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The Lived Experiences of Married Immigrant Coptic Women in the Context of Their Coptic Orthodox Church

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The Lived Experiences of Married Immigrant Coptic Women in the Context of Their Coptic
Orthodox Church

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

The focus of this dissertation is centered on the lived experiences of married immigrant Coptic women in Canada with regards to aspects of living their faith in the context of the culture of their traditional Coptic Orthodox Church. A descriptive phenomenological inquiry was undertaken as a methodological framework to gain understanding of the lived experiences. In an attempt to capture the meaning and the interpretation of the described lived experiences, the symbolic interactionist approach served as a theoretical framework. Feminist principles were also incorporated in order to facilitate the research process in understanding the lived experiences in this descriptive phenomenological inquiry. Purposive sampling techniques were employed; eight participants participated in the study from the Greater Toronto Area through the Coptic centers located in Mississauga and Toronto. It was through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions that the interpretation of their experiences emerged. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to the descriptive phenomenological approach. Thematic analysis was the level of data analysis that was applied in aiming to capture thematic statements of the meanings regarding the phenomenon on the basis of the descriptive phenomenological approach. NVivo software was used to create thematic emergent themes and thematic coding folders in facilitating the data analysis. The study illuminated valuable insights and provided married immigrant Coptic women the opportunity to express their lived experiences within the culture of their Church; an opportunity they previously might not have had. Findings showed consistent understanding among all the participants in this study who all believed they held the greatest status in, and through, the patriarchal system and structure of their Coptic Church. Findings generated knowledge for social work practice about many of the spiritual and religious aspects of the faith of Coptic women and the influence of their Coptic Church on them.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Patriarchy is characterized as a social system in which the position of men is central to social organizations (Walby, 1997, 2002); it is based on hierarchical and unequal power relations that control women (Therborn, 2004; Walby, 2002). The nature of control is complex and varies according to the respective social location; it differs based on class, caste, religion, regional variations, ethnicity, and socio-cultural practices (Bhasin, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Patriarchal structures generally carry a clear ideological message (Therborn, 2004) that contains an implicit pattern of structured power relationships that men maintain over women (Therborn, 2004; Walby, 1990, 1997), particularly through religious institutions controlled by men (Blackwell, 2005; Chakravarti, 2004).

In the patriarchal context of the Coptic Church, the head of the Coptic Church, Pope Shenouda III (1992), adamantly emphasized that biblical traditional patriarchal structures have not changed and are unlikely to change because they are ordained by God. The Coptic Church, however, has adopted many societal and cultural structures that contradict biblical texts and contribute to the inferior status and role of Coptic women (MacHaffie, 2006). For example, perspectives concerning the inferiority of women held by Greek thinkers and philosophers were transmitted by religious patriarchs during the spread of Christianity and preserved to present time (MacHaffie, 2006; Winter, 2003). Ancient Roman laws that regulated each aspect of Egypt, including the Coptic Church, not only accepted the Greek philosophical views that claimed women were physically and mentally inferior to men but also entrenched those beliefs into law (Winter, 2003). In addition, Egypt, which had been a “matriarchy state” with a relatively homogeneous population, was changed by the Coptic Orthodox Christian community that

followed the Muslim-Arab conquest of Egypt in the 7th Century. The structures imposed have served over the centuries as a driving force for controlling the systems in Egypt, including the Church, and implementing the inferior status of women. Tracing the adopted beliefs concerning the inferiority of women is the focus in part one of the literature review.

It is argued that in Christianity, leadership by men in the church is not an absolute or unquestionable authority that dictates how men and women should live; rather, it is a prescribed role and pattern that both men and women follow (Bennett, 2006; Blackwell, 2005; Langenwalter, 2012; Miller & Bayne, 2012). It is emphasized by several Coptic Orthodox Church leaders, including Al-Malaty (1987), Al-Meskeen (1984), and Shenouda III (1989) that in practicing patriarchal roles men, particularly the Church leaders, practice humbleness to their ultimate capacity just as Christ practiced and outlined in John 13: 14-17 (New International Version): “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

In each society women are subjected to various forms of public and private patriarchy (Jia, 2002) based on “the mind of” each society (Vygotsky, 1978). Women’s narratives of patriarchal structures share experiences about enforced submission to male domination (Ali, 2006; Amin, 2000; Blackwell, 2005; Jia, 2002; Rafiq, 1995). The availability of research and data, including women’s personal narratives, is a key element in a service provider’s decision-making process (Cotterill, 1992; Cox, 2006). Unfortunately, for Coptic women in the Orthodox Church, the inadequate or incomplete information in social work research related to any topics or social groups impedes social policy formulation, implementation of social work services, and the enrichment of social work practice (Cotterill, 1992; Cox, 2006; Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, & Larsen, 2010).

Not until this research project was conducted, were the experiences of Coptic women in general, and Coptic immigrant women in particular, under the Patriarchate of Coptic Orthodox Traditional Church yet to be narrated. To my knowledge, no published research is available on the lived experiences of Coptic immigrant women situated in Coptic Orthodox patriarchal cultural, and this represents a significant deficit in research availability.

This study has explored the narratives of Coptic immigrant women with regard to their living faith in the Coptic Orthodox traditional Church's patriarchal system, an issue that has been overlooked since the Church was established more than 2000 years ago. In doing so, a descriptive phenomenological qualitative method was used. In order to generate descriptions about Coptic immigrant women's experiences under the Patriarchate of the Coptic Orthodox traditional Church the researcher used semi-structured individual interviews with eight participants.

Definition of the Key Concept

Statistic Canada's (2010) report on religions in Canada reveals that in the last few decades the Egyptian population, particularly in Ontario and Quebec, has experienced a large influx of the Coptic Orthodox population. In the City of Mississauga alone, the location of one of the largest Canadian Coptic Centres and communities, there are more than 50,000 Copts out of 250,000 nationwide ("Mississauga News", 2014). Few people are familiar with the terms Copt or Coptic Church. It is therefore necessary to begin with a brief description of Coptic identity and the traditional Coptic Orthodox Church and its patriarchal domains in order to gain an understanding of the topic of the proposed research.

Coptic Identity

Independent of faith tradition, linguistically, in both the Coptic encyclopaedia (Atiya, 1991) and *Oxford English Dictionary* (Soanes & Stevenson, 2008) the term Copt is a noun that refers to any Egyptian who is descended from the ancient Egyptians, while the term Coptic is an adjective that describes an aspect of Copts, such as their Coptic language or their Coptic Church (Al-Masry, 1971, 1984; Louka, 2001; Manassa, 1982).

Coptic identity has a long history and has remained culturally and religiously distinct from other Egyptians; Copts are considered Egyptians without any Arab sentiment (Atiya, 1991; Werthmuller, 2009). Since Muslims conquered Egypt in the 7th Century, the word Copt refers strictly to Egyptians who are Christians (Al-Masry, 1971, 1984; Louka, 2001; Manassa, 1982).

The Arab identity refers to descendants of Middle Eastern Arab Muslims and is therefore affiliated with the Islam religion (Phillips, 2013). The Arab identity imposed on Egyptians by Gamal Abdel *Nasser* in the 1950s was perceived as an attempt to separate the unique Coptic Egyptian identity, descendants of Pharaohs, from its entity; this attempt was rejected by Copts of Egypt and abroad (Werthmuller, 2009). Copts have resisted the imposed Arab identity; they see themselves as the direct descendants of Ancient Egyptians and their Coptic language links them to their ancient roots (Louka, 2001; Manassa, 1982). Copts feel their cultural heritage is being taken away (Manassa, 1982) and that they have a responsibility to carry on their traditions that are legally forbidden by Arab rulers (Louka, 2001; Manassa, 1982); hence, the Coptic Church has taken on the responsibility to protect and teach their ancestry (Atiya, 1991; Werthmuller, 2009). As such, the term “Copt” is not only religious but also has (Tovstiadi, 2008) cultural identity, significance and heritage.

The Traditional Coptic Orthodox Church

Coptic Orthodox Churches in Canada are parishes of the Patriarchate Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, the See of Alexandria, and the largest Christian church in Egypt, Africa, and the Middle East (Louka, 2001). The Coptic See was founded by Saint Mark the Apostle and Evangelist in approximately 42 AD (Al-Masry, 1984). The head of the See of Alexandria is the Pope and Patriarch of Africa and worldwide (Basil, 2011). It is considered a traditional church because it has always held the traditional faith, understandings, teachings, rituals, services, events, and structures that were originally passed on by the Apostles (Shenouda III, 1997).

Patriarchal domains of the Coptic Orthodox Church are deeply rooted within leadership and teaching techniques communicated in biblical texts. As an organization, it is known as the Patriarchate of Coptic Orthodox and is led by its current Patriarch, Pope Twadrouse II, the 118th of the order of Popes that followed St. Mark the Apostle (Al-Masry, 1971). Each of the leaders from Pope to priest is called “Papa”, which means “father” in Coptic. The spiritual fatherhood in the hierarchal order of Church leaders reflects the patriarchal patterns that are rooted in both the Old and New Testaments (Blackwell, 2005; Shenouda III, 1997). Theologically, the philosophy of the Church is based on the tenets of biblical patriarchal patterns. The doctrine of the biblical patriarch, according to the Church, is considered the essential structure of God’s ordained patterns for people to follow (Blackwell, 2005; Frank & Leaman, 2003). Following these ordained patterns, in the present it means that the Church affirms the creeds and confessions of the Apostles Creed and the written word of God (Shenouda III, 1997).

A number of concepts devoted to justify the patriarchal leadership and theological domains in the Coptic Church are outlined by numerous church leaders, including theologians Al-Malaty (1991), Al-Meskeen (1984), Gregorios (2003, 2004, 2006), and Shenouda III (1992).

Together, they indicate that the Church teaches that God is neither male nor female but has chosen to reveal Himself as masculine, the eternal Father, and so are His begotten Son and His Holy Spirit. As such, the husband and biological, or spiritual, father directs his household or Church in paths of obedience to God.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, Copts in Egypt and Canada, where the Coptic Church maximizes its effort to protect members of the religion from deviation, remain resistant against foreign ideologies, or any ideologies that oppose the Coptic Orthodox traditional Church (Werthmuller, 2009). As such, I believed that many women might be unwilling or have difficulty adapting to socio-cultural changes when acclimatizing to the values and beliefs in Canada. Until this study was accomplished, there had been very little, if any, data detailing the struggles of Coptic women in their transition from Egypt to Canada and no data focusing on their lived experiences as members of a patriarchal orthodox. Religion and spirituality highlight and define the identity of Copts (Al-Masry, 1987); this raises the issue of what the individual's own experience is and whether the experience arises from an inner search by Coptic women that expands outside of structured spirituality or if it is shaped and structured by their religion, church, and traditionally spiritual life. In brief, the dilemmatic position of Coptic women is produced by the two convergent boundaries; these boundaries refer to direct readings of the primary biblical texts versus the contradictions of the scriptures by the Church teachings, or religion versus life in Canada, or all of these together. According to MacHaffie (2006), the Church has adapted societal and cultural structures that contradict biblical texts and contribute to the inferior status and role of Coptic women, which, as my research aimed to investigate, resulted in a collision that affects their lives in Canada.

Rationale for the Study

My own background is strongly related to this study and research question. My space between being an insider and outsider, according to Asselin (2003) and Kanuha (2000) has brought forth strengths and challenges as emphasized by Day (2010), Chavez (2008), Chaudhry (1997) and Eppley (2006), which is an argument that is partially addressed in this section and in the reflectivity, strengths, and limitations sections. Occupying a dual space has invited me to question my social location as a member of the population of interest in this study and as a researcher (Chaudhry, 1997; Chavez, 2008; Day, 2010; Eppley, 2006). In conducting a study with members of the researcher's own population (immigrant Coptic Orthodox), instead of acting as dichotomous key insider or outsider, the researcher's position was of both insider and outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As an immigrant Egyptian male, I acknowledged that I was both an insider and an outsider. As a member of the ethnic group that was studied, I recognized that the population was not homogenous; there were differences in gender, class, and education (Serrant-Green, 2002). Although, for this specific group, the most visible difference between myself and my participants was that I was male; I was, thus, an outsider in this area perhaps more significantly than others. Being an insider, an Egyptian-Canadian immigrant with a Coptic background, enhanced my understanding of the population in a way that might not be accessible to other researchers (Day, 2010; Kanuha, 2000).

As a Christian man with a Coptic identity and strong beliefs and values deeply rooted in the Coptic Orthodox Church, I am faithful to the biblical texts and the Church doctrines. Such faithfulness developed during decades of studies, research, and comparisons that have led to my beliefs. I have a unique perspective as a dual citizen; being an Egyptian citizen provides me with insight into the Coptic identity and culture, as well as many of the issues that are socially and

religiously oriented. I immigrated to Canada more than two decades ago; I have worked and received further university education that has given me unique perspectives that are integrated with my traditional background.

Living in Canada for more than two decades and receiving further formal undergraduate and graduate education has offered me profound and reflective thoughts and views on social issues and culture beliefs (Day, 2010). Among these issues is what Coptic immigrant women encounter in their Church. As a brother of six sisters and the son of a widowed mother, I am sensitive to women's issues through the concerns they have shared with me. As an insider, I am an active member of the Canadian Coptic Centre where I work and serve in Mississauga, Ontario, the largest Coptic community in North America. In my capacity as Social Worker in the Canadian Coptic Centre, which has been known to any of the participants, I have encountered a wide range of issues brought to my attention by Coptic women. For example, a Coptic woman must not receive communion for 80 days if she gives birth to a girl, but only 40 days if she gives birth to a boy; many women think they are punished for giving birth to girls. Also, female virginity is a significant condition for marriage, while male virginity can be regained by repentance. Coptic women have come to me with struggles over beliefs that many people of the secular world would label as blatant misogyny. As a Coptic male with strong female presences in my life, their conflicts are of sincere interest to me on personal and professional levels. As a researcher, my personal experiences with the subordination of women in the Coptic patriarchy have provided a target field for my academic progress. My life has been influenced by the women around me, and this, in turn, has influenced my aims as a researcher. However, collectively, these factors could only direct my bias to conduct this study and to anticipate the findings would be negative, but they did blind me in any ways as findings revealed otherwise.

Most Coptic women follow the beliefs, dogma, doctrines, practices, traditions, and rituals of the Coptic Church (Börresen, 1995; Malone, 2001; Werthmuller, 2009). Together, the Coptic Church and the Christian religion have a significant and direct influence on Coptic women. Yet, how the structures affected Coptic women and how much they were willing to share their personal experiences and beliefs in relationship to such rules was unknown. As such phenomena could only be described by Coptic women, thus the aim of this study was to report the description of their experiences.

But, how to remain objective and unbiased when providing my analysis and interpretation of the findings of the participants' experiences, I understood that in conducting a social research with human participants I would be actively engaged in interpreting and ascribing meaning (Schutz, 1932/1967). I acknowledged my own interpretative work as I analyzed the social world I was researching, and recognized that in doing so, as Schutz (1932/1967) emphasized, I might activity impose a second level of interpretation behind my analyses. Therefore, constantly, I have taken the works to its original authors, the participants, to check and verify its interpretation and meaning.

Purpose of the Study

This study was projected to explore the lived experiences of Coptic immigrant women and their living faith in relationship to the culture of their Coptic Orthodox traditional Church's patriarchal system. The study aimed to explore to what degree Coptic women were able to adapt to socio-cultural changes when settling in Canada and acclimatize to the new values and beliefs. In addition, this study investigated by what means these lived experiences were shaped subjectively, within the individual, and/or objectively, by the church and other outside influences.

Research Study Questions

The research question for this study was: What were the lived experiences of married immigrant Coptic women in Canada with regard to aspects of living their faith in the context of the culture of their traditional Coptic Orthodox Church?

Importance to Social Work

Social workers are involved in a variety of contexts, and the quality of their practice relies on and is affected by the range of their knowledge while working with unfamiliar populations (Hepworth et al., 2010; Padgett, 2008; Rubin & Babbie, 2009). This study explored the lived experiences of Coptic immigrant women in relationship to their Coptic Church environment. The knowledge generated can enhance the role in social work's efforts of practice and reduce the possibility of ambiguity and misunderstanding while working with Coptic immigrant women.

In general, evidence-based practice has been increasingly accepted in social work and is becoming more apparent and pressing (Proctor & Rosen, 2008). This study has generated evidence-based knowledge for social work practice to be used and resultant improvements to practice are to be realized. As social work requires more engagement in service that is based on research, the implementation of this research in social work practice has the evidence-base to potentially extend the benefits of efficacy and effectiveness in research. Also, in the real-world of social work practice and service delivery, the generated knowledge of this research can enhance and facilitate interventions, feasibility and the decision support procedures.

In particular, this study has strived to contribute knowledge in several ways. It has generated an understanding of the lived experiences of Coptic immigrant women within the patriarchal Coptic Orthodox traditional Church. The study also has sought to further our

understanding of the social transition and location of Coptic women. In addition, this study has identified factors that can enhance and inhibit social work practice in addressing Coptic women's issues. Besides, the study has advanced the welfare of Coptic women through the inclusion of their voice in research, with an overall commitment to social justice.

Much like the understandings of social issues and inequalities, women's everyday experiences must be understood within the context of their affiliated social organization and its ideological structures that generate the experience (Anderson, 1987; Reid, 2004). Women's experiences, according to Reid (2004), could be intimately related to the conditions under which women (including Coptic women) live.

Also, it is emphasized that one of the contemporary social injustices is that those who live in disadvantaged circumstances are the people who are unable exercise capacities or express experiences (Benzeval, Judge, & Whitehead, 1995). In contrast, social justice thus concerns the degree to which a society facilitates and contains the conditions necessary for all its members to participate in determining actions including exercising their spiritual capacities and expressing their religion.

According to Young (1990), social justice requires not the melting away of groups' difference, but the promotion and respect for their differences without oppression. However, social justice is not only an approach through which we see the world or groups' differences, but it can also inform how research is conceptualized and conducted, how we engage with marginalized groups and conceive our role as researchers, and how we explore opportunities for social justice (Reid, 2004; Wilkinson, 1996; Young, 1990).

The contribution of social work research informs evidence-base practice to effective social work practice (Humphries, 2008). This study has allowed Coptic women to express their

lived experiences and offered an important critical framework for understanding how research can inform social work practice of Coptic women's spiritual capacities.

Social work is considered as “holistic focusing on the person-in-environment, acknowledging the psychological, emotional, physical, and social aspects of the individual” (Epple, 2003, p. 173). The question that invites itself here is how can social workers intervene more effectively without having insights on the role of spirituality and religions in the lives of those whom they serve? The findings of this study provide insights on many of the spiritual and religious aspects of the faith of Coptic women, which can help social worker to intervene effectively and give researchers an opportunity to generate more knowledge in such area that has been lacking.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

In any fields that provide human services, professionals including social workers rely on research and theoretical constructs to guide them in their practice. Serving in the Coptic realm, especially when serving Coptic women I could not find any data that could help me to better understand their issues and the types of interventions through which I could help them to manage the effects of the issues on them. In performing counseling to Coptic women, I found myself struggling with what evidently were unanswered questions related to their lived experience in the Coptic Church. Generally speaking, social workers rely on reliable intervention models along with other types of management strategies borrowed from other fields. With this in mind, the influence of quantitative research data has informed theories and interventions, which offers scripted segments of intervention.

