# TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE ROLE OF SELF IN A MORAL DILEMMA

by

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Liberty University

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### A Dissertation

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Faculty of Liberty University
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by

Patricia McCarthy Broderick

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#### **ABSTRACT**

# TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE ROLE OF SELF IN A MORAL DILEMMA

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Moral identity was investigated phenomenologically as it was experienced both by those who adhered to their stated moral convictions as well as those who did not. More specifically, 16 adult, unmarried, pro-life women who had experienced an unwanted pregnancy were interviewed, 8 of whom had carried and 8 had aborted. Significant findings include the propensity of those who carried and aborted, alike, to view their moral dilemmas through the filter of protection of self. Those who carried saw their moral beliefs as serving their self-interests, but those who aborted did not. Connection with a higher purpose was found in those who carried. A Moral Juncture Model of Self, as conceptualized by the researcher, is presented.

### Dedication

Dedicated to my generous and loving husband and family who have endured years of distraction from my first calling; to the beautiful women of this study who courageously shared their lives with me so we might gain from their insights and wisdom; to my amazing chair, Dr. Fred Milacci, whose poignant questions and selfless gifts of his time and expertise kept me on track; and mostly to Christ, my Lord and Savior, who continually grants me opportunities to lean on Him so that I might know His sustaining faithfulness.

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#### CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Albert Bandura (2002) once asserted, "Almost everyone is virtuous at the abstract level" (p.115); however, what is done in real life is often another matter entirely (Blasi, 1980). What one hypothetically considers the right thing to do in a moral dilemma is often radically different from what one actually does when personally faced with that exact moral dilemma (Krebs & Denton, 2005). Despite intensely held moral beliefs, the movement from the impersonal "one ought" to the very personal "I should" is often quite pronounced (Goodman, 2000). This gap between what one believes is the right thing to do in a situation and what one actually does when faced with that situation remains perplexing.

Why are some people who have very strong moral beliefs unable to live by them while others are able to uphold their moral convictions despite the promise of substantial personal sacrifice? Questions such as these have been pondered for centuries. For example, Paul, a first century apostle of the early church, reflected on his personal torment: "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing" (Rom. 7:18-19, The Holy Bible, New International Version).

#### Background to the Problem

Researchers have spent decades investigating the countless factors that determine how people make moral decisions (Bandura, 1999; Bergman, 2002; Bersoff, 1999b; Blasi, 1980; Colby & Damon, 1992; Denton & Krebs, 1990; Gilligan, 1977; Haidt, 2001; Hoffman, 2000; Kohlberg, 1971; Milgram, 1974/2004; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Piaget, 1932/1969; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Piaget (1932/1969) conducted *in situ* observations of children in the midst of unstructured play. Then through Kohlberg's (1971) work, moral development researchers took a radical move toward analysis of hypothetical dilemmas. Only in the last thirty years have researchers begun to study the reasons why hypothetical moral decisions frequently vary from the decisions one makes when faced with that same dilemma in an authentic, personal situation (Bandura, 2002; Blasi 1980; Krebs & Denton, 2005).

Researchers have turned their attention to factors other than merely moral reasoning to account for what influences actual moral (or immoral) behavior. Some of the other factors found to significantly impact moral action include: (a) moral emotions (Hoffman, 2000), (b) moral intuitions (Haidt, 2001), (c) moral motivations (Bersoff, 1999a), (d) the ability to rationalize (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Bandura, 1999; Tsang, 2002), and (e) moral self-identity (Blasi, 1984).

Researchers have also focused their study on actual moral behavior by conducting qualitative studies of societal moral exemplars in comparison with a control group of

people with no exemplary standing in society (Colby & Damon, 1992; Hart & Fegley 1995; Matsuba & Walker, 2005; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Verplanken & Holland, 2002; Walker & Pitts, 1998).

Additionally, social psychologists have examined criminals and delinquents who defy the moral standards set by society through laws (Straub, 2003). However, scant research exists that identifies the factors that contribute to the failure to uphold one's own moral standards (Bandura, 1999, 2002; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996). As Joy (1983) aptly asserts, "Moral failure, too, belongs to the domain" of moral development research, necessitating that the researchers delve into why one would revert to "self-centeredness, and destructive, anti-just, immoral reasoning and behaving" (p. 58). The challenge for the researcher is to find a real-world venue for the study of a self-described moral failure as it compares with those in a similar situation who have upheld their own moral beliefs.

The dilemma of an unwanted pregnancy has long been understood to generate some of the most intense and weighty moral internal conflict in a woman's world (Coleman, Reardon, Strahan, & Cougle, 2005; Gilligan, 1977). Many researchers have used unwanted pregnancies where abortion is legally sanctioned by the state as a laboratory for studying moral decision-making (Foster & Sprinthall, 1992; Gilligan, 1982). Several studies indicated that those who hold negative attitudes about abortion will have increased post-abortive psychological complications (Adler et al., 1990; Conklin & O'Connor, 1995) as well as spiritual repercussions from their abortions

(Trybulski, 2005). Recent polls show more than half of Americans label themselves as pro-life (Ertelt, 2004). Therefore, an exploration into the moral decisions of pro-life women in unwanted pregnancies is a culturally significant setting for studying factors that influence moral decision making.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the moral self-identity as it was experienced both by those who adhered to their own stated moral convictions as well as those who did not. More specifically, the study targeted select pro-life women who had experienced an unwanted pregnancy and explored how their perceptions of their own moral self-identities influenced their decisions whether to carry their pregnancies to term. The nature of this type of investigation, which sought to explore the significance of morality to one's self-identity within the experience of an actual moral dilemma, was best examined using a phenomenological method of inquiry (Blasi, 2005; Blasi & Glodis, 1990, Kohlberg & Candee, 1984).

### **Research Questions**

In this study, it was assumed that women who self-identify as being pro-life (to be defined below) but chose to abort an unwanted pregnancy have made a decision that violates their moral beliefs. Concomitantly, it was assumed that women who self-identify as being pro-life and choose to carry their unwanted pregnancy to term have made a

decision congruent with their moral convictions. Given these assumptions and taking into account that the overarching objective of this study was to examine the extent to which moral self-identities influenced the translation of moral beliefs into moral actions, the following primary research questions framed this investigation:

- 1. How do select pro-life women describe their moral self-identities prior to an unwanted pregnancy?
- 2. How do participants describe the impact of that pregnancy on their moral self-identities?
- 3. What, if any, factors of their moral self-identity do participants identify as influencing their decision to abort or to carry?

#### **Definitions**

#### Akrasia

The term akrasia was used in this study to refer to the inability to act in accordance with one's own sense of moral obligation or a failure to act with moral integrity (Bergman, 2002). Akrasia was assumed in this study when pro-life women chose abortion.

### **Morality**

Morality is a code of conduct which defines right and wrong as accepted by a society, a religion, or an individual for her own behavior (Gert, 2008). Morality in this

study was operationally self-defined by the participants to eliminate the researcher's bias and to facilitate the study of actions either morally congruent or morally incongruent with the participant's own moral judgments. Therefore a moral decision, in this study, is one that is congruent with the participant's own moral judgment and an immoral decision is defined as one that is not consistent with the participant's own moral judgment.

# Moral Agency

Moral agency can be exercised in both an inhibitive and a proactive manner.

Inhibitive refers to the perceived ability to refrain from immoral behavior and proactive describes the self-assessment of one's capability to behave morally (Bandura, 1999). This study considered both aspects of moral agency expressed as the perceived capability to reject abortion as well as the capacity to carry to term.

### Moral Identity

Using Blasi's (1983) "Self Model of Moral Functioning," moral identity was defined in this study as the extent to which morality is reflected as a central or essential characteristic of an individual's sense of self. Because of this, the terms "moral identity," "moral self," "moral self-perception" and the more accurate term, "moral self-identity" were used interchangeably.

# Moral Integration

Moral integration occurs, according to Blasi (1983) when moral judgment unites with moral action and results in personal consistency. Moral integration was assumed in this study when pro-life women chose to carry their unwanted pregnancies to term.

Pro-life

The question of what constitutes the definition of "pro-life" is debatable even in pro-life circles. However, the accuracy of the definition was not of grave concern for the purposes of this study. What was significant was an accurate understanding of whether the participants in this study had violated or upheld their moral convictions. The parameters used in this study to define the term, "pro-life" began with Werner's (1993) "Principled Pro-life" definition. Werner defined members of this principled pro-life category as those who (a) describe the fetus as a person who is alive; (b) think abortion is therefore the taking of a life; and (c) reject the benefits of abortion to the individual or family, regardless of circumstance. Thorp and Wells (1995) recognized that most pro-life physicians consider abortion justifiable if it preserves the life of the mother. Additionally, Christian tradition has held that abortion to save a pregnant woman's life is justifiable (Jones, 2005). Consequently, this study classified those women who considered abortion justifiable only if the continuation of a pregnancy threatened the physical life of the mother as "pro-life".

## *Unwanted Pregnancy*

For the purposes of this study, a woman who aborted her pregnancy and who was not coerced to do so was assumed to have experienced an unwanted pregnancy (Adler et al., 1992). A pregnancy carried to term was defined as "unwanted" if, at the point of discovery, the mother (a) was unmarried and (b) claimed she did not want to be pregnant.

### Locating Myself as a Researcher

In order to elevate the level of authenticity and trustworthiness in a qualitative study, Creswell (1998) recommends that the researcher make possible sources of preconception explicit by exposing "past experiences, biases, prejudices and other orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study" (p. 202). Certainly, my past and present experiences, beliefs, and passions deeply impacted my interest in and consequently my choice of focus in this study. Therefore, in the spirit of transparency, I will briefly discuss these areas of myself as they pertain to the research topic.

I was raised in the home of a military officer where morality was constantly emphasized. My selection of the United States Air Force Academy as my college of choice speaks to my own comfort in living in an environment where honor and integrity were highly treasured and enforced. In my first year as a cadet, I also became a follower of Christ. This faith emphasizes the powerful moral code of honoring others above self as was done by Jesus Christ for all humanity.

My experience as a student at the Academy gave me my first exposure to abortion. I heard that female cadets who became pregnant were quietly escorted downtown for abortions because pregnancy and parenthood were grounds for dismissal from the service academies. Although I have never experienced an abortion, I understood how sexual incidents that occurred while at the Academy could have forced me into an unwanted pregnancy. This would have required me to choose between aborting so I could graduate or the more difficult path of becoming an unwed mother. Without a strong belief structure about abortion, I am unsure what I would have chosen at that time.

The revelation that I could have chosen abortion compelled me to get involved with helping women faced with crisis pregnancies to find ways to give their children life. My Christian convictions, bolstered by education about fetal development, abortion procedures, and the negative emotional and spiritual impact abortion can have on women have led me to become pro-life. I was a volunteer counselor at pro-life pregnancy centers for seven years and have financially supported them for the past twenty years.

Despite my Christian convictions, I recognize that, at times, I fail morally. Even if I believe strongly that something is the right thing to do, I can allow fear, self-centeredness, and pride to override my own moral convictions. Consequently, I have a keen interest in the field of moral development and specifically, the difficulty one has in actually doing that which one has decided is morally right. An exploration of my own moral failures has resulted in an understanding that my own movement to self-

centeredness is very natural, resulting in a daily struggle. Although I know the right thing to do, I often fail to do it.

In essence then, this study is an extension of the study I have begun on myself. Why do I undertake what is right when it is hard, but other times neglect carrying out what is right even if it is an easy task? My hope was that in hearing the voices of those who have betrayed themselves as I have at times, I would more readily recognize and reject that propensity in myself. Likewise, I hoped that in listening to the voices of those who have risen above their self-protective selves, I could do so myself.

Because of my deep involvement in the pro-life community, I understand gaps often exist between what the pro-life community espouses and what they do when personally faced with an unwanted pregnancy (Henshaw & Kost, 1996). Due to my deeply held beliefs that abortion is harmful to both child and mother, I attempted to set aside my judgment of what constitutes moral and immoral actions. By reporting the experiences of women who were self-proclaimed pro-life prior to an unwanted pregnancy, this becomes their pronouncement, rather than mine.

### Significance of the Study

Although mankind makes moral decisions every day, Rest (1986) points out that "moral behavior is an exceedingly complex phenomenon" (p. 18). The field of psychology has used a variety of research settings in an attempt to gain understanding of this multifaceted subject. Delinquency, or the violation of social norms has been used to

study moral failure (e.g. Straub, 2003). Those chosen as social moral exemplars have been investigated (e.g. Colby & Damon, 1992) and, in some cases, compared to those who are not known for exemplary moral behavior (e.g. Hart & Fegley, 1995). In-depth comparisons have been made between those viewed as morally courageous (e.g., rescuers of Jews in Nazi Germany) and those who did not demonstrate such courage in the same situation (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). However, little in-depth qualitative work has been done to investigate the decisions of those who have violated personal moral values compared to those who upheld theirs. This study was designed to help fill that gap.

The concept of moral identity has been hypothesized as an important bridge between moral judgment and moral behavior (Blasi, 1984). Scant qualitative research has been conducted to phenomenologically explore whether moral identity is the pivot point (Goodman 2000) it has been theorized to be (Hardy & Carlo, 2005). To do this adequately, a real-world venue for the study of the moral self as experienced by someone who displayed moral integrity was needed to compare with those of someone self-described as having failed morally.

The dilemma of an unwanted pregnancy in an environment where abortion is both legal and available provides an appropriate setting to study intense personal moral deliberations. However, in much of the literature, even when women assert they believe abortion is wrong, the rightness or wrongness of the decision has often been ignored (Blasi, 2004). The women in Gilligan's study said things such as "I don't believe in abortions" (Gilligan 1982, p. 81); "It is taking a life" (p. 83) and "I have always thought

abortion was a fancy word for murder" (p. 85). These women's judgment of the immorality of abortion was seemingly ignored by the researchers who treated all decisions of a moral nature as "moral." The design of this investigation accounted for the women's beliefs about the immorality of abortion by making that conviction the lens through which their actions were viewed as adhering to moral convictions or contradicting them. This study attempts to investigate, phenomenologically, the position that moral self-identity holds in actual moral dilemmas.

# Summary

Often a gap exists between what one believes is the right thing to do in a situation and what one actually does. While qualitative studies usually have focused on violations of society's moral standards (Oliner & Oliner, 1988), little research has been conducted to explore the experience of violating one's own moral convictions or the experience of adhering to those convictions in a similar situation. It has been proposed that one is more likely to adhere to one's moral convictions when one considers morality to be central to self-identity (Blasi, 1983). This study of pro-life women who have experienced an unwanted pregnancy provided fertile ground for the exploration of moral identity as it influenced the capacity to hold to her stated moral convictions. The review of the literature to follow frames the discourse, past and present, of theories and research concerning the connection between moral reasoning and moral action.

#### CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to review the existing literature in order to present the theoretical discourse and applicable research pertaining to the relationship between moral judgments and moral actions. In the literature, the relationship between moral judgment and action has been a topic of myriad research and theorizing (Bandura 1999; Blasi, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1993, 2004, 2005; Bergman, 2002; Bersoff, 1999a, 1999b: Colby, 2002; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984; Nunner-Winkler, 1993; Rest, 1984; Walker, 2004). The cognitive-developmental movement, which brought moral psychology into a field of its own and centered mostly on the realm of moral reasoning or judgment, will open the discussion. Beyond the moral reasoning alone approach, the review will follow the research as it made a practical move toward theorizing and investigating the variables in the exposed gap between moral judgment and action. The next section addresses the concepts and research of moral emotions and intuition and how they inform the moral judgment-action gap. Then the research into moral motivations and its subset, moral identity, will be presented, including the gaps in the moral identity research. Finally, an overview of how the moral dilemma of an unwanted pregnancy in a woman's life has been used previously in the literature will be discussed.

#### Moral Reasoning

While playing games such as marbles with children and recording their spontaneous remarks, Piaget (1932/1969) uncovered what he described as phases that, "broadly speaking, follow one another without, however, constituting definite stages" (p. 195). Through a series of naturalistic observations, Piaget recognized even young children as philosophers who answered moral questions in ways very different from adults. In young concrete-thinking children, morality was framed as an obedient response to adults. However, older children, he noticed, had begun to internalize the consciousness of good in an autonomous and reciprocal manner, initiating and expecting the give-and-take of moral norms in relationships independently. This type of development later gave way to the "discipline of inner submission which is the mark of adult morality" (Piaget, 1932/1969, p. 404).

According to Piaget's (1932/1969) formulation, children's moral development is best promoted through discussion among equals (cooperation) rather than constraint from an authority (heteronomy). In the forward to his book on childhood moral development, Piaget began with the disclaimer that it is the "moral judgment that we propose to investigate, not moral behavior or sentimentality" (1932/1969, p.7). Through the experience of cooperation, Piaget expected moral thought to develop from moral action. Therefore, since he did not expect moral thought to precede moral action, he never concerned himself with the dilemma of akrasia (Bergman, 2002). He wrote, "Thought always lags behind action and cooperation has to be practiced for a very long time before

its consequences can be brought fully to light by reflective thought" (Piaget, 1932/1969, p. 64). In Piaget's formulation, since moral thought developed from moral action, the dilemma of akrasia was never addressed (Bergman, 2002).

Building on Piaget's notion of the child as a philosopher, Kohlberg (1981) conducted cross-cultural, longitudinal studies on children's moral reasoning. In so doing, he found what he called "universal levels of development in moral thought" (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 17) that he claimed could be defined independently of specific content. People moved invariantly, in sequence, up the three levels and six stages, as described briefly below (taken from Kohlberg, 1981):

- 1. Level I Pre-conventional Morality based on cultural rules and labels
  - a) Stage 1 Punishment and Obedience Orientation
  - b) Stage 2 The Instrumental Relativist Orientation
- 2. Level II Conventional Internalized Cultural Expectations
  - a) Stage 3 The Interpersonal Concordance or "Good Boy-Nice Girl" Orientation
  - b) Stage 4 Society Maintaining Orientation
- Level III Post-Conventional or Principled Based on universal values and principles apart from authority
  - a) Stage 5 The Social Contract Orientation
  - b) Stage 6 Universal Ethical Principles Orientation Following self-chosen ethical principles such as justice, human rights and respect for human dignity

Moved by his proximity to the Holocaust and unwilling to kowtow to the valueneutral voice of social science, Kohlberg asserted that a philosophical underpinning must
be present to any talk of "moral" development (Walsh, 2000). Kohlberg (1971) argued
that his research revealed "justice" had proven to be the over-arching principle toward
which people morally develop, albeit at different paces and with different end-points.

Kohlberg's method of evaluating the moral stages using hypothetical dilemmas generated
a series of research challenges. Although ample support for Kohlberg's cognitivedevelopmental perspective existed (Blasi, 1980), troubling exceptions to his model
persisted as well.

Researchers demonstrated that moral judgment varies with the content of the dilemma presented to or generated by participants in their studies (Krebs & Denton, 2005; Krebs, Vermeulen, Carpendale, & Denton, 1991; Walker, de Vries, & Trevethan, 1987). The research of Carpendale and Krebs (1992, 1995) also showed that the audience of the reasoning affected the way one thought about moral issues. Similarly, work by Denton and Krebs (1990) revealed that moral reasoning changed with the context of the dilemma. Additionally, people often reasoned at higher Kohlbergian stages about abstract moral dilemmas than they did about self-reported personal real-life dilemmas (Armon, 1995, 1998; Krebs & Denton, 2005). Each of these findings questioned Kohlberg's emphasis on the ability to reason at higher stages as the lone goal of moral development.

While Kohlberg is credited with making moral development its own field of psychology, his original formulations apparently dismissed the question of whether this

higher staged ability to structure moral cognitions in a universal, reciprocal manner would lead to moral action. Kohlberg (1981) referenced the Platonic assumption that "He who knows the good chooses the good" (p. 30). This assumption eventually displaced Kohlberg's theory from center stage of the moral psychology field to a supporting role, but not without first igniting a firestorm of research.

The turning point in the direction of the moral development field seems to have been ushered in by Blasi (1980). In his review of the literature, Blasi compared Kohlberg's stages of moral development with a variety of measures of real-life moral actions including reported delinquency, descriptions of honesty, measures of conforming activities, and altruistic behaviors. While concluding that moral reasoning is statistically related to moral action, Blasi (1980) contended that the research does not support the theory that those who reason at the higher Kohlbergian stages are more likely to uphold their own reasoned moral standards. This problem of akrasia or the inability to act in accordance with one's own sense of moral obligation showed up in a variety of other studies, challenging the central importance Kohlberg's theory gives to moral reasoning (Bergman, 2002).

Milgram's (1974/2004) now-famous and equally controversial investigation brought akrasia into the limelight. Milgram's experiment included actors pretending to be both test-takers and authorities administering the tests. The subjects of his experiment were asked by the authority figures to shock test takers for wrong answers with feigned volts of electricity. Although the majority of his subjects clearly saw disobedience of the

authority figure by terminating the shocks as the morally right thing to do, very few exhibited the courage to stop delivering the shocks (Milgram, 1974/2004).

Oliner and Oliner's (1988) work further highlighted the problem of akrasia. They compared those who rescued Jews from the Holocaust with those who had opportunity to, but did not get involved. Although they were not studying moral reasoning per se, Oliner and Oliner (1988) found that only 11% of rescuers were motivated to action by their reasoned principles.

