

ALONE IN A CROWD: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY  
INTO LONELINESS AS EXPERIENCED BY PASTOR'S WIVES

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## ABSTRACT

### ALONE IN A CROWD: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO LONELINESS AS EXPERIENCED BY PASTORS' WIVES

by Jama L. Davis

This phenomenological study investigated the individual experiences of eight pastors' wives with the phenomenon, loneliness. The topic of loneliness generated emotionally charged responses from women who live their lives in the public eye.

Data was collected using informal, conversational, taped and transcribed interviews. Descriptions of the experiences of loneliness and the general factors contributing to loneliness were identified by the participants. The experiences and general contributing factors were compared and contrasted.

Participants identified loneliness as an indescribable void, resulting from guardedness, and a normal experience. General factors contributing to loneliness were identified as explicit or implicit. Explicit factors, those directly related to ministry, developed within the ministry context itself and ministry-related interactions and relationships. The implicit factors included non-ministry related interactions, family and time concerns, and physical limitations of the participants.

The findings of this study suggest three factors which most significantly impact pastors' wives and loneliness: the roles of pastors' wives, the personal choices of the pastors' wives, and the pastors' wives relationships with God. Implications emerged from the study for those who research pastors' wives and loneliness, the individual churches which employ pastors, the colleges and seminaries which train pastors, and the denominations to which pastors report. Suggestions for future research involving pastors' wives and pastors are provided.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Problem Background

Loneliness is among the most ordinary distresses humans experience (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Weiss, 1973). Although the experience of loneliness is a common one, it remains a topic of little discussion (Killeen, 1998), with its prevalence difficult to measure (Weiss, 1973). When individuals recall their experiences with loneliness, they frequently identify being most impacted by their perception of abandonment or separation from others, their feelings of being vulnerable and devastated, as well as a host of other emotions (Rokach, 1988).

This phenomenon of loneliness has elicited more “powerful and pain-filled remarks” from pastors’ wives than any other issue (Brunette-Hill, 1999, p. 81). Although loneliness elicits these types of responses, investigation into loneliness as described by these women has been limited in both quantity and scope.

The role of the pastor’s wife is viewed as a place of privilege and as a complicated place of challenge, because of the emotional ambiguities involved in her fulfilling the role. With these challenges and ambiguities, a pastor’s wife often finds it difficult to maintain emotional wholeness and balance in her life (Zoba, 1997). A pastor’s wife moves through her daily life without a trusted friend to whom she is able to turn when needed (Briscoe, 2005). Furthermore, a pastor’s wife is at a greater risk of experiencing loneliness than a woman married to a non-minister (Warner & Carter, 1984).

An abundance of literature addresses issues related to clergy couples (e.g. Blanton & Morris, 1999; Brown, 1982; Cole, 1991; Cothorn, 2002; Darling, Hill, & McWey,

2004; Ducklow, 1995; Frame, 1998; Frame & Shehan, 1994; Goetz, 1992, 1997; Golz, 2005; Hartley & Taylor, 1977; Houts, 1982; Lee, 1999; Mace & Mace, 1980; McMinn, Lish, Trice, Root, Gilbert, & Yap, 2005; Mickey, Wilson, & Ashmore, 1991; Morris & Blanton, 1994, 1995, 1998; Warner & Carter, 1984). A modicum of literature addresses issues focused solely on pastors' wives (e.g. Baker, 1989; Baker & Scott, 1992; Brackin, 2001; Brunette-Hill, 1999; Hartley, 1978; Huebner, 1999; Mayo, 1999; Niswander, 1982; Schmucker, 1979; Speight, 2005; Zoba, 1997). Therefore, this study attempted to add to the literature by phenomenologically researching loneliness as experienced by pastors' wives.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the individual experiences of pastors' wives with the phenomenon, loneliness. Additionally, descriptions and experiences of loneliness were compared and contrasted among participants.

A qualitative method of inquiry, phenomenology, is best suited for this type of research (Creswell, 1998; Portney & Watkins, 2000; van Manen, 1990). This approach allows the researcher to investigate how participants experience and exhibit the phenomenon being studied through the perspective of the participants' personal experience (Creswell, 1998; Portney & Watkins, 2000; van Manen, 1990).

#### Research Questions

In this study, loneliness was perceived as a common experience affecting many pastors' wives. Additionally, a presupposition for this study was that loneliness, when experienced by pastors' wives, left many of these women silent, never expressing their

true feelings aloud to anyone. With this in mind, the primary research questions framing this study were:

1. How do pastors' wives describe loneliness?
2. What factors do pastors' wives identify as contributing to their descriptions of loneliness?
3. How do participants' descriptions of loneliness compare and contrast?

### Definitions

In this study, pastors' wives were defined as a Caucasian females, married to ordained, evangelical (Christian), Caucasian male ministers currently serving in active, paid, church ministry positions or having been out of this role of active ministry less than one year. Pastors' wives recognized there are expectations associated with being married to ministers. Pastors' wives derived these expectations internally from themselves and externally from their spouses, congregants, and denominational leadership. They often accepted, or were expected to accept, responsibilities related to their spouses' vocation. Pastors' wives recognized the role they served in influencing, positively or negatively, their spouses (London & Wiseman, 1999) and their continued employment. The pastors' wives in this study found a positive sense of fulfillment and identity in their role, as the wives of pastors, within the church.

A pastor is defined as a clergyman of an evangelical (Christian) denomination serving a local church. Pastors work in various positions within the church that hires them. The senior pastors' roles are similar to those of corporate presidents. The staff and associate pastors' roles are similar to executives within those corporations, responsible for specialized areas.

“Ministry” is a term widely used by the participants in this study and in the evangelical (Christian) community to describe the work (duties and functions) associated with the role of a pastor in a church.

Webster (1973/1977) defined lonely as “...sad from being alone” (p. 677). This study defined loneliness as “caused not by being alone but by being without some definite needed relationship or set of relationships” (Weiss, 1973, p. 17).

### Locating Myself as a Researcher

Life’s experiences have flamed my passion for pastors’ wives. Throughout my lifetime, I have learned many things about these women. Some of my learning experiences have been exciting, while others have been disheartening and bothersome. I believe it has been my personal experiences, both those of experiencing loneliness as the wife of a pastor, as well as the privilege of being allowed into the private world of many pastors’ wives, which have fueled my interest in the study of pastors’ wives and their experiences.

My first “official” experience serving as a pastor’s wife came a short time after marriage when I was 20 years old. Looking back, I recall being excited about the future and our prospects for ministry together. It was not long, however, before I realized how unprepared I was for this new role. My understanding of marriage and the impact pastoral work had upon the marriage, as well as the pastor’s wife, was limited at that time. The pastors’ wives in my life, with the exception of perhaps one, made everything look so easy and almost effortless. While much of what came with being a pastor’s wife I enjoyed and embraced, the difficulties faced were surprising to me. Some of this may

have been because of my own naivety about pastors' wives, and the challenges they face in their role.

I came face to face with a deep, personal sense of loneliness around the 12<sup>th</sup> year of ministry. A staff member at the church where my pastor-husband and I were employed was involved in immoral behavior. I was cognizant of what was happening and aware of the attempts being made to make the church leadership conscious of the issues, only to witness that the information apparently "fell on deaf ears." Other staff members and I were placed in very difficult positions during this time. Each of us had to face false accusations made against us as the person involved in the immoral activity avoided the responsibility for his actions.

Unfortunately, my feelings of loneliness became more intense as we continued to minister there. I felt all alone, even though I was surrounded by people on a regular basis. There were things I knew I could not share, which led to actions I had to take that were not understood by others, and, consequently, many hours I had to spend either by myself or with my husband contemplating our future in this place. People would tell me they cared for my family, but the actions needed to support this sentiment were absent.

As time went on, the challenges of this ministry continued to increase on a daily basis. Eventually, the minister involved in the immoral activity resigned, and a replacement minister was hired. Despite new leadership, our troubles had not ended. The new senior pastor indicated that, while he did not want us to stay, neither did he want to be the one to let us go. My husband and I resigned our individual positions and were pressured to make a quick exit (a mere two weeks) without giving explanation as to why we were leaving. To this day it is hard to describe the devastating loneliness I felt at this

point, and I had no way of knowing the darkening loneliness I would face in the difficult days ahead. Very shortly after resigning, I began hearing the untruths that were being told about my husband and me, both in the church and community, by this newly hired pastor.

Knowing false statements were being told about my husband and me caused an even deeper sense of loneliness. We had resigned from a church we loved, and we remained in the same community. We were emotionally exhausted and not at a healthy point to start a ministry anew. To make matters more difficult, I had to field questions from our children as to why their friends did not call them to play or come to our house anymore. They were much too young to understand all that was happening around them. I remember one day driving past our former church, and my son asked, “Why don’t those people like us anymore?” This had to be one of the most difficult questions I have ever had to answer. While wrestling with the difficult questions from my children, the intense feelings of loneliness increased as I was ignored in public places by old friends and church members. During this time, it was not only my children who were missing friends but us also. Many of those connections were terminated as the untruths were told. The phone in our home – which once had been busily ringing – had become eerily silent. At times it felt as if the searing pain would never end.

Over a period of time, my husband and I compiled two written pages of untruths we knew had been told about us, only later to discover this list barely scratched the surface. This became a part of the healing process as the statements were written down with the agreement not to allow this situation to rule our lives any longer.

While living in the same community and working at my new counseling job, God began placing more and more hurting pastors' wives in my path. As a counselor, this was a time of personal growth. I realized in a new way that it would only be through God and His strength that healing would come for people. I also realized I had to learn to trust again; I had experienced so much betrayal in my last position. I was blessed with a co-worker who listened to me as I learned to open small cracks of my wounded soul by testing her trustworthiness. She became a confidant for me as I learned to trust once more.

As I continue in the role of a pastor's wife, I wish I could say I do not experience times of loneliness. Although the experiences are short-lived, I have not found that to be part of my reality. I now know the need for deep friendships where I can be honest and safe. I have learned the value of taking care of myself, and the importance of admitting to myself and to my spouse those times when I do experience loneliness. I know in times of loneliness I have no choice but to reach out to people with whom I can be genuine.

Reviewing my experiences with loneliness in ministry, without even taking into account other periods of loneliness in my life, I feel uniquely prepared to venture into this study of pastors' wives and their experiences of loneliness. God has opened many doors for me to work with pastors' wives who are enduring loneliness. I have been prepared in ways I would not ask to repeat, but this immersion has taught me to value and treasure my past experiences. I look forward, though at times apprehensively, to where God is going to lead me. This study of loneliness as experienced by pastors' wives is more than an academic exercise. Because of my personal understanding of loneliness, I am empathetic to other women in similar positions.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of literature related to loneliness (e.g. Booth, 1983; Cacioppo, Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, & Thisted, 2006; Elliot, 1988; ; Goswick & Jones, 1981; Hsu, Hailey, & Range, 1986; Jones, Freemon, & Goswick, 1981; Killeen, 1998; Kornblum, 2006; McWhirter, 1990; Moustakas, 1961/1989; Nolen-Hoeksema & Ahrens, 2002; Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Rokach, 1988, 1990; Rokach & Brock, 1997, 1998; Schwab & Petersen, 1990; Weiss, 1973). In this literature, the multi-faceted phenomenon of loneliness, loneliness as a common experience, the subjective notion of loneliness, and the impact of loneliness emerged as significant themes.

Concurrently, literature examining loneliness as experienced by pastors' wives was analyzed and subsequently presented (e.g. Anderson & Stark, 1988; Baker, 1989; Baker & Scott, 1992; Blackbird & Wright, 1985; Briscoe, 2005; Brown, 1982; Brunette-Hill, 1999; Cothorn, 2002; Dobson, 1995/2003; Dugan, 1994; Frame, 1998; Frame & Shenan, 1994; Goetz, 1992, 1997; Golz, 2005; Hartley, 1978; Hartley & Taylor, 1977; Houts, 1982; Lee, 1999; Langberg, 1988; Lee & Balswick, 1989; MacDonald, 1984, 1998; Mace & Mace, 1980; Mayo, 1999; McMinn, Lish, Trice, Root, Gilbert, Yap, 2005; Mickey, Wilson, & Ashmore, 1991; Morris & Blanton, 1994, 1995, 1998; Niswander, 1982; Noller, 1984; Pannell, 1993; Price, 2001; Schmucker, 1979; Speight, 2005; Taylor, 1977; Valeriano, 1981; Warner & Carter, 1984; Wright & Blackbird, 1986; Zoba, 1997). This literature review includes a profile of pastors' wives, their lives in the public eye, their roles, challenges, marriages, and other relationships. Loneliness dynamics for pastors' wives were also reviewed, including marriage and loneliness, relationships and



loneliness, loneliness resulting from leadership, the impact of relocation, isolation and alienation, and the reluctance of pastors' wives to seek help.

### Loneliness

The literature on loneliness suggests all individuals experience loneliness; however, the duration and intensity of loneliness varies among individuals over their lifespan (Rokach & Brock, 1997). Weiss (1973) and Killeen (1998) identified women as being more vulnerable to the experience of loneliness than males.

#### *Descriptions of Loneliness*

##### *Multi-faceted Loneliness*

Loneliness is described as a “multifaceted phenomenon” which may include “interpersonal and intimate loneliness,” feeling isolated from a group, or feeling a sense of marginality from the culture surrounding an individual (McWhirter, 1990, p. 418). Not only is loneliness multifaceted, it is a “complex experience” that may be caused by a variety of circumstances and situations, resulting in variation in both the quality and expression of the loneliness experience. Included in the complexity of loneliness are elements that are described as “disturbing and incongruent with desired experiences” (Rokach, 1988, p. 542).

Loneliness is both a common (McWhirter, 1990; Moustakas 1961/1989; Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Rokach & Brock; 1997; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Weiss, 1973) and distressing experience (McWhirter, 1990; Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Rokach, 1988; Rokach & Brock; 1997; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Weiss, 1973). Killeen (1998) suggested the distress that accompanies the loneliness experience increases because

loneliness remains a topic seldomly discussed. Loneliness is viewed as a negative embarrassing state, unique to each person experiencing it, and challenging to describe (Killeen, 1998). Though admittedly challenging to explain, Killeen (1998) attempted to describe loneliness as “pervasive, depressing, and debilitating” (p. 763) moving an individual to feel isolated and without purpose in life.

Loneliness is more than “simply a desire for company, any company” (Weiss, 1973, p. 13), but rather a desire for a specific form of relationship. Being separated and excluded from meaningful relationships is painful for the lonely individual (Schwab & Petersen, 1990). Peplau and Perlman (1982) suggested loneliness is a psychological state resulting from the discrepancy between individuals’ desired relationships and the actual relationships in which they are engaged. Webster (1973/1977) defined lonely as “...sad from being alone” (p. 677). Weiss (1973), however, challenged Webster’s definition believing it to be misleading; instead, he identified loneliness as being “caused not by being alone but by being without some definite needed relationship or set of relationships” (p. 17).

#### *A Natural and Common Experience*

Loneliness is natural for individuals to experience. It is an essential part of a person’s humanness, as integral as “joy, hunger, and self-actualization” (Rokach, 1990, p. 39). Loneliness is an emotional condition affecting virtually everyone at some point in his/her lifetime (Booth, 1983). For many, loneliness can become “almost permanent” and “too familiar” as a way of life (Rokach, 1988, p. 531). For all humans, the experience of loneliness is identified as being unpleasant (Goswick, & Jones, 1981).

For most, loneliness appears to be a momentary experience; however, a significant number of people find loneliness to be a “constant and serious emotional problem” (Hsu, Hailey, & Range, 1986, p. 62). Estimating the prevalence of loneliness, however, is difficult due to a lack of a visible or overt identifier such as a broken arm. Instead, loneliness may be more comparable to fatigue, which may vary from “barely perceptible to the overwhelming” (Weiss, 1973, p. 23).

Many people find it embarrassing to admit they are experiencing loneliness. Therefore, if anonymity is not established, people are more likely to identify themselves as being self-sufficient rather than lonely (The Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2000). Then, too, because the phenomenon of loneliness has been described as “very painful, distressing, and disturbing,” it often has a stigma attached to it (Rokach & Brock, 1997, p. 285). Because of the stigma attached to loneliness, many individuals will not reveal or discuss their true feelings and thoughts they may have about being lonely during the actual experience of loneliness (Rokach & Brock, 1997, 1998).

#### *Loneliness as a Subjective Notion*

Loneliness is a “personal, subjective experience....with no foolproof objective signs” (Peplau & Perlman, 1982, p. 69). Without clear objective signs of loneliness, it cannot be directly observed, which, in turn, creates dependence upon individuals’ statements about their experiences of loneliness (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Many people underestimate their own personal experiences with the phenomenon, because they lack direct experience with it, which results in the underestimation of the role loneliness plays in these individuals’ lives. (Weiss, 1973).

Lonely individuals retain an organization of emotions, self-definitions, and definitions of their relationships with others dissimilar from the ones they maintain when they are not lonely (Weiss, 1973). Weiss (1973) recognized the difficulty individuals have attempting to think back to times when they were not lonely and to remember the experiences accurately. Individuals may believe the persons who experienced loneliness in the past are not the same as the persons they are in the present (Weiss, 1973).

### *Impact of Loneliness*

Loneliness increases self-awareness, which moves people to a point of being in touch with their own existence and with the existence of others (Moustakas, 1961/1989). Moustakas (1961/1989) suggested loneliness taps into people's resources, requiring strength and endurance to reach depths previously unknown. Individuals who are disconnected from human companionship discover a profound reverence for friendship, the type of friends who stand by them in their hour of need (Moustakas, 1961/1989).

Most individuals experience intense loneliness as being short-lived. For some, however, the feelings of loneliness remain a persistent aspect of their day-to-day lives (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Killeen (1998) ascertained that everyone experienced loneliness to "some degree, no matter how much they pretend they are not: it is part of being human" (p. 762). Loneliness is such an "innate part of the human psyche, that it cannot be solved like a puzzle; it can only be alleviated and made less painful" (Killeen, 1998, p. 762).

Lonely people are hurt by the slightest of criticisms (Moustakas, 1961/1989). They have the tendency to think poorly of themselves and anticipate rejection from

others. This may result in a failure to take advantage of interpersonal opportunities which, ironically, have the potential to ease the feelings of loneliness (Goswick & Jones, 1981). Loneliness often leads individuals to think of their feelings as a character weakness, since no physical pain is involved. This leads individuals to increase their self-criticism, if they are unable to leave behind their feelings of loneliness and focus elsewhere (Weiss, 1973). The negative emotional state and unpleasant experience related to loneliness (Peplau & Perlman, 1982) become magnified with individuals' rise in self-criticism. Thus, these individuals tend to view loneliness as a "wilderness," a place of increasing vulnerability (Elliot, 1988).