Given the lack of qualitative research, and the deficient emphasis on the lived experiences of Coptic women in the Coptic Church individuals, it became questionable to me if there was in fact enough data to determine whether the employed interventions or the counseling approaches were effective or even relevant. Undoubtedly, my exposure to literature, especially in the absence of research availability in the area of Coptic women's lived experience in the Coptic Church shed some light on their issues. Initially, the existing body of literature enhanced my understanding of Coptic women's shared lived experiences during counseling sessions. However, as I became more informed through both the available literature and the shared experiences, the negligible data of research raised more questions for me if the existing literature was conclusive or there was a need to know more about such an area. Surprisingly, the lived experiences as described by Coptic women in this study do not necessarily agree with many of

those found in the literature. This alone, shows how important it was to conduct this study and invite Coptic women to share their lived experiences based on their own interpretations, meaning and description.

Literature Review

When examining the status of women in larger terms, the lived experiences of Coptic women in Egypt or abroad, including Canada, is usually overlooked. The literature review presents an impression of the conflicted position of Coptic women that is produced by the two convergent boundaries that are described in this section. Biblical texts and relevant scholarly work are examined in order to highlight the practices of the Coptic Orthodox Church that contradict many of the biblical texts that actually define women's status as equal to men and encourage their participation in the church and society.

Coptic Women's Status in the Coptic Church in Light of Biblical Texts

Traditional perspectives. According to MacHaffie (2006), the Coptic Orthodox Church considers women inferior by nature and in the social hierarchy. Knowing the historical background of philosophical, social, and cultural views on the status of women leads to a better understanding of what shaped the opinions of the traditional Church leaders, theologians, and canon on women (Day, 2010; Oden, 1994). Studying the patterns and examples reveals valuable information about the current state of Coptic women's social status.

The concept of tradition and the historical background of what is considered tradition appear to be two sides of the same coin (Cianci & Harding, 2007). Linguistically, the term tradition, according to Congar (1998, 2004), derives from the Latin noun *tradition* (safekeeping) of the verb *tradere* (to transmit or to hand over). Lewis and Ibbetson (1994) emphasize that this term originated and was used by Roman law to mean inheritance. Tradition, as outlined by

Cianci and Harding (2007), is one of anthropology's fundamental concepts, so anthropologists find it unnecessary to define due to its obvious meaning and thus there is no theory or tradition. Some scholars, including anthropologist Boyer (1990), however, argue that defining the term tradition and developing relevant theories is essential to the discipline as based on unified ideas related to particular fields.

While the definition of tradition has specific meanings and origins, the broader concept has roots in many aspects of culture. One branch, in particular, involves religious traditions. Just as systems of belief and law are engrained upon society throughout time, there is also a traceable history of religious tradition. Philosophically, many of the traditional perspectives on the status of women held by Greek thinkers and philosophers were transmitted by religious patriarchs at the spread of Christianity and preserved to present time. Plato (427-347 BC) claimed that women by nature are physically degenerated human beings and that men alone are directly created (Manor, 2008). Similarly, Aristotle (384-322 BC) considered the nature of women as defective (Davis, 2008; Edel, 1996; Rouse, 2008). In confirmation of the traditional presumption of the inferior status of women, Augustine (354-430 AD) writes that it is the natural order that women serve their husbands and their entire family based on the principle that the lesser serves the greater and the irrational and weaker in mind serves the rationale and stronger in mind (Pusey, 2006). Augustine, according to Chadwick (2009), concludes that the relationship between women and their men is similar to that between masters and slaves, in which men excel in power and reason.

Epiphanius (315-403 AD) is another example of a writer who supports the philosophical presumption that women are inferior to men. According to Epiphanius, women are feeble human beings, untrustworthy and less intelligent than men (Louka, 2001). According to Louka (2001),

Epiphanius concludes that the devil recognizes the weak nature and poor mental capacity of women and knows how to make them discharge ridiculous teachings. Smith (2004) concludes that it is the philosophical model that, either implicitly or explicitly, has been applied by religious leaders.

Surprisingly, ancient Roman laws not only accepted the Greek philosophical views that proposed women to be physically and mentally less than men but also legalized the notion (Winter, 2003). In the Roman laws, women are the property of men, who are their masters and lords. Under the Roman laws, women were denied legal and civil rights and the ability to keep their inherited property or dowry. Courts viewed women as irrational human beings; thus, their testimony was not accepted in court (Clark, 1983; Winter, 2003). Clark (1983) indicates that the subordinate status of women imposed by Roman laws was accepted and adopted by some of the leaders of the Coptic Orthodox Church who were greatly influenced by the opinions of the Greek philosophers and Roman judiciary systems. Despite the dissolution of the Roman Empire in Western territories, Spielvogel (2008) indicates that Roman law was enforced in the Eastern territories throughout the Byzantine Empire (331-1453) (Marston, 2003; Vasil'ev, 1958). Roman law was used as a basis for legal systems throughout Western continental Europe and worldwide, including the Byzantine legal system (Vasil'ev, 1958). The inferior status of women as denoted by Roman law was espoused by other legal systems; Roman authority was imposed worldwide (Gardner, 1991).

Roman law had been established and recognized by the public and authorities before Christianity (Winter, 2003). The subordinate status of women under Roman law long precedes Christianity's judgments, as evidenced by varied ancient social and cultural factors (Gardner, 1991). Church leaders and fathers were under the rule of the Roman and Byzantine empires

(Vasil'ev, 1958). Together, these elements left little room for church fathers who had already adopted the Greek philosophical views on women to change their position on women's inferior status. Biblical text teaches Christians to "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority" (1 Peter 2:13). Such verse was deliberately selected and used to justify a belief that was already adopted and practiced and later became part of traditional church teachings and belief system.

Adapted traditional views. Patterns of belief are a form of traditional knowledge passed on through many generations, thus forming a traceable history of religious tradition. Many perspectives on the status of women held by Greek thinkers and philosophers were transmitted by religious patriarchs at the spread of Christianity and preserved to present time. The dismissal of, and ignorance towards, the portions of biblical texts that support the equal status of women is the result of the pressure imposed by societal and cultural traditions. The portions of documents that view women as less than men have become more significant than the texts as a whole. In his argument about the subordinate status of women, Al-Meskeen (1984), who is regarded as a significant figure in the Coptic Church, emphasizes that, while women make the cities (that are responsible for giving birth to future citizens), they should not be working in them because that conflicts with their prescribed role of having and caring for children. In a practice of active and consistent ignorance, many Coptic Orthodox Church leaders criticize women's contributions to the communities around them; this is an act that reflects patriarchal culture and society, as well as opposes the whole truth as prescribed by biblical texts (Al-Masry, 1971, 1987).

Biblical texts and the issue of interpretation. Although biblical texts are a fundamental element in the conceptual origin of the inferior status of women, there are also countless documents of the same background delineating women's status and considering women as equal

to men that have been dismissed or misinterpreted. Evidently, large parts of society do not question this selective uptake of knowledge (Patai, 1991). While biblical texts categorize humans as male and female, the same texts also define the equal status, role, and opportunity for both genders. For example, it is written that “God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’” (Genesis 1:27-30). God also decreed both males and females to rule equally over the earth, water, sky, and all the creatures that exist in them. Equality of both genders is confirmed and outlined by biblical texts; it is written that “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one” (Galatians 3:28). Despite biological gender differences, biblical texts affirm the equality of both genders and caution against inequality based on biological differences. In addition, biblical texts state: “The man [Adam] said, ‘This [Eve] is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man, and they become one flesh’” (Genesis 2:23-24). Based on the principle of equal status, the biblical texts establish it is written that “in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman” (1 Corinthians 11:11-12).

Arguably, biblical texts were written, translated, and interpreted for centuries by men in patriarchal cultures (Fiorenza, 2001; Kelly, Burton & Began, 1994; Korotayev, 2004; Smith, 2004) where women were subordinated and texts related to women were often misinterpreted and overlooked (MacHaffie, 2006). For instance, most of the personal pronouns written in the original languages are non-gender specific, but they are translated into other languages as masculine (Fiorenza, 2001; Kelly, Burton & Began, 1994; MacHaffie, 2006; Smith, 2004). Besides, some of the imposed teachings of the Church fathers contradict the outlined teachings

of the biblical texts and cause conflicting dual messages. Coptic women obey either God's commands or the demands of the Church. If they obey God, they risk excommunication based on traditional law or they could be accused of deviating from the religious traditions; however, if they follow the demands of the COC, they disobey God who said: "So you testify against yourselves; you have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men" (Mark 7:8). Therefore, Coptic women struggle with the question of whom they should obey and the consequences of that decision.

MacHaffie (2006) argued that in the Church the commands of God, as outlined by the scriptures, must be differentiated from the patriarchal, cultural, and societal demands imposed by people, particularly by males. In order to provide an accurate understanding of the actual meaning of the texts, MacHaffie (2006) argued that an attentive textual interpretation or study must be made using all available means and comprehensive approaches of biblical scholarship. Researchers and readers must attempt to differentiate between the intentions and the interpretations of texts in order to gain an understanding of the historical and social conditions of the biblical texts (Smith, 2004). The commandments of God must be discerned from the demands of society, including the COC (MacHaffie, 2006).

Traditional Church and the degree of freedom for Coptic women. Coptic women in Canada remain members of a strong traditional Coptic Church. The ability of immigrant women in Western societies, including Canada, to express their opinions or publically criticize the demands imposed by their religious leaders is greater than that of their sisters in their native nations (Brown & Hamazawy, 2010; Vogel, 2011). There are indications that the level of freedom Coptic immigrant women have in Canadian society provides, to some degree, the opportunity for them to stand up for their rights as granted in Western society and as evidenced

by the opinions expressed by people regarding religious passages. For example, a divorced Coptic woman in Canada may be granted a second marriage, which is denied by the same COC to Coptic women in Egypt (Shenouda III, 1982).

Al-Meskeen (1984) pointed out that Coptic women in Canada may participate, to a limited degree, in teaching in the Church; an act that remains taboo in both societies. The women who practice such acts are criticized by men in the Church and even by some Coptic women who still hold on to tradition, while it remains an unachieved dream for many Coptic sisters in Egypt. Al-Masry (1971) concluded that tradition ensures that works by Coptic women thinkers and writers go unrecognized, unpublished, or unavailable for Copts to review.

Up to the date my study was conducted, how Coptic women perceived imposed limitations of their social and religious practices and what their understanding is of their situation remained unknown because of the absence of data and research on the issue. Confirming that male dominance in the Church hierarchy has kept Coptic women's voices suppressed is virtually impossible as there are no primary sources to examine. History testifies that Coptic women's texts were decoded, and often reprimanded (entirely destroyed), by male clerics (Börresen, 1995).

Traditional versus contemporary social and philosophical conditions. Clinton and Lunardini (2000) reported that negative attitudes by the Christian church until the end of the 19th Century created barriers against women attempting to gain economic, political, and social freedom. According to Esposito (2005), in Western societies the role and status of women in traditional religions eventually improved publicly, resulting in a rejection of restrictive interpretations. Buechler (1986), however, postulates that the reinterpretation of Christian texts beginning at the end of the 19th Century and into the 20th Century led to more recognition of the

status and rights of Christian women. Esposito (2005) and Goody (2004) outlined that the strengthened role by women in traditional religions in Western society has influenced the silent re-evaluation of many women activists and scholars and inspired similar re-evaluation in Muslim societies. Despite variations in the status of women in traditional religions that exist across class and region, the social and economic vulnerability of Coptic women are not well documented or acknowledged, let alone addressed (Hasan & Menon, 2004).

Engineer (2003) pointed out that while modern Christians have changed their outlook on many matters, the Church has not. To rectify this, Engineer (2003) voiced the need to adopt an intellectual approach, balancing devotion to religious beliefs with modern knowledge. Further, Haddad (2005) and Manji (2003) cautioned that traditional societies and cultures can go backwards without the intellectual approach, particularly where human intellectual thought is rapidly progressing. According to Rajae (2007), Rejwan (2000), and Shani, David and Wilson, (2004), difficulties arise during the struggle for change and reform in traditional societies, cultures, and communities because of two major divisions or duties: the emotional attachment of members to their traditions and the calls of modernists to create Westernized-type status within traditional societies.

There are many factors that conflict with the maintenance of Coptic Church tradition, including globalization, immigration, travel, industrialization, Internet, and the integration or marginalization of particular groups (Engineer, 2003). In reaction to conflicting factors and in an attempt to preserve traditions, the Coptic Church has focused on preserving traditional aspects such as the Coptic language. Other aspects of modernity that differ from traditional law and dogma are not negotiable. For example, a Coptic woman who is granted a divorce decision by a Canadian court is considered an excommunicated member of the Church unless a divorce

decision is issued for her by the head of the Church in Egypt and is only granted on evidence of adultery committed by her husband (Shenouda III, 1982).

One of the prayers that the Church uses every time in liturgy is: “As it was, and shall be, from generation to generation and unto all ages of ages” (Basil, 2011, p. 261). Unlike the imposed conservative and restricted conditions in Egypt, the transmission of church traditions from generation to generation is unlikely to be preserved, practiced, or passed on in Canada where women have the freedom to fulfill their own goals, especially for second or third-born generations of Coptic-Canadians. An opportunity is created for Coptic women and future generations in Canada to question, challenge, and change the traditional discourse of the Church to its members.

Challenging the Dominant Discourse

There is an opportunity for dominant discourse to be resisted, as Smith (2004) emphasized, simply by recognizing that the frameworks of its meaning put forward do not have to be accepted. Fook (2002) and Smith (2004) highlighted that the strength of dominant discourse is at the same time its very weakness; they are powerful precisely because they are unquestioned and all players, even those who do not benefit, uncritically accept them. In this sense, the power of discourse lies in the degree to which it is unquestioned. Simply choosing not to accept dominant ideas and pointing out contradictions can work to resist, challenge, and change dominant systems of meaning (Fook, 2002; Smith, 2004).

Feminist Views on the Status of Women in Patriarchal Society.

In sociology, social stratification refers to a system by which a society ranks particular groups of its members in a hierarchy based on many factors such as socio-economic status, race, class, ethnicity, religion, ability status, and gender (Grusky, 2011). Stratification thus leads to

greater status and power for some groups over other members. Stratification that is based on gender gives men greater status and power over women (Baines, 2003; Saunders, 1990). In its critique of social relations, much of feminist theory aims to understand the nature of gender inequality and examines women's social roles (Baines, 2003; Hogg, 2003, Mcleod & Lively, 2003). In doing so, feminist theory highlights the role of patriarchy in maintaining the oppression of women by focusing on patriarchy as a system of power that ranks society into a complex of relationships based on the affirmation of male domination (Baines, 2003; Hogg, 2003; Mcleod & Lively, 2003; Stryker, 1980).

Western societies and prominent women activists. According to Esposito (2005) and Ramadan (2004), in contemporary Western societies where the birth of the women's movement has taken place, women of traditional religions have tended to focus their efforts inward rather than outward. As the number of Coptic immigrants started to rise in the Western societies in the early 1960s, the attempts of Coptic women to restore their role in these societies have taken a new outward focus. Mujtaba and Lari (1977) indicated that growing up in Western society has resulted in more prominent women activists and a better understanding of their subculture.

Feminist perspectives on patriarchy. In the context of the Patriarchate Coptic Church and the status of Coptic women, it is important to look at the origin of the term patriarchy from a feminist perspective. Understanding the historic and contemporary function of the term, according to Lerner (1986), leads to a better appreciation of feminist views on the complex dynamics of patriarchal systems, including the Church.

To recap, originally, patriarchy referred to a senior man whose supreme authority was concentrated over his extended family and whose decisions were not restrained by any system

(Mies, 1999). Patriarchy is a Greek compound word derived from two words, “father” and “ruler” or “leader” (Saller, 1996).

Religiously, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are considered three patriarchs of Jews and the time they lived is called the “Patriarchal Age” (Blackwell, 2005).

Ecclesiastically, the highest-ranking of the Coptic (or any Orthodox Church) is termed *Patriarch*, or *Pope*. The ecclesiastical center of the Patriarch is where his *See* is located and the dioceses under his jurisdiction are called *Patriarchate* (Al-Masry, 1971, 1984; Louka, 2001).

Socially, patriarchy refers to the system by which men are the authoritative figures over their wives, children, and property, or in institutions where their positions involve the subordination of women (Coward, 1983). It also reflects the reserved beliefs about women that people learned through their socialization, learning process in society, culture and social interactions (Blumer, 1969; Hogg, 2003; Mcleod & Lively, 2003; Stryker, 1980).

Culturally, patriarchy has influenced modern civilization even though many cultures have shifted toward more egalitarian social systems within the past century (Inhorn, 1996). Gemzöe (2000) maintained that patriarchy established a tendency among people to see the world exclusively from the male viewpoint and to assume that such a viewpoint is also suitable for women.

Ideologically, patriarchy is a constructed discourse that ecclesiastically, socially, and culturally considers men superior to women (Bennett, 2006). Patriarchy, as argued by Blackwell (2005), imposes complex dual characters of masculinity and femininity on society that fortify its discourse and power relationships. Smith (2004) stressed that religions contribute to the practice of patriarchal ideology and serve as an engine that continues to produce and maintain patriarchal discourse.

Operationally, from a traditionalist point-of-view, patriarchal ideology of motherhood is not only biologically determined but also defines the social roles and tasks of men and women (Inhorn, 1996). Virginity and motherhood are two significant aspects of the role that characterizes Coptic women (Inhorn, 1996).

Traditionally, specifically, from a traditionalist point-of-view, patriarchal ideology of motherhood is not only biologically determined but also defines the social roles and tasks of men and women (Inhorn, 1996). From a feminist perspective, Bennett (2006) outlined that the concept of motherhood is a form of formal and informal control of women through their reproduction and has been regulated throughout history. Leskošek (2011) outlined that, historically, motherhood has been linked to femininity and considered the most valuable natural beauty through which women's love and power are best expressed. Women would be considered psychically unfit, mentally egotistic, and selfish if they chose not to be mothers. Such ideology is carried forward by different systems and even science, especially the field of medicine, which has the power of intervention over the human body, imposing restrictions to women's free will in making decisions concerning their own bodies. It was through the emergence of the women's movement that strength was gained to resist and challenge society's dominant ideology of motherhood and marriage (Bennett, 2006; Carabine, 2004; Castelli, 2001; Chodorow, 1978).

In this context, the Church uses powerful symbolism to bind meaning to the traditional roles determined for women by the patriarchal discourse. According to MacHaffie (2006), motherhood and virginity are symbolized by the Church with the Virgin, St. Mary, who was both virgin and mother. Virginity must be maintained until marriage, and motherhood is expected after marriage; these two stages of women's lives are determined by the Church (Shenouda III, 1982). Each stage is defined through traditional rules and rituals circumscribed by men for

women to practice. In order to motivate women to practice the rituals, the Church uses an approach that focuses on the consequences of the practice rather than analyzing the meaning of the actual rituals (Bell, 1997).

Feminist approaches toward identifying patriarchal structures. The various dimensions of feminist approaches help to locate the patriarchal discourse and structures embedded within the philosophical and political perspectives, including religious discourse (Echols, 1989; Janowick, 2008; King, 2011; Thompson, 2011). One of the key concepts of feminism is awareness for both men and women to initiate change to the patriarchal discourse and philosophy embedded in the Coptic Church (King, 2011; Thompson, 2011).

With the emergence of the women's movement during the 1960s and 1970s, followed by additional movements and the development of feminist theories, the excessiveness of patriarchal control started to be altered (Butler, 1994; Messer-Davidow, 2002). With the growth of feminist responsiveness and increasing numbers of women scholars and their works, women became both the subjects and representatives in analyzing patriarchal systems, including religion (King, 2011).

Feminists have responded to the discourse of patriarchy in a variety of ways and perspectives. In her analysis of the formation of patriarchy, Lerner (1982) dismisses beliefs of a single cause or one historical moment when patriarchy was established. Many feminist scholars have analyzed and conceptualized patriarchal discourse from a different point-of-view; these feminist perspectives have challenged the patriarchal philosophy, ideology, and practice. Yet, the efforts of feminists toward understanding patriarchy vary.