Gilligan's (1982) interviews of 29 women facing the abortion dilemma further substantiated the presence of akrasia in actual moral reasoning. Although not directly addressed by Gilligan, her anecdotal transcripts document a gap between these women's theoretical moral reasoning about the morality of abortion and their behavior. Gilligan's (1982) interviewees used phrases such as "I am saying that abortion is morally wrong, but the situation is right, and I am going to do it" (p. 86), and "I have always thought abortion was a fancy word for murder....but I am doing it because I have to" (p. 85). These quotes point to a marked disconnect between these women's reasoning about the morality of abortion versus their actions in an unwanted pregnancy.

Foster and Sprinthall (1992) found a similar gap between reasoning ability and actual reasoning in a moral dilemma. They queried young women, ages 12 to 25, who had come to a health care facility to abort their pregnancies. Foster and Sprinthall (1992) found that regardless of age, the women reasoned at a lower Kohlbergian stage when

determining what to do about their own abortions than they reasoned on the hypothetical dilemmas.

Colby and Damon's (1992) research furthered the understanding of the moral reasoning-action disconnect. In their study, 23 moral exemplars were picked by a panel of "expert nominators" for possessing all the characteristics of a highly moral person (committed to morality, possessing moral integrity, selfless, inspirational, and humble). In testing Kohlberg's moral stages of these exemplars who were known to live exceptionally moral lives, Colby and Damon (1992) discovered that only half of them reasoned at the higher stages (four to five) while the other half reasoned at stages three and four. This lent further credence to the notion that one does not need to reason at high levels to act morally.

More recently, studies with adolescents have shown a similar gap between reasoning and action. Hart and Fegley (1995) found 15 adolescent "care exemplars" who participated in helping behaviors in the community exhibited no higher levels of moral judgment than those in a control group of adolescents who were not known for their participation with helping behaviors. Conversely, in their exploration of 278 adolescents, Leenders and Brugman (2005) found that scores of those who obtained low Kohlbergian measures of moral judgment were not predictive of reported delinquent behavior.

Many researchers still claim that moral reasoning is a necessary component of moral action (Blasi, 1999; Bergman, 2002; Hoffman, 2000; Rest, Narvarez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). Other researchers, however, have begun developing more comprehensive

theories involving other elements that moderate the relationship between moral reasoning and behavior. Moral character had long been abandoned by the field of psychology because of the confusion and uncertainty surrounding a theoretical basis for the concept, as well as the propensity to reduce moral character to nothing more than a bag of disputable virtues (Blasi 2005). The concept of moral character has recently been revitalized in a project by Lapsley and Power (2005); however, the differentiation of moral character from moral identity in this project remains conceptually vague (Blasi, 2005). The most well-researched and conceptually clear moderators between moral reasoning and moral action appear to be moral emotions (Hoffman, 2000), moral intuition (Haidt, 2001), moral motivation (Power, 2005), and moral identity (Blasi, 1983, 1984, 1993, 1995, 2004).

#### Moral Emotions

Although Kohlberg's work was guided by the assumption of cognitivism, he recognized human affect plays an important role in moral reasoning as well (Kohlberg & Candee, 1984). He contended that emotions, such as sympathy, indignation, concern and guilt needed the structure of objective cognitive perspective-taking operations to be a positive addition to one's moral development. Indeed, the studies that Batson and his colleagues (Batson, Klein, Highberger, & Shaw, 1995) at the University of Kansas conducted on their students seem to support Kohlberg's assertion. They found empathy-induced altruism that has a goal of helping the one to whom empathy is felt can be

independent of the moral principles of justice. Specifically, when their students felt empathy for a particular individual, they were willing to over-ride their own beliefs of what constitutes fairness and allocate preferential help for that individual.

Colby and Damon's (1992) study recognized the importance of empathy to the moral exemplars that they interviewed. Oliner and Oliner (1988) likewise noticed more empathy in those who risked personal safety to rescue the Jews from the Nazis than the non-rescuers. Although both studies were correlational, empathy seems to be related to moral behaviors. Similarly, Kagan (1997) found that some individuals have temperaments which naturally produce more frequent and intense moral emotions. What remains unknown is how much of the tendency toward moral emotions is attributable to temperament and how much is learned.

Blasi (1999) took a detailed look at the role of emotions in moral motivation. His contention was that if emotions are motivators of behavior and if the regulation of emotion is largely shaped by individual automatic mechanisms or classical conditioning, then they can be trusted as a sincere, objective expression of the attitudes of the person. According to Blasi, even though emotions occur involuntarily, they are similar to intentional actions, in that they reveal one's desires and beliefs about a situation. Additionally, Blasi asserted that emotions can be shaped reflexively as they are experienced and consequently owned as appropriate or rejected as inappropriate to one's perception of oneself. For Blasi, emotions such as empathy are not moral unless they are regulated intentionally toward specifically moral ends, or if they are a spontaneous

response to pre-existing moral concerns. In Blasi's formulation, it is prudent for the researcher to inquire about the emotions surrounding an event as an objective indication of that individual's "personal norms" (Blasi, 1999, p. 15).

In her review of the literature concerning the role of emotions and emotion-related regulation in moral functioning, Eisenberg (2000) agreed with Blasi's (1999) theories about moral emotions. Her review suggested that moral emotion can motivate both moral and immoral behaviors. Additionally, those emotions can serve to communicate one's moral values and concerns to the self and others. Eisenberg (2000) identified guilt as the quintessential moral emotion, but discussed shame and empathy as being other well-researched emotions. In addition, Eisenberg's review found non-moral emotions such as anger, frustration, fear, and general temporary mood can impact moral functioning.

Hoffman (2000) also worked with moral emotions to formulate a theory of empathy and guilt development. In light of his study of prosocial moral behavior, he recognized the importance of these emotions to moral development. However, he also recognized the limitations of moral emotions to guide moral behavior and has labeled those he found in his research as "empathic over-arousal," "familiarity bias" and "hereand-now" bias. Empathic over-arousal can cause one to become so distressed that the person moves out of empathic mode entirely. Familiarity bias occurs when a person empathizes with family, friends and others similar to oneself more than those who are different. A here and now bias occurs when a person favors people in close proximity who present themselves as victims.

Because moral emotions can lead to both immoral and moral behavior, Hoffman (2000) contended, much like Kohlberg (1971), that a comprehensive theory of moral development requires moral principles. According to Hoffman, empathy is "mutually supportive" (p. 225) with the principle of caring and provides a motive to remedy violations to the principle of justice. However, Hoffman also conceded that empathy and guilt may well be the response of those motivated to uphold the principles of justice and care. Hoffman's extensive work with moral emotions pointed to the controversial nature of the role that human affect plays in promoting moral action.

#### Moral Intuition

Closely related to the research concerning moral emotions is Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. Moral intuition is defined by Haidt as: "The sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike), without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion" (p. 818). Moral reasoning is, in the moral intuitionist's paradigm, relegated to searching for an argument to support a decision that has already been made. Haidt likens the intuitionist's reasoning to the arguments of a lawyer defending a client rather than a scientist seeking truth. Therefore, according to Haidt, emotions such as love, empathy, guilt and remorse, as well as intuitions, provide a much greater influence on moral behaviors than objective thoughts about the matter.

The moral intuitionist's theory is supported by the research of Bargh and Chartrand (1999). They covertly primed their participants with mental representations. This unconscious priming had the same effect on the subjects' behavior as explicit and intentional directions. Whether self-intended or placed there by others, the source of the representations was inconsequential. Bargh and Chartrand (1999) concluded that most mental processes are automatic, effortless, fast, and are either naturally formed or have developed out of repeated and consistent experience.

Haidt's (2001) assertions in his social intuitionist theory opened a floodgate of criticisms. Saltzstein and Kasachkoff (2004) argued that although behaviors may be undertaken automatically, this does not necessarily indicate that they "originated and developed automatically" (p. 279). They contended that Haidt confuses the causes given to explain behavior, with reasons given to justify the judgment as being morally correct. Despite these concerns about the intuitionist theory, many have begun to recognize the non-verbal and intuitive aspect of moral decision-making in moral judgments (Narvaez & Bock, 2002; Colby, 2002). Like moral emotions, Narvaez and Lapsley (2005) assert that moral intuitions can be trained, educated or developed similar to the ways experts train themselves to have automatic responses based upon important clues. Moral intuitions and emotions, according to Saltzstein and Kasachkoff (2004), can be a reflection of an iterative, developmental process combining reasoning, experiences and intuitions, providing an objective insight into one's moral motivations.

#### Moral Motivation

A situation where one knows the moral thing to do but lacks the motivation to follow through with it, is easy to conceive (Hardy & Carlo, 2005). The concept of moral motivation attempts to answer the question posed by the existence of akrasia, "Why is one unable to act according to one's own sense of moral obligation?" Power (2005) defined moral motivation simply "as a part of a desire for the good" (p.197), but later qualified his definition by requiring that moral motivation be "based on a recognition that one is acting in accord with one's moral duty or sense of what is morally right" (p. 203).

Nunner-Winkler (1993) further clarified the motivation toward morality by defining it as a second-order desire. According to Nunner-Winkler, first-order desires are immediate or spontaneous needs or wishes, such as a desire for sweets. Second-order desires are those that are chosen with some deliberation, often regulating first order desires, such as a desire to eat in a healthy manner. Nunner-Winkler (1993) contends that the motivation to act morally or to be a person of high moral character constitutes a second order desire. For a motivation to be moral it must be aligned with one's sense of moral duty or what is right. However other motivations, such as empathy, can prompt one to act. According to Nunner-Winkler, moral duty acts "as a filter through which other motives must pass" (p. 284).

Along with this internal obligation arising from the individual's conscience,

Power (2005) recognizes a sense of duty that spawns from identification with the

community. Expanding on Kohlberg's "just-community" approach, Power contends that

along with experiencing accountability for community norm violations, individuals experience "collective responsibility" (p. 220). These are motivations that develop out of a sense of attachment to the community as a whole.

Identification with one's community is not the only influence that researchers have found can increase one's sense of moral motivation. Hoffman (2000) points to empathy and guilt as emotions that consistently act as motivators to moral behavior. Hardy and Carlo (2005) agree with Hoffman that moral emotion can be a primary source of moral motivation and often is the "'spark' that leads to action" (p. 233). Hardy and Carlo contend, however, that Hoffman overstates the role of moral emotion. They can conceive of a situation where one believes a course of action is right, is emotionally motivated to take that course of action, but does otherwise. This lends credence to the presence of other moderating factors in addition to moral reasoning and emotion.

Bandura (1999, 2001) posited that one's sense of moral agency could provide a motivation to do what one believes is morally right. According to Bandura (1999), moral agency has dual aspects – inhibitive and proactive - where inhibitive refers to one's perceived ability to refrain from immoral behavior and proactive describes the self-assessment of one's capability to behave morally. Power (2005) asserts that spirituality can contribute to one's sense of agency by creating a "perception of a supramoral self that draws its sense of moral agency from a power beyond the self" (p. 237).

Additionally, Power claims that spirituality can motivate moral action by changing the

way individuals perceive themselves and their world, as well as by adding religiously motivated weight to their moral reasoning.

Krebs and Denton (2005) took a much more cynical approach to religion as the basis of moral motivation:

All societies attempt to persuade people that behaving morally will pay off in the end, because, for example, there will be a final reckoning that will determine whether they reside eternally in heaven or in hell. However, false promises tend to lose their power when they are exposed as invalid. (p. 646)

Building on Piaget's (1932/1969) idea of cooperation as the ideal moral motivation, Krebs and Denton suggest that people can be motivated to act cooperatively rather than immorally when they believe that they will reap greater benefits by doing so. Although openly dismissive of religion's contribution to moral motivation, Krebs and Denton's (2005) pragmatic approach to morality realistically recognizes that there are competing motivations to the desire to be moral.

# Competing Motivations

Colby (2002) recognized that common sense, more than research, teaches that regardless of one's level of sophisticated moral reasoning, one can be motivated toward desires other than morality. Walker (2002) supports Colby's assertion with his definition of moral motivation as the prioritizing of "moral values over competing values and concerns" (p. 355). Hoffman (2000) contended that moral acts cannot be read as simple expressions of one's moral motives. Rather, actions are the result of one's attempts to balance egoistic and moral motivations. According to Bargh and Chartrand (1999), one's judgments, decisions, and behavior are accurately viewed as indicators of the goals one is

presently pursuing. These may or may not be moral goals and are often subconscious. This is in keeping with Freud's (1930/1961) "pleasure principle" which recognized that man is motivated, often subconsciously, to seek pleasure and to avoid pain.

The avoidance of pain can be a powerful motivating factor. Straub (2005), whose work had him examining the psychological origin of mass murders, genocide, and other forms of immoral human destruction, recognized the propensity toward hostility and aggression was often motivated by the frustration of one's basic psychological needs. Likewise, he asserts that fulfillment of these needs (for security, positive identity, effectiveness, control, relationships, autonomy, comprehension of reality, satisfaction, and transcendence of the self) provides fertile ground for growth of altruistic behaviors. In a similar vein, Sykes and Matza (1957), found in their work with delinquents, that "deviation from certain norms may occur not because the norms are rejected, but because other norms, held to be more pressing or involving a higher loyalty, are accorded precedence" (p. 669).

In his review of research studying subjects motivated to act morally, but unable to do so, Bersoff (1999b) hypothesizes that when other life goals outweigh one's desire to be moral, self-serving interests succeed in controlling behavior. According to Bersoff, all that needs to be done is to convince oneself that one is the exception to the rule in order to justify fulfilling self-interests. Krebs and Denton (2005) asserted, "Selfishness and self-serving biases may well be a more formidable enemy of morality than low-stage moral reasoning" (p. 646).

Batson and his colleagues at the University of Kansas have gone one step further by claiming from their research that rather than being motivated to be moral, most people are motivated to appear moral while serving self-interests (Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, & Wilson, 1997; Batson, Thompson, Seuferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999; Batson, Thompson, & Chen, 2002). Through a series of eight studies, Batson and colleagues continually found more evidence of what they termed, "moral hypocrisy" than participants demonstrating moral integrity. They concluded that when being moral involves personal cost, a person's motivation to be truly moral is often overpowered by one's motivation to serve self-interests. Batson et al. (2002) also noted that the charades undertaken by participants to appear moral to themselves were extensive. Consequently, appearing moral was important even when they knew they were being immoral. This finding supports Tsang's (2002) assertion that the rationalizations of immoral behavior, ironically, are driven by the high importance one places on moral standards and the need to appear moral to oneself. The self-condemnation associated with acting immorally leads one to reinterpret the act as moral by using rationalizations or neutralizations.

#### Neutralizations

Much has been written about the mental gymnastics involved in making immoral behavior palatable to oneself. Although often used interchangeably in the literature, neutralizations are considered to be the thoughts used to justify an immoral act that one is planning to commit without seeming immoral to the self (Sykes & Matza, 1957); on the

other hand, rationalizations are the cognitive processes one goes through after the violation of a moral standard to convince oneself that the action was not immoral (Tsang, 2002). Ground-breaking neutralization theory work developed largely within the context of delinquency research by Sykes and Matza (1957), helped explain many types of norm-contradicting behavior (Fritsche, 2002). The five major neutralization techniques their research identified were: (a) denying responsibility such as asserting that the action was accidental or outside one's control; (b) denying injury, such as believing that no great harm was caused; (c) denying the victim, by asserting that the injury was not wrong in light of the circumstances or that no one suffered; (d) condemning the condemners, by rejecting or minimizing those who disapprove of the behavior; and (e) appealing to higher loyalties, by claiming there is someone who demands greater loyalty than the society who formed the norms.

Bersoff (1999a) studied neutralization techniques among participants who were purposefully overpaid. He found that it took only subtle disruptors to derail the neutralization process used to justify accepting overpayment. Additionally, he noted that the less ambiguous the situation, the harder it was for participants to justify the unethical behavior. Bersoff (1999a) further concluded from his study that when one uses neutralizations to further one's self-interests, those neutralizations will be effective only as far as they are believable to the self.

Bandura (2002) proposed a theory of moral disengagement, whereby people who feel motivated to violate their own moral standards, disengage their normal self-

sanctions. He described cognitive manipulations which allow one to justify immoral behavior as: (a) euphemistic labeling to provide a language that sanitizes cruel behavior; (b) advantageous comparisons of the self to others who are more morally corrupt; (c) displacement of responsibility, minimizing one's agency and responsibility; (d) diffusion of responsibility leading to collective action and anonymity; (e) disregard or distortion of consequences; and (f) the dehumanization of the victim. Bandura contends that these methods of disengagement are used to neutralize self-censure and to preserve self-esteem.

Bandura (2002) described the differences between individuals who maintain their own moral standards and those who are unable to keep such moral integrity. He asserted that the differences are not found in the ability to reason morally at the abstract level, but how easily one can use these disengagement techniques quickly and effectively in real life. Whether one refers to neutralization techniques, rationalizations, or disengagement techniques, it seems evident that an internal drive to maintain a positive moral self-perception exists. Recognition that the self is central to the ability to live by one's own moral standards has produced a spate of research regarding moral identity. Since moral motivations ultimately stem from the perceptions and priorities of the self, for the purposes of this study, the focus was on moral self-identity.

# Moral Identity

### Early Moral Identity Research

The concept of moral identity springs, in part, from Festinger's (1957) Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. This theory holds that individuals strive for consistency within themselves, between their thoughts and actions. To Festinger, the existence of dissonance (or inconsistency) motivates one to reduce that dissonance by avoiding situations or information that would increase that inconsistency. Festinger further states that "a fear of dissonance would lead to a reluctance to take action – a reluctance to commit oneself. Where decision and action cannot be indefinitely delayed, the taking of action may be accompanied by a cognitive negation of the action" (p. 31). After a series of studies, Festinger concluded that the "tolerance of dissonance" (p. 267) varies from person to person. For some, dissonance is extremely painful and intolerable; for others, life contains more gray areas, making dissonance easier to tolerate.

In their comparison of rescuers with those who did not rescue the Jews in Nazi Europe, Oliner and Oliner (1988) found that the moral self provided the filter for action or inaction. The rescuers in their study were more expansive through strong attachment to others, but non-rescuers were more constricted and detached from the Jews and their plight. Rescuers' sense of obligation to help arose largely from internal belief structures that valued the lives of others and the anticipation of guilt or shame if one failed to act. Rescuers, they found, displayed a strong sense of personal integrity and care within their own value systems.

Similarly, in their study of moral exemplars, Colby and Damon (1992) found that moral excellence required personal integrity or a commitment to consistently translate moral principles into moral action, regardless of the personal cost. Colby and Damon concluded that exemplars exhibited an inner harmony that seemed to unite self and morality, so much so that their decisions to act were almost no decisions at all. The moral exemplars perceived that they had no choice but to live by their moral commitments. These findings caused Colby and Damon to conclude, "Where there is perceived concordance between self and morality, there will follow direct and predictable links between judgment and conduct as well as great certainty in the action choices that result" (p. 304).

# Blasi's Self Model of Moral Functioning

Blasi (1983) was the first to propose that the moral self and particularly, moral identity, could fill the akrasia gap between moral judgment and functioning. His contention was that "self-consistency is the motivational spring of moral action" (Blasi, 1993, p.99). Blasi has been systematically honing his "Self Model of Moral Functioning" (hereby also known as the "Self Model") for more than two decades (1983, 1984, 1993, 1995, 2004). Blasi claimed that self-identity is the central concept in understanding moral functioning as it relates moral cognition to moral behavior. The three basic components of his model include (a) the importance of moral self, (b) personal responsibility for moral action, and (c) self-consistency (Walker, 2004). The first of these three components, the moral self, is conceptualized by Blasi as how central people value

morality in their awareness of their core selves. The moral self, Blasi contends, speaks to the "significance and salience" (Walker, 2004, p. 2) of moral values to the core self-identity.

The second central component of the Self Model is the extent to which one feels personally responsible for moral action (Blasi, 1983). For Blasi, the formation of a moral judgment is insufficient to move one to act morally unless one also is convicted of a moral obligation to undertake (or refrain from) that action. It is this sense of moral responsibility that implicates the self as the agent accountable for the moral action.

The third central component of the Self Model is what Blasi (1983) calls self-consistency or integrity. Initially, Blasi conceptualized moral integrity as a motivational force that prompts the self to act in alignment with one's own moral judgments. If that alignment does not occur, then Blasi contended that neutralization techniques would be required to alleviate the inconsistency within oneself. Later, Blasi (2004) clarified that there are many motivational forces that propel one to action. Some are personal or non-moral values rather than moral. However, there are only a few values in one's sense of self that can be classified as core values and these are particularly important to creating the essence of a being. For Blasi (2004), to truly be oneself is to live out core ideals.

According to Blasi (1993), only with these components of the moral self in mind can the notion of moral self-betrayal be conceptualized. The thoughts and emotions associated with a sense of self-betrayal require that one feel responsible for one's identity. Blasi and Glodis (1990) attempted to measure moral self betrayal in women by

asking each of them to identify an ideal that was very important to her sense of self. Then six to ten weeks later the women were encouraged to envision themselves taking part in activities hand-selected to contradict their previously self-stated ideals. Moral self-betrayal was evaluated by using the following scales: positive emotion, conflict, strong negative emotion, reference to ideal, practical reasons, moral and altruistic reasons, and self-inconsistency.

Blasi and Glodis (1990) found two distinct patterns in the group of women: one group seemed content to focus on the pragmatic consequences of the decision, while the other group felt deep regret at violating their values. The pragmatic group expressed relief and satisfaction in their decision, even though the decision went against their stated ideals. The regretful group voiced neither positive feelings nor pragmatic justifications. They viewed their assigned deeds as serious contradictions to their ideals, resulting in feelings of shame, guilt, and depression. The researchers concluded that expressions of self-betrayal were indications that the ideals were more central to the women's core sense of self.

# Recent Moral Identity Research

Several studies have been conducted to test the validity of the moral identity construct and its impact on moral behavior. Hardy and Carlo (2005) conducted a review of the literature prior to 2005 and concluded that Blasi's (1983) conception of moral identity as a source of moral motivation was generally validated. The studies which focused on adolescents and adults generally supported the notion that those who held

moral values and virtues as an important part of their self-concept also were more engaged in pro-social behaviors.

What was not clear to Hardy and Carlo (2005) in their review, is the direction of causality between moral identity and moral behavior. In fact, a two-year longitudinal study by Pratt, Hunsberger, Pancer, and Alisat (2003) comparing adolescents' moral identity with their involvement with community helping activities indicated that the volunteer activities preceded endorsement of moral values for the self, and not the other way around. In a similar finding, Matsuba and Walker (2005) solicited stories from adolescent moral exemplars, and noted that most narratives included an early exposure and involvement with the suffering of others.

Early exposure to others' suffering was a theme supported in Colby and Damon's (1992) moral exemplars, as well as Oliner and Oliner's (1988) study of the rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe. Oliner and Oliner (1988) describe a catalyst as an external event that challenged the rescuers they studied, causing them to internalize the needs of others and compelling them to become involved. Haste and Locke (1983) refer to a triggering event as an occurrence that creates a powerful emotional response which triggers a reexamination of one's life choices, moral perspective, and sense of social responsibility. The necessity of some form of activation found in the literature lends credibility to the second component of Blasi's (1983) model of the moral self, that of personal responsibility.

The responsibility component of Blasi's Self Model was further bolstered by Verplanken and Holland 's (2002) research. In a series of six studies looking into the value-behavior link, they found two components necessary for values to affect behavior: the value must be central to the self and the values had to be cognitively activated in order to guide behavior. The value-activation manipulations that Verplanken and Holland used only worked when the value was central to the self, lending credibility to the importance of the self in the value-behavior relationship. However, having moral values as central to the self was not sufficient to motivate congruent behavior without activation of those values. A responsibility to uphold those values was needed as well.

Aquino and Reed (2002) conducted a series of six studies designed to investigate the construct of moral identity further. First they designed and validated a measure of moral identity that identified nine traits that a moral person possesses: care, compassion, fairness, friendliness, generosity, helpfulness, diligence, honesty, and kindness. Then they compared those claiming a strong moral self-identity with actual donation behaviors, and found second to gender (girls gave 2.33 times more than boys), students who strongly internalized moral identity were more likely to donate food to the poor. Additionally, the results revealed two dimensions of the self-importance of moral identity, one private (internalized) and one public (symbolic). Aquino, Reed, Thau, and Freeman (2007) attempted to examine the role that the moral self-concept plays in moral disengagement. They found that participants in whom morality occupied an important position in the self-concept were less likely to use disengagement techniques to support brutality in war.

The concept of moral identity as a motivator toward moral behavior has come under some scrutiny. Nucci (2004) contends that the idea that a moral action is primarily motivated by one's desire for self-consistency is mechanistic and reductionistic, ignoring the complex contextualizations involved in many moral decisions. Nisan's (2004) research agrees with this assessment. In describing the difference between a moral judgment and moral choice Nisan (2004) states,

When a person confronts a situation in which he identifies a moral problem, he carries out two judgments – one regarding the right behavior in this situation, from a pure moral standpoint relying exclusively on moral standards, and the other an all things considered judgment that he will actually adopt (p.148).

In Nisan's formulation, the moral choice, rather than the moral judgment is more closely linked with identity – it "reflects the person's identity, values, and commitments that are important to him, without which he is not himself" (p. 156). Blasi (2004) responds by asserting that it is the hierarchical ordering of these contextual inputs present in every moral decision (needs, desires, values, traits, and life events) that determine what one's core commitments are. Therefore, how one orders these inputs reflects the relative importance and centrality of morality to the self.

### Limitations to Moral Identity Research

In their review of the literature, Hardy and Carlo (2005) admit to being puzzled as to why there has been extensive theorizing about, but little research directed toward moral identity. Perhaps, they surmise, it is due to the abstract and complex nature of moral identity. Regardless of the reasons, there are notable limitations to the research concerning the moral self. Although the qualitative designs used by Oliner and Oliner

(1988) as well as the interviews of moral exemplars by Colby and Damon (1992) identified moral identity as a recurring theme in their research, these research projects were limited to the study of individuals who were moral exemplars or failures in the eyes of someone other than themselves.

Batson and colleagues (1997, 1999, 2002), conducted quantitative studies to expose moral hypocrisy and found that participants violated their own moral standards. However, in-depth experiential interviews of participants who have violated their own self-identified, strongly held moral beliefs, have yet to be conducted. Additionally, in their review of the research directed at understanding moral identity, Hardy and Carlo (2005) note that little has been done to study moral identity in morally prohibitive situations where inaction rather than action is the morally ideal action.

### Abortion as a Moral Decision

Bandura (2002) recognized that the study of morality using abstract principles in "decontextualized and depersonalized circumstances" (p. 115) renders almost everyone as virtuous. However, the choices one makes in real world decisions are much more indicative of one's moral fabric. Abortion has long been recognized as a contentious public moral topic, as well as a hotbed of intense personal moral deliberation.

Gilligan (1977) has described all judgments about the moral dilemma of an unwanted pregnancy as part of the moral domain. Specifically, she recognized that, "When a woman considers whether to continue or abort a pregnancy, she contemplates a

decision that affects both self and others and engages directly the critical issue of hurting" (Gilligan, 1977, p. 491). In her book developed from her research, Gilligan quotes naturalistic interviews of women in the throes of the abortion decision in an attempt to lend credence to her theory that women's moral reasoning is constructed of "caring" or relational themes that are overlooked in Kohlberg's "justice" framework of moral development. In her analysis of the voices of women making the decision whether or not to abort, however, she seemingly overlooked the moral judgments of the women themselves. Many of the women began their discussions of the conflicts and reasoning behind their decisions to abort with their own moral pre-judgments about abortion such as "I don't believe in abortions" (Gilligan 1982, p. 81); "It is taking a life" (p. 83); and "I have always thought abortion was a fancy word for murder" (p. 85), then went on to describe why they had the abortion anyway.

When Broen, Mou, Bodtker and Ekeberg (2005) looked at the reasons Norwegian women chose to abort, their findings supported many previous studies that identified educational, vocational and financial concerns, as well as the lack of desire to have a child, to be among the top reasons for abortions. As Nunner-Winkler (1994) notes, the question these women are answering is not whether an abortion in their situation is morally justifiable or not, but what kind of lifestyle they want to live. According to Nunner-Winkler, this involves, "a morally neutral balancing out of different ego interests" (p. 269) such as the desire for a professional career versus a desire to have children and stay home.

In her interviews of women considering abortion, Smetana (1982) recognized these differing frameworks that women use to make their abortion decisions. She distinguished between three types of reasoning: moral, social-conventional, and personal. She discovered that the type of reasoning a woman uses depends upon her belief as to whether or not the fetus is a human life. If the woman thought the fetus was a human life, the decision became moral for her. Research concerning adjustment following abortions shows that the framework a woman uses in her choice to abort matters.

Women who have negative attitudes toward or are ambivalent about abortion will experience greater negative psychological adjustment responses, including guilt, anxiety, and depression (Adler et al., 1990, 1992; Cohan, Dunkl-Schetter, & Lydon, 1993; Coleman, Reardon, Strahan, & Cougle, 2005). Coleman et al.'s (2005) summary of longitudinal pre-and post-abortion studies found that although initial emotions may resemble relief, negative emotions including dissatisfaction with the abortion decision increase over time. This is especially evident, they noted, when the woman was conflicted over the meaning of abortion, felt ambivalent about the pregnancy, or experienced a bond with the fetus.

#### Summary

The moral development field has undergone radical transformation over the last thirty years. It has evolved from thinking about hypothetical dilemmas to considering actual experienced moral dilemmas. It has matured from the notion that the ability to

make principled moral judgments precipitates moral action to a recognition that moral reasoning is but a small factor in the complex totality of factors that contribute to moral deeds and misdeeds. It has displaced cognition from the spot of preeminence in moral functioning and opened itself up to the complex role that intuitions, emotions, and motivations play in driving behavior. Moreover, it has begun to recognize the essential role that the ever-present variable of the self has as the primary filter, processor, and executor of morality. However, limited research exists that investigates this phenomenon of the moral self as it is actually experienced by those who have upheld their own moral standards in contrast to those that have not. In keeping with the movement in the field, this study investigated, in-depth, the complexity of moral self-identity through the experiences of pro-life women who lived the moral conundrum of an unwanted pregnancy.

#### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

In light of the movement of the field of moral development, this study explored the moral self as it was experienced by those who adhered to their own stated moral convictions in comparison with those who did not. To accomplish this, the moral self-identities of select pro-life women who experienced an unwanted pregnancy were explored to consider the influence that identity had on those women's decisions whether or not to carry the pregnancy to term. A phenomenological method of inquiry was utilized in order to tap into the richness of the participants' self-identities as perceived within the experience of an actual moral dilemma (Blasi, 2005).

This study was designed to add to the body of literature by utilizing in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 16 self-identified pro-life women who have experienced an unwanted pregnancy, 8 of whom terminated the pregnancy, and 8 of whom carried the unwanted pregnancy to term. This chapter will describe (a) the choice of the qualitative approach and the phenomenon of unwanted pregnancy in the study of moral identity; (b) the selection of participants and the methods of negotiating access to them; (c) the commitment to confidentiality and how that was communicated; (d) the interview guide and procedures implemented for its use; (e) the emotional impact on the participants and how their care was insured; (f) the procedures for data management, analysis and verification; and (g) the approach to ethical concerns of the study.

### Research Design

Although the literature concerning moral identity and its influence on the moral thought-action link has been inundated with philosophizing and theorizing, thoughtful research into moral identity remains somewhat lacking (Hardy & Carlo 2005). The previous chapter identified both qualitative and quantitative studies that researched moral identity. Both methods have contributed to the present understanding of how moral identity bridges the gap between moral reasoning and moral action. Although Batson and colleagues (1997, 1999, 2002) conducted quantitative studies that included participants who violated their own moral standards, no qualitative studies comparing the moral identities of participants who have or have not violated their own self-identified, strongly held moral beliefs have been completed.

Many researchers recognize that the study of moral reasoning and moral behavior is, by its very nature, phenomenological (Kohlberg, 1981; Blasi, 1983; Higgins-D'Alessandro & Power, 2005). Others, however, disagree on grounds that moral functioning is intrinsically affective (Hoffman 2000); that moral functioning relies heavily on intuition (Haidt 2001; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005; Walker, 2004); that action choices are often not made through moral reasoning and deliberation (Nisan, 2004); and that attempts to describe why one acted a certain way are usually retroactive (Haidt 2001), distorted and inaccurate (Bargh. & Chartrand, 1999). Despite these possible limitations to a phenomenological approach, the method has considerably more strengths.

Saltzstein and Kasachkoff (2004) argue that the mere fact a moral decision is made automatically or is triggered by emotion is not proof that the decision originated that way. Blasi (1983, 1995, 1999, 2004) has consistently argued that the essence of morality necessitates understanding. He is even bolder when he says, "Morally positive behavior is that behavior that corresponds to the agent's moral judgment and is performed because the agent understands it to be morally good" (Blasi, 1983, p. 185). He takes this stance based on the uniqueness of moral action. Without the understanding that an action is morally right, the completion of that deed is morally neutral. Similarly, if one does what one knows to be right for the wrong reasons, the action is not morally positive. A phenomenological study is best able to "hear" the moral significance of the lived experience of each participant in a study (Creswell, 1998; van Manen, 1990).

Similarly, Blasi (1993) defines identity in subjective experiential terms. As such, both the way that one experiences identity, as well as the content around which an identity has been constructed, need to be considered (Blasi, 1993). In this paradigm, the researcher studies moral identity, but also probes for the sense of agency felt in its selection, including the sense of responsibility and fragility toward the identity. Listening for these "voices" necessitates phenomenological research. Despite the benefits of studying moral identity phenomenologically, very little of this type of research has been conducted.

Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer (1984) recognized the need to research the connection between moral thought and action. In so doing, they considered it imperative

that moral conduct be phenomenologically as well as behaviorally measured. An action that is immoral to the researcher or to society may not be seen as such by those participating in the study (Nucci, 2004). With these considerations in mind, a phenomenological approach was used to gather interviews with multiple individuals who experienced the moral dilemma of what to do about an unwanted pregnancy in order to glean much-needed insight into the impact moral identity may have had upon the decision. The participants were able to provide in-depth descriptions of their experiences in their moral dilemmas (Creswell, 1998).

The research into the lives of women who were faced with a moral dilemma about which they had previously made definitive abstract judgments was indeed fertile soil for the study of moral self-identity. The use of self-described pro-life women in an unwanted pregnancy situation was intended to insure the women held their own opinions of what is morally right and wrong in this circumstance. This allowed moral self-identity to be studied both through the lens of those who adhered to their own moral convictions and the lens of those whose actions contradicted their moral beliefs

In order to form an adequate comparison for the group of women who chose abortion, Adler et al. (1990) recommended that a group of women who surrender their child for adoption would be ideal. Although this comparison would ensure the unwantedness of the pregnancy, it seemed unnecessarily limiting. Women who have moral convictions about abortion would be excluded from the study if they also have strong moral convictions that they must live with the consequences of their own behavior

and raise the child their actions have produced. Therefore, determining the unwantedness of the pregnancy was sought by using probing questions about the initial thoughts and feelings upon confirmation of pregnancy. These probing questions were among the initial questions of the interview and determined if the interviewee was to be included in the study (See Appendix A).

Coleman et al. (2005) suggested that an adequate comparison group for those who chose abortions would be those who wanted an abortion, but who did not obtain one for personal reasons such as fear, anxiety, or guilt. This idea, too, was rejected for this study because of its limiting nature. A great deal of rich, valuable information about moral identity might be needlessly discarded if a study of pro-life women excluded those in an unwanted pregnancy who never allowed themselves to consider abortion. Coleman et al. (2005) lamented the very few direct comparison studies of women who abort and women who carry an unwanted pregnancy to term. This study was designed to have the advantage of direct comparison of the experiences of those who aborted and those who carried.

In light of the extensive body of research on morality that preceded this inquiry, and to extend the research concerning the role that moral identity plays in the moral judgment-to-action link, the following research questions framed the inquiry:

1. How do select pro-life women describe their moral self-identities prior to an unwanted pregnancy?

- 2. How do participants describe the impact of that pregnancy on their moral selfidentities?
- 3. What, if any, factors of their moral self-identity do participants identify as influencing their decision to abort or to carry?

## Selection of Participants

Because an unwanted pregnancy is such a private, emotionally-charged event in a woman's life, special attention was given to sensitively and discretely gaining access to pro-life women who have experienced the phenomenon (Goodrum & Keys, 2007). Due to the sensitive nature and hard-to-reach population necessary for inclusion in the study, outcropping was chosen as an appropriate sampling technique (Lee, 1993). Outcropping involves finding sites where the target group members can be found. Because the target population was pro-life women who have experienced an unwanted pregnancy, pregnancy centers were an obvious location for finding potential participants. Pro-life pregnancy resource centers offer volunteer counseling to women in unplanned pregnancies, as well as post-abortion counseling for women who are struggling with their abortion decision.

Due to this researcher's previous affiliations with pregnancy resource centers, access to centers in Colorado and Virginia was attempted first. Once access to the facilities was granted, criterion sampling was used to screen the potential participants to determine who had experienced the desired phenomenon. Since the number of women

needed for the study was not sufficient using these venues, snowball sampling of other pregnancy center sites, maternity homes, and other pro-life agencies was then made through church and school affiliations.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 16 self-identified pro-life women who experienced an unwanted pregnancy, 8 of whom terminated the pregnancy and 8 of whom carried the unwanted pregnancy to term. This number was selected as a means of attaining proper saturation, as well as to prevent undue repetition in the collected data (Creswell, 1998). Screening questions were asked first to insure the women met the parameters for the phenomenon. In order to decrease the risk of selecting participants who were merely parroting their parents' beliefs, only self-described pro-life adults who had been independent of parental financial dependence for at least two years prior to the pregnancy were included in the study. Relationships other than parents which might influence an adult are assumed to have been optional and therefore reflective of the values of the adult. Since moral identity is not believed to be formed until late adolescence or early adulthood (Blasi, 1993), the experience of an unplanned pregnancy at the age of 20 years old was set as a minimum age for the participants.

As stated previously, this study included only those women who described their pro-life position prior to their unwanted pregnancies according to Werner's (1993) principled pro-life definition. This means prior to pregnancy, the participants must have (a) viewed the fetus as a person who is alive, (b) considered abortion as the taking of a life, and (c) rejected as invalid the reasons for abortion. Although Werner (1993) did not

include the caveat, those women who thought abortion was justified if the physical life of the mother is threatened by the continued pregnancy were also considered pro-life and qualified for the study. The screening process prior to the interviews probed these areas of the participants' stance on abortion.

The screening process prior to each interview was designed to take into account the above parameters by limiting participation in this study to those who met the following criteria:

- 1. Must have been at least 20 years old at the discovery of the pregnancy
- 2. Must have been financially independent from parents for at least 2 years
- 3. Must have been pro-life prior to the pregnancy:
  - (a) Viewed the fetus as a person who is alive
  - (b) Considered abortion as the taking of a life
  - (c) Considered abortion justifiable only if the actual physical life of the mother is threatened by the continued pregnancy
- 4. Must have had an unwanted pregnancy:
  - (a) The pregnancy was aborted but not for the purpose of saving the life of the mother, or
  - (b) The woman was single and the pregnancy was self-described as "unwanted"

#### **Data Collection**

In order to collect personal insights into the moral identities of women who have experienced the phenomenon of an unwanted pregnancy, one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded. A long interview protocol of one and one-half to two hours (as suggested by Creswell, 1998) was followed to allow the interviewer time to establish rapport before reaching the more sensitive, personal questions toward the end of the interview (Goodrum & Keys, 2007). This helped elicit the deep and rich text surrounding the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Verification and triangulation of the information gathered in the interviews was garnered by requesting journals or diaries that the women had written during or following the unwanted pregnancy. Contact was also made with several of the women following the interview to clarify points from the interview. Additional verification was sought by performing member checks or taking data, and their analysis and interpretation, back to the interviewed women to judge the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 1998).

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics which were discussed in the intensive interviews, careful attention was paid to reassure participants of the voluntary nature of the interview and the confidentiality. Each interviewee was given a copy of the Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study (Appendix B). After the researcher verbally highlighted the key points, requested that the form be read in its entirety, and addressed any questions or concerns about the study, the participant and researcher

signed two consent forms each. Once researcher and participant each had a copy of the signed consent form, the interview began.

Phenomenological inquiry calls for a guided conversation between the researcher and the informant that stays as close to the lived experience as possible (van Manen, 1990). Thus the setting ought to be a place of comfort and lack distraction (Creswell, 1998). Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded at the pregnancy centers, where possible. When that was not possible or practical, a site that was comfortable and convenient was selected by the interviewee. One interview was conducted in a small café; ten were done either at churches or local pregnancy centers, three were done in private homes, and two were done in work offices. The semi-structured interviews followed the Interview Guide found in Appendix A, varying as the conversation warranted, but with a focus toward remaining on the specific prompts which were guided by the research questions (van Manen, 1990).

The interview protocol began with screening prompts to ensure the participant met the qualifications for inclusion in the study. At the beginning of two of the interviews, it became evident that the woman did not meet the criteria, despite having been given clear selection requirements. One was clearly not pro-life and the other was not pro-life prior to her abortion. Abbreviated versions of the interview were conducted to exhibit appreciation for their willingness to participate and to communicate the value of their stories, despite their inability to be included in the study. These 2 interviews were not included among the 16 that formed the findings.

Following the interview, a referral list of local counselors was provided to each participant to give her access to help in handling painful emotions stirred up during the interview. In addition to the interviews being recorded, field notes were written after each interview. Several brief follow-up interviews were conducted in order to clarify and validate information gathered during the first interview.

#### Data Analysis

In qualitative research, Creswell (1998) envisions data analysis as a spiral that moves from raw data collection to the final narrative through iterative, overlapping interpretative lenses. The gathering, transcribing, coding, and organizing of the data is done with the sole purpose of presenting the "essence of the experience" (p.149) through meaningful descriptions, interpretations, and classifications. The idea that the data drives the management and analysis is the heart of qualitative research. It allows the actual experience of those studied, rather than theories about the experience, to formulate the overall description of the essence of that phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, themes for the last two chapters of this study were formulated as they emerged from the data through the reading and re-reading of the transcripts, note-taking, and grouping of patterns.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim in their entirety by a transcriptionist so that they could be analyzed for emerging patterns. Editing was done by the researcher to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were read repeatedly (Creswell, 1998). Then notes were made for describing, classifying and interpreting. Each reading was done with the

research questions in mind in order to keep the purpose of the study in clear focus (van Manen, 1990).

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative research, by its very nature, brings with it ethical concerns which must be addressed by the researcher (Creswell, 1998). These include (a) protection of the anonymity of participants, (b) emotional support of participants, and (c) concerns about how explicit to be with the topic of the study. The manner in which this study addressed each of these concerns will be included in this section.

Protection of the anonymity of the participants was addressed on multiple levels. Pseudonyms were self-selected by each interviewee at the beginning of the interview. Only the researcher saw the identifying demographic and contact information as it was linked with the pseudonyms of the participants. This information has remained securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home and were destroyed upon completion of the study. Only the transcriptionist and the researcher heard the unedited, raw data of the recorded interviews, which, at times contained actual names. Once the transcriptions were found to be accurate, all names in them were replaced with pseudonyms and recordings were erased.

Due to the sensitive nature of the interviews, protection and welfare of the participants remained paramount during the interviews. Therefore, the voluntary nature of each interview was emphasized during the review of the informed consent form.

Additionally, the interviewees were watched carefully for distress and given the option of stopping if they appeared to be struggling emotionally. They were offered the option of a 15-minute break from the questions or an option to discontinue the interview at any time. None of the interviewees took the option to take a break or to discontinue, although several were asked, and many experienced distress in the retelling of their stories.

The nature of the study required that women describe themselves in their unwanted pregnancy without being primed with the topic of "moral identity." Such priming would unnecessarily taint the participants' responses about themselves (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Therefore, only general rather than specific information about the topic of the study was offered on the informed consent form signed by the interviewees (Creswell, 1998). The purpose of the study was stated thusly: "to gain insight into the actual experiences of pro-life women who have faced an unwanted pregnancy in order to understand what factors went into their decisions to abort or to carry the pregnancy to term." Exclusion of a specific focus on moral identity did not increase the risk to the participants.

## Summary

Following their review of moral identity literature, Hardy and Carlo (2005) recognized the challenges of developing studies that adequately measure the complex and dynamic concept of moral self-identity. The use of a phenomenological method of inquiry provided a venue for hearing the richness of the participants' voices as they

described their self-identities before, during, and after their actual moral dilemmas (Blasi, 2005). As such, the moral self-identities of 16 select pro-life women who have experienced an unwanted pregnancy was explored using recorded, in-depth interviews to investigate the influence that moral identity had on those women's decisions whether to abort or to carry their pregnancies to term.

Selection of participants was limited to those who were 20 years of age or older, who were financially independent, pro-life and who had experienced a self-described unwanted pregnancy. In order to allow for comparison, 8 of those participants were selected because they chose abortion and 8 because they carried their pregnancies to term. The semi-structured interviews, which followed the Interview Protocol, were recorded, transcribed by one transcriptionist, and analyzed for themes by one researcher. Additionally, journals written by participants about their unwanted pregnancies were collected to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

The protection of the participants was held in higher regard than the collection of data. As such, participants were reassured of their anonymity and their right to withdraw from the study at any time in the Informed Consent Form which each interviewee read and signed. The participants were offered emotional support through counselor referrals. The topic of the study was presented to interviewees generally rather than specifically to prevent priming them with the concept of moral identity and thereby tainting their insights into their experiences. These methods were all designed to get to the heart of the

complex and dynamic concept of moral self-identity as it influences behavior, while keeping the best interests of the participants in mind.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

The movement from chapter three to chapter four, for the reader, is but the turn of a page, but for the researcher, it has been a paradigm-altering journey into the pain and peace inherent in the lives of pro-life women whose choices placed them at the moral juncture of an unwanted pregnancy. This phenomenological expedition into the experiences of 16 women who agreed to share openly what were often the lowest points of their lives so that others either would not do likewise, or might find the strength to do so, has been nothing short of inspiring. Along the way, the study was focused on how these women describe their moral self-identity as it impacted their ability or inability to adhere to their own moral convictions.

This chapter briefly introduces the 16 participants through the means of selfportraits and then presents the findings organized by the three research questions. Since
data from the actual experiences of the participants, rather than theories about the
experience, drives the management and analysis of qualitative research (van Manen,
1990), the organization of this chapter is also data driven. Thirteen sub-themes arose out
of the three main research questions and are presented as they were heard:

- The participants' moral self-identities as self-described prior to their unwanted pregnancies:
  - (a) Moral disillusion and apathy
  - (b) Moral clarity

- (c) Self-focus
- (d) Moral hypocrisy
- 2. The participants' moral self-identities as impacted by unwanted pregnancy:
  - (a) Decreased moral agency
  - (b) Increased moral responsibility
  - (c) The lure of moral hypocrisy
- 3. The participants' moral self-identities as it influenced their decision to carry or to abort their pregnancies:
  - (a) Protection of self interests through immorality
  - (b) Protection of self interests through morality
  - (c) Connection with higher purpose
  - (d) Disconnection from a higher purpose
  - (e) Dissonance emotions
  - (f) Inner harmony emotions

## **Sketches of Participants**

The task of briefly describing 16 complex women, each whose life could easily fill a volume, is daunting. Thus, it is important to recognize that these sketches are but brief self-portraits of each woman as gleaned from interviews lasting one to two hours. Due to no screening for race or ethnicity, all but two of the women were Caucasian. Concomitantly, all of the women self-identified with the Christian faith, broadly defined

as believers of Jesus Christ. Twelve labeled themselves as non-denominational Christian and four as Baptist. Although religion was not included as part of the screening process, the pro-life organizations that referred the interviewees are Christian-based.

With the exception of long-time single mothers Sara and Lisa, who each continues to struggle financially, most of the women could be described as middle class. All but Jacky, Lisa, Lucy and Sara have attended college. Lisa and Sara have passed the General Educational Development (GED) test. This group of women exhibit marked variances in their education, their socio-economic status, their support from family-of-origin, and the availability of free time for the luxury of introspection. Because of these differences, it is not surprising that some are more articulate and reflective about their experiences than others. However, as Colby and Damon (1992) found in their interviews, the will to stand for moral convictions does not necessarily correlate with the ability to articulate the moral reasoning behind the judgments. Such was the case with the women interviewed for this study.

Ironically, some of the most moving acts of selfless adherence to morality in these interviews came from those least able to describe why they were able to do it. Thus a portion of each of the 16 interviews has been included, from the expressive to the inarticulate. The brief sketches below will begin with those who chose to abort their pregnancies (Alex, Hillary, Jacky, Joan, Lucy, Marie, Sara Kensington, and Sue), followed by the women who chose to carry their pregnancies to term (Elizabeth, Joy,

Kay, Lisa, Nancy, Samantha, Sara and Yara). Brief demographics of both sets of women are outlined in Table 1.

#### Women Who Aborted

Alex is a 20 year old from what she described as a loving southern Christian family. She dated the son of her pastor for several years, a young man a few years her senior who was her acting youth pastor. They remained virgins for most of their relationship until they were alone in her parents' vacation home. He forced himself on her twice, even though she asked him to stop. He denied his part in the pregnancy, but was willing to drive her 13 hours to help her get an abortion, if she promised never to contact him again.

Hillary is a Native American, born seventh of a family of eight children, with several older sisters who had children out of wedlock. She was married, had one child in that relationship, and then divorced. When she was 37 and a single mother of a teenaged son, she found herself pregnant again. Her relationship with her boyfriend at the time was volatile and unstable. Though raised in a Christian home, she admitted that until recently her Christian beliefs never impacted how she lived her life.

Jacky described being raised in rural Kentucky by a very loving family with lots of extended family interaction. Her world fell apart when her father ran off with another woman when Jacky was 15. Her mother was unable to function for the next two years, so Jacky ran the house. She had been the self-described "good girl" until that time, when she

became promiscuous and took up drinking and drugs. She resumed her "fun party life" even after she became pregnant and had an abortion at age 22.

Joan, who picked her pseudo name for "Joan of Arc," was 41 when she had her abortion. She had been married with three children. Her husband ran off when she was 30, but she could not find him to divorce. While a single mother, she put herself through school and became an engineer. She described herself as a "devout Catholic," but became disillusioned with her faith and began an affair with a married man (while still married herself). He and his wife paid for the abortion.

Lucy remembers her father's death when she was four. She was taken in by her grandparents where her grandfather sexually abused her until she was 12. She got pregnant at 15 and married at 16 years old. She carried and parented that child despite the protests of all around her. She married a second time and was in the process of divorcing again when she became pregnant again as the result of an affair at the age of 21. Her son was five years old when she chose to abort her second child.

Marie remembers being sexually abused by a male and female caretaker when she was five. Her brother, whom she suspects was abused at the same time, then began abusing her as well. Her parents became Christians late in life and were very strict with her. During her first year of college she told her mother of her brother's abuse. Her mother denied it could be true. Marie was raped in her early 20s. She began drinking and taking drugs which helped her find a profession as a stripper for several years. Her abortion was when she was 22-24 years old – she is unable to remember precisely.

Sara Kensington<sup>1</sup> is the eldest of three in what she described as a dysfunctional, but outwardly Charismatic Christian family from Wichita, Kansas. Her father, who was an alcoholic, had an affair, and left the family when she was 14. Her mother became emotionally and physically incapacitated by his departure. Sara assumed the role of the adult, becoming the strong one in the family. Her pregnancy was by her first sexual partner, whom she began dating when she was 20, while putting herself through college. She was the only one interviewed who used RU 486 for her abortion.

Sue is third of four children from a Baptist, middle class, Pennsylvania family. She is an accountant who was in an abusive relationship at 25 years old when she learned she was pregnant. She was preparing to have major back surgery and had subjected herself to an estimated 30 full body x-rays before discovering the pregnancy. The doctors caring for her never told her what was wrong with the child, but they warned her that the pregnancy could not have a "happy ending."

#### Women Who Carried

Elizabeth is a twin with five older siblings. They grew up in a self-described permissive Christian home in Southern Virginia. She reports rebelling around the age of 13, spiraling into promiscuous sex, drugs and alcohol. She almost finished college on a track scholarship, but got injured. She had plans to go into the Marine Corps but a few

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Sara Kensington came up with this name for herself only after prolonged struggling as to what proper

<sup>&</sup>quot;pen name" would be "really good."

days before she was to report in, she found out she was pregnant. She and the father, a Marine, chose to get married, even though they were not excited about the marriage.

They are expecting their fifth child now.

Joy grew up in rural Virginia as the only child of two well-educated Christian parents. She is self-described as very bright and opinionated, causing her to have a difficult relationship with her parents. She married and divorced an abusive man. Then she went to live in a home with eight other "roommates," one of whom got her pregnant. She quickly broke it off when he wanted her to abort the pregnancy. She was 22 at the time. She is raising her son.

Kay was another independent spirit who grew up in rural Virginia in what she called a loving Christian family. Her parents each had 13 siblings so she was related to all her neighbors. She lost her younger brother in a bicycle accident when she was 16 years old. She finished college and went to New Zealand for a month following graduation. She was engaged to marry a Navy pilot, but decided while she was away that she wanted to postpone the marriage and learn to live on her own first. She became pregnant at 23 upon her return to the United States. Her fiancé was transferred to California where he decided to end the engagement. She has raised her daughter with her current husband's help.

Lisa is an African American from Northern Virginia who presently works as a maid. She grew up with a father who was rarely around, and when he was he was verbally and emotionally abusive to her. She remembers that she and her sister were kidnapped by her father when she was five or six. Her father told her she would never

finish school, never get a job and never be able to live on her own. She was pregnant at 17 and kept her son. She became pregnant again when she was 27. She never married and is raising her teenaged daughter.

Nancy, a 20-year-old, described coming from a supportive, loving Christian home in Northern Virginia. She had very strong convictions about waiting until marriage for intercourse. She was involved with a man she met at Bible study and found him continually pushing the physical boundaries of the relationship they had agreed upon. She maintains that there never was penetration, so she was unwilling to believe that she was pregnant for some time. The man moved to California and wanted nothing to do with his son. She placed her son with a couple in an open adoption.

Samantha grew up in what she described was a loving Christian home with both parents and her grandmother. Her father was in the military and she grew up in several states. She was told at 16 she would never have children. When she was 22, her mother was killed in a motorcycle accident while her father was driving. She ran from the pain by using drugs and partying. She attempted suicide several times and was living with an abusive "friend" who got her pregnant just as she was moving out, at age 23. Samantha placed her child with a couple in an open adoption.

Sara grew up in Colorado, the eldest of two girls. She never knew her father in her youth, her mother was physically and emotionally abusive, and she was sexually abused by a step brother. She ran away from home when she was 14 and lived in and out of foster homes until becoming pregnant the first time at 18. The father of her child was a

drug abuser, but she tried to make it work with him for her son. Then, at 20, she got pregnant again by the same father. At the time of the pregnancy, she was a waitress earning less than minimum wage. She has five children now and never married.

Yara grew up in a Catholic family in rural Philadelphia and went to Catholic private schools all through high school. She reports being ostracized socially up through her high school years until she discovered that smoking pot made her popular. She admits to being an adrenaline junkie who always had a "wild side." She received her fashion degree while living with an abusive boyfriend whom she left just before becoming pregnant at age 21. She has raised her son on her own.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	D . D !	At Conception <sup>a</sup>		Age at	Outcome of
	Prior Pg <sup>t</sup>	Education Lvl.	Age	Interview	Pregnancy
Alex	0	Some College	20	43	Aborted
Hillary	1	Some College	37	39	Aborted
Jacky	0	High School	22	46	Aborted
Joan	3	M.A.	41	56	Aborted
Lucy	1	High School	21	54	Aborted
Marie	0	Some College	23	37	Aborted
Sara K.	0	Some College	20	25	Aborted
Sue	0	B.A.	25	45	Aborted
Elizabeth	0	Some College	22	29	Parented
Joy	0	High School	22	32	Parented
Kay	0	B.A.	24	43	Parented
Lisa	1	G.E.D.	27	42	Parented
Nancy	0	Some College	20	24	Adoption
Samantha	0	Some College	23	26	Adoption
Sara	1	G.E.D.	20	30	Parented
Yara	0	Some College	21	39	Parented

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup>At conception refers to the unwanted pregnancy researched in this study.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>b</sup>Prior Pg – Number of pregnancies each woman experienced prior to the unwanted pregnancy explored in this study – each prior pregnancy was carried to term and parented.

# Moral Self-Identities Prior to Unwanted Pregnancies

Several moral self-identity sub-themes became apparent in the women's descriptions of themselves prior to their pregnancies. All of the women who aborted and four of the women who carried described themselves using bleak terms such as: "I was a broken person," "I was lost," "I was a wreck," "I was a failure," "I was a nothing," "I was obviously worthless," "I was hopeless." Interestingly, the descriptions from women who carried were not as hopeless: "I was a mess," "I didn't respect myself," "I was very confused about life," "I was on a self-destructive path." In addition to their low opinions of themselves, the following sub-themes arose in the narratives of the women prior to their pregnancy and will be addressed:

- 1. Moral disillusionment and apathy
- 2. Moral clarity
- 3. Self focus
- 4. Moral hypocrisy

#### Moral Disillusion and Apathy

Four of the women who aborted and one who carried described events prior to their pregnancies that led to their discovery that the world is not as they thought it should be; subsequently, they became disillusioned with the moral structure they had trusted up to that time. Those who experienced moral disillusionment, with the exception of Sara Kensington, also described ensuing moral apathy.

Marie's moral disillusionment, for example, seemed to intensify when she finally found the courage to tell her mother that her brother had molested her as a child. Her Christian mother was unable to believe or hear Marie's cry for help:

I grew up in a, you know, a family that we started off going to the Lutheran church, and then when I was in about 7th grade, my parents became Christians and we started going to a new church, and my dad was very strict, legalistic, and had a very tight rein on me, and followed me around, wanted to know where I was at all times, and which made it very difficult for me to feel like I could go to them with things. So I definitely never told my parents about my brother until later, after my first year of college when things started really going downhill for me...I came home one break and I told my mom about it, that my brother had abused me, and she said, "there's no way he did that to you." So I, that shut me down completely, and pretty much at that point was when I really started to go off the deep end, and I moved to California.

Marie's moral disillusionment caused her to give up her virginity and spiral deeply into a lifestyle of moral apathy:

I was doing some modeling at the time and, you know, really got wrapped up in the wrong crowd, and I quit my nanny job and I started dancing. I was a stripper. And that was my real way of getting back at men, because they could look but they couldn't touch. And so I did that for about a year and a half, or two years, and I would have to get totally drunk or high on drugs to be able to even do it.

Likewise, Jacky was able to pinpoint the time and cause of her moral disillusionment, which led to her own moral apathy:

I thought we were the good, trustworthy, hard working, great friendships, great family. You know, we all, like for holidays we would always go to my grandparents' house, my dad's parents. All the cousins. We all stayed all night. We'd play Candy Land; we'd play card games; we, you know, we'd eat a lot. We, you know – it's all happy memories. All. Until dad left, and until that change. Because from that point on, all the relationships were different.

Everyone, all our relationships were different. And so at the time right before the abortion, what I thought, or what I thought was real, or what I thought was right, all of a sudden wasn't anymore. I completely lost the truth of, and perspective, of – moral went out, moral went out the door. And then, again, I'm not trying to put

all the blame there, but I can tell you that's when the change of the crumbling down of everything as I knew it changed. It was now broken, and then I was very angry and pretty much just, you know, screw this. So then started smoking pot, starting sleeping around, didn't care. I just didn't care. Long answer to a short question, I didn't care. So became very apathetic to morals, and truth, and relationships, and holding things sacred. Everything went out the window.

Joan's moral disillusionment seemed to have spawned from years of what she perceived as unrewarded faithfulness for doing the right thing:

I couldn't get that from the Catholic Church. I could get no counseling from the Catholic Church. It was, "Go back to your husband," but I couldn't find my husband, and I was run down. I had spent the past 16 years as a single mom, celibate, working myself into the ground, with all three of my children, all athletes...So when I went to the flesh, I went to the flesh. There were multiple men. I went to the flesh. I can't even count them on three hands, four hands, because I was rebellious, I was hurt, I was confused, I had phobias, I was running in fear and didn't know what I was running from...

Joan described the moral apathy that followed in this manner:

I was a nothing. I was - I didn't really have my family with me because I was bad, I was dirty. I was, you know, not acceptable. Not acceptable in that church, not acceptable with my family, and I didn't like who I was, and so I didn't care. And my not caring hurt my children.

Similarly, Lucy, who had a child at 15, pointed to her life as a single mother and two failed marriages as robbing her of a "Leave it to Beaver" idealism that she possessed when she was pregnant and able to carry the first time.

Samantha was the only woman who carried who described this same type of moral disillusionment and apathy. It came for her as a result of the death of her mother, whom she describes as an "amazing woman":

When I was 22, my mom was killed in a motorcycle accident, and my father was driving, and so he, we all just kind of went through just a huge just devastating time, and at that point I kind of figured I didn't want to be around anyone or anything that reminded me of my mother. It's not that I didn't want to remember

her. I did remember her. It was just too painful to remember her at that time, so that was just kind of my family life surrounding that time...

I had stopped going to school. I really just, I dropped out. I didn't withdraw or anything, just stopped going. And everything that I thought I would be able to accomplish in my life, I really didn't care about anymore. Said, you know what, whatever, you know, this is obviously not the life that I was meant to have. I'm just – maybe later down the road I'll quit, you know, doing these drugs (LAUGHS) and try and get my life back on track, but for right now, I just didn't care.

In contrast to the moral apathy that is so prominent in many of the stories, some of the women maintained a sense of moral clarity prior to their unwanted pregnancy.

# Moral Clarity

Four of the women who eventually carried their pregnancies to term and one who aborted each described having a very strong and clear sense of what is morally right and wrong, even if she chose to do wrong. This is referred to as moral clarity.

Yara described how, despite her partying and wild life prior to her pregnancy, she still knew right from wrong:

I mean, I, you know, while I was going through all this, I still was raised in a Catholic family, with two parents. I may not have been very close with my parents, but they were a moral people. They taught us right and wrong, you know, so I had that instilled within me at some – at some level I knew right from wrong, and I just was choosing to be wrong.

Joy was able to recognize that her inner moral clarity was present despite the absence of parental instruction. "I always had very strong – they [my parents] never talked to me about smoking, or drugs, or drinking either, but they were very lucky in that I just happened to have extremely strong, you know, decisions and stick by them."

Nancy's moral clarity came in the form of Christian conviction that premarital sex was wrong. She attempted to assert these convictions with the young man she was dating:

When we were dating, he would always initiate physical contact and we would, you know, be kissing or whatever, and then it would, you know, all of a sudden become into making out, and you know, things got hotter and heavier, and I would always—not always, but a lot of times—I'd just be like, "Okay, will you stop." You know, "Stop." And he would get really frustrated with that, and so that was kind of a red flag. And I would talk to him about how I felt about the physical relationship, and he was like, "You're right, you're right," and he would say, you know, "Cool it," or whatever, but then it would just happen again.

Likewise Elizabeth became convicted that her lifestyle of partying was wrong and moved back home with her parents in an attempt to manage her temptation.

One of the women who aborted her pregnancy, Alex, described similar moral clarity that stemmed from her Christian faith. She described her physical relationship with her youth pastor boyfriend this way:

And I knew better than it in my head. You know, I – you know all the facts, you know better, but it just made sense. I know – I mean, I don't know how to explain that, but it just was kind of like that it made sense, and because I needed the security of a man so bad, for whatever reason, I really trusted him, but I had told him on the couch that I did not want to do that until we got married. That I had – you know, we could do everything else, all these other things, but I did not want to have sex, and that angered him, and I remember him getting off the couch and just being very angry, and just leaving out the door and slammed the door.

Alex's reaction to her capitulation to her boyfriend's physical pressure to have sex also indicates her moral clarity:

You know, some time that afternoon my sister went with her friends, and I just remember going to the bedroom and, you know, making out or whatever, and starting into sex, and I remember being on the bottom, and I remember at the point of him having intercourse with me, crying and crying and crying, and just saying please stop. No, that I can't do this. Please stop. And I remember that, and

I remember him not stopping, that it was not going to be something - he wasn't going to stop.

Self-Focus

The results of the interviews indicated that most of the women had motivations that trumped morality as a central component to their description of themselves prior to their pregnancies. Four of the women who aborted revealed that they were mostly self-focused. Hillary, for example, described herself this way:

I don't know who I was. I really don't. Like my walk of faith with God was – I always depended on myself, and I never depended on Him. Never. Never depended on Him. And I just couldn't see that the choices that I made depended on myself, how terrible, how you know, how bad things were. But it's like I always seemed to get through it, and I guess it kind of gave me a warped sense of self. You know, a self reliance, thinking that okay, well I made a bad choice, but I got through it and, you know, okay, well that's just how I'll handle my life.

Later in the interview, she described her morality prior to her pregnancy as doing that which felt right for her, "[I was] again, self reliant, thinking that what I was doing was right, and you know, just struggling."

Sue describes a similar self-reliant moral structure. Prior to her pregnancy, she remembers how she was bent on living as she pleased:

I was working hard and playing hard, and I kind of had, somewhere along the line, come to the conclusion that I could do whatever I wanted, that I didn't, I was a technically good person, and I would just, I was in control of my own life and where I was going to go. And I just had pretty much taken God out of the equation, and I don't really remember why.

Lucy remembers that her life and priorities were very simple and she describes them in simple and succinct terms, "I was very lost, and very selfish, self-centered person. It was all about me and my son. I think I was like that for a long time." Similarly,

Jacky and Sara Kensington shared their commitment to their own forms of self-focus as their overriding priority prior to their pregnancies as well.

Two of the women who carried to term described themselves prior to pregnancy as motivated by selfish desires. Yara held a belief that she could live as she pleased and God would rescue her from the consequences of a lifestyle rife with poor moral choices:

You know, that's kind of what I grew up thinking, that eventually things were going to work themselves out, and that nothing permanent – I was really set that nothing permanently bad was going to happen to me. I wasn't going to get arrested, I wasn't going to end up with bad credit, or I wasn't going to end up, you know, permanently disabled because of doing drugs, you know, or you know, my mind wasn't going to get fried, or – and I certainly wasn't going to end up pregnant. That's not going to happen to me, you know. You know, God's got my back. That's not going to happen.

Samantha described her abandonment of her family, her drug addiction and her lying as all a result of selfishness:

I was untrustworthy. I was not a very nice person. I battled with a drug addiction to cocaine, and probably one of the main reasons was because it made me feel numb to anything and everything. I didn't have to deal with my mom's death. It was a scapegoat. And I stole from my dad, I stole his pain medication after the accident to feed my habit, to try and get more cocaine. And I lied to everyone who loved me, and I pushed everyone that I really knew, and knew who loved me; I tried to push them as far away as humanly possible. I was just not a very nice person unless there was something that I wanted. You know, I was out for my own wellbeing, and I really, I abandoned my family when they needed me the most. I was not – I just was not a very nice person.

## Moral Hypocrisy

Several of the women admitted that they were more motivated to *appear* moral than to actually *be* moral prior to their pregnancies. Batson et al. (1999) refers to this motivation as moral hypocrisy. Sara Kensington, who described herself as "very

judgmental," having grown up in a strict Christian school, chronicles her own progression into moral hypocrisy:

And so raising them [siblings], trying to hold the family together, just feeling the burden of everything and the burden to be, you know, perfect and still, you know, not let people at school and in church and stuff know that I, what's going on, because that was pretty shameful for me because I didn't really know a lot of people at that time whose families were breaking up. And so I'm trying to be perfect at school, trying to do, maintain this Christian image that I had that nothing was wrong, everything was fine; didn't really tell even my best friends what was going on, and so trying to manage my stress.

Then once she and her boyfriend began having sex she described her thoughts on what contraception use would mean:

And so, you know, we swore that we weren't going to do it anymore, that that wasn't going to happen, and obviously it did continue, and I felt trapped. I felt helpless to stop it in a lot of ways, and I also felt like if I, you know, did any kind of contraception or birth control, that that would have made me one of "those girls," you know, who, you know, were living that lifestyle of promiscuity, and that by not using the, any kind of contraception, that I was saying, you know, oh this was just a surprise, and it's not really the way I am, not how I live.

Alex, who also grew up in the church, expressed her own moral hypocrisy prior to her pregnancy as an inability to be authentic about what was going on inside of herself:

You know, I had no self-assurance, no self-confidence. It was inner though. It was inner stuff. I could fake it to anybody. I mean, I could get in front of an entire church and lead a youth whatever conference, and I could, you know, model or run, or whatever, but inside at night, you know, I was scared, I was nervous, cry a lot. So I remember that about myself mostly.

Prior to pregnancy, all but two of the women (Lisa and Sara) depicted their lifestyles as inconsistent with their moral convictions with respect to sex before marriage; for Lisa and Sara sex before marriage was the norm. Therefore all of the women, except Lisa and Sara, were already trespassing their own moral convictions before they became

pregnant. For some, the experience of an unwanted pregnancy made it easy for them to continue down this path, as will be discussed in the next section. However, for others, the unwanted pregnancy was the impetus for a palpable moral reversal.

## Moral Self-Identity as Impacted by Unwanted Pregnancy

Haste and Locke (1983) identify a "triggering event" as some incident that creates a powerful emotional response causing one to reexamine life's choices, moral perspective and sense of social responsibility. An unwanted pregnancy was such an event in the lives of the women interviewed for this study. Yara, for example, expressed such a thought when she said of her unwanted pregnancy, "I think, the way that I always describe it, is sometimes you have to hit bottom before you look up, and that was my bottom." However, upon reflection, the women recognized the pregnancy did not always trigger what they considered movement in a positive moral direction. The following sub-themes became evident as the women described themselves as impacted by the dilemma of an unwanted pregnancy:

- 1. Decreased Moral Agency
- 2. Increased Moral Responsibility
- 3. The Lure of Moral Hypocrisy

## Decreased Moral Agency

Neutralizations are what Sykes and Matza (1957) called the thoughts used to justify an immoral act that one is planning to commit without seeming immoral to the

self. All of the women in this study who aborted believed they lacked the ability to do the moral thing (prohibitive). This belief system helped decrease their feelings of responsibility toward the moral action by convincing themselves that they were not even given a choice in the situation. Some samples of their thinking are: "I didn't feel like I had a choice," "I can't go through with this" [pregnancy], "I felt trapped," "There was nothing I could do," "I didn't have any choice," "There's no way I can have this baby," "I didn't have the strength to fight it," and "That was what I had to do."

Four of the women who aborted described their pregnancies in terms that indicated they viewed themselves as victims of their pregnancies or their circumstances. Their sense of moral agency decreased as they thought themselves to be helpless casualties of life's injustice. Sara Kensington, for example, reported that in her pregnancy, she felt as if she was a victim of God. She went so far as to accuse God of being responsible for her abortion:

I remember being angry with the Lord that He even allowed me to get pregnant, knowing that I would have an abortion. I, you know, I put the responsibility – you, why did you let me, why did you let this happen to me?

As a victim of the Lord's injustice through both her pregnancy and her inevitable abortion that came with it, Sara Kensington convinced herself she was bereft of moral agency: "I didn't feel like I had a choice."

Sue, who was preparing for major back surgery, already felt distraught and burdened. The pregnancy was perceived as one more blow to someone who was already down:

I mean, it was – I was really scared about this surgery I was having. I was really afraid. I mean, there was a high, a fairly good probability I could be paralyzed, and I knew I'd have a year of recovery, I'd have to leave my job. I was just really going through a lot, and I was scared. And then when this, you know, when I thought I was pregnant on top of it, it was like oh my gosh, I can't take any more.

Her guilt from the pregnancy and all the x-rays she had while pregnant seemed to render her incapable of moral action:

I was just like – I just, at that point I had it in my head that this is what I had to do because I had destroyed this baby and I couldn't take care of it even if I wanted to because I'm going to need taking care of.

Joan portrayed herself as someone who just wanted to be loved, who became the victim of a married man who pursued her and got her pregnant, but ultimately didn't want her. Scorned, rejected, and feeling powerless, she developed the belief that she must decide which of her children she would have to sacrifice:

Let's get back into reality now. I'm pregnant, I'm a single mom, and if I carry this baby to term and have it, I will ruin the complete relationship, if any, that I have with my two daughters. I will have nothing. So which do I sacrifice?" It became that to me... And I thought, how could God ever love me?

And as Joan chose to save her relationship with her other children by moving toward what was, in her mind, an inevitable abortion, she described her sense of inability to endure a child out of wedlock:

I looked at my youngest daughter (STARTS CRYING) and I was like – I looked at the children that I had and I said (SOBBING) they're all I had that I was – my gifts that the Lord gave me, and I thought will I lose them too, because I didn't know Jesus enough to have the rock, to know that I could do this. That having a child out of wedlock regardless, even if you – and I – and everything I believed in, you know, pro-life, everything I believed in, I was going to go against. I was going to go against.

# Increased Moral Responsibility

All eight women who carried reported that their pregnancies caused them to develop an increased sense of responsibility. Most described considerations for what would be in the best interests of their child. Although their conclusions as to what was best for their children varied, their commitment to them did not. Four of the women who carried described the pregnancy as a major positive turning point in their lives. They described having no respect or concern for themselves, but the responsibility of caring for an innocent one brought about a radical transformation. Yara and Samantha had similar stories of completely eliminating their drug, alcohol, and cigarette abuse when they found out they were pregnant. They did for their children what they were unwilling to do for themselves. Samantha's transformation was drastic:

Before where I didn't feel like I had a reason to live, I tried several times to take my own life, I finally felt like I had a purpose to live for. That it was no longer for myself, that I had a responsibility, and it was time for me to step up and take care of that responsibility. The day that I found out that I was pregnant was the day that I stopped smoking cigarettes, doing cocaine, smoking marijuana, stopped drinking.

Nancy and Samantha, who chose families to adopt their children, felt a great responsibility to give to their children what they had been given: a stable loving family with a father and a mother. Elizabeth, who gave up her opportunity to join the Marine Corps, was the only woman who married the father of her baby upon the discovery of the pregnancy. Her decision to marry the baby's father came directly from her sense of responsibility to her child:

I mean, it was okay, I have made this decision and this baby is innocent. This baby did not ask for this, and I mean, I felt like this baby was going to deserve to have both parents. I didn't want the whole split-up scenario that rides so rampant right now, and damage – I mean, it's damaging on children, and I, I mean, you, it's obvious, you know that, and so I was like I didn't want to add to the statistics there, and I think just realizing this baby was innocent. You know, they didn't ask for this. We made the decision, and now we have to step up to the responsibility, is where I was at. So it was, I guess, loving the baby before I knew the baby.

Sara, a single mother who barely made minimum wage, hadn't grown up with much love. She found in her pregnancy an opportunity to give her child something she lacked:

Like about here I had somebody to take care of and, you know, I just felt like I could do this. I kind of, even though I was scared and alone, and lonely for myself, I just felt like I could be a mom if I was given the opportunities, you know. But I really didn't think that – as far as like providing, yeah, maybe somebody could have provided, you know, things better, but I just felt like nobody could love my kids better than me.

Similarly, Lisa, who was barely scraping by financially as well, determined to give the same to her second child as she had the first. Motivated by her own father's devastatingly cruel favoritism of her sister, Lisa said:

I had my first one, I did the best I could do, you know. I'll have this one, but no more. And that's one of the reasons for my decisions, and I always said if I had children, never would I – you know, if I can't do for both of them, neither one of them would get anything.

Yara and Joy, who ultimately parented their sons, described similar feelings of connection and responsibility for the long-term care of their children upon learning of their pregnancies.

# The Lure of Moral Hypocrisy

Although Gilligan (1977) considered all decisions concerning the dilemma of an unwanted pregnancy to be a part of the moral domain, the moral element is even more pronounced for pro-life women faced with an unwanted pregnancy. This is especially true for those who are part of a church that considers extramarital sex to be sinful. Six of the women who chose abortion recognized that their desire to appear moral outweighed their desire to be moral.

Sara Kensington articulated her own moral hypocrisy in very succinct and descriptive terms:

I was most fearful of judgment on the part of everyone in my life. Parents, friends, you know, church, people that I didn't even know. You know, I was just afraid of this idea about me that no, people would know that I wasn't who I made myself out to be, and that I was working so hard to hold up this image and this mask, and that that would reveal me.

Joan used religious terms to describe her thoughts about ending the pregnancy to continue the appearance to her church, her family, and perhaps herself that she was still acceptable:

I don't know if I thought it was going to be freedom, or that nobody would know that I was bad, ugly, sinful, dirty woman, you nasty person, you – you know, look at you. You loser. So, you know, and I, you know, my family was beginning a little bit to come around. I had made it. I had proven that I could get a four year degree, and my girls went to church, and I served the Lord, and I wasn't dirty that my husband, my first husband wasn't with me. That I wasn't a sinner.

The rest of the women who chose to abort similarly described their own moral hypocrisy: Hillary acknowledged that she fooled herself into thinking she could solve her problem by making yet one more "mistake" by having an abortion; Sue described her

goal in deciding what to do about the pregnancy as one of taking responsibility for her mistakes by "correcting them" through abortion; Marie described the shame she would feel in telling her parents that she was pregnant as her main reason for considering abortion; and Jacky believed an abortion would, "Just fix it and it's over," so they could return to "our fun party life, and nobody gets hurt."

Three of the women who carried described a strong pull toward abortion as a means of covering up their sex outside of marriage, but were able to overcome the temptation for a variety of reasons. Yara, for example, was able to recall the specific mental struggle she had about abortion and her desire to not be a hypocrite:

But I wasn't really judgmental where if somebody believed in pro-choice, I didn't fault them for that, and I didn't judge them for that, but the rationale that went on in my mind was, well if you're pro-choice and you do something like that, it's one thing, but if you're pro-life and you make a choice, and you then, you know, consciously pro-life all of your life and then you go and have an abortion anyway, that's ten times worse. That was kind of the mentality that went on in my, the struggle that went on in my brain. You know, well if you're going to do that, and you've always believed this one way, that makes you a total hypocrite, and I just, I couldn't bring myself to do that.

Kay remembers the temptation to abort came briefly the one time her ex-fiancé mentioned it. She acknowledged only a moment of considering abortion so that she would not have to face her own mother who was always very critical of girls who had pregnancies out-of-wedlock:

I did even think about the abortion when [her ex-fiancé] mentioned it. That was kind of the, oh well I could hide everything if I did that, you know. I don't need anybody's permission or whatever. No one would have to know but me and him.

But when queried about how she responded to him, she replied simply, "I just said I wasn't, I couldn't do that. I wasn't going to do it."

Elizabeth recognized the temptation to accept the Marine recruiter's suggestion that she abort, but did not allow herself to consider it. To do so would mean, "I was trying to cover up my wrong with more wrong. That, in my mind, was detest... like disgusting." Similarly, Nancy already felt so much pain because she had betrayed her own standards about sex before marriage that the idea of violating more of her standards through abortion was too painful to consider seriously as an option.

**Summary** 

The stories of the women interviewed for this study indicated that their unwanted pregnancies did have a substantial effect on their moral self-identities. The sub-themes that described the changes they experienced included a decreased sense of moral agency, sometimes through victimhood; an increased sense of moral responsibility because they saw themselves as protectors; and an increased pull to look more moral than they actually were. Each of these sub-themes appears to have played a substantial role in propelling them toward their ultimate decisions.

Moral Self-Identity's Influence on the Pregnancy Decision

All of the pro-life women who were interviewed for this study had to make a decision. Some did so with a great deal of mental and emotional wrangling. For example, Sara Kensington described arguing with God over the abortion, devaluing the fetus by

calling it "cells" and working very hard to come to a place where she could abort, "And so I had to find some way to separate myself from what I knew was right to be able to make that choice, because I'd even like protested that clinic when I was little."

Others did what they wanted without allowing themselves to think about what they were doing. Alex, for example, was in such denial that when her Grandmother sat her down to talk to her after learning of Alex's pregnancy, she replied "I don't know what you're talking about."

Regardless of their decisions or how the decisions were made, each based her decision on what mattered the most to her at the time. The sub-themes depicting moral self-identity that were heard in the stories of how the women made their decisions were:

- 1. Protection of self interests through immorality
- 2. Protection of self interests through morality
- 3. Connection with a higher purpose
- 4. Disconnection from a higher purpose
- 5. Dissonance emotions
- 6. Inner harmony emotions

Protection of Self-Interest through Immorality

Each of the women who aborted was asked to look introspectively and describe how she made her ultimate decision to abort; what meant the most to her in making the decision. Upon self-analysis, each of the eight women, without exception, reported or described protection of self interests as the overriding factor that permitted her to ignore

her own moral beliefs about abortion and do what she really wanted to do, which was to stop the pregnancy. Several of the women were able to articulate this finding with clarity.

Sara Kensington remembered the thoughts which helped her overcome her own condemnation:

I remember just thinking over and over again, I want my career, I want my education, I want my white wedding on my time. You know, I want my dream wedding, and I don't want it to be a shotgun wedding, and I don't want to have a big belly in my dress, and, you know, all these things, and I don't want to have to marry this guy if I don't want to, and I'm not sure that I want to. So that was kind of like a little stream of consciousness thought.

And later she described, clearly that she felt her self-interests were in direct conflict with her own sense of morality. "I knew that what I was doing was wrong, but I wanted my way more than right. My way was more important to me than the right way."

Likewise, Marie described her self-interests as being in direct conflict with her morality, which she linked to what her Lord would want her to do. She very succinctly expressed her primary motivation behind her decision to abort:

Selfish. Wanting to – I mean, thinking about it back then it was an inconvenience, definitely, to my life and I just thought there's no way I can be a mom. I'm so screwed up. I knew how screwed up I was, but I couldn't see a way out of that, and...and I just, I was so ashamed of even thinking about it, because I knew what the Lord said about it. I knew that it was murder, but I did it anyway.

Jacky recognized the self-protective motivations behind her decision to get an abortion as the solution to her problem. Additionally, she acknowledged that she did not seek advice from someone who might give advice in conflict with those self-interests:

So I guess, again, so selfish, so very selfish, that it was about me. You know it was just about, again, the solution to the problem, and it was just pretty much that

cut and dried and simple, and I certainly didn't consider do I need to go talk to a preacher, or a pastor, or a priest, or a – you know, I didn't bring in any of those.

Likewise, the other women who aborted expressed similar self-protective motivations behind their decisions. Hillary, Lucy and Joan each reported using their own pain as a single parent as well as the pain of their children as motivation to abort. But each of these ladies emphasized this was a rationalization they used to fulfill their selfish desire to end their pregnancies. Sue and Alex each allowed others to make the decision for them as a way of minimizing their own accountability in their own minds for the decision that they admitted they selfishly wanted to do anyway. Sue didn't want the responsibility of caring for a potentially deformed baby, and Alex didn't want others to know of the pregnancy.

Protection of Self-Interest through Morality

Although the women who carried had markedly different outcomes to their stories, just like those who aborted, they spoke of protection of self-interests in their decisions to parent or to put their child up for adoption. However, the difference appeared to be what they believed was in their self-interests. Their responses indicated that for them, following the moral path *was* protecting their self-interests.

Despite myriad voices telling her to abort, and offering her the money to do so, Yara clearly articulated how she could not make that decision because it would damage her ability to live with herself. The anticipated negative self-betrayal emotion of guilt helped her to make a decision she could live with:

I wanted – I mean, I think – I needed to make a decision that I could live with, and I knew I couldn't live with an abortion. I knew. I am a very guilt ridden

person. I carry guilt with me on a daily basis, and I knew that I could not carry that with me. I couldn't do that.

Sara described similar feelings about the prospect of having an abortion when she said, "I just couldn't live with myself." Samantha sought out a solution that would give her positive moral emotions and was able to find that only in the idea of adoption, although she knew it would also give her great personal pain: "I didn't have a peace with anything else."

Likewise, Joy spoke in adamant terms about her protection of self-interests when discussing why she never allowed the thought of abortion *or* adoption to enter her mind:

I'm not kidding when I say abortion would've destroyed me...I'm in touch with myself enough to know, you know, what I can and can't do. Just what I'm – I'm not strong enough to give a baby up for adoption, or to release a baby for adoption, but I'm very pro-adoption, and my husband and I have planned on adopting more children. And abortion was just never an option because I could not possibly do it.

Nancy was the only one who drew on her spirituality to describe her moral decision making. She describes sitting in an abortion clinic parking lot and coming to the conclusion, "I can't do this, you know. I was like, you know, I've got to trust God for strength and, you know, chose another option, because I can't do this." And when asked why she felt that she couldn't do it, she responded in a way that showed how deeply her identity was enmeshed with her God and her belief that his direction was what was best for her. So much so, that she links her personal pain in her pregnancy to stepping outside of his guidance:

Because I knew that it would cause more pain than I was already experiencing at that time. I knew that the sin that I had committed, this was the—I don't want to say consequence—but it was, in a way, and then I thought okay, if this is the

consequence and the pain I'm feeling right now because of that sin, if I go and commit this other sin, it's even greater in my mind, you know, then there's going to be a whole lot more pain to go along with it.

The remaining women who carried all used equally adamant responses to the question of why they did not abort. They refused to allow themselves to consider abortion as an option that could be in their self-interests. For example, Samantha said "That's just not a thought that I even...entertained"; Kay stated, "I just didn't consider the abortion thing;" and Elizabeth, asserted, "I can't say it was even an option." Lisa, in her simple response, indicated that for her, moral beliefs equate to moral action: "I just don't believe in that."

The responses of the women to questions about what ultimately impacted their decision to abort or to carry revealed moral self-identity was at the heart of their decisions. Those who believed that their self-interests were best protected by suspending or ignoring their own moral beliefs for this one decision - what to do with an unwanted pregnancy - acted immorally. All the women who aborted, without exception, believe today unequivocally, that their abortions were wrong. For the women who carried, they believed that doing so was protective of their ultimate self-interests as well, even if it meant sacrificing their own plans and dreams. Each of the women who carried believes today that it was the right thing to do. The decisions seemed to hinge on their connection with or disconnection from some higher purpose served by their pregnancies, as well.

Connection with a Higher Purpose

The self-described moral path for the pro-life women in this study was clearly the path of inconvenience, embarrassment and delayed dreams. Therefore, not surprisingly, those who chose this path reported a connection with a higher purpose. They each

describe some form of a connection or identification with some principle or being that transcended themselves.

All of the women who carried described their adherence to their own moral values as fulfilling a higher purpose. For Yara, Samantha, Sara, Lisa and Kay, the ability to give life rather than take it served a higher purpose and prevented them from catering to their desires and fears. Samantha's account shows how her role as the protector of the life of her unborn child added meaning and worth to her own existence:

Before where I didn't feel like I had a reason to live, I tried several times to take my own life, I finally felt like I had a purpose to live for. That it was no longer for myself, that I had a responsibility, and it was time for me to (LAUGHS) step up and take care of that responsibility.

Sara described her pregnancy as almost a calling to the valued, protective role of motherhood this way:

I actually felt – it's kind of hard to explain, but I actually felt, I kind of felt cool, you know, like, you know, like I felt more important. Like about here I had somebody to take care of and, you know, I just felt like I could do this. I kind of, even though I was scared and alone, and lonely for myself, I just felt like I could be a mom if I was given the opportunities, you know.

Nancy, Joy, and Elizabeth linked their moral values to a personal God whom they pictured as knowing what was best for them and providing strength to act in accordance with what was right. Nancy elicited her God's help to stick to her moral convictions:

I actually drove to one [abortion clinic] and it was, the parking lot was empty. It looked so just evil. (LAUGHS) It just looked so broken down and unattractive, and at that point I sat in the car and I started crying, and I was like, I can't do this, you know. I was like, you know, I've got to trust God for strength and, you know, choose another option, because I can't do this.

Despite her fears, Joy was able to find happiness in her pregnancy because she believed it was part of a higher purpose and leaned on her God's strength to sustain her through it:

You know, I was definitely shocked and, you know, scared, but I was also happy because I figured, you know, there was a purpose...It brought me back to my religious roots. I got a lot closer to God really quick, because I was praying like every day, all day long, you know, for the baby and for, you know, help me figure this out, help me get through this.

Elizabeth's description of her motivation to parent her child included an understanding that the life she carried mattered to her Lord.

Pleasing the Lord, because I mean, I knew that I had, you know, made some wrong choices, and so I think that was my biggest thing was just pleasing Him, and knowing now I have this life that He's entrusting to me, and how am I going to respond, how am I going to handle it. And, you know, I definitely was wanting to raise this baby in the ways of Him, and to grow to know Him, and so, you know, I really had to buckle down, and it was no longer just me.

These women describe their connection with a higher purpose as being important to them and giving them the strength they needed to follow their moral convictions. Similarly, the women who aborted often described a disconnection from any form of a higher purpose.

Disconnection from a Higher Purpose

Six of the eight women described some form of disconnection from a higher purpose as contributing to their abortion decision. The other two, Lucy and Alex, reported shutting down their thoughts and emotions to prevent any connection with their own belief system. Hillary depicts her disconnection from God as directly related to her "terrible" choices:

Like my walk of faith with God was – I always depended on myself, and I never depended on Him. Never. Never depended on Him. And I just couldn't see that the choices that I made depended on myself, how terrible, how you know, how bad things were.

And later, she laments that had she listened to God, it would have been better for her, "You know I wish I could make it right. The only way I could have made it right is if I would have listened to God and done the right thing." Likewise, Marie, Sue, and Sara Kensington described their purposeful focus on the difficulty of their circumstances and their disconnection with God as contributing to their ability to choose a path that seemed beneficial to them at the time. Sue also described her abortion as a missed opportunity to serve the higher purpose of protecting her child, "Well, if someone broke into your house and was going to either kill you or your baby, you would defend your child...but for me, I took the easy way out."

Jacky associated her morality with her family and, specifically her grandmother. She remembered feeling the need to hide her decision from that grandmother who had Christian beliefs. Her grandmother's morality conflicted with what Jacky thought was in her self-interest:

At that point I do remember thinking, what would grandma – again, grandma was my poster of, you know, Christian, churchgoing. I remember thinking how disappointed grandma would be. She could never know about this. This would be so disappointing to her. And I remember thinking, it is disappointing, but it's what I have to do, you know.

The question of whether the women made connections with a higher purpose or were at a point of disconnection appeared to play an important role in their emotions following their decisions as well.

#### Dissonance Emotions

According to Blasi (1999), it is wise for the researcher to investigate the emotional responses surrounding a moral decision as indicators of whether personal moral convictions have been violated. Embracing this suggestion, the researcher probed the feelings of the women following their decisions to explore how deeply they held their pro-life views. Festinger (1957) termed the emotions that follow inconsistency between thought and action as dissonance. The dissonance emotions of the women who aborted were especially prominent and pervasive throughout their interviews.

All eight of the women who aborted experienced unrelenting, painful moral emotions that indicate their actions (abortion) were in conflict with their beliefs. Among the dissonance emotions found were guilt, shame, regret, deep sorrow, and hopelessness. Alex, Marie and Jacky each spoke of no desire to live. Marie and Jacky used illicit drugs to diminish the pain and were bent on self-destruction. Alex, a nursing student, tried to take her own life:

And I just remember being in perpetual motion forward. I don't – I mean, I did nothing. I went to school, and I ate, and I ran, and several times went to try to kill myself. I drove out to this lake and I stole a bottle of insulin from the hospital, and I knew that if I would inject the entire bottle of insulin, that I would go to sleep and I'd die, and I wouldn't be in pain. And my only fear of dying was being in pain. I didn't even have a healthy fear of the Lord at that time, or like that that was a sin. I just wanted the pain to go away. I wanted the emotion to go away, I wanted to stop thinking about it.

Sara Kensington and Jacky also described an obsession with babies as a result of their regret. Sara K. described her fixation this way:

I was obsessed with babies. I mean, anywhere I went, everywhere I saw – I mean, it was all I could see was babies everywhere. And my friend had a baby that would have been maybe four months older than mine, and I mean, I just couldn't get enough of him. It was like I was just so attached to him, and very depressed. Not realizing, not connecting that at the time, but just in a deep sorrow.

Three of the women, when discussing what they would say now to someone in an unwanted pregnancy, warned of never being able to forgive oneself for having chosen to abort. The intense feelings of shame are evident in Hillary's words as she imagined herself talking to a young lady considering abortion:

When you think about how you're going to feel if you make that decision, and not keep your child, then you're going to, you're never going to escape how you're going to feel about that. You won't. It will – others may see you as a good person, but it's never going to be how you see yourself. You're never going to feel that way, and it's – you think you can go on and you can kid yourself, but you don't. It's just always there, and it's always, you know (SNIFFS), reminding you that you were weak and you just gave in to your weakness.

All of the women who aborted described emotions of guilt and deep sorrow. As Sue, for example, relayed an actual conversation she recently had with a woman in an unwanted pregnancy, she provided a glimpse into the emotional devastation of her own abortion:

I took the easy way out. And I had a lot of guilt associated with it for years and years, so. I just, I was definitely very depressed for a long time, and you sort of stuff it. I stuffed it. I kept stuffing it down. Not a healthy thing to do. Seventeen years later it all came flying out...You will never forgive yourself. It will eat you. It will just ruin your life.

Jacky very poignantly described how the progression of her decisions made her feel about herself:

The respect level went way down. Even more so. Again, because I was the good girl, I was the one who held out. Then I was the one who didn't hold out. Then I was the one who got pregnant. Now I'm the one who's murdered my child. So

yeah, the self respect was gone. Gone, gone. Then there was no worth or - it doesn't, it just so didn't matter, it didn't matter. Drugs didn't matter. Guys, it didn't matter. Live or die, it really didn't matter. I mean, it just didn't matter. There was zero worth. It was gone.

The dissonance emotions described by the women who aborted were palpable even today, depicting the self-betrayal of their actions. On the other hand, the emotions of the women who carried their pregnancies to term were notably different.

# *Inner Harmony Emotions*

In keeping with Festinger's (1957) Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, those individuals who are able to exhibit consistency between thought and action will experience consonance or inner harmony emotions. The women who gave their sons for adoption, Nancy and Samantha, both described intense pain in relinquishing their children to the adoptive parents. For example, Samantha described the pain of relinquishing her son as, "Just a guttural…like I could not control this pain that I was feeling." However, later on they spoke of the peace that inner harmony brings. Nancy said "I can now see my son where he's at, and I just have incredible peace. I don't have regret; I don't have envious feelings." Samantha relayed similar feelings, "Best decision of my life. I'm proud of the decision I made."

While some described feelings of regret about becoming pregnant outside of marriage, all of the women who carried and parented said they would do the same thing again if they found themselves in an unwanted pregnancy, indicating feelings of inner harmony about their decisions. Yara described her emotions after her decision as "relief." Likewise, Elizabeth described similar emotions, "We both felt like we were making the

right choice, so there was satisfaction in that, and once we were married, I think there was more relief on my part that this is the direction we're going in." She experienced these emotions despite the fact that she had to give up her dream of entering the Marine Corps. Lisa, in her concise and winsome manner, described the inner harmony that her decisions have brought her as, "I feel good about myself. I think I've, me myself, I think I've done pretty well."

### Summary

The findings of this study have been presented in this chapter. First, sketches of each of the 16 women who took part in the study were given. Then each of the three main themes and the 13 sub-themes found in each were presented. The question of how women described their self-identities prior to their pregnancies was addressed first. In such, moral disillusionment and apathy sub-themes were much more prevalent in those who aborted than in those who carried. Likewise, moral clarity was a more prominent sub-theme heard in the stories of those who later carried. Self focused motivations, including moral hypocrisy, were prioritized over morality in the women who carried and aborted alike. However these sub-themes were more prominent in the narratives of the women who later aborted.

Findings which explored how the women's moral self-identities changed as a result of their unwanted pregnancy were presented next. Some of the women experienced a decrease in their sense of moral agency through seeing themselves as a victims. Each of

the women who aborted described feeling incapable of carrying her child to term. Those who carried reported increases in moral responsibility because they saw themselves as an agent of protection for their unborn child. The lure toward moral hypocrisy appeared to increase during unwanted pregnancies in most of the women, but those who carried described how they were able to rise above it.

The most definitive differences between the group of women who aborted and those who carried were found during the exploration into how moral self-identity impacted their ultimate decision. Without exception, all of the women described protection of self-interests as a motivating factor. The women who aborted described the belief that their self-interests were best served through their decision to override their own moral convictions, ensuring protection of pragmatic interests at the expense of moral ones. Conversely, the women who carried described their beliefs that their self-interests would be ultimately protected by the decision to carry. Another sub-theme that arose was the propensity of those who carried to link their pregnancies to a higher purpose and those who aborted to point out their disconnection from any sense of being a part of a higher purpose. Finally, the moral emotions experienced by the women following their decisions were portrayed by their self-descriptions. The two sub-themes, dissonance and inner harmony lent credence to the depth of their pro-life convictions, especially for those who aborted.

The focus of this chapter has been to highlight the findings as they were gleaned from the experiences of the women who found themselves in unwanted pregnancies. The

sub-themes were self-emerging in the women's narratives. The next chapter will present an analysis of the findings in light of the literature, a model to structure the analysis of the findings as they relate to and extend the literature, and recommendations for areas of future research.

### **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

#### Overview

Jacky's words from the previous chapter sum up the findings of this research study in one pithy line, "It was all about me." This was the surprising discovery for both those who carried and those who aborted, alike. At the heart of the pro-life woman's moral decision in an unwanted pregnancy was protection of self-interests. No new levels of Nirvana and no ascension to an altered state of nobility where the self does not matter were found in the narratives of the women who carried. The findings of this study diminished the likelihood that such an altered state of nobility exists; however, these findings also demonstrated that such a state is not necessary for the translation of moral beliefs into action. Those who honored their moral convictions by carrying their pregnancies to term appeared to hold the simple belief that doing so would ultimately be advantageous for themselves as well.

Thus the encouraging piece in the findings is that the capacity to exhibit moral integrity in one's life resides in regular human beings. Additionally, the findings revealed a connection with a higher purpose was an essential element to elevating the women's motives above merely survival instinct. The ensuing discussion will integrate these and other findings of this study with the literature to gain insight into how one experiences a moral dilemma and maneuvers through the decision process to choose between routes leading to moral integrity, or to personal akrasia.

First, the discussion will explore the juncture of the findings and the literature as they contribute to how one perceives oneself in a moral dilemma. Second, the focus will turn to the self in the experience of the juncture between an immoral and a moral action. Next, the connection to a higher purpose and the effect of that connection on the self-identity will be considered. These findings and analyses will then be summarized into the researcher's synthesis of the experience of the self in a moral dilemma, presented here as the Moral Juncture Model of Self. The model will be discussed in light of Blasi's, Kohlberg's and other researcher' contributions to the understanding of moral judgment and action. The possibilities for further research will be recommended in the next section and throughout the chapter. Then the implications of this study on education in moral development and in counseling will be discussed. Lastly, a summary of the chapter, followed by concluding thoughts on the research project will be presented.

### The Perceptions of the Self in a Moral Dilemma

In his review of the literature addressing the gap between moral reasoning and moral action, Blasi (1980)recognized the significance of the moral self to both the success and the failure to uphold one's own moral convictions. The findings of this study indicated that the self was, as Blasi asserted, central to the participants' ability to sustain moral integrity as well as their failure to do so. If a woman viewed herself as a victim of her pregnancy, her sense of moral agency decreased as well. This appeared to coincide with a woman's ability to neutralize her own beliefs about abortion and to engage in

immoral behavior. Conversely, when a woman viewed herself as a protector of her child, she seemed to develop feelings of moral responsibility, as well as to anticipate feelings of dissonance if she aborted. The impact of viewing the self as a victim or a protector is discussed in this section

Self as Victim

The women in this study who viewed themselves as victims of their circumstances tended also to think of themselves with little sense of moral agency, and thus appeared able to neutralize more readily. Nunner-Winkler (1993) contends that morality is a second-order desire. This coincides with the findings in this study. When faced with the crisis of an unwanted pregnancy, most of the women in this study had a strong first order desire to end the pregnancy. The desire to act morally was secondary and required the ability to see their pregnancies as more than an attack on themselves. With this understanding, the propensity of one to think of oneself as a victim who is responsible for protection of one's own basic human needs such as survival, would diminish the duty to think about second-order desires such as the right thing to do. Moreover, in viewing oneself as a victim, the sense of moral agency is diminished, and Bandura (2002) posits moral agency is necessary to convert moral thought into moral action. One could argue, however, that the lack of agency beliefs are merely neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957) or disengagement (Bandura, 2002) techniques used to allow the self to follow an immoral course without seeming morally wrong.

Using Sykes and Matza's formulations, if a woman convinces herself that she is merely a victim of insurmountable circumstances with no ability to carry her pregnancy to term, then abortion can be pursued without taking responsibility for having made a decision. This denial of responsibility for her decision neutralizes the feelings of acting immorally. Bandura (2002) labels this kind of minimizing of one's sense of agency and responsibility as a disengagement technique used to allow a person to violate one's own standards and disengage one's own self-sanctions. These women's stories lend credence to the work of Bandura (2002) as well as that of Sykes and Matza (1957).

The women who were able to convince themselves that they were victims of their circumstances were not capable of carrying a child, or were not responsible for the decision, were able to go through with their abortions. Like Marie, some of the women who aborted made their lack of moral agency a mantra to help them pursue their desired outcome, "All I kept thinking is I can't have a baby." Others, like Alex, became robotically and unthinkingly obedient to those telling them to abort in order to distance themselves from the responsibility of the decision.

### Self as Protector

In contrast, upon learning of their pregnancies, some of the women perceived themselves as instant mothers, responsible for the protection and well-being of their children. Surprisingly, two of the women who aborted also reported such feelings.

Consequently, both faced fierce internal battles to overcome their intense feelings of love and connection to their unborn children. Joan convinced herself that her abortion decision

was a choice between the inevitable sacrifice of either her existing children or her unborn child. Sara Kensington found ways to deny her victim (Sykes & Matza, 1957) or dehumanize her victim (Bandura, 2002), by purposefully working to override her beliefs. Her stance prior to pregnancy was, "I believed that life began at conception, that abortion took that life, that life was sacred." However, upon becoming pregnant, she admitted, "We devalued it by saying it's still just cells." Apparently these women were not as convincing to themselves as they would have liked. The powerful mother-love persisted even during their abortions. Joan told of asking the child for forgiveness as it was being extracted through the vacuum tube. Sara Kensington journaled after taking the first of her RU 486 pills, "I lost you, I already loved you...I've missed out on all of your life milestones." These two women's experiences bolster Verplanken and Holland's (2002) research indicating that even if values were central to the self, the responsibility to uphold them was not necessarily present. This responsibility was neutralized or disengaged just long enough for the start of the abortion procedure or the taking of a pill.

The other women who viewed themselves as mothers and therefore protectors, became responsible agents of moral action, as Blasi (1983) suggested in his Self Model of Moral Functioning. These women reported feeling, at some level, both responsible and capable of the moral action of carrying their child. The moral emotions of empathy for their children and pursuant responsibility to give them a stable upbringing both seem to have been significant motivational factors toward moral behavior.

Additionally, those women who anticipated that negative moral emotions such as guilt, shame, and sorrow would be experienced if they aborted were able to recognize this as self-destructive and therefore inhibitive. As Hoffman (2000) suggests, these moral emotions were supportive of the women's sense of caring and justice for their children. However, if the women did not have a prior belief about the immorality of abortion, it is difficult to conceive that they would have anticipated guilt from it. The implication from this is that the women's moral emotions supported their previous objective moral reasoning, rather than the other way around.

The most difficult piece to glean from this section concerned with how one perceives of oneself in a moral dilemma is direction of causality. Does the sense that one is incapable of moral behavior lead to immoral behavior or does the desire for the rewards of immoral behavior drive neutralizing, such as minimizing one's sense of agency? Do the beliefs in one's moral agency act as a motivating factor to engage in moral action (Bandura, 1999), or does the powerful desire to act rightly create a sense that one is capable of doing so? While such questions are left for further research, it seems apparent that a strong desire for the rewards of immoral behavior, in conjunction with a lack of moral agency, is a quick path to immoral behavior. On the other hand, a strong desire to act morally, combined with an assurance that one is capable of such action, is a hopeful combination for moral behavior.

### The Self in the Juncture between Moral and Immoral Action

The crisis of an unwanted pregnancy in the lives of the pro-life women who participated in this study generated a notable priority toward protection of self-interests. Statements from those who decided to abort, such as Jacky who said, "It was so self centered, and it was self protective," centered on self-interests, as did statements of those who decided to carry, such as Yara, "I needed to make a decision that I could live with." However, the juncture between moral integration and akrasia (or the failure to act in accordance with one's moral convictions) appears to hinge on what the women perceived was in their self-interests. The default position for human nature appears to be that which provides the most reward and the least consequence to oneself.

## Protection of Self-Interests as Motivation

Krebs and Denton (2005) recognized the human propensity toward "selfishness and self-serving biases" (p. 637) as the enemy of morality. To the contrary, the findings of this study indicate that even those who act morally are doing so to ultimately serve the self. As indicated above, the difference lies in which path is believed to serve the self. When morality appears to be in conflict with self-interests, the path of akrasia is chosen. Even if the moral structure is very firmly held at the objective level, as Bersoff (1999b) indicated, the move to consider oneself as the sole exception to the rule is an easy hurdle for some. The findings in this study supported this conclusion. All of the women held steadfast beliefs about the immorality of abortion prior to their unwanted pregnancies. However, the eight women who aborted their pregnancies clearly saw their own cases as

an exception to the rule because of their circumstances. In other words, while moral decisions are made objectively for others, they are often made relativistically for personal circumstances. This allows one to avoid the reality of personal akrasia or hypocrisy.

To account for this, Nucci (2004) put forth a contextualized structuralist account of moral reasoning which postulates that one projects one's own moral reasoning onto a situation only when recognizing that the decision is indeed in the moral realm. Nucci considered the context of a decision and its ability to overshadow a person's ability to think and act morally to be a part of the complexity of the decision making process. While the findings of this study supported the latter contention, the findings also indicated that the women who believed their self-interests were served through abortion purposefully chose how to think about the situation (pragmatically as opposed to morally). This was apparently done so they could proceed with the abortion, while avoiding the inner dissonance of self-condemnation that could be an inhibitor. Similarly, several of the women who carried did so to protect their self-interests by preventing themselves from having to experience the emotional and spiritual consequences of abortion. This self-protective motivation heard in the narratives of those who chose to abort and carry, alike, harkens back to Freud's (1930/1961) pleasure principle in which he described man as seeking pleasure and avoiding pain to the self. The diversity of the women's beliefs concerning what would bring the most pleasure and pain was pivotal to their decisions.

### Akrasia

When choosing immoral behavior, the rewards to the self appear to be so enticing that the consequences to the self are often overshadowed. The rewards include preservation of self plans and dreams, avoidance of inconvenience, and often a maintained or improved impression on others. Sara Kensington demonstrated several of these in her mantra of the benefits of abortion, "I remember just thinking over and over again, I want my career, I want my education, I want my white wedding on my time. You know, I want my dream wedding, and I don't want it to be a shotgun wedding…"

The idea of moral hypocrisy, posited originally by Batson et al. (1997), fits neatly into this category of rewards being especially salient, particularly for a woman in an environment where unwed pregnancy is looked down upon. The ability to maintain the appearance of morality by acting immorally was very enticing and motivational to all of the women who aborted in this study. The opportunity to do as Sue desperately wanted, "To correct the mistake I'd made," is incredibly attractive. In order to obtain the very enticing and desirable rewards of the abortion, the women's own moral belief structure had to be impugned. In this study, the women did not do this overtly, but rather focused on the pragmatic reasons that moral behavior would be destructive to self-interests and therefore was not reasonable. This rescues the self from accusations that must come if the moral belief structure is acknowledged and upheld as valid. However, if the pathway of akrasia is chosen, after the rewards, inevitable and long-lasting consequences are experienced.

In this study, the mental gymnastics that were employed in order to shield the women from dissonance emotions long enough to act immorally, wore thin over time. The women reported loss of self respect, disconnection with a higher purpose, and intense dissonance emotions (Festinger, 1957) such as guilt, shame and sorrow. These emotions often began during and immediately after the abortion and were still present at the time of the interview as was evidenced by the depth of emotional pain displayed in their stories.

# The Path of Moral Integrity

The path of moral integrity, surprisingly, fits neatly within Freud's (1930/1961) pleasure principle as well. Moral integrity was found in this study in those who indicated that they believed morality would ultimately serve them and immoral action would bring great pain to them. Unlike those on the akrasia path of immorality who focused on the rewards to the exclusion of the consequences, those on the moral integrity pathway were painfully aware of the consequences of immoral behavior (abortion) to themselves. These consequences appeared excruciating and overshadowed any lure they felt toward the rewards of abortion. The rewards to the self as a result of moral behavior, although often delayed, were described as vital to the self. These include self-respect, increased union with a higher purpose, and inner harmony emotions such as peace, joy, and contentment. These rewards appeared to be quite motivating to those on the moral pathway. But moral behavior has consequences to the self as well. In this study, these include the loss (or

delay) of goals and plans, as well as the pain of enduring an unwed pregnancy, delivery and beyond.

The women in this study who aborted by discounting their own moral beliefs still live in the consequences of their decisions. While any reward for doing so has long passed away, the betrayal of both themselves and their children has been a continuous and deep source of pain. The dissonance emotions presented in the findings attest to this. In contrast, those who chose the path of moral integration by heeding their own moral beliefs and carrying their children, report that they live with no regrets about the decision to carry. The consequences for choosing this route have not been painless; however, the women seem to be dwelling on the rewards. In hindsight, all of the women agree that adherence to their own moral beliefs was or would have been best for them.

The Proximity of Rewards/Consequences to the Self

Blasi's (1984) self-model addresses the significance and salience of moral values to the self. It speaks of the awareness and worth one places on moral values and how proficiently they can be activated. In this study, it became apparent that the proximity of the reward and consequences to the self for moral or immoral behavior was of greater motivational importance. It can be argued that the proximity of rewards and consequences determines how salient one allows one's moral values to be in a dilemma. Despite the significance and salience of an objective, theoretical pro-life moral belief prior to an unwanted pregnancy, once the women were personally involved in the dilemma, the rewards and consequences of their choices became very real. Krebs and

Denton (2005) recognized that people in moral conflicts have a vested interest in the consequences of the outcomes, evoking emotions that are not present in objective reasoning about the dilemma. The construct of proximity of rewards and consequences was formulated to account for the powerful draw toward rewards and away from consequences heard in the participants' stories. This construct of proximity is not so much physical or temporal nearness, although that can be a factor. It has more to do with emotional proximity to the potential outcomes.

The most obvious example of a reward in this study was the women's strong desire to not be pregnant. Each of the women felt this desire to some degree upon learning of her pregnancy. Abortion was the only path to this reward. Proximity speaks to the intensity of the desire for the reward and awareness of the consequences which are influenced by the legality, availability and affordability of abortion services, the opportunity for anonymity, the ability to neutralize effectively, the awareness of current and anticipated moral emotions, the support of others, and the awareness of connection with a higher power, for example. Each of these proximity factors moves the woman emotionally closer to or farther away from the enticement of the "rewards of abortion." The closer she is, emotionally, to the reward of not being pregnant, the more enticing the draw to immoral behavior and the more mental energy it takes to overcome that lure.

An example of rewards and consequences of competing proximity can be demonstrated by Nancy's experience of sitting in the parking lot of the local abortion clinic. Physically, abortion was there, available and anonymous. It would provide her a

way to hide her moral failure from her parents and protect them from the pain she was enduring. It would allow her to finish her college and career uninterrupted. Each of these factors increased her emotional proximity to the reward of abortion as the solution. However, she had some powerful inhibitive factors at work as well. She was experiencing intense moral dissonance from having traversed her own sexual mores, causing her the severe emotional pain of guilt, regret and anguish. She was in close proximity to the emotional consequences for her first moral self-betrayal and she anticipated the painful moral emotions of a more grievous trespass, that of abortion. Even in the abortion clinic parking lot, she could not separate herself from her beliefs that her morals served a higher purpose and were ultimately self-protective. In the end, her proximity to the consequences of an abortion and to the rewards of remaining connected to her God prevented her from taking that route. She was very aware of the potential increase in emotional and spiritual pain an abortion would cause her.

Nucci (2004) recognized that the moral psychology field needs to account for when individuals prioritize their moral values and when they do not. Addressing proximity of rewards and consequences recognizes the old adage that "we do what we want to do." "What 'really matters'" (Blasi, 2005, p.92) to an individual at a moral junction is determined by that individual's awareness of the rewards and consequences for both the moral and the immoral choices that lie ahead. What one chooses at the moral junction defines what mattered the most during the moment of decision. Moral growth

occurs when one can look back over immoral decisions and accept this truth about oneself.

This idea of proximity of rewards and consequences can be instructive as well.

Acknowledging one's draw toward immoral behavior that is emotionally or physically near allows one the opportunity to set up protective measures that distance oneself from those tempting rewards. Additionally, the reminders of the consequences to the self of immoral behavior and of the rewards for moral behavior can facilitate taking the higher road of moral integrity.

## The Self in Relation to a Higher Purpose

In their research of moral exemplars, Colby and Damon (1992) found that select members of their group were determined to reach for a "purpose beyond themselves" (p. 300). Such was the case in this study as well. Examples of higher purposes noted by participants in this study covered a broad spectrum. Some believed in the benefit of obeying God; others believed in the importance of preserving all life. Although varied in content, these connections to a higher purpose were heard repeatedly in the stories of those who carried, and were conspicuously missing by those who aborted. This section will explore the findings of this study in tandem with the literature on the subject, first in a discussion of the disconnection from a higher purpose and then a discussion of the philosophical necessity for the connection of morality with a higher purpose.

## Disconnection from a Higher Purpose

Six of eight of the women in this study who aborted evidenced a disconnection with a higher purpose which appeared to contribute to their willingness to take a direction they viewed as immoral. This disconnection ranged in severity from those who experienced general moral disillusionment such as Jacky, "So [I] became very apathetic to morals, and truth, and relationships, and holding things sacred. Everything went out the window;" to those for whom morality had become connected to nothing beyond themselves such as Hillary, "[I was] again, self reliant, thinking that what I was doing was right;" to those like Alex and Sara Kensington who maintained vestiges of moral clarity based on their relationship with God that they chose to ignore just long enough to abort and maintain their moral appearance. The disconnection to a sense of higher purpose experienced by participants of this study made it difficult for them to perceive of morality as anything beneficial to themselves; rather, they viewed it as nothing more than an unnecessary, external, untrustworthy constraint which, in this case, contradicted their self-interests.

As discussed in the findings about moral disillusionment, the women in this study appeared to develop their morals in relation with others. These findings correspond with Piaget's (1969) playground findings where he noticed from his observations of children that morals are developed in cooperative relationships. However, Piaget was convinced that heteronomy, or learning from authority figures, was not as effective as peer cooperative learning. The findings of this study indicate that both the quality of the

heteronomous relationships and the ability of the authority figures to live the morals they conveyed were vital.

The women in the abortion group who were victims of moral wrongdoing by a parent or authority figure – Sara Kensington, Jacky, Lucy, and Marie – each experienced an extreme downward moral spiral. Once they recognized the moral hypocrisy in their authority figures' lives, the women jettisoned the principles taught by the hypocrites. Why some women dismiss the morals of authority figures who harm them and some keep the moral values, but dismiss their teachers as flawed, are questions for further research.

Straub (2005) contends that morality has fertile ground for growth in environments where man's basic psychological needs are fulfilled. The case could be made that the women who felt deprived of some of these basic needs abandoned their idealistic desire for transcendence. Similarly, Nunner-Winkler's (1993) assertion that morality is a second-order desire, rising above the basal desires for things such as pleasure, indicates that those who experienced first order deprivation may have experienced diminished motivation to reach for higher purposes. Along with the integrity of the authority figure who taught the morals and the capacity to think beyond basic needs, the stability of the higher purpose itself was significant, as well.

Kohlberg (1981) insisted that morality be linked to a universal, philosophical principle. He knew relativistic arguments had been used to justify the Holocaust, and he held that some things (such as annihilation of an entire race) were morally wrong. He proposed justice as the over-arching principle that moral actions were intended to uphold.

Gilligan (1982) believed that she heard the voice of caring as another, equally worthwhile principle, which morality serves. A variety of higher purposes were heard in this study.

Repeatedly, when the higher purpose itself on which the women had built their moral foundations appeared to have failed, the women were no longer able to trust that morality served their self-interests. Jacky's morality constructed around her family fell with the demise of her family as she knew it. Joan's morality built around a religion of works, which taught earthly rewards from God for obedience, crumbled over time as she felt unrewarded. Lucy's dream of an Ozzie and Harriet life became dismantled with the demise of her second marriage. Marie's belief in a God of love and truth collapsed when her Christian mother discounted the veracity of Marie's claims of abuse by her brother. Samantha's trust in a loving, compassionate God was shattered when her devoted, selfless Christian mother was killed in a motorcycle accident.

A connection to a higher purpose appears to be affected by the moral integrity of the authority figure, the ability to think on a transcendent plane and stability of the higher purpose itself. Regardless of the influences which affect connection to a higher purpose, the lack of connection to a higher purpose experienced by the women in this study had a profound impact upon their views of morality and consequently their decision to abort or carry.

Connection with Varied Higher Purposes

All of the women interviewed for this study who carried their unwanted pregnancies to term spoke of some connection with a higher purpose as a motivating

factor behind their moral decisions. The findings of this study revealed several principles toward which the participants felt moral obligation. Those principles were quite varied and some were more encompassing than others. Some women believed in a deep abiding relationship with a personal God whose scriptures guided them. Lisa and Sara, both of whom later carried their pregnancies, determined that the poor treatment by their parents was wrong, and therefore they developed reactionary principles that were deeply entrenched and guided their lives. Sara never felt loved by her parents, creating in Sara an intense obligation to love her children. Lisa's sister was the favorite child, so Lisa's sense of duty included treating her children fairly.

Other participants held tightly to higher purposes because it was what they were given. Elizabeth, Nancy and Samantha believed strongly in not merely the right to life, but life in a stable, intact immediate family. Elizabeth married the father of her child while Nancy and Samantha each chose a couple to adopt their children. In hindsight, Samantha spoke of God's higher purpose in her life and in her pregnancy:

I mean, [my son] is my gift. You know, I still love him with all of my heart, and he is probably the most important, the single most important thing in my life right now, but he was always meant for [the adoptive couple]. You know, God, as soon as I made the decision, you know right when I made the decision to have sex, and God knew what was going to happen and said, "You know what? I have this couple, and this is going to be the couple," and He knew, and He had them, and I mean, it was just, it was perfect. I mean, they are his parents, 100% his parents. I got the honor of carrying Regan for nine months, but he was always meant for them. Always meant for them.

The concept of a higher purpose and how motivated each woman was to remain or become connected to it appeared to be significant in her ability to uphold her own moral standards. If she was disconnected from that sense of a higher purpose during her unwanted pregnancy, she was more likely to abort. A connection to, and a trust in that higher purpose appeared to contribute to the belief that moral action would ultimately serve self-interests, even if pain was a certainty on that pathway.

Significance of Connection with a Higher Purpose

The idea that moral action is motivated by connection to or identification with a higher purpose has been found in several qualitative studies (Colby & Damon, 1992; Oliner & Oliner, 1988). Although the motivational power of the ultimate rewards of religion was discounted by Krebs and Denton (2005), this study found that faith in a transcendent being was indeed a motivational pull toward moral behavior. Power's (2005) contention that a power beyond the self could provide a needed sense of moral agency was indeed supported by some of the women who carried in this study. However, his idea that this connection could provide the means for someone to act in a "supramoral self" (Power, 2005, p. 237) was not supported here. Colby and Damon (1992), Oliner and Oliner (1988), and the findings of this study all point out that those who do morally courageous acts are normal and average people who perceive of themselves as nothing out of the ordinary. One possible reason for this could be that those who act morally feel they are serving their self interests through their moral actions and their connection to a higher purpose, as opposed to doing something incredibly selfless.

Statements from participants, such as Lisa's "I just couldn't live with myself," and Yara's "I knew I couldn't live with an abortion," indicate that there was a point of

moral self-integration where they believed that morality served their self-interests. This is an extension to the literature concerning moral identity and the motivations to act morally. Those who carried their pregnancies to term, in making the choice to remain or become connected with a higher purpose by living within their own moral convictions, appeared to do so because it was in their self-interests. In so doing, they discovered a path of regret-free inner harmony that came with the connection to that higher purpose, despite the hardships of single parenting or the placement of their children for adoption. These findings support Blasi's (2004) claim that one truly becomes oneself in living out one's core ideals. Oliner and Oliner (1988) found that those who rescued Jews from the Nazi regime experienced the enduring reward inherent in the significance of their moral actions. Likewise, the participants in this study who chose to act with moral integrity and carry their children are left with the enduring reward of that decision.

Similar to the women who carried, the women who aborted did so believing that they were serving self-interests. However, this study found that immoral action done in self-interest that requires disconnection from a higher purpose appears to be ultimately detrimental to the self. Unlike the women who carried and have experienced the enduring rewards of their choice, the women who aborted have long ago discounted any rewards their abortions provided them. What remained for them were the regrets and the dissonance emotions of guilt and sorrow. Although five of the eight women have sought out post-abortion counseling and believe that they are forgiven by their God, all of them continue to struggle with forgiving themselves. Five of those women now work for or

volunteer their time to pro-life counseling ministries in order to use their regrets to help others make better choices. They are trying to use their stories of pain and sorrow to serve a higher purpose: preventing others from facing a similar lifetime of regret.

#### Moral Juncture Model of Self

As the findings and the analysis were being assimilated, a picture of how the moral self-identities of the women in this study impacted their decision-making began to take shape. A preliminary model is presented here to structure the findings of this study in context with the literature and to provide a framework for future research.

## An Overview of the Model

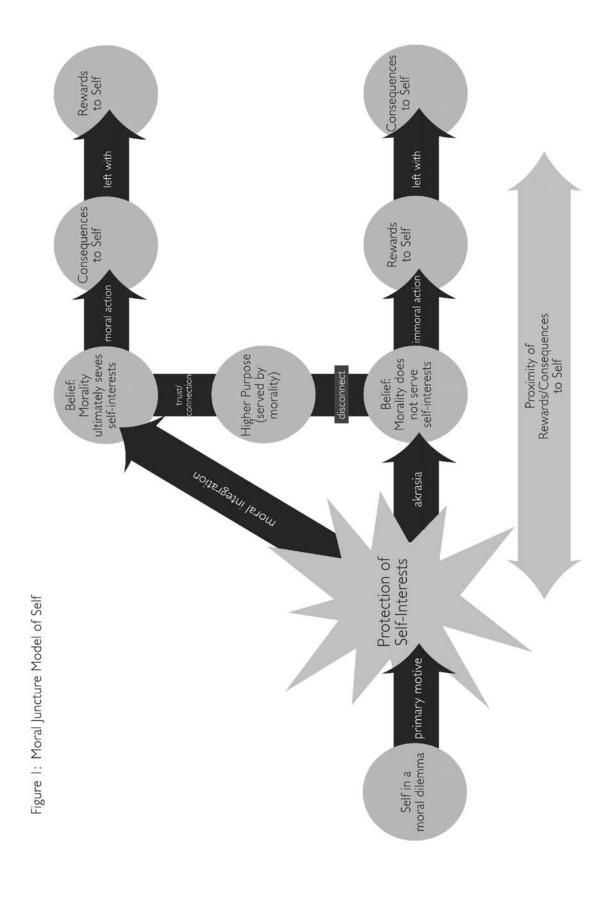
The complexity of a single moral decision is perplexingly complicated and multifaceted. Thus, a simple model might seem both presumptuous and naive. However, using the principle of parsimony, sometimes the simplest explanations are the most useful. With this principle in mind, the Moral Juncture Model of Self (Figure 1) is presented here as a simple explanation of the intersection of morality and the self in the decisions of the women in this study. The model is merely a reflection of the experiences of the 16 pro-life women in an unwanted pregnancy in this study, but it has potential for expansion to the body of moral self-identity and decision making as well. That possibility is a question for researchers to follow.

The Moral Juncture Model of Self assumes that an objective moral judgment has previously been rendered for the moral dilemma being faced and therefore a moral

conviction has been formed prior to the specific dilemma addressed by the model. The model begins with the self in that particular moral dilemma. Factors that would impact the self in a moral dilemma would include one's moral history, sense of moral agency (Bandura, 2002), moral emotions (Blasi, 1999; Hoffman, 2000), moral motivations (Batson et al., 1997; Blasi, 1999; Nunner-Winkler, 1993; Power, 2005), moral intuitions (Haidt 2001), desires, personality (Blasi, 1995; Oliner & Oliner, 1988), spirituality (Power, 2005), ability to neutralize (Bandura, 2002; Sykes & Matza, 1957), and the context of the dilemma (Bersoff, 1999b; Krebs & Denton, 2005; Nisan, 2004). All of these elements factor into and impact how one perceives the self in this specific moral dilemma.

According to the findings of this study, the primary motive for the self in a moral dilemma is protection of self-interests. The direction one takes at this fork in the road constitutes a decision between moral integrity, that is, adherence with one's own predetermined objective moral judgments, and akrasia, the pathway to action that conflicts with previous moral reasoning on the subject. All the factors mentioned above affect the propensity toward the higher path of moral integration or the lower path of akrasia.

The proximity of anticipated rewards and consequences to the self for following the higher or the lower pathway, as introduced in a previous discussion, has the predilection for overriding all previous moral reasoning about this dilemma and other factors which have been shown to impact the moral self. The awareness of competing



rewards and consequences answers the question, "What matters most to me in this dilemma?" The answers to this question will govern which rewards and consequences are emotionally held close and are thus motivational. The proximity of rewards and consequences additionally affects the belief system about the importance of morality.

The pivotal point of decision will come from the answer to the question, "What is in my self-interest?" The higher path of moral integration is motivated by the belief that morality ultimately serves the self. This pathway is one of trust in and connection with some form of higher purpose. The lower pathway begins with the belief that morality conflicts with self-interests. To take this pathway, connection with a higher purpose must be temporarily severed (or prevented from forming) and the focus must remain on pragmatic considerations above principled reasoning.

If the higher path is chosen, resulting in action commensurate with moral convictions, the consequences to the self, such as loss of pragmatic dreams and plans must be endured. However, these are filtered by the ultimate rewards to the self, such as self-respect, inner harmony emotions (peace, contentment, satisfaction), and an increased sense of union with the higher purpose. If the lower default path is chosen, the pragmatic rewards to self, such as attainment of desires and preservation of self-plans and dreams, are experienced. However, these are overshadowed over time by the consequences to the self: loss of self-respect, disconnection with a higher purpose and intense dissonance emotions. In the end, the enduring legacy of the lower pathway is the lasting consequence

to the self; the legacy of the higher road is the enduring reward of significance beyond the self.

Differences from Blasi's Moral Model of Self Functioning

Nucci (2004) and Nisan (2004) criticized as simplistic Blasi's (1984) Self Model of Moral Functioning with its three components: the moral self, moral responsibility and self-consistency. They argued his model was not complex enough to describe real-world moral functioning. Blasi's model is built on the understanding that as one values morality as part of the core identity, one will feel more responsible toward acting moral and will thus be motivated to act in a congruent manner where moral beliefs match moral actions. The complexities of understanding how temptations toward immoral behavior affect those in moral dilemmas are not addressed by the model. The conceptual problem that Nucci (2004) and Nisan (2004) appear to have concerning the application of Blasi's model arises when attempting to understand the majority of real moral decisions. Blasi (1993) does recognize that a deeply moral person can act immorally:

A person can be deeply moral even if he or she engages in actions that are morally ambiguous or outright immoral; in this case, the integration of morality and personality could be seen in one's response to one's own action, e.g., regret, guilt, and concrete attempts to repair the damage and reconstitute one's values (p. 120).

However, his model does not account for how this happens, especially if the person deeply values and identifies with morality, feels acutely responsible to act morally, and longs to act consistently on those morals. While it makes sense that when one acts immorally, either morality was not prioritized, or one did not feel responsible to act morally, or the draw to remain morally consistent wasn't an adequate motivator, there are

probably better explanations for the lure toward immoral behavior. A model such as the Moral Juncture Model of Self (described above) is intended to extend Blasi's (1984) Self Model to address the realities of decision-making in the moral realm. The temptation of the rewards of immoral behavior beckons even the best of moral exemplars.

Another way that the Moral Juncture Model of Self differs from Blasi's (1984) model is in the conceptualization of the moral self. The problem with the concept of the moral self in Blasi's model, once again, has to do with how this applies when one does not prioritize morality in oneself. If one prioritizes pragmatism above morality, does this constitute a less-than-moral self? Because of the problems with defining and understanding the concept of the moral self, the model presented in this paper depicts the self independent of, but in relation to moral values. It is when one understands and acts on the belief that morality ultimately serves the self that moral integration is reached during that specific moral dilemma.

The Moral Juncture Model of Self depicts a single moral dilemma, and describes how the decision is made for that particular dilemma. Each moral dilemma has a different set of factors that impact a decision. The possibility for growth in moral integrity exists as one chooses the path of moral integration over and over, but the possibility for failure exists with every moral dilemma as well. Moral behavior, according to this model is even more significant when it becomes consistent behavior because the possibility for failure always exists and continually tempts the one in the dilemma.

Blasi's (1984) Self Model of Moral Functioning shows up in several places in the model presented here. How one perceives oneself in a moral dilemma would be affected by how closely one values morality and how responsible one feels to act morally. The desire for consistency shows up in this model in the proximity of rewards and consequences. If one values morality and feels responsible toward it, then the anticipation of dissonance emotions if one acts immorally will be emotionally near and prohibitive. However, the Moral Juncture Model of the Self acknowledges that the temptation for the reward of immoral behavior can draw emotionally closer, and thus override the fear of consequences for the immoral behavior.

The Moral Juncture Model of Self clarifies the use of the word moral, as well. Blasi (2004) criticized the propensity in the literature for authors to confuse the word moral for all decisions that have "characteristics associated with moral functioning" (p.346), regardless of whether they are moral or immoral. This problem certainly existed in Gilligan's (1982) qualitative interviews of women in an abortion dilemma. Those who believed they would be killing their children but aborted anyway were making "moral" decisions alongside the moral decisions of those who refused to do so. Neutralizations were analyzed as moral reasoning. Hopefully the Moral Juncture Model of Self will help clarify such confusion.

### Revisiting Kohlberg

The disappointing aspect of the Moral Juncture Model of Self lies in its centering on the protection of self-interests. In Kohlberg's (1981) stage and sequence model, he

visualized moral development as a movement away from self-interests toward principled reasoning. Although not specifically studied, reasoning from all of Kohlberg's stages was evident in the women interviewed. Most were able to reason in a principled manner before they were in an unwanted pregnancy; however, upon finding themselves in the dilemma, they moved to an orientation of satisfying their own needs. Those who carried differed from those who aborted in that they believed the moral action could satisfy their deepest needs. The Moral Juncture Model of Self accounts for this movement by recognizing all personal moral decisions are made through the filter of self-interests. This might be a reason for the previous findings that people reason at higher stages when reasoning objectively than when they are in the midst of the same moral dilemma (Armon, 1995, 1998; Foster & Sprinthall, 1992; Krebs & Denton, 2005). This might also help explain why Colby and Damon (1992) found that the moral exemplars in their study were not all reasoning at higher principled stages.

In accord with other researchers (Blasi, 1999; Bergman, 2002; Hoffman, 2000; Rest, Narvarez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999), this model embraces Kohlberg's (1981) belief in the significance of the ability to reason morally and to develop toward more principled reasoning abilities. The model assumes that moral reasoning has led one to a belief about the right thing to do in the moral dilemma in which one finds oneself, or at least one has developed principles to guide one into knowing what would be right and wrong in the predicament. However, according to this model, only when a connection is made between objective moral reasoning and how it ultimately serves the self to become part of a higher

purpose, does the reasoning become personal. Since one reasons through the filter of the self in a moral dilemma, unless one is able to perceive how morality will ultimately serve the self, one is less likely to pursue the moral course of action. This model challenges the belief that people are capable of ascending to a level where the self-interests do not enter into the deliberation of a moral dilemma.

Kohlberg's model was formulated to understand development in objective moral reasoning; it was not intended to describe motivations toward moral behavior (Colby, 2002). The Moral Juncture Model of Self was developed to address the motivations toward moral as well as the natural temptation toward the immoral, if it appears to serve the self. This model was developed by incorporating findings from the decision-making experiences of those who made immoral as well as moral choices, while assimilating research into decision-making behind morally deviant behavior as well as that of moral exemplars. In so doing, this model hopefully sheds light on why the same person could act morally in one situation and immorally in another.

This section of the chapter has presented a self model of moral decision-making as derived from the experiences of the women in this study and from the literature. A visual portrayal of the delineating factors that propel one to remain true to one's moral convictions or that lure one to the path of akrasia has been presented. This is a simple attempt to describe the phenomenon of the selection of divergent paths for those with similar moral convictions as heard from the women in this study. Additionally, this section has contrasted the self model of moral decision-making with Blasi's self model of

moral functioning and Kohlberg's (1981) universal levels of development in moral thought.

Additional Comparisons with the Literature

Several of the factors affecting one's ability to act on one's moral convictions as discussed previously in the literature review were indeed present in the findings of this study. Moral emotions, as Eisenberg (2000) stated, appeared to indeed motivate both self-described moral and immoral behaviors. Guilt and shame associated with the unwanted pregnancy at times appeared to motivate women to abort in order to eliminate the pregnancy causing those emotions. Conversely, the painful guilt emotions from the unwanted pregnancy also seemed able to motivate some to carry to term to avoid further guilt from an abortion. Eisenberg's (2000) contention that non-moral emotions such as anger, frustration, and fear can impact moral functioning was supported by this study. Hoffman's (2000) recognition of the limitations of moral emotions to guide moral behavior, such as the "here-and-now" bias favoring those close to oneself (in this case protection of one's self-interests through abortion) appeared to be relevant to this study. As Hoffman asserted, it was hard to ferret out when moral emotions were motivators and when they were responses of those motivated to act morally.

The idea behind the proximity of rewards in the Moral Juncture Model of Self takes into account how the moral emotions can cause one to emotionally move toward or away from a moral decision. For example, a woman may have become more emotionally attached to the idea of carrying her child because of empathy or a woman may have

moved away from the idea of carrying a child to term because of anticipated shame emotions associated with unwed pregnancy. The idea of moral intuitions is similarly addressed in the proximity of rewards.

Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist approach that recognizes the sudden appearance of moral thoughts could be explained in this model as a sudden propelling toward one outcome (carry or abort) driven by the close proximity to the rewards to the self or the consequences to the self of that decision. The experience that some of the women described sounded as Haidt (2001) asserted, that they made their decision and then became like a lawyer, defending their decision to themselves and to others. This ability to defend the decision could also be called neutralization or rationalization, if the decision is believed by the one making it to be immoral. As Bandura (2002) asserted, the women who were better at using disengagement techniques such as avoiding their own thoughts, allowing others to make the decision, using euphemistic language and convincing themselves that they could not carry to term, were among those who went through with their initial intuitions and aborted.

Moral motivation, as defined by Power (2005) as the desire for the morally good, is also evident in the Moral Juncture Model of Self's proximity of rewards and consequences. The things that matter to one, and therefore are emotionally "close" in the moral decision-making process indicate what motivates a person. If one anticipated a great amount of guilt surrounding an immoral action, it is apparent that one is motivated by morality. If very little guilt is anticipated when planning to act immorally, one is

probably not overly motivated by morality. For many of the women who aborted, it was apparent that their pragmatic concerns for freedom, education, career, or financial stability were more motivational than their desire to do what they believed was the right thing to do. This finding squares nicely with Bersoff's (1999b) hypothesis that when other life goals outweigh one's desire to be moral, the behavior follows the motivation. This becomes apparent in the Juncture Model when looking at what rewards and consequences mattered the most thereby affecting the decision. The next section will address proposed praxis for the model presented in this study.

## **Implications for Practice**

The Moral Juncture Model of Self has practical implications for moral development education as well as in counseling practice. For moral educators, the model points to the importance of understanding the higher purpose that is served by one's moral convictions. As Kohlberg (1981) recognized, moral education requires an understanding of the reasons one ought to be moral. The Moral Juncture Model is a reminder to those who hope to help others develop not merely in moral thought, but in moral action, of the necessity to connect those morals with a higher purpose.

Additionally, the model points to the importance of understanding how morals serve the self interest. The benefits of connection to a higher purpose could be purposefully and sincerely explored.

Likewise, the impact that the proximity of rewards and consequences has on one's ability to make moral decisions congruent with moral convictions could be a beneficial concept to moral educators hoping to engage students in lively, productive, and realistic scenarios. As the Juncture Model depicts, the propensity to negate one's own convictions when the rewards of doing so seem proximal and tangible is a temptation that could be at least brought to the conscious level through education. This temptation and the destructive nature of the consequences could then be considered consciously, rather than allowing the power of the subconscious to pull toward apparent rewards to self and to influence decisions, unchecked.

Kohlberg's (1971) ideas about moral education's use of Socratic questioning may have spent too much time pondering dilemmas where there was no clear moral and immoral decision – choosing to focus on the structure of the reasoning rather than the outcome. The Juncture Model depicts that even when there is a clear-cut conviction, the choice can seem hard because of the proximal nature of the rewards of immoral behavior to the self. Socratic discussions of the long-term pain of a disconnection from a higher purpose and the painful, lasting dissonance emotions caused by akrasia may be more productive for moral educators.

In counseling, the Juncture Model would indicate that Socratic questioning about the higher purpose the clients' decisions may serve and the long-term value of connection with that higher purpose may help clients remain true to their own moral convictions.

Additionally, questioning about the long-term consequences for the decision may help the

client to focus on the rewards for remaining true to their own moral convictions and aid the client in making a decision congruent with his or her own value system. The next section is provided to suggest further research to answer questions generated by this study.

### Recommendations for Research

Similar to most research projects, this study has probably generated more questions than it has answered. Recommendations for further study in several areas in addition to those suggested earlier in this chapter will be presented here. First, further investigation will be proposed into the area of moral development as spawned by the findings of moral disillusionment. Secondly, questions that arose about the conceptual construct of a higher purpose as a basis for moral action will be presented as possible research topics. Finally, suggestions for further research into the validity of the proposed model will be addressed.

Moral disillusionment was a prominent finding in this study. Just as immorality needs to be studied in the context of moral decision making (Joy, 1983), so does moral disillusionment as a potential juggernaut to moral development. As such, the prominent place held by relationships, both positive and negative, in moral identity formation is worth revisiting in-depth. The impact that the moral integrity or the moral hypocrisy shown by authority figures in a child's life has on their moral development would make a useful study.

Perhaps the most significant question that arose from this study is one that has been bantered through the ages. Although philosophical in nature, the idea of morality, as Kohlberg (1981) asserted, begs the question, what is the higher purpose that morality serves? Is it merely whatever principles one vows to pledge? Are some higher purposes better than others at encouraging moral integration? If one believes that the higher purposes are defined by a god, does the ubiquitous nature, stability, accountability, and the understanding of the source of morality help one maintain moral convictions?

Investigation into the Moral Juncture Model of Self presented in this research paper would be helpful. First, does the model fit the experiences of other populations in other moral dilemmas outside of pro-life women in unplanned pregnancies? Do repetitive iterations on either level of the model (moral integration or akrasia) by the same person predict the path that person will take in future moral dilemmas? What kind of counseling interventions can be implemented to increase connection with a higher purpose and therefore a greater proclivity toward moral integration?

### Summary

In this chapter, the findings of the study were compared with the literature to discuss what factors impacted one's moral self-perception. Following this assessment, a discussion of how that self-perception impacted the actual decision-making processes of the women in a moral dilemma was presented. The construct of a higher purpose, which was found in the interviews and the literature alike, was presented as it affected the

ability to act in accordance with one's moral convictions. A synthesis of the literature and the findings was then presented in a visual version of the researcher's concept of how they integrate into a decision-making model, called the Moral Juncture Model of Self.

This model was then compared and contrasted with other researchers' findings about the moral judgment-action relationship. Finally, implications for practice, as well as questions and possibilities for future research were provided.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Blasi (1983) is credited with being the first researcher to recognize the significance of self as filling the gap between moral thought and moral action. Such was found to be the case in this study. However, at the heart of the juncture between moral and immoral action was the question of what best protected self-interests. The central prominence that the self played in the role of moral decision-making and how the self would be affected by the consequences and rewards of their actions was perhaps the most predominant finding. Moral integrity was chosen to ultimately serve the self-interest of being a part of a higher purpose. Identification with a higher purpose gave meaning and legitimacy to the women's moral action. Additionally moral integrity was found to be innately and enduringly satisfying because it met the women's inner need for a connection with something higher than themselves. Ironically, the mantra of present-day culture to seek self-fulfillment by looking inward was, in this study, the pathway to regret and loss of self-respect. A representation of the analysis as interpreted by the researcher

was presented in a Moral Juncture Model of Self. The model, which centers on the protection of self-interests, was expounded upon as it integrates the self in a moral dilemma, the beliefs about morality, the connection with a higher purpose, and the proximity of rewards and consequences to self.

Sixteen women volunteered to share the details of their lives in this study so that others might learn and grow from their moral successes or failures. The depths of emotion filling their stories with deep regret or enduring peace indicate their agreement with the sentiment at the end of Robert Frost's (1920) poem, "The Road Not Taken":

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference."

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

Title: Pro-Life Women Faced with an Unwanted Pregnancy

Setting: Determine location that is comfortable, safe for the interviewee. Ask her to bring along any journals/diaries/writings concerning thoughts about and experiences during the unwanted pregnancy.

#### 1. Introduction:

- (a) Introduce self
- (b) Request permission to record turn on recorder
- (c) Review/sign Informed Consent highlight voluntary nature and contact researcher's information
- (d) Take Demographic Questionnaire information
- (e) Provide a list of post-abortion counseling contact information/counselors in the local area who have agreed to accept referrals from the current study
- (f) Collect diaries or journals of timeframe to make copies
- (g) Provide information about number of questions (approx. 30 one to two hours), organization of interview guide and types of questions (researcher seeks to know about you and your experiences with this pregnancy questions will begin general and will become more specific)
- (h) Questions?

#### 2. Screening:

(a) What was your age when you discovered you were pregnant? (must be 20 y/o or more to be included)

- (b) What was your living situation? (must have 2 years or more of financial independence from parents to be included)
- (c) Prior to the pregnancy, how would you have described your stance on abortion?

  [Must:(a) view the fetus as a person who is alive, (b) consider abortion as the taking of a life, and (c) think abortion justifiable only if the actual physical life of the mother is threatened by the continued pregnancy to be included]
- (d) Tell me about the circumstances surrounding your pregnancy and your feelings about it. (If aborted assume unwanted; if aborted to save life of mother will not be included; if carried to term must be unmarried and unwanted to be included)
- 3. Demographic questionnaire(Appendix C)
- 4. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
  - (a) Family
  - (b) Work
  - (c) Daily Life
- 5. If you were to describe yourself to me what would you say? Who are you?
  - (a) What things matter most to you?
  - (b) Tell me how significant parts of your upbringing made you who you are today.
- 6. Go back to just prior to your pregnancy and describe yourself to me. Who were you then?
  - (a) What mattered most to you then?
  - (b) What were your goals?

7.	Tell me what it was like for you when you found out you were pregnant.
	(a) Thoughts
	(b) Emotions
	(c) What did you fear the most?
8.	Did becoming pregnant change the way you thought about yourself?
	(a) How so?
9.	What options did you consider in the pregnancy?
	(a) With whom did you consult?
10.	How did you make your decision to (abort/carry)?
	(a) What were your goals or motivation?
	(b) What mattered most to you then?
11.	Was there a right thing to do in this situation?
	(a) Tell me how responsible you felt for doing the right thing.
	(b) Tell me about your feelings as to whether you were capable to do what you
	thought was the right thing.
12.	Tell me about your emotions following your decision.
	(a) Did you feel positive/negative, conflicted/peaceful, eager/avoidant?
	(b) How did you feel about yourself in the decision?
13.	If you had it to do all over again what would you do?
	(a) Why?
	(b) What would you say to someone in an unwanted pregnancy?
14.	Did this interview change your thoughts or feelings in any way?

15. That is all of the questions that I have for you. Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

#### 16. Post Interview Activities:

- (a) Remind participants that they have a list of counselors in the local area who have agreed to accept referrals from the current study
- (b) Provide contact information and invite participants to call or e-mail with additional thoughts or concerns
- (c) Thank participants for time and valuable insights

Appendix B: Informed Consent
Pro-Life Women Faced with an Unwanted Pregnancy
Patti McCarthy Broderick, Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
Center for Counseling and Family Studies

You are invited to be a part of a research study investigating the experiences of pro-life women who have been faced with an unwanted pregnancy. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were identified as being pro-life, over 20 years of age and financially independent from your parents when you discovered your pregnancy. Please read this form in its entirety and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This research study is being conducted by Patti McCarthy Broderick to fulfill one of her requirements for earning a Ph.D. in Professional Counseling from Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia.

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the actual experiences of pro-life women who have faced an unwanted pregnancy and to understand what factors went into their decisions to abort or to carry their pregnancies to term.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be a part of this study, your participation will involve a private, confidential interview with the researcher that will last approximately one and one-half to two hours. Additionally, you are encouraged to provide any journals, diaries or other writings that may enlighten the researcher about your beliefs about unwanted pregnancies, and your thoughts and feelings as you journeyed through your own unwanted pregnancy. No more than two follow-up interviews may be conducted that will last no more than one hour in order to clarify and validate information gathered during the first interview. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim for a more thorough analysis of their content.

#### Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

Psychological risks exist. Consequently, discomfort may be experienced as a result of participating in this study. These may include, but are not limited to (a) emotional/psychological stress generated from the question content or the memories generated by the questioning, (b) the possibility of becoming fatigued during the interviewing process or as a result of the interview and the emotions generated from it, and (c) revelation of

personal issues of sufficient depth and meaning to cause emotional pain during and following the interview.

Benefits of participation in this study include the opportunity to look introspectively through the interview questions, the chance to describe your own experience to help social scientists understand what it was like for you, and the opportunity to share with others what you have learned from your experiences.

#### Mental Stress

Following the interview, a referral list of willing local counselors who have agreed to see participants of this study will be provided to you. Liberty University will not provide treatment or financial compensation if you become mentally stressed as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

#### **Confidentiality**

The information you provide during this and any subsequent interviews will be kept private. Transcriptions will be conducted by a professional transcriptionist who is ethically required to maintain confidentiality. The transcriptionist will never see the demographic information. Digital tapes will be maintained until the transcriptions are verified by the researcher, when they will be erased.

All interviewees will be given fake names and any specific identifying information discussed during the interview will not be included in the final report to protect your identity. These fake names and identifying information will be seen only by the researcher and will be kept secure in separate locations of the researchers' home.

Upon completion of this study, the researcher will contact you to discuss the results and provide you with a copy, if desired. The results of this study could be published in professional journals, books and articles.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. If an interview has already been conducted, your individual responses may be removed from the study prior to publication by contacting the researcher at the number provided on the following page. Should you become fatigued at any time during this interview, a 10-15 minute break will be taken from the interview to allow you to determine if you desire or are able to continue. Should issues of emotional distress or functional difficulty arise as a result of this interview, please contact the researcher.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

Please direct questions regarding your participation in this research study, participants' rights or on issues relating to participation in this research study to the researcher by email at <a href="mailto:pmbroderick@liberty.edu">pmbroderick@liberty.edu</a> or by calling (703) 737-7353. The Liberty University Institutional Review Board, an objective group of representatives from Liberty University who are responsible for the ethical treatment of the participants of research conducted at the university, may be contacted at <a href="mailto:IRB@Liberty.edu">IRB@Liberty.edu</a> or by writing the Institutional Review Board, Liberty University, 1971 University Blvd., Campus North, Suite 2400U, Lynchburg VA 24501. If you have concerns about how you were treated by the researcher, please feel free to contact them.

#### **Statement of Consent**

By signing below, you voluntarily consent to participate in this study and acknowledge you understand and voluntarily agree to: (a) the potential risks to yourself and (b) the manner in which the information you provide this study will be gathered, stored, and used. Your signature is required on both identical copies of the consent forms. One copy is to be kept by you for your records and one will be retained by the researcher for the research records.

Participant Signature		
Printed Name		
Date		
Researcher Signature		
Printed Name		
Date		

# Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Your Name	(first name only)
State of Residence	
How can I contact you?	
Phone Number	Can I use this? (yes/no)
E-mail	Can I use this? (yes/no)
I will wait for you to contact me o	only (please do!)
Information about you now:	
Age:	
Race:	
Religion:	
Marital Status:	
Occupation:	
Education Level Attained:	
Number of Children:	_
Total Number of Previous	Pregnancies:
Total Number Aborted:	
Total Number Delivered:_	
Total Number Miscarried:	