### *Social Loneliness*

Social loneliness is described as resulting from an absence of "socially integrative relationships" (Weiss, 1973, p. 33). Individuals who integrate into social networks are provided with information and advice in regards to their own behaviors and the behavior of others, as well as, a network of individuals with whom to exchange favors (Weiss, 1973).

The absence of socially integrative relationships referred to by Weiss (1973) appears to be a phenomenon that has risen sharply in this decade. In a 2004, University of Chicago study, Americans reported having one-third fewer "confidants and close friends" than in the 1985, during which time, they reported having three people in whom they confided. In the year 2004, the number of confidants had fallen to two, with 25% of people having no close confidant at all (Kornblum, 2006).

*Studies in Loneliness*

One of the challenges encountered by Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980) in studying loneliness was that loneliness, unlike competition or aggression, is unable to be “readily manipulated by researchers” (p. 472). This led the researchers to develop what is known as the UCLA Loneliness Scale, an “instrument [designed] to detect variations in loneliness that occur in everyday life” (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980).

Jones, Freeman, and Goswick (1981) found loneliness to be positively correlated with shyness and negatively correlated with self-esteem and feeling acceptable to others. Loneliness, in two separate studies, was found to be associated with feelings of increased powerlessness, social isolation, and a critical attitude toward others, specifically in the area of trust (Jones, Freeman, & Goswick, 1981). This research also suggested poor self-esteem of people experiencing loneliness increased their perception or anticipation of rejection from others, which in turn resulted in the lonely person being “less likely to initiate interactions or respond favorably to social overtures” (Jones, Freeman, & Goswick, 1981, p. 46).

Additionally, Goswick and Jones (1981) identified loneliness as being related to individuals’ discontentment with themselves, negative self-perceptions, and negative evaluations of their own behaviors. Lonely individuals were also found to have increased focus on their personal feelings and reactions and less focus on others’ feelings and reactions (Goswick & Jones, 1981).

Emotional distress has been suggested as the most significant characteristic of the experience of loneliness (Rokach & Brock, 1997). Feelings accompanying emotional

distress included “agony and turmoil,” described as anguish and internal unsettledness, and “emptiness and hopelessness” described as a void and a lack of being able to control one’s own destiny (Rokach & Brock, 1997, p. 292). Those individuals who experienced loneliness in response to external, event-related situations felt increasingly socially inadequate, blaming themselves for creating an experience deemed “socially unacceptable” (Rokach & Brock, 1997, p. 295).

Rokach (1998) furthered her study of loneliness by identifying four major elements or “super structures” of loneliness: “self-alienation, interpersonal isolation, distressed reactions, and agony” (p. 534). Rokach (1998) suggested these four elements combine together only in the experience of loneliness, creating a unique phenomenological structure. Other researchers (Moustakas 1989/1961; Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Weiss, 1973) also identified these elements as being associated with loneliness. However, prior research failed to result in a model of loneliness that integrated each of the four elements (Rokach, 1998).

One study found wives of professional soldiers to be similar to pastors’ wives; loneliness is a way of life for them as well (Lord & Faber, 1999). Commanders’ wives understand there are obligations that come with their positions, such as directing “an endless series of luncheons, teas, and dinners” (Lord & Faber, 1999, p. 34). Wives of commanders need “the skills of a first lady... You have to be very good with people” (Lord & Faber, 1999, p. 34). Although these wives experienced loneliness, the experiences were “out-weighed by a sense of pride and duty” (Lord & Faber, 1999, p. 34).

Wives of physicians who were admitted for psychiatric hospitalization were found to have symptoms of depression related “empirically to the profession of the husband” (As Cited In Krell & Miles, 1976, p. 268). Literature pertaining to wives of executives, physicians, politicians, and attorneys was explored. No similarities to pastors’ wives were found. In related literature, Boers (1991) stated he had never met a pastor who was not lonely, citing loneliness as “widespread” (p. 131).

### *Coping with Loneliness*

Rokach (2001) suggested individuals’ ability to cope with loneliness is at its “most beneficial state” during the years of middle adulthood, because individuals are more established and exhibit increased wisdom that seems to with life experience (p. 15). Rokach (1990) identified three phases in the process of coping for individuals experiencing loneliness: (a) acceptance or self-healing, (b) a transition involving the restructuring of the individual’s resources, and (c) the process of building social bridges.

In the process of acceptance, individuals were able to refocus their loneliness into solitude, which is referred to as a “positive, pleasant experience that is conducive to replenishing one’s energy and resources” affording individuals time to “reflect, be creative, or just enjoy rest” (Rokach, 1990, p. 42). The transition phase in this coping process involved individuals taking some time to evaluate their situation, making necessary changes in “life style and behavior” while also searching for inner resources, including faith (Rokach, 1990, p. 44).

Schwab and Peterson (1990) found that individuals who described themselves as “active Christians” experienced a “helpful relationship to God” and were less lonely (p.



340). Rokach (2001) suggested that individuals who felt “connected to and/or worship[ped] a divine entity, God, or a Supreme Being” experienced an increase in personal strength and peace, along with a feeling of belonging (p. 13).

#### *Depression and Loneliness*

Studies (Hsu, Hailey, & Range, 1986; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Cacioppo, Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, and Thisted, 2006) have found a positive correlation between depression and loneliness. Depressed individuals, according to Nolen-Hoeksema and Ahrens (2002) reported higher levels of loneliness, placing loneliness as a significant factor in the identification of depression. Rokach and Brock (1997) found women experience loneliness differently than men in the intensity of perceived pain and their decreased tendency to deny the loneliness experienced.

#### Pastors' Wives

##### *A Profile of a Pastor's Wife*

#### *Marriage and the Pastor's Wife*

When a woman marries a pastor, she enters a relationship that places her in a more important and demanding role than spouses in many, if not most, other professions (Dugan, 1994). The occupation of a pastor stands alone in its requirement for greater involvement from his wife, when compared with most other occupations (Mickey et al., 1991; Noller, 1984). Ministers are alone in the level of demand placed upon their spouses (Baker & Scott, 1992), with the Protestant minister standing “alone in the *extent* of demands” made upon his wife (Hartley, 1978, p. 178).

Pastors' wives often face challenges maintaining a personal sense of identity as they are often recognized in association with their pastor-husbands. Ministering alongside their spouses, the pastors' wives are often referred to as "our minister's wife" (Lavender, 1976). Introductions for the pastors' wives may include words such as, "the lovely wife of So-and-So" in place of being introduced by their individual names (Pannell, 1993).

### *Role of the Pastor's Wife*

The role of the pastor's wife is viewed as a place of privilege, while at the same time a complicated place of emotional challenge because of the emotional ambiguities involved (Zoba, 1977). Their lives often become complicated as they struggle to maintain a sense of emotional wholeness and balance in their many relationships, both in their lives personally and in ministry. Zoba (1977) refers to this attempt to maintain balance and emotional wholeness as a "delicate dance" (p. 22).

This "delicate dance" becomes more difficult as parishioners place unrealistic expectations on these women to be positive, hard working, submissive women who are happy with that role (Mickey, Wilson, & Ashmore, 1991). Simultaneously, pastors' wives are often expected to participate in numerous religious activities, such as leading Bible studies, comforting those who need comfort, and leading prayers. However, pastors' wives' ability and desire to participate in leading these religious activities are often "taken-for-granted" by those in the congregation (Hartley & Taylor, 1977, p. 63).

Further complicating matters, pastors' wives maintain a desire to be thought of as normal, yet their presence is often viewed as intimidating to people around them

(Dobson, 1995/2003). Briscoe (2005) also asserted that ministers' wives are "never viewed as being in the same category as 'normal' people" (p. 25). Normalcy appears to be difficult to achieve and maintain when the majority of these women live under the pressure to be ideal role models within ideal family systems (Goetz, 1992).

#### *Challenges for the Pastor's Wife*

One of the challenges for pastor's wives involves understanding their roles within their specific ministry context (Langberg, 1988; Dobson, 1995/2003). Many female congregants see pastors' wives in terms of their roles, rather than an individual people (Langberg, 1988; Dobson, 1995/2003). Congregants may attempt to identify flaws in the pastor's wife so that they themselves might feel more comfortable around her (Langberg, 1988). This creates a sense of alienation that is not uncommon for the pastor's wife (Dobson, 1995/2003). Adding to the challenge of understanding her role, the pastor's wife is often expected to accept ministry responsibilities as part of a "package deal" that comes along with the hiring of her pastor-husband (Lee, 1999; Lee & Balswick, 1989; Taylor, 1977).

The lives of pastors' wives involve a "degree of suffering" which encompasses at least some "measure of sacrifice" (Zoba, 1997, p. 26). However, along with this sacrifice and degree of suffering comes the privilege of being trusted by people who are hurting and feel they need pastors' wives during these times. The privilege afforded pastors' wives allows them to share in those very personal moments when other individuals are crying out to God (Zoba, 1997).

### *Fishbowl Existence*

Pastors' wives live in a world of high visibility often referred to as a "glass house" (Lee & Balswick, 1989), a "goldfish bowl" (Hartley, 1978; Hartley & Taylor, 1977; Baker & Scott, 1992), or the "proverbial fishbowl" (MacDonald, 1998). Thus, pastors' wives identify a lack of privacy in their lives. This lack of privacy is recognized by pastors' wives as a disadvantage to their husbands' ministry because of their perceptions that their families are continuously being watched by individuals from their congregations and communities (Lee & Balswick, 1989). Pastors' wives have identified their goldfish bowl existence as a source of significant stress in their lives (Baker & Scott, 1992). Therefore, it is not uncommon for pastors' wives to complain about their lives in the fishbowl (Hartley, 1978).

Pastors' wives face increased pressure and stress in their roles as examples to their communities (Hartley, 1978). Seventy-seven percent of pastors identified their spouses as feeling pressured "to be an ideal role model for a Christian family" (Goetz, 1992, p. 39). This pressure to be the ideal Christian family, when combined with living the fishbowl existence, places pastors' wives in the position of putting on a "pseudo-self" in an attempt to appear as if they "have it all together" (Lee & Balswick, 1989, p. 150). In order to maintain the appearance of having it all together, pastors' wives often conceal their own pain (Brown, 1982).

### *Relationships in the Lives of Pastors' Wives*

#### *Relationship Challenges*

The elevation of pastors' wives to celebrity-like status (Blackbird & Wright, 1985) places them in a prominent social position in many communities. This position prevents these women from making friends in their current congregations.

Concomitantly, the high demands of ministry on their time and energy prevents these women from making friends outside the congregation (Lee & Balswick, 1989). The time demands imposed on pastors' wives often result in their feeling forced to place ministry schedules above relationships (Dobson, 1995/2003). At the same time, the highly public image of pastors' wives discourages close friendships within the congregation.

Pastors' wives are often concerned they may be "discrediting their spouse's public image by disclosing personal information" (Baker, 1989, p. 17). Their concern for their husbands' public image and their fear that inappropriate self-disclosure may jeopardize their husbands' career potential (Mace & Mace, 1980) makes finding close friends difficult (Baker, 1989). Traditionally, pastors' wives have been taught by other pastors' wives and denominational leaders not to form intimate relationships with members of their congregations to avoid any possibility of jeopardizing their pastors' positions (Ducklow, 1995). If pastors' wives do form relationships in their congregations, they often question whether the individuals would be their friends if their husbands were not the pastors (Dobson, 1995, 2003).

The lives of pastors' wives involve an unending cycle of activities, family needs, and expectations from the church. This results in their lack of pursuit of "meaningful friendships" (Briscoe, 2005, p. 26). Briscoe (2005) noted pastors' wives are taught to

“expect that God will meet [their] every need” (p. 26). Pastors’ wives who are “naturally introverted and shy” (Baker, 1989, p. 17) have difficulty establishing relationships.

### *Desiring Close Friendships*

Fifty-six percent of pastors’ wives have said they have no close friends. Twenty percent of these women believed people shied away from a relationship with them because they were married to a pastor (Valeriano, 1981). Many pastors’ wives move through their daily lives without a trusted friend in whom they can confide (Briscoe, 2005). Only one-third of pastors’ wives reported having a few personal friends, which reiterated once again the issue of pastors’ wives having an absence of friendships and support networks (Brunette-Hill, 1999).

Pastors’ wives have felt “constrained from developing personal friendships within or outside of the congregations;” however, they acknowledged an increasing need for these friendships (Lee & Balswick, 1989, p. 147). Forming socially supportive relationships is difficult for pastors’ wives (Blackbird & Wright, 1985; Wright & Blackbird, 1986). Briscoe (2005) identified the difficulty forming supportive relationships as troublesome, when evidence suggests these relationships are vital for pastors’ wives. Close friends, for pastors’ wives, make a positive difference. Friendships allow them to process their experiences in life and ministry and to be honest with other individuals (Briscoe, 2005). Pastors’ wives who lack supportive relationships may also lack the needed resources to cope with the increased stress that comes with ministry (Lee & Balswick, 1989).

Lee and Balswick (1989) found friendships with other pastors' wives to be beneficial. The time demands of ministry make it challenging for these women to maintain these relationships on a "meaningful level" (p. 154). With the demands of ministry, pastors' wives need a person

with whom she can identify, with whom she can feel comfortable. She needs a person she can trust; one she believes able to really understand her position and her feelings; one who hears her pain and is able to be with her in the midst of that pain; one who can minister skillfully and compassionately. She needs one who can be to her, maybe for the very first time in her life, an incarnation of the message of hope and love (Schmucker, 1979, p. 98).

Pastors' wives need friends with whom they can be authentic and accepted (Lee & Balswick, 1989). However, because of the idealization of their role, friendships such as these are difficult to find. Many feel "cut off from the informal social fellowship" other members of the congregation enjoy (Lee & Balswick, 1989, p. 149).

The presence of pastors' wives can, at times, be intimidating to others, despite the fact that they would prefer to be thought of as "normal" people (Dobson, 1995/2003). Briscoe (2005) does not believe pastors' wives are ever viewed as being in same category as "normal" people. People either live under the assumption that pastors' wives are "aloof" or they act "aloof." Added to this is the belief, by many people, that pastors' wives should not have problems or weaknesses themselves, so they are better able to attend to their problems (Briscoe, 2005). This often leads pastors' wives outside of their local congregation to find friendships, if they have friendships at all (Briscoe, 2005). The

continued deficit of social support available through relationships contributes to the loneliness felt by many pastors' wives (Morris & Blanton, 1994).

When surveyed, pastors' wives identified their primary felt need as being "friendship and community, due to an acute sense of loneliness" (Zoba, 1997, p. 22). Research continued to confirm these feelings as 76% of pastors' wives reported being in need of a close friend, while 43% felt isolated from outside support (Golz, 2005). Lee and Balswick (1989) said "loneliness from not really having a close friend" ranked third highest among problems identified by pastors' wives (p. 196).

### Loneliness Dynamics in the Lives of Pastors' Wives

#### *Marriage and Loneliness*

The ministry, with its constant demands, has caused pastors and their wives to feel they have "insufficient time together" (Goetz, 1992, p. 40). This is the number one problem in their marriage (Goetz, 1992). Pastors' wives have been honest and "willing to complain" about the challenges of their lives in the fishbowl and the insufficient time spent with their pastor-spouses (Hartley, 1978, p. 178). Price (2001) found over 50% of pastors spend 10 or less hours each week with their families. The majority of pastors and their wives agree on the amount of time they choose to spend together, yet at the same time, both individuals report being lonely (Warner & Carter, 1984). Ministry involves unpredictable time demands for pastors which, in turn, often leaves their families' needs unmet and creates significant loneliness for the pastors' wives (Morris & Blanton, 1994).

Loneliness for pastors' wives appears to be related to the quality of the marriage relationship (Niswander, 1982). While pastors are busy during evening hours – a time



when typically their wives are less busy – the degree of emotional closeness and loneliness felt appears to be more connected to their active intentionality to build intimacy together than to their lack of time together due to busy schedules (Niswander, 1982). Many pastors' wives who have been unfaithful in their marital relationship trace their problem with unfaithfulness back to “basic loneliness and a lack of self-esteem, or the absence of a unifying theme to life with their spouses” (Briscoe, 2005, p. 22).

Additionally, pastors and their wives tend to experience significantly less positive marital adjustment than those in non-pastoral roles. This diminished marital adjustment produces loneliness in pastoral couples. Loneliness in pastoral couples has also been shown to result from burnout, which leads pastors and their wives to withdraw from each other and their friends, with pastors being overly involved in their jobs and the pastors' wives being emotionally exhausted (Warner & Carter, 1984). Emotional burnout, loneliness, and dissatisfaction in the marital relationship are recognized as increased risks for pastors' wives (Mace & Mace, 1980; Warner & Carter, 1984).

Pastors' wives also identified loneliness as a disadvantage of being married to pastors (Baker, 1989). Forty-eight percent of pastors' wives also identified the “lack of in-depth sharing” with other couples from their churches as another disadvantage of a ministry marriage (Warner & Carter, 1984, p. 126). The marital relationship for clergy couples takes on special significance, given the difficulty of their being able to develop close friendships outside of the marriage. When the marital relationship is troubled, pastors' wives may sense increased loneliness and helplessness, feeling as if they have no where to turn for interpersonal support (McMinn, Lish, Trice, Root, Gilbert, & Yap,

2005). Pastors and their wives may appear to have healthy marital relationships, while in reality they may be “resolutely functioning in independence and loneliness” (Lavender, 1976, p. 100).

Pastors’ and their wives share much of their personal time with other people. This sharing of time was identified as a contributing factor to the loneliness of pastors’ wives (Dobson, 1995/2003). Goetz (1997) believed pastors who are satisfied in their ministry are married to women who are satisfied in their role as pastors’ wives. With loneliness present as a factor for pastors’ wives, the question could be raised as to “how many pastors’ wives are crouched behind doors, waiting for their husbands to come home, and feeling swallowed up in everybody else’s needs” (Zoba, 1997, p. 26). This suggested discrepancies between the satisfied spouse, referred to by Goetz (1997), and pastors’ wives who are lonely, distressed women waiting behind closed doors (Zoba, 1997).

### *Leadership and Loneliness*

MacDonald (1984) identified loneliness as an integral cost of leadership for pastors and their wives. Women in leadership, “by virtue of their position in life,” will experience loneliness (Langberg, 1988, p. 67). Pastors’ wives often deal with difficult details regarding the lives of their congregants. These situations are kept confidential as it is inappropriate for others within the congregations to know the details. Dobson suggested (1995, 2003) pastors’ wives often experience magnified feelings of loneliness during these times. Sharing these times with their pastor-husbands is part of the package that comes with being married to pastors (Dobson, 1995, 2003).

Leadership involves decision-making, which can also create periods of loneliness. Pastors' wives, along with their pastor-husbands, may be the only ones who are able to make an "ultimate decision" or who are able to "assume responsibility" in certain situations (MacDonald, 1984, p. 199).

Ironically, loneliness, for the pastor's wife, may come during the process of encouraging others toward increased spiritual growth. During this time, the pastor's wife is also pursuing individual wisdom and insight (MacDonald, 1984). Loneliness results from a lack of spirituality or the lack of ability to worship God (Dobson, 1995/2003; MacDonald, 1998).

Pastors' wives can become competitive. They often learn this from their pastor-husbands. This competitiveness often centers on the size of church being led and served and creates a "spirit of divisiveness," which "contribute[s] to loneliness rather than comradeship" (Dobson, 1995, 2003, p. 82).

#### *Paralyzing Impact of Loneliness*

Loneliness, if allowed, can become "paralyzing" for pastors' wives (Mayo, 1999). Many people would find it difficult to believe the pastors' wives are affected by loneliness, as it appears they have incredible husbands, ministries, and families (Mayo, 1999). However, no other issue has elicited the same powerful, painful remarks. The loneliness experienced by pastors' wives was described as both profound and agonizing (Brunette-Hill, 1999). Intense loneliness was often the end result of many conflicts and struggles for these women (Warner & Carter, 1984).

Unfortunate attitudes displayed by some congregants result in pastors' wives feeling a heightened sense of loneliness. These attitudes are often displayed in "that of desiring to see a leader fail or that of putting a leader on a pedestal as the essence of perfection" (MacDonald, 1984, p. 200).

*The Impact of Frequent Relocations on Loneliness in Pastors' Wives*

Frequent relocations serve as barriers to forming close relationships for pastors' wives. When pastors' wives move into a new community, they are often viewed as outsiders. Everyone around them is already part of an established community that is rich with history and traditions (Zoba, 1997). Pastors' wives may be immediately accepted into their new communities but are still often treated as "misfits, wallflowers, or china dolls in the social fabric of the community" (Houts, 1982, p. 148). As pastors' wives transition with their families into new communities and cultures, their need for connection is high; however, some church communities are not attentive to the feelings of loneliness that accompany relocation by a clergy family (Dobson, 1995/2003).

The frequency of relocating weakens opportunities for pastors' wives to form established social support networks, which in turn, disrupts their individual growth (Anderson & Stark, 1988). Relocations disrupt social networks and often serve to form anticipatory grief, which results in reluctance by pastors' wives to form relationships in their communities (Frame & Shehan, 1994). Uncertainty as to the length of time the family will be in its current location, along with the anticipation of the next relocation, serves to discourage pastors' wives from investing in new relationships (Baker, 1989).

Relocation uproots these women from friends, home, and, at times, family (Cothorn, 2002). The study conducted by Speight (2005) suggested pastors' wives experience loneliness when they are geographically separated from family. This loneliness is compounded by their lack of community in their congregations. Frequent mobility, as a result of ministry, creates a sense of feeling isolated, which creates difficulties for pastors' wives when they are in need of help. This often results in pastors' wives facing problems in their lives alone (Darling, Hill, & McWey, 2004).

#### *Relocation and Stress*

Frequent relocations serve as one of the leading causes of stress associated with being pastors' wives (Baker & Scott, 1992). Pastors' wives experience increased responsibility when their families relocate (Frame & Shehan, 1994), while their spouses are beginning their "exciting" new ministries (Cothorn, 2002). Establishing their families in new communities becomes the primary responsibility of pastors' wives once relocation has occurred. Pastors' wives have the job of locating new medical providers, hairdressers, playmates, schools and private instructors for their families in the new communities. Pastors' wives are often busy with the details of the move, thus the real impact of the relocation does not settle in immediately (Frame & Shehan, 1994). Clergy spouses display lower self-esteem and profound loneliness resulting from frequent relocations (Frame, 1998).

#### *Relocation and Employment*

Because two-thirds of pastors' wives work outside of the home (Goetz, 1997), relocation creates employment issues. Niswander (1982) suggested pastors' wives who

are employed outside of the home experience loneliness to a lesser degree than those wives who do not have outside employment. Pastors' wives with outside employment have less time alone and less time to focus on their feelings (Niswander, 1982).

Employment outside of the home often provides pastors' wives with a place where their unique worth is affirmed, along with opportunities to develop friendships outside of the congregation (Niswander, 1982).

#### *Isolation and Alienation in the Life of the Pastor's Wife*

Pastors' wives often feel alienated and isolated (Blackbird & Wright, 1985; Lee & Balswick, 1989). Contributing to this widespread feeling of alienation are the pastors' wives being looked at as a role, rather than as individuals (Dobson, 1995/2003; Langberg, 1988). Pastors' wives feel a greater sense of isolation than their pastor-husbands, "because even in difficult times, pastors get some sense of satisfaction from their ministry" (Goetz, 1992, p. 42). Pastors' wives, while they are considered part of their congregations and surrounded by people, may feel isolated and alone. Forty-three percent of pastors' wives reported feeling isolated (Golz, 2005).

Congregations are not always apt at offering social support, including friendships with pastors' wives (Dobson, 1995/2003; Morris & Blanton, 1994). One-third of pastors' wives said they had a small number of personal friends, and they felt an increased sense of isolation, which placed them in a vulnerable position in both their marriages and congregations (Brunette-Hill, 1999). As congregants look for flaws in their pastors' wives to make themselves feel more comfortable being around her (Langberg, 1988), these women are left feeling trapped in a sense of aloneness (Schmucker, 1979).

### *Resentment and Loneliness*

Pastors' wives live with the feelings of loneliness and times of being "stretched too thin," resulting in feelings of "resentment and frustration" (Blanton & Morris, 1999, p. 344). For some wives of pastors, a "deep-seated resentment" builds over time, because they are left alone and ill-equipped during the times of their husbands' educational processes (Houts, 1982, p. 147). For some, their husbands were also serving in local churches while pursuing their education. During these times, the pastors' wives tended to the needs of the congregation, raised the children, and often financially supported their husbands and families (Houts, 1982).

### *Coping with Loneliness*

Pastors' wives often show a lack of coping strategies in dealing with the loneliness they experience. According to Lee and Balswick (1989), the tendency for pastors' wives is to use coping strategies that only serve to keep them isolated. Pastors' wives may be trading one problem for another when they become "people saturated and seek solitude as a way of replenishing emotional reserves" (Lee & Balswick, 1989, p. 154). If the coping strategies of pastors' wives are primarily directed away from people, they may be perpetuating social isolation (Lee & Balswick, 1989).

Pastors' wives who lack supportive relationships may also lack the needed resources to cope with the increased stress that comes with ministry (Lee & Balswick, 1989). Lack of social support contributes to pastors' wives' reporting loneliness in their lives, which is an added stressor (Morris & Blanton, 1994).

*Seeking Help as Pastors' Wives*

Pastors' wives are reluctant to ask for help from others (Briscoe, 2005; Brown, 1982; Morris & Blanton, 1995). Only one percent of pastors' wives asked for help when it was needed (Briscoe, 2005) as opposed to 85% who are hesitant to ask for help of any kind (Morris & Blanton, 1995).

Many pastors' wives view self-disclosure as a danger which could jeopardize their pastor-husband's career. Pastors' wives are reluctant to seek help from qualified professionals for fear of being found out or "judged as unfit" to meet the requirements to remain in ministry (Brown, 1982, p. 189). The expectation for pastors' wives is to conceal their own emotional pain while they help others resolve their painful experiences (Brown, 1982).

Moreover, pastors' wives have a tendency to face their problems alone because of the isolation created by their frequent relocation. The frequency of relocation varies among different denominations. Ministers and their families within the United Methodist Church move, on average, once every four years (Frame & Shehan, 1994). Along with frequent relocation, come reasons of being embarrassed about seeking help, and the fear of a lack of anonymity once help is sought (Darling, Hill, & McWey, 2004). The Rapha hotline, "The Minister's Hotline for Counseling Assistance," identified pastors' wives as being their most troubled callers, calling the situation "a quiet desperation" (Goetz, 1992, p. 42). Stuart Rothberg of the Rapha hotline explained,

They have no apparent avenue to talk about their frustrations. They can't talk to anyone in the church about their family problems. Nor do they feel they can talk



to denominational heads. Admitting marriage or family problems to a denominational executive, they believe, might prevent their husband from graduating to a larger church (Goetz, 1992, p. 42).

Loneliness in pastors' wives became so prevalent in the early 1980's that an insurer of large numbers of pastors and their families, Ministers Life and Casualty Company, encouraged pastors' wives to join together and form support groups to increase their ability to cope with loneliness (Niswander, 1982). For pastors' wives to effectively cope with loneliness, they have to make an intentional choice to help themselves (Niswander, 1982). Darling, Hill, and McWey (2004) described pastors' wives as needing a "village of understanding," noting the need for support from congregants and denominational leaders (p. 276). The phenomenon of loneliness is undoubtedly an all-too familiar reality for pastors' wives (Dugan, 1994).

#### Summary

Loneliness is a common and distressing experience that remains a topic seldomly discussed. For most individuals, loneliness is a momentary experience. For others, loneliness becomes a normal part of their day-to-day lives. Loneliness is identified as a personal and subjective experience.

People who are lonely tend to think poorly of themselves and anticipate rejection from others. This results in a failure to take advantage of interpersonal opportunities that have the potential to diminish these feelings of loneliness. The absence of socially integrative relationships appears to be a phenomenon that has risen sharply in this decade.

Individuals' ability to cope with loneliness appears to increase during the years of middle adulthood. Those individuals who identified themselves as active Christians were identified as less lonely. Those who also felt connected to a divine entity also were found to experience an increase in feelings of belonging.

Pastors' wives face challenges in their roles being married to ministers. They live in a world of high visibility. They often identify feeling pressured to be an ideal role model within their communities. At the same time, these women face challenges of maintaining a personal sense of identity as they are often recognized in association with their pastor-husbands.

Close relationships for pastors' wives are often lacking. These women need friendships in which they are able to be authentic. Friendships such as these are often difficult for pastors' wives to find.

Pastors' wives identified loneliness as a disadvantage of being married to ministers. Time often needed for the marriage and family is spent helping other people. This sharing of time was identified as contributing to the loneliness of pastors' wives.

Additionally, frequent relocations impact pastors' wives often serving as barriers to forming close relationships. These women experience increased responsibilities helping their families adjust to the relocation. It has been suggested that pastors' wives who are employed outside of the home experience less loneliness.

Pastors' wives who are struggling are reluctant to seek help from others. The majority are hesitant to ask for help of any kind. Many fear their self-disclosure could in some way jeopardize their husbands' career potential.

Although loneliness is common, conversations about loneliness are often discouraged. Individuals at times are discouraged from verbalizing feelings of loneliness either because of the severity of loneliness or simply an overall lack of understanding regarding what it means to experience loneliness. The lack of objective signs of loneliness creates an increased need to hear individuals' personal experiences surrounding the phenomenon of loneliness.

Speight (2005) identified a need for future research exploring the phenomena of loneliness in the lives of pastors' wives. This study was an attempt to expand the literature by investigating, phenomenologically, loneliness as experienced by pastors' wives.

### CHAPTER III: METHOD

The review of literature in Chapter II revealed that both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used to explore lives of pastors' wives and their loneliness. No single study was found, however, that phenomenologically investigated the experience of loneliness as lived by pastors' wives.

In qualitative research, surveys or questionnaires were most commonly used (Brunette-Hill, 1999; Darling; Hill & McWey, 2004; Frame, 1998; Goetz, 1992; Hartley, 1978; Hartley & Taylor, 1977; McMinn, Lish, Trice, Root, Gilbert, & Yap, 2005; Mickey, Wilson, & Ashmore, 1991; Zoba, 1997). McMinn, Lish, Trice, Root, Gilbert, and Yap (2005) made use of the personal interview with pastors' wives as an addendum to a survey or questionnaire. Speight (2005) is the sole qualitative study in the literature that used personal interviews for data collection. Speight's (2005) study also included a personal questionnaire.

Although Speight (2005) used the personal interview as an expanded means for data collection, the interview was limited in its scope to a time frame of a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of 60 minutes focusing on loneliness and depression. Moreover, the research by Speight (2005) was limited to Southern Baptist Ministers' Wives living in the state of Colorado. Therefore, further study was warranted to gain an increased understanding of the experience of loneliness in ministers' wives (Speight, 2005). I chose to use the interview as a means to allow pastors' wives to describe and reflect on their experiences of loneliness they have lived through, systematically describing the internal meaning attached to their experiences of loneliness (van Manen, 1990).

## Research Design

Qualitative research designs allow participants' individual insights and perspectives on a given subject to emerge (Creswell, 1998; Portney & Watkins, 2000; van Manen, 1990; Piantanida & Garman, 1999; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Qualitative research gives depth to research because it attempts to move the reader to "empathetic understanding" of a subject matter through the use of "*thick description*" which moves readers towards an understanding of what the experience would be like if they were living the experience themselves (Stake, 1995, p. 39).

This study relied on the phenomenological tradition of inquiry in qualitative research. Phenomenological inquiry typically generates its narrative through interviewing (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Phenomenological inquiry focuses on the individuals' experiences, describing and providing clarifying explanations to the meanings individuals place on those experiences (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995 van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology, in a broad sense, is a "philosophy or *theory of the unique*" as its interest lies in what is "essentially not replaceable" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). As suggested by van Manen (1990), phenomenological inquiry seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of an individual's experiences. Phenomenology, as a research method, sets itself aside by attempting to gain insightful descriptions of how individuals experience their world (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological inquiry allows individuals to reflect on experiences they have lived through, systematically describing those experiences and the internal meaning attached to the experiences (van Manen,

1990). As expressed by van Manen (1990), lived experiences of individuals have “temporal structure” which is not able to be “grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as past experience” (p. 36). Additionally, according to van Manen (1990),

Every project of phenomenological inquiry is driven by a commitment of turning to an abiding concern...phenomenological research does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real person, who in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence (p. 31).

Given this, along with my passion to understand in greater depth the experiences of pastors’ wives who feel or have felt loneliness, I attempted to place a “brick in the wall,” so to speak, describing loneliness from experiences of pastors’ wives as they encountered this phenomenon.

The primary research questions which framed this study were:

- How do pastors’ wives describe loneliness?
- What factors do pastors’ wives identify as contributing to their descriptions of loneliness?
- How do participants’ descriptions of loneliness compare and contrast?

#### *Selection of Participants*

Participants in this study were initially selected through the use of purposeful, criterion sampling, which ensured all participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998). Snowball sampling was used in an effort to gain

additional participants through two different individuals known to this researcher. Diversity was sought through seeking participants of varying ages and years in the pastorate, currently serving and past experience serving varying sizes of churches, as well, as interviewing participants who are currently employed outside of the home as well as those not currently employed outside of the home. Snowball sampling is used when participants with “specific characteristics are hard to locate” (Portney & Watkins, 2000, p. 149). These procedures ensured an evangelical (Christian), multi-denominational sample of participants were selected.

As a result of snowball sampling, one potential participant contacted regarding possible participation agreed to participate. She realized that she knew me through previous ministry connections. Two other individuals who were contacted to participate in this study were not familiar with me and declined to be interviewed.

As suggested by Creswell (1998), no more than 10 participants were interviewed to provide saturation yet to prevent collecting overly repetitive data. All participants were women married to an evangelical (Christian), ordained male minister either currently serving in a full-time pastoral ministry role or having left a position in full-time pastoral ministry within the past year.

One week prior to her interview, each participant was mailed the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale to complete. The results from this instrument were used to ensure participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied (i.e., loneliness). The Revised UCLA Loneliness scale, a self-report measure, consists of 20 items, none of which use “lonely” or “loneliness” terminology. Of the 20 items contained in the

Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale, ten of the items reflect an individual's satisfaction with his or her social relationships, while ten items reflect personal dissatisfaction with social relationships. (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980). Overall, results from these twenty items indicate how "lonely individuals describe their experience" (Russell, 1996, p. 21).

The participants were also asked to complete the Beck Depression Inventory-II to account for the possible presence of depression. Participants were not excluded from the study if they were identified by the instrument as being clinically depressed. The information regarding depression provided a basis for further understanding as to whether the presence of clinical depression provided varying descriptions of loneliness among the participants. Because of their manifestation of moderate or severe depression, recommendations for professional treatment were given to three participants at the conclusion of their interviews.

#### *Data Collection*

Interviewing is the primary means of collecting data in phenomenological research (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Interviews in this study were primarily conversational in nature, and the interviews were recorded. While in-depth interviewing was the primary the method of choice for collecting data, other methods of data collection which also sought to trace etymological sources of the phenomenon being studied, including journals and diaries were also used (van Manen, 1990). For the purpose of triangulation (Creswell, 1998), participants were asked to provide relevant personal writings or journals that address their loneliness. Participants were also contacted through e-mail six to eight weeks after their interviews. The purpose of these e-



mails was to request any additional information or writings they desired to add to the information provided through the interviews.

The interview protocol used in this phenomenological inquiry was designed to be conversational in nature (see Appendix A). The interview focused on the research questions which “prompted the need for the interview in the first place” (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). Structure was present in the interviews as I remained mindful of specific prompts with each interview question in an effort to stay focused and avoid an “over-abundance of poorly managed interviews,” which has the potential to lead to “total despair and confusion” for the researcher (van Manen, 1990, p. 67).

Prior to each interview, I addressed any questions from the participants pertaining to the research to their satisfaction after which they signed an Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study (See Appendix B). During the interview, I obtained taped, conversational and detailed personal stories of participants and their experience with the phenomenon, loneliness. Interview times of one and one half to two hours in length are consistent with phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990). All initial interview times for this study fell within this range with the exception of two interviews which lasted 80 minutes and one interview which continued for 85 minutes. The remaining five interviews ranged from 90 to 110 minutes. Field notes were taken during each interview with additional notes completed on the same day each interview occurred. As the researcher, I questioned whether I was “getting it right” as far as obtaining a thick, rich description of loneliness from each participant. I discussed this through e-mail with my advisor who provided helpful suggestions and reiterated the need for cross-checking.

I was prepared to conduct a telephone interview if geographical location were a problem, as this is the best source of obtaining information should the interviewee's location be problematic in obtaining direct access (Creswell, 1998). However, I was able to reserve time to travel to the participants' homes for face-to-face interviews. One interview was conducted in a secluded location in the participant's church. Although the travel time became extensive, I believe it was well worth the additional time and effort to provide an interview location familiar to each participant.

#### *Data Analysis*

The raw data collected in this study was obtained and recorded during the participant interviews. All interview tapes were copied with the copies coded appropriately and stored in a secure location. The original tapes were priority mailed to the transcriptionist. All recorded interviews were then transcribed into verbatim transcripts by a professional transcriptionist who agreed to confidentiality.

The professional transcriptionist phoned when the transcriptions were complete and returned all transcripts and original interview tapes to me. All verbatim transcripts were reviewed by me, while I listened to the recorded interviews. Editing was done to each transcript in order to ensure its accuracy. Once the editing was complete, the transcripts were deemed accurate.

A total of 149 pages of single-spaced typewritten data were produced from the interviews. Participants' Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale scores, Beck Depression Inventory-II scores, and total interview times were written at the top right corner of the first page of each transcript.

The analysis of the data was approached in terms of “theme analysis,” the process of recovering “themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Phenomenological themes occurring within the text of the interview transcripts are understood to be “*structures of experience*” (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). As the phenomenon of loneliness in pastors’ wives was analyzed, the attempt was made to identify the experiential structures making up the experience (van Manen, 1990).

Throughout the process of theme analysis, I kept the research questions framing this study clearly in focus in order to “give control and order” to the research and writing (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). This was accomplished by posting the research questions guiding this study, along with the participants’ pseudonyms, on the wall in front of my computer. These were referred to regularly while examining the data and assisted me in maintaining focus on the phenomenon being examined. Ultimately, this was done in effort remain strong in my “orientation to the fundamental question[s]” guiding this study (van Manen, 1990, p. 33).

After several readings and re-readings of the transcripts, the words lonely, loneliness, and alone were highlighted on each transcript in yellow. The transcripts were re-read to identify words or groups of words related in meaning to the words lonely, loneliness, and alone. These were highlighted in pink. Smaller word groups were then underlined in pencil as I attempted to identify the richness of the description. Significant descriptive words were then circled in purple.

Each transcript was then re-read and groups of words describing loneliness were identified with a “D” circled in red in the right margin. Following this, each transcript was read again and words identified as contributing factors to the participants’ descriptions of loneliness were identified with a “C” circled in green in the right margin. Transcripts were read once more with each section relating to the “D” read, and a general description of the section was written on a red page marker post-it note and attached to the page. The same process was used for each section related to “C” as a general description of the section was written on a green page marker post-it note and attached to the page. Statements were then grouped in themes according to either descriptions of loneliness or general factors contributing to descriptions of loneliness by specific words or phrases. Sub-themes were then sorted and grouped according to their descriptions of loneliness or general factors contributing to descriptions of loneliness.

#### *Creating the Phenomenological Text*

An essential concern in creating phenomenological text is language. “Creating a phenomenological text is the object of the research process” (van Manen, 1990, p. 111). van Manen (1990) recognized “to *do* research in a phenomenological sense is already and immediately and always a *bringing of speech* of something” (p. 33).

A munificent sampling of the participants’ voices must be included in the written text to truly be a phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 1990). I recognized the participants’ voices were significant in providing rich description of the experience of being lonely. The stories of the participants were recorded within this study in great quantity purposefully to provide “fuller understanding” (van Manen, 1990, p. 152).

### *Trustworthiness*

Throughout this study, I attempted to generate a trustworthy, credible work by using member checking to assess the accuracy of the data (Isaac & Michael, 1971/1995; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Three participants examined, in its' entirety, the analyzed data and successive writing of the research prior to the final research write up being submitted (Isaac & Michael, 1971/1995; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). A fourth participant was invited to participate, but she declined because of travel issues and time constraints.

A faculty advisor conducted periodic peer reviews of interview transcripts, analyzed data, ideas and the phenomenological text. The role of the faculty advisor was to ask "hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations" (Creswell, 1998, p. 202).

The collection of corroborating data fulfilled the purpose of triangulation in this study. The corroborating data included participant interviews, e-mails, and field notes taken during and written on the same day as the interviews.

### *Summary*

This study, which investigated loneliness as experienced by pastors' wives, used a phenomenological method of inquiry to allow the researcher to enter the participants' realm of insight on their experience of the phenomenon, loneliness. The perspectives of eight pastors' wives were obtained through personal interviews. Pseudonyms were given to each participant and verbatim transcripts were coded and analyzed to create a

phenomenological text. Member checking, peer review, and triangulation were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to further the understanding of pastors' wives. Specifically, this study investigated the individual experiences of pastors' wives with the phenomenon, loneliness. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the instrument. Eisner (1991) describes the researcher as "...the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it. [Moreover], it is the researcher's ability to see and interpret significant aspects...that provides unique, personal insight into the experience under study" (p. 33). van Manen (1990) adds "the textual approach one takes in the phenomenological study should largely be decided in terms of the nature of the phenomenon being addressed and the investigative method that appears appropriate to it" (p. 173). In phenomenological research, determination of how to create the text lies entirely with the researcher.

This chapter begins by presenting introductory portraits of the eight participants, the collaborators in this study. Following the portraits, research question number one is addressed through the identification of themes from the participants' descriptions of loneliness. The section addressing research question two presents the factors pastors' wives identified as contributing to their descriptions of loneliness. Research question number three is addressed throughout the findings as the participants' descriptions of loneliness and identified contributing factors are compared and contrasted.

### *Portraits of Participants*

This section presents the stories of the eight pastors' wives, Allison, Chloe, Katie, Lauren, Emily, Margo, Natalie, and Sarah (all pseudonyms), that shaped this study. Seven of these women are married to ordained ministers who are ministering full-time in

local church settings. One participant's husband, an ordained minister, not presently ministering in a church, full-time, has continued to participate in occasional ministerial duties. This participant's husband has been in a role other than full-time ministry for less than eight months at the time of the interview.

The participants were Caucasian women with a range of experience as pastors' wives from four to 38 years. They have been married from 12 to 38 years. Their pastor-husbands have served in churches ranging in size from 25 to several thousand throughout their years of ministry. All participants currently serve or have served churches in the Midwest United States.

The portraits of these participants are pictures taken and developed by me. Every effort has been taken to produce a trustworthy representation of these participants (Riessman, 1993). The topic of loneliness seemed to touch each of the participants deeply and personally, as evidenced by individuals pausing to wipe a tear or stopping to gather themselves emotionally. Noteworthy to me was the authenticity of each of the participants. This sense of authenticity was apparent through the heartfelt stories shared by each participant.

### *Allison*

Allison has been married for 38 years. With the exception of the recent months, her husband has ministered at five different churches. The majority of the years her husband served as a senior pastor full-time. She has two adult children. One lives nearby while the other lives in another state. Allison is college-educated and currently employed full-time in a professional position. For the greater part of her years as a pastor's wife,



Allison was employed as a private instructor. She also assisted her spouse in various duties in the church office for many years. Much of Allison's identity has come from being a pastor's wife.

I always loved being a pastor's wife....I was very involved. I loved having people over. I loved feeling like I was a part of people's lives. I loved feeling like that they valued what I thought and that I could help them.

Allison has been very active in church ministry. She has taught children, teens, and adults, as well as entertained in her home. Allison stated, "The more I [did] at the church the happier I was, because it felt like I was making a difference in people's lives, and it was just good. I loved it."

According to the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale administered to Allison, she exhibited a significant level of loneliness. The Beck Depression Inventory-II identified a moderate level of depression was present for Allison.

### *Chloe*

Chloe has been married to her pastor-husband for 12 years. She has two elementary aged children. Chloe is college educated and currently a homemaker who volunteers at her children's school and occasionally substitute teaches in the local school system. Chloe's husband has served as senior pastor at four churches in their 12 years of marriage. Chloe's involvement in church work has included working with children, organizing large events, and entertaining in her home.

Chloe's initial view of ministry was positive. "For the most part I do enjoy it. I do enjoy working in the church. I have always been a part of being active in the church." She also recognized challenges regarding balance in her role as a pastor's wife.

I really want to be involved in ministry, and I like to be involved in ministry. But I feel torn between doing all of these things. I sort of feel like the event coordinator for the church. Being all of those things to those people, but then also if I do that for them, [and] I lose my own family in the process and my kids then resent the church, then it's all for nothing.

According to the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale administered to Chloe, she exhibited a significant level of loneliness. The Beck Depression Inventory-II identified Chloe as experiencing normal mood fluctuations.

### *Katie*

Katie has been married for 25 years. Her husband has been a pastor serving on a church staff for 16 years. For the first nine years of their marriage, they were involved in volunteer ministry. Katie is looking forward to an upcoming transition in pastoral work to a new church setting as her spouse is seeking a position as a senior pastor. Katie's level and type of ministry involvement has fluctuated with her varying stages of life. With young children, she often served in children's ministry areas and later served in youth ministry along with her husband. At this point her involvement is portrayed as,

I don't know if I would say I'm involved. I support him....But he is more doing the ministry and I'm kind of just with him. That's partly because I've not wanted to be up front, and I'm pretty comfortable letting him do his thing.

Katie is a mother of three adult children. She has worked outside the home at various times in ministry. At this time, Katie is a homemaker and often spends time with her grandchildren.

Katie expressed “feeling I don’t fit the role” of being a pastor’s wife. She acknowledged this feeling to be tied to “some of my own set of what I think a pastor’s wife should be compared to who I am. It’s not so much other people putting it on me as much as myself feeling that.” At times her struggle has involved “knowing where to fit in, what [her] place is ministry-wise.”

According to the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale administered to Katie, she exhibited a significant level of loneliness. The Beck Depression Inventory-II identified Katie as experiencing normal mood fluctuations.

### *Lauren*

Lauren has been married for 13.5 years. She is approaching the completion of her ninth year in ministry at four different churches with her pastor-husband. Lauren’s husband has served his entire ministry career as a staff pastor.

Lauren is the mother of three children. Two of the children are elementary school-aged and the youngest is a preschooler. She is college educated and is currently working part-time. She would like to wait to return to work full-time until her youngest child is in kindergarten. She noted the decision regarding work is monitored yearly to determine the financial feasibility of her continuing to work part-time.

Lauren has been very involved in ministry throughout the years. She leads various committees within the church, along with serving in the children’s and music

ministry. In previous years, she has been involved in the youth ministry. She has lessened her involvement in this area because of the ages of her own children.

Lauren identified her role as a pastor's wife as being "different than I imagined it to be....it has its goods and bad that I didn't anticipate." She stressed her personal importance of being supportive of her husband by "being at everything that I can that he plans, by being by his side in the church so that he is visibly connected to a spouse without question."

According to the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale administered to Lauren, she exhibited an elevated level of loneliness. The Beck Depression Inventory-II identified Lauren as experiencing normal mood fluctuations.

### *Emily*

Emily has been married for 27 years and in ministry alongside her spouse for 28 years. Her husband has served as senior pastor in four different churches and as youth minister at two churches. Emily, while in college and dating her soon to be pastor-husband, volunteered time helping him in his first pastorate.

Emily has two adult-aged children who are currently completing college and graduate school. Both adult-children are home on a semi-regular basis on weekends. Emily is college educated and holds a master's degree. She currently works four days each week in two part-time jobs.

Emily identified the current position in pastoral work her husband holds as being the most positive for her in comparison to previous positions noting

We're serving a big enough church now that I can come and go as I need to. I don't have a lot of people questioning what I'm doing. I don't have a lot of people telling me you don't want to do that, that's not what you want. That part is good now.

Emily recognized she has changed significantly over the years.

...I've changed. I'm older. I used to try not to care, but it was in my face. Now it's not in my face, and I don't care. I care a little bit, because people's souls are sometimes in danger from just their pain and what they're projecting. I care in that way...I have never liked and still don't like, well, you're the preacher's wife you should do this, because it is required because of your position.

Emily's involvement in ministry includes teaching a ladies class and meeting with a group planning women's Bible studies. She also noted being involved in short-term projects but not having time for long-term commitments. Emily becomes very involved "when someone has a crisis." She will often "meet with [the individual(s)], assess the situation, and get the proper referrals....Some weeks, that doesn't involve me. Other times...I experience a lot of involvement" through meetings, phone calls, and follow-up with the individual[s]. She appeared to have a positive sense of her giftedness and abilities, along with time available to help as needed.

According to the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale administered to Emily, she exhibited an elevated level of loneliness. The Beck Depression Inventory-II identified Emily as experiencing normal mood fluctuations.

*Margo*

Margo has been married for 15 years and has two elementary school-aged children. The first three years of marriage were spent at with her husband in seminary. Since that time her husband has served at two churches in staff positions. One of the churches was a large established church, the other a new, smaller, formed church.

Margo is college educated and has worked full-time and part-time in the past. Currently, she is not working outside of the home. She is contemplating her next steps regarding outside employment and desires for ministry.

Margo has been very involved in ministry over the years. She was also on staff at the first church her husband-pastor served. In the second church she has been actively involved in leadership in children's ministry and meeting regularly with various women to pray and to provide and receive encouragement. Margo expressed many positive feelings regarding ministry including,

I enjoy some aspects of being a pastor's wife, being able to minister to people, know that I'm a part with [spouse] in this mission. It's important to me. I guess ever since I was a little girl, I always dreamed of being a pastor's wife. I always thought being the leader's wife was something significant, I guess.

Along with the positives with ministry, Margo was also attuned to other aspects.

There are some aspects of being a pastor's wife that I don't enjoy also, like not always being in partnership in ministry or our lives revolving around the ministry. When you're in ministry it's not just your occupation. It's your friendships. It's all consuming.

According to the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale administered to Margo, she exhibited a normal level of loneliness. The Beck Depression Inventory-II identified Margo as experiencing mild mood fluctuations associated with depression.

*Natalie*

Natalie has been married for 20 years. Her husband worked in para-church ministry for 13 years and has served as an associate pastor for four years. Natalie and her husband have attended the church where her husband is employed throughout their marriage.

Natalie described the transition to church staff through the words of her friend, “You’re suddenly a tall blade of grass.” She noted how people unknown to her were coming to her as a resource, when previously they would not have sought her out of the crowd. Now Natalie recognizes that “people anticipate that I know everything that’s going on.” With the increased anticipation from others she acknowledged, “I can be as in the dark as other people. There are a million things going on....”

Natalie has one elementary school-aged child. She runs her own business from her home. During the past two years, Natalie has suffered from a chronic illness which has impacted all aspects of her life.

According to the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale administered to Natalie, she exhibited a significant level of loneliness. The Beck Depression Inventory-II identified Natalie as experiencing a moderate level of depression.

*Sarah*

Sarah has been married nearly 18 years and has two teenage children both of whom are in high school. She has served alongside her husband in ministry for 19 years. The first ministry position for her husband came in college prior to marriage.

Sarah's husband has served as a pastor at seven different churches. She has been in the role as a wife of a staff pastor and is currently in the role of senior pastor's wife for the third time in her marriage.

Sarah works part-time at the church office for which she receives no financial compensation. This position is temporary to ease the financial strain the church was in when her husband became its pastor. In previous churches, Sarah also worked in the church offices, in various paid capacities.

Sarah described ministry as being a "fishbowl" where "everybody knows everything that you are doing and sometimes what you are not." She recalled being asked by a woman, "What do you do?" To this question, Sarah responded, "Anything a mom would, anything that a wife would, I just have an extra role of being a pastor's wife and it is just another hat that we have to put on just like any other job."

Sarah's ministry involvement includes the office work along with many activities behind the scenes. She described herself as the "prop lady." Her pastor-husband uses "props or illustrations for teaching to...help people...remember what the topic was about. I'm probably 90%-95% of [getting the props] for the weekend service. He gets the idea and I am the legs behind it."



According to the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale administered to Sarah, she exhibited a significant level of loneliness. The Beck Depression Inventory-II identified Sarah as experiencing a severe level of depression. Sarah reported being on psychotropic medications related to the treatment of her depression.

#### *Participants' Levels of Loneliness and Depression*

All eight participants exhibited feelings of loneliness according to the results from the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale. Allison, Chloe, Katie, Lauren, Natalie, and Sarah exhibited significant feelings of loneliness, while Emily experienced elevated feelings of loneliness, and Margo exhibited normal feelings.

According to the Beck Depression Inventory-II, two of the participants, Allison and Natalie, exhibited a moderate level of depression. A third, Sarah, experienced severe depression. Natalie expressed her belief that her increased depression was directly connected to her chronic illness of the past two years. She agreed to speak with her physician regarding the depression and to follow recommendations given by the physician. Sarah was already being treated for her depression. Allison did not appear to be surprised that she was identified as being depressed. She agreed to consider recommendations I gave to her for professional treatment.

#### *Participants' Descriptions of Loneliness*

This section of the findings describes the three main themes that emerged as the participants described their feelings of loneliness.

*An Indescribable Void Created by Loneliness*

Loneliness created an indescribable void in the lives of participants. They portrayed this indescribable void in depth as a feeling of emptiness, isolation, and being cut-off from others.

Katie identified herself as being accustomed to loneliness in her life. She appeared so accustomed to the indescribable void of loneliness, at times, it appeared to be more matter-of-fact and distant to her, though paradoxically very real and present. She remarked, “It’s just being by myself, not having any close relationships besides the surface type of relationships with people, except for with my husband and my kids at times.” Katie acknowledged the difficulty of loneliness for her and the challenge of describing this phenomenon. “It’s hard to describe what loneliness is. It’s just a void.”

Katie talked in-depth concerning a period of deep loneliness when one of her children was in legal trouble. The loneliness increased as she had “no one to share the hurt with, share the worries, the difficulties.” This indescribable void created by loneliness was ever present as she recognized she and her spouse “had each other but not really anybody else” with whom they could openly share their pain.

Katie described this time as being “very tough.” She said they managed to get through it “with each other, with us holding onto our beliefs, with us holding onto God and wading through it.” She acknowledged that people knew what was happening with her son since they lived in a small town, and the incident was reported in the newspaper. This heightened the difficulty and loneliness, expanding the indescribable void, as people

around her knew what happened yet were quiet. Katie felt as if, because of this incident, her family was being talked about, but no one was talking to her directly.

Chloe identified deeply with the indescribable void created by loneliness during times when she is struggling in her marriage and is

really ticked off at [spouse] and you can't tell anybody....Then having to go to church and pretend like everything is okay. Even when family is over and pretending like everything is okay and in front of the kids. We don't want them to have to feel that tension. So it's just a lot of pretending...eventually it gets resolved...or you just learn to deal with whatever the circumstance is. I guess if you keep pushing something back long enough you don't feel it anymore maybe. I don't know.

Margo resonated with Chloe and Katie in relating the indescribable void created by loneliness through her statement, "the loneliest moments [are] the times when you're down and you're struggling with your marriage or with your kids and you just don't feel like there's anybody around to talk to or you just don't know who to call." Margo described these times of loneliness as times when she has been "too dependent on [her] husband...when he's your only emotional support that becomes draining on him."

Adding to this indescribable void created by loneliness, Margo expressed, "it's easy for me just to go through the motions of life and ministry without thinking that I need anybody, that I need friends." Allison concurred, identifying a time of loneliness as feeling "like my life is motions. I just go to one side and then to the other." During a

time like this Allison tearfully identified “wishing I was dead” and questioning “why am I even here” leaving her feeling an indescribable void of emptiness and loneliness.

Loneliness in these times of intense questioning and soul searching for Allison has lead her to question her impact on others in her life.

...loneliness means...if something were to happen to me right now...pause...I am giving you my feelings. It feels like my kids and [spouse] and only a few people would be touched, but I feel like it would not make a difference to my world, that world I have tried to impact. I think I could probably just fade away and nobody would realize I was gone. I think that's lonely.

This has led Allison to feel “everything you do in life you're just really one in a crowd, and it's not really meaningful to anybody...useless.” This was obviously painful and very sad for Allison to express as she has invested her adult life in others.

Chloe identified with Allison stating, “I felt like we were always surrounded by people but nobody wanted to be with us.” Natalie described loneliness as when “people are around you but not with you” as if she is “in a big room and everybody is too busy.” For Natalie, Chloe, and Allison, it was as if they were cut-off from others creating the loneliness.

Margo suggested the indescribable void created by loneliness as being present when she had a “hard time knowing who to trust and who to connect with, especially at a really large church.” This appeared to be contradictory to Margo for her to be in a large church and feeling an intense void of loneliness.

Margo identified a time of loneliness in her life when she had no one she could depend on or who would “take an interest in my life.” She recounted two distinct periods in her life when she sought professional counseling during times of increased loneliness. “In the times of loneliness that did help, because there was somebody that could listen and process and just care for me with no strings attached to tell anything.”

The indescribable void created by loneliness for Allison was related in terms of being deeply hurt in relationships by “people I thought were my friends.” Allison described a point in ministry when her pastor-husband was leaving a church under great distress. A direct reason was never given by the church board as to why in an unofficial vote of yes or no; the majority answered “yes” to the statement “I want the Senior Pastor to leave.” She remembered thinking “there was probably some mistake....I couldn’t even register it that it was true....I kept thinking that something would change, that somebody would come and clarify it.” Allison has continued to hear of the church board telling the congregants, “We didn’t ask him to leave.” Allison agreed her spouse was not asked to leave. Instead, “they [church board] said they wanted us to [leave].”

Allison received no clarification from church denomination officials who reported they “had no clue” as to what had happened. The indescribable void of loneliness became increasingly eerie for her. Allison tearfully recalled her questioning of relationships and of the loneliness which still continues, as she remarked, “I just don’t know who doesn’t want to be my friend anymore.” Allison’s struggle with this void of loneliness has intensified now that her husband has recently left full-time ministry.

Lauren portrayed the indescribable void created by loneliness as the “lack of a deeper friendship when I need one.” She wistfully recalled her years in college when she had more time to develop deeper friendships and the encouragement it provided for her.

Lauren also identified loneliness as “times that I would like to have access to my husband, but I can’t just physically if the hours are not at the right time. It’s feeling that other people need him more.” When these types of situations have surfaced with her husband, Lauren has been left feeling increasingly cut-off and empty. At times Lauren fills this void created by loneliness through reading romance novels she refers to as the “Christian kind” which she believes to be “purposeful.” The longing of Lauren’s heart was revealed through her statement,

When I’m reading that [romance novel] type of a story, I don’t feel so lonely. I feel involved in those people’s lives in that book in a way that I might be kind of wanting right then. The book ends up providing it instead of a real relationship for a little while. I’ve definitely been reading more lately, so that tells me something.

When I asked Lauren what this told her, she responded, “That there have been more lonely opportunities lately.

This indescribable void created by loneliness, along with a desire for time with and access to her husband, was mentioned by Lauren in the interview as her feeling much like a single parent. I initially asked Lauren, “What is it like for you to be a pastor’s wife?” To this she replied,

I find that at times it's a bit lonelier than I anticipated it would be. I find that I am more of a single parent than I planned to be in church settings. It is also very exciting, because I get to be so involved in my husband's job. I didn't anticipate any of those things being exactly that way. So it has its goods and bad that I didn't anticipate.

Lauren also described loneliness as the lack of current involvement in ministry alongside her spouse. She depicts this as feeling "cast aside" recognizing her spouse "doesn't need me so much." Lauren often feels she is behind at knowing what is going on as her active ministry involvement alongside her spouse has decreased as they have added children to their family.

Lauren also identified loneliness as "tending the children" which often leaves her feeling "lonely and disconnected." The responsibility of looking after the children on Sundays is most often left up to Lauren as her husband has told her "I'm not a very good father when I work." Lauren noted her husband

finds it difficult to jump in and be [in] the father role, to look [out] for our children or to keep track of them and what they're doing when he is trying to work and to network with other people, [and] ask questions of them [regarding] things that he needs from them.

Lauren struggles intensely with keeping an eye on her children. She tearfully, but only briefly, spoke regarding her own painful life history, which has resulted in her elevated fear and concern for her children and her desire to be increasingly protective of them.

This indescribable void of loneliness and disconnection was identified by Chloe as she noted

...being lonely is just not having anybody to confide in. It's not necessarily being alone because we're surrounded with people all the time. But it's just having someone to confide in and tell those things that you just can't tell anybody else.

Lauren appeared to struggle with her desire to assist and please her spouse while protecting and caring for their children and leaving little time and energy for herself to connect with others.

Sarah, for the majority of her life, has been a "people pleaser, so I want to make sure that everybody is happy and that you are comfortable." Along with this, Sarah "took that perception that I had to be whoever that was that they thought, so that they would feel comfortable." This mentality has created more distance in her relationships, thus limiting her opportunities to build friendships. Sarah recognized deep friendships and deeper connections are minimal in her life, "To say that I have friends, I know a lot of people, whether I would say they are friends, I don't know."

Natalie, who has been chronically ill for the past two years, portrayed Sundays as being "lonelier than I anticipated" and identified worship times as being "very individualized," when she is often apart from her husband. She noted the indescribable void created by loneliness and disappointment of feeling disappointed and surprised by the people who have not walked this journey of chronic illness with her. "I think that's been lonely and isolating. It's to see that people have very definitive lines and that those



lines, that circumference is a lot smaller than you anticipated.” Natalie’s illness left her bedfast for four months. Within the last few months, she has been able

to, what I call, function, get up, get dressed, get [son] ready for school, have one or maybe two meetings like this [interview] today and then that’s it...there was probably six months where I was out of bed, but it was the kind of thing where I had to choose. Do I bathe today or wash my hair, because I didn’t have the energy to do both.

Throughout this time, Natalie has been left with the indescribable void created by loneliness as support from others has decreased and, at times, turned to questioning as to why she is not fully recovered.

Emily resonated with Natalie when she identified loneliness as “where there’s nobody that knows who you are. When you tell them who you are, they say it’s not okay. That’s lonely...I wanted adult people to know and understand me, and they would say no that’s weird.”

Emily currently has “good friends outside of the church” which is new for her in the last five years. Within the church, Emily viewed her relationships as compartmentalized....I can be at church and have relationships that are somewhat superficial and some are kind of deep. Even the superficial ones don’t feel entirely superficial. I feel like I know how to connect with their soul a little bit in some of those friendships, and that’s good enough. I don’t feel like I have to know everything, or they have to know everything.

Superficial friendships were the norm in the first 23 years of ministry for Emily. This approach of superficiality has resulted in the presence of an indescribable void created by loneliness for Emily and continues to do so as relationships are compartmentalized in Emily's life.

### *Summary*

The indescribable void was portrayed in-depth as a feeling of emptiness, isolation, and being cut-off from others. Though described to varying degrees, the indescribable void created by loneliness was present in the lives of each participant.

### *Loneliness Resulting from Guardedness*

Seven of eight participants identified a sense of guardedness as a contributor to feelings of loneliness. Natalie, the woman who has been a pastor's wife the fewest years, perhaps not surprisingly, was the only participant who did not describe loneliness in this way. This sense of guardedness was portrayed as being cautious in relationships ultimately creating a feeling of loneliness.

Emily talked at various points in the interview about being guarded in relationships. When asked about guardedness impacting loneliness, she responded, "It's all a piece of one. They are all the same thing." Emily expanded on this statement as she talked about some ministry situations.

You have to be guarded because you're not in a place where people are healthy enough to process and do things correctly. People weren't healthy to process anything they did know and did unhealthy things with it. The more guarded you are...the more lonely you get. But even if you're unguarded, if you're with

people who are emotionally mature enough to deal with that, you're still lonely because it alienates you in a different way.

Emily reiterated that "relationships were always hard and always guarded. Always guarded." Emily acknowledged she had spent the majority of her life in ministry as guarded stating, "It's the way to do it." Emily believed "if I had been unguarded or when I was unguarded it would backfire" on her. As a result of this guardedness, Emily combated her loneliness through increased involvement with her children. She believed in her life "they were the only ones I had, the only ones I could trust."

Emily said she started in ministry with the mindset that "nobody is trustworthy." She eventually saw herself changing as she recognized she "didn't like their religiousness." She began to trust those individuals who responded positively to her challenges regarding their religiousness. Those who told her she was "all wet and wrong, [she] wouldn't trust," which left her continuously guarded in those relationships.

Sarah also acknowledged a sense of guardedness which has resulted in loneliness albeit she began ministry with what she believed to be a different mindset regarding trust than Emily. Sarah initially believed that this guardedness began as trust was broken many times over the course of ministry. This increased her sense of loneliness. Sarah recognized,

It's very hard. I was a very trusting person when we first got into ministry. I felt like I could trust anybody and I could talk to whoever, and it wouldn't matter. I learned early on that is not always the case. There are people you can talk to, but they are not always right there in plain sight. I have been hurt and had trust

broken so many times....Just about the time that I felt like I could start, and it would take a long time to get to that point to start taking the wall down, it seemed like something would happen. I am not going there again and the wall is going back up.

As she talked, Sarah recognized she was guarded, to some degree, prior to becoming a pastor's wife. This was because of childhood abuse which occurred from age 5 to age 15 or 16. Sarah clearly understood this had impacted her view of trust, though she believed she had learned to be a "very trusting person" only to have that trust broken many times over the years in ministry.

Emily recognized that these experiences left her not only guarded, but numb. This numbness and guardedness has created times in Emily's life in which she has been pretentious in her responses to others. It appeared Emily recognized during the interview her guard was lowering as she stated, "I'm telling you all this stuff and not even thinking about what's spitting out here." Emily continued with ease, describing her feelings of being numb and how they contribute to her guardedness.

Emily described growing up in a family "where if you felt anything you pretty much kept it to yourself." She recognized she followed this same pattern in ministry for many years, though is working to change this pattern she now views as unhealthy. The result of this internalization of thoughts and feelings for Emily has been the development of a "full-blown anxiety disorder."

Emily labeled the years she spent in a Midwestern state as “the dark years.” The dark years were described as years full of “rejection, loneliness, [and] alienation.” She recalled

The church was bad enough, but it was my husband who would usually be there to remind me that I wasn’t good enough at anything. I couldn’t do anything right, and he was certainly stuck with me. He felt that his parents were disappointed in him for marrying someone who was so wrong. If somebody at church told me I wasn’t fitting the mold correctly, he would agree and point out how other women do it so much better than you....I needed affirmation to come from somewhere, anywhere, and I refused, because of my own spiritual convictions, to look for it in an outside relationship.

These years were formative in elevating her feelings of guardedness.

Sarah identified her lack of trust and guardedness as antecedents in creating feelings of relationships being superficial. She acknowledged her discomfort when people ask her how she is doing and she found herself wondering “Do they really want to know what I am dealing with?” Sarah recalled times when individuals have pursued her and asked how she was doing. She identified their pursuit as making her “very uncomfortable” due to her having a difficult time “opening up” and sharing.

Chloe’s guardedness was expressed through how she, at times, appears much different than she actually feels.

...you just get used to appearing to have the right spirit, but maybe not necessarily really having it....It's a struggle...you have to work through it and pray through it. You just try to get through it on your own with the Lord's help. She explained what she meant by "work through it" as praying and "more debates in my head all the time" in which she questions whether she is "doing the right thing." It appeared Chloe believed it was in her best interest to be guarded as she talked about "appearing to have the right spirit."

Katie, near the end of her interview, spoke about it being "hard not to be guarded." She has to fight against being guarded. "We are taught that way. It's the role." Katie understood guardedness to be an expectation for pastors' wives.

Allison portrayed the loneliness she experienced as a result of guardedness through a time which she questioned

...do you want to get back into a church where they are fighting all the time, but yet, they'll still vote for you or do you want to go to a church where everything is all happy and you get whopped when you turn your back? I just want to hide.

Allison's hurt because of this led her to be more guarded and lonely; she has a deep fear of being hurt again in ministry. This fear is elevated, and she becomes increasingly guarded when she witnesses other ministry families experiencing difficult ministry departures.

Margo described the sense of guardedness in her life as she talked about situations in which people have talked behind her back, sent her unjustified e-mails, or left the church with unresolved issues. Margo recognized guardedness has elevated feelings of

loneliness for her. She found herself being increasingly guarded in relationships in her quest to find those who were “safe.”

Lauren’s sense of guardedness increased rapidly when she discovered her spouse’s involvement with internet pornography. While Lauren was supportive of her husband and his choice to come forth regarding this issue, the result of having to leave their ministry location and start over at a new church left her feeling guarded and very lonely. She reflected,

It was very embarrassing. The job prospects were not huge...the confidence level on [spouse’s] part [was not] huge either leaving there....We weren’t sure how that was going to be perceived and whether the future in ministry would be for him or not at that point.

Lauren found herself very guarded as she entered a new ministry in a new location. She found herself more wounded than she had ever been.

### *Summary*

Increased guardedness resulting in loneliness was portrayed for some participants as falling within the scope of being a part of the role of being a pastor’s wife. Other participants described this sense of guardedness as creating increased loneliness through some very difficult and challenging experiences within ministry. For some of the participants, these types of experiences overtime lead them to viewing loneliness as being a “normal experience.”

*Loneliness Described as a “Normal Experience”*

A third way in which participants described their experience of loneliness was in terms of it being a normal part of life. Six of the participants portrayed loneliness in this way and recognized the normalcy of the experience of loneliness in their lives.

The intensity of discussing loneliness was very real for Chloe as she talked about the loneliness in her life. With tears flowing, Chloe found herself mustering a laugh and remarked, “I don’t know if I’m glad I did this [interview] or not.”

Chloe expressed how she does not “even think about it as being lonely. It’s just life. We weren’t all called to this life to enjoy life every day. Sometimes it’s just a tough spot and you have to just get through it.” This recognition of loneliness for Chloe has become a consistent part of daily life. “...I don’t really think about it...It’s just normal life for me,” Chloe added.

Katie agreed. She stated that loneliness was a very normal “part of being in the ministry and being a minister’s wife. I understand that completely.” Chloe attends church each week feeling lonely and is “sometimes sad, but I’ve gotten so used to it that it’s almost normal to me now.”

Katie did discover it was easier to deal with loneliness “when the kids were here, because I could be involved in their lives.” Katie articulated her need to

be aware of the fact that I find myself being too lonely and not putting myself out there, it’s very easy to go from loneliness to depression...If I let the loneliness escalate and go to depression, I just know I’m in trouble at that point. I guess I’m aware of that for myself. Even though, yes, the loneliness may not be gone



because I'm involved with people, but at least I'm out there. I'm not just totally isolated.

Chloe acknowledged there were times of increased loneliness when she moved to “shut myself off from it...and I cry....I guess since I've never known anything but ministry you just know what's allowed and what's not. You just adapt.” Although Chloe spoke about adapting and knowing what is and is not allowed, the pain was evident through her tears.

Allison also described the challenges inherent in a life where being lonely is normal.

I don't like to cry in front of people, and I don't like to talk about this to other people, because people are tired of hearing about it [ministry transition]. But it's on your mind, so it's just best to be quiet. Nobody wants to hear “I'm feeling horrible today.” So when I feel horrible I don't call people, because I don't want to say that. I don't want to ruin their day too. So a lot of times I should probably call someone. But I don't know what to say, so I just don't.

Allison reiterated this feeling adding,

I don't like loneliness. I like being with people. I know that's a contradiction, because I tell you that I choose to stay here when I could call people and say would you do something. I know that. But I don't. I suppose I could get myself out if I would just do that. But I just don't know who to call. It feels like everybody has their life kind of going...

Allison recognized the normalcy of loneliness has become so intense for her at times she finds herself in a position of “just want[ing] to hide.” She acknowledged the busyness of ministry kept her from giving voice to the normal feelings of loneliness in her life. She realized, in her life, the busier she kept herself the less time she had to acknowledge her loneliness. Simultaneously, she identified the normalcy of loneliness throughout her ministry years and how she has worked to stay busy to avoid those feelings. Ultimately, Allison understood she had equated busyness as the opposite of loneliness. As long as she was busy, she did not believe she would be lonely.

Chloe expressed her understanding of negative things in ministry including the normal feelings of loneliness. However, she is unable to

imagine doing anything different. I think there’s probably negative things in everything. But at least for right now, I believe that this is what God called us to do, and I just want to be the best I can be at it.

Lauren articulated her recognition of the feelings of loneliness as being normal as well. However, she was clear in her direction of “even though at times I feel lonely, I don’t feel like we should be doing something different because I feel that way. It’s just something to work through in my opinion.”

Margo identified the feelings of loneliness as being normal for her. She said it is “hard to find somebody who really gets it that really understands how much you give....We give and give and give. I think some people who aren’t in ministry don’t get how much you really have to give.” When the intensity of these feelings increase for Margo, she acknowledged, “it makes me want to get out. It makes me want to go the

other way and escape.” Margo identified an “escape mentality that I go to when I’m lonely. I’d rather just go be by myself and not get hurt or not give anymore.”

When others express appreciation and respect, it helps Margo through times when she wants to escape. She finds loneliness present if she is not asked “how are you doing or how is ministry going” or told “thanks for what you’re doing” as a volunteer in ministry by the ministry leader(s).

Sarah recognized she has never had a best friend. Since childhood her life has been full of many acquaintances, but void of deeper relationships. She wondered if “maybe God was preparing me for this” referring to the lonely feelings which are a normal part of life now. However, Sarah now is involved in an accountability relationship, which has provided a deeper relationship for her.

The loneliness in Katie’s life has become a normal part of most days. She commented, “I used to joke with my husband, but he doesn’t always like it...I said, you know I think God brought me here to teach me loneliness.” Katie expressed, “I don’t really know if that’s the truth but that has come out of being here, which in some ways is okay. It gives me great empathy...for people that live it and go through it.”

### *Summary*

Five of the participants who described loneliness as a normal experience were still deeply committed to their role as pastors’ wives despite these feelings. The recent painful ministry transition for Allison has left her uneasy with ministry and the role of a pastor’s wife in general.

For these women, loneliness was a normal experience that they see as an indescribable void, resulting from guardedness. It would lead a person to question the factors contributing to this loneliness as experienced by pastors' wives.

#### *General Factors Contributing to Loneliness*

Overall, the factors identified by participants as contributing to their experience of loneliness were almost exclusively found to be tied—in one way or another—to ministry. Some of these contributing factors were found to have directly (or explicitly) resulted from ministry itself. Others were identified by participants as those in which ministry may have been a catalyst that in turn spawned something else which contributed to the loneliness experienced. In the end, the determining factors contributing to loneliness for pastors' wives cannot be attributed to any one specific factor, but rather a combination of effects, which includes (but is not limited to) their husbands, the roles they are asked to play, and the specific ministry context within which they live.

#### *Explicit Factors Contributing to Feelings of Loneliness*

Each participant identified several explicit factors as contributing to their feelings of loneliness, all directly related to ministry. Significantly, all participants mentioned that these factors may not have been present if they had not been involved in ministry alongside their husbands. These explicit factors are grouped in two categories: the ministry context itself and ministry-related interactions and relationships.

#### *The Ministry Context Itself*

In an effort to develop greater understanding of pastors' wives, the extent to which their lives are impacted by their spouses' ministries must also be understood.

Pastors' ministry positions, along with decisions made by church governments and congregants, impact the pastors' families in ways often left untold.

Pastors' wives often find themselves in a sea of silence. From time to time they may reach out to others for help and connection and find it reciprocated, though they often find themselves lonely and without connection.

For example, Chloe viewed ministry permeating every aspect of her family's lives. On most days Chloe talks with her supportive mother on the phone. However, Chloe has placed some limitations on what she will speak about with her mother, which leaves her continuing to feel lonely, and aware that she is unable to talk to anyone about these issues. As Chloe thought about the centrality of ministry in relation to all of life for her family, she remarked,

...if he had another job [other than a pastor and was] not happy [he could] go find another one. That doesn't necessarily mean you have to move, take your kids out of school, find a new church, find new friends, and that kind of thing. But in ministry it does affect everything...I guess this is probably where the loneliness does come in. I would say my Mom is probably my best friend. I can talk to her about anything in the church and that kind of thing, but I don't think its right to talk to her about this. That's the part where...you just have to deal with it. You don't have anybody to talk to at that point. And you can't talk to anybody in the church about their pastor [and tell them] he's a jerk today.

Margo talked openly about "times when I have been very lonely in ministry."

She recognized the reality of the presence of other pastors' wives within her church she

could talk to, however, she has chosen not to approach them because of her recognition “they also struggle in ministry...[and] sometimes you don’t reach out with your own personal struggles, because you don’t want to burden somebody else who is struggling.” Margo acknowledged being fearful of getting to “know people and for them to get to know me, that they wouldn’t accept me.”

Natalie discussed the disappointment she experienced with other pastors’ wives within the same church when her pastor-husband joined their current church staff.

Natalie

anticipated or assumed [that amongst] the other pastor wives, there was a bonding, connection, support, and sharing of ideas and information....I made a few efforts at trying it and everybody was too busy. They didn’t want to participate....They said, “I don’t want to spend energy on that.”...I felt like I’m in a big room, and everybody is too busy. I understand busy. I felt very isolated, to some degree, because I felt like, okay, am I the only one that feels this is really crucial and important? Am I the only one who has concern and focus and wanting to make sure that I am there for [my spouse] in the way that he needs? ....I was walking away puzzled...am I really in my own world here? Why are they not interested?

Natalie expressed her loneliness during this period of time, “...lonely from the perspective of, okay, I have to figure this out on my own.”

Allison described the feelings of loneliness created by the “war going on” within her church, and in particular within the members of the church board. She recalled

feeling as if she and her husband were the “victim[s] of the war” but lacked knowledge regarding what the “war is about.”

Allison described the lonely times of being in “the pit” with her husband in earlier years after church board meetings during this period of “war.” She would be very concerned during these meetings, since they were consistently difficult and often full of conflict. When he would come home in “the pit” of loneliness and frustration, she would often jump in “the pit[s]” with him. This decision created intense periods of struggle with deep loneliness.

Allison and her husband left the church with the “war” stating “we just felt like it was time for a change, and it was. We were about to die, because of the war that was going on all the time.” Allison and her husband were asked to return to this same church a few years later after the “war” on the church board appeared to have ceased. She recalled “this time everybody was happy and joyful, everything was wonderful, and the church was growing.... [spouse] would come home from board meetings, and he wasn’t sick” which was different than when he would have previously been in a “pit” after board meetings at this church.

However, Allison’s loneliness escalated, and she felt “blindsided” as her husband was told by the church board they wanted him to again leave his ministry position. Allison was unsuspecting of any problem issues explaining,

When you at least see it, you know where your problem is. It’s not as bad as now feeling unsafe because I had no idea, and I still have no idea, who or what blindsided us. I still have no idea....so that’s why I feel unsafe. If I knew what it

was, then I would know what to do to guard against either that or what I did or what I didn't do....I just don't feel safe in church.

Emily described in detail a church picnic at a local park which ended with an outcome similar to Allison's. Although Emily was aware of what was happening during the meeting and what the outcome was to be, the entire situation still created increased feelings of loneliness for her.

At the end of the picnic, Emily and her husband took all of the church members' children home with them, so the congregants could have a "conversation." She believed the conversation included comments such as "These people are no good, let's get them out of here." Emily recalled her husband planning the picnic in the park that day and "then they have a congregational meeting and ask us to leave." Emily described knowing what the "conversation" was about as her husband had been challenging the congregation to evangelism and was facing opposition with statements of we "can't have this evangelism thing." Emily greeted the congregants at her home as they picked up their children, all the while knowing what they had talked about during their "conversation" and what that meant for her and her husband. Incidents such as this increased Emily's guardedness in her life which also served to increase her loneliness.

#### *Ministry-Related Interactions with Others*

Not surprisingly, pastors' wives interact with others on a regular basis. Many of those with whom they interact are also connected to their churches and their husbands' positions as pastors. This was recognized by participants as creating internal conflict as



they navigate these relationships with the recognition of the potential impact upon their pastor-husbands' jobs.

Katie, for example, realized she shares limited information with people within the church stating, "for the majority I really don't talk to most people." For Katie, this became intensified in her current ministry situation when she was

informed that [she] shouldn't share personal or things going on either in the church or in the home [as] that might be a problem with people in the church or in the area. It was felt that people in the congregation would have a hard time accepting the fact that you are human and there are problems...I think that was another instance of feeling like I needed to close myself off and not share...I became very guarded. I became very careful about things I said, things that I did...I removed myself from having any real major intimate personal relationships with people.

This resulted in Katie consistently hiding her feelings, including those feelings of loneliness. In regard to loneliness, she stated,

I don't talk about it for one. I try to be very positive when I'm not here....When I'm not home. When out at the church, it's not that I'm unhappy when I'm out there or here. I don't feel like it's something that people need to know.

Katie admitted not talking with others was both a matter of her own choice along with the "pressure" of not being able to "share those things" coming together.

Katie guarded herself closely due to the "feeling that I can't really get close, close to somebody" which leads her to "closing [her] self off." She thought that maybe closing

herself off was making things safer for her by allowing her to “guard against not saying or doing something that I shouldn’t be or I think I shouldn’t be or someone else has told me that I shouldn’t be.”

Katie recognized she chooses at times to “close myself off” because it is “safer this way.” She talked about choices she will need to make when she and her pastor-husband move to a new ministry location in order to attempt to protect her from increasing loneliness. One of those choices for Katie will be not allowing herself to “choose to withdrawal.”

Allison consistently held on to the belief she had to “always put on the good face and only talk to people about the good things.” She had a few people she would allow “inside [and tell] if anything bad [or difficult to deal with] was going on.” She identified how this “knowing that you lived in a world that you couldn’t share” created loneliness for her. Allison went on to add, “I didn’t share a lot of times because I didn’t think it was the right thing to do.”

Chloe echoed the sense of loneliness associated with putting on “the good face” as identified by Allison.

I think sometimes we’re good at just putting on the face that we need to put on and where we need to put it on. As a pastor’s wife...you get used to when you’re not happy with your husband you still have to act like he’s the wonderful pastor when you’re at the church. You get used to pretending, I guess. You believe he’s a good pastor and he’s a good man, but you’re just not happy with him right now. But you don’t air your dirty laundry...we’re looked at as an example. We’re not

perfect but we shouldn't do things to make people think less of us, and I shouldn't do anything to make people think less of [spouse]. That may not be the top concern of most wives...but it is our security too. It is all tied up in there also. Chloe believed if she would in anyway do or say something to show a poor example "then that will make them think less of their pastor and that affects his security and his job and then my security and everything else."

Lauren expressed concern about whether she impacts her husband's ministry in a negative way. At the same time she recognized this creates loneliness for her.

I don't want to be a detriment more than I want to have the deeper relationships at this point in my life I guess. I'm sure it's self-imposed that I'm holding back and choosing to be lonely over choosing to go for what I want. It's me trying to figure out what role I'm best in, to helping [spouse] but still get out of life what I want. That's what I feel like it is. I think it is a balancing act...a lot of things you say and do are kind of reflected on your husband in a way that a person in another profession would never have to deal with their wife in their job, knowing all the same people that they do and talking to the same people. It's a little annoying sometimes that you spend so much time at your husband's job.

Lauren recognized some of her responses and thoughts "may be a little self-preserving" as she has attempted to protect herself from being hurt once again. As a consequence of past hurts resulting from ministry, Lauren entered her current ministry situation a "little more reserved and little more wounded" which contributed to her elevated feelings of loneliness.

In thinking about ministry and how she became lonely, Chloe expressed the sentiment that

...being in ministry has attributed to it...my personality too probably hasn't helped things where I do beat myself up over things...I wouldn't want somebody else to see my dirty laundry. I think there probably have been more situations arise where you needed to talk to somebody because of being in the ministry and there isn't anybody....you feel like you're in that by yourself.

Chloe added she is continually checking the impact of what she says and does on the overall ministry. She identified a time when she did not receive needed encouragement from her church and "took it as negativity." She later realized the congregants were not perhaps

particularly negative towards me, but they didn't want me involved. They sort of rejected the gifts that I had. So I didn't know what to do. It was just very lonely and very difficult. It was just a sad, sad time. It affected me physically, mentally, and emotionally.

This particular ministry situation resulted in intense loneliness as Chloe explained,

I am so critical of myself, when other people are critical towards me as well then that's just monster sized. I had that there and didn't know how to deal with it.

Then the physical reactions that you cannot control. Emotional ones you can talk yourself through, but the physical ones, there's nothing you can do about it.

In this same ministry situation, Chloe explained her loneliness as she identified the pastor and family as always being the "odd one out." Congregants are more like

family, according to Chloe, and they recognize the pastor will eventually move to another church. “We are the outsiders. We just know that.”

Lauren expressed loneliness as a result of feeling as if she has to be careful what she says

in order to keep things balanced for [pastor-husband] and not cause extra problems for him [so] I have to be careful. I may not be quite as careful if I was a lay person and it didn't reflect directly so much on my husband.

Subsequently, Lauren also finds herself being hesitant in relationships. She loves to enjoy herself with others but has learned to approach with caution.

I'm a person who likes to cut up and have a good time. You're not going to get filthy stories out of my mouth. But at the same time even in creating friendships I find myself holding back and being careful, so that I don't end up offending anybody or casually saying something about something that I know about in the church or a person working on a program that maybe I shouldn't be sharing just yet, or I shouldn't share at all. I have to be careful with that. It's not a bad thing to put restraint on your mouth....But I do constantly try to make sure that I'm thinking about the angle of it not reflecting poorly on my husband or creating problems for him.

This hesitancy in relationships has contributed to Lauren's increased feelings of loneliness as she is not able to freely be herself. Lauren longs for a deeper friendship.

I would love to have a friend that would be a little bit deeper to even be an accountability partner, that kind of thing. But I have a hard time picking who that

person would be. It needs to be somebody I feel I could be totally honest with, like this circumstance is allowing me to do, without reservation, I would love that. A peer that would be somewhat my age would be nice. Somebody like my mom but more my age.

Lauren added,

I feel like whenever we've worked in a new church that they pay [pastor-husband] for my silence. It's mainly because I feel like I am my own individual. I have a strong personality, and I'm a people person. I'm confident about ideas that I have....I feel conflicted on whether I should say something to help benefit the program or whether politically I'm causing a little bit of a problem for my husband. So I feel like I'm always teetering on how much do I say and what I should not say....But sometimes people just aren't ready for the pastor's wife to be any more than a meek person that doesn't say much.

Lauren acknowledged this need she feels to be silent creates times of intense loneliness for her as she doesn't feel free to be herself.

While Lauren identified the schedule and friendship difficulties in ministries examined earlier in this study as contributing to her feelings of loneliness, she added later in the interview feelings of loneliness occur when she is

boxed into a role where I feel like I can't quite get out of it right now, or I can't change it right now. That would definitely make me feel lonely, to feel unfulfilled. If I'm doing something [and] I feel like it's not what I should be doing, as far as the call on my heart, that would definitely contribute to feeling

lonely. I would not be in the place where I felt like I was being used to my fullest or challenged to my fullest.

Lauren portrayed a situation in which she felt boxed in by the senior pastor at a church her husband has served.

There are some people in churches and sometimes even senior pastors that we have worked for that I feel like they would kind of like to box me in. Like me doing the...ministry...might be great because it's being handled, but I don't feel called to do...ministry. So that's been something that for three years that's been kind of frustrating for me. I actually got into doing that part of the ministry, with me being in charge of it, by signing a paper saying that I would be involved in...ministry and not realizing that I was signing myself up to lead it. It was just an oversight from the office. It was not something that was provided good information to me....It was one of those moments when I felt like I needed to guard my tongue, because I thought it was a very bad communicating thing from our office....I went ahead and stayed in the position that first year just to cover their tracks, not because I wanted to....I kind of felt a little boxed in into being who people want me to be instead of who God called me to be. I wish people would just let me be who God calls me to be all the time. Then I realize that might not be real life for other people either. That's one of those moments where I kind of felt like maybe being quiet and keep my peace for another year....would reflect better on [spouse] than for me to act like I wasn't going to at least be workable and helpful.

### *Summary*

The feelings of loneliness generated by ministry-interactions with others along with their concern of the potential negative impact those interactions might have on their husband's job created feelings of loneliness for the participants. Then too, the centrality of the ministry context itself to their overall lives was evident as a contributor to their feelings of loneliness.

### *Implicit Factors Contributing to Loneliness*

In addition to the explicit factors discussed above, participants spoke of several implicit factors as having contributed to their feelings of loneliness. Implicit factors include situations involving non-ministry related interactions with others, as well as family and time concerns. Physical limitations of two of the participants were also noted as contributing in some way to their feelings of loneliness.

### *Non-Ministry Related Interactions with Others*

Participants identified factors related to their interaction with others as contributing to their feelings of loneliness. These factors were implicitly related to ministry because the potential is present for these factors to occur in the lives of others and not exclusively pastors' wives. These factors center on the busyness of the individual, fear of rejection, relocation, and changes in the ministry plan of the church.

For Allison, busyness in ministry kept her feelings of loneliness from surfacing. She recognized if she slowed down, the loneliness might intensify. She recalled one night of increased difficulty when



I just got busy and did something to get my mind off of it. I think that's the way I lived, probably, just trying to keep doing things for other people so that I wouldn't, I guess, have to deal with me. I don't know. There is no way I could ever live up to my own standards. There's no way.

Allison believed as long as she could keep herself busy with people around her, she "didn't have to share all the bad gunk" going on in her life. She remarked, "I never have wanted to share the gunk in my life, even with most of my friends. I just have always felt like if you share that then they're not going to want to be around you."

Allison and her husband spent the majority of their ministry years in three different churches within close proximity of each another. During the later years of pastoral work, she and her husband transitioned several hours from the area where he had been employed for the majority of their marriage. She acknowledged difficulty developing in-depth friendships after relocating and leaving long-term relationships, remarking,

It felt like people were nice but they didn't want me to really be a part of their life....I had no problems there, but it wasn't where people just hang out with you and do things just because it's fun and they just want to be with you....So when I moved, as far as relationships, I had many friends that I would do things with but I didn't get that bosom buddy feeling with most of them.

Lauren also acknowledged the impact of relocation on her chance for developing deeper relationships. Friendships she had begun to form in one church she identified being

cut off just by locality mostly. We were not able to see those people very much anymore. We also didn't want to cause problems for them or for the leadership...looking like we were trying to do some sort of ugly church split kind of behavior where we were keeping our friendships to a higher level than we should have. But it was definitely very lonely to be separated so abruptly from those kind of relationships, just for the sake of not hurting people any more than the situation already did. It was sad for me....I think [the relationships] were able to be a little bit deeper than I've been able to have here. That may be a little self-preserving on my part, to be careful not to be quite that hurt again.

Sarah identified feeling lonely as she thought about her family being nine hours away from her current home. Sarah is the only member of her family who has relocated out of his/her home state. That being the case, Sarah, her husband, and her children do the majority of traveling the nine hours to visit relatives. She longs for time with her mother that is unable to occur on a regular basis because of the distance.

Margo found that moving to a new state for her husband to attend seminary after graduation induced feelings of loneliness. This loneliness intensified as this transition for Margo symbolized the "first time I had been away from home....you go from college having all these friends and being close to family to having very few friends. It was a huge transition...It was...real life." Her search for friendships, at this point, left her often feeling lonely. She sought connections with other seminary wives and found them to be minimally present.

Margo revealed her fear to get to “know people and for them to get to know me, that they wouldn’t accept me.” She believed at times it to be easier to be the leader and to just know everybody kind of on a surface level and not feeling like you have to go deep....Then you don’t have to face your fears of getting to know anybody. So when you’re in leadership you could opt out easily and just be the leader and just be in that role of caring for people but nobody ever caring for you. But if you are in that place, then you’re lonely for sure. You can hide in that role and not pursue friendships, and you can pursue friendships and get burned.

Changes in ministry structure have also created feelings of loneliness for Margo. Margo recognized she was less lonely when she had regularly structured time with the same individuals. “It was the structure of it in seeing them every other week felt so good to me, because it was a place where...I was vulnerable.” As her church changed its ministry emphasis and Margo’s structured time was eliminated, she faced increasing feelings of loneliness.

Lauren also noted feeling loneliness as she has found herself recently ...flitting from one group to another trying to accomplish things more than I am having friendship type of conversations. The leader in me doesn’t mind that, but personally, it probably gets to me that it makes me feel a little bit lonely that all I’ve done is work, work, work, work instead of getting around to making more friends.

Similarly, Emily talked about feeling rejected in relationships, and the impact it had on her feelings of loneliness. She wished someone knew who she was on a deeper level, yet was unable to find that relational connection. “When you tell them who you are they say it’s not okay.” She desired adult connection, someone who would “know and understand” her and was met instead with “that’s weird.”

Emily was clear in her choice to be guarded in relationships which has, in turn, created loneliness. Emily stated, “When I was unguarded it would backfire on me” and that lesson was “really hard to learn.”

Margo shared two specific situations where she had pursued relationships with individuals from church and was left feeling lonely and rejected like Emily. All of the individuals involved eventually left the church where Margo was a pastor’s wife. As Margo was sharing, it was evident to me these scenarios were difficult for her to grasp a clear understanding of why these situations had occurred.

Margo recalled one situation where she was told a new small group had formed after she had stepped aside from leading a small group.

The leader came to me and told me that they were talking about me and how the women felt uncomfortable around me, because I’m the holier than thou pastor’s wife. I still don’t understand why she shared that with me. It felt very awkward. I felt completely shut out of those relationships by those women. Eventually all three of those people left the church. Another woman left the church along with those people who wrote me a nasty letter, just horrible. She had no grounds for saying anything to me. I hadn’t done anything to her.

Margo went on to talk about a couple who had taken some initiative to care for her and her pastor-husband. The man from this couple worked in the same ministry area as Margo.

He wrote me an e-mail about a whole bunch of garbage that he didn't agree with at our church. So that was just a horrible, horrible year for me....that was hard, to let go of all of those friendships and feel safe enough to be safe with new people. It was very lonely and my dad was dying. It was horrible.

Allison's loneliness elevated as she relived her own painful ministry experiences as she witnessed other ministry families in situations reminiscent of her past experiences. She identified, "it just feels like oh, my goodness, they're going down one by one....I don't know what was going on, but I know they got rid of him, and I know I felt sorry for him." This has left Allison questioning who is safe and trustworthy in her life. She was able to identify a very small number of people who overtime have proven themselves trustworthy; however, the deep hurts have left her profoundly wounded.

Sarah resonated with Allison as she recalled the degradation of her ability to trust over her years in ministry.

I have been hurt way too many times ...Just about the time I felt like I could start [to trust], and it would take a long time to get to that point for me to start taking the wall down, it seemed like something would happen. I am not going there again and the wall is going back up.

She recognized the choice she makes to keep herself safe from trust being broken again by the "wall going back up."

Sarah also identified a choice she has made in holding confidential information regarding people within the church from her spouse. She expressed her understanding that holding this information has created loneliness as she has not been able to verbally process those situations with anyone.

These factors contributing to loneliness are not exclusive to the pastor's wife. Nevertheless, the participants identified their busyness, fear of rejection from others, relocation and its impact, and ministry plan changes within the church as having an impact on their feelings of loneliness.

#### *Family and Time Concerns*

Parents in general face challenges as their children grow and the time demands of jobs increase. Participants identified feeling as if their husbands' job demands left them feeling beneath the ministry in level of importance. These pastors evening commitments were high. Their children were young and needing increased attention, adolescents with busy schedules who also need focused time with parents, or grown leaving an empty nest for the couple. Along with these challenges was the perception that pastors' wives were not to appear needy to their husbands, as many others need them and their time.

Katie, who lives a long distance from her family, found herself experiencing intensified loneliness as she was faced with the "empty nest syndrome type thing." She recognized she was questioning "what do I do now." She tried to fill her days with "things, reading, doing something, cleaning, and packing" in preparation for her upcoming move to a new ministry location.

While Katie was faced with loneliness from her children growing and moving out of the home, Lauren found herself lonely as she was busy tending her children rather than being actively involved in ministry. Lauren acknowledged feeling lonely and

disconnected. These feelings were conflictual for Lauren as she recognized her spouse

doesn't need me so much... [and]...in order to keep the other part of our life held together, I feel like I should be doing what I'm doing. But it doesn't make me love it all the time when I do it.

Lauren often hears ministry information second hand since she is less involved. This also leaves her feeling lonely.

Katie recounted her recent years of ministry and the lack of involvement on her part. She recognized this has contributed to her feeling loneliness at times and is looking forward to a fresh start at a new ministry location where she plans to increase her ministry involvement. Katie recalled many instances in ministry she felt lonely as

sometimes feeling like myself and the family have taken second place over the church's needs, others in the church. It's just that sometimes those things came first and that's just part of the job and having to accept that. But at times it's a challenge.

Emily resonated with Katie's feelings of loneliness as she recalled feeling "stuck in the church...stuck in the marriage...stuck in third place or maybe fourth, being low on the list." When questioned further regarding her feeling "low on the [priority] list," she responded, "It felt like that, and he might as much as said so for a long time."

Chloe and Lauren both spoke of their spouses' demands and evening commitments, admitting that their husbands' absences created feelings of loneliness. Chloe stated her husband was gone three to four nights per week which leaves her with two elementary school-aged children to care for alone.

Lauren identified "four nights in a row that he's basically gone and inaccessible. Those would be four school nights as well." Lauren is caring for three young children during this time. On the evenings of the night meetings, Lauren's husband would be home just over an hour for dinner before he returns for evening meetings only to return home after the children are in bed sleeping. She expressed a sense of loneliness "at night time with him having so many night time meetings at this particular church."

Lauren mentioned three times in her interview the importance of her not appearing needy to her husband. She emphasized the number of people around him that need him and her goal to not "act needy like I need his attention." She also identified her attempts to try to "make sure that I can keep my needs to the times that I know he can freely give to me."

#### *Physical Limitations*

Loneliness resulting from a lack of connection was present for Katie and Natalie. Both expressed their personal physical limitations had impacted their increased feelings of loneliness. In each of these situations time away from others, resulting in a lack of connection and loneliness, was forced due to the participants' inability to leave their homes or only leave for short periods of time.



Katie expressed “some of the loneliness has been my own limitations because of having back problems and not being able to get out all the time and not being able to do things all the time....Maybe it’s safer this way.” When I asked, “What would make it safer?” Katie responded, “My guard against not saying or doing something that I shouldn’t be or I think I shouldn’t be or someone else has told me that I shouldn’t be.” She also had mentioned this earlier in the interview as contributing to her loneliness.

Natalie identified her disconnect with active ministry due to her physical limitations as contributing to her feelings of loneliness.

So it’s lonely because I feel like my hands are tied. The most I can do is come [to church] and be part of worship and then go. So the illness just brought a lot of loneliness, because a lot of things I would normally either join [pastor-husband] in doing or be doing while he’s doing his work. Instead it’s down time here at home. So the time he is gone is even more compounded because of being limited this way. That makes it lonely.

### *Summary*

Participants identified busyness as a means of keeping loneliness from surfacing. The fear of rejection resulted in the participants choosing to remain guarded in relationships as a means of avoiding being rejected. Relocation often left the participants away from family and with relationships that had been terminated abruptly. Changes in the ministry plan of the church resulted in relationships changing for the participants.

These implicit factors described through non-ministry related interactions with others, along with family and time concerns, and physical limitations have served as

catalysts creating experiences of loneliness in the lives of the participants. Each of these factors described relate to ministry, yet may also be experienced by spouses of other professionals.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This study investigated the phenomenon, loneliness as described by pastors' wives and the factors participants described as contributing to those feelings of loneliness. In this chapter the descriptions and contributing factors identified by the participants are compared and contrasted with those found in literature. Conclusions are drawn from the findings of the study and their implications are considered. Finally, suggestions for future research to further the knowledge and understanding of the life experiences of pastors' wives and pastors are presented.

### Participants' Perspectives Compared to Findings from the Literature

A significant degree of overlap exists between the descriptions of and factors contributing to loneliness identified by participants in this study and those identified in the literature. Both included descriptions of loneliness as a normal experience, as well as creating an indescribable void in those experiencing loneliness. The impact of relocation, relationships including friendships and marriage, rejection, and the concern about being an ideal role model and maintaining a positive public image were also identified.

All participants in this study were identified by the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale as experiencing loneliness. This was consistent with the literature by Rokach and Brock (1997) which suggested all individuals experience loneliness with a variation of duration and intensity over the lifespan. Nevertheless, while each participant experienced loneliness, not all of them exhibited an elevated level of depression. In the present study, Allison, Natalie, and Sarah exhibited either moderate or severe depression along with significant loneliness. Hsu, Hailey, and Range (1986) and Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona

(1980) recognized a positive correlation between depression and loneliness. Depressed individuals like Allison, Natalie, and Sarah were identified by Nolen-Hoeksema and Ahrens (2002) as reporting higher levels of loneliness, placing loneliness as a significant factor for individuals suffering from depressive symptoms. All other participants exhibited normal mood fluctuations with a range of normal, elevated, and significant levels of loneliness.

Additional findings of this study support Rokach (1998) because the participants described their experiences with loneliness as being incongruent with their desired experiences. Participants became guarded because of failed attempts at, woundedness resulting from, and their fear of being hurt in relationships. Thus loneliness can be described as complex (Rokach, 1998) and multifaceted (McWhirter, 1990) by the participants.

Though the participants described loneliness as complex and multifaceted, this study also found consistency with the literature identifying loneliness as a common experience (McWhirter, 1990; Moustakas, 1961/1989; Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Rokach & Brock, 1997; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Weiss, 1973), as six of eight participants identified loneliness as a normal part of life. Also, consistent with the literature were the participants' descriptions of loneliness in terms of creating a void in their lives (Rokach & Brock, 1997). Then too, Peplau and Perlman's (1982) descriptions of loneliness as an aspect of day-to-day life was consistent with the depictions of loneliness of all participants.

All participants addressed the value of friendships in their lives. They recognized either how having close friendships has benefited them in life, or how the lack of friendships has proven to be detrimental in their lives. Five of eight participants acknowledged having a small number of close friends. The findings of Brunette-Hill (1999) identified one-third of pastors' wives as having a small number of personal friends. The remaining three participants reported a discrepancy between their desire for and lack of friendships. This discrepancy was consistent with the research by Peplau and Perlman (1982) as the participants desired the relationships but had few.

Moreover, this study paralleled the literature regarding pastors' wives being taught not to form intimate relationships within the congregation (Ducklow, 1995). Although only one participant, Katie, directly mentioned being instructed in this way, several participants identified forming intimate relationships within the congregation as being questionable through their descriptions of guardedness.

Participants' responses showed they anticipated rejection from others which was consistent with the research by Goswick and Jones (1981). The majority of the participants experienced feeling rejected in at least one relationship connected to the pastorate. This has served to increase their anticipation of future rejection.

This study found relocation to be a factor in the loneliness experienced by seven of eight of the participants. Natalie, who did not mention relocation as a factor relating to loneliness, has not experienced a transition. Relocation was portrayed by the participants as being an obstacle to forming relationships in their new community (Zoba, 1997; Houts, 1982; Dobson, 1995/2003; Anderson & Stark, 1988; Speight, 2005).

Sarah identified experiencing loneliness when she was holding confidential information regarding a congregant and was unable to talk with her husband about it. Sarah's experience was consistent with the literature that identified pastors' wives as experiencing magnified feelings of loneliness during these times. However, Sarah's response is inconsistent with the literature as Dobson (1995/2003) identified the sharing of this information as part of the package that comes with being married to a pastor. The majority of participants shared confidential information back and forth with their pastor-husbands which was consistent with Dobson (1995/2003).

The results of this study regarding the pastors' wives and their ongoing concern of discrediting their husbands' image in public were consistent with previous research (Baker, 1989; Mace & Mace, 1980). Participants recognized the importance of their role and their words along with the potential impact on their husband's vocation. Along with this concern of discrediting the public image of their husbands, participants identified feeling pressured to be a role model of the ideal for a Christian family, a finding consistent with the literature (Goetz, 1992).

The results of this study revealed that participants failed to cope with loneliness better during their middle adult years. Those participants who were more established in adulthood and exhibited increased wisdom coming from life experience were no less lonely than the younger participants. This finding is inconsistent with the literature (Rokach, 2001).

All of the participants described their faith in God as being important to them. With an active faith in God, the fact that some were experiencing elevated and severe

loneliness was inconsistent with literature that described these types of individuals as less lonely (Schwab & Peterson, 1990). Participants said their faith in God helped them face their loneliness. Chloe stated, “I know the Lord has helped [me] through every situation.” Allison recalled awakening often “in the middle of the night” going into her living room and “kneel[ing] by this chair, this couch, and pray[ing].” Katie, in her attempts to be positive in ministry described spending “a lot of time reflecting, a lot of time praying, and a lot of time depending upon God.” Lauren described her development as a “Christian and as a leader.” Emily described the process of when her faith in God developed as she came to understand and express faith recognizing, “If you just do your faith its miserable. It’s okay to feel it and become it and let it become you.” Margo talked openly about time she spends with other women to “pray together.” Natalie spoke of challenges she faced where she said, “okay God, I’m just going to gut it out and get a real good prayer partner...” This, she believed, has helped her in her growth. Sarah described having “a reassurance that God is with [her]. Even though [she] may feel alone and there not be another person around me, I know that I am not totally alone.”

### Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest three conclusions regarding factors which most significantly impact pastors’ wives and their loneliness. The factors that most significantly impacted loneliness in the participants in this study include: (a) the role of the pastor’s wife itself, (b) the personal choices the pastor’s wife makes, and (c) the pastor’s wife’s relationship with God.

*The Role of the Pastor's Wife and Its Impact on Her Loneliness*

When women marry men who either become or are pastors, they enter into both a marriage and a vocation. My findings were consistent with Dugan (1994), pastors' wives have a more important and demanding role than that of spouses in many—if not most—other professions. Participants in this study claimed that the demands of being pastors' wives are always present. Participants appeared to have a clear understanding of the potential impact—positive and negative—they have on their husbands' jobs. One participant, Emily, explained her understanding this way:

Politics and Preaching. Sometimes, I can't tell the difference. Both are people who are passionately trying to make a difference in the world. I am fortunate that the preacher I am married to is sincerely trying to make a difference for God's sake and not his own. The way I see it, these are two jobs that impact the spouse even if you try to avoid it, don't like it, try to outgrow it, [or] ignore it.

The participants understood the importance of using discretion in forming relationships and in revealing information about themselves, as well as their husbands. They recognized the potential ramifications for their families if, for some reason, their husbands' pastoral work was impacted negatively. This resulted in the participants often hiding behind a smile when, in actuality, they were lonely and in need of close relationships.

Impacting pastors' wives are the unspoken or "implied" undertones present in the pastorate. These undertones imply the idea that because the pastorate is God's work, the stakes are higher. Therefore, the importance of—and demands placed upon—the pastor's



wife in the success of his work is greater (Mickey et al., 1991, Noller, 1984, Baker & Scott, 1992, Hartley, 1978). Thus, pastors' wives feel a sense of responsibility and increased pressure to meet the ever increasing demands of their role. Katie identified with this sense of responsibility and pressure as she often "guard[s] against...saying or doing something that [she] shouldn't." Allison spoke of believing she needs to "always put on the good face and only talk to people about good things." Lauren expressed concern regarding whether she impacts her husband's work in a negative way. Consequently, it has created loneliness for her as she has determined she does not "want to be a detriment more than [she] want[s] to have the deeper relationships."

The demands of the role for pastors' wives together with the time demands of pastoral work upon their husbands impact loneliness for these women. Participants reported their husbands being gone three or four weeknights per week. While these pastors' wives have settled into the routine of their spouses being gone, the normalcy of their absences has not alleviated their feelings of loneliness. There is limited time each week to "access" their husbands' attention.

Lauren said there are "times that I would like to have access to my husband but I can't just physically if the hours are not at the right time. It's feeling that other people need him more." While Lauren recognized she did not feel this way all of the time, she noted, "at times it gets to me." Lauren added that her husband is "bound and determined that we will have family time and that we will not make ourselves stretched so thin. So he is working on that as hard as I do." However, Lauren spends four school nights each

week at home alone with her three children. While her husband has expressed desire to have family time, his schedule continued to remove him from his family.

It appeared that the pastor-husbands identified clearly with the concept of their work being God's work and the stakes being higher, often at the expense of placing their work as top priority above their families. While the majority of participants embraced their roles as pastors' wives, many were left feeling as if the pastorate held a higher priority. Natalie noted, "Ministry in and of itself is hard enough alone....the biggest challenge [is when] something schedule-wise challenges or threatens the time that I know we need for the family or him as a father." Emily recognized the family was "low on the list" of priorities behind ministry. Margo was the sole participant to describe her husband as having a "really good home ethic."

The literature identified pastors and their wives recognized the high demands placed upon them in ministry resulted in an insufficient amount of time together (Goetz, 1992). The fact that pastors continue to work at a pace that is detrimental to their families and their marriages would lead one to question what void the pastor is attempting to fill through his ministry. It appeared the pastors have come to accept the ministry life and schedule as normal for themselves, while their marriages and families are often relationally wounded.

Some pastors' wives embraced their role and appeared to have formed a sense of identity around it in spite of the challenges mentioned. While their husbands' schedules were very busy, their personal schedules often involved increased busyness in an attempt to avoid feelings of loneliness.

*The Choices of the Pastor's Wife and Their Impact on Her Loneliness*

The participants have become so accustomed to loneliness in their lives, that for the majority of them, loneliness has become a normal—almost expected—part of their daily experience. These women move through life “putting on the face we need to put on,” in the words of Chloe, or as Allison said, “feeling that [I] had to always put on the good face and only talk about the good things.” Loneliness has become a normal aspect of life for these women, which has increased their tendency to be guarded in their relationships.

This lack of understanding regarding their own loneliness has left many pastors' wives adding more activity to their lives in an attempt to fill this void. Each participant identified with the busyness of the pastoral schedule. This sense of busyness associated with the pastorate, along with their own personal endeavors, leaves little time for pastors' wives to care for themselves or even recognize the impact loneliness has on their lives. In fact, this busyness often serves to mask their feelings of loneliness.

The choice of being silent and not sharing with others was made by each of the pastors' wives. For some, not talking was a matter of choice and was “self-imposed... choosing to be lonely over choosing to go for what I want” as Lauren reiterated. Chloe was concerned and did not want others to “see [her] dirty laundry.”

Pastors' wives, though surrounded by people in their churches regularly, are lonely and lack connectedness with one another as well as others. Margo reiterated this by saying,

Even though I know that there are other people that I can talk to like [names of pastors' wives] you also know that they also struggle in ministry...sometimes you don't reach out with your own personal struggles because you don't want to burden somebody else who is struggling.

Natalie, in her quest to increase her connection with the other pastors' wives at the church found the women were uncomfortable with her inquiry into how they made their life work for them and their families. As she attempted to connect, some were clear they did not want to be part of a "pastor wife's club." In her search for connection, Natalie went to the internet "searching just to see if there was anywhere else I could plug in for some resources or connecting."

Allison, as she reflected on her time in the pastorate and connecting with pastors' wives wrote in an email sent to me, "I wish we could be there for each other but we are... 1. too busy 2. too scared 3. afraid to trust each other???? 4. and we wonder if it could help for starters."

It appears pastors' wives know there are other women who share their experiences who, like them, could benefit from increased connection, yet they live with an underlying apprehension to even attempt to connect with one another. This apprehension may be tied to their fear of betrayal and loss of trust, as this has been consistent with previous experiences for the majority of the participants.

Interestingly, elevated levels of depression did not significantly impact the participants' descriptions of loneliness. Allison, Natalie, and Sarah exhibited elevated depression as identified by the Beck Depression Inventory-II. Although these three

participants exhibited the elevated depression, their descriptions of loneliness were highly similar to those participants not identified with elevated depression by the Beck Depression Inventory-II.

The experience of loneliness is more prevalent for pastors' wives than the general population (Brackin, 2001). In this study, 88 % of the participants experienced elevated or significant feelings of loneliness. The percentage of pastors' wives who signified elevated loneliness in this study was higher than reported by Brackin (2001), who reported 75 % of pastors' wives were lonely.

Pastors' wives recognize their need for relationship and a trustworthy friend, yet many continue to be surrounded by feelings of loneliness. It appears with the fears associated with impacting their husbands' ministry in a negative way through expressing themselves in a friendship, these women would find an increase in safety in relationships formed outside of their local church congregation with someone who in no way can influence decisions related to their husbands.

*The Pastor's Wife and Her Relationship with God and Its Impact on Her Loneliness*

All participants described themselves as experiencing loneliness to some degree. The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale identified seven of eight participants as experiencing either elevated or significant loneliness. The remaining participant manifested normal feelings of loneliness. Each participant described in their interviews their faith journey and relationship with God along with their desire for God to be vital in their lives.

Despite the fact that Schwab and Peterson (1990) found individuals who described themselves as “active Christians” and experienced a “helpful relationship to God” were less lonely (p. 340), the participants in this study vary from this in regard to loneliness. The findings of this study are also inconsistent with the literature which suggested loneliness resulted from a lack of spirituality or lack of ability to worship God (Dobson, 1995/2003; MacDonald, 1998). From the results of this study, it appeared the pastors’ wives relationships with God did not lead them to experience a decrease in their feelings of loneliness as defined in this study. The participants, though dedicated in their faith and commitment to God, all experienced loneliness, many at a significant level.

#### Implications

Several implications emerged from this study, which affect entities beyond pastors and their wives. Specifically, these implications are directed for those who research pastors’ wives and loneliness, individual churches which employ pastors, colleges and seminaries which train pastors, and denominations to which pastors report. Moreover, implications for the counseling field were identified.

#### *Implications for Researchers*

For the participants in this study, familiarity, at some level, with the researcher was important. Two potential research participants were contacted through the use of snowball sampling, and both declined to be interviewed. Neither of these participants knew me. One of the potential participants declined stating she was “too busy with church work” while the other said she was uncomfortable with the idea of being interviewed.

Based on feedback from the study participants, some level of connection and familiarity with me appeared to be important for them to experience feelings of safety and trustworthiness during the interview and subsequent writing. Connection levels for the participants varied, with the majority of the participants being my acquaintances.

I recognized there was a stigma attached to loneliness (Rokach & Brock, 1997, 1998) which makes it a difficult topic to discuss. It appeared that without some level of familiarity with me the participants would have increased difficulty discussing their true feelings surrounding loneliness as pastors' wives. I recognized the deep sense of trust the participants were placing in me, as a researcher, as they shared from the depths of their hearts their experiences in ministry and with loneliness. For example, Emily, at one point in her interview paused and said, "I'm telling you all of this stuff and not even thinking about what's spitting out here." Later in an email, Emily went on to say,

I don't think that I have spent that long talking about my history and experiences of being married to the pastor. A few times, I wondered if I was telling too much, but I am comfortable with you and trusted you to hear everything. Before our meeting, there were a few areas of our marriage relationship that I was feeling unsure of how to handle. Since then, I feel that God is showing me how to proceed to work on one of those areas that will have a large impact.

Lauren talked of her experience in the interview as she related it to her need for a friend stating, "It needs to be somebody I feel I could be totally honest with, like this circumstance is allowing me to do, without reservation. I would love that." This statement reiterated the importance of the participants trusting me in the research process.

The depth of disclosure by the participants appeared at times to surprise them more than it did me. As the interview progressed, the participants became even more comfortable sharing about their lives at a greater depth. Safety and trustworthiness is critical for pastors' wives, as their lives are lived in the public eye with the heightened awareness their words may impact their husbands' ministries.

*Implications for Denominations, Colleges, Seminaries and Churches*

Beyond those who research pastors' wives and loneliness, this study has implications for the individual churches which employ pastors, the colleges and seminaries which train pastors, and denominations to whom pastors report.

All participants reported a connection between the expectations—both implicit and explicit—they believed were being imposed on their husbands by the churches in which they served, and the wives' own experiences of loneliness. It is therefore vital that churches who hire pastors recognize the impact of such expectations on both the pastor and his family and that—intentionally or unintentionally—these expectations do in fact contribute to the sense of loneliness experienced by pastors' wives.

The pastors' wives in this study reported receiving little or no help from their respective denominations (in this case, all came from evangelical Christian denominations), colleges, or seminaries in preparing them for their role as pastors' wives. This was consistent with the literature which identified 84% of pastors' wives feeling unprepared for their lifestyle (Cullen, 2007).

Lauren recalled “when we got married at [college] it [being a pastors' wife] was definitely kind of a glorified thing, in a very Christian setting. It was like, oh, you're



going to the ministry and everybody was excited for you.” Moving from the idealism of the pastorate as a “glorified thing” to the realities has left Lauren recognizing “it’s a bit lonelier than I anticipated it would be.”

Margo married her husband and moved with him to seminary. She searched for support with other wives at the seminary, finding it minimally present. Though support was present at a minimal level through meeting for tea every other week, Margo identified this time as helpful. Margo took initiative, which is normal for her to do. Had she not taken this initiative, this time at seminary would have been even lonelier than it was for her.

Denominations, colleges, and seminaries—not to mention individual churches that employ pastors—need to increase (or perhaps create) the support for women who are married to or planning to marry men entering the ministry. The realities of life as pastors’ wives are often hidden by these women who have developed the habit of “put[ting] on the good face” leaving those women who enter the pastorate alongside their pastor-husbands feeling unprepared. Pastors’ wives, both current and future, need to know they are supported and have been adequately prepared for their roles.

#### *Implications for Counseling Practice*

Pastors’ wives need to be provided with information and opportunities to seek professional counseling without a negative stigma being attached. In this study, Margo and Sarah acknowledged they had sought professional counseling in the past and found it to be very helpful. For many pastors’ wives, a fear of someone discovering they are seeking counseling keeps them from obtaining the support they need.

Professional counselors have the opportunity to provide benefits to pastors' wives and their families through varied practice paradigms including individual, premarital, marital, family, and career counseling. The need is present for counselors to increase their networking to include the pastors' wives in their local area. Because these women may appear to be less accessible than their husbands, counselors will have to diligently pursue access to these women.

Pastors' wives would benefit by the formation of support groups designed for their specific needs. It would be imperative that confidentiality and trustworthiness be maintained within these groups. Professional counselors could provide oversight or leadership to these groups based upon the needs of the group members. From the results of this study and the participants' desires to be understood, these groups could prove to be invaluable for the pastors' wives, which in turn would benefit those around them as they become healthier individuals themselves.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

The suggestions for future research were formed from both the conclusions drawn from this study and the experience of conducting this study. The suggestions for future research lie within the qualitative tradition of inquiry in anticipation that the limited research on this topic will be expanded and filled with the voices and experiences of pastors' wives and their husbands to facilitate an increase in the understanding of their life experiences.

### *Identity of the Pastor's Wife*

The findings of this study indicated many of the women appeared to have formed a sense of personal identity around their role as pastors' wives. Allison questioned her impact on others in her life as she discussed her thinking over the previous months since her husband left his full-time ministry position. She believed at this point she "could probably just fade away and nobody would realize [she] was gone." Lauren identified frustration over her lack of involvement in church work with her spouse because of the necessity of her caring for the children.

Qualitative exploration of this personal identity pastors' wives form with their husbands' ministries could provide information into how the identity of being a pastors' wives impacts these women. For many of these women, being a pastor's wife appeared to energize them. Exploring this apparent sense of identity has potential value for denominations, colleges and seminaries as they seek to better prepare current and future pastors' wives.

### *Personality Traits and the Pastor's Wife*

The findings of this study indicated a need for further research regarding pastors' wives personality traits and whether these predispose these women to experience greater loneliness in their lives. Chloe was aware, at some level, that her personality has impacted her sense of loneliness. She remarked, "...my personality too probably hasn't helped things, where I do beat myself up over things."

Allison, in her interview, identified the feeling of guilt that many pastors' wives recognize they experience when she stated

There is something in my personality I really need to work on...if I would ever be arrested or put in jail for murder, by the time I got to my trial I would think I did it. I don't know why I do that. I always have to fight the guilt feeling, that I'm doing something wrong. I don't know where that started or how to get rid of it... I tell God I'm sorry for this mess...I don't even know what I did to cause it. I feel guilty, and I don't know why.

Allison also expressed the sentiment of many pastors' wives regarding their aim at perfectionism. "There is no way I could ever live up to my own standards. There's no way."

Suggestions for research include qualitative studies of pastors' wives and their personality traits. Specific characteristics to be considered in research include perfectionism, self-esteem, and introvert/extrovert traits. This study indicates these characteristics are worthy of investigating their impact on loneliness experienced by pastors' wives.

#### *Identity of the Pastor*

This study was focused on pastors' wives, yet it did reveal some insights regarding pastors. The pastor-husbands in this study appeared to recognize their work as God's work and, as a result, believed the stakes to be higher. From their wives perspectives, this often led them to prioritize their pastoral work above their families.

The fact that pastors continue at a pace of ministry that was detrimental to their families and their marriages would lead one to question what void the pastors are attempting to fill through their service to others. The pastors appear to have come to

accept their work life and schedule as normal for themselves, while their marriages and families are often relationally wounded.

Qualitative studies designed to hear the voices of pastors would be beneficial in an effort to develop a deeper understanding of the pressures they feel and the reasons behind the choices they make with regards to their families. Results of these studies could be beneficial not only to current pastors, as they seek to focus their lives, but also to denominations, colleges, and seminaries providing training for these current and future pastors who will influence generations to come.

#### Summary

A significant degree of overlap existed between the descriptions of and the factors contributing to loneliness identified by participants in this study and those identified through a review of literature. Both included loneliness as a normal experience and an indescribable void; including friendships and marriage, relocation, rejection, and the concern about being an ideal role model and maintaining a positive public image.

Divergence from the literature was found as several participants exhibited normal mood fluctuations rather than elevated levels of depression albeit experiencing normal, elevated, and significant levels of loneliness. The majority of participants in this study reported having a small number of close friends which was inconsistent with the literature. Middle aged participants in this study were not found to cope with loneliness better than the younger participants as research had suggested. Faith in God did not alleviate feelings of loneliness for the participants.

This study concluded that both the role and choices of pastors' wives impact their feelings of loneliness. While church work is extremely demanding upon pastors' wives, the participants were unaware of the impact of their experiences of loneliness upon their lives as they had become a normal experience. Pastors' wives are surrounded by people in their churches regularly yet lack connectedness with one another. The participants' experiences of an active faith did not account for experiences of decreased loneliness. The trustworthiness of the researcher was important in the participants' willingness to be transparent about their lives as pastors' wives.

Suggestions for future research call for further study into the identity of the pastor's wife, personality traits of the pastor's wife, and the identity of the pastor. It appears, from this research, these women develop a sense of identity from their role as pastors' wives. The pastors continue to work, at times to the detriment of their families. This brings to question whether there is a void the pastors are attempting to fill through their employment as pastors.

Pastoral work will continue, and pastors' wives will continue to be present alongside their husbands volunteering at varying levels in the church. Developing a better understanding of pastors' wives, through hearing their voices, is essential as a means to further understand the issues these women face.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Title: A Phenomenological Investigation of Loneliness and Pastors' Wives

1. Tell me about yourself.

- Marriage
- Children
- Extended Family
- Work – career/home
- Hobbies
- Spare time

2. What is it like to be a pastor's wife?

- Experiences in the role
- Length of time in ministry
- Challenges/Pressures
- Benefit

3. Describe a typical weekday for you.

- Home
- Work
- Church
- Volunteer

4. Describe a typical Sunday.

- Responsibilities at church
- Life at home

5. Tell me about your faith journey.

- How faith intersects daily life

6. Tell me about your relationships, friendships, and support network.

- Close confidant
- Accountability

7. Describe a bad day...what is that like for you?

8. What is your understanding of loneliness?

9. How do you think you became lonely?

10. What else do you think would be significant to share?



## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

### Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study

This study is being conducted to further the understanding of the personal experiences of pastors' wives. Results of this study may provide information that can assist pastors' wives, individuals who work with them, and those who befriend them.

This study is being conducted by Jama Davis, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia as a partial fulfillment of the degree Ph.D. in Professional Counseling.

Your voluntary participation in this study opens the door to providing important information regarding pastors' wives and their well-being. You qualify to participate in this study by being married to a pastor who is currently serving in a ministry setting.

Individuals participating in this study will be screened for appropriateness through the use of the Beck Depression Inventory and the Personal Experience Survey in addition to being interviewed by the researcher for approximately one and one half to two hours at length. Some participants may be requested to participate in a follow-up interview in order to clarify themes and ideas from emerging data. The follow-up interview will be approximately one hour in length. Interviews will be recorded and verbatim transcripts generated for analysis. A confidential professional transcriptionist will transcribe all data collected. All interviews and data will be assigned coded names and/or numbers to protect confidentiality.

Risks and discomforts are associated with anyone participating in a research study. These may include: (1) emotional stress generated from the question content, (2)

becoming fatigued during the process of responding to the assessment instruments and/or interview questions, (3) discovery of issues of pertinent depth and difficulty in your life. To minimize risk for participants, random names and numbers will be assigned to each individual to identify their responses. All participant information will be coded and locked with access only by this researcher. Should you become fatigued at any point during the interview, a 10-15 minute break will be taken during the interview with the interview proceeding following the break. Issues creating emotional distress and/or issues of pertinent depth or difficulty may be further discussed with this researcher by calling the researcher at (317) 402-3688. Assistance in finding counseling resources will be provided if needed.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. If an interview has already been completed, your individual responses may be withdrawn from this study by contacting the researcher. Upon completion of this study, the researcher will contact individual participants to discuss the results of the study. Results of this study may be published in a professional journal.

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 e-mail at [jldavis3@liberty.edu](mailto:jldavis3@liberty.edu) or by calling (317) 402-3688. The Liberty University Institutional Review Board may be contacted at [IRB@liberty.edu](mailto:IRB@liberty.edu) or by writing the Institutional Review Board, Liberty University, 1971 University Blvd., Campus North, Suite 2400 U, Lynchburg, VA 24501

Consent to participate in this study will be indicated by your signature on this informed consent form. Participant signatures are required on both identical consent forms. One form will be kept by the participant 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: EPILOGUE

This journey of researching and interviewing pastors' wives has been humbling, rewarding and revealing for me. I was filled with humility as I sat with these eight participants, listened to their stories, read them over and over again in transcript form, and then wrote about them. I believe these pastors' wives opened a window to their soul to me, and, as a result, I will be forever changed for the better.

With the recognition I had walked this journey of loneliness as a pastor's wife, I challenged myself early in this project to identify the impact loneliness had on my life at the present time. Through this challenge I came to recognize the minimal impact loneliness has on my life, for which I am thankful. I was also able to see clearly how it has manifested itself in my past. At this point in my life, I am able to refer to loneliness as an easily identified infrequent visitor, never invited for a lengthy stay.

In the last several years, I have come to understand the importance of relationships in which I can be genuine and be provided with feedback, both positive and negative, given in truth. Though at times this can be painful and other times joyous, it takes me to a point relationally that I have come to recognize as critical in maintaining a healthy sense of self, both emotionally and spiritually. In particular, I have used these relationships throughout this study as sounding boards for me to ensure I maintained proper balance and perspective.

My passion to help pastors' wives has not lessened in the least. If anything, it has become greater as a result of this study. I continue to believe ministry can be positive, though not without difficult challenges, and does not have to be permeated with

loneliness. However, I know facing difficulties in ministry and remaining positive takes work and do not happen by chance. My prayer is that as I have learned and am now deemed responsible for the knowledge I have gained, I will honor God with this knowledge and help pastors' wives in their journeys.