Feminists and the term patriarchy. Generally, feminists are not in favor of the term "patriarchy"; rather, they prefer the term "gender" for a number of reasons (Bennett, 2006).

Relatively, the term has remained vague and conceptually it involves the assumption of a universal system of inequality. Barrett (2014) argues that the use of the term patriarchy evokes a universalistic notion of unchanged relations between men and women. Therefore, disuse and replacement of the term patriarchy provides better analysis of gender inequality (Walby, 1986). The disagreement of how the term patriarchy is defined, or should be defined, reflects the influence of men's role during the emergence and growth of feminist analysis of the definition (John, 2004). In a hierarchical system, gender oppression is based on patriarchal discourse (Walby, 1986). With this being addressed how Coptic women perceived the term patriarchy and how its discourse operated in the Church remained unknown until the voice of these Coptic women has challenged the notion of understanding patriarchy from their views.

Feminists have dealt, theoretically and politically, with the multiple forms of patriarchy as articulated within the diverse nature of patriarchy itself (caste, sex, class, Black women, race, community and ethnicity) (Bhasin & Khan, 1999; John, 2004; Mandell, 1995). Feminist theories, according to Bennett (2006), therefore, provide awareness and understanding of patriarchy in reference to its origin, diverse nature, and structures. For example, in the family, patriarchy influences women's fertility, sexuality, labor outside the home, and role and spirituality within the church. Feminism concerns the struggle of women to achieve equality, dignity, liberty, and control over their lives and bodies at home and in the larger world (Inhorn, 1996).

Since the discourse of patriarchy can be recognized in different systems and structures, multiple feminist approaches increase awareness and understanding of the patriarchal discourse and provide the appropriate strategies to abolish it. The various dimensions of feminist approaches help to locate the patriarchal discourse and structures embedded within the philosophical and political perspectives, including religious discourse (Janowick, 2008; King,

2011; Thompson, 2011). As one of the key concepts of feminism is awareness, the goal of the second wave is education for both men and women in order to initiate change to the layers of patriarchal discourse and philosophy (King, 2011; Thompson, 2011) embedded in the Coptic Church for many centuries.

Feminist activists are explicit in advocating for social change and challenging the traditional patriarchal domains that favor men over women (Bhasin & Khan, 1999; Korotayev, 2004; Thompson, 2011). Echols (1989) and Rao (2003) emphasized that social location defined the perception of reality and, thus, the approach that represented women's issues was determined and validated accordingly. Nevertheless, in the context of the Church, plurality is found in its traditional practice and patriarchal discourse; however, only the Coptic women may determine what they want to do and what best fits their own beliefs and interests as individuals. Some women, including participants in the study, may exhibit resistance to the patriarchy and others may consent to the regime.

Gender relations and the study of Coptic women in Canada attest to complex dynamics of the force of traditional beliefs and the clash of modern thought through which the role and status of Coptic women is enacted. Many traditional Coptic leaders view secular modernists as Westernized reformers whose paradigms and values threaten their traditional values. The purported Western values of autonomy, liberty, and equality have had wide-ranging changes for Coptic women's lives in modern society in challenging patriarchal society.

Nevertheless, in general, the existing feminists' record is deemed to be the only challenger against the patriarchal systems and structures. So, to question if there was any particular patriarchal structure or system that could be deemed as desirable to women or at least to some particular group of women was not only thus dismissed but it was not even given any

room to be addressed. Heinich (1997) indicated that there is deficiency in understanding when the attitude of the general public is deemed to be the only challenger on record. According to Heinich (1997), when arguments (e.g. related to patriarchal structure and system) are examined from a particular group's (e.g. Coptic women) point-of-view that is not only restricted to the general public (feminist's view) , the opinions and judgments are distinguished than what is deemed to be the only challenger on record. In light of what was indicated by Heinich (1997), Kazan (1998) and Messer-Davidow (2002) in some cultures a group of women may have relief from the patriarchal structure and system through their religious functions and beliefs. Richter, Räßle, Modschicdler and Peterson (2005) stressed that women's understanding of their own religion is vitally shaped by the way they relate to the records of their religion and how they practice their beliefs. Also, Bryant-Davis, Austria, Kawahara and Willis (2014) stressed that religion does not only inform women's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours but also their sense of connections to the Higher Power and the Angels. However, by viewing the feminist psychologists' perspective on religion, their focus has been on religion as an oppressive patriarchal discourse and religion as a beneficial experience for many women remained a dismissible issue (Bryant-Davis et al., 2014; Rayburn & Richmond, 2002).

Summary

The literature review indicates that some of the established Coptic traditions that contradict the biblical texts create duality and generates unresolved conflicts between the two opposing sides. In addition, it outlines the tendency of Coptic women to recreate their private and public images in alignment with the identity of modern Canadians, creating another duality and generating additional conflicts. In the context of theoretical feminist approaches, Coptic women are encouraged to be aware of the polarities, resist oppressive discourses, and incorporate

notions of liberation and independence. Dominant modernist discourse challenges the patriarchal paradigm in relation to women's status. The current emergence of multiple discourses in collaboration with alternative paradigms maps, shapes, and defines what may be the future of a promising new discourse for Coptic women's lives. On the other hand, what the Coptic women's lived experiences evaluated in such systems remained an unanswered question until the Coptic women voiced their views on the patriarchal system and structures of their Church through this study. However, the unfolded lived experiences of Coptic women in their Coptic Church in this study describe their reality as they live it. Such descriptions pervade many aspects of knowledge for scholarship and infuse some of the misunderstandings of the meaning of and the relationships between Coptic women and their Coptic Church presented in chapter four.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

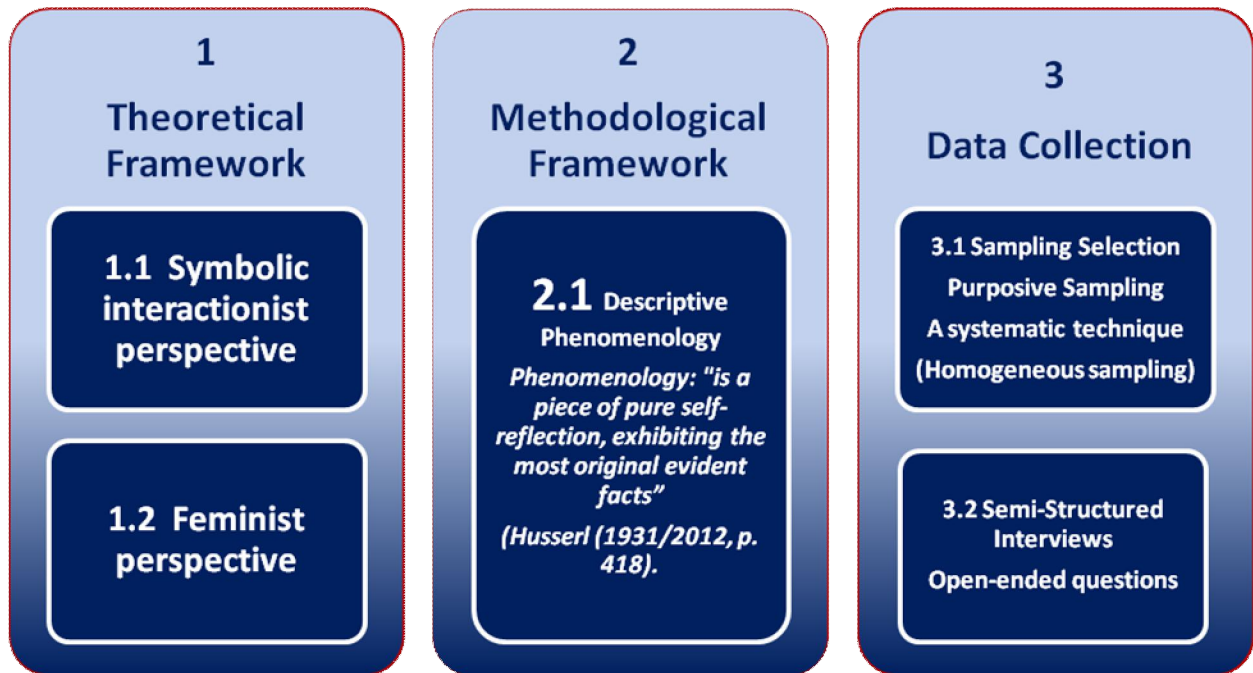


Table 1

This research was a qualitative descriptive phenomenological inquiry that was informed by symbolic interactionist and feminist perspectives; it sought to explore the lived experiences of married Coptic immigrant women in the context of the culture of their Coptic Orthodox traditional Church's patriarchy. The conducted study aimed to uncover the meanings of those experiences from the participants' points-of-view (Cox, 2006; Englander, 2012; Giorgi, 2009). The researcher learned that meanings, description, and interpretation were unquantifiable realities of human existence (Berg, 2001). Also it was acknowledged that phenomenological research was aimed at the study of phenomena and its nature and meaning (Finlay, 2009). Moreover, the researcher was aware that qualitative methods were indicated if the researcher was interested in how description and meaning were formed and replicated within particular social, cultural, and relational contexts (Berg, 2001; Cox, 2006; Finlay, 2009). Furthermore, data

revealed to the researcher that the qualitative approach, a specifically descriptive phenomenological inquiry, focused on the participants' perspectives as they narrate their lived experiences, a context in which their narratives highlight the meanings (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the researcher was informed that qualitative research could provide rich data and understanding of complex social phenomena or issues (Creswell, 2007; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln, 1995; Padgett, 1998).

Moustakas (1994) emphasized that the challenge is to elucidate the phenomenon in relation to its constituents and possible meanings. The meaning of a phenomenon, as discussed by Husserl (1931/2012) and Moustakas (1994), is in the act of experiencing it regardless of whether the object exists or not. Acts are intentional experiences; experiences are the combination of the outward appearance of the objects, or how they look in the real world, and how they look inside one's mind, based on his or her memory, image and meaning (Englander, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology specifically deals with the descriptions of experiences; it is not about explanations or analysis. The data of experience, thus, is regarded as imperative in understanding the acts as they are described.

The challenge was that "there are many books with advice on how to conduct an interview, but none happens to be written with explicitly phenomenological criteria in mind" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 122). With this respect, Englander (2012) wrote that this issue "needs to be clarified in order to see how data collection and data analysis are interrelated in relation to descriptive phenomenological research" (p. 14).

With this in mind, data collection of this research was based on conducting an individual interview that would focus on the bracketed subject (Moustakas, 1994). As outlined by

Moustakas (1994), the organization and analysis of data facilitated the development of each participant's own textual, descriptive, and structural meaning of her lived experiences.

The phenomenological method allowed the researcher to investigate “the way things are experienced by the experiencer, and . . . how events are integrated into a dynamic, meaningful experience” (von Eckartsberg 1998a, p. 286). The researcher understood that the aim of phenomenological method was to examine the content of one's experience by preserving its essential meaning without inflicting external interpretation imposed by the researcher (Giorgi, 2009; von Eckartsberg, 1998b). This method aimed to elicit definite descriptions from participants and then analyze them for common themes. Based on this principle of the phenomenological method, thematic analysis was used to extract and organize themes that have the same meaning as participants' experiences, which was examined across the responses (von Eckartsberg, 1998a). Thematic analysis thus allowed the researcher to not only organize themes but also to determine if there were any overlapping themes that could be integrated into one fundamental structural definition (Cott & Rock, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Building a conceptual framework that is linked to the phenomenon of this study was an important guide for every aspect of this research. This research was guided by the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and feminist perspectives.

Symbolic interactionist perspective

Research interaction theory is used with qualitative methods for a wide range of topics to allow social researchers to understand the meanings of actions and interactions of a particular social group in specific situations (Blumer, 1969; Burke, 1980). The symbolic interaction theory is a micro-level orientated approach that focuses on human interaction in particular situations

(Burke, 1980; Stryker, 1994). The symbolic interaction perspective, also called symbolic interactionism, is a major framework of sociological theory; it relies on the symbolic meaning developed by people during the process of social interaction (Blumer, 1969; Herman-Kinney & Reynolds, 2003). Historically, the origins of symbolic interactionism are traced to the German social science professor Max Weber (1864 -1920), who claimed that people act according to their interpretation of their developed meaning of their world (Anderson & Taylor, 2009). Upon Weber's death in 1920, the symbolic interaction perspective was introduced by the American philosopher George Herbert Mead, and later the term was coined by his student Herbert Blumer who put forward three basic premises of the theory (Anderson & Taylor, 2009). First, people respond to objects on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those objects. Second, their meanings of objects are developed from the social interaction they have with one another. Third, developed meanings are modified through an interpretative process while dealing with the objects encountered (Blumer, 1969).

According to symbolic interaction theory, society is analyzed by addressing the subjective meanings that are imposed by people on objects (e.g., situations, events, and behaviors) (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980). Primacy is given to subjective meanings based on the belief that people act according to what they believe rather than what is objectively true (Blumer, 1969). Thus, society is considered to be socially constructed through people's interpretation and social bonds are formed through interpretations of one another's behaviour (Blumer, 1969; Hogg, 2003; Mcleod & Lively, 2003; Stryker, 1980). For example, the symbolic meaning of smoking (e.g., cool or harmless) overrides the actual facts about the informed risks of smoking tobacco (Anderson & Taylor, 2009). However, symbolic interaction theory is criticized for neglecting the social interpretation at the macro level and for disregarding the weight of social

forces and institutions on people's interactions (Hogg, 2003; Mcleod & Lively, 2003; Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975).

The central theme of symbolic interaction theory is the human life as lived in the symbolic domain. Likewise, the core aim of my research was to focus on the experiences of married Coptic immigrant women as lived in the Coptic Church. Another theme addressed shows that the symbolic interaction concept is about culturally and socially shared meanings that are developed and maintained through social interaction. Equally, the aim of my study was to explore the shared meanings that married Coptic immigrant women had developed and maintained through their interaction in their Coptic Church. Based on the notion of symbolic interaction, language and communication serve as a means through which human reality is constructed and that reality is a social product of the human environment that emerges from, and depends on, symbolic interactions for its existence (Anderson & Taylor, 2009; Burke, 1980; Stryker, 1994). The purpose of my study was to understand the reality as lived and described by married Coptic immigrant women in their Coptic environment.

As illustrated, in an attempt to understand social phenomena, symbolic interactionists do not isolate the social group of people from their social world. Therefore, this approach was chosen as the theoretical framework as it was well aligned with the intent of the proposed study: to seek understanding of the meanings of married Coptic immigrant women in the context of their Church.

Theoretically, both symbolic interactionism and descriptive phenomenology seek understanding of the human experience. Phenomenology asks for the meaning, structure, and essence of a particular phenomenon for a person or group of people; it is about understanding the experiences that are associated with a specific phenomenon (Englander, 2012; Moustakas, 1994).

Symbolic interactionism attempts to account for common sets of symbols and understandings that emerge to give meaning to people's interactions; in symbolic interactionism the focus is on the particular meanings of symbols (Anderson & Taylor, 2009). In this context, phenomenology aimed toward understanding the lived experienced of Coptic women in the culture of their patriarchal Church, while symbolic interactionism offered understandings on how the culture of the patriarchal Church was perceived and altered by Coptic women based on their experiences.

Feminist perspective

Feminism refers to the collection of movements and ideological discourses that define, establish, and defend equal rights and opportunities for women politically, economically, academically, and socially (Gilligan, 2008). Feminist theory emerged from the feminist movements and discourses that strived to understand gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experiences (Price & Shildrick, 1999; Zajko & Leonard, 2006). In response to issues such as the social construction of sex and gender, multiple forms of feminist theories have been developed in a variety of disciplines (Messer-Davidow, 2002). Early forms of feminism were criticized for focusing only on White, middle-class, educated perspectives and resulted in the development of ethnic and multiculturalist forms of feminism (Chodorow, 1989; Cornell, 1998; Gilligan, 2008). Elaine Showalter (1988) (as cited by Code, 2004) described the evolution of feminist theory as three phases. First, "feminist critique" refers to the period during which the readers of feminist ideologies examined the notion behind literary phenomena. Second, "gynocriticism" refers to how women become the producers of textual meanings. Third, "gender theory" is the last phase during which the effects of the produced ideological inscription and the literature of the sex/gender system are explored.

An extension of feminist theory includes feminist theology, a form that reconsiders the traditions, theologies, scriptures, and practice of religions from a feminist perspective (Anderson & Clack, 2004). One of the goals of feminist theology is to increase women's roles among the religious authorities (Loades & Armstrong, 1990; Parsons, 2002; Watson, 2003). Additional goals include reinterpretation of male-dominated imagery and language concerning God and the studying of images and the status of women in the scriptures (Bundesen, 2007; Harrison, 2007). A branch of feminist theology is Christian feminism, a form that interprets Christianity in terms of the equality of women and men (Gemzöe, 2000; Harrison, 2007). While there is no uniform set of beliefs among Christian feminists, the majority agree that God does not discriminate based on gender (McIntosh, 2007). Some Christian feminist perspectives support women's ordination, deny claims of moral deficiency and the inferiority of women, and object to the poor treatment of women by the church (Beavis, 2007; Bundesen, 2007; Dagers, 2001).

According to feminist theory, the concept of patriarchy refers to the social systems, including the church, that reproduce and put forth male dominance over women (Pateman, 1988). Most forms of feminism describe patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women (Chodorow, 2002; Pateman, 1988; Reinisch & Harter, 1994; Tickner, 2001). Feminist theory also characterizes patriarchy as a social construction that can be defeated by revealing and critically analyzing its discourse and manifestations (Chodorow, 2002; Tickner, 2001).

Together, the rationales behind feminist theory, its extension forms, theological branch, and perspective on patriarchy discourses believed to properly serve as theoretical framework for the overall scope and objectives of this research, as the literature presented outlines that feminist theory works to understand the character of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experiences. Similarly, the focus of this research study was aimed to examine the

social role of married Coptic immigrant women and their lived experiences in the Coptic Church; the common ground with feminist theory was thus tied to my research. In addition, as outlined, multiple forms of feminist theories have been developed in a variety of disciplines in response to issues, such as the social construction of sex and gender.

Women's lived experiences are regarded as central to feminist research (Alcott & Potter, 1993). Phenomenology pays tribute to the importance of researching women's own personal experience, knowledge and description of meaning in data analysis (Pascal, Johnson, Dore, & Trainor, 2011). According to Pascal et al. (2011), phenomenological methodology, such as descriptive phenomenological studies, incorporated feminist principles in order to facilitate the research process in understanding their experiences.

Methodological Framework

Paradigms and Approaches Overview

As more questions emerged concerning the focus of inquiry, the exploration of the methodologies that emphasized description and meaning, such as qualitative phenomenological methods, were more appreciated than prediction and measurement (Ashworth, 1993; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Garza, 2007; Moran, 2000). The increased value of phenomenological description and meaning was viewed as a dynamic movement toward understanding the experiences as they were lived (Ashworth, 2003, 2006; Giorgi, 1989; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Laverly, 2003). Moving his attention from mathematics to phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) saw phenomenology as the essential inquiry of lived experience (Garza, 2007; van Manen, 1997a) that placed emphasis on the experiences as they were lived by an individual. The world or reality is not separate from the experiences lived by the individual (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). The phenomenological method was believed

by the researcher to be constructive when linked to a phenomenological philosophy or theory (Finlay & Madill, 2009; Garza, 2007; Giorgi, 1985a, 1985b; King, Finlay, Ashworth, Smith, Langdridge, & Butt, 2008).

Based on this brief overview of the descriptive phenomenological inquiry, it was appropriate to choose it in conjunction with symbolic interactionist and feminist perspectives in searching for the meanings of the lived experiences of married Coptic immigrant women in the context of their Church.

Theoretical Foundations of Descriptive Phenomenological Study

The application of phenomenological research studies social and cultural phenomena, as well as their nature and meanings (Finlay, 2003, 2005; Halling & Leifer, 1991). It focuses on how objects appear to people through their lived experiences and in their consciousness; the phenomenological inquiry attempts to provide a rich textured description of those lived experiences (Ashworth, 2006; Garza, 2007; Langdridge, 2007). Edmund Husserl founded the concept of phenomenology in the early years of the 20th Century, and it was later expanded upon by a circle of his university followers in Germany and then spread to France and the United States (Langdridge, 2007; Zahavi, 2003).

Husserl's concept of phenomenology is concerned with the systematic reflection on, and study of, the structures of consciousness in which the phenomena occur (Husserl, 1931, 1970; Moran, 2000; Zahavi, 2003). Meanings are found in lived experiences through the interaction of people and the perceptual environments where they dwell (Garza, 2007; Sparks, 2005; Todres, 2007). The lived experiences of the individual's inner world are pre-reflective; that is, they happen before being expressed in language (Nunan, 2003; Valle, King & Halling, 1989; van Manen, 1990, 1997a, 1997b). The meanings developed are complex and formed against the

backdrop of people's everyday actions and interactions (Garza, 2007; Todres, 2007; Vedder, 2002).

The researcher's job was to present knowledge as it is given (Ashworth, 2003, 2006) and to reveal the lived world as understood as ascribed by people (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003). However, it is argued that the researchers do not just report details; they also interpret them, and the details are contingent upon the research process (Fink, 2000). It was therefore important to be aware of and acknowledge the researcher's personal influence on the representation of the report. What is the experience like, what does it mean, and how does the lived experience present itself to the person are the types of questions phenomenology asks (Finlay, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Wertz, 1983, 2005). Finlay and Madill (2009) indicate that the challenge for the researcher is two-fold: how to help participants describe their lived experiences directly and how to present the dimensions of the lived experiences revealed.

The reported meanings by the researcher also emerge from the researcher's attitude and way of posing questions (Fink, 2000; Finlay, 2005; Vedder, 2002). Husserl (1931/2012) identified the concept of bracketing; during the process of uncovering meanings the researcher attempts to 'bracket' or suspend pre-existing assumptions or perceptions in order to present the phenomenon as it manifests (Finlay, 2005; Marion, 2002; van Manen, 1997a; Vedder, 2002; Zahavi, 2003). In this regard, Husserl (1931/2012) stated that:

Since every thesis and every judgment can be modified freely to extent, and every objectivity that we can judge or criticize can be "bracketed", no field would be left over for unmodified judgment ...the use of phenomenological □ποχή[epoché, suspension] ... completely bars me from using my judgment. (p. 59)

Bracketing is a process that is utilized in qualitative inquiry to assuage the possible detrimental influences posed by the researcher's preconceptions that may taint the process of the research (Tufford & Newman, 2012). The bracketing process requires the researcher to put aside how objects supposedly are and instead focus on how objects are experienced; the researcher needs to be open and willing to see the lived experiences differently from the way he/she tends to see things (Garza, 2007; Husserl, 1931/2012). Ashworth (2003, 2006) pointed out certain essential features of lived experiences as posited by phenomenological theorists; these include people's sense of selfhood, embodiment, sociality, spatiality, ideology, temporality, communication, and mood. Dahlberg et al. (2008) stressed that the researcher needs to consider these interlinked 'fractions' and use them as a lens to view the given data. Smith and Osborn (2003) and Sparks (2005) articulated that it is the researcher's task to bring out these dimensions and uncover the structure that is socially communicated and experienced by the individuals' particular ways.

Despite its challenges, the descriptive phenomenological theoretical framework method was well-suited for this research to uncover the meanings of the lived experiences of married Coptic immigrant women in their Church culture. Overall, the essence of descriptive phenomenological inquiry concerns the underlying meaning of the lived experiences of participants as they describe their experiences (Ihde, 1998; Sparks, 2005; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Descriptive phenomenological inquiry provides a holistic account of the factors of lived experiences of participants (Sparks, 2005). Within descriptive phenomenology the researcher's role is to reveal essential general meaning structures of the phenomenon that is in question. While phenomenological researchers attempt to describe rather than to explain, when they proceed reflectively they go beyond explicit expressed meanings in order to access implicit

dimensions, a process that can generate uncertainty (Todres, 2005; Marion, 2002; Smith & Osbourn, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). Giorgi (1986) cautions that phenomenological researchers need to maintain the richness and form of the data as given to them. In order to see the phenomena clearly, Husserl proposed that researchers need to suspend their own judgment and beliefs and open their eyes to the work at hand (Osborne, 1994).

An Exclusive View into the Scenery

This next section aims to present the process of data collection prior to which it is my intent to briefly reflect on my experience specifically in applying the descriptive phenomenological method. This reflection is not about a record of what I executed and how I did so during the process. Rather, in an attempt to control my values, thoughts and biases my constant aim was consciously to acknowledge them. So, while I tried to be engaged with each participant I kept my assumptions distanced from what they shared. Even when I was asked by the participants to clarify the some of the questions, it was very important for me personally to learn about their lived experiences while maintain a dialogue format as much as possible. I have strongly realized and respected the trustworthiness of the method relied on what was taking place in the site where the research was being carried out.

Data Collection

Sampling Selection and Criteria

Purposive sampling. The sampling method chosen and used by the researcher in this study was purposive sampling and was based on who would be the appropriate individuals to participate in this study. So, such method began with a purpose in the researcher's mind and thus the sample was selected to comprise the group of interest and to exclude those who did not suit the purpose (Daniel, 2012). Selecting participants aligned with the research objectives which rely

on the researcher's judgment; purposive sampling is therefore a systematic technique (Daniel, 2012; Ray, 2012). There is a wide variety of purposive sampling; each focuses on particular characteristics of the population that best answer the research questions (Daniel, 2012; Patton, 1990, 2002; Ray, 2012). Of these types, homogeneous sampling, which, according to Ray (2012), is a technique that aims to achieve a sample such as Coptic women who share the same or very similar characteristics and background (e.g., Coptic Orthodox, immigrant, married) was used for this research.

Participant selection. Participants were selected based on characteristics they possessed that were of particular interest to the researcher's inquiry (Babbie, 2001; Daniel, 2012; Fetterman, 2008; Patton, 2002; Ray, 2012). It was therefore reasonable to employ purposive sampling, specifically homogeneous sampling, in order to gain detailed answers for the research question of this research. I selected participants who met the following criteria:

The criteria of the participants

- **Coptic Orthodox women** between the ages of 35 and 55, who described their experiences in the context of patriarchal structures (Walby, 2002);
- **Married women** were interviewed so they could describe their lived experiences in their Church and its structures, especially when they got married or gave birth. For Coptic women, any marriages outside the Coptic Church are not recognized (nor accepted) by the Church. In addition, any pre-marital intimate relationships or pregnancy are not tolerated by the church and are considered adultery. When Coptic women encounter marital issues they always have to resort to the church, as by law the Coptic Church has the authority on matters such as marriage, divorce, baptism, and remarriage (Shenouda III, 2001).

- **Immigration to Canada** was another required criterion of the sample to express their experiences in the Church in Canada as a contemporary society. On its site, Statistics Canada (2010) defines immigrants as: “persons residing in Canada who were born outside of Canada, excluding temporary foreign workers, Canadian citizens born outside Canada and those with student or working visas” (para. 1).
- As for **duration in Canada**, the participants lived in Canada for at least three years to experience social change (Aroian, 1990), and they had to be able to speak English.

Recruitment Strategies

Potential participants who met the sampling criteria and who represented the richest source of data relevant to the phenomena to be studied were invited to join this research (Morgan, 2008). The process involved the development of a carefully designed guideline for recruitment that was aligned with the sampling strategy to ensure the utmost data collection of the phenomena for this research (Eide & Allen, 2005; Morgan, 2008).

Ideally, I worked in close consultation with the Canadian Coptic Centre (CCC), community leaders, and gatekeepers who had already expressed their support for my research to develop the recruitment plan. The CCC, which was a potential location in which interviews were conducted, is one of the largest in Canada.

In addition to the churches, CCC consists of multiple buildings and facilities including schools, daycares, restaurants, gymnasiums, meeting and counseling rooms, libraries, and facilities for seniors and people with disabilities. As a potential location for conducting the interviews, CCC was an appropriate place in which women’s privacy could be protected as much as possible in a closed religious community. For the gatekeepers, I provided a full summary of the research proposal. I developed and provided guidelines and in the introduction I specified the

criteria for the potential participants (Woods, Ziedonis, & Sernyak, 2000). A brief recruitment poster (Appendix A) and a further detailed recruitment notice (Appendix B) were made available for potential participants to review.

The guidelines were written as sensitively as possible to the cultural contexts of potential participants to be recruited (Eide & Allen, 2005). It also reflected the researcher's awareness that willingness to participate in the study (Morgan, 2008), especially interviews, depended on how well-informed the participants were about the study, what was expected of them if they participate, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the full respect of their privacy (Woods et al., 2000; Young & Dombrowski, 1989). Therefore, I took full responsibility to inform participants of the nature of the study, helping them understand the research project.

The recruitment process also included an invitation letter that was handed out in a recruitment meeting that was held in the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga with contact information provided in the letter (Young & Dombrowski, 1989). The recruitment procedure took place after the consent of the Coptic Bishop of Ontario and then the review and approval by the ethics committee at the University of Calgary.

Formal informed consent was obtained and I clearly explained the research project to potential participants (Steinke, 2004). Nevertheless, I acknowledged that my status in the community introduced a factor that influenced both participation and responses. In managing my role, I recognized that the study was not about the title I held in the CCC; it was about my behaviour and roles I played while interacting with others to accomplish the research accurately. My roles in the study as a researcher were visibly identified to the potential participants and made sure that these roles did not conflict with my status in the community.

Demographic Questionnaire

Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire to gather the following data: gender, age range, marital status, city of residency, level of education completed, employment status, number of children, and status and duration in Canada. The demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) is essential to identify relevant characteristics of the population with whom the researcher is intending to study (Brace, 2008). In this regard, the researcher had to determine what characteristics existed and then included the group of interest and excluded those who did not suit the purpose (Brace, 2008; Bradburn, Sudman, & Wansink, 2004).

It is argued that respondents are prone to decline if given demographic questionnaires before the interview; therefore it is recommended that they be completed after the interviews when the researcher will have established rapport that will encourage respondents to be honest (Oppenheim, 2000). However, in the context of the presented rationales about the sampling selection and criteria, along with the recruitment strategies, I used the demographic questionnaire before the interview to ensure that participant characteristics meet the required criteria. Table 2 presents the demographic data of each participant who met the sampling criteria and who represented the richest source of data relevant to the phenomena.

Table of the participant's demographic characteristics.

Pseudonyms	Age Range	Marital status	Number of children	Highest level of education	Type of Work	Immigrant Egyptian	Length in Canada	Coptic Orthodox	Residing
Susan	45-54	Married	Two	Bachelor's	Pharmacist	Yes	>5 years	Yes	W. Peel
Mary	30-34	Married	One	Bachelor's	Teacher	Yes	>5 years	Yes	W. Peel
Martha	35-39	Married	Two	Bachelor's	Engineer	Yes	>5 years	Yes	W. Peel
Janet	40-44	Married	Two	Bachelor's	Teacher	Yes	>5 years	Yes	W. Peel
Gege	40-44	Married	Two	Bachelor's	Engineer	Yes	>5 years	Yes	W. Peel
Karen	35-39	Married	Three	Bachelor's	Physician	Yes	>5 years	Yes	W. Peel
Angela	30-34	Married	Two	Bachelor's	Engineer	Yes	>5 years	Yes	W. Peel
Georgette	45-54	Married	Two	Bachelor's	Accounting	Yes	>5 years	Yes	W. Peel

Table 2

Interview

Semi-structured interviews. Individual semi-structured interviews were the method applied for data collection to capture the meanings of the lived experiences of Coptic women within the cultural context of their Church. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit data and questions could be changed or adapted according to participant responses (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Seidman, 2006). Unlike the non-structured interview, which would be even less intruded upon by pre-set questions, in a semi-structured interview the participants could tell their stories with minimum intrusions from pre-set open-end questions that could answer the research questions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). In contrast to structured interviews, which used closed-ended questions, there was no fixed range of responses to the questions asked in semi-structured interviews (Hempel, 2005). In a semi-structured interview questions were asked in a systematic and consistent order and other questions arose from the dialogue occurring through the interview (Galetta, 2013; Leech, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher had the flexibility to ask probing questions for the purpose of clarification that were not initially planned. Semi-structured were in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to delve deeply into social phenomenon of Coptic women and to get a wider range of their experiences about it. The strengths of semi-structured interviews including the ability to fill a gap in knowledge that cannot be bridged effectively by other methods; elicit a diversity of meaning and experiences; delve in-depth complex experiences; demonstrate respect to those who give the data and value their point-of-view (Galetta, 2013; Leech, 2002; Longhurst, 2009; Seidman, 2006)

In a semi-structured interview the researcher prepared a written interview guide in advance and followed the guide based on the informed responses (Bernard, 2013). The interview guide, according to Bernard (2013), had to be specific in which questions were carefully worded

and topics were based on the research question as well as the phenomenon that underlied the research. In addition to the questions that were directly related to the research phenomena, the researcher was able also to use a selection of probes including active listening skills, in order to elicit further data or to build understanding (Englander, 2012; Giorgi, 2009). For example, a question may be followed up by a paraphrase, a reflection (e.g., It sounds like you were...) or by a neutral probe (e.g., Can you tell me more about what that was like?) (Englander, 2012). Giorgi (2009) stressed that questions that are part of a phenomenological interview should meet the criteria of description. The first question thus to be addressed is: “Can you please describe as detailed as possible a situation in which you experienced ‘a phenomenon’” (Englander, 2012, p. 26).

As a result of the degree of flexibility in asking questions and the dialogue occurring in semi-structured interview, such a method is considered a collaboration process between of the interviewer and interviewees (Galetta, 2013; Leech, 2002; Longhurst, 2009; Seidman, 2006; Zahavi, 2005). From a descriptive phenomenological method, Englander (2012, p. 24) outlined that: “getting a description from another, in terms of an interview, is a subject-subject relation and not a subject-object relation.” According to Englander (2012), “the phenomenon is the object of investigation, not the person, although obviously, a person is required to describe the phenomenon” (p. 25). The interviewer therefore had to evade leading questions in order to ensure the soundness of the responses as described by the interviewees (Englander, 2012; Zahavi, 2005). For example, a leading question such as “what was the main benefit of your faith?” was replaced by a question such as “how would you evaluate your faith?” So, the latter question does not lead the interviewee to provide only one kind of evaluation. For semi-

structured interviews, eliciting rich and relevant data depends on the interviewer's capability to respond to the information provided by the interviewees (Englander & Robinson, 2009).

Using semi-structured interview techniques enabled the researcher to investigate beyond what was already planned in order to clarify the meanings given by respondents (Babbie, 2007; Kvale, 1996). The open-ended questions (Appendix F) used were not limited or predetermined; rather, conversation flowed freely, several topics were discussed, and unplanned information was explored (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 2006).

One disadvantage of semi-structured interviews, as with many other types of interviews, is the potential influence of the interviewer; interviewee responses may be affected by the researcher's character (e.g., ethnicity, colour, gender, or reactions to responses) (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). In managing the disadvantages and limitations, some steps have been identified by several sources. Kvale (2008) outlined that researchers must be aware of the influence of their presence in order to eliminate, or at least minimize, any impact on the respondents. The researcher's role is determined by evaluation of the situation and is established during the interview based on a number of factors: preconceived notions, biases, and pre-existing knowledge about the interviewee's personal situation, culture, and any "avoidance aversion tactics" of particular issues (Chase, 2006; Kvale, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Conducting interviews is a complex process (Berg, 2001) and unique cultural phenomena interviews intensify such complexity (Fischer & Fontaine, 2011).

Interviews generally serve to access the unquantifiable reality of human existence (Berg, 2001; Friesen, 2010) that Holstein and Gubrium (2004) called the core of data. By using qualitative methods, particularly interviews, researchers gain an in-depth understanding of how

description and meaning are formed and replicated within particular social, cultural, and relational contexts (Creswell, 2007; Filip, 2012; Flick, 1998). It is generally agreed that interviews elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point-of-view and situation (Berry, 1999; Friesen, 2010; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Patton, 1987). For the purpose of my research, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format with each participant individually, who had the opportunity to share her stories and express her views and perspectives (Kvale, 2008).

Interview schedule and conducting interviews. As suggested by Arksey and Knight (1999) and Friesen (2010), careful advanced planning for scheduling and conducting interviews was arranged during the recruitment meeting. I informed potential participants about the possible times, dates, venues, and settings during the meeting. Identifying these steps were prearranged with the Coptic Canadian Center leaders and discussed in the meeting. While it was not culturally appropriate for a man to privately meet with a woman, it was commonly accepted that such meetings could take place in the CCC, where I usually meet with women for a variety of reasons. I invited potential participants to visit the meeting room to become comfortable with the setting (Fletcher, 1995). However, it was announced that if women think or feel that the CCC location might influence their level of comfort and intimidation, the interviews could be conducted at any of the local public libraries or coffee shops of their choice. As emphasized by Arksey and Knight (1999) and Friesen (2010), I ensured that potential participants were at ease and felt welcomed in order to ensure a positive initial contact before conducting the interviews. Each interview, as stressed by Brinkmann and Kvale (2009), was similar in structure, with each participant being given a similar opportunity to respond to questioning. The purpose of the interview was to explain to the interviewees a tape-recorder would be used during the interview

session, for which the interviewee's permission was obtained in writing, using a consent form that was read to each participant prior to her signing it (Kvale, 2008). Potential participants were informed that there was professional childcare at the Canadian Coptic Centre for them free of charge. An honorarium was not provided to participants; culturally, it would be considered disrespectful. In case any women got upset during the interview, counseling was made available for them. At the end of the interview each participant was thanked for her time and for sharing her experiences (Friesen, 2010). A member-checking was done during the interview process and at the conclusion of the inquiry in order to improve and ensure accuracy (Schwartz-Shea, 2006). Each participant was informed that the transcript would be brought to her so she could look at it and she would have the opportunity to make any changes.

Transcription. Each interview was transcribed in full. While it was indicated that a note that summarized the key points in the interview was sufficient for most qualitative research (Arksey & Knight, 1999), a high quality recording was used to avoid complicating the already difficult process of transcription (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Friesen, 2010). Before each interview each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym name for the transcript in order to optimize the protection of the interviewees' identity. I planned to hire a qualified data transcriber for whom I prepared a confidentiality agreement to abide by its terms and to sign (Appendix G). For protecting the interviewees' confidentiality, originally the plan was to hire a qualified professional transcriber from a reliable agency as suggested by Davidson (2009) and Fletcher (1995). However, the researcher decided to carry out the entire transcriptions of all the interviews to allow himself to carefully listen to the lived experiences of Coptic women. As the researcher was doing so, he was able to take notes in which he was able to take back to the participants for clarification and affirmation. Although that was a time-consuming task to carry

out, it helped him to expand and deepen his understanding that later shaped the themes for analysis when he started reading the written transcriptions as recommended by Lapadat and Lindsay (1999).

Timetable. I interviewed eight Coptic women, one participant per week. Thus, it took eight weeks to conduct all the interviews.

Reflexivity

In the process of qualitative research, the relationship between the researcher and participants has been critically examined and given attention epistemologically, methodologically, and ethically. The researcher's position and character is considered a central component in such processes, especially interviewing; understanding and reflecting upon the significance that individual private and interpersonal dynamics may have on the research process is vital (Fetterman, 2008; Ganga & Scott, 2006; Labaree, 2002). Specifically, the dual positionality as both an insider and outsider in the research process, particularly when interviewing within the researcher's own cultural community, can be multi-faceted and even more complex than originally assumed (Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990; Hellowell, 2006; Mercer, 2007). On one hand, it can give the researcher a degree of social proximity whereby social ties and cultural fissures are better recognized (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Rabe, 2003). On the other, illumination of the subjectivity of knowledge production can be impacted by the dual space; it can influence and/or break the objectivity of knowledge production (DeLyster, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). Inhabiting a dual space requires particular strategies in order to maximize beneficial results and eliminate disadvantages.

The focus of this section is on reflexivity; two major sections discuss the essential elements of reflexivity relevant to this study. The first section deals with the researcher's dual-

space as an insider-outsider or dual-role in this research. The second section focuses on the influence of the researcher's personal character and biases on the research.

Section One – Insider-outsider

This section articulates the potential advantages and downfalls of the dynamic dual role. Utilizing the philosophical literature regarding the dual role in the research process, this section scrutinizes the associated epistemological, methodological, and ethical issues of the insider-outsider dual role in academic culture. This section identifies the main aspects of the term “insider-outsider.” Afterward, core elements of the functionality of the term are addressed in conjunction with its benefits and risks. Throughout, this section identifies the probable and applicable strategies that helped to maximize the benefits and minimize the risk of my dual role in the research process.

The term “insider researcher” refers to the status of a researcher who is a member of the population that the research topic is investigating, whereas a researcher from a foreign country studying the same topic is considered an outsider (Fetterman, 2008). In contrast to an outsider position, with an insider status the researcher shares similar backgrounds, including cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national, and religious heritage (Ganga & Scott, 2006). In his classical discussion of the positioning of the researcher, Merton (1972) outlined that the notion of an insider researcher involves prior close knowledge of the community and its members. Conceptually, the word “community,” according to Merton, is considered a much wider term than an organization. In other words, possessing intimate knowledge as a member of a particular organization does not necessarily indicate membership within that organization. As a member, it is possible to better see the full range than what an outsider may see (Hellowell, 2006; Poppenk & Köhler, 2010). The definition of an outsider status, according to Hellowell (2006), is the lack

of intimate knowledge or familiarity of the setting and the people with whom the research is conducted. In their clarification of the researcher's positionality, Buber (1994) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined that the role can range from inclusive membership with the research participants (an insider) to complete stranger (an outsider).

In the qualitative research academic arena, there has been extensive engagement regarding the researcher's identity, as insider-outsider, in relationship to the community studied (Kerstetter, 2012; Simmel, 1950/1917 & 1950/1923). While Unluer (2012) highlighted that there are various definitions for the insider-outsider researcher, Breen (2007) explained that the insider researcher belongs with the participants, while the outsider does not belong with the participants of study. Belonging indicates familial origins or social roots within the community.

Literature surrounding the researcher's dual role. In qualitative research, being an insider-outsider has led to a wide range of literature debate (Hellawell, 2006), to the extent that the outsider is called a "stranger" and is encouraged to "go native" (Burgess, 2005, p. 23; Kanuha, 2000), while an insider's role is considered an "academic sin" (Hellawell, 2006) and "invalid" (Lewis, 1973, p. 582), and being "in the middle" (Breen, 2007) or "in between" and entails a dual role (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) wrote,

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand. (p. 123)

Despite the shared heritages (e.g., membership, language, culture, religion, and ethnicity) an insider may have with the participants, the researcher can be considered an outsider from different aspects (e.g., faith denomination, education, perspectives, gender, and sexual

orientation). Asselin (2003) pointed out that although an insider researcher is a member of the culture under study, the researcher may not understand the subculture. In this context, the following is a systematic review of the philosophical literature, exploring the nuances of the dual role in the qualitative research process.

Methodological views. The issue of a researcher's role in relationship to the group or area being studied is considered significant to every approach of qualitative methodology (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Relevancy is due to the direct and intimate role that the researcher takes on in both data collection and analysis (Bartunek & Louis, 1996). Regardless to membership status as insider, outsider, in the middle, or dual status in relation to the participants in the research, the researcher's status is a crucial and potentially invasive aspect of the research project. Asselin (2003) suggested that, for the insider researcher, it is important to gather data with "eyes open," supposing they do not know about the phenomenon of the research project, as an insider may not understand the subculture of members within their own culture. Rose (1985) concurred that "there is no neutrality ... There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you're leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you're doing" (p. 77). Some scholars have argued that the distinction between outsider-insider is an unrealistic dichotomy, as both an insider and outsider have to contend with similar methodological matters of positionality (Banks, 1998; Merton, 1972; Smith & Kornblum, 1996).

Epistemological perspective. The notion of insider-outsider status has a particular epistemological perspective: an outsider may not comprehend or embody particular experiences that come from different backgrounds, as an outsider brings frameworks that can restrain proper understanding (Griffith, 1998; Merton, 1972). The ascribed status (insider-outsider status), according to Merton (1972), requires an evaluation based on knowledge, including recognizing

limits and possibilities. In assessing social research, some critiques revealed that both the researchers and participants are involved in the research production (Griffith, 1998; Kirk, 1984; Segal, 1983; Serrant-Green, 2002). The same critiques demonstrated the need for assessing qualitative research from a holistic perspective, including types of knowledge gained, academically and non-academically, from the inside/outside role between the researcher and participants, focusing on the attached values of that knowledge (Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008; Serrant-Green, 2002; Smith, 1999). Feminist critiques of the dogmatic views of positivists, which once controlled academic research toolkits, has raised an important analysis about the stages at which data is collected, analyzed, and represented, as well as the illumination of the subjectivity of knowledge production (Rose, 1997). To this end, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) revealed the academic literature has embarked upon the epistemological foundation of social research.

In the social academic field, the dynamic relationship of the interview process is considered an area of critical reflection and is markedly examined, especially from the nature of its construction (Hample & Cionea, 2012; Wengraf, 2001). Researchers, according to Griffith (1998), cannot be outside of society; therefore, their research activities or objectives are striated with procedures to minimize the researcher's presence or subjectivity in the research. Rose (1997) outlined that the issues of the researcher's subjectivity and the power relations involved in the research process have been most skilfully illustrated through interviews. Largely, debates tend to emphasize the insider-outsider dynamic relation (Bohannon, 1994; Davies & Davies, 2007); negotiation and views surrounding the dual positionality in qualitative research widely vary (Banks, 1998).

Ethical concerns. It has become a major mode of inquiry and a point of intellectual excitement in North American education to pursue research inquiries within one's own area of practice or community (Zeni, 2001). The institutional board of ethics reviews research proposals and asks researchers precisely about how data is collected and what techniques are used (Anderson, 1998).

Beyond the reviews and advice of the institutional board of ethics, the researcher must also consider principles of reflexivity (Rose, 1997). For example, Williams (1996) suggested that it is necessary to examine the impact research has on the people whose lives are documented. Reflecting on power relations with people is a tactical approach suggested by Rose (1997). According to Anderson (1998), the researcher needs to acknowledge any emotional and interpersonal reactions that may become part of the data; this is especially relevant from an insider-outsider perspective, as the researcher runs the risk of being blinded by previous knowledge and preconceptions of the social group studied. In addition, confidentiality and anonymity is an ethical responsibility that may conflict with intellectual property (Tovstiadi, 2008; Wengraf, 2001); confidentiality concerns leaking of private information, while anonymity involves the identity of the participants. When the researcher knows the identity of the participants, the researcher has an ethical responsibility to maintain the confidentiality of those involved (Christopherson, 2007). Again, personal and professional knowledge run the risk of mingling and becoming confused by the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher could be inclined to discuss findings within their own social group or outside the group with fellow researchers, perhaps thinking that much of the data could be considered a collection of public knowledge in the first place. Thus, the researcher must have strict ethical conduct and awareness, and confidentiality must be maintained by keeping the recorded data safely secure from anyone

whom it is not entrusted to. Anonymity on the other hand is maintained by keeping the identity of each participant strictly protected by not linking their identity with the data gathered (Bjarnason & Adalbjarnardottir, 2000).

The capacity of the dual role brings forth benefits and conflicts; debates over such a status have revealed the complexity inherent in each role and has recognized that the boundaries of dual perspectives are not clearly delineated (Greenfield, 2000; Kerstetter, 2012; Maydell, 2010; Mullings, 1999; Unluer, 2012). In the field of research, each experience represents numerous combinations of the insider/outsider status under study (Unluer, 2012), including the proverbial “ties that bind and the shackles that separate” in the research process. The research may feel favourably biased towards the group in focus, or they may feel disconnected and alienated from them. It is vital that the degree of the advantages and disadvantages is assessed accordingly (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 405). For example, some debates have drawn upon power relations while others examined the impact on objectivity of the research (Herod, 1993; McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1997; Schoenberger, 1991). According to Mullings (1999) and Rose (1997), these issues, have been central debates due to their impact on the rigor and ethics involved in the research process. For example, the role of an insider researcher who holds an authoritative position in the research setting can impose power that may influence the potential participant’s decision not only to participate but also what to say. Two serious issues are raised at this point, one related to ethical dilemmas and the other to the trustworthiness of the data elicited. For example, if a manager of a job site conducted a survey of worker satisfaction with his own job performance and if in-person interviews were held, both the ethical repercussions and validity of the data are compromised; negative feedback could result in workplace conflict, so the worker would feel compelled to rate the manager in a positive light. Ignoring the capacities

of the dual role of an insider-outsider risks the integrity of the research, and the well-being of the participants. The researcher is ethically and professionally obliged to consider the many facets and consequences of such a role.

In the context of a qualitative exploration of the experience, the insider-outsider status is a central aspect in relation to cultural validation (Keval, 2009). According to Keval (2009), the existence of insider identity is connected with aspects of the participants' identity. The combination of the identity of the insider researcher and the participants shapes the research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000); with this in mind, Ellis and Bochner (2000) wrote that "my research is a part of my life and my life is a part of my research" (p. 417). For example, being an active member of a church for decades has shaped the researcher's identity and personal life, most of which has been devoted to that church.

Conclusion

The insider-outsider position required critical reflection and attention directed at the complexities and contradictions that encompassed the dual role the researcher inhabited in this study. He could not assume that the dual role of an insider-outsider would lead to greater proximity to the participants during the research process. It was also important to acknowledge that the dual role was generally beneficial to the research process; it conveyed a degree of social features of the participants and their Church that might otherwise remain concealed for an outsider researchers. Despite his insider position, this researcher had to have a degree of "outside-ness" in order to carry out research; this did not necessarily mean that the insider's perspective was reduced; rather, both positions existed simultaneously and came together to create a broad range of understanding. The insider-outsider position has benefits and challenges, though these have different weights depending on the particular conditions and intentions of the

research. Within his own research, the insider-outsider status allowed him to better communicate and understand his Coptic interviewees and to interpret the data as an outside researcher.

Section Two – The researcher’s personal character and biases

This section focuses on the influence of the researcher’s character on the participants and outcome of the study. The quality of qualitative inquiry relies on the researcher’s skills, beliefs, and assumptions, and is easily affected by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies (Chase, 2006; Friesen, 2010; Jootun, McGhee & Marland, 2009; Kvale, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Qualitative research criteria offer a means for the researcher to proceed precisely, but beyond scientific criteria, I believe that it is the responsibility of the researcher to account for any personal influence over the research. I am confident that I acted responsibly throughout the research process. Certainly, the criteria serve as a guideline to researchers to ensure the trustworthiness of their projects and findings; a personal fieldwork diary also served as an ‘audit trail’ during each step of the research process. An audit trail is a secure record that provides documentary evidence of the interview procedure and data transactions (Russell, 2007). According to Russell (2007), this process is required so that data can be traced and made accessible by the permitted users when there are concerns or questions as to its accuracy.

Personal Characteristics. Personal characteristics, preferences, and attitudes during the interview process can strongly affect research quality (Berg, 1995). As mentioned previously, the participant’s responses may be influenced by the researcher’s characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, colour, gender, or reactions to responses) (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). In my case, I am a middle-class, Christian Coptic orthodox, Egyptian-Canadian, heterosexual, single, male. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) explain that the interviewer’s characteristics could affect the value of the research, therefore, the interviewer must intelligently unfold and define his “personal packages”

(e.g., biases and presumptions) before the interviews. Upon assessment and identification, the interviewer must also learn to plan how to lessen the influence of personal biases (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). One of the cognitive biases is anchoring, the tendency people have to rely heavily on an initial piece of information, which is based on their point of reference and can influence the way they intuitively assess probability (Baron, 2000). Avoiding anchoring is difficult (Simmons, LeBoeuf, & Nelson, 2010), but it was not impossible during the interviews. The awareness developed prior to conducting the research enabled me to lessen my personal biases through practiced mindfulness.

Personal Biases. Thinking about my own biases led me to consider two components. On one hand, I saw myself as less vulnerable to bias; on the other hand, when I looked at my own blind spots, I found a number of personal biases. Such duality results from deeply rooted sources that involve my values, beliefs, and attitudes and how I conceived the values, beliefs, and attitudes of other people, including Church leaders. For example, I realized some of the practices of Church leaders were the product of social constructs that contradicted the Scriptures and led to the oppression of Coptic women, but was not necessarily perceived by the Church leaders as a conflicting practice. When I think of my social constructs there are two words that come to my mind, reality and knowledge. As an independent thinker, reality, to me is my value pertaining to the phenomena, while knowledge is the degree of certainty about the phenomena. As in Hegel (1807/2008)'s view, I can only know reality when I completely master the appearances (the phenomena), since the phenomena (the appearances) partially hide and partially reveal. Reality is the degree of my mental consciousness pertaining to the phenomena, while knowledge is the degree of truth concerning what is revealed to me about the phenomena. Hence, this is a phenomenological study because of my mental focus on the phenomena I delved. The

interrelation between the two words (reality and knowledge) is what constructs, reconstructs, and deconstructs my social constructs and beliefs. As a Christian and professional social worker, my background allows me to see contradictions in each discipline; some practices in the Church disagree with the course of knowledge in my professional field and vice versa. I believe that the knowledge I have gained about the Scripture does not disagree with, or violate, my ethics and performance as a professional, rather, it strengthens both. For example, even though I ideologically disagree with a particular faith or religion, personally and professionally, I still help its individuals and groups to the utmost of my ability. I believe the Bible is the communicated word of God, which inspires me to act and sacrifice myself for others. The Bible can be misinterpreted if its reader misses its full portrait, resulting in beliefs (and actions) that contradict the Scripture. From a personal perspective and scientific basis, gender physiological differences exist to fulfill human needs; likewise, in the Church, each member has his or her own role to fulfill. I strongly believe the Bible is rich in Scripture leadership roles for many women, excluding the priesthood; women in the Coptic Church have leadership roles that men cannot fulfill. My beliefs about patriarchy in the Coptic Church, as defined by the Scripture, in which I believe, but is not based on the negative structure designed and carried out by men, including some of the Church priests or Coptic philosophers. According to the Scripture, patriarchy is about the pattern of salvation defined by God for all people, men and women, which differs from the patriarchal pattern structured by men. Regardless of any of my personal biases, beliefs, values, faith, thoughts, and views, I have the confidence to state that, to the best of my knowledge and capability, I have held my biases in check for the purposes of interviewing the participants and analyzing the data.

Personal cognitive bias. My personal cognitive biases include some that may be difficult to properly identify, especially those that I have had for decades in a system of which I am a part of, including my tendency to think and respond according to my learned values; my dogmatic thinking to seek information that confirms my thinking; my tendency to place importance on a single aspect of an issue, because I think it is important; and my tendency to think that a harmful omission is equal to a harmful action. For example, to some degree I think that the Church patriarchy system may have a negative impact on Coptic women; while, this was not necessarily how Coptic women viewed patriarchy, I was eager to learn what their views actually were, thus, determining the value of a discourse must be left for the interviewees to do.

Personal beliefs and philosophical bias. My personal beliefs and philosophical bias include my tendency to discount ideas that contradict my own beliefs. When I tried to identify my biases that might affect interviewing Coptic women, I thought that I shared a common identity and philosophy with them; however, I tried not to use or present these commonalities in any way. I also thought that I might be influenced by my knowledge of the different views on the discourse of patriarchy that would, in turn, influence even the shared common philosophy. I had to give the same level of respect to all the interviewees, who had unique personalities and styles, situations, and needs. Once again, my view on the structure of the patriarchal Church that might have a negative influence on Coptic women was revealed to be different from their lived realities. An interviewee who shares kinships and characteristics with me allowed me to be equal (to have common characteristics and origin), and at a certain level to build from that perspective. It was helpful to review beliefs I strongly held and might contrast with the interviewee's beliefs, which I also had to respect. Identifying reasons for different beliefs was a helpful approach to

reduce personal biases; as I understood that my beliefs were right to me, I also recognized the interviewees' beliefs were right from their perspectives.

It is my philosophy that an individual's discourse tends to selectively and systematically locate the social and linguistic definition by which people tend to justify their own interpretation of meanings, including Scriptures. There are always inner motives toward social justice, to the extent that the issues of those who face injustice become my issues. The concerns that Coptic women have brought to my attention, in the context of the Church, have raised my concerns. For example, one of the issues raised by many Coptic women is about the ritual performed after giving birth to purify the women and the actual belief that women need to be purified. Another issue concerns the 80 days of purification if women give birth to girls and only 40 days if they give birth to boys; during this period women cannot receive communion or even attend the baptism of their newborn. In my view, and based on extensive studies of the issues, there is no compelling evidence in the Scriptures that supports this practice. It is my belief that Coptic women should not continue to pay the price for roles dictated by a male discourse that considers women as less than men.

Ultimately, I needed to remind myself, from time-to-time my personal biases would interfere with the competence of my role as interviewer. I required an honest assessment of my actions, behaviors, and communication; this strategy was done through personal reflection. In addition to the use of critical self-reflection, employing peer-debriefing was an important technique, including a discussion with supervisors and colleagues who held impartial views of the study to ensure the collection of valid data. In other words, peer debriefing helped me to be more aware of my own views about the data (Spall, 1998).

Conclusion

In light of all information thus far presented, personal characteristics and dual roles bring forth the potential for a myriad of strengths and challenges (Asselin, 2003; Kanuha 2000); this is also true of my own research. There are certain methods and interpersonal skills that I had to use in order to capitalize on the benefits and reduce the risks of the insider-outsider status.

Occupying a dual space invited me to question my social location as a member of the population of interest in the proposed study and as a researcher. In conducting a study with members of the researcher's own population (immigrant Coptic Orthodox people), instead of acting as a dichotomous key insider or outsider, the researcher's position was of both insider and outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As an immigrant Egyptian male, I acknowledge that I was both an insider and an outsider. As a member of the ethnic group that was studied, I recognized that the population was not homogenous; there were differences in gender, class, and education (Serrant-Green, 2002). For this particular group, the most visible difference between myself and my participants was that I am male; thus, I was an outsider in this area, perhaps more significantly than others. Being an insider, however, as an Egyptian-Canadian immigrant with a Coptic background, enhanced my understanding of the population in a way that might not be accessible to other researchers (Kanuha, 2000).

Data Analysis

Analysis raises the raw data up through levels of conceptualization (Wetcher-Hendricks, 2011). Data from each interviewee was collected through digitally recorded interviews (and written notes) and transcribed for analysis along with the demographic questionnaires. A coding process was used after data collection for the demographic questionnaire and interviews before analysis; the respondent's name on the demographic questions was replaced with an

identification code to maintain confidentiality (Cramer, 2003; Wetcher-Hendricks, 2011). In order to transform and model elicited data with the goal of highlighting useful conclusions, data analysis will involve multiple approaches and techniques (Mellenbergh, 2008). For the nature of this research, the data analysis that was applied was thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used form of analysis in qualitative inquiry when data is analyzed according to themes (Guest, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1994). In doing phenomenological analysis, Giorgi (2009) outlined that the researcher needs to look for unity and constancy in the diverse described experiences, and thus spotting themes is an incipient presence to the essential aspects of the phenomena. As well, in descriptive phenomenology, analysis entails categorization of the meanings formed into themes that are common to all participants (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Thematic analysis highlights patterns or themes across the sets of data that are important to describe the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006), that are specifically associated with the research question, and that become the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1970), and Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald (1988) (as cited by Wojnar & Swanson, 2007), outlined four essential steps to be considered in descriptive phenomenological inquiry data analyses. These include bracketing, analyzing, intuiting, and describing.

Table 3 summarizes these four steps of descriptive phenomenology method of analysis and the purpose of each step:

Steps of analysis	Purpose
1-Bracketing	Attaining the state of transcendental subjectivity
2-Analyzing	Involving the researcher’s reflections, debriefing and discussing findings
3-Intuiting	Remaining open to the reality of another’s experience
4-Describing	Identifying the true structure and meaning of the phenomenon

Table 3

According to Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1970), and Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald (1988) (as cited in Wojnar & Swanson, 2001), these four steps are outlined as important in the descriptive phenomenology method of inquiry. While each of these four steps is considered a distinct component of descriptive, the entire process of data analysis, entails a blend of these four steps in order to generate a true understanding of the phenomenon (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Bracketing. Bracketing is an effort made by researcher in attempt to reach a transcendental subjectivity state by putting aside pre-existing knowledge and/or preconceptions about the phenomena (Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004). The researcher persistently maintained a sense of caution about what role his personal bias might have played when analyzing the collected data.

Analyzing. Analysing involves the researcher’s reflective notes, debriefing and discussion of findings with other professionals who are expert in phenomenological methods, and other professionals who are familiar with the Coptic culture and faith as well as with the participants (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Therefore, analyzing in this research in order to ensure rigorous analysis of data was accomplished in ten steps:

- 1- I read the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon over and over again while I was listening to the recorded voice of each participant at the same time in order to ensure accuracy and fostering comprehension of what was told. Although this process took me a few hundred hours that could have been saved if it had been conducted by hiring a professional transcriber, I personally chose to do it so that I could gain better understanding of the phenomena. Doing the transcription process was a great investment for the data analysis.
- 2- Then, I began to look for word repetitions, the frequency of key indigenous terms and words as well as the context in which the words were said that allowed me to understand what the participants were telling. More formally, I generated a list of all the unique terms and words in a text and counted the number of times each was repeated by using NVivo computer software. I used such information as clues for themes that I later developed and used in coding the texts.
- 3- Afterward, I started to carefully extract important statements pertaining to the phenomenon. Next, I started to organize the words and terms in categories that could data regarding the lived experiences of the participants.
- 4- Then, I formulated meanings for these significant statements or categories that were formulated into the themes that were included in the results of this study.
- 5- Themes then were integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon of the Coptic women participants.
- 6- The next step then was describing segments of text for topics that were compared for consistency in themes and their conceptual meanings. The comparison approach was based on the ideas that themes represented in the texts which were similar or constant

could describe the phenomena as recorded from given answers to the questions across all the participants.

- 7- Once texts were completed, then I took each transcript and the emerged themes to each participant to validate as each participant was informed prior to the interview of this step that would take place.
- 8- Upon validating the texts with the participants, I incorporated any missing information along with any changes or further data that were offered by the participants into the final description of the phenomenon.
- 9- I sought critique for my insights from methodological experts or other professionals who had personal experience with the topic I was investigating.
- 10- I remained open to the reality of Coptic women's experience, trying to innate a sense of what it was like to have lived the participants' experience.

Intuiting. Intuiting, like bracketing, concerned the importance of transcendental consciousness; the researcher had to remain open to the reality of another's experience. Intuiting was balanced with bracketing; an attempt to honor the insights about the emerging meanings informed (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). I remained open to the reality of Coptic women's lived experience, trying to innate sense of what it was like to have lived the participants' experience.

Describing. Describing is about identifying the true structure and meaning of the phenomenon of an individual's experience that they would be able to identify as their own experience (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). It involved the conclusion of the descriptive phenomenological inquiry in which the essential themes of the phenomenon were represented.

NVivo Software

NVivo software is rededicated qualitative analysis programs that was used to locate particular words or phrases (Corbin & Strauss, 2011), such as making lists of words, putting words into alphabetical order, inserting key words or comments, counting occurrences of words or phrases, and attaching numeric codes (Bazeley, 2007). NVivo is designed to support data from multiple formats including but not limited to audio, Word (which was the format), PDF, rich text, and plain text files. It also accommodates a wide range of research methods (e.g., phenomenology) and organizational analysis. The function of NVivo allowed the researcher to classify, arrange, and cross-examine data in many ways. For example, simply, it allowed the researcher to know how many times a word or a phrase was said in one transcript or among all the transcripts, and thus information was arranged and sorted accordingly.

As mentioned in step two of eight prior to this section, I used NVivo computer software to search for the repetition of words, key indigenous terms and words and the frequency of the repetitions. Based on the revealed data of the repetitions, I was able to generate a list of all the unique terms and words and how many times they were repeated from each participant and across all the participants. While NVivo computer software could be used to support data from different formats, I selected Word in which data was written since the vocal through audio format might be impacted by the accent of the participants who were all adult immigrants. The results of this process served as clues for developing themes and categories that I used in the coding the data.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness is a fundamental element of this research; efforts were made to ensure that findings reflect the reality of the lived experiences of Coptic women. A commonly used

strategy that maximized trustworthiness involved member-checking (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985); the researcher took the analysis back to the participants to affirm that it reasonably represented their described experiences and to ensure that findings were not impacted by the researcher's biases (Parahoo, 1997). After these visits, I made sure the data were carefully sorted and that irrelevant or inaccurate data (data that did not reflect all the participants' lived experiences) was eliminated. The four essential steps that are outlined earlier, include bracketing, analyzing, intuiting, and describing validated the trustworthiness of the findings. I also made sure, as much as possible, that my interpretation or beliefs did not adversely influence the given data and its analysis (Polit & Beck, 2004).

In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified the following four fundamental considerations that were given by the researcher of this study in order to ensure trustworthiness of findings in qualitative research: a) credibility; b) transferability; c) dependability; and d) confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is evaluating the findings to determine if they reflect a "credible" interpretation of the original data gathered to establish confidence that the phenomena are recorded according to the described reality. For this research, credibility was employed through the careful design of the research procedure and making sure that the actual processes followed the design. One of the advantages that served the credibility was the fact that I have been sufficiently oriented in the Coptic culture and Church for decades. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the prolonged engagement and involvement before conducting a research so that the researcher can become "oriented to the situation, [and needs to be] soaking in the culture" (p. 302), which is true in my case as I am a part of the Coptic culture. Prolonged engagement,

according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), helps the researcher to detect, evaluate, and better deal with personal distortions that can impact the data and to identify characteristics and elements about the situation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that “no one enters a site with mindless fashion” (p. 302).

The concept of triangulations through multiple sources is presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a technique that enhanced credibility of my research. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), multiple sources that I used were the responses collected from the interviews, which verified and confirmed the data.

Debriefing by peers is another technique suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that improved credibility of interpretation. In doing so, the research sought four peers who were interested in the research but were not part of it to review and critique the emerging interpretation of the data.

Transferability

Transferability is the possible range that the findings can be applied to or the possibility of its transfer further than the original project to other situations by other researchers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed that, while it is not the qualitative researcher’s “responsibility to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316). Due the unique setting of the Coptic Orthodox Church and culture it was the researcher’s role to enhance transferability through describing the research context and the assumptions that were essential to this research. However, it is the responsibility of a researcher who wishes to transfer the results of this research to a different setting to make the judgement of how sensible it is to do so in other context or settings.

Dependability

Dependability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is proposed as a framework to ensure trustworthiness of the data and the study. Dependability is determined by ensuring the consistency of the research processes by assessing how well data collection, data analysis, and theory generation was processed, integrated, and kept for external auditing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In replacement of the concept of reliability, the procedure of dependability encourages researchers to provide an audit trail, the sequence of documentation of data, methods and decisions about the research that can be available to an external inspection or an independent auditing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that: "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability]" (p. 316). In being consistent with what Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested, I ensured that all information consistent and dependable.

In this regard, I maintained the same process for data collection with all participants and data analysis with all transcriptions. I asked the same set of questions to each participant and followed the same pattern of approaching each participant regarding the data collection process. Similarly, I used the same procedure for data analysis with each transcript and across them all to ensure consistency. All recorded data including the audio of each interview with all the participants, the demographic questionnaires and the signed consents are all kept secured and available for external auditing. In other words, all the sequence of documentations of data, methods and decisions about the research are available to an external inspection.

Confirmability

Confirmability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), replaces the idea of objectivity, and also invokes auditing as a mode to demonstrate quality of the study. For example, the

researcher conducted a self-critically reflexive analysis of the methodology used in the study and measured how well the findings were backed up by the data gathered in order to ensure confirmability.

For this research, confirmability was enhanced through documenting the processes for checking and rechecking the data throughout the research, including a description of any negative instances, and data auditing to examine the potential for personal bias or distortion. Besides, using techniques such as triangulation, was a useful means of ensuring confirmability. In accordance to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability and confirmability are primarily achieved in the course of audit trails. In the inquiry of auditing, the external auditor examines both the dependability of the process and the confirmability of the findings. Developing a reflexive journal, in accordance to Lincoln and Guba (1985), enhanced confirmability of the findings of this research. This was accomplished in a diary in which the researcher wrote down and recorded personal entries throughout the research process. Reflecting upon what was happening in terms of the researcher's own values and biases was also documented in the diary.

Ethical Issues

One of the essential components that I was confident of was my ability to follow the appropriate procedures as outlined by the Ethics Board of the University of Calgary. A letter of approval was issued from the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Canada to conduct this research. As soon as I obtained the Ethics Board approval for my research I proceeded. A meeting was held in the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga, Ontario, to inform potential participants of the nature of the study and ethical principles. I informed potential participants that participation was voluntary, participants could withdraw at any time at no risk, and results would be reported only at the aggregate level. I explained that the information would not be revealed or

tied to the person to maintain confidentiality and the time required to participate. Participant consent would be required upon their understanding of the nature of the research and their willingness to volunteer for the study (Yang, 2000). It was unlikely that participation in this study would impose any negative impacts on the women involved; however, any concerns that might have arisen would have been reviewed and addressed accordingly to ensure participant safety and to maintain research integrity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Despite all the scholarly advice I received and ethical principles I honored, as well as the considerable materials I reviewed and, by which I was enlightened, when I came to write this chapter I was wordless for some time. Attempting to prepare and present the Coptic women's lived experiences in their Coptic Church into written text was the most difficult aspect of the research process.

Thankfully, my conclusion of descriptive phenomenological research is not primarily a matter of choosing what, or how, to write the text, as outlined by Husserl (1931/2012). Rather, it is fundamentally about using the descriptions of the lived experiences as described by the Coptic women (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003). By using the descriptions, I do not mean the technique to formulate a written task; rather, it aims to present the meaning and interpretations as given by the Coptic women of their own world and reality (Finlay, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Wertz, 1983, 2005).

Similarly, attempting to reflect on the Coptic women's lived experiences was another complex task including fear of failing to accurately reflect on the lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations from my own world and reality. Primarily, while reflection was thoughtfully carried out, the women directed the gaze toward their region of meaning to ensure that reflection was sound. Therefore, I brought my presentation to the Coptic women who participated in the research to review and ensure that the descriptions used were not colored by my own personal perspectives; giving me the confidence to conclude that this chapter represents the voice of the Coptic women's lived experiences in their Coptic Church.

In addition, the presentation in this chapter was the product of carefully formulated, semi-structured, open-ended questions that were asked by the researcher and the lived experiences

described by the Coptic women. In other words, this chapter is the reflection of the contextual dialogue that took place between the Coptic women and myself about the questions addressed and descriptions given in each of the eight interviews. Contextuality thus is an important component of the descriptive phenomenological research that influenced the dialogue and transformation throughout each interview (Finlay, 2003; Finlay & Madill, 2009; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Wertz, 1983, 2005).

Having addressed the difficulties associated with the presentation of this chapter, I concluded that my task relied on the process discussed in the previous two chapters about data collection and analysis. Relying on the processes outlined earlier served as a guideline for me to present the text. In this sense, I realized that my responsibility in this chapter, as outlined by Ashworth (2006), Garza (2007), and Langdrige (2007), is to present the lived experiences of Coptic women as described of the interviews I had with each of them and to reflect on meanings and interpretations as colored by their own reality and perceptions.

Therefore, this chapter presents the most significant components of the research - the identified themes and subthemes.

The Identified Themes

Identifying the themes refers to the data analysis process that involves the lived experiences of Coptic women in the context of the culture of their Coptic Church and developing five major categories that capture the descriptions of their lived experiences. Each category includes a major theme and subthemes; Table 4 presents the five categories with their five major themes and subthemes.

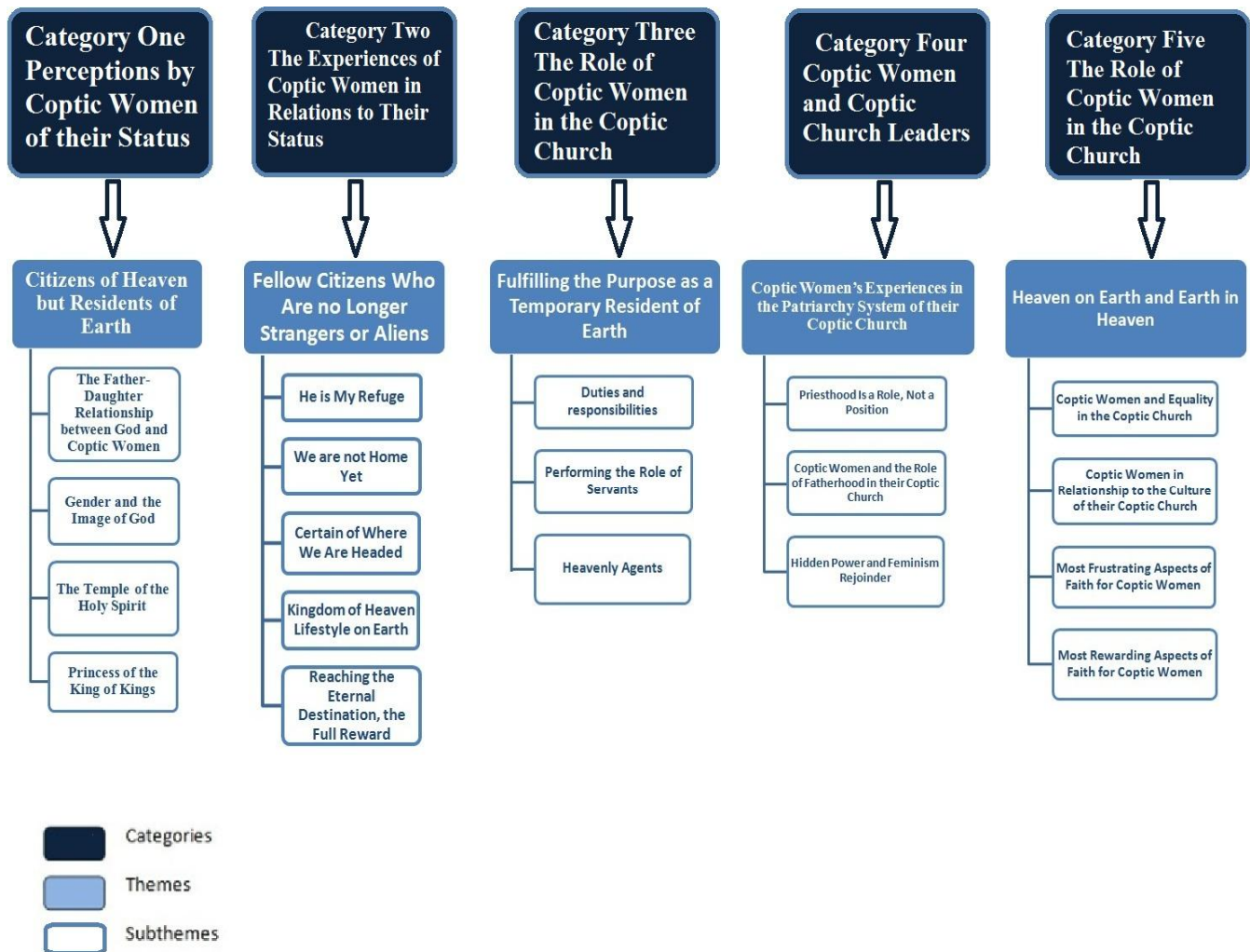


Table 4

Category One

Perceptions by Coptic Women of Their Status

The first category focuses on the major theme of how the Coptic women perceive their own status in both Christianity and their Coptic Church. In response to the first and second research questions, each Coptic woman was first asked to describe her own understanding of her status in Christianity and in the Coptic Church. In general, the responses of the eight participants indicated that there were not any major differences between their status in Christianity and in the Coptic Church. Rather, they all found that their status in Christianity was based in the Coptic Church. They explained that it was through the Coptic Church that their status was ascertained. The following section discusses the major theme and related subthemes within this category.

Theme One: Citizens of Heaven but Residents of Earth

With careful attention to what each participant said in the interviews, and through thoughtful reading of their transcripts, there was overwhelming consensus among the participants' understanding of their own status that led to the formulation of this major theme; their unique relationship with God and heaven as well as their purpose on earth.

All the participants defined their status as "children of God" and "daughters of God"; they are "equally created in His likeness" or "image" and "placed on earth to fulfill His purpose"; "God is their heavenly Father"; they are "on earth temporary to accomplish His purpose"; they will "leave earth" and "inherit heaven", which is "the kingdom of [their] heavenly Father". Therefore, they "reside on earth to accomplish God's purpose for [them]", but their "eternal home is Heaven", which they reach at the end of their journey on earth. Nevertheless, while most of the descriptions of their heavenly status are included as subthemes, the overall response of their status is that they are citizens of Heaven residing on earth.

The first research question asked each participant to describe their understanding of their status in Christianity. After details were provided and participant questions answered, each participant was asked the second main research question; similar to the first, but specific to their status in the Coptic Church. Noticeably, all the participants responded that there were no differences between their status in Christianity, in general, and the Coptic Church, in particular.

In this regard, Susan indicated that, “in the Coptic Church, I do not think I am different as the Coptic Church is the church of Christ; it is my understanding that there is no difference for being a Christian”. Mary stated that: “as a Coptic woman, in Christianity and in the Coptic Church, I have one status, the status of equality in God’s eyes”. Martha, Karen, Gege and Janet had similar answers with Martha stating that “my status is the same in the Church as in Christianity. I am equal to men regardless to the differences in roles between men and women in the Church”.

Angela and Georgette had similar ideas of their status. Angela explains: “my status in Christianity that I shared with you I have gained through the Coptic Church”. She added, “My status in Christianity has been granted to me through the Coptic Church and being a member of the Church”.

Together, the participants explained that it was through the Church that they were born from above and became citizens of Heaven. The relationship between Christianity and the Church in defining their identity as citizens of Heaven is inseparable. It was clear to the Coptic women, that the status they held made them equal to anyone, regardless of their gender or role in the Church. In her explanation about the equality of her status in Christianity and in the Coptic Church, Susan explained:

I am so favored and privileged as a child of God. I do not think there is a difference between a child of God as a man or as a woman; because I know Eve was created or came out of the rib of Adam. She was created second, but not the least. The Lord told Adam that she is a helper and that she is exactly like you. As a woman, I am created from Adam; I am not less than him, but I am a helper equal to him. According to God's wisdom, man was created first and I am created second, but we are equal; that is why as a Christian woman, I know that I am as dear as the man; I am not less than the man. I have everything in Christ. St Paul talked about many times that woman is not less than the man and that the man is not different from the woman in Christianity or in the Coptic Church.

For Mary:

I believe as a Coptic woman in Christianity, I consider myself as someone who is the child of God...I am not different from anyone, poor or rich, male or woman. I feel that I am a person who is dearly loved, because I was created in His image for a reason and a purpose.... I have an equal status.

Martha said:

I am the same in the Coptic Church as in Christianity. I am equal to men, regardless to the differences in roles between men and women in the Church...but this doesn't make me feel that I am less than men in the Coptic Orthodox Church...I do not feel inferior or any less than men.

In her description, Janet explains:

As a woman, I never have felt any difference. It is not like you can do this as a woman or cannot do that, because you are a woman. If you are talking about respect, value, equality, importance, I am equal to anybody else.

Gege elaborated:

...both, His words and the Church give me the true self of confidence that I am loved, valued and respected as everybody else. When Jesus came to earth, He did not choose Jews or Gentiles, or even the worshipers of idols; He came for everyone, for the whole world. It does not matter how sinful they are, He came for us all, sacrificed Himself for our sins to give the life to every single person on this earth. For me, this is the greatest love and kind of equality.

With her emphasis on equality Karen stated:

I am equally valued; I can see that in my mind; as you probably know, there are lots of relationships that value men and consider them more important than women. When it comes to Christianity, we are all the same. So, I don't feel inferior; I do not feel that I am less than anyone or men in the Coptic Church. This is actually not something I only believe in, but it is also indicated in the Bible. God doesn't look or value me as a woman or less than a man, which, of course gives me great satisfaction in my relationship with Him. As I see in different cultures that courts accept men's testimonies than what women say, men's words are counted against women's words, which do not apply to Christianity or Coptic Church.

Georgette describes her equality:

We are all created by God according to His image and that we are all His Children and He loves us all. So, I understand and believe that we, including me, as Christians are equal because we are all the Children of God; this how we are all equal, it is as simple as that.

The Coptic women in this research believed that they were citizens of Heaven who were just residents on earth for a purpose. For these women, their described and defined status in Christianity, in general, and in the Coptic Church, in particular, was what determined their purpose of life on earth. Although Coptic, they acknowledged that they were caught up in everyday activities, such as responsibilities related to being citizens of earth yet they still asserted that their primary status and citizenship were tied to Heaven. Based on their understanding, the women deemed to be given an equal heavenly status to fulfill their purpose not only on earth, but also beyond, after they departed earth for eternal life in Heaven, their everlasting home.

The given status had dual purposes: one is temporary, to fulfill their purpose for living on earth and the other permanent, in heaven as the eternal reward. As citizens of Heaven, Coptic women have a mission that they were sent to accomplish on earth and then they would return to their eternal home in Heaven. In response to what shaped their understanding as citizens of Heaven and residents of earth, Coptic women explored their lived experiences of their heavenly citizenship and what tied them to Heaven. As such, the following subthemes emerged in relation to their heavenly status.

The Father-Daughter Relationship between God and Coptic Women. In reflecting on the ties of their heavenly citizenship status, the theme of fatherhood emerged as Coptic women revealed that God was their heavenly father, they were born from Heaven and they belonged to Heaven, the kingdom of their father. Coptic women evaluated the fatherhood of God as beyond the pattern and qualities of the most ideal earthly fathers. In exploring their experiences under this fatherhood relationship, Coptic women emphasized that while their human fathers exercised

their paternal love and care to the best of their ability over their own minor children as protectors and providers, so did God, their heavenly father in His unlimited capacity and power.

Being the daughters of God, the heavenly father, the living hope of Coptic women was that God's promise to them was an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that would not fade away, reserved in Heaven for them. The inheritance was further reflected in the hope Coptic women had for what was awaiting them in Heaven. The promise of inheriting the kingdom of Heaven thus confirmed the legitimate father-daughter relationship and the legitimate status of Coptic women as the beneficiaries.

In light of the fatherhood relationship, the Coptic women participants called themselves daughters of God, the father. In their affirmation of their identity as *daughters of God*, each Coptic woman was unique in her experience and privilege as a child of God. In her description of the father-daughter relationship with God, Susan states:

As a Christian woman, I believe that I am a child of God...I am so favored and privileged as a child of God. I do not think there is a difference between a child of God as man or as a woman...He is my Father.

Equally, Mary stated:

I believe as a Coptic woman in Christianity, I consider myself as someone who is the child of God....God is my Father....I get this based on a lot of references in the Bible that show I am the child of God....I am loved by Him regardless to what path I am going through and that He cares and loves me a lot and that I am not different from anyone poor or rich, man or woman.

Martha valued her father-daughter relationship with God and explained the significance of such a relationship to her:

He loves me. It is a great feeling to be loved by my Father who art in Heaven. This is what shapes my status in Christianity and gives me the power. It means a lot to me to have a very powerful Father. So, in Christianity, when we pray we say our Father who art in Heaven. This means that we are His children. He is in Heaven above all; it is very powerful. I am praying to someone who is far away, but it is a very special relationship with God; it is like the biological fatherhood relationship, but it more powerful....I see that He is fulfilling every relationship in humanity to meet our needs. For me personally, as I lost my father, this relationship makes me feel that I am not alone or an orphan. So, having a heavenly father is a big deal for me...; it is a very special relationship. For me personally, I like to describe Him as a father; He is my father.

Janet's description of the father-daughter relationship stated:

Well, a lot of people see God as a scary God. I was brought up to fear God out of respect and love, but not out of fear, even my own family...In Christianity, at the Church, as well as at home, I was taught that God is approachable and that He is my Father and I am His daughter. ...; I learned that even in the Old Testament God always wants to be called a father....So, being His daughter is a loving and trusting relationship. So, I do things, not because I have to respect God and obey Him, but now I trust Him, and so I love to obey Him.

Gege also affirmed her father-daughter relationship with God:

In my own point of view, as a Christian woman, I am a daughter of God and that I have to act accordingly. As a daughter of God, I have to think that when I act it has to be in a way that does not make me only happy but also makes God happy.... For example, when people show negative attitudes, I try not to be affected by these negative factors, but these

factors are used like an opportunity for me to apply what I learned as a Christian and as being a child of God. As a daughter of the exalted God, I cannot lose sight of the strength I have from Him despite any circumstances...

Karen identified the father-daughter relationship as her top status in Christianity and in the Coptic Church:

My status in Christianity...most importantly is that I am a daughter of God... I also believe that I am here to enjoy that relationship with Him ... As a Coptic woman, my status is not different from the status of any man in Christianity.... I feel it is more a personal relationship that He is my father and that is what He wants me to call Him my father. I feel this is a very unique relationship with the creator. Unlike the relationship with biological father...., I look at Him, even when I struggle with a sin in my life, I go to Him when I have emotional needs or physical needs, or anything else. I feel that I am a little child that has no one else except to go to my Father and ask Him. There is not any fear in the relationship; rather, it is a very satisfying and fulfilling relationship...

Angela also perceived the father-daughter relationship with God as her highest status:

In regard to my status, the number one that makes me happy is that I am a child of God....This makes me feel very happy; it makes me very special that I am granted this status through the Church. Also, I am equal to any human in the Church regardless to my race, my age, my gender; being a daughter of God gives me faith that I can inherit the kingdom of Father, God, later on. I am also unified with Christ.

At the beginning of her response to describe the father-daughter relationship with God, Georgette invited the researcher to imagine her lived experience in such a relationship. Then, said:

My understanding of my status as a Coptic woman in Christianity is that I am a child of God. As Christians, we are all children of God and this is not only our understanding but it is our belief that we are the children of God.... Yes, of course, He is my Father, and that is why when we pray we say: "Our Father, who art in heaven". Who is that Father? The father is God.

These were the descriptions presented by the participants about their father-daughter relationship with God. It not only revealed that God was their father or they were His daughters, but each participant included her own meaning and interpretation of that status or relationship. While the given meanings vary, based on each participant's lived experiences and own understanding of that relationship, the common theme was that God was their father and they were His daughters, and that their father-daughter status was above all else. When each participant described her understanding of her status, they first identified their father-daughter status. Their description revealed values that were added to their status, such as the sense of gender equality, security, caring, and loving.

Gender and the Image of God. Another subtheme that emerged from being citizens of Heaven and part of the father-daughter relationship was that each of the eight Coptic women indicated that they were made according to the image of God.

All eight participants emphasized that there is a purpose for being created in His likeness that they had to fulfill. Their mission on earth, therefore, was to be God's witnesses through their deeds. Since they were created in the Godly image, Coptic women said they had to be God's representatives and act accordingly. The Coptic women added that being made in God's image indicated that they could do what God did (e.g., forgive those who harm them, pray for their enemies, and heal the sick); they acknowledged the sense of the power that was given to them to

act beyond their human nature. They expressed their appreciation for being made in God's image and the resultant gift of power. They said that the consequences for being created in God's image was that they inherited the godly nature (but not the divine nature) and that the godly nature had to be manifested throughout their actions, to represent God's caring, loving, and forgiving for all mankind. In her description, Susan said: "As a Christian woman, I believe that I am created after His image. I am loved, created, and brought to this earth to follow Him, to love Him, and to change, as St Paul said, until I mimic Christ's image". Like Susan, Mary also stated:

I believe as a Coptic woman in Christianity.... I am created according to His image; I am loved by Him regardless to what path I am going through, and that He cares and loves me a lot, and that I am not different from anyone poor or rich, man or woman. I feel that I am a person who is dearly loved because I was created in His image for a reason and a purpose.

Martha explains her of gender issues and the church:

"As a Coptic woman in Christianity, I believe that Jesus created me exactly like Him. ... I believe that in Christianity, Coptic women are equal to Coptic men in everything... I believe as a Christian woman I have all rights and the power to do anything.

In her description of being made according to God's image, Janet explains: "I strongly believe in the Biblical view that I am beautifully and wonderfully made and that I am created in God's likeness....I was created according to His image for a special purpose".

Similarly, as being made in God's image, Gege stated:

"In my own point of view, as a Christian woman...I am created according to His image and likeness and that I have to act accordingly. As a daughter of God, I have to think that when I act it has to be in a way that reflects my status as being the image of God".

Equally, Karen stated:

I think that I am equally valued; in Christianity, I believe we are all the same. Simply, this is because we are all created in God's image and likeness, males and females, equally. So, I do not feel inferior; I do not feel that I am less than anyone or men in the Church, this is actually not something I only believe in, but it is also indicated in the Bible...Of course this gives me great satisfaction in my relationship with Him.

In her description as a child of God, or the father-daughter relationship, Angela emphasized that the image of God status asserted that He was her Father and she was His daughter:

I am very proud to be a Coptic Christian woman and a member or part of the Christian Coptic Church. In regard to my status, the number one that makes me happy is that I am a child of God. He made me in His likeness; created me in His image, this affirms my status as His child and that He is my Father.... This makes me feel very happy...very special that I am granted this status through the Church. Also, I am equal to any human in the Church regardless to my race, my age or my gender.

Likewise, Georgette tied the father-daughter relationship to being created in His image:

As a Coptic woman, I am a child of God. As Christians, we are all children of God. We are all created by God according to His image and that we are all His Children and He loves us all.....The Bible says that God created men and women in His image.

Data in this subtheme indicated that the image of God status was granted to all the participants, leading them to believe that they were all equally made, loved and valued. Being made in God's likeness affirmed the major theme of their status as citizens of Heaven living on earth and further tied the participants to Heaven as their destined home.

The Temple of the Holy Spirit. Defining themselves as the temple of the Holy Spirit is another subtheme that emerged to define Coptic women as citizens of Heaven. While the Church was considered as the Holy place and Heaven on earth, the temple was considered the holiest of the holy; as based on their faith that the temple is the throne of the Holy God. Consequently, when the women described themselves as the temple of the Holy Spirit, they were describing the throne of God, in which the Holy Spirit dwelled.

Although Coptic women are not allowed to serve in, or enter, the temple (or the altar) they are equally sacred as the altar. The only difference is that the temple would be demolished one day, but the women would be unified with the Holy Spirit forever.

Once baptized, Coptic women are anointed with the Holy Myron to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. The sacrament is conducted in the Church and performed by the priest, bishop, or Pope, since administration of the sacraments is part of the ecclesiastical functions in the Coptic Orthodox Church. Mary identified herself as the temple of the Holy Spirit, a heavenly status by which she was honoured: “I believe that the Bible identifies me as the temple of the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit lives inside me. As a Coptic woman, I obtained his status through baptism and through the Holy Myron”.

Martha also defined herself as the temple of the Holy Spirit and explained how she attained that status:

As a Christian and Coptic believer, when I was baptized I was born from above and became the daughter of God. Then, when I was anointed with the Holy Myron, I became a temple of the Spirit of God, who lives in me and makes me holy. I believe that it is through the Holy Spirit that my relationship with my heavenly Father becomes strong and

fruitful. This is a permanent status... you never feel that you are empty; He fulfils your entire life.

Susan added that, in addition to being the daughter of God and made in His likeness, she identified another status as the temple of the Holy Spirit:

As a Christian Coptic woman, I have also become the temple of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit of God dwells in me and makes me a sanctuary for Himself, which means that I belong to God physically, intellectually, and emotionally.

In her description of her status as the temple of the Holy Spirit, Angela added a significant element of the implication:

Being a temple of the Holy Spirit, and I know that the Holy Spirit dwells in me...it was through my Coptic Church where I was anointed with the Holy Myron Oil when I become the temple of God's Spirit...Being the temple of the Holy Spirit is not only a status, but it is also the power of God that will remain in me and will rise me for the eternal life.

Similarly, Janet identified her status as being the temple of the Holy Spirit and that she held the power of resurrection for eternal life:

Christ promised us that He would not leave us orphans and that He would send us His Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of the Truth, to stay with us forever. Also, the Bible said that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us. As a Coptic Christian woman, I have received my status as the temple of the Holy Spirit through baptism and the anointment of the Holy Myron. The Holy Spirit is my comforter in life and guide to the Truth. By the way, the Holy Spirit testifies that I am the daughter of God.

Gege also defined herself as the temple of the Holy Spirit who was teaching her directly and that He would remain in her as an eternal companion:

God blessed us with heavenly treasures...made us worthy to be the temple of His Holy Spirit. So, this means He sanctified me through His Holy Spirit who is my teacher, my guider, my comforter, and my power....He enflames me to pray, repent, love, forgive, give, and act according to the Spirit.

Georgette also described herself as the temple of the Holy Spirit, confirming the father-daughter relationship with God: "Being a daughter of God the father was confirmed when I received His Holy Spirit through the sacrament of Holy Myron. This made me a temple of the Holy Spirit Who stays with me...forever".

Beyond being the temple of the Holy Spirit, for Karen, the Holy Spirit was the life giver without whom she would not have had a life on earth or be a daughter of God:

As a daughter of God, without the Holy Spirit I would be like a body without soul, a dead body. The Holy Spirit stays with me as Christ said; I am the temple of the Holy Spirit who gives me peace, comfort and He confirms my relationship with God, my Father.

All participants in the research identified and affirmed their status as the temple of the Holy Spirit. They also described the function of the Holy Spirit in them as the values of being the temple of the Holy Spirit. They valued the Holy Spirit as the comforter, life giver, and permanent companion who has the power of resurrection and eternal life. They all believed that the Holy Spirit confirmed and testified that they were the children of God. Again, the description of the participants of their status as a temple of the Holy Spirit is another confirmation as citizens of Heaven, although they reside on earth.

Princess of the King of Kings. Being citizens of Heaven entailed another status, but it is not an ordinary status; rather, it is a royal heavenly status. For Coptic women, who defined themselves as citizens of Heaven, they identified themselves as princess. God was considered their father, and God was considered the King of all kings, and they are the daughter of God; therefore, Coptic women understood that they were princesses. The Coptic women considered this a majestic royal status, and thus they had the kingdom of Heaven. While the kingdom belonged to God, as the women acknowledged, they believed that they were the legitimate heirs of that kingdom, to be crowned and glorified.

When each woman identified and described her status, she expressed that her happiness, excitement, sense of power and security, and royal privileges are greater in Heaven than on earth. Gege identified herself as a princess simply, because she considered herself as the daughter of not just an ordinary king, but the King of all kings:

I am so proud to be considered by God Himself as His own daughter; He is the king of all kings, humbly made me His daughter and that He is my father. Can you imagine how great it is to be the daughter of the King of all kings; this makes me a princess.

According to Karen, being the daughter of the King of all kings was beyond any description she could give:

Through Jesus Christ that we, His Children, all became princes and princesses...we are in fact His servants but He made us His children. He said that the Father is pleased to give us His kingdom. I cannot describe my feeling as being a princess of the King of all kings. Janet was not surprised that God, King of all kings, crowned her as a princess, because she saw God as a loving and humble father:

God offered Himself on the cross for me as a sinner; He did so because, He loves me and because He is a very humble. It is hard that someone sacrifices himself for a good person, let alone the King of all kings gave up Himself to give me life and make me a princess. For Georgette, being a princess of the King of all kings added value to her relationship with God and also let her disregard the glory of earthly materials:

When you reach the top, whatever is below becomes belittled. Christ was ascended into Heaven, set on throne of His glory as the King of all kings, He took all His Children with Him and made them princes and princesses. I am so happy to be one of these princesses; He is all pleased to let us inherit His kingdom.

In Susan's description, her status gave her comfort during times that she was not valued: "God alone loves me unconditionally. Despite my weakness and sins, He calls me His own daughter and installs me as a princess, princess of whom, of the King of all kings".

During midnight prayer services, Mary remembered God's promise to her that He would let her inherit the kingdom of Heaven, reminding her of her status as a princess:

Jesus told us not to be afraid because our heavenly father is pleased to give us His kingdom. I believe that my heavenly father is King of all kings... He made us princes and princesses. I considered myself very lucky to be His daughter.

Angela saw that her heavenly Father was incomparable to her biological father; being the daughter of the heavenly Father gave her the privilege to be a princess, since her heavenly Father is the true King: "While my biological father has limited capacity and resources, my heavenly Father's capacities and affluences are unlimited. His heavenly treasures are unimaginable...He the true King of all kings...Who crowned me a princess in His kingdom".

As an orphan, Martha appreciated even more the relationship with God, whom she considered the King of all kings and that she is a princess:

I lost my biological father...I relied on my heavenly Father, who fulfills not only the role of my father, but also beyond. He is the King of all kings as the Bible says; I am His daughter so, He places me in a higher status than His angels, He made a princess.

In contrast to the accountability of being the temple of the Holy Spirit, which required Coptic women to manifest such grace openly, the grace of being a princess of the Kings of all Kings was hidden. When Coptic women defined themselves as princesses, they explained that, “The king's daughter is all glorious within” (Psalm 45:13), a biblical verse, quoted by Janet. The rest of the participants expressed the same sentiment without explicitly quoting the verse. According to the women, “the glories within” referred to virtues, the good quality of one’s traits, thoughts, words, and deeds based on heavenly and biblical principles that God outlined.

Category Two

The Experiences of Coptic Women in Relations to Their Status

Similar to category one, category two consists of one major theme and five subthemes that are associated with the theme of the Coptic women as citizens of Heaven, but residents of earth, and the five emerged subthemes that were identified in part one. More specifically, category two focuses on the lived experiences of the Coptic women, including their meanings and interpretations in relationship to their ties to Heaven.

Theme Two: Fellow Citizens Who Are no Longer Stranger or Aliens

According to the participants, the status of being fellow citizens who are no longer strangers or aliens on earth reflected the changes that occurred to their status from that of foreigners to members of the household of God. Exploring the meanings and interpretations, the

Coptic women said that it was through God's love, redemption, and reconciliation that they became members of the household of God. The women explained that no one, including themselves, was able to reconcile them or mankind with God except through the works of Jesus Christ. The unity of the household of God would not come into existence unless the Coptic women were transformed by God's Holy Spirit and the works of Christ.

To the Coptic women, being strangers and aliens on earth signified that they did not have any status because of human sin. Prior to the works of Christ, Coptic women considered their status as strangers or aliens in the world, even in their native land of Egypt or Canada, where they immigrated and were granted Canadian citizenship. For Coptic women, the purpose of life was to be in one of God's households in Heaven. They explained that their experience in Canada was the closest parallel that deepened their lived experiences as strangers and aliens. As such, these experiences always remind them of their heavenly home; however, after the works of Christ, they were no longer strangers and aliens, but were members of the households of God, even though they remained foreigners on earth. The women clarified that they had no status on earth, regardless of the work of Christ, because their status has always been in Heaven through the grace of the works of Christ. Their lived experiences without status on earth added more meaning to their ties to Heaven. In addition, the works of Christ that transformed them as one in His households clearly defined their purpose as a stranger and alien on earth, but as one in the households of God in Heaven.

According to the participants, members of the households of God were relatives who served one another and shared with each other. The women said that being members of the households of God made them believe that difference and otherness among the members served their purpose on earth through their duties and responsibilities. With this in mind, Susan

explained how love and sacrifice were related and she considered them the main grounds for the status of the citizens of Heaven as members of one household that belonged to God:

Christ loves us. He gave up Himself for us, to redeem us, and reconcile us with the Father. Love and sacrificing are not separable... One is nurturing the other one's needs; you give and the other one takes.... You know if it is something you went through, you can counsel people from a lived experience... I do that with people and I hope they have the same understanding...that we are all related through Christ's love and cross.

Similar to what Janet emphasized, Mary believed that Christ laid out the pattern for those who believed in Him and were no longer strangers, but children of God. In return she had to help and accept all people as family members:

I believe that I have to help people and be like a role model for them, and be someone who they can depend on for guidance. So majorly, what I do is the kind of services that can help people to get closer to God....I feel that I am doing something useful or helpful in my life that can make a difference in someone's life, someone who is struggling or is lost or needs to reconcile with God. So it is very important to me, I do not think I would give up these services.

In Gege's view, the theme of no longer being a stranger was through the works of Jesus:

I believe that when Jesus came from Heaven to earth, He did not choose Jews or Gentiles, or even the worshipers of idols; He came for everyone, for the whole world, because He wanted to make us all one family. ...this is the greatest love and lesson I learn a lot from...I try to help and respect everyone and accept them as they are...I also learn how to be patient with people especially those who lack good attitudes or with poor thinking.... I feel that Christianity helps me to build up healthy patterns in life and thinking as well as

loving the “enemies”. This is the richness of Christianity that if people reach, they will feel that they have no enemies around them; they will have peace with everyone.

Karen indicated that God valued every human equally and that He saved them in order to reconcile them with God:

We all are important to Him because He came to save all of us, but I actually believe that He came to save me personally. So, I do like and enjoy that type of relationship with Him that He is my father...and that I am not a stranger; I always think of Him that way that He is my father... in Christianity, through Christ; we all are equally valued in His eyes, because we are all members of one home, His body, and that is the Church.

Georgette emphasized that her appreciation of God’s love, salvation, and redemption is beyond what she could express; it is through His love that she was reconciled and considered herself related to God physically and spiritually:

It is my belief that through God’s love He made us all one in Him. I believe that this unity came after the reconciliation that Christ made through His salvation He offered on the cross. We become relatives of one household and Christ is the head of that one family...we are not strangers anymore.

While the various descriptions focus on the subtheme that the participants perceive themselves as members of one family with Christ as the head; the added value here is the degree of closeness to God and the reconciliation with Him through Christ’s salvation. Sin, according to the Coptic women, separated them from God and made them enemies and strangers. In Christ, they all received salvation and were reconciled with God to become closer than ever. In addition, they all learned that as Christ made the offer to grant them this status, they had to help others in the same manner, unconditionally as written: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to

Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

He is My Refuge. While hidden bitterness could be detected because of illness, loss of family members, and tribulations that the women experienced, they took a different approach in their description of the theme of refuge, through which the bitterness could be seen implicitly. The eight participants mentioned that during hardships they ascertained where to go and to whom they could seek refuge while seeking a refuge reflected the level of threat an individual or group might experience; each participant described her lived experience with God as her refuge.

By identifying God as their refuge, the Coptic women said this enabled them to trust Him more freely. They acknowledged that they go through difficult times, illness, sadness, and tribulations. Yet, knowing Him as their personal refuge, they did not need to fear situations on earth or other people who threatened their well-being, whether physically, spiritually, socially, politically, or economically.

Susan described that while she struggled and went through a lot of hardship, she was determined, because she trusted in her source of power and security of the Lord as her refuge:

I struggled a lot; deep down...As we are the children of God, the hidden and seen armies are at the door trying to snatch and kill us...in Egypt all the time...but, the Lord is my refuge; I trust in Him....What happened in my life was a kind of transference; my satisfaction comes from the word of the Lord. I am really so thankful to my Coptic Orthodox Church; I think it is very Christ centered. I kind of transferred all my needs and satisfaction to the Lord. If the word intimacy would be used, I kind of find the Lord in every aspect of the Church.....When I experience hardships I always go to Church; it is

always open and...quiet in the morning...I go and kneel there where I feel the presence of God. This will be always my harmony and refuge; this is my fuel, this is where I sit down and shed my burden out of my shoulders, I get my peace and my energy for the day...I seek Him as my refuge I feel protected and get replenished.

In contrast to Susan, Mary did not discuss any struggles much, but when she identified God as her refuge, she said:

...my struggles are not specifically related to me as a Coptic married woman, neither have anything to do with my faith in Christianity or in the Church, I think I struggle in general with human beings. I definitely appreciate, and I find it very rewarding, specifically as a Coptic married woman, that I can seek God's help and protection. When I have concerns or problems, I know at any point I can go to the Church and I have Jesus who I can talk, because He is my refuge.

For Martha, as an orphan she found that God was her refuge and Father, who cared for and sheltered her during her tribulations and illness:

I see that He is fulfilling every relationship in humanity to meet our needs...as I lost my father, this relationship makes me feel that I am not alone or an orphan. So, having a heavenly father is a big deal for me; it is a very special relationship. He is my father and my refuge and my power.

Janet perceived God as her guard to whom she could run for protection, help, peace, and comfort:

..., a lot of people see God as a scary God. I was brought up to fear God out of respect and love, but not out of fear,...I was taught that I could talk to Him at any time and about

my tribulations, sadness and any issues I encounter, or I want... So, I grew up knowing and learning that God is approachable, and my refuge; He is my father.

Gege described God as her source of power and that He was her refuge and strength during difficult times:

I believe that I am strong by God and His promises and words; God is my power, protector, saviour; ...I am so proud to be Christian...He gives us strength when we confronted with many challenges in life. He protects us; as the Bible said that the Lord is my shepherd and my refuge, He is my power, I feel safe with Him...

Karen defined God as her refuge based on her experience that He is present during the troubles she encountered:

During all the troubles I encountered I experienced that God...alone is my refuge safe guard. He saved my life. I am delighted and lucky to experience His hands through my life during the hard times. You know when it rains, you need to find a place to keep you dry; there is no better place to be in during troubles except to with Him.

Angela also defined God as her refuge and strength her and for her family and thus, she did not fear:

From my experiences, I have learned that I fear not even if the entire earth is shaking, because He is my rock.... He is my refuge in time of distress and He is always ready to help me in my difficult times. I could see the strength and protection that He provides to me, my husband and my kids.

Similarly, Georgette indicated that God was always her helper and protection, and that He was the only one she could trust in protecting her and her family:

I am sure and always see that Jesus is near to me and my family during the times of difficulties or danger. He is my Saviour, rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the strength of my salvation, my stronghold as the Bible says; I am very lucky.

Participants presented God as their refuge; each tried to describe her own experience during times of tribulation and when she sought Him as her refuge. The tribulation, dangerous situations, and difficulties encountered led to more trust in God as their refuge. When they experienced hardships and prayed to God to intervene, they felt more secure that He was with them.

We are not Home Yet. Based on the faith of the Coptic women participants, in spite of all the glories the Coptic women claimed that they received, the glory of the final destination of the heavenly home was yet to come. Claims, being the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the daughters of the heavenly Father, as well as their ties to Heaven and holding royal status were preparations for the eternal home. According to their faith, Christ promised them that He went to Heaven to prepare the place for them and He would return to earth to take them into His house.

Being residents on earth, according to the participants, was a temporary condition until they reach home, the kingdom of God, their Father. During their stay on earth, their perspective changed the way they lived. Coptic women stressed that God wanted them to draw from earthbound pursuits until He ushered them into their heavenly home. Janet said that, “is an incredible promise of the final destination; I live based on this hope everyday”. For Martha, “it is my hope to be there; I have to hold on that hope that one day I will be with Him in His house”. Gege explains that “Nothing would be like Heaven, the eternal destination”. Susan said that, “despite that when I am in the Church I feel like I am in Heaven, but it is never like what we hope for, the house of my heavenly Father”. Equally, Karen states, “I cannot wait until I arrive to

my home once I accomplish my purpose here in earth”. Georgette also said, “Our final destination awaiting for us makes us disregard all the tribulation”. Mary said that, “kingdom of God is impermeable or unimaginable; it is saved for us where we live there forever”. Finally, Angela stated, “Jesus said that there are many rooms in the house of His Father that He is pleased to let us inherit”.

Once again, the participants not only tied their status to Heaven, but also their eternal future and life. Based on their descriptions, it was their greatest hope that one day they would be in Heaven once their mission on earth was completed. Their hope made them believe that no matter how they suffered on earth, their final destination is the greatest reward.

Certain of Where We Are Headed. While all the participants claimed that where they were headed was beyond any human’s imagination or thinking, they still held strong hope for what they did not see or know. They indicated that hope was the belief and faith in what one did not see; where they were headed could only be seen through hope. The promises of Christ and their trust in Him allowed the Coptic women to feel certain that they would reach their final destination after their journey on earth. In this regard, Martha said, “His promises kept me from having any deep ties on earth”. The same with Gege, “while the world pleasures in the corruptible treasure, my intimacy in Christ, the true everlasting pleasure is the incomparable treasure of Heaven, the home of my Lord where I will be with Him”. Equally, Karen stated, “every beauty on earth is meaningless in comparing to the place Christ prepared for me in Heaven; my hope in that is unquestionable”. Janet also said, “No earthly positions, power, wealth, or any other possessions can have a room in my heart; my heart is in Heaven where my treasure is”. As well, Susan stated:

My heavenly relationship with Christ let me have no ties or attractions to earthly materials or lusts; my eyes aimed toward one heavenly goal that is my hope that I will be with Him forever. I know once I reach home there is no suffering or illness, He will comfort me and wipe my tears.

Georgette said that while, “traveling from one destination to home does not require me to accumulate much of stuff, my final home in Heaven has it all”. Angela believed, “no power on earth that can change my direction where I am headed...no matter what the world offers cannot have any roots in my heart”. Finally, Mary said, “I know I came to earth empty and that I will leave it with nothing; why would I care especially when my final heavenly castle is beyond my imagination”.

The views participants presented reflected their own certainty and hope of where they were headed. Their hope and certainty made them believe that whatever was on earth would not let them shift their eyes from where they were headed. Noticeably, participants claimed that they were certain where they headed, despite that none of them saw the final home or could even imagine what it was like; reflecting the strongly held sense of faith and belief.

Kingdom of Heaven Lifestyle on Earth. In their descriptions of their lifestyle on earth where they are residents, the women explained that they lived in Heaven during their stay on earth through the spiritual life. By the heavenly lifestyle on earth, they meant their lived experiences of their relationship with God; these experiences included the states of spirituality that exemplified the heavenly lifestyle. One example was that God who is in Heaven came to earth in the flesh and as a result earth became like Heaven. Also, Christ, who is in Heaven, is present on the altar during every mass where they could see him and be unified with Him through the communion. As well, just as angels always praised God in Heaven, all believers praised God

on earth. Moreover, being the temple of the Holy Spirit made them a sanctuary for the presence of God all the time.

Therefore, the Coptic women in the study believed that the spiritual lifestyle on earth reflected how Christ taught them to act and how to be when they pray to him, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven”. They believed that earth could be like Heaven during the mass services, prayers and praising, as well as giving and forgiving. In relation to the participant’s experience of this lifestyle, Martha said that, “I experience Heaven while I am on earth. Every time I take communion I receive eternal life”. In her experience during the mass services, Gege described her state, “While I am among the congregations and we all praise Christ in one voice, I feel His presence; I feel that I am in Heaven”. Georgette invited the researcher to experience what she experienced by asking him, “do you want to see or experience Heaven, then go visit the sick people in the hospitals or the poor ones in Africa, or the prisoners, serve the seniors. You will see Christ, because nothing as important in Heaven as Christ is; to me this is Heaven”. In her description to her lifestyle, Janet indicated, “I experience Heaven during God’s visitations to me personally, during my personal relationship with Him; it is a stage I cannot describe.” Similarly, Susan said, “He lifts me up to Him; I feel I am in Heaven, it is a very uplifting relationship with Him.” Once again during the mass, Mary said, “every time I hear what the priest says during the liturgy when he says lift up your heart and we all respond saying we have them with the Lord, I do feel then that I am in Heaven”. Karen said that, “nothing on earth is alike to the moments I spend with Him alone during my prayers or reading the Bible. It explains how Christ let us experience what He said, that the Kingdom of God is inside you”. One of the experiences Angela shared reflected on this lifestyle through the

choir in which she served, “when we all sing with the entire congregation I feel the presence of Christ, it is like Heaven on earth; it is Heaven”.

While experiencing the heavenly lifestyle on earth was not limited to the descriptions presented in this theme, all the women participants concluded throughout the interview that they lived Heaven on earth. In addition, the roles they performed on earth and the purposes that brought them to earth, which they had to fulfill, were among the lifestyle of Heaven on earth. Simply, while they were on earth they acted according to God’s will and complied with His heavenly commandments.

Reaching the Eternal Destination, the Full Reward. For the women, living the heavenly life while on earth was like a prequel of what was yet to come; yet, the eternal life, the inheritance of the kingdom of God of Heaven, or the eternal glory, is unknowable and unimaginable. According to the Coptic women participants, however, Christians, including themselves, believe in the eternal rewards. Each one would be rewarded according to what was accomplished on earth. The ultimate reward would be Christ Himself and being with Him forever; although there would be glory in Heaven for everyone, all would be with Christ.

All the participants shared one core goal concerning rewards; Heaven, more specifically, Jesus in Heaven is their ultimate reward. Janet indicated that, “I am not looking for any rewards here in earth; to be with my saviour forever in Heaven, that is all I what want”. For Georgette, “I am sure He will reward me for fulfilling my duties on earth, I just want to be with Christ”. Susan talked about her awaiting rewards for her suffering, “I know that once I am done here and reach my final destination, I will be free from all sufferings; I will be also rewarded for what I have gone through here”. In her description of the heavenly rewards, Gege said that, “in Heaven there will be many rewards, while Christ is our ultimate desire and reward, He will be crowned for

what we did and what went through”. Likewise, in her expression of the eternal rewards, Mary said, “I am delighted that one day I will turn to be like Him; how awesome that is”. “Yes, the glories of Heaven is beyond what I can imagine, but the glory of God who made the Heaven is incomparable; He will change me to be like Him in Heaven”, said Martha. Karen described the final rewards, “OH WOW, when I think of the eternal life, I become speechless; I do not know what to say, it is not imaginable”. It was Angela’s desire that the eternal rewards be granted to every person and not just herself, “I pray and preach that everyone gets to know the Lord so that we all can have their share in Him; there are many rooms in His house, as He said”.

The ultimate goal of Heaven seemed to be a strong desire for all participants across all the data; however, the ultimate final reward in Heaven, as identified by all participants, was Christ. With this in mind, data given by the women testified that they did not have ties on earth including any earthly treasures, or pleasures; it appeared that they did not want to have treasures on earth. Yet, when it came to eternal treasure, all that attracted them was the incomparable treasure in Heaven, Jesus Christ.

Category Three

The Role of Coptic Women in the Coptic Church

The theme of the roles of the Coptic women in their Coptic Church has three subthemes that emerged as they explored the different roles they performed in their Coptic Church. Roles, according to the participants, were not about positions or titles that they held. Rather, roles as described by the women reflected the duties and responsibilities they carried out in fulfilment of their status as citizens of Heaven who resided on earth with a purpose. Therefore, fulfilling their purpose on earth is the third major theme identified in the data, as defined by the participants.

Theme Three: Fulfilling the Purpose as a Temporary Resident of Earth

This theme developed out of the responses and across all the data of the participants when asked to describe their roles as Coptic women in their Coptic Church. The eight participants claimed that God created and brought them to earth for a purpose. While reflecting on their roles in the Church, the participants indicated their roles were their duties and responsibilities for fulfilling their purpose. All the participants believed that God loved them and made them for unique purposes that He predestined and prepared the path they walk.

The participants understood that they had to live according to what God prepared for them to do. The details of where or how God led each participant varied, and God gave power and authority to each so that she could fulfill His purposes. They also believed that their destiny would unfold as they obeyed the daily prompting, direction, and guidance of the Holy Spirit who had clear and defined strategies for each of them. Defining the successful strategies, therefore, is based on their obedience of the Holy Spirit who helped them through the challenges they encountered.

The participants gave some Biblical examples to demonstrate the steps required to ensure the success of fulfilling their purpose. Among the examples given was what Jesus said in the Book of Luke (14:28-30, New Version) to illustrate the steps required for successful strategies.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will not you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and was not able to finish'.

The participants did not say the entire example; they did refer to it to show the importance of the steps required to accomplish their purpose. The participants also stressed that God led them in

steps, but not by leaps, so that purposes could be fulfilled successfully. Each participant believed that her purpose was uniquely defined by God; therefore, it was important that she constantly return to God and His scripts in order to have a meaningful life. According to the participants, the only appropriate person to consult, and through whom their purposes could be discovered, was the designer of the plan - the Almighty God and His Holy.

In this context, Mary stated that: “I believe God created me for a purpose or purposes. My role is to fulfill these purposes....This is very significant for me to do”. Equally, Janet explained that, “God has a plan for me on earth; He created me for a purpose. So, I believe that it is my responsibly to fulfill that purpose according to God’s plan”. Likewise, Gege said: “God brought me on earth...for a purpose. He also helps me to fulfill this purpose that God has for me; I am happy when I accomplish what God wants me to do”. In identifying the purposes for which she was created, Martha indicated that:

What makes my life very meaningful is the fact that God brought me on earth for a reason...everything happens in my life is part of His plan... So, when I married my husband it was for a purpose. When I got my two children that was also for another purpose. When I came to Canada it was for a purpose. Even participating in this research is for a purpose. There is a direct long involvement in fulfilling a purpose such as my role with my children or a short role like this one hour interview.

In her evaluation of her purpose on earth, Karen said: “God’s purposes give my existence meaning, otherwise what is the purpose. Fulfilling theses purposes is not only meaningful to me but also significant because I am doing God’s will”. Georgette said that, “I considