spirited inclusivity spread on a global level.

Pastor preached the theme of a recent conference with a message about standing one's ground in these Last Days. The sermon naturally became a critique of Universalism and moral elasticity. Pastor, also Bishop, recently came under fire for what some identify as legalism. He has stood his ground on issues of promiscuity, alcohol abuse, and loose theology, for example, and has been attacked for his convictions by ministers in his own network and in other LGBT Pentecostal fellowships. Pastor's sermon was the product of attacks that left him feeling alone in

an affirming faith system that seemed to be “swayed by every wind and doctrine.”⁵⁷ Others, who compromise, do so in order to survive in a market in which a peculiar ecstatic experience is unpopular. Some LGBT Pentecostals leaders have allegedly compromised in order to keep their churches afloat and to prevent isolation, including accepting “sinful” lifestyles and beginning to understand Pentecostalism as one of many paths to a blissful afterlife. In a fiery manner, Pastor let us know that God says in his Word that, “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” In an unpopular manner, he established that the group still believes the Pentecostal experience and righteous living is required to experience Heaven, not that anyone has the right to be hateful to those of other faiths but, rather, must empathetically share Truth to those who need the Holy Ghost experience. It seems natural and intuitive to loosen restrictions on believers in order to grow the fellowship, but doing so is compromise, something so risky that it could result in missing out on a heavenly eternity. In addition, leaders within the fellowship stoically insist that LGBT persons are not allowed special privileges of being spiritually secure while living a “worldly” lifestyle, including excessive drinking, clubbing, and bed-hopping. It is said that living a holy life comes easier for those who are truly filled with the Spirit and “prayed up.” As some LGBT Pentecostals splinter off from the association over their alleged moral elasticity, Pastor stands through the rejection, gossip, and competition within his own fellowship in order to establish righteousness in perilous times,⁵⁸ a strict lifestyle that some say places unbearable accountability on those within the queer community. Once the church quits emphasizing Truth, does not labor in the Holy Ghost, and individuals cease to “crucify the flesh,”⁵⁹ it is understood that true anointing abandons the church, only to be replaced by a deceitful replica of the Spirit and the resulting manifestations.

Being incorporated into dominant Pentecostalism, the United Pentecostal Church International, in particular, is the goal of leadership at Spirit and Truth and the larger network of queer, Oneness Pentecostals. The perception of eventual success is, no doubt, part of the rationale for maintaining a strict lifestyle and orthodox theological standards. The UPCI suits the theological tastes of the congregation, with their rejection of the Trinity and belief that the godhead exists entirely in Jesus as God in spirit and in flesh. Each year, Pastor and his partner make their way down South to one of the major conferences for the United Pentecostal Church in Louisiana. Leaders there are familiar with Pastor's scandal of coming out of the closet after overseeing a church with his wife and then opening up an inclusive church with a male lover. To those in Louisiana and elsewhere, Spirit and Truth Ministries exists as proof that the end is near, that the outreach embodies the notion of a doctrine of devils. The Pastors, however, see improvement, because at least they are not being completely shunned these days. A typical response from the confident revolutionaries is something like, "God will fight our battles; he's on our side." Until victory, the Holy-Ghost filled guys continue attending UPCI conferences in order to feed their souls and demonstrate their normalcy. The righteous prophets exist as diplomats in a psychologically damaging and hostile terrain. It is a task that is not for the faint of heart and one that a few in the fellowship see as wasteful. One must admire their courage, however. Some argue that the oppressive regimes should simply be allowed to wallow in their ignorance. However, Pastor sees souls in the balance, closeted LGBT persons being damaged by just this one denomination. Their optimism envisions incorporation as only a matter of time.

I contend that the reason for the congregation's insistence on maintaining Pentecostalism, doctrinally and experientially, despite being LGBT in a heteronormative religious landscape, has to do with the lack of spiritual fulfillment found in other Christianities as well as the present risk,

or spiritual insecurity, already involved in queering Pentecostalism. In his work with a gay evangelical group, Scott Thumma contends “the identity negotiation requires that these Christians accept a historical critical approach to the Bible, but it does not change them into liberal Christians. The negotiated identity allows them to accept their homosexuality, while not requiring that they deny their faith” (Thumma 2005:81). Interpreted through the enlightened biblical reality the faithful have revealed, salvation for LGBT subjects is risky enough that guarding against worldly proscriptions, including the endangerment of other doctrine, is essential to spiritual confidence and puts the believers in a better position to argue for inclusion among their brothers and sisters in so-called straight churches. Determination to queer the familiar is important within a mindset that teaches that non-Pentecostal Christians will not experience Heaven’s splendor. Remaining Pentecostal in experience and theology allows for the ousted believers to have a continued spiritual experience in a faith system that is familiar. As with the Seventh-day Adventists Rene Drumm writes about, Pentecostalism is a way of life. Drumm states, “Seventh-day Adventists lesbians and gay men share a heritage that is more than a set of religious beliefs. Adventism is a way of life. It is a culture, an identity...when personal identities collide, a painful struggle ensues” (Drumm 2005:65). Settling for something other than the real thing is not fulfilling. The dogma argues that only God is the judge and will decide who gets into Heaven, but being filled with the Holy Ghost is part of the salvation process. It is a righteous message that does not make much sense to most in the gay community who are said to have taken to a universal message, when religion exists at all. There are motivations for spreading the goodness of the Spirit, such as wanting others to experience the rapture found in the Holy Ghost, but not giving into Universalism likely has more to do with the teachings and resulting uncertainty brought about by mainline regimes, as well as a seemingly-unquenchable desire to be

included. LGBT Pentecostals seem to hold themselves to high standards in order to offset the conflict involved in reconciling faith and sexuality.

In a spirited night of revival, Sis. Helen led a community of LGBT Pentecostals into a new dimension in their faith, a realm they had not been confident enough to experience. The believers were now freed to explore the limitless power of the gifts, including healings, not just an assurance of eternal salvation. Those in the Rust Belt take pride in the power of the Holy Ghost and empathetically share the promise of infilling. However, the practice of the gifts, with tongues being at the forefront, is not a realm in which most LGBT persons imagine themselves participating. There is the whole stigma of such pastimes satisfying the wild impulses of crazed holy men who have screwed gays over many times, not to mention the classist judgments. Despite frequent rejection of the spiritual force, a favorite affirming passage for the congregants at Spirit and Truth and the network of LGBT Pentecostals around the world is “In the last days, I will pour my spirit upon all flesh.” Since the text states “all flesh,” the interpretation has it that all are eligible, an affirming promise to LGBT believers, and particularly transgendered persons, who fall outside of the normative bounds of acceptable flesh. To the believers, this prophetic vision had the marginal saints in mind when it was divinely penned. In the Indiana Rust Belt, the gift of the Holy Ghost is precious and empowering, too great of a power to not insist upon sharing it or allow its power to be diminished by a generic and, to them, a less fulfilling spiritual connection. Pentecost is not something they are willing to compromise anytime soon, despite the strains of spiritual insecurity brought about by the homophobia embedded in the streamlined version of the faith. Pentecostal ecstasy is what is familiar to the adherents and deviating from that norm does not provide for their needs. With their faces against stained carpet, the insistent will not concede a style of worship and a way of life. Healings produced that evening provided

divine proof that God has smiled on affirming Pentecostalism and offered undeniable evidence that the Holy Ghost among them is genuine. The manifestations were greatly needed to offset spiritual insecurity that has been imposed on LGBT subjects by the heterodominant regimes that disposed them. With such divine intervention comes the expectation that the believers must “come out from among them, and be ye separate.”⁶⁰ As a last remnant, my friends are unable to serve two masters,⁶¹ God and the fleshly desires. They must not be unequally yoked with things of the world if they are to continue experiencing authentic Pentecost.

Be Ye Not Unequally Yoked

“Be ye unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?”
2 Corinthians 6:14 KJV

Chapter Five

All six of us were handed a lesson plan for “Solo Flight,” a breakout session at the annual conference. The purpose of the forum was for a group of us singles to encourage one another to not give into temptation or be burdened by the woes of living life alone, because the right partner would be coming along soon enough. Being the single anthropologist, I was expected to be experiencing the same struggles. We would sacredly unite with this individual and be able to live for the Lord together with a supernatural blessing. Sis. Alyssa, a transgendered Pentecostal from Arizona, led the meeting. She used to have a male form, but now the transitioned sister identifies as a lesbian with a said “God-given” attraction to other females. Alyssa has been alone for ten years, ever since coming into Truth and losing her partner to religious difference. This lady has a serious tone about her, and an original deep voice that occasionally manifests itself when she gets in the Spirit. The ex-girlfriend just did not seem to respect Alyssa’s walk with the Lord, which resulted in the two parting ways. Alyssa’s primary complaint was that her girlfriend would not go to church or spend time in prayer with her. The ex felt uncomfortable when Alyssa could be overheard praying in tongues in the living room and did not like being startled early on Sunday mornings when the fervent woman would make her way to the House of the Lord. Knowing that a connection will not continue in the afterlife makes it difficult to be one in the present life. Believers refer to these incongruent relationships as being “unequally yoked,” an expression found in the Word. The meeting had the excitement of a teenage sex-ed class, a liberating forum to discuss attraction in a group that, despite the sexual nature of their identity, must restrain sexuality. In a passionate and righteous tone, Sis. Alyssa warned us to keep our “temples” clean, our bodies being the temples of the Holy Spirit. Clearly promiscuity was not acceptable but also porn, the solution to promiscuity, was not an acceptable part of a holy, LGBT lives. The singles admitted that it is easy to be tempted by pornography and cybersex with its

convenient access and anonymity, but succumbing to the demonic forces clouds thoughts that should be focused on God. Likewise, with such technology as Grindr,⁶² a phone application with GPS locator for anonymous sex, pleasures “in a wicked and perverse generation” are easy to come by. The breakout session highlighted a promise ring⁶³ approach that is being implemented by LGBT Pentecostals, a frustrating and nearly incongruent means of survival in a community constructed upon on a sex-based identity.

As Pentecostals build social support by demanding accountability, the believers are engaging in a complex normalization of LGBT sexuality with their notions of purity. For the current analysis, I will refer to these problems as “sexual anxiety.” I am referring to a heightened struggle to reconcile faith and sexuality in two distinct communities, of which neither offers complete belonging but only a contingent fit. The identities of LGBT and Pentecostal are in constant negotiation for the sake of peace and, depending on the moment, one association tends to trump the other until the two are brought back into alignment while in fellowship. The righteous few are refusing to be seen simply as sexual deviants, particularly in the church world, and challenge society to see the community for its wholesome contributions. They are attempting to accomplish such refashioning of queer identity through celibate loneliness, monogamous marriage, godly living, and other public and private presentations of piety. In this chapter I explore the ways in which LGBT Pentecostals engage in celibacy, cautious dating, and life-long marital commitments that are believed to separate their existence from Northwest Indiana norms of detached, convenient sex and anonymity that are, along with other forces, due to an embodied oppression.

Being single while in the field, I was naturally included in the conversations of other lonely souls, primarily men due to my subjectivity within the gendered boundaries and the nature

of the field site. One of my male fieldwork favorites always had a way of interjecting some humor in order to alleviate the pious mood found even among casual fellowship around the congregation. Quick remarks about getting “a big one” over in Gary, for example, were a common theme. Whether true or not, the honorable mentions could have gotten the guy into big trouble with Pastor. The brother would pull us in close with his arms over our shoulders and whisper something that would cause us to burst into laughter, ensuring a few stares from the more spiritual individuals in the church. His comedy was meant for us singles, a circle of mostly guys, who understood and probably needed such relief. It is likely that our resident comedian’s accounts had no basis in reality; rather, the tales may have simply been representative of the sexual frustration found when attempting to synch neoconservative Christianity with urges that subsist underground. Singles within Spirit and Truth want to “live right,” but doing so seems a difficult positionality given that they must continue to engage with the broader LGBT community in order to reach lost souls and find physical relief. Finding someone within the church, or even at the larger conferences involving believers from across the country, is highly unlikely. While my single friends were quite aware of the church’s standards, there was a certain level of tolerance for promiscuity for those who chose it, at least within casual, non-religious conversation. Most tried to live pure lives, but the frustration that everyone faced was collectively understood, resulting in a non-judgmental attitude, at least among singles. While in the fellowship, I often felt as if there were two, distinct realities at play, the world of committed, righteous couples and the more playful singles. The pent-up energy was brought about by having to reckon with purity teachings within the church, curiosity quenched only with quick hookups or relationships that, as far as the church was concerned, went unaccounted.

Brother Ryan quickly shoved an iPhone into a pocket in his slim-fitting blazer when Pastor approached him to say hello after church in the parking lot. I was standing nearby and could tell the brother was rather nervous and was curious as to why. He, of course, covered it up with nervous overexcitement as he embraced Pastor to tell him how much he and Pastor Michael meant to him. His thick, black hair was classically parted to the side and his physique marked him as the sexiest guy that had been around the church in quite some time, perhaps too beautiful to not be sexually active. Ryan attends a church in a different state but considers Spirit and Truth his spiritual home. He later revealed to me that he was on Grindr, a phone application for meeting guys, when Pastor approached him in the parking lot.

The technological advancement for dating is considered a seedy approach and many gays, even in non-religious environments, look down on those who utilize the app. Should a guy be horny enough and in the right location, he can find action within a few hundred feet. Out in small towns, there will certainly be someone to hook-up with just a mile or two away. Most in this cyber platform are said to only be looking for sex. However, there are plenty of lonesome men there who desire more than the usual, but finding more than a quick fix in Northwest Indiana, for example, might be asking for too much. I do not want to perpetuate the fantasy that cities are the meccas of queer existence since "...queer life beyond the city is as vibrant, diverse, and plentiful as any urban-based sexual culture" (Herring 2010:6). It is also not helpful to think of geographical differences as irrelevant regarding queer self-awareness since the "...cultural marginalization that structures these specific rural communities render them ill-suited to strategies of visibility currently privileged by the priorities of the United States' predominantly middle-class, urban-focused gay and lesbian social movement" (Gray 2009:30). However, without having the convenience of a great number of safe spaces, dating in smaller towns

requires more dependence upon cyber interactions. This is a consequence of not being concentrated in one area. Online sites such as gay.com, scruff, or adam4adam.com⁶⁴ are other options for males. The advantage of dating online is that "...interaction on the Internet compared to face-to-face environments is the simultaneous experience of distance and intimacy, which allows individuals safety in conveying their sexual (or other) personal aspirations without having to risk face-to-face rejection and its potential for spoiled identity" (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005:70). Part of the identity that could be spoiled is a pious, Pentecostal one, which the Internet may shield. However, the other primary option for dating is in the bars, which is problematic for pious Pentecostals. Meeting places with an exaggerated queer theme, whether cyber or in person, are needed to create a safe spaces, especially in a place where aggressive homophobes can attack at any moment if lines get crossed. Since sexual prowls, better known as cruising, are not necessarily verbalized. The existence of LGBT and straight spaces are important to articulate what goes unspoken. The problem for my friends, who strive for purity, however, is that such spaces are not ideal and, due to their cruisy nature, are a threat to uneasy salvations. The believers strive to separate themselves from the crutch of temptation, and usually stay away from spiritual hazardous spaces in order to protect their delicate spiritualities.

According to the unofficial but omnipresent doctrine of purity, walking into a queer bar in the area, although such establishments are quite limited, does not send the right message. It is not necessarily uncommon for believers to frequent boozy environments but doing so is an activity rarely discussed in company of the church. Good-standing members do not check-in⁶⁵ on Facebook when they are at a leather bar in Boystown, for example. The kinetic energy found under rainbow neon and the voices of affirming divas is a force too tempting for singles and one that partnered Pentecostals have no need to seek out, especially when promiscuity is believed to

be common among the gays. As Richard illustrates in his analysis, these women, particularly Madonna and Lady Gaga have "...blurred the boundaries between the erotic and the spiritual, the sacred and profane," which is not a palatable form of entertainment for pious, queer Pentecostals (2012:225-6). In addition, since the constructed queer spaces are known cruising grounds, there is not enough justification for pious LGBT persons to frequent them. To filter their experience through Mary Douglas's ideas concerning purity and danger, for the righteous few, "physical crossing of the social barrier is treated as a dangerous pollution...the polluter becomes a doubly wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line and second because he endangered others" (1966:140). Although the believers are known to stop by the questionable queer events for witnessing purposes, which I explain in the next chapter, the bar life is commonly outgrown and too risky of a social and spiritual pastime for my friends in the Rust Belt. Venturing into the temping environments usually requires going with someone who can hold the believer accountable. Options for dating, therefore, are limited.

As the singles learned in Solo Flight, God will send appropriate life-partners. Patience is key. While believers are free to date within the fellowship of saints, choices are extremely limited as opposed to the range of possibilities in the club and, for example, on Grindr. Singles in Solo Flight agreed that they were better off living for God alone than to be unequally yoked with a non-believer. To be in love with someone who does not live for God and does not maintain a spiritual consciousness is seen as a spiritually damning influence. If living pious lives requires sacrificing one's sexuality, even in the queer context, believers are willing to do what is necessary to make it to Heaven. The influence that faith has on their lives is too powerful a force to not share it with a like-minded believer. The righteous few realize what is best for keeping their salvations intact.

There are other complexities regarding dating at Spirit and Truth such as bringing a girlfriend or boyfriend around results in church people getting involved in the details of the connection. Introducing a potential partner signals the beginning of accountability for the relationship, similar to bringing a mate home to meet the parents. There would also be pressure placed on the lover to experience Pentecost, an awkward expectation. It is no surprise that I only observed a few individuals entering relationships within view of the congregation. Having a pastor and a host of church members involved in one's relationship can be a difficult pressure at the onset of a love interest. When the two are certain that their relationship will weather time, hopefully the rest of their lives, single believers can be at ease to bring the lover around. Such anxiety is due to concerns of premarital sex. While it is rare even among heterosexual evangelicals to put off premarital sex, sexuality simply does not work in such a stoic manner in queer subcultures. Without having the social support to uphold puritanical standards, entering a celibate relationship in the LGBT community is nearly non-existent. For an unbeliever to go on a date with someone who piously professes they are saving themselves for the right person or marriage does not even translate in the gay community. Interested couples inevitably must become sexually engaged and informally committed before something more substantial can take place, unless, of course, a single person happens to fall in love with someone they find in the network of Pentecostal practitioners. Those waiting on life-partners God will send them must wait at this incongruent and liminal position.

However, Spirit and Truth is incredibly good at supporting the relationships it blesses. Those who find the church as a couple have discovered a great support group to uphold their vow of monogamy. Any successful couple that I observed within the fellowship of believers came to the church that way, already committed. Leaders within the wider fellowship and most

within the church were certainly partnered, their sexual activities no longer suspect. For those who were partnered, the righteous fellowship became their final means of social maturation, including covenant marriage. Covenant marriages⁶⁶ are commonplace among evangelicals, as they operate on stricter grounds for divorce and require candidates to go through premarital counseling. Such marriages are a heightened social obligation that imagines ordinary secular recognition as not good enough, especially given the high percentage of divorces in the United States. Accordingly, “while covenant marriage is a much smaller step towards reducing divorce than social conservatives would prefer, it is in their desired direction, and it is accomplished without mobilizing the opposition. In that sense, it provides a potential model for other Christian Right initiatives” (Felt, Rosier, and Manning 2002:180). The concept is a product of neoconservative notions of family values, of which homosexuality is a heightened threat. The idea is that when such unions are taken seriously and cemented over time, there will be, for example, fewer breakups, abortions, and promiscuity, all byproducts of a world destined to end. It is unclear why such zealots respond to the aforementioned issues of worldly others considering that escape is the end goal and ramped, apparent sin only facilitates the getaway. Regardless, LGBT Pentecostals have their own version of covenant marriages. While the vows function more informally and are not state sanctioned, the unions are acknowledged in both secular and spiritual ways. Considering the lack of legal recognition, it is especially important for the same-sex couples to have their marriages affirmed in the spirit realm. For the believers, divine recognition of the marriage is more important than worldly confirmation anyway, although the believers are certainly invested in marriage equality and have not given up on an inevitable victory in the flyover states. The benefit of being in covenant is that those who are married are held accountable for what God has joined together and, rather than simply separating, agree to

seek counseling and the extended support should something go awry in relationship.

Understanding that their connection could be attacked by the devil at any time, it is important for the pious gays and lesbians to bring God into their marriages to offset the spiritual warfare that the couples will inevitably face.

Take for example, Sis. Nancy and Sis. Sheri who entered a covenant marriage that was performed by the church. The two had a commitment ceremony while they were in the world but wanted for their union to be blessed by the Almighty. The women, both lipstick lesbians,⁶⁷ used to be relatively involved in the bar crowd. Most involved in the secular gay community of the northern Indiana town knew Sheri and Nancy. The now-saved women used to host an annual Independence Day party that locals looked to with anticipation. Bud Light, brats, watermelon, and good friends all made for good times. Locals say that the parties were clean fun and a unique event when lesbians and gay men mingled, as if they had been doing it all year. The sisters were what one might call a power couple, at least in regard to the influence they wielded in LGBT circles. Local narrative says that local LGBT persons looked up to the couple due to their relationship's consistency and active stance on equality. Both sisters were raised in strict church and re-found Jesus about two years ago. For the most part, the two exchanged their worldly friends for those they found at Spirit and Truth. The reason why their born-again experience prompted such a change in social surroundings is that the women did not feel right about encouraging alcohol abuse and a bit of cursing, for example, at the parties they were known for hosting. However, old friends or anyone, for that matter, who are curious about Jesus' saving power are free to drop in over at Sis. Sheri's and Nancy's two-bedroom brick home. A pair of hyperactive Cocker Spaniels, Samson and Delilah, are the first to greet company.

Sexual purity is a lifestyle at Spirit and Truth as believers have developed ways of instituting accountability and providing couples with social confidence. Pastor David says the injustice of marriage inequality in the state and in much of the country is part of the reason why promiscuity seems to be prevalent among LGBT persons. Pastor performs covenant marriages before God and a crowd of witnesses. Same-sex relationships are often blessed under a flowery arbor behind the parsonage and also on the beaches of Lake Michigan. The marriages, often with little family present, are deeply sacred ceremonies that resolve the imbalance of guilty pleasure and the religious experience that brings about inward peace. The moral productions are probably the reason I never witnessed a separation or divorce while in the field. As it is rare to witness relationships develop among singles, it is uncommon to watch them dissolve. When a marriage ceremony occurs, it is usually for couples that came to the church already as a couple. Separation and divorce are as troublesome in the LGBT Pentecostal environment as they are in heterosexual churches. The ideal is that one's mate will be with one for life, and the only socially acceptable grounds for adventure being when one partner is deceased or cheats on the spouse. Should a couple decide that their relationship problems are out of control, ideally they will come to the leadership for counseling. The congregation and Pastors will act as a support group to help the couple uphold the vows they consummated. Once a commitment is made, especially once the pair is in covenant, the relationship is expected to weather even the greatest troubles, despite not being acknowledged by state or federal governments. Believers are especially adamant concerning the need for marriage equality. Social acceptance of their marriages grants needed authenticity for a wholesome performance in a conflicted social landscape. Establishing and celebrating long-term marriages are very important for my friends in the Rust Belt, as marital consistency provides needed evidence to argue for inclusion within the broader world of

Pentecostalism. Knowing the criticisms and attacks of marriage equality opponents, same-sex couples in the church take extra pride in the consistency of their relationships. Experiencing a separation or divorce in the religious community would be quite distressing in a setting in which believers have queered notions of family values.

According to my informants and other marriage enthusiasts, normalizing queer sexualities through such processes as marriage equality is said to bring what remains underground into the light. Doing so creates environments that not only allegedly curbs bodily urges but also makes them socially acceptable. LGBT Pentecostals imagine a cleaner sexual community, for both heterosexuals and homosexuals, and thus the promiscuity in Boystown and other places is problematic for not only their own temptations but for the shaping of queer identity itself. Some queer liberationists who would look at the fellowship of LGBT Pentecostals and their manner of regulating sexuality with disdain, as only byproducts of homophobia, religious intolerance, and, overall, an embodied oppression. According to this perspective, for the believers to desire reconnecting with mainline practitioners who have disowned them would be counter to equality. Even several non-churched gays and lesbians I met near my field site considered the church to be rather obnoxious. Michael Warner contends that such normative goals operate, in part through “sexual shame” He states that “large number of lesbians and gay men—just how large we can only guess—embrace a politics of privatization that offers them both property value and an affirmation of identity in a language of respectability and mainstream acceptance” (1999:164). He continues to say “the idea that marriage is simply a choice, a right that can be exercised privately without cost to others, dazzles by its simplicity” (Warner 1999:97-8). His ideas highlight part of the identity dissonance that informants sense as they attempt to negotiate belonging between secular queer America and the largely homophobic

church world. My informants regulate sexuality through the sexual shame operative, as do other neo-conservative Christians. The shared imagining is that body is inherently profane and must constantly be restrained. The responsibility to control the flesh is part of their moral obligation, even in the queer context.

Prior to liberating themselves as self-identifying gays and lesbians, many of my friends were members of mainline, homophobic churches which they attended with opposite sex partners and offspring. Perhaps the reason why practitioners do well as they strive for sexual purity and maintain monogamy with their life partners is that many were married to the opposite sex when they were “living a lie.” Since they have proved the ability to live in a monogamous marriage without a fair sex life, to both of those involved, the believers are quite relieved to have the freedom to live for God with a partner of their orientation. Some lived most of their lives in a church’s closet, unspoken accommodations in music ministries, for example. A great number of closeted believers continue to live such a life, which is part of the reason why the self-confident practitioners of Spirit and Threat are so threatening. Although many married men and women continue to survive oppression in the church, it is too difficult an issue for most of the evangelical world to identify and resolve with understandings of sexuality that persist. Leaving the environment typically requires a dramatic exit plan that involves getting caught up in an affair, spontaneously leaving when the pressure is too great, or confessing truth to the spouse. For those who have been married and have now re-established themselves in the church world as LGBT, there is little visiting this past life. Families have been traumatized, a church has taken sides with the heterosexual partner, and the LGBT person at fault has started life anew. Many take the opportunity to free themselves from the confines of faith or to expand their notions of belief. Others take to remedying a nagging spiritual consciousness. Those within the affirming

Pentecostal fellowship typically came across the faith after being estranged from dominant churches and spending a bit of time experiencing their natural sexualities “in the world.” A hiatus into the queer subcultures is like coming of age again, which is something rather transforming, especially at middle age.

Despite not being biologically fruitful with children in the relationships, as many of my informants were when they were married to the opposite sex, the purists see themselves as socially productive. The teachings offer guidelines for LGBT persons to conduct themselves sexually, ideally with salvation and in monogamous relationships. Such partnerships help to cut down on selfish passions in the Latter Days. The relationships also engage in mutually beneficial relationships by responding to heterosexuality’s excess with loving homes. Let us not forget Brother Scott, his partner, and that minivan full of kids. Ellen Lewin contends that “at a moment when being gay is invoked in popular discourse as a code for irresponsibility, profligacy, and selfishness, gay fathers and gay men who aspire to fatherhood can stake a claim to a different moral terrain just by declaring their desire to parent.” (2009:188). Heterosexuals are not the only ones imposing notions of “selfishness” and “irresponsibility.” Moral conflict occurs among gays and lesbians, too, as queer people negotiate their own notions of morality, as is the case among LGBT Pentecostals. Many in the fellowship produced children in past heterosexual marriages, but, of course, some of those offspring do not have much to do with the parents due to honest living. Others, though, are encouraged to adopt children and fully participate in society with a wholesome contribution. For those who adopt, there is an obvious sense of confidence about them as they have defeated a glaring disparity between heterosexual and homosexual. With children at their side, the relationships do not simply appear as fleshly desire. Such monogamous pairs are then able to contribute to society. Those couples operate in a shameless manner as they

passionately acclimate the children to Truth with Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. Having enough children for a Sunday School is often a problem for LGBT Pentecostals but the need to impart religious instruction does not let up. The believers dream of beginning a bus ministry to bring in disadvantaged kids in the area but doing so with the stigma of pedophilia that is inflicted on queer populations, for no rational reason, makes the evangelistic vision a lasting obstacle. The church is overcoming the challenge by winning over straight couples with children and encouraging same-sex couples to adopt. The usual baby pictures and sharing stories about childrearing are tolerated and even celebrated in an environment that is often thought of as childless. Having a single mother attend with her four kids was an exciting moment in the church. It meant that the Sunday School program could be revived.

With or without children, the purity teachings allow the queer righteous to participate in a familial morality that has excluded them. In order to be a part of family values notions, LGBT persons must minimize hypersexual stigmas that have long dominated their identities. The stinging rhetoric of family values has been used to demonize gays and lesbians, single moms, and others who exist on the margins. However, through diligent intuition and the reality that a heteronormative and morally anxious society has not met its own expectations, the pious gays and lesbians are offering their cases as upstanding and productive members in society by manipulating the very movement that intended to damn them. Rather than attacking from the outside, LGBT Pentecostal and other socially conservative networks of sexually marginal people are fighting from the inside. The Pentecostals are constructing their own version of what it means to exhibit a celebrated morality despite being with the same sex, and they proceed to share their normalcy with non-affirming Pentecostals. Similar to the queer Judaism that Moshe Shokeid writes about, with discussions of childrearing and evangelism, for example, queer Pentecostalism

contributes to “the emergence of gay and lesbian spaces, more visible and familiar to the world outside where gay and lesbian encodes more than sex, carries profound consequences for the current living of gay and lesbian communities as well as for the meaning of their identities” (1995: 242-3).

Despite isolation over one segment of society’s values, the LGBT Pentecostals do not simply dismiss morality problems in queer environments. Sexually, there are many issues pious believers find in the gay community. To elicit a response, I mentioned the upcoming International Mr. Leather Festival coming to Chicago when talking with Pastor David. IML is an uninhibited time for leather-clad men from around the world to sexually express themselves in the city’s Boystown. Activities like S&M, while not uncommon among LGBT persons, are an uncomfortable reality for pious circles. With inclusion in normative society and religion a primary goal, it is clear why unconventional sexual expression could impede progress. Someone in the community who we both knew was going to be attending the convention. He was not a church member. Picturing the scene caused a troubled brow on Pastor’s face. His immediate response was that the man could be freed from all of that, much like liberating oneself from a demonic force. Pastor also said he was curious about the convention, however, and even snooped around at it one year. Without saying so, it was clear to me that Pastor seemed to view such physical engagement as a sinister energy within the gay community. However, at other times he ensured me that it did not matter what individuals do in their bedrooms. The point is to keep such behavior in the bedroom and not in the street as in the IML or pride parades. Being LGBT and Pentecostal demands a clean representation of sex. It is difficult enough for homophobic practitioners to make peace with the notion of homosexual relationships without complicating

their repressed and consequently hypersexual imaginations with even more scandalous visions such as pride parades, drag shows, or the IML.

All may be sexually suspect but bodily accountability is especially demanding for those in leadership roles within the local church and wider fellowship. Certain members of Spirit and Truth had quite a bit to say when a female couple seemed to be entering a relationship, both of whom were on the platform. Both women were active in the music department and one would occasionally deliver a sermon. The sexual energy between the two had been apparent for quite some time. Whispers were starting to be heard regarding the current relationship status, especially since they had been going out of town on a regular basis. Sis. June, a certain church lady who sees herself as a moral gatekeeper, was certain that the lesbians must have been sharing a room together when on the road, and it was clear that she did not approve of any sort of shacking up until they were married. She knew that they could not be recognized by the state but, to her, being married “in the eyes of the Lord” was all that mattered anyway. The righteous sister was not comfortable with the women being on the church’s platform given the reality that they could be “living in sin.” One flamboyant brother chimed in that he did not want either of the women to pray for him during the next altar call, because it was becoming clear that the sisters were not living right. They were “living in sin.” The social drama was getting a bit out of control and the reputations of talented people were on the line. Pastor had to step in to put a stop to the malicious gossip. Otherwise, the women would have likely been ostracized and felt the need to find another church. Pastor David was quite charismatic in his approach to the problem within his congregation. Although being a gentleman with strong convictions, he assured those whom he pulled into his office that it was not the laymen’s responsibility to manage the morality of these women. Rather than to judge the sisters, members should leave the issue up to God due to

the danger of risking “blood on their hands,” if the women were to leave the church and not make Heaven home. He was clear, however, that it was not appropriate for the women to be engaged in questionable relations but perhaps they had already been in covenant with one another, such as an informal agreement made in one of those hotel rooms. Despite the gossip that Pastor extinguished and his defense of women that would soon experience his inquiry, rising attention to the developing relationship was a melodramatic example of purity’s pressures. If their reputations and spiritual respect were to survive, the women now needed to prepare for commitment, in the form of a marriage, engagement, or keeping a comfortable distance when around other believers. Plans for the couple to be in covenant surfaced soon after the gossip became widely known. There was excitement in the air now. Believers were ready to witness the sisters-in-Christ making their vows public and soon became a great support group for the couple. They would no longer be living in sin.

Several Oneness Pentecostal fellowships for LGBT persons have been organized over the last couple of decades and a shared sexual anxiety has resulted in similar drama among other congregations. In addition to the sexual uncertainties, theological issues, power struggles, and difficulty organizing relatively few scattered believers over a vast landscape have led many of the organizations to give up on their missions. Periodically, the latest fellowship will take the spotlight. Their conferences are widely attended and then the revival seems to move on. The existing movement will obtain a crafty name and it usually has an energetic and savvy online presence, since the success of revival is greatly connected to cyber interaction. YouTube videos become must-sees and momentum builds with such achievements of the Spirit that are recorded and uploaded. Lay believers follow the Spirit to the settings it chooses to manifest itself. These sacred environments, usually humble in terms of material goods, provide a channel for constant

gusts of supernatural power to overtake born-again bodies, often resulting in hours of wailing around altars and experiencing divine ecstasy. The new organization will establish itself with leading ministers, perhaps a Bishop, and connected churches that take on its name. Ministers will be licensed and ordained by the dominant group, while the others struggle to maintain consistency. The dominant may disappear or morph into something new as quickly as it appears, which can likely be attributed to the casual and decentralized location of these movements on the Internet. As Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors write, “the adoption of the mass media, although suitable for the spread of religious ideas, raising important questions concerning the maintenance of religious authority. Addressing religious practitioners as audiences may entail cracks in the maintenance of religious regimes, and hence give rise to ambivalent attitudes vis-à-vis media” (2006:9). However, in the case of Pentecostalism, the essence of such organizational style represents the fluidity of the Spirit that has always been a problem within Pentecostalism. From an organizational standpoint, the spontaneous Holy Ghost is problematic. However, perhaps the lack of uniformity helps to level out concentrated power, but frustrates leaders as it appears that naïve believers are being “swayed by every wind of doctrine.” The reality is that lay Pentecostals cannot be bothered with the sociopolitical gain to be had within structure and are more interested in having their souls fed. Practitioners move along to the next happening place, even if doing so leaves behind dry wells and bruised egos. Since all have access to Holy Ghost power, laypeople tend to disperse the movement and the organizational power of it, which arguably keeps the faith less centralized than other Christian denominations. The fellowship and local congregation of this narrative prides itself on consistency. The faithful here, including the leaders, have cautiously stood their ground and have not been seduced by the latest and most charismatic distractions. The fellowship has been rewarded with stability because of their stance.

For those LGBT Pentecostals who have splintered off from the more strict fellowship of my research, the new organizations, albeit quite energetic initially, are said to taper off quickly. The revivalist bursts begin with a distracting outpouring but “the form of godliness” does not seem to carry believers through the rough patches in their lives. Those at Spirit and Truth are taught to be wary of such movements, to test the spirits. Perhaps being hesitant to jump into every revival fire has put a cap on their constant renewal but has kept morality and the anointing in check, meaning Spirit and Truth has been able to keep the doors open.

The fellowships come and go, seeming to evolve and spontaneously combust overnight. When I inquired as to why splits are somewhat common, I was told that many of the problems have to do with promiscuity. One story that circulates among believers claims that a minister within a different fellowship was caught looking at porn during a conference he was hosting. His damaged reputation was irreparable at that point. A different, hellfire-and-brimstone preacher, again unaffiliated with those of my field site in Indiana, was known for his gravitation toward younger newcomers and ended up having sex with several of the guys. His sexual practices were his ruin.

Particularly during conferences when most are staying in hotels, there is plenty of chatter concerning the bed arrangements. Although no one seems to pry into the business of others in an aggressive manner, being surveilled and kept in check by other attendees is a response to sexual anxiety. A corresponding problem is the intensified sensuality involved in being around others of like faith. For the attendees, all but a few of whom grew up around the Holy Ghost, finally being able to confidentially assert oneself into the religious social landscape as a queer believer and befriend other gay believers connects a spiritual consciousness with a physical attraction. It is no wonder the dissociated preacher slept with several newcomers. The mutual understanding can

mean deeply erotic connectivity, especially considering the believers' bodies are not their own but dominated by the presence of the Holy Ghost. Finding a potential mate with the same infilling is a visceral experience. There is an immediate, basic but deep understanding of another's origins. The possibility of meeting someone is rather slim, considering many of the believers are already partnered, but the determined search goes on for those who are single.

From the viewpoint of my friends in the Rust Belt where issues of purity are a central concern, groups that have dissipated did so because of inconsistency and not being completely "sold out," meaning not able to fully sacrifice the flesh in exchange for rewards in the Spirit. As discussed in the previous chapter concerning spiritual gifts, authentic manifestations cannot be conceived in an atmosphere comprised of people who are not living right. Even when practitioners achieve spiritual results despite not living godly lifestyles, my friends in Indiana cannot associate with such organization because of the tainted and inevitable self-destructive nature of it all. The local church, Spirit and Truth, and the connected branches of the ministry throughout the country are known for a strictness that remains consistent, even in these perilous times. As believers see the Final Day approaching, they feel that it is increasingly important to stand one's ground. The pious remain watchful, knowing that deception can often be avoided with careful scrutiny. The devil is thought to be especially concerned with destroying the prophetic promise of an LGBT revival, the one implied in the biblical statement of "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." Since it is said that sexuality is a primary method Satan uses to destroy God's children, in general, it is a special cause of concern among an identity that is forced to unite over nothing more than sex. My informants have not been afraid to articulate these concerns in their pulpits and call for introspection of sin in the camp. Considering its easy access in a sexual underworld, promiscuity is the sin that worries saints the most. Morality is

thought to go awry without clear grounds for behavior, thus destroying the believers' sense of spiritual alignment.

Despite the sexual anxiety, uncharted territory, and sporadic nature of LGBT, neoconservative Pentecostalism that I have outlined, Pastors David and Michael have achieved the ideal partnership and consistency in leadership. The Pastors provide an example of holiness and theological soundness for the rest to emulate. The passionate men of God have made a home for themselves on the outskirts of town, a house that is framed with free-spirited flowerbeds. The lovely, two-story, brick home with rockers on the front porch has a certain peace about it that is hard to come by. It is the type of stillness that follows honest, content, and good lives. Pastor David's gardens are his recreation, places in which he dwells on the goodness of the Lord while caring for creation. The cordless phone is usually nearby, as cell phones have a limited signal in the area, and brothers and sisters from across the country seem to always be calling for guidance or general fellowship. For Pastor David, his gardens are a natural sanctuary to foster and better articulate a plethora of dreams for Spirit and Truth. He imagines a youth group with a seemingly unquenchable thirst for God, greater revival for LGBT persons who have been estranged from the church, a bussing ministry, and mainline believers having a revelation that God loves all of his children. I have never asked Pastor specifically what goes through his mind when he is deep in thought but he is quick to talk about such issues after his furrowed brow eases up. Preaching an inclusive gospel is a constant burden for Pastor. Sermons come to mind here, as well as worries for church family and social issues that concern the passionate man. The carefully sculpted but wild nature of his flowerbeds seems to say something about his personality, one that attests to the freedom and direction he has found in being true to himself after many years of having to hide out. It is a freedom he found in the revelation that salvation is his, too. A plaque in

the dining room reads, “Jesus is the head of this household.” While Pastor Michael enjoys nurturing guests with such kind hospitality, Pastor David busies himself by entertaining with stories of church life and sharing visions for a future of affirming faith.

The spacious home welcomes a consistent flow of brothers and sisters from across the country. With the number of practicing, LGBT believers being rather low, believers have to go out of their way to bask in the fellowship of the like-minded. The Pastors’ home, with a piano in the basement and roomy living area, can be transformed into a prayer meeting at any given moment. A Christ-centered mindset is the nature of the home. Magazines like *Charisma*⁶⁸ and various End Time publications are scattered throughout, as well as Bibles, study guides, and a variety of digital media to assist the men in living holy lives and articulate an inclusive message in the Last Days. The home is a sanctuary in which a lifestyle of purity is held to its highest standards, which is likely the reason why those who have maliciously attempted to destroy the men’s reputations in the past accuse them of having orgies and engaging in lascivious behavior. Since it is widely known that the “men of God” live what they preach and unapologetically do not back down on clean living, the false gossip is certainly hurtful, especially when it comes from competitive leaders of other fellowships. The Pastors understand that their ability to live in a monogamous relationship and uphold the standards of Pentecostalism is the reason why Satan seeks to destroy their reputation, as he uses the tongues of those who are not setting a high standard. Additionally, other ministers within LGBT Pentecostalism sometimes accuse pastors David and Michael of being too legalistic. Pastor David says that an accusation of legalism is not terrible if that is the worst those guys have to say about him, since it means that the pillars of his faith and teachings have remained consistent in troubled times. The aura of the Pastors’ living situation would astonish most of those who judge the LGBT Pentecostals. Despite how hard they

try to live right, it seems that most cannot get past their sex lives, something that, considering their constant laboring for the Lord, occupies a minimal part of their lives. Regardless of a piety that may never be realized by the rest of the church world, the Word instructs the faithful to stand: “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”⁶⁹ Through standing one’s ground, LGBT righteous are challenging both the gay community and a heteronormative America with examples of a new righteousness. While gossip regarding sexual accusation occurs frequently among the pious LGBT saints, this discourse also comes in a formal fashion from the pulpit.

In a memorable and flustered fashion, a minister recently challenged the fellowship to straighten up and fly right during a conference in the Midwest. In one of the more rare moments of talking about sex, rather than just sexual identity, from the pulpit, the brother criticized believers by saying that the problem with LGBT religious circles is that the club mentality has crept into the church. The brother paced from one side of the platform to the other in a fiery and concerned manner as he wiped the sweat from his face. He told those gathered that church people have not been able to rid themselves completely of this worldly mindset. This was in reference to how promiscuity is a constant temptation and some have even used the church as a cruising ground, especially when newcomers come around. He said we are to help those “babes in Christ” find their way and set an example. The topic of sugar daddies and sugar babies came up while he was all stirred up. Despite probably making a few intergenerational couples uncomfortable, it was clear that he disapproved of such arrangements.

Such a jeremiad is one of many involving the complexities of juxtaposing dissonant identities. One of the greatest threats to a pious reputation and, consequently, an anxiety among the Pentecostals is being accused of being promiscuous. Occasionally, believers boldly put others

in line that are believed to be living in sin within the church. The theological stance argues that couples should not be sleeping together until there has been some sort of commitment ceremony. The problem is that not only do heterosexual relationships rarely operate according to this ideal but, arguably, homosexual relationships are dependent upon such informal beginnings. For LGBT persons who face constant shaming, especially in a place like Rust Belt Indiana, meeting the church's expectations of purity is a lonely existence unless one is already partnered. Although articulating the strict stance is a bit awkward, it is essential to define moral grounds. The uninhibited reaction to something that sets a preacher off over sexual misconduct may come from anywhere, a ride through Boystown, a friend's Facebook status, or even gossip. Establishing purity's standards reminds believers that, regardless of the situation, it is not proper to simply start shacking up with someone. Abruptly correcting the errors is usually accomplished with a stinging sermon but Facebook has become the chosen method for some preachers. Instructing brothers and sisters not to judge one another but to simply pray when they see fault typically concludes the diatribe. While some in various Pentecostal fellowships have said a less damning approach is needed when dealing with gays and lesbians, those like Pastor David have responded with the conviction that LGBT persons are just as capable of living wholesome and monogamous lives as straight counterparts. To expect anything other perpetuates homophobia's fears and demeans the value and potential of same-sex love. He does not believe that gays and lesbians should be granted a special tolerance just because the primary depiction of the gay community is hypersexual and seems to celebrate lewdness. Most members of the congregation seem to agree, except for a few of those single guys I discussed earlier. Sometimes getting a big one in Gary is too tempting.

In general, while in the field, I found myself constantly inspired by my friends' strength to out themselves as LGBT in society while maintaining a monogamous relationship or hoping to be partnered and not enjoying the usual or imagined benefits of a sex-based identity. The trouble with being single and a neoconservative, LGBT Pentecostal means facing the consequences of homophobia as an ousted individual but not being able to experience sexual freedom in the traditional sense. Such positionality requires incredible restraint, something that highlights the depth and sincerity of faith in the lives of my friends. In particular, those who are single and earnestly lived the dogma of the church demonstrate a complex strength and conviction that is challenging and unachievable for many. Although sleeping around does happen and is joked about, there are a great number of committed believers who trust that God will send the right woman or man along in his own time. For those who are partnered, too, the believers must reckon with the hypersexual conations of their existence while attempting to live righteously, something that seems goes unnoticed by those around. The process of synching sexuality and faith is an ongoing process for righteous LGBT persons who exist in a liminal place during this exhausting struggle for equality, one that produces sexual anxiety as believers prepare their traditionally unfit bodies for the Kingdom of Heaven. Being pure, in their minds, the marginal practitioners respond to oppression with a performance of sexual normalcy, consisting of faith-based monogamy or abstinence. The believers insist on being understood according to their normalcy in this multifarious nation, as different but collaborating for a wholesome society. Unfortunately, according to heterodominant Pentecostal visions, the LGBT Pentecostals only seem to be confirming how twisted and confusing society is destined to become in the end of time, which ultimately provides proof, to both non-affirming and affirming believers, that their eternal redemption is nigh.

There Is Neither Male Nor Female

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female:
For ye are all one in Christ Jesus”
Galatians 3:28

Chapter Six

Reverend Elizabeth Brashear greeted a gathering of spirited saints at a regional conference in St. Louis last winter. The meeting was held in a gothic-style, Presbyterian church in the inner city, a bit of a High Church setting for Holy-Ghost types who quickly became proud of the fact that they were the first ones to run around its sanctuary while under the influence of the Holy Ghost. The sophisticated setting had been temporarily repurposed to allow for LGBT Pentecostals to partake in a supernatural visitation of their own. A Hammond organ was brought in on a rolling, wooden platform and an impressive sound system was positioned throughout the sanctuary to allow the believers to worship in a familiar way. The sounds produced that weekend, in a sanctuary with brick floors ricocheting anointed preaching and music, allowed the Holy Ghost no choice regarding whether it would “show up and show out.”⁷⁰ The intensity of the noise alone was enough to funnel the Spirit. The space had been prepared by the righteous through prayer, a place that had not yet known Pentecost. Reverend Brashear and her female partner recently founded a “radically inclusive” Pentecostal church in Booneville, Mississippi, a state infamous for numerous social problems, with intense homophobia making the state one of the most frightening places to live for many LGBT people. The woman of God passionately brought this humble church to life in our imaginations as she described a simple, wooden structure outside of city limits. What once was a one-room schoolhouse and multi-purpose facility for the local population now serves as a gathering place for LGBT Pentecostals who reject abuse in mainline churches and, simultaneously, refuse to become what the devil would make of them should they sever their ties with Christ. The passionate woman of God shared that locals have not been completely dismissive of their existence, but, for the most part, the inclusive congregation exists in isolation. The church is certainly one of a kind for the deep southern state, a place in which Pentecostalism is a dominant Christian form. In a zealous manner, the anointed

preacher slapped the podium a few times and spoke through tears as she told us about poverty and a struggle for spiritual freedom the devil is waging on the state. Her own inequity of being a lesbian Mississippian was not her concern; rather, her heart was burdened by what she referred to as the “spiritual oppression” of Mississippi, in general, which she believed to be responsible for problems that constantly entertain the rest of the country. Spontaneous chords on the imported Hammond organ backed up a greeting that turned into a mini-sermon. Although being a lesbian and considered demonic by the surrounding southern churches, Sis. Brashear told us she was determined to not let prejudices hinder her from laboring for the Lord. Conference attendees sensed the urgent need for a message of hope to a great number of queer believers in the state who have been rejected by their churches, and not just these places of worship but, for many, systems that are their complete social networks. Sis. Brashear had many in the gathering moved to tears as it was evident that a marginal existence, on several levels, had not undermined her pure love for humanity, even for those who refuse to associate with her and the deviant flock she tends. The fervent sister simply believes that God will reveal the message of inclusivity to heteronormative environments and demonstrating consistency and an aura of love is all that is required of her. She claims to have been called to do this special work in the Last Days and insists that believers must be “set apart” in the process.

Despite being out of the closet and barred from reentering the churches of her youth as her current self, the preacher continues to look the part. Sis. Elizabeth refuses to cut her hair. The godly woman puts her waist-length hair into a ponytail and rarely fixes it very fancy, as many pious women of her spiritual homeland are known to do. Meaning, most women who emphasize holiness through hair spend a great deal of time presenting it in an attractive and even edgy manner to include, but not limited to, fake flowers and even glitter, depending upon the confines

of the local rules. However, Sis. Brashear just wears her hair slicked back and in a big ponytail. It sort of waved back-and-forth when she took to slapping that podium. She also refuses to give up those iconic, blue-jean skirts made popular by Pentecostal women who conform to what they call “standards,” meaning norms of dress that allow believers to perform notions of “holiness.” Such coverings feel right to her, not that she judges others for their clothing choices, especially given the gender issues involved in pastoring a predominately LGBT church. Sis. Brashear’s modest dress, her lack of make-up, and remaining long hair makes her a bit of a novelty in the fellowship. She is someone who believers appreciate for carrying over familiar clothing standards, since most women have whacked their hair, donned “ear-bobs,” and exchanged knee-length skirts for pants for quite some time now. To the righteous, Sis. Brashear’s appearance stimulates nostalgia for a shared heritage. In Anthony Synnott’s words, “hair is one of our most powerful symbols of individual and group identity—powerful first because it is physical and therefore extremely personal, and second because although personal it is also public, rather than private,” I contend that Sis. Brashear has utilized the maintenance of her Pentecostal hair as a symbol of resistance, as a witness to the fact that she is still a child of God (1993:103). Although the reverend’s insistence upon Pentecostal dress is no longer required of her among LGBT brethren due to the destabilization of gender, it is admired.

In this chapter I will discuss concepts of gender and body management among LGBT Pentecostals in Rust Belt Indiana and the wider affirming fellowship. I will explore the subject through the consideration of clothing and modesty, transsexualism and transgenderism, and “lust of the flesh”⁷¹ as it applies to the virtuous in the Last Days. Despite being initially taught that holiness is performed, in a large part, through dress, I will outline the ways in which the believers have re-created the embodied system of holiness in their lives despite having to deal

with the problems of gender in an inclusive congregation and have, therefore, arrived at a consensus that stresses a generalized modesty over the specific, gendered rules that are familiar to my informants. Furthermore, I will synch these issues with the trouble of being “set apart” at the intersection of saved and LGBT.

One of the ways classical Pentecostals maintain separation from the rest of the world is through what they call “standards,” or more broadly referred to as “holiness.” In her discussion of Pentecostal standards, Amanda Phillips states that certain Pentecostals “...use dress to ‘set-themselves apart’ from mainline society, and define a holiness identity which can be used to communicate their closeness to God to both members of the assembly and to the outside profane world” (2012:66). Since, “the Pentecostal view is that the world is the domain of the devil,” many believers have turned to clothing as a means to clarify that they are not a part of it (Toulis 1997:136). These standards are norms of dress and bodily management that allow believers to be noticeable in the rest of the world, mainly long hair and skirts for women and long pants and short hair for men and could be considered “fossilized fashion” or “...a sudden ‘freezing’ of fashion whereby a group continues to wear a style long after it has become outmoded for the general population” (Arthur 1999:5). While believers do intend for their dress to represent some sort of continued, or frozen, modest dress, Pentecostal dress is in a constant state of negotiation as modesty meets current style. Therefore, believers engage in a type of Pentecostal fashion that maintains neoconservative imaginings of the past but is overlaid with the pressures of fashionability. Without such holy attire, adherents contend that it is difficult to reach the lost should believers look just like them. If the men and women of God are running around in short-shorts and sunbathing in strings then the lost will not believe that there is a God. In addition, as Elaine Lawless suggests, “Pentecostal dress is also a statement to other Pentecostals that the

believer is willing to sacrifice all notions of fashion for notions of holiness...but dress also serves as a comment on the immoral attitudes and styles of the rest of the community” (1988:37). The specific rules for covering signal belonging to one another and to “the lost.” Godly dress provides a visual means for distinguishing between saved and unsaved while surviving in a doomed social landscape, in which blurred lines are said to be the norm. As Colleen McDannell writes, “sacred clothing traditionally is worn to distinguish one group of people from another: lay from ordained, male from female, initiate from uninitiated. Clothing symbolized powers, responsibilities, and duties that other people do not have” (1995:206). Dressing in the particular manner allows the world to see the light of Christ and, ideally, will provide an opportunity for evangelism. Bodily presentation, primarily clothing and appearance, theoretically allow the unsaved to look onto the men and women of God and notice a difference, ideally something better and different than what they currently know. By dressing according to “holiness” standards, “without which no man shall see the Lord,”⁷² the practitioners are able to exhibit their own piety and salvation but also submit their bodies in the name of service.

Should the female believer, for example, cut her hair and start wearing pants, she is classified as backslidden. Accordingly, she usually cuts her hair first when she wants to separate herself from the church. Just as her participation in holiness norms marked her as a member of the group, her rebellion isolates her even more. In her work with LDS devotees, Colleen McDannell has written specifically about Mormon undergarments as a method for constructing a similar godliness and the implications of refusing to wear them. She states, “Mormons who decide to stop wearing garments make a strong statement to themselves, their family, and their community. Members may challenge doctrine, drink a beer or two, or stop going to services but when they stop wearing garments those around them know they have left the faith” (1995:208).

The responsibility of shining a light for the lost to see through proper presentation of the body is flattering but is also a demanding performance that must be maintained for the world and for the church. Since Pentecostalism is a broad faith with various denominations and norms, those who exhibit the dress standards are only one fraction of the larger group, whether or not they see themselves as one group or not is a different matter. However, as the majority of my informants in the LGBT fellowship stem from such tradition of neoconservative dress, a system also utilized to establish gendered boundaries in a time when gender is said to be ambiguous and threatened, it is important to recognize the ways in which “standards”⁷³ have been translated in what could be called a queer displacement, at least in terms of being dispersed from mainline churches and left to wander in a spiritual wilderness. Although free of many restrictions, as previously stated, LGBT Pentecostals maintain certain standards in order to not look like the world. The concept of “looking like the world”⁷⁴ is much more prevalent in heteronormative churches adhering to holiness dress standards but the practices linger and have been transmuted in affirming fellowships, primarily being converted for a generalized modesty.

One of the primary truths that queer Pentecostals bring into the twenty-first century church is that there is “neither male nor female in the Spirit.”⁷⁵ Of course, such a revelation is the community’s ideal that has faced much negotiation as believers sort out problems with utmost spiritual intuition. LGBT Pentecostals understand that, in general, that salvation and Jesus’ understanding of his children does not necessarily include a gendered difference. LGBT theological revisions allow reconciled saints to free themselves of the typical clothing restrictions that are gender-based, including the practices that Sis. Elizabeth exemplifies. Although they have abandoned the staunch dress codes of heteronormative superiors, queer believers maintain dress convictions that have been carried over. More specifically, my informants, especially the pastors,

have established the following perimeters to govern righteous, queer bodies: it is inappropriate for any sex to go into public in short-shorts, to wear skimpy swimsuits around unknown others, for women to wear low blouses or for men to be shirtless for no practical reason, for believers, especially men, to wear an excessive amount of jewelry, for one's pants or skirt to be too tight, and, in general, to reveal so much of the body as to appear seductively in public arenas. What the practitioners see as enlightenment has allowed them to move into a dimension, not without inner conflict, that has allowed for the full participation of transgendered and transsexual practitioners. Through the process of destabilizing theological norms of sexuality, my informants have called gender and the nature of the physical body into question. Despite how uncomfortable doing so has been for a group of believers intent on striving for social normalcy, for them, questioning the norms has been the only path to true inclusivity. The fellowship had considered itself inclusive of the LGBT sexual and gender spectrum but had been a mostly homogeneous collection of gays and lesbians until recently. There were a few believers who came to fellowship as established transsexuals and transgenders but no one had transitioned during their tenure in the fellowship.

Dressed in a modest pink blouse and black skirt, Sister Samantha, formerly Brother Byron, led us in a Bible study one Wednesday night. As the congregation gathered around the table, Samantha passionately explained the Ten Commandments given to Moses a few thousand years ago. In a thick, Rust-Belt drawl,⁷⁶ she quoted from her favorite talisman, the Holy Bible, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me."⁷⁷ With a fist pounding the table, she interpreted the scripture as any good literalist does, "So, then why does the world think there can be other Gods like Buddha and Allah?" "It is our duty to tell them the truth, Jesus is the only God," the sister passionately uttered. Her Bible case appropriately matched the message, a colorful one depicting Moses with two stone tablets in his hands, snowy-looking hair, and words being etched on the

tablets with divine lightening. Samantha is a passionate convert. After spending years in public school being made fun of for “looking like a girl,” Byron dropped out to pursue a GED⁷⁸. He had always been a pretty boy, a fellow who started dabbling in makeup as a blossoming tween.⁷⁹ Despite “persecution”⁸⁰ in the world, Samantha found peace in salvation at the little LGBT Pentecostal. Regardless of her male genitalia, Samantha says God sees her as a woman, more specifically as his daughter. One day she will change her anatomy to match the gendered understanding of her body, but coming up with the money needed for the operation will be quite the challenge.⁸¹

When I first arrived in the field, the issue of transsexualism, transgenderism, and bodily transition was a social drama that was just beginning to play out. Samantha had announced her desire to transition into being female, and other congregants were forced to decide where they truly stood on the issue of bodily modification. Samantha had been around the church for quite some time but had only recently insisted upon the usage of a female name and pronouns when being referenced. After years of confusion and feeling as if she did not belong in her body, Samantha realized that the gender imposed on her and the expectations of that cultural meaning did not match her body. Previously, the member had identified as gay but gradually began to see herself as a straight woman. Had the individual initiated herself as Samantha and already transitioned then there likely would not have been an issue with her acceptance in the community. Rather, the church family loved Byron and thought of him as their son. He was someone who crashed on their couches and enjoyed nothing more than being in the Holy Ghost and fellowshiping with church family, his fictive kin, since most of his biological family had rejected him. Spirit and Truth Ministries were the first group of humans to ever accept him and certainly the first religious institution to allow Byron to worship the Lord. Since Byron had been

incorporated as a son in need of much development and love, the announcement of a transition came as somewhat of a shock, one that challenged the notion of acceptance in an LGBT-affirming Pentecostal church. The believer put up quite a campaign, too, often refusing to answer to the name Byron and insisting that the saints call her Samantha. At one point while eating at an all-you-can-eat hibachi grill, one of our favorite places to share a meal after Sunday service, a sister in the church used Byron's name when speaking directly to him. Samantha responded with "I don't know who you are talking about." She refused to engage at that point with the member for the duration of the meal. Samantha had to routinely correct others for referring to her old self, a past existence she diligently attempted to shed. Her struggle to redefine, enforce, and perform her new gender beautifully illustrated the truth that "the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movement, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler 2008:191). For Samantha, much of this social transition involved being thought of as a sister in Christ and as his daughter as opposed to the social and spiritual role of son and brother she had once been assigned. Accordingly, Samantha gradually introduced the appropriate female attire in order to perform her new role as female, including high heels, silky blouses, form-fitting skirts, and painted nails. For such individuals who are in transition and for cross-dressers, as Jane Hegland and Nancy Hodges explain in their analysis, dress "...allows them to become what they believe they should be and to therefore express their ideal self, but dress is more than just a tool to facilitate the masculine-to-feminine [or vice-versa] transformation. Dress carries with it the desires, motivations, and goals...powerful connections can be seen between the senses, feelings, and dress within each narrative" (Hegland and Hodges 2007: 165-6). Using the seemingly natural divisions between male and female dress and other performance, Samantha

was able to construct a new female, pious, Pentecostal self within the congregation despite the fact that “just as concepts of male and female and masculinity and femininity are complex and a mixture of physicality and enculturation, there is nothing innately feminine about hosiery or a slinky dress” (Hegland and Hodges 2007:166).

Byron’s drama became a moral quagmire for the righteous to carefully navigate. Many initially saw Samantha as somewhat of a scandal. Members knew that Byron was not a masculine guy by any measure but imagining a reassignment surgery, involving the cutting and manipulation of what God had created, was difficult for even Pastor Michael to justify in the Word, an all-inclusive road map for the saints. A few felt they had been duped, as if Byron should have joined the church as a woman instead of everyone getting accustomed to him as their innocent son. Certainly Byron’s online behaviors were questioned, considering he could have been inspired by demonic influences such as pornography to become fixated on transition. If God wanted Byron to be his daughter would he not have created her as a woman? Would manipulating Byron’s body be the same as critiquing God’s work? Others were supportive of Samantha, knowing the courage that it must have taken to have a second coming out, likely due to genuine empathy and also the fear of losing a member in the intimate congregation. Thankfully, there were no spiritual causalities and no loss of membership in the church due to the social drama. No one was bothered by Samantha’s new identity so much that they left the church. The mild crisis allowed for the congregation to truly define and articulate its stance on an issue that had not been dealt with until now. It allowed for the believers to interrogate the assumptions they had made about queer bodies. Their resolution assumed that Jesus also understands the torment involved in the transgendered spirit making peace with societal impositions and personal awareness of the body. As such, the issue allowed the believers to also

feel safer and liberated about no longer fitting the Pentecostal mold, in regards to their revised standards of dress, due to their freeing of Samantha's body.

As I have explained elsewhere, although my informants' fellowship consists of predominantly gay and lesbian believers, that does not mean that the disciples go along with accepting all things queer. Rather, the righteous few remain watchful for deception. Meaning through Holy Ghost vision, "by 'seeing through the Spirit,' members with the gift can detect physical and spiritual danger for themselves and others" (Toulis 1997:161). For some, the Byron-to-Samantha controversy was immediately flagged as potential deceit, to be reviewed and decided upon after much prayer and discussion, gossip not to be excluded. The righteous realize that eternity is at stake should they be misled. Keep in mind that salvation among Pentecostals is not a fixed state; rather, salvation is constantly being maintained through the process of clean living. It is especially important for the shepherds, or the pastors, to maintain spiritual intuition when dealing with such delicate issues in their congregation. Should the pastors lead others astray, then it is believed that "the blood will be on their hands." Therefore, the men are responsible should the sheep wind up in Hell due to moral miscalculations. Pastors David and Michael were initially conflicted on the issue. During Byron's time at Spirit and Truth Ministries, the ministers watched the Lord transform Byron into a powerful leader, and they wanted to be sure that the devil was not interfering with the delegation God had appointed to reach the lost in the Last Days. Rather quickly, Pastor David was quick to articulate a theology of acceptance for those who undergo gender reassignment surgery. He felt that God understood how problematic the notion of gender is for creation. Pastor David contended that modifying genitalia would be similar to correcting a cleft palate. He understood that biological reality was different than original creation and that these processes are too complicated and not yet fully

understood to be dismissive of the intellectual reality that the human may suffer. He argued that a cleft palate would quickly be corrected without debate. Therefore, according to his rationale, it would not be any different to match a disjointed body with a gender the individual felt was socially comfortable. Although Pastor David did not find direct biblical evidence in which bodily transitioning is addressed, he assured those who approached him with their concerns that “there is neither male nor female in the spirit.” He also knew that a soul was “in the balance⁸²” in this situation. Pastor David knew that he had to be led by the Holy Ghost on the issue and, no doubt, sought guidance through traveling in prayer before the Lord. Samantha provided a theologically intellectual dispute over the meanings and certainty of gender, as it is understood through the body and its presentations.

On the contrary, Pastor Michael was a little less sure than his partner that bodily modification could be “scriptural,” meaning justification found in the Bible. Not directly to Samantha but in informal conversation, Pastor Michael cautioned that he just wanted to be sure that Byron was not getting caught up in the “lust of the flesh.” The notion of lustful flesh is ingrained part of the evangelical consciousness, something that believers must continually bring into alignment with proper prayer lives and spiritual guardianship. According to this perspective, “lust of the flesh” causes cheating, divorce, reckless financial decisions, alcohol abuse, and other temporal satisfaction that disconnects the believer from Christ. Should Samantha’s decision to transition be brought on by sexual fantasy and pornographic stimulation, for example, it would be a choice that would ultimately “lead her astray.”⁸³ The decision could have easily been a satanic attack on Samantha, one in which he filled her imagination with fantasies that could steal her soul. Not being certain how to proceed, Pastor Michael trusted that the Holy Ghost would direct his husband, since Pastor David serves as the primary pastor and Pastor Michael’s role is

more of a supportive one. Michael was empathetic and loved Byron as a fictive son, but he wanted to be sure that the homely young man was being led by the Spirit, not a sex drive and lonely fantasy world. As Pastor David shared his theological perspective on reassignment with Pastor Michael, the two begin to agree that the church should serve as a support network for Byron during what must be a difficult time of adjustment. Those in the congregation who were hesitant gradually followed the pastors' lead, although the matter was never directly addressed on the platform or through other official outlets. Of course those who were accepting from the beginning were a bit embarrassed that the group had questioned acceptance, something they were already proclaiming to "a lost and dying world." The issue of manipulating the body in real time to match a culturally assigned gender had not been confronted so intimately before; other transsexuals and transgenders came to the fold as such. It was rather easy to label the church as accepting the entirety of LGBT sexuality, but when it came down to managing its subjects, the reality of tampering with what God had created was a startling idea to some. Although Samantha is transgendered but not yet transsexual, the believers have worked through the theological and spiritual confusion and are prepared to welcome her new body into the fold when that time comes. The grueling process of transition, both in terms of financial and psychological demands, continues to prepare Samantha for a transition that society does not allow her to do easily. The process seems to say that she is not capable of making up her own mind, as if there is something wrong with her for wanting to be physically considered female and sever the penis.

If Sis. Samantha's decision was steeped in demonic influence and the church immediately accepted the transition without "praying on it,"⁸⁴ the community would have allowed a dark influence in their midst that could have potentially hijacked the church. The situation would have been worsened with Samantha in a leadership position. Then the suspect

individual could have led others astray from a position of authority, not just from a layperson's level of influence. Therefore, the church would have embraced spiritual impurity, and the blood of her soul would have been on the pastors' hands⁸⁵. Maintaining a prayer life in the Holy Ghost on individual and group levels offsets such threats to the integrity of the church.

The drama surrounding the idea of Byron fully transitioning into Samantha highlights the dangers of the flesh, even in LGBT-affirming environments, and further illustrates why places like Boystown and other areas with high concentrations of LGBT individuals must be carefully navigated by believers. The idea of separating from the mainstream, especially as believers approach the end of time, dominates Pentecostal mindfulness. Once spiritual contamination happens, it may be difficult to purge the environment. Believers carefully enter and negotiate with queer culture, knowing that even the strongest believer can succumb to temptation.

While walking through Boystown one night before picking up Pastor David at the airport, Pastor Michael told me about how the church participated in the Chicago Pride Parade several years ago. I will discuss the following event through recall ethnography, since I was not there, depending upon Pastor Michael's recollection. The believers pulled a decorated float with the pastors' SUV. The LGBT Pentecostals rode on the wagon and marched along side of it with gospel music accompanying their pious presence. The music was that upbeat, praise stuff that is iconic for charismatic worshippers. Other music that provided a soundtrack for the celebration was the popular stuff that many gays love so much, such divas as Lady Gaga and Madonna, music that allowed flamboyant participants an opportunity to flex their bodies in a rhythmic manner. The church's float advertised Spirit and Truth Ministries, the Pentecostal church about an hour away. The purpose of Pentecostal representation was not to blend in with other LGBT participants but to appear as distinguished and joyful Christians. The righteous few insisted that

other queered persons in this gayborhood could coalesce their sexuality and faith too, and the believers intended to emit an aura of love and empathy. Along with the music and Bible-toting came their print culture. Gospel tracts were passed out along the festive trail. Authored by the believers, such tracts as “A Positive Look at the Bible and Homosexuality,” and “What if Christian Leaders are Wrong about the Gay Issue,” contest a blurred history of passion to make a place for themselves within mainstream Christianity. These self-authored pieces are intended to salvage a few of the souls headed for an eternity in Hell. Many boozy participants rejected the gospel tracts that were kindly offered to them and others went so far as to toss them onto the ground. The lost with a jaded perception of religion were not to blame, necessarily; rather, the attitude of mainline Christians were at fault for purging their communities of gays and lesbians for quite some time now, resulting in celebrations like the one in which LGBT Pentecostals were left responsible to repair colossal social damage. A few graciously accepted the invitation to attend the church; however, the righteous delegation at the Chicago Pride Parade was mostly an unrepeated, failed attempt at evangelism. Participation in the event provided a sobering message for the party, one that challenged LGBT subjects to reconsider a role for faith in their lives and to focus on eternal satisfaction rather than temporal pleasures.

What is important about the pride parade in relation to the current topic of dress and body management is that LGBT Pentecostals participated in the festivities as children of God, as ones who could extend an offer of hope and grace to a troubled community. They partook in the notion of pride but their pride is much more focused on being heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven. Not only did the righteous commission distinguish themselves with the music and the gospel tracts they attempted to get into as many hands as possible, the believers did not look like many of the attendees and parade performers who were dressed in revealing clothing. A great number

of the “worldly” men were dressed in nothing but their unmentionables. The pious visitation came in the form of mostly middle-aged to blossoming seniors fully covered while joyfully sharing the gospel of inclusivity. The men of the church were not shirtless. The women of the church, while most were wearing shorts or pants, did not look like the women “of the world” either. The evangelists were “set apart.” While their intention was not to protest the behavior of the LGBT group that had gathered to celebrate with their unintended family, the presence of the Pentecostals morally critiqued what they found in the gay village. The participation of affirming Pentecostals from the neighboring state likely appeared to many lost souls as judgment. The zealous believers, however, attempted to overcome such resistance by asserting a queer identity in tandem with an empathetic, inclusive message for the Last Days.

For LGBT Pentecostals, the trouble with being “set apart” and “being Holy for I am Holy, saith the Lord”⁸⁶ is that the nature of such an existence challenges the expectation that the group will share common cause with other marginal gays and lesbians. As Martin Manalansan writes about immigrant, gay Filipino men who, in part, reject a belonging to a homogenous queer America, queer Pentecostals engage in a similar identity politic. He states:

Despite the kind of gay lifestyle ascribed to men in the gay community, Filipino gay men’s quotidian experiences reject the kind of homogenizing tendency of what is seen as a gay ghetto or ‘circuit’ way of life. Filipino gay men are in fact continually positioning and repositioning their performances and themselves through varying modes...depending on the kinds of exclusions and affinities they face in daily life (2007:124).

Similarly, while the believers do entertain the reality that they suffer alongside queer non-believers, their cause is primarily otherworldly. The righteous few want to seize equal protections and authentication of their love, especially when they realize the difficulty of maintaining same-sex monogamy in a place that does not value such commitment and in a queer culture where open relationships are relatively common; however, earthly causes do not take

precedent over soulful contributions to the Kingdom of Heaven. As the pride parade demonstrated, in many ways, fringe believers reject a segment of society in which they are supposed to belong, a group to sense a common cause. Unfortunately, for the righteous few, spiritual warfare often comes in the form of their imposed identity and its associations, which highlights the complexity of what it means to be a “normal” or socially-acceptable homosexual in a conflicted queer sociopolitical landscape. According to Steven Seidman, this imagination of the “normal gay is presented as fully human, as the psychological and moral equal of the heterosexual. Accordingly, gays should be integrated into America as rights-bearing, respected citizens...the normal gay also serves as narrow social norm...the normal gay is expected to be gender conventional, link sex to love and a marriage-like relationship, defend family values, personify economic individualism, and display national pride” (2005:45). For “normal” gays, pride parades rarely exhibit their values.

Meanwhile in South Africa, in the only published anthropological account of LGBT Pentecostals, Graham Reid argues that believers constructed a similar performance that challenged gay men to perform traditional gender roles and lesbian women to enhance their femininity for a pageant in the Johannesburg Pride celebrations. Their goal was to problematize the mainline church’s notions of gender, however, by performing heteronormative roles in drag. As Reid writes, “ in this sense the pageant was the real drag show, because it was in the pageant that participants worked hard to achieve a gender identity that was far removed from what was known, what they felt comfortable with and was regarded as ‘natural’ ” (Reid 2010:90). While this production was meant to highlight the inconsistencies and injustice of gender in the wider South African church world, life in the Rust Belt is a bit more serious and less playful.

It is difficult for my friends to sense an equivalency with scantily-clad muscle gods who

would cause their imaginations to wander and, as a result, threaten their salvations. The lust of the flesh, this revealing of the body, is all part of the contradiction experienced as members strive to demonstrate their decency for mainline believers who insist they are no different than the sensuous imagery of Chicago, New Orleans, New York, and San Francisco. The trouble with the notion of a gay subculture and the notion of a queer community, in general, is that it is trusted to unite those who initially have nothing more in common than same-sex or “deviant” desire. It is essential for the congregation to cautiously venture into spiritually hazardous zones such as Boystown and to carefully consider Byron’s announcement. The believers must ward off the lustful spirits that could destroy their “walk with the Lord.” For the righteous few, such a common interest is trumped by an emphasis on living right. The Pentecostals challenge us to further think in terms of subcultures, intersectionalities, and conflicted and contingent belongings that now constitute what it means to be LGBT, because “when a practitioner of ‘homosexual acts,’ or a body that carries any of many queering marks moves between officially designated space—nation, region, metropole, neighborhood, or even culture, gender, religion, disease—intricate realignments of identity, politics, and desire take place” (Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 2000:3). The iconoclastic visions of LGBT believers, in various forms, are resulting in the new formations and the splintering of faiths as they assert a pious presence in the face of heterodominant fears.

For a group of fringe Pentecostals coming from the perspective of total depravity, in which there is a constant effort to reign in the body’s natural inclinations through processes of holy clothing and presentation, revising this material manifestation of spiritual consciousness has been an important component of constructing salvation in the queer environment as well. Although, as I have previously stated, adhering to traditional holiness looks with long hair and

dresses for women and long pants and short hair for men is no longer the rule for insistent LGBT practitioners, there is a certain appreciation for those who make such a sacrifice, as in their admiration for Sis. Brashear. Queer believers have defined their own limits to baring the body, such as when a young sister was called out for wearing shorts that rode too far up her thigh. In this regulatory mechanism, “there is personal social control...second, there is informal social control. When the individual begins to offend, peers issue a warning of disapproval” (Graybill and Arthur 2000:10). The young woman failed to realize that she transgressed norms of modesty, which prompted other believers to control her body. Due the complications of gender, it is not possible for the believers to enforce the policies of those who have rejected them in their religious motherlands. Should the marginal devotees ever achieve inclusion in a homophobic church world, mainline Pentecostals would have to not only get over their prejudices regarding non-heterosexual relationships but also the reality that LGBT believers do not look the same. The appearance alone of LGBT Pentecostals will likely always keep them far removed from their superiors. Despite this reality, the physical manifestations of maintained holiness remain to be seen as reflections of the inner spiritual health of the believer. As previously stated and demonstrated through the performance at the Chicago Pride Parade, practitioners are able to accomplish separation and subsequent eternal safety by “presenting their bodies a living sacrifice.” An ambiguous and negotiable notion of modesty now encapsulates the emphasis on performing holiness for the world to see. It is said the Holy Ghost that dwells inside of the believer is capable of instructing the individual on dressing in ways that please the Lord. For example, if the girl had been prayed up, the inner Spirit would have told her that her short-shorts were not appropriate in the House of the Lord. When they cross a line, such as wearing swimsuits for some, the Holy Spirit will “prick their hearts” and bring the believer back into line.

The new system of governing dress is said to be a more accurate reading on who is living right and who is not, because they are not having to submit to an exact set of rules for covering the body. The Pentecostals of Indiana have replaced gendered, clothing guidelines with a general emphasis on intuitive modesty. My informants believe they have insight into answering the question “what does ‘transparency’ keep obscure?” (Butler 2008:xx). With their realizations, my friends have been able to critique mainline Pentecostals for what they may have gotten wrong for too long.

The revolutionaries have uncovered, along with other critiques of holiness dress standards, that emphasizing and enforcing strict rules for outward appearance may allow the interior of one’s soul to hide in a tarnished condition, either filled with lust of the flesh or other problems such as jealousy, gossip, resentment, and other dangerous energies that are covered up, provided the believer appears holy. Also, they understand that mainline believers run the risk of arrogance as “Pentecostal dress, rejection of the world and persistent proselytizing all contribute to a ‘holier than thou’ attitude that is difficult for outsiders to accept, but is generally cultivated with pride within the ranks of Pentecostals” (Lawless 1988: 41). According to a critique that even certain heteronormative regimes have caught onto, it is rather easy to cover up what would otherwise be called out as sinful and damaging to the body of Christ. These standards have been a matter of contention in Pentecostal churches for over a century, with many refusing to define standards other than modesty and moderation, while other congregations, one in the deep South that I am familiar with, may go as far as contending that sisters of the church should limit the styling of their hair to include no more than seven curls⁸⁷. The independent nature and the notion of “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” has given rise to a plethora of interpretations and resulting divisions from individual interpretations. While some churches may

not allow any makeup on its female adherent, others will tolerate an unspoken amount of foundation. I have heard others that have come out holiness traditions say, rather disturbingly, that “any old barn looks good with a coat of paint.” For many, these material markers have been a simplistic way for others to categorize believers into a distinct, usually inferior class group, in society. As Bernice Martin writes of Pentecost in Latin America, and I would contend that the same is true in the United States, “the dress code, because it usually prevents them following the latest fashions, makes them instantly recognizable as ‘believers’ and simultaneously relegates them to the category of ‘out of date,’ as well as underlining their class identity. Pentecostals in the professional middle classes...are acutely aware of the class connotations of the typical Pentecostal dress code and tend to modify, if not wholly abandon it...while still avoiding sexual immodesty” (Martin 2006:152).

While my friends in the Rust Belt tend to admire much of what comes out of mainline Pentecostal churches, believes whom they consider family in Christ, they articulate a salient critique of heteronormative standards of righteous dress. Their argument and experience is that simply having a rather butch lesbian don a hyper-feminine, floor-length dress and manage uncut, flowing hair does not take away or compensate for her same-sex desire. Similarly, having the male homosexual cover his suspect body according to the rules of the religious establishment does not make him any less gay. However, even within the most rigid Pentecostal establishments, LGBT people are still easily distinguished. From the heteronormative gaze, proper clothing form does not cover up the signs. Revealing symbols are such things as rebellious males wearing pink dress shirts,⁸⁸ either for the purpose of coming to terms with their sexuality or innocent taste, or pants that are just a bit too tight. Although popular knowledge sees Pentecostal women as homely-looking to begin with, sisters who do not emphasize the

femininity of their dress are also suspected of being infested with evil spirits. Of course, the assumptions extend beyond the material that covers the assumed-to-be queer bodies to include one's gate, speech, and interests. According to the queer critique, heteronormative practitioners have long been guilty of attempting to compensate for their homosexual fears with proper gender technique and standards of dress. Liminal ex-gay men, for example, are frequently told that orientations can change with the proper cultivation of gender: "The idea is that if they first recuperate their gender identity through masculine ritual practices like basketball, heterosexuality, masculinity's natural correlation, will soon follow. For many, climbing a mountain or scoring a basket is a transforming religious experience" (Erzen 2006:109). Of course, the alleged successes have been manipulated by the Religious Right⁸⁹ to directly attack their own, as in Erzen's ethnographic example of an ex-gay fighting equality with a baby and wife while "the sign over their baby stroller proclaimed, 'My daddy changed...Now I exist...It's Possible'" (Erzen 2006:126). Through the militarization of queer bodies, in the form of ex-gays, homophobic regimes have activated a most crystalized manifestation of fear and oppression in the form of self-hate. My informants have been able to reveal this problematic system of dress uniformity, expected reproduction, and other gender and sexual proscriptions for what it may leave hidden and, therefore, not truly capable of crafting holiness in the lives of the believers, as is popularly believed. They know that same-sex desire continues to exist even under the most creative facades. Most heteronormative practitioners do not seem to understand the discrepancy, however, and blame changes in appearance on when the protected believer delves into the realm of homosexuality, there to be destroyed and morphed into something demonic by Satan himself.

Some behaviors, for individuals such as Pastor David, will never feel completely comfortable, despite having received the revelation that there is neither male nor female in the

Spirit. For example, the Pastors have a pool, but Pastor David continues to feel awkward when visitors engage in “mixed bathing,”⁹⁰ meaning both sexes swimming together. Pastor David upholds this standard for himself, regardless of understanding how odd it may sound to explain that although he is gay but does not feel comfortable swimming with his sisters in Christ, despite not desiring their form. On a side note, the norm highlights the homoeroticism and conveniences for queer people built into the separation of the sexes found in such neoconservative environments. Meaning, whenever there is a concentration of the same sex in order to restrict behavior and desire, such as the protection of one’s sexual purity or even in the cases of imprisonment or locker rooms, there is a certain convenience and anxiety of being found out for those who attracted to the same sex despite that the boundaries are built upon assumed heterosexuality and, hence, homophobia. Pastor David certainly does not believe that his congregation should adhere to the rule, but, rather, he is aware that refraining from mixed bathing is more of a cultural conviction for him. Meaning, the rule is one that he has embodied due to familiar, repetitive practice. Similarly, according to any sort of liberated judgment, Sis. Brashear would get away from what “the world” sees as an oppressed pilgrim- look and drop those blue-jean skirts off at the Goodwill for heterosexual Pentecostal women to sort through. However, preaching in blue jeans or even a Clinton pantsuit⁹¹ does not bode well for the modest Elizabeth. She was saved while wearing long dresses and pulling her long, blonde hair into a ponytail. The performance of holiness is what feels right for the sister, even though she crawls into bed every night with a female life-partner. Dismantling such an embodied system of dress for the woman may not be possible. Her convictions of not feeling spiritual safe without maintaining a holiness wardrobe posit a further exploration into the material aspects of religion. This material culture, for Elizabeth, are homely skirts and straight, long hair that flings back-and-

forth in one big bundle, as she preaches the Word with excitement. Clothes, therefore, become a part of realized salvation. Elizabeth's sanctified expressions and Pastor David's concern with mixed bathing have been unintentionally carried over from the embodied convictions of their youth, forever structuring their presentation and interaction with the world.

The way in which LGBT Pentecostalism supports itself with the rationale that there is neither male nor female in the Spirit will likely forever keep heteronormative and LGBT-affirming assemblies segregated. While the realized freedoms of loosening gendered restrictions is a contested terrain among queer Pentecostals, most have had to perceive the body in a starkly different manner than heteronormative Pentecostals to realize that the Holy Ghost is for all people. In order to justify complete inclusivity of not only gay and lesbian but also transgender and transsexual believers, such as Sis. Samantha, LGBT saints have had to develop an iconoclastic approach to gender rules. The realization that gender is a temporal and fluid identity has allowed inclusive congregations to give up the iconic clothing norms and other bodily management practices, causing many LGBT practitioners to look quite different than their straight counterparts. In order to define and perform notions of holiness, LGBT Pentecostals in the Rust Belt, have imagined beyond clothing and familiar bodily management techniques that they have been conditioned to but maintain modesty. Continuing to preach that women must wear skirts below the knee with slits not to come above the middle of the leg does not make sense when the belief in gender itself has been destabilized to accommodate individuals such as Sis. Samantha. In the queer, Pentecostal temporality, it does not make sense to demand that butch lesbians present their bodies in ridiculous, flowery dresses that sweep the floor. In order to compensate for the discrepancy between what is seen and what remains unseen, queer believers emphasize inward purity. When impurity is inwardly present and manifests itself on the surface,

other saints will be sure to correct the wandering soul. Other comments about the general display of cleavage through low-cut blouses and shorts that reveal too much of the thigh are also a means of defining and displaying holiness without having to enforce specific rules that have caused Pentecostals to look like pilgrims for quite some time. The congregants do not look at those who uphold traditional convictions of holiness dress standards with disdain or as less evolved. My informants understand the only reason why they have been given this End Time revelation of Christ's LGBT inclusivity is because they have had to suffer through oppression, thought of as a satanic attack to keep LGBT people out of Heaven. Rather than resentment, there remains an admiration for the ways in which mainline churches hold steadfast to their truth, even when, unfortunately, as rejecting queer subjects is a part of their particular truth. Amidst this myriad of allegiances, Sis. Brashear has become a site to project certain longing for spiritual homeland and an admiration for the way mainline believers keep the faith. Despite painful histories of exile from safe spiritual havens and their attempts to recreate righteousness of an affirming kind, queer practitioners prefer to idolize heterosexuals within mainline Pentecostal churches or their own successful believers rather than search for LGBT role models.⁹² Using the pride parade as an example of what queer communities offer the unconventional Pentecostals speaks to the reality that, according to their convictions, there is not anything worth aspiring to be within the identity that has been branded upon their existence. The intersectionality of LGBT and Pentecostal challenges believers to present holy bodies while also joining in the fight for equality among tainted "family" without getting too close to temptation among the among people they should be reaching, as was witnessed at the Chicago Pride Parade. Such positionality contributes to the further complication of what it means to be queered in America, as faith is re-created in places where it may not be expected. These "...effects of movement, of tectonic shifts between

differently produced and carried identities and differentially textured places are far from uniform...the focus of attention is no longer on whether identity is ever not constructed...but instead on how to make sense of the always poignant and sometimes hilarious labors of reinvention and renegotiation in new places, or in reimagined old ones” (Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 2000:3). While my friends in Middle America may have “family” who strut through the streets of Chicago in sexy briefs, speedos, and leather harnesses, they do not go as far as completely disassociating from queer people, and may even attempt to justify such behavior, but understand that they must remove themselves from such “lust of the flesh” and be “set apart” in order to make Heaven their home. In the End of Days, the holy separatists have a difficult time maintaining their purity, especially considering the recognized profanity of other “family” members. However, as I will explain in chapter six, such a complex existence contributes to the idea that queer people are a last remnant to be reconciled with the gospel and are being specifically chosen and refined to make it in the Rapture.

Two Men in One Bed: Two Women Shall Be Grinding Together

“I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”
Luke 17:34-5 KJV

Chapter Seven

The anointing had been incredibly strong. Congregants were exhausted by their journey in the Spirit that night. We had been at church for several hours. Sometimes believers gather and the Holy Ghost does not really show up and the meeting feel like a waste of time; at other times, like tonight when practitioners are “prayed up,” the powerful force completely takes over the service, resulting in a beautifully blended and divinely directed pandemonium. Two souls “in the balance,” Alice and Jewel, became the focus of the service as they viscerally reconciled their faith and sexuality on a night composed of intense crying around the altar, hand clapping, smiles, speaking in tongues, marching around the sanctuary, and joyous dancing to finish it all off. It seemed we had experienced the entire spectrum of Pentecostal emotionality before leaving the place. Jewel, a twenty-something who emits a beautiful aura, could have been a flower child if she had been around in the 60s and 70s. Those long skirts she continues to wear fit her personality quite naturally. The young woman grew up in small-town Alabama and ventured up north to find work with a bachelor’s degree in English and determination to escape what she called a physiologically-abuse home. She was raised a biblical literalist and charismatic worshipper. After being reinitiated into Pentecostalism, she was reminded of how much dancing in the Spirit fulfills her. Some in the church are not known for dancing, but others, like her, want to do it just about every service. In those ecstatic moments, her lily-white face maintains a constant smile and she utters unknown words while spinning about like a Sufi. Flowing blonde hair swirls around her head as she responds to the Spirit. Although Jewel is quite “fem”⁹³ in her mannerisms, Alice, on the other hand, is a self-proclaimed “plaid-shirt dyke.”⁹⁴ Her spirit, like Jewel’s, is quite magical. There is just something particularly comforting about Alice, perhaps it is her quiet confidence, analytical mind, or simply the compassion she extends to everyone who makes contact. While Jewel had went forward during prayer, Alice was just taking it all in,

anxiously gripping the chair in front of her with an eager expression. When Alice witnessed her lover experience spiritual freedom, she decided she could no longer resist. The hardy woman was soon surrounded by a group of prayer warriors, mostly other lesbians, as she surrendered to the Spirit. Her body collapsed as the Holy Ghost overtook her body. The sisters knelt on the floor with the “backslider” and continued “praying her through to the Holy Ghost,” meaning until tongues begin to flow from her belly, something they feels so good. The utterances were guttural and everyone began to listen in as she was “renewed” in the Holy Ghost. When individuals are in the Spirit it is said they disconnect from the notion of time, which is likely why the couple stayed in a happy place for nearly two hours. For young charismatics, such as Alice and Jewel, harmonious identifies must be confirmed in the spirit world. Making peace with theology and their conflicting attractions cannot be realized simply by studying biblical literature and modern contentions. Rationalizing on paper is not enough to be certain salvation is had. In the frenzy of the Spirit, they find true peace, as much of Pentecostalism exists in the realm of individual feelings. Within the controlled chaos of the Spirit, spiritually damaged LGBT subjects are reconciled. Before the women left, they felt God’s love and knew they would be “caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”⁹⁵

Watching the women reconnect with Jesus caused excited Pastors David and Michael to burst into tears and then start running around the sanctuary in celebration. Their lives’ work was coming into fruition within view, a cumbersome labor of love that often benefits humanity out of their site through online media platforms, for example. At one point, Pastor David took Pastor Michael by the hand for a Holy Ghost dance around the sanctuary composed of stackable chairs and modest chandeliers above. Pastor David then grabbed the cordless microphone and started singing along to the upbeat music. “It’s not form and it’s not fashion. This salvation sent from

God suits me fine. It's old yet it's new. It's powerful, yet it's true. I'm so glad this Holy Ghost is genuine!"⁹⁶ He twirled around and sang another verse to the Pentecostal standard: "On the day of Pentecost, there assembled but a few. But the most important thing was soon to come. Then from Heaven God did send like a mighty rushing wind. Then they found that Holy Ghost so genuine!" Pastor inserted short proclamations during the celebratory mood, passages he has found to affirm LGBT saints in the Word. "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel,⁹⁷" Pastor David joyously yelled as he took off his tie and suit coat. He immediately recited additional biblical affirmation: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is *neither male nor female*, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." We are all included and equal in the Holy Ghost, he said, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and heterosexuals. Pastor quoted Acts 2:17, another favorite among the reconciled: "And it shall come in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my spirit upon *ALL FLESH*: and your sons and daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." He quoted mostly from scripture, such as telling us that this was the revival that was promised long ago to gay and lesbian people. The believers ended up dancing the night away in Holy Ghost bliss. To experience God moving in a mighty way among sexual-marginal believers is a testament to the imagining of queer people being a final territory to be reached before the Lord returns. Pastors David and Michael, along with their flock, have devoted their lives to fostering such visceral reconciliations for queer people. It is their revival.

In chapter one I addressed the ways in which the Pentecostals find queer representation in the Word. In this chapter, I further explore the ways in which my informants understand their role in the End of Days and have produced a complex liberation narrative and subsequent revival. I will explain the ways in which queer Pentecostals have filtered their marginalization

through an existing persecution complex. As queer people, who have long been used as incarnate evidence of the Second Coming, navigating the End of Days involves being conscious of the misguided notions that often lead homophobic practitioners, while also sorting out shared convictions. Accordingly, they have inserted their marginalization and resulting liberation into Pentecostalism's story. The Last Days, despite how freeing they may be, are tough times for the believers. Their passions are great and their virtually untapped mission field is so vast that reaching the lost can often be a frustrating and demanding responsibility. Individuals such as the lovely Jewel and Alice remind the practitioners why they insist on sharing their inclusive gospel.

According to the worldview, others have been liberated from the bonds of oppression, such as women and African Americans. Queer people are seen as the last targets of pharisaical judgment and consequential displacement. Those in the unexpected Rust Belt congregation articulate the argument that God tends to use social outcasts. In fact, practitioners say he prefers them, the downtrodden, those who have been tainted and deemed unworthy of God's presence by the rest of society. The very origin of Pentecostalism testifies to such equalization. As poor African Americans and Anglos gathered amidst humble settings in Los Angeles, they were considered lunatics by the press and religious regimes of the time (Robeck 2006, Wacker 2001). Press headings are telling of the inequality and subsequent marginalization of the times: " 'Religious Fanaticism Creates Wild Scenes,' Accompanying this headline were such delectable subtitles as, 'Holy Kickers Carry on Mad Orgies,' and 'At All Night Meetings in Azusa Street Church, Negroes and Whites Give Themselves Over to Strange outbursts of Zeal...' Women with Men Embrace' ...' Whites and Blacks Mix in a Religious Frenzy...' Disgusting Scenes at Azusa Street Church' ...' Crazy Girls in Arms of Black Men' " (Robeck 2006: 125-6). As Ian MacRobert explains in his analysis of racism within Pentecostalism, tragically, "just as infants

are unconscious of racial and colour distinctions until those who are ‘older and wiser’ infect them with prejudice in their childhood, so also the Pentecostal movement enjoyed several of racial harmony until the division of the basis of colour, which had split the older denominations in America, led to the segregation of white from black Pentecostals...the Pentecostal movement conformed to the prevailing racist attitudes of white America” (1988:87-8). LGBT Pentecostals are attempting to build upon the true equal nature of Pentecostalism and include their own marginalization into a historical narrative. According to the vision, God prefers to channel himself through broken spirits and their consequently willing vessels. It is said that he enjoys the poetic and ironic nature of manifesting himself in such a way, all while heteronormative pharisees observe with disdain and miss out on experiencing revival.

To arrive at such a position, my informants re-interpret End Time prophecy. Interpreting the convoluted book of Revelations and other passages that make sense of what is to come in the Last Days has always been a source of contestation and intellectual pursuit within Pentecostalism. For many working- class believers, being able to navigate the complexities of the Word serves to offset marginalization of blue-collar existence. For the disciples, studying scripture is a method of proving worth and intellect in a world that only seems to value their manual labor while disregarding contributions of the working-class mind. There are those who self-identity as pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation with regard to when the precise moment of the Second Coming will occur. Such a distinction in thought means that Christ will return either before Christians have to go through any persecution, during the middle of such a time, or after many Christians have been killed by those who despise God. These strands of thought pervade not only Pentecostalism but much of neoconservative evangelicalism. The anticipation and perception of imagined End Time happenings is likely the least understood

but most crucial component of American Evangelicalism. We can only make sense of neoconservative actions and expectations when their carefully calculated trajectories of End Time events are understood. For many in the church, the greatest fear but anticipation is that the notion of social progress involves an attack on true believers that may be followed by isolation or eventual elimination. While some believe that the faithful will be “called out of the world” before troubles begin, others understand that many of the righteous will have to give their lives for Christ. Despite differences, it is commonly understood that true Christians, primarily Holy Ghost filled ones, will have to face some sort of persecution prior to complete redemption. These apocalypse subcultures are not necessarily concerned with the fate of liberal, inclusive Christians; rather, they are constantly on the lookout for attacks on those who take the Word literally and defend its teachings. This is what I refer to as an existing persecution complex.

The practitioners feel the need to keep up with End Time advances but understand their own existence has been included as part of this plan, so they must be careful to not be deceived by other misleading moral panics. Once they have cleared their own names of trouble, the believers have had to face anxieties such as abortion and how to envision the role of Israel.

Although many expect a time of tribulation, better known as “persecution,” believers operate as if the Rapture could occur at any moment. Pentecostals and other apocalypse enthusiasts are constantly on the lookout for prophetic evidence that the Second Coming is nigh. American involvement in the Middle East, for example, continues to signal that time is coming to an end. As soon as the world comes against Israel, God is expected to physically intervene in the tension. For Pentecostals and other End Time enthusiasts, the past, present, and futures of existence are intimately linked to their visions of the Middle East. Susan Harding writes, “The rise of the West, the development of capitalism, and the expansion of American hegemony are

not central stories in world history. History instead is centered in the Middle East and narrated as a relentless road toward the fulfillment of biblical prophecies in which reemergent biblical empires plunge into war, all ultimately in pursuit of the apple of God's eye, Israel and the Jews—with whom God has some unfinished business” (Harding 2000:238). Zionist evangelicals and their queer counterparts are in a quandary when it comes to God's People in the contentious state, a predicament not unlike many of their other modern concerns. Supernatural involvement is expected should everyone come against the state but evangelicals do not want to be in the wrong here. It seems rational to idly watch prophecies be fulfilled, should they be accurate; however, in practice, it seems that believers are much more concerned with delaying events rather than watching them proceed naturally. Unlike today, in early American Pentecostalism, “by the calculus of apocalypse, politics, reform, or any ‘worldly ambitions’ became anathema (Stephens 2008:170). Harvey Cox explains that Pentecostal involvement in politics is something new: “In the early years of their movement pentecostals did not have much time for the politics of this fallen world. Since Jesus was coming again soon it didn't matter much who was mayor or governor or even president. In the past two decades, however, American Pentecostals have put aside their reluctance to participate in politics” (Cox 1995:287). I contend that by involving themselves in what is understood as End Time concerns, the believers negotiate additional time to reach the lost, particularly salvaging the souls of family members they could not imagine being doomed for eternity. What is particularly interesting, though, is that LGBT Pentecostals engage in theological questions concerning the End Time but have positioned themselves as persecuted victims in the Last Days, oddly by homophobic Christians.

As is the nature of the End Times, the righteous few have no choice but to constantly engage in spiritual warfare, not only with the devil directly but also as he is made manifest

through mainstream Christians who have been tricked. As Peter Martin illustrates in an ethnography concerning the Holy Ghost in Brooklyn, the acts of warfare

...occur on behalf of oneself, another individual, a group, neighborhood, city, state, region, country, or world. Spiritual warfare combats the personal problems of the individual or structural issues threatening human society... Spiritual warfare is used to help heal the sick, eradicate disease, eliminate grief, cure physical disabilities, make poor people rich, ameliorate depression, destroy sin, cure vice, resolve conflict, and provide hope...But it is always only individuals who are saved who can wage this war for the rest of humanity (2013:245).

The rationale of queer Pentecostals is that a primary form of warfare is homophobia in the Church. My friends believe that heteronormative Christians have been deceived into believing that LGBT people are a threat rather than recognizing them for their talents, gifts that enhance supernatural connectivity rather than distracting from it. “Certainly, there is no quarrel about the fact that obviously gay, flamboyant and queenly males and masculine-type females exist in abounding numbers in Pentecostal churches—more so than in other faiths. If our churches were to instantly get rid of the homosexuals in them, they would cease to remain ‘Pentecostalist’. For the gospel choirs and musicians (the mainstay and pivot of our ‘liturgy’) would certainly disappear” (Tinney 1983:169). Although heteronormative believers recognize queer presence and abilities to prompt the Spirit’s moving, acknowledging the evil spirits must not happen. Ever since queer people came under attack by the church, it is said that the devil created one of the greatest attacks on humanity. He is accused of robbing Heaven of a LGBT presence. With displacement into leather bars and dykes on bikes events instead of focusing on Jesus, it is said that Satan has attempted to keep an entire segment of humanity from seeing Heaven’s gates. Although queer individuals must make a choice regarding which God they will serve, Satan or Jesus, opportunities to serve the Lord have been limited due to blatant exclusivity or simply distaste for religiosity resulting from most churches being on the wrong side of history.

Practitioners in the Rust Belt congregation realize their role in diversifying Heaven's population may be the most difficult one assigned in the End of Days, but they eagerly meet the challenge. With impending redemption, the righteous realize they only a few more years to reach those who have been disposed. Despite homophobia coming in the name of God, it is, ironically, Satan who is responsible for the damage to an unknown number of souls who walked away from the Truth in exchange for lives that are solely focused on the present world. According to the rationale of my friends, he has used innocent believers to carry out his plan, individuals, institutions, and leaders such as the late Jerry Falwell, for example, and his End Times war on LGBT subjects. Falwell's words testified of his disdain and outright fear of gay and lesbian people:

I am against homosexuality because it is not a victimless crime—it enslaves others. The worst thing about homosexuals is that they draw others into their net. They proselyte after the worst order—they prey on children. Little children are exploited and their bodies are ravaged by human animals...Because homosexuality cannot procreate, it must proselyte. If one generation rejected homosexuality, it would die out. If one generation became homosexual, there would be no next generation (Sutton 2013:108-9).

In other responses and fear mongering to his writers, along with such morale boosters as Anita Bryant, claims were made that homosexuals enjoy burning Bibles. This rhetoric has not disappeared and only continues to evolve in its own image. Such fear and understandings, assisted by modern-day prophets as Rick Warren, have allegedly even contributed to the recent criminalization of LGBT people in Uganda.⁹⁸ My informants see all of this moral panic through their existing persecution complex that includes homophobia as part of the confusion to be found in the Last Days.

As part of an End Time prism, LGBT Pentecostals understand strides toward equality as God's work, while opponents view such advances as demonic in nature. According to the opposing view, "evil will be called good and good evil"⁹⁹ in the Last Days. Heteronormative Pentecostals feel as though the gay agenda is being pushed on them and their offspring. The

strong-willed opponents predicted this would be happening as they neared an escape, so they stand their ground just as those at Spirit and Truth do, all while feeling as if they are being martyred for Christ' sake. As marriage equality spreads throughout the country and world, my friends take advantage of such opportunities to praise the Lord for intervening on their behalf. Since the devil is responsible for attempting to doom queer people to an eternity with him, the homophobia that is aroused during same-sex marriage debates, for example, is also his work. When mainline televangelists, for example, engage in a hateful attack on LGBT people, my friends rationalize it by seeing the devil at work. Such events as bullying¹⁰⁰ and murders of queer people are additional reasons to see persecution in the Last Days. The church world tends to simply ignore such events, likely due to progressive legislation that the events encourage. Members of the Rust Belt church understand that homophobia permeates the church world due to spiritual warfare and do not necessarily maintain animosity with their non-affirming, heterosexual counterparts. My friends believe that God is on their side and is using them to reveal the fact that Jesus has always welcomed those who have been queered by society.

As part of their revival, my informants are finding a restored joy. Due to their long journeys and learning to cope without the comfort of faith for so long, the believers understand that they were robbed of their intimacy with Christ. The virtuous refer to this theft as having joy taken away, since relationship with Christ is defined in terms of joy. However, the practitioners realize that the due recompense will be unlike anything the church world has ever seen, in the form of a revival, as an innumerable amount of queer subjects make their way to Christ in the next few years. Those who are opposed to LGBT communion with God will be surprised and confused by the way in which queer persons will “cry unto God” for authentic, supernatural connectivity. It has been prophesied in the Rust Belt that over the next several years, marginal

people will begin to “fall on their faces before God.” Joel 2:25 reflects this promise and remains a favorite among the fellowship: “I will restore unto you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.¹⁰¹” The time spent in the dry and barren wilderness is proving to be worth the reunion with the savior. Some did not realize what they had, as far as their supernatural relationship was concerned, until reconnecting with Jesus after years of “emptiness.” Many cried out for God even while in the clubs and knew he was there. The believers say they felt his presence and knew he never left them. However, they had no access to the “throne room,” meaning access to God’s presence, until reconnecting in places such as the Hoosier church. According to Pentecostal vision of the social landscape, there is no happiness to be found in the gayborhoods of America, unless the Lord is present. Since they say Jesus is not a prominent or celebrated influence among the intentional communities and happiness is understood as coming from God, it is a difficult environment for believers intent on a satisfying religious existence.

My friends’ reasoning does not place entire blame on heteronormative believers for such a problematic existence; rather, divisiveness is said to be product of satanic confusion, just the type of thing to be found in the Latter Days. My informants have therefore utilized their oppression within a liberation narrative. They have taken their histories within psychologically damaging environments to exemplify just what God has delivered them from. Their assurance is said to be stronger due to the grueling process of reconciling faith. Salvation within the queer circles typically carries with it the sting of hate and feeling inadequate but the inequality produced causes the believers to expect greater blessings in the spirit realm, especially as they approach the Last Days, as I explained when discussing faith healing and other Spirit manifestations in chapter three. The spiritual outpouring is expected to intensify as the believers

get closer to the Second Coming. The reality that the believers are living in a society in which LGBT lives are routinely threatened by hate exemplifies a rationale that part of End Time persecution is manifesting itself in the form of homophobia, not necessarily homophobia directed towards non-believers but by those who are professing Christians. However, queer non-believers are inevitably affected by the exclusionary faith, as many are “living in darkness” due to pharisaical judgment. Therefore, the homophobia component of End Time persecution has been inflicted upon all gays and lesbians, and the number of those who would have lived for the Lord will never be known. The believers make sense of their social positions through the Word. Therefore, my friends insert their experiences into Pentecostalism’s evolution while casting themselves within the eschatological expectation of persecution.

My friends understand that the church world has fallen prey to the devil’s trickery, resulting in a lack of access to redemption. In order for the Lord to return, complete Truth must be revealed and barriers eliminated. Proponents contend that the gospel must be preached to everyone. In order for the Second Coming to occur, all of humanity would have the choice to accept salvation, including gays and lesbians. According to the rhetoric, LGBT practitioners become the heroes and heroines needed to complete scriptural prophecy as they embrace queer “family” into the fold. Realizing the role they play in finalizing preparedness for the End of Days is terribly frustrating when the pious few must reason with the structural and social limitations of their movement. Being positioned outside of an urban center and involuntarily in opposition with other churches in the area means an isolated existence.

At no point can frustration for revival and expectations of members be more felt than at a wintry, mid-week Bible study that is under attended. In short, midweek Bible study often feels like this. Money is tight. Many in the congregation are on public assistance and the rest of us

seem to be in a constant struggle to survive financially. It is the dead of winter in northern Indiana. Attendance has been down for the entire month of January due to icy roads and consistent below-freezing temperatures. The weather takes a toll on the bodies of the aging congregation, a group consisting mostly of middle-aged to senior citizens. Frustration seems to dominate the tone as ten of us spread around the plastic folding table for a Bible study that is held every Wednesday evening. The projector in the sanctuary is not working and it will have to be replaced. Despite costing several hundred dollars, it must be changed since it is used to project biblical passages and song lyrics. The piece of equipment is especially important for church growth, since visitors depend on it to feel a part of the worship and competency is already such an informal process in Pentecostal settings. Electric bills have been quite high due to the cold weather as well. Pastor David asked us to give a little extra to help cover those costs but he knows God will supply the need. He says he cannot worry about stuff like this anymore because it has taken a toll on his body. Pastor says that Satan fights when he sees potential.

Being LGBT and Pentecostal means frequently feeling like much of the world is against you, seemingly demonic to mainline Christians and of little use to the rest of America. Sure, a few liberals find the congregation alluring for its poetic nature, and then are a few faithful allies who drop in occasionally. Certain yuppie liberals seem to think the idea is colorful and allows them to feel like they are participating in some form of equality before heading back home to their opposite sex partner and children. Church gays are a sort of accessory for some locals. However, it is primarily Pastor David, Pastor Michael, and a handful of faithful believers that keep the church open. Understandably, the charismatic worship, however, does not seem to make sense to many visitors. Practitioners, however, are passionate about sharing faith. They want the

visitors' souls to be saved, even if it takes being patronized a bit, even if it takes being someone's gay.

To make such outreach possible, members such as Sister Hazel and her husband Frank are held responsible for the unending chores associated with operating a church. The several acres of land always seem to be in need of mowing and the heating and air conditioning are a relentless challenge during winter and summer peaks. The PA system and media ministry require a great deal of time in and of itself. On top of these laborious demands, there is the managing of people, including curtailing gossip, hospital visits, and a general litany of responsibilities that fall on the backs of the pastors and supporting leadership. Working and unemployed saints tithing ten percent of their income and then being theologically challenged to give offerings in addition demonstrates just how much they believe in the message of inclusivity. Their sacrifices represent how important it is to share Truth so that a latter rain¹⁰² is made possible. Members also assist in monthly fundraisers to help support the church due its limited financial means. Monthly spaghetti and pizza suppers offset much of the financial burden and allows individuals who feel financially inadequate to support the mission. The productions also bring in a great number of people from the community and believers seize these "divine appointments" to share their love of Christ. Being in the church facilities also allows non-members to feel comfortable in case they decide to return for a Sunday morning service. One tired church member would inevitably volunteer or be volunteered to wash dishes, a labor of love I carefully steered away from. With that being said, being committed to the work of the church was a demanding and occasionally tiring devotion. Likely, as a combination of hard work and often not realizing a tangible return, defeat occasionally would saturate the air, like during certain mid-week services. Thankfully, the Spirit of the Lord would show up to refresh the weary pilgrims in the Holy

Ghost. The enlivening but frustrating process of sharing the faith is translated as a dark attack on what God has promised during the Last Days. Financial limitations, as well, become part of the negative energy found in the quagmire of struggles during their final stand. Satan does seem to damper their revival at times, but the saints are more determined to press on as he battles the church. The devil fought the first night of a recent conference when the electric piano just would not turn on. The believers knew that the Holy Ghost would be moving in their midst that night. For the Pentecostals, frustrations serve as supernatural approval and signs that God is about to move among them.

Amid other duties, the primary responsibility for the individual in relation to the revival is to sacrifice time for prayer. P.U.S.H,¹⁰³ a popular acronym used around the church means “Pray Until Something Happens.” The promise is that when the righteous few put forth the effort, God will show up. An End Time revival is hinged upon this laborious process. Through weekly corporate prayer and intense personal prayer lives, the revolutionaries continue experiencing revival. Unbelievers and estranged queer ones will be attracted to the movement through their prayer. Attending the meetings is an expected part of the Christian lifestyle at Spirit and Truth Ministries. It is a Pentecostal duty to travail in the Spirit, even after working all day. Those who have been on the job drag themselves into the sanctuary for congregational prayer but sense a new energy before leaving the sacred space. Once they push through the supernatural oppression felt in the world, they tap into the joyous ecstasy that carries them through another week and fosters revival for the LGBT community.

The ambiance of the revival is centered on the LGBT experience, simply because of the energy required to reconcile queer sexuality and faith. However, as believers see the end of times approaching, they realize the need to broaden their religious identity away from irrelevant labels.

The believers have found that it is easier to reach others who have been marginalized by mainstream dogmas, such as single moms, interracial couples, and others on the margins of society. It is something they have trying to do for quite some time but something that has not been an organic transition. Pastor David reminds the congregation periodically that Spirit and Truth is not a “gay church.” Rather, the humble gathering is God’s church and should include not only various sexualities but racial and class difference. Perhaps only in Heaven will believers be able to free themselves of the restrictions that plague the current experience. On numerous occasions, I attended “straight churches” with members of Spirit and Truth. Predominately African American churches seemed to be the safest environments for us to enter, although it was clear that we were marked. We would attend for musical programs, for example, and it was clear that members were not sure how to or if to engage with us. When we boldly entered predominately white churches, the experience was even more awkward. They were not afraid to stare or question our right to be in their presence. In both environments, Pastor David would use his “gaydar”¹⁰⁴ and give a church card to those who seemed to be struggling with accepting their natural sexualities, particularly men who were involved in music who sensed a mutual understanding. He empathized with such abused individuals and wanted them to live honestly and open for God. Pastor gave out the church cards because he says that time is running out. He knows the Second Coming is about the happen.

Alternatively, the crossing of heteronormative Pentecostals into the spiritually dangerous environment of the LGBT church rarely occurs. Pastor David was thrilled to have Sis. Annette and her husband Bro. Bryan visiting from Cincinnati. The minister and his wife were associated with the United Pentecostal Church and were invited to sing during a conference at Spirit and Truth. Sis. Annette was in full-blown Pentecostal fashion¹⁰⁵, complete with an assortment of pin

curls just dangling off of her head. Her pencil skirt, falling just below the knee, and an ornamental flower on her chest marked her as someone from the other world, a reflection of a past life for many of friends. Despite the same doctrine and salvation process, believers needed to convince the couple that the same Holy Ghost resided with believers at Spirit and Truth as the one they were accustomed to in southern Indiana. The delegation had passed over into the danger zone, either in hopes of reaching lost souls or extending an olive branch. We were not sure. The Spirit moved that night. It seemed that there was no second guessing God's favor on that Rust Belt congregation. Miracles were accomplished and believers sensed a deep supernatural connection to one another that night. Heteronormative regimes have lost a few of their followers to the seduction of inclusivity but mostly only LGBT ones. A few straight ones, such as Annette and Bryan, have been won over to the ideal of inclusion but such enlightenment has been met by immediate isolation if they were to share such heresy in their home churches. Even if they sense the Spirit there, the social risks are tremendous and often not worth associating with the suspect congregation. When Pastor David sees such success, he reassures the congregation that God is revealing to homophobic church people he loves his gay children.

Daring souls such as Annette and Bryan, who insist upon Pentecostal norms but transgress boundaries, are few. Rather, engagement with the church world typically takes place in other forms, occasionally volatile ones. Despite what my friends see as theological and social enlightenment, believers are taught to not argue with heteronormative practitioners. Doing so only stirs up strife. As much as mainline believers detest the "homosexual agenda," especially when it means perverting the sacred, they have empowered the homosexual through their fear. Those in the Rust Belt are not sure that they will ever win over those who call their Truth a doctrine of devils but continue to patiently reach out. When a member gets angry or frustrated as

they attempt to share Truth, Pastor David gently puts them back in line by explaining that we do not have to feel inferior when dealing with practitioners within mainline Pentecostal churches. He says they are the ones in the wrong and we can only pray that God will “remove the scales from their eyes,”¹⁰⁶ as they ask God for clarity during this confusing time. Congregants also get frustrated simply combatting religious intolerance with non-Pentecostals in the area. Since the church is routinely attacked in local pulpits and or comments left on online newspaper articles about the group, Pastor David and his flock have learned to remain calm and confident in a supernatural battle for “God’s gay children,” as he calls them. The queer Pentecostals are determined to see their revival succeed, even when it means putting themselves in tense situations. They are activists for religious inclusion. Pastor David says at those who are closeted in those churches will know that an affirming, Pentecostal group exists, perhaps saving a few spiritual and physical lives. All of this spiritual warfare, he says, is just the devil working feverishly because he knows he does not have much longer to build his eternal kingdom.

The way fringe believers flatter themselves with the notion that their revival is likely the final one would sound rather arrogant to heteronormative practitioners who are trying their best to simply hold onto faith in testing times. For years, devotees have anticipated the promise of a “latter rain,” meaning a final down pouring of the Holy Ghost. Accordingly, as Donald Dayton explains in his analysis of Pentecostalism’s roots,

This literal rainfall pattern provides the image by which Pentecostals understand their own relationship to the apostolic church and to the imminent end of the age. The original Pentecost of the New Testament was the ‘early rain’, the outpouring of the Spirit that accompanied the ‘planting’ of the church. Modern Pentecostalism is the ‘latter rain’, the special outpouring of the Spirit that restores the gifts in the last days as part of the preparation for the ‘harvest’, the return of Christ in glory (1987:27).

The waves of glory would cause the world to take notice. Although anticipated, this saturation of the Spirit is supposed to be surprising. Sinners should be in awe when they see the movement

occurring, causing a great number to fall on their faces before God. The latter rain has been explained as the international growth of the supernatural experience, particularly in relation to the African Continent, Central and South America, and parts of Southeast Asia. The faith's successful global growth is likely to "...Pentecostalism's fluidity, its lack of common set of fixed doctrines, creeds, or institutional forms beyond a small cluster of elements" (Martin 2013:117). Considering that much of the revival has been outside of the United States, it has caused American Pentecostals to explain their own anticipated revival away as something that was missed due to moral decay. Nigerian, Guatemalan, and Pilipino Others, for example, are seen as more thirsty for Truth and are able to harness and channel the incredible powers of the Holy Ghost due to an innocent purity. Histories of colonialism have been important in the construction of this narrative due to oppression supposedly molding broken spirits into the types of candidates God is seeking.¹⁰⁷ In the United States, people have had it too good, they say. With the entrapment of materialism in the form of fancy cars, McMansions and a secular consciousness, many Pentecostals understand that they been passed over. In various Pentecostal pulpits across the country, believers are scolded for not being able to seek the things of God anymore. It is said that many idle practitioners are too complacent while the rest of the world experiences the harvest. Even much of the contemporary message for the evangelical audience emphasizes the consumerism that is believed to be problematic for the spiritually minded types. This health and wealth gospel is argued to not feed the soul, rather just those deprived of meaningful status, further depleting any notion of revival.

On the contrary, LGBT Pentecostals in the United States say that revival is happening. Unlike heteronormative believers, the queer believers see an inclusive revival happening both in the United States and beginning to be preached in other parts of the world. According to Sandra

Turnbull, an affirming preacher, straight Pentecostals are invited to the revival but will likely miss out, as one minister writes: “God’s Gay Agenda is one that purposes for the world and the Church to know the uniqueness, calling, and gifts of His gay and lesbian children. If the Church will not receive this agenda that comes from Heaven, it will miss out on one of the greatest moves of God in the earth” (2012:17). The unexpected believers know that their message is a timely one that Jesus has designed for humanity to realize prior to his Second Coming. As such, a large part of their ministry is online. As Aisha Geissinger explains in her analysis of queer Muslims, in an online age, “now, members of sexual and gender minorities who have access to the Internet and the requisite technological skills can put forward their own religious views, interact with others who share them, and thus create virtual communities” (2012:84). The Pentecostals meet promising others virtually, such as a recent recognition of kinship in Thailand.

Pastor Gan of Bangkok joined us via a prerecorded video clip during a recent conference. The jovial thirty-something greeted the meeting and introduced several members of his reconciled Pentecostal church. About fifteen queer believers flashed through the video offering quick hellos and God’s richest blessings upon those who had gathered in St. Louis. The “*gaysians*,” as a few attendees lovingly labeled them, sensed the same Holy Ghost in the American meetings that had been piped in via Skype and YouTube. The Thais have been conjuring up the superpower for two years now. A compact sanctuary on the fifteenth floor of the urban skyline provides a home for their gatherings. Redeemed “*ladyboys*,”¹⁰⁸ a few lesbians, and “*straight acting*” males meet several times each week to “*stir up the gift*” of the Holy Ghost. Pastor Gan reached out to Pastor David after finding the fellowship while searching the Internet one night for inclusive faith. He was inspired to begin his own work in the bustling city after coming out of the closet and resigning from a leadership position in a mainline Pentecostal

mission funded by North American Pentecostals. Attendees in St. Louis periodically raised their arms to praise the Lord and cried when they met their first sister church abroad. Believers gave sacrificially that night to support the work on the other side of the world. Certificates were given to those who pledged to support the church every month. The five, ten, and twenty-five dollar a month commitments became righteous status symbols and performances of piety as believers took them home to be displayed in living rooms, offices, and bedrooms. Several in the fellowship even tried to organize a trip to Thailand in order to meet their brothers and sisters in person. The finances just did not seem to afford such a luxury, but the visionaries know that there will be a great meeting in Heaven soon enough. Faithful Thais shared anticipation of the Great Day when the sky will split apart as the King welcomes all of his children home.

Claiming that queer Pentecostal revival is a last one to sweep the world is a bold proclamation, a rationale that can only be understood in an age of new media that allows humanity to "...reflexively transcend traditional boundaries, andd are now brought nearer 'the action' in the public sphere" (Hoover 2006:284). Displaced believers are scattered throughout various parts of the globe without sufficient central locations. A church in Harrison, Arkansas, or Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, for example, may dismiss a couple of queer subjects over several years but it is quite difficult for those few members to form some sort of fellowship, even if they are interested in reconciling faith and sexuality. Such outcasts will likely be absorbed by secular affirmation. Due to the torment of spiritual displacement, however, some insist upon being hopeful and their search is aided by the fact that "...social media such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and the video-sharing service YouTube have in a short time become part of everyday life for users of the internet across the world" (Mjøs 2012: 27-8). YouTube, in particular, captures the anointing in various meetings and is thus quite important to the LGBT revival. Such

a phenomenon has occurred very recently when “by late 2005, YouTube was the most well-known service among a group of web-based services that hosted videos” (Mjøs 2012:30). The site is free and can be accessed across language barriers. Since the Spirit does not have a language, other the universal tongues that are not necessarily understood anyway, desiring believers can still feel the Spirit even when they do not understand the songs or sermons. Curious believers can also sense the obvious LGBT nature of the services as well, which all confirms for them that sexuality and faith can be synched. As with Pastor Gan in Bangkok, online searches, YouTube, books, webcasts, and other forms of connectivity allow scattered practitioners to reestablish faith in their lives. LGBT charismatics without access to a place of affirming worship, which would be most, are able to sit in their living rooms with Bibles in their laps and enjoy week-long conferences and services that are broadcasted for free by an increasing number of worship centers throughout the world. Through that media platform, the Holy Ghost is able to visit with estranged queer subjects from all over the world, even if linguistic barriers exist. The theological explanations for inclusivity may easily be translated. Although queer Pentecostalism has been an American concept, fellowships of diverse nations and languages are beginning to join in the promotion of inclusive faith to make this dream of global revival possible.

Enlightenment occurs even with just one revolutionary searching for understanding. Witnessing Thai brothers and sisters in Christ unapologetically practicing Pentecostal faith, even without full English language competency, demonstrates Rust Belt influence in the new media age. Contact has also been made in parts of Africa, Central America, and India. As members cope with the financial and audience limitations in northern Indiana, they zealously realize “the harvest truly is great” as it extends beyond their physical location. The Internet allows the revival to easily and

rather quickly repair the social damage that my friends are determined to correct. As the last remnant, the access thus prompts Jesus to return and claim his children.

LGBT Pentecostal revolutionaries know that time is coming to an end and are waiting to escape this temporal existence. Until the “midnight crying”¹⁰⁹ is heard, meaning the pleas of those who have been left behind in the Rapture, they have a great responsibility to share Truth. The obligation is one that constantly burdens their spirits thus they continue reminding themselves that they can do more to reach wandering souls. The LGBT saints realize they have a limited timespan to influence those who have been spiritually displaced by dogmatic regimes, and it is the believers’ duty to correct what mainline churches have been wrong about for too long. Promoting global access to the Holy Ghost is something that must be done with their limited means. Thankfully avenues such as YouTube offer the capability to reach the globe without placing further financial strain on the local church, a collection of passionate believers who often struggle to financially survive due to the complexities of life in a largely postindustrial land. The technology has been perfectly timed for the End Time. Reconciliation is beginning in other parts of the world with leaders such as Pastor Gan sharing the burden in Thailand. Others are reaching out to Pastor David and local church too. They understand that God is beginning to use their multimedia ministry in a mighty way. With LGBT people being the last group needed to experience salvation and have it offered to them, believers in the Rust Belt understand such reconciliation to be a final piece of End Time prophecy, as the last remnant of humanity needing to be reached. Accordingly, the unexpected believers insert their struggle into the history of Pentecostalism and challenge opponents to consider the faith’s egalitarian roots, specifically the ways in which God used “remnants” to produce revival then. Since they understand that time is quickly coming to an end, my informants are unafraid to attend non-affirming churches in order

assert their theology of reconciliation and to reach oppressed LGBT believers who may give up on faith and miss out on eternal bliss. The innovators understand that a revival has been promised to those who have been rejected by heteronormative religious arenas. My informants are beginning to see a rising number of LGBT people fall on their faces before God, as they search for a happiness that they believe can only be had in Christ. The believers will never know the true extent of this revival or of the hearts that have been reconciled and devoted to Christ until they make it to Heaven. Up there, lives they touched will approach the righteous few to say thanks. All of their labor will be worthwhile. Those in the Rust Belt church contend that God prefers to manifest himself through those who have been marginalized by dominant societal forces. Although the majority of heteronormative Pentecostals see the inclusive gospel as a “doctrine of devils,” LGBT practitioners expect heteronormative believers to be quite surprised when they see queer saints dancing alongside them on Heaven’s streets of gold.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have explored the complexity of Oneness Pentecostalism in its queer form. The reconstitution of Pentecostalism is only one fragment of queer, religious innovation presently occurring in the American cultural landscape. Due to the polarization of sexual orientations and homophobic religious regimes, sexually marginal believers and, quite importantly, a few courageous allies have been and are being displaced by the communities of faith that have played such an essential role in their lives. Many ousted, LGBT subjects have adapted to life without the dogmas that once oppressed them; stubborn others, albeit usually unaccepted by the mainstream, have resisted by forming alternative sacred spaces. For a group of LGBT Pentecostals in the Indiana Rust Belt and a network of fellowships they have aligned themselves with, simply transitioning into Christianities that offer affirmation was not enough to fulfill their understanding of expected supernatural expressivity; rather, the believers have chosen to recreate the Pentecostal experience, which includes the classic manifestations of speaking in tongues, tongues interpretation, laying on of hands, dancing, demonic deliverance, prophecy, and other charismatic practices that could not be found in the existing churches that would include them. Heterodominant Pentecostals, most of whom would not dare affiliate themselves with Spirit and Truth Ministries, immediately flagged the formation of queer Pentecostalism as prophetic evidence that they are living in the Last Days; contrarily, for my informants, the existence of inclusive Pentecostal faith now means that all of humanity has been offered Holy Ghost salvation, which will allow for the Second Coming to take place. The fringe believers understand the oppression and liberation of LGBT people to be a last remnant and final equalization to occur prior to when they will be raptured. Since it is understood that all humanity must have access to the gospel prior to Christ's return and Pentecostalism has already been

introduced to the rest of the world vis-à-vis heteronormative initiatives, the reconciliation of sexuality and Pentecostalism must now be offered to those who have been displaced.

Fortunately, with the assistance of YouTube and other globally accessible media outlets, prophets in the Rust Belt speculate that their goal to reconcile “God’s gay children” will be achieved rather quickly, thus prompting Gabriel to blow his trumpet.

As the charismatic subjects strive for purity in bodies that have been deemed unsuitable to house the Holy Ghost and invade a neoconservative, heteronormative religious regime, they are dangerous and “out of place” (Douglas 1966). According to this dominant vision, queer Pentecostals should not be able to conjure up the Holy Ghost in order to heal their bodies. Even according to secular, hegemonic expectations of queer people, LGBT people are not supposed to be speaking in tongues. The unexpected piety makes them difficult to categorize. Due to their liminal state, my informants cannot easily partake in much of queer America, and, at the same, they are essentially barred from the mainstream churches they identify with most. Queer Pentecostals are negotiating and blending pure and impure as they attempt to reinvent the global faith and normalize their existence at a plethora of intersections.

Being raised in a non-affirming, Pentecostal setting as a gay man, such oppressive faith led me to study religion from an anthropological perspective. Although I was quite struck with the innovative Pentecostalism that I initially observed via YouTube, I was unsure that I could write fairly about the queering of such a global faith in the American social landscape, because it would be too difficult to separate my own prejudices and, simultaneously, negotiate any remaining emotional connectivity. In this process, I learned that my familiarity and vulnerability were assets to building rapport with the community. While, at times, I resented my informants’ persistence and wanted to dismiss their supernatural contact and dogma as only internalized

homophobia, I eventually began to appreciate their rebellious spirits as they combated inequality where it starts, from the pulpit, or the “sacred desk,” as my friends refer to it. Several analyses have been written on the complexities of non-denominational and, therefore, less conservative queer communities; however, my research provides original insight into one vein of unapologetic, neoconservative faith emerging in American society, as it is the first anthropological account to explore queer Pentecostalism among predominately white and working-class practitioners in the United States.

As all research projects have limitations and are products of their established perimeters, should this exploration be expounded upon, it would be important to interrogate the usual structure of male-dominated leadership and any potential resistance among similar predominantly-lesbian congregations of faith. While most affirming Pentecostal fellowships, such as the primary site of this analysis, are male led, there is a great need to simultaneously understand the ways in which determined lesbian women, who without significant biblical representation, attempt to construct pious lives.

As I have articulated in this dissertation, the casting of the reconciliation movement as a last piece of biblical prophecy helps to offset the tremendous feelings of loss and disruption that pharisaical judgment has caused in my informants’ lives. Queer Pentecostals in the Rust Belt and their wider fellowship maintain an understanding that the exilement of LGBT subjects from heterodominant, Pentecostal churches has been and continues to be a manifestation of spiritual warfare in the Last Days and, ultimately, Satanic trickery to rob Heaven of a queer presence.

Embattled with religious homophobia and a distaste for the moral highs of neoconservative faith in the larger queer community, the LGBT Pentecostals negotiate identity dissonance through an innovative pious performance in order to elicit sympathy from the church

world and a cautious queer belonging in order to “save” their “lost family.” The message of neoconservative reconciliation of faith and sexuality, in particularly of a Pentecostal form, is not a popular message, as many in the gay community have moved beyond such faith. My friends sense a frustration for a revival that they expect to happen, because it is not happening as fast as they would like. While the believers sense an alliance with other LGBT peoples, the righteous few also adhere to the notion of being “set apart,” meaning being in “the world but not of it.”

The ways in which my informants have utilized, internalized, and rearticulated mainstream Christianity’s homophobia illustrates the efficacy of such dogma at this pivotal moment in our nation. However, it would be unfair to simply assert that the ethnographic particulars I engage are only a product of rearticulated oppression. Queer, religious creativity is a messier reality. I prefer to challenge the notion of unilineal queer progress. Troubling for this unilineal project are perhaps the ways in which queered peoples do not necessary lay faith aside upon being told of their unworthiness, but, rather, often latch onto neoconservative religiosities as a means to offset uncertainty. The agency of queer people to reconstitute faith in their lives should not simply be viewed as the reticulation of heterosexual dogma. Rather, it is the transformation and reconfiguration of existing symbols and structures that have been reappropriated for “unfit” bodies. As “queer people have always taken dominant systems and structures of meaning and used it for our own purposes... we’ve expressed our gendered and sexual selves as drag queens, butch and femme lesbians, tranny boys and girls, leather daddies, bears, and twink...[and] when institutional religions would not take us in, we created our own religions” (Lindsay 2011:224-5). Although much of it may appear as simply mimicry, doing so only casts pious queer people as victims of institutions that they themselves have defined as important. As “...identity is social, unstable, continually in process, and to some extent, is both

necessary and impossible,” my informants’ multilayered and dissonant identities are evidence of the continued fragmentation of queer equality and taken-for-granted allegiances in our landscape (Sullivan 2003:149). The narrative at hand also challenges those interested in equality and syncretism to reconsider ‘the Church,’ as it is portrayed.

Whilst queer spiritualities can be described as ‘spiritualities of life,’ they can also be inextricably linked to public religiosity and ‘dominant religions. This finding has significant implications for activism; it is unhelpful perhaps to keep shouting that ‘the Church’ is homophobic or biphobic and transphobic...that can essentialise ‘the Church,’ and unhelpfully alienates religious communities and LGBTQI people within them” (Browne 2010:237).

When LGBT Pentecostals sense more of an alliance with heterodominant practitioners than with the leathery men parading their beautiful bodies, we get a visual of the complexity of equality and diverging views on what it means to be equal and equal to whom, particularly given the race, class, ethnic, gender, and religious complexities of such a notion. Being liberated in Boystown is not necessary the same as liberation in a nearby rusty town. It is important to consider the resistance and realignment of allegiances that a path toward equality produces. That which liberates in one setting may not free another. Perhaps such queer, pious presence is the embodiment of Paul Robinson’s words: “gay conservatism should be thought of as a luxury that comes with success” (Robinson 2005:5). This ethnographic evidence is indicative of the continued fragmentation of queer identities, ideologies, and politics, particularly as marriage equality is achieved and gays and lesbians are no longer politically monopolized. This project should challenge the field of queer and gender studies to consider the ways in which queer lives intersect and overlap in their struggle for equality and, in this case, achieve religious impartiality.

When I left the field, the church was experiencing a growth spurt. New souls were coming into the fold, including “lost” LGBT and straight people alike. The congregation was especially proud of the last converts, ones they had won over to the notion of equal access to the

Holy Ghost, and not only supported their cause but, furthermore, labored to make supernatural connect with them. Continued and increasing communication with queer Pentecostals in other parts of the world built greater anticipation for their revival. Without oppression, liberation is not necessary. However, when oppression occurs, it often only produces a more pronounced and salient liberation. On one of my last nights in the field, Pastor David gave a particularly fiery sermon about God's movement among his LGBT offspring. Dressed in his high-class clergy shirt, he paced the platform and excitedly told his saints in a loud and masculine tone, "Church, the best is yet to come!"

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Notes

¹ Spirit and Truth Ministries is a pseudonym I use in reference to the congregation I conducted fieldwork among. I have used fictive names for the church, the pastors, and the members of the congregation in order to protect their identities. I have also blended certain data in order to further protect the identities of my informants.

² I have alternated between End of Days, End Time, End Times, Last Days, and Latter Days throughout this text in reference to the eschatological understandings among evangelicals. These references all refer to the same imagining. This expected period in time is a contested trajectory but one that is said to involve saved individuals leaving Earth, potential persecution of saved persons prior to their departure, catastrophic events when the Earth is destroyed, and a realization among those left behind that Christians were right all along. I have chosen to capitalize these terms as those who expect this period in time refer to it in a proper form, as if it were like the Renaissance. For those who expect a period of tribulation, or persecution, there is a general tendency toward survivalism, as they understand they will not be able to buy or sell without taking “the mark.” The mark is said to be a futuristic, but not far off, technological advancement that will require subjects to have a chip implanted in their forehead or hand. Since believers understand that the Book of Revelation states that those who take the chip will not be able to make it into Heaven, those who expect to be present during the time in which “the mark” is implemented are planning to survive without it. It is not uncommon for such individuals to store away freeze-dried food and, increasingly, guns, for example, in preparation for a subsistence lifestyle through this period. My informants do not necessarily prepare in such ways. There seems to be less fear among my friends regarding the End Time, which is likely due their recognition that much of it is misguided, specifically realizing that their own existence has been manipulated as part of End Time fear.

³ Marketing the notion of family values became popular in the 1980s among conservative Christians and became part of a political platform. Televangelists, such as Jerry Falwell, played a critical in its conception. Among issues such as abortion and insistent feminists, these neoconservative Christians imagined gays and lesbians to be primary contributors to what they called “moral decay.”

⁴ “Race to the bottom” is a socio-economic term that refers to competition between countries and geographical areas. It is the idea that profit-driven enterprises move about in order to find the cheapest leader and under conditions that do not hold them accountable for the human and environmental costs.

⁵ By moral panic, I mean that LGBT equality, specifically the contest between the Religious Right and affirming others, has been a moment to negotiate morality. Much of it has been fear-based and a sort of panic, particularly on the side of those who disapprove of queer equality.

⁶ Emerging out of gay/lesbian and women’s studies, the use of “queer” started to become popular in academic discourse during the 1990s, particularly with works by Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. “Queer” has been utilized as a means of resistance to oppressive categories and to problematize heterosexuality. The term continues to be debated.

⁷ Alan Chambers resigned from Exodus Ministry in 2013 and denounced reparative therapy as a cure for homosexuality.

⁸ I have utilized several sources that focus specifically on African American Pentecostal churches. I have done so not in order to conflate what are mostly segregated religious

experiences but in order to acknowledge and include the similar experiences for African American and white queer subjects. I have also incorporated the research as a means to recognize the roots of the Pentecostal movement as a joint effort that initially rejected racial divisions. In my experiences, and as one who spent much of my early life in a 50/50 African American and white Pentecostal church, there is a great deal of longing on both sides for unity. The problem, however, is the remaining racism on both sides and the reality that both groups have developed a multitude of sophisticated and powerful organizations that will probably not be willing to compromise their power anytime soon. I have also included the research to make sense of the ways in which queer Pentecostals desire a return to the origins of Pentecostalism that involved an equalization of difference. As the emergence of the faith in the early 1900s challenged gender, class, age, and class, the LGBT Pentecostals I work with contend that the marginalization of queer people can be overcome if heteronormative believers would return to their roots and utilize the mechanics of the Holy Ghost as the great equalizer.

⁹ Oneness Pentecostals, in accordance with their view that the Trinity does not exist and all three functions are products of Jesus, often refer to “The Name” instead of saying “Jesus.”

¹⁰ The Second Coming refers to Jesus returning to Earth in order to gather the believers and take them to Heaven for eternity. It is called the Second Coming, as opposed to the first, because it is said that Jesus’ time on Earth was the first time he was physically among humanity.

¹¹ James 5:16-18 states, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” The practice of confessing exists among believers as a means to strengthen the body of believers. While, in practice, it can be helpful, doing so is often known to cause people to gossip about the confessions.

¹² Remaining watchful is a theme among neoconservative evangelicals involving watching for a variety of signs, including but not limited to End Time prophetic evidence and spiritual decay within society and church body.

¹³ Leviticus 18:22 KJV is a favored passage among non-affirming believers. It states, “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination.” My informants understand the passage as dated, Old Testament guidelines that instructed individuals to not waste their seed in order to grow the population.

¹⁴ Rapture is the idea that the angel Gabriel will blow a trumpet one day and cause believers to rise to meet Jesus in the air and spend eternity in heaven.

¹⁵ The term “contingent belonging/s” has been utilized in a few veins of academic discourse to reference various marginalizations. Most commonly, the term was used in a paper called “Chronic Threat and Contingent Belonging: Protective Benefits of Values Affirmation on Identity Development” by Geoffrey Cohen, Julio Garcia, Jonathan Cook, and Valerie Purdie-Vaughns. The usage of the term in this paper is in reference to the academic performance of African American youth in high school settings. In popular queer studies discourse, the term was used to name a queer studies conference at the University of Minnesota. I have used, in part, the definition that the organizers of the conference have penned to understand contingent belonging in the queer context.

¹⁶ I use a capital C in “Church” to reference a broader body of believers rather than a particular congregation.

¹⁷ “Falling out in the Spirit,” or being “slain in the Spirit,” is a common experience among Pentecostals. It usually occurs when a minister and congregants pray for an individual. The

individual is said to be overwhelmed by the Spirit inasmuch that they can no longer stand. Some practitioners, including several of my informants, feel that falling out in the Spirit has too often been attributed to charismatic televangelists such as Benny Hinn. When Hinn prays for his subjects, they usually fall on the floor. He quite often will force them onto the floor as a sign of submitting to the power of the Spirit. Those such as Pastor David maintain a certain discomfort regarding this spiritual manifestation, because he wants to be sure that nothing be faked. He does not believe that it is wrong to fall out in the Spirit but does not believe it is necessary.

¹⁸ Neo-Nazi

¹⁹ As is popular among evangelical groups, my informants frequently employ the analogy of a congregation being a flock and the pastor the shepherd. This metanarrative comes from the parable in the Bible about the shepherd who left his flock to go after one lost sheep.

²⁰ I am referring here to alcohol. I have heard several preachers within Pentecostalism refer to alcohol as “the devil’s mouthwash.”

²¹ Most Pentecostal meetings are not complete without a Hammond. The desired style often resembles what one would hear in jazz and soul music. Many white Pentecostals envy the incredible talent of Hammond players in African American churches and often attempt to mimic the “licks” that can be heard on such gospel recordings. Typically a pastor’s wife will play the organ or piano. When a woman marries a preacher, she often feels that she should learn to play the organ or piano if she does not already know how to play the instruments. As such, piano and organ roles are usually occupied by what would be called effeminate and, therefore, suspect men and heterosexual women.

²² Achievements in the spirit world are often articulated in terms of dimensions and levels. To experience a new ecstatic high is to experience a different dimension of existence.

²³ “Holy rollers” was applied to early Pentecostals due to the ways in which ecstatic believers would fall onto the floor and sometimes roll while in the Spirit. I have never seen someone roll on the floor while in church. However, the term is still a popular one. Pentecostals have even written songs that refer to themselves as holy rollers. They do so in a humorous but proud way.

²⁴ The title of the song is “Ticket to Paradise.” The song was written by Scotter Simmons in 1987 and made popular by The Cathedrals, an all-male gospel quartet. This analogy is frequently used in evangelical rhetoric and has also been popular in secular music, such as in “Leaving on a Jet Airplane,” written by John Denver in 1966.

²⁵ Matthew 13:49-50 KJV “So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them in the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

²⁶ The believers see themselves as having been released from Old Testament views of not wasting seed, which includes homosexuality. As such, they say that God sees them as clean. They connect their positionality to Acts 10:15 when God was revealing to a disciple that it was okay to consume certain meats. “The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ ”

²⁷ Christian groups often refer to Matthew 18:20 when attendance is low in a particular service. Doing so serves as a means to reassure them that the meeting is not a waste and that God will still be there. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

²⁸ Believers often reflect on their church growth and celebrate what God has done for them considering their small beginnings in the basement of the pastors’ home. “For who hath despised

the day of small things? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” Zechariah 4:10 KJV

²⁹ “Laying on of hands” occurs at times such as when an individual is attempting to be filled with the Holy Ghost, when someone needs a healing, when a believer needs to be refreshed in the Spirit, and for other concerns. It typically involves the use of virgin olive oil and the minister, and potentially others, dabbing their finger in the oil and then anointing the one in need on the forehead. Often laying on of hands will involve placing hands on certain parts of the body that need healing, such as a sprained ankle. Typically someone of the same sex will anoint the troubled part of the body. Olive oil is used because of its historical significance in the Bible days. There is a tourist industry of importing and selling olive oil that is marketing as being harvested in the Holy Land. This adds a special value to the product for many believers. Often those who visit the Holy Land will bring back a bottle for the church to use. However, if olive oil is not available, believers will utilize any sort of oil, such as vegetable oil, when spontaneous prayer is needed.

³⁰ Pastor David has several grandkids, while Pastor Michael does not have any biological offspring. The two are quite proud of David’s lineage, and Michael calls them his own.

³¹ Tammy Faye LaValley Bakker Messner (1942-2007) was a sort of celebrity among evangelicals. Many liked her and others thought she was a terrible image for the Church. Her downfall in popularity came during her marriage to Jim Bakker and his alleged misuse of funds at The PTL Club (1976-1987). Tammy Faye, having experienced what it felt like to be ousted by judgment, befriended gays and lesbians. Although she never came out in support of marriage equality, she was loved by many gays and lesbians simply because she reached out to them, a segment of the population that most of the church world separated themselves from and demonized.

³² “The house of the Lord” is a term that believers use for the church.

³³ “Backslidden” is a term that believers use to refer to those who once had a relationship with Jesus but have since been out of spiritual touch. The term, backslide, may also be used as a verb.

³⁴ Referring to other LGBT people as “family” has been around for quite some time in the LGBT community. This likely comes from the fact that many LGBT individuals are rejected by their own families and have created a world of fictive kin among other marginal subjects. The 1979 song “We Are Family” by Sister Sledge has been popular among gays and lesbians, in particular, for this reason. My informants even changed lyrics to the song a bit and sang it during a conference to not only refer to Christian family relationships but also the queer idea of family. The new lyrics concerned how they become family by being baptized in Jesus Name and being filled with the Holy Ghost. It had a double meaning.

³⁵ 2 Timothy 4:2 KJV “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: And they shall turn away from their ears from the truth, and shall be turned into fables.” This passage is used by both non-affirming and affirming believers as a means to guard against seductive theology that makes their Christian lifestyles easier. The verse is typically used to further demonize groups that accept LGBT people into their congregations. However, my informants reappropriate the passage in their own way.

³⁶ Philippians 2:15 KJV “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.” This passage is utilized to refer to the assumed degenerative nature of human existence.

³⁷ Matthew 7:13-14 KJV “Enter in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” This passage is a favorite among Pentecostals and serves as a means to ingrain the idea that salvation is uncertain and one may be tempted into a different direction at any moment.

³⁸ Romans 1:26-7 KJV is a favorite passage to condemn LGBT people. It states, “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another: men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.”

³⁹ Plenty of gay, bisexual, and “heterosexual” men who have sex with men individuals refer to themselves as “straight-acting.” This may mean that they watch sports, are not “limp-wristed,” wear ball caps, have Skoal rings (chewing tobacco), in their blue jeans, or they simply attempt to or naturally pass as heterosexual, similar to lipstick lesbians. Often such men cling to their own kind and distance themselves from overtly gay men, a form of internalized homophobia. They are often “tops” and do not like to, or refuse to, “bottom,” out of fear of being feminized.

⁴⁰ Tongues are often referred to as the Heavenly language, as it is believed that only God and the angels know what the tongues mean.

⁴¹ The Pool of Bethesda narrative concerns a pool of water in Jerusalem that would occasionally be stirred by God. The narrative states that the first sick person to enter the water upon the stirring would be healed.

⁴² “Getting fed” is used by my informants to refer to being spiritually charged when in fellowship with other believers. The analogy likens the religious meetings as feeding the soul and allowing it to exist in “the world” among the unrighteous.

⁴³ I am referring to Durkheim’s notion of the collective energy felt in certain group settings. In the case of the church, it is a self-fulfilling evidence that truth is had. It is a sense confidence that anything is possible in the spirit realm.

⁴⁴ Prayer lines have fallen out of popularity among many Pentecostal fellowships. These events were wildly popular in the days of tent revivals. The prayer line would typically occur at the end of a sermon or during a climatic moment during the music. The conduit asks those who need a spiritual blessing to line up, usually down the center aisle. A few ministers then lay hands on the first person in line and then they are moved to the side. The preachers continue praying for each individual until everyone in the line has been through it. The intensity builds as participants are often praying for the person in front of them. Prayer lines are typically quite ecstatic and result in falling out in the Spirit, speaking in tongues, crying, dancing, and other outward signs of tapping into a spiritual realm.

⁴⁵ “Step of faith” is often referred to the initial step that a believer makes as they step into the aisle and head toward the altar for a spiritual blessing. However, believers also refer to it when taking certain risks, such as launching a business, and trust God to protect them.

⁴⁶ Mark 16:17-18 KJV “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

These are referred to as the believers' powers that are given upon being filled with the Holy Ghost. While my friends utilize most of these signs, they do not go as far as to handle snakes. Snake handlers exist primarily in Appalachia and are a small fragment of Pentecostals. Serpent handlers are usually thought of as a cult by most Pentecostals and are accused of testing God. I once made the mistake of giving my opinion about snake handlers in a dinner conversation with the pastors. I told them I had spent some time with snake handlers and that they were wonderful people. I went too far, however, when I said I did not see why serpent handling could not be considered "anointed" just as other things that Pentecostals do. This statement did not settle well, and they lovingly looked at me like I was crazy. What I meant by my statement is that if believers were to read the text literally then it seemed rational according to such a perspective.

⁴⁷ "Sugar daddies" are those who provide an above average lifestyle for their often younger and attractive spouses known as "sugar babies." The younger may or may not be attracted and "in love" with the older. Often the arrangements are based on class as middle and upper class men or women are able to exploit the inequality between the two.

⁴⁸ Pentecostals who enjoy the dancing, up-beat music, and ecstasy of the spirit world contend that these are sacred manifestations but also exist in perverted, secular forms. They often cite the King of Rock and Roll as evidence. Elvis was raised among Pentecostals in Mississippi. According to Oneness Pentecostals, he was even baptized in Jesus Name. Despite singing plenty of Gospel songs during his music career, he was met with disapproval by Pentecostals. They understood that he had perverted the musical gifts he was given by God. Elvis had a difficult time dealing with such harsh judgment.

⁴⁹ I Corinthians 14:40 KJV "Let all things be done decently and in order." Managing the spontaneity of Holy Ghost interactions within a congregation can, at times, be difficult. This passage is cited to understand that there is believers should be intuitive and tactful in their outbursts.

⁵⁰ Being prayed up means that the believer is maintaining a healthy prayer life, which includes frequently praying until they begin to speak in tongues.

⁵¹ Similarly, to pray through is to pray until the believer begins to speak in tongues under the direction of the Spirit.

⁵² "Breaking through" is when believers tap into the ecstatic spiritual dimension and feel God's presence among them.

⁵³ It is said that one gets the Holy Ghost when they first speak in other tongues. To get the Holy Ghost is a primary rite of passage for believers, and the announcement that someone got the Holy Ghost in a particular meeting is articulated with elation.

⁵⁴ There is a sort of dynastic element to Pentecostal norms. I once brought a gay friend with me to the field. He was a fourth generation Pentecostal. Pastor David was quite impressed with such a family history. In a sense the Pentecostal multigenerational connections operate as an alternative class system.

⁵⁵ Spirit and Truth Ministries has ministered to those with HIV and AIDS ever since the ministry's conception. Several years ago, the church used to operate a home for those who were suffering from AIDS and did not have a place to live. The believers see this epidemic, in part, as a result of a homophobic society that has ignored the health needs of LGBT people. HIV-positive individuals and those suffering from AIDS find an affirming religious home at Spirit and Truth. Some of these individuals are straight but have been shunned from their home churches simply because of their sickness. They find an alliance with my informants.

⁵⁶ I John 4 “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” According to heteronormative believers, Pastors David and Michael would fall into the category of false prophets.

⁵⁷ Ephesians 4:14 KJV “The we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” Affirming Pentecostalism would be cited by heterodominant practitioners as an example of a demonic theological force that tempts those who are not careful.

⁵⁸ 2 Timothy 3:1-5 “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” These words are often used to condemn LGBT people, especially the debatable reference to men loving themselves and being without natural affection. However, my informants have debunked this End Time evidence as not referring to LGBT people, but they see certain truths within this passage.

⁵⁹ Galatians 5:24 KJV “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” Among evangelicals the notion of crucifying the flesh is discussed in terms of making an effort to do one’s Christian duties. For example, spending a few minutes in prayer at night rather than watching TV would be referred to as crucifying the flesh.

⁶⁰ 2 Corinthians 6:17 KJV Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

⁶¹ Matthew 6:24 KJV No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

⁶² Grindr is a smartphone application for men. It is one of a few that allows gay, bisexual, and curious men to post their picture and info such as age, height, weight, and race into their profile. The popularity of this application is primarily due to the fact that it has the option for GPS location. Opening the application in Boystown, for example, will provide cruising access to countless guys within a few or several hundred feet of one another. It is especially useful for introverts who prefer a virtual introduction.

⁶³ Promise ring, pre-engagement ring, and purity ring are nearly synonymous terms for rings worn predominantly by young females to symbolize a commitment to virginity until marriage. Such rings are also employed as symbolic material for a non-sexual but committed relationship prior to being engaged.

⁶⁴ Gay.com and adam4adam.com are gay dating websites similar to match.com for heterosexuals.

⁶⁵ Checking-in on Facebook, a social media site, is a feature that allows users to specify their location, as in a restaurant or bar, and create a status and/or share pictures of the activity.

⁶⁶ Covenant marriages are a legally recognized union in which heterosexual couples agree to stricter ground for divorce and also agree to counseling prior to marriage. Mike Huckabee has enthusiastically touted this concept for several years, and, as such, has been a public face for the movement. Covenant marriages came into popularity in the late 1990s and 2000s. Proponents contend that divorce statistics are way too high and have responded by promoting a more committed form of marriage.

⁶⁷ “Lipstick lesbian” is a term given to women who are considered to be quite feminine and able to pass as heterosexual in society, if desired. Often such women embrace the label should they fit the criteria.

⁶⁸ *Charisma* is an End Time sort of publication featuring articles considering prophetic evidence of the Second Coming. The reports typically center on Israel, with Jerusalem being the center of attention.

⁶⁹ Ephesians 6:11 KJV

⁷⁰ “Show up and show out” is a general expression that refers to the Holy Ghost moving among a congregation. The Spirit shows up when believers conjure it up and it shows out when the Spirit moves through the bodies gathered, resulting in a variety of manifestations.

⁷¹ 1 John 2:16 “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.” My friends referred to the lust of the flesh when negotiating Byron’s desire to transition. This idea is anything that distracts from one’s walk with God. In Byron’s case, in particular, the notion the flesh’s lust was quite suiting considering the imagining of changing body parts.

⁷² Hebrews 12:14 KJV “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” Those who propose strict standards of dress often refer to this passage in order to claim that one should dress appropriately in order to see Heaven.

⁷³ Mainline Oneness Pentecostal churches typically refer to their guidelines for dress as “standards” and “holiness.” The rules vary from one congregation to the next, particularly among independent churches away from the United Pentecostal Church International and Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ fellowships. For example, most UPC churches would not approve of makeup. However, a church in Fort Smith, Arkansas, allegedly allows females to wear mineral-based makeup, as it is said to be more natural. Some churches require members to wear sleeves below the elbows, while others do not have rules regarding sleeve length. Certain congregations require women to wear pantyhose, especially when on the platform, while others contend that such a rule is a bit overzealous. Rules for men are more standardized. Most generally require males to not wear shorts, tank tops, and to maintain short hair. These rules are easier to uphold, while women bear the brunt of a marked existence. Hair is a primary site to perform holiness for women, with some churches not allowing women to even trim their hair. Long hair is referred to as a woman’s “glory.” This view is taken from 1 Corinthians 11:14-15: “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.” For women, the scripture ordering them to not put on anything that pertains to a man, Deuteronomy 22:5, results in a limited selection of clothing, as all pants and shorts are off limits. Women’s liberation is often cited as the reason for women allegedly putting on men’s clothing. Queer influence is also implicated in what is referred to as a confusion of the two genders. My friends struggle to negotiate their own dress “standards” coming out of such dogma. Therefore, they emphasize a general agenda for modesty but also maintain nostalgia for their heritage, even in a sort of humorous way. Doing so would probably involve an entire chapter, but I should mention that Pastor David dressed in Pentecostal drag as an elderly, woman preacher while I was in the field. The performance was part of comedy skit.

⁷⁴ The idea of looking like the world fuels much of the dress convictions for heteronormative Pentecostals and has been, to an extent, carried over into the queer version of the faith. Looking like the world involves engaging in sinful behavior and appearance. This could involve tanning

in skimpy swimwear on the beach, showing too much cleavage, a man taking off his shirt, and a number of other behaviors. My friends have queered this notion to make it palatable for the LGBT community and, rather than rigid rules, emphasizes a general common-sense modesty. My informants would not deem it appropriate for men to march shirtless in a pride parade or a female to wear a halter-top in public, for example. However, they have broadened this notion to emphasize one's interactions as well, such as acting with kindness, love, and other godly manifestations. Doing so distracts from the glaring disparities between queer and heterosexual Pentecostals.

⁷⁵ Galatians 3:28 KJV "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: For ye are all one in Christ Jesus." This passage is one the primary verses that offers my friends affirmation. It is one of their favorites, as it equalizes humanity and offsets culture-bound marginalization.

⁷⁶ Samantha's voice is on the most distinctive voices that I heard while in the field. She has never traveled far from Northwest Indiana and maintains a sort of undefiled drawl.

⁷⁷ This is one of the Ten Commandments believers record to memory early in their spiritual relationships.

⁷⁸ General Educational Development

⁷⁹ Tween refers to minors who are not yet teenagers but are in transition from childhood to teenhood. Tween years are the years from age 10 through 12.

⁸⁰ As I discuss in chapter six, my informants often consider attacks on LGBT people to be a form of persecution. The idea of persecution is a widespread expectation among Pentecostals that typically imagines devout Christians being persecuted by godless people in the End of Days. What is interesting here is that persecution among heterodominant groups typically thinks of being persecuted, in part, by having homosexuality "shoved down their throats" by secularists. My friends, however, have queered this notion to say that persecution may, in reality, be LGBT people being hated, bullied, and even killed by homophobes who are often reared in non-affirming religious establishments.

⁸¹ Samantha and her family are quite working-class and struggle to make ends meet.

⁸² A soul being in the balance is an expression used to stress one's duty to evangelize and also to emphasize the ambiguous nature of the souls that believers are expected to reach.

⁸³ This analogy relates to the shepherd and sheep parable in the Bible.

⁸⁴ "Praying on it" means that a believer takes the issue to God in prayer. When approached with a particular decision, practitioners often say that they will pray on it to reach a decision.

⁸⁵ Having blood on one's hands means that they are held responsible should they cause a believer to fall from grace and lose their salvation, since salvation is not a fixed state for Pentecostals.

⁸⁶ 1 Peter 1:16 "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

⁸⁷ Although the conviction is apparently true, the seven-curl story is more a legend among Oneness Pentecostals to remind themselves that rules should not get out of hand.

⁸⁸ It is not uncommon for heterodominant ministers to preach against men wearing pink, to the point of saying that it causes men of the church to look like queers, homos, or, even, faggots.

⁸⁹ The Religious Right or Christian Right refers to the emergence and present existence of religious-based political platform. It came into fruition in the late 1970s. Televangelism, specifically movements such as Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, played a pivotal role in its development, as well as homophobia being a primary organizing principle.

⁹⁰ Rules against the sexes swimming together are quite common among heteronormative Pentecostals. Such Pentecostals usually do not swim in swimsuits, anyway, but take extra precaution to not engage in the sensual environment that causes lust of the flesh.

⁹¹ I am referring here to Secretary of State and First Lady Hillary Clinton's iconic pant-suits. She has quite the collection.

⁹² Usually on Sunday nights, the pastors and a church member or two would gather in the pastors' basement to watch services broadcasted by the Pentecostals of Alexandria, a heteronormative megachurch in Louisiana. Those who gathered would "have church" with those appearing on the television. There was a sense of longing among the displaced, queer believers who were raised in such environments.

⁹³ "Fem" is much like being a "lipstick lesbian," meaning the individual maintains a normative gender expression despite their same-sex attraction. Sometimes such individuals are resented for "passing" in society as heterosexual, simply because of the assumptions that are made about them.

⁹⁴ A "plaid-shirt dyke" is a "butch" lesbian who embraces what others refer to as her masculine mannerisms. Often she may be an outdoorsy type who drives a truck or motorcycle, enjoys hiking and camping, or just simply exists as a "butch." These women are often working-class "rednecks" who retain much of their origins but resent homophobic impositions. There were several of these women among the fellowship I conducted fieldwork. They usually did not dress up for church, but, rather, wore everyday clothing. Such women were quite approachable and down-to-earth, rational, and desired a simplistic existence. A rather flamboyant and male guest musician referred to these women from the platform while I was in the field. He said he enjoyed visiting gay churches, because they were the only type of churches in which men insisted upon wearing nicer shoes than many of the women.

⁹⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4:17 KJV "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

⁹⁶ The title of the song is "It's not form, it's not fashion." The song was written by Carroll McGruder and first recorded by the McGruders in 1989. Carroll McGruder is Pentecostal preacher and singer/songwriter.

⁹⁷ Acts 2:15-18 KJV "For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." Acts chapter two is an important theological to rationalize the Pentecostal experience. It is believed to encapsulate the strangeness of the ecstatic experience.

⁹⁸ On Monday, January 24th, 2014, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda signed into law an antigay bill that may result in life-long imprisonment for LGBT individuals. The bill was greatly contested by LGBT individuals and allies in Uganda and by many other nations. The bill originally included the death penalty. There is much criticism of American evangelical preachers who have engaged in anti-gay seminars in Uganda that warned Ugandans that gay people wanted to high-jack their country and were after their children. *God Loves Uganda* is a recent film that interrogates the role that American evangelicals have played in further enhancing homophobia. The few impassioned evangelical leaders who spoke in Uganda about the threat of homosexuality were likely imposing their own sense of failure to control homosexuality in the

United States and were eager to participate in this dialogue. This is same rhetoric that Jerry Falwell and others used decades ago but now in a more globalized form.

⁹⁹ Isaiah 5:20 KJV “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and the light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” Homophobic believers often refer to this passage in order to argue that rising marriage equality and other advancements for the LGBT community as being society’s way of calling evil good.

¹⁰⁰ There was a rise of bullying that swept the media while I was in the field. As a result, there was quite a bit of discussion happening among my informants and in society, in general, to address schools could prevent LGBT and marginal others from being bullied. As I explain in chapter six, the rise of bullying and awareness of it has been interpreted as part of a form of persecution among my informants.

¹⁰¹ The locusts that queer Pentecostals imagine are in the form of homophobic heterosexual and the wider homophobic church world.

¹⁰² The notion of a latter rain implies that this is the second time in history that God has poured out his Spirit, the Holy Ghost, on humanity, with the first being on the biblical day of Pentecost. It is expected that the intensity of the latter rain will continue to build until the Second Coming, meaning a growing number of souls will be added to the Kingdom.

¹⁰³ P.U.S.H. was a popular expression among heteronormative revival movements in the past twenty years or so. The acronym has been carried over into the queer environment in order to produce revival.

¹⁰⁴ “Gaydar” is a popular term that references an LGBT person’s ability to know if someone else is LGBT. The term is particularly used among gay men. Often one knows through eye contact or lack thereof. There is a certain gazing in another’s eyes or curiosity that is like exchanged outing.

¹⁰⁵ Pentecostalism maintains its own fashion norms, trends, and an art to clothing that sets believers apart. The fashion is often incredibly competitive, especially felt during youth crusades, for example. For the young, it often involves testing the limits of what is acceptable in order to negotiate relevant yet timely modesty. Expensive clothing with modern labels is not excluded within this production.

¹⁰⁶ Acts 9:18 KJV “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.” The analogy of scales being removed from one’s eyes references one’s human and natural blindness without supernatural intervention. Believers pray that unbelievers will have scales removed from their eyes in order for Truth to be revealed to them. Also, believers pray for their own bodies in order to receive a clear, supernatural vision.

¹⁰⁷ The LGBT believers also maintain a mission drive in order to introduce their theology to the rest of the world. A wooden plaque in the shape of the African continent is situated on a wall in the back of the church. Members give sacrificially each month and at other times in order to support affirming missionization.

¹⁰⁸ Kathoey, better known as ladyboy in English, is a Thai term for a transgender women or effeminate gay male.

¹⁰⁹ The notion of midnight crying comes from a popular southern gospel song, “The Midnight Cry.” The song was written by Greg and Chuck Day in 1986. The lyrics refer to the weeping believers imagine will occur when a great number of people do not make it in the Rapture.

April 21, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joshua Eugene Noah
JoAnn D'Alisera

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: PROJECT MODIFICATION

IRB Protocol #: 11-03-526

Protocol Title: *The Last Remnant: Pentacostal Salvation, Desire, and Queering the Holy Ghost Experience in the Rust Belt*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 04/21/2014 Expiration Date: 03/17/2015

Your request to modify the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. **This protocol is currently approved for 150 total participants.** If you wish to make any further modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

Please note that this approval does not extend the Approved Project Period. Should you wish to extend your project beyond the current expiration date, you must submit a request for continuation using the UAF IRB form "Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects." The request should be sent to the IRB Coordinator, 210 Administration.

For protocols requiring FULL IRB review, please submit your request at least one month prior to the current expiration date. (High-risk protocols may require even more time for approval.) For protocols requiring an EXPEDITED or EXEMPT review, submit your request at least two weeks prior to the current expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation *on or prior to* the currently approved expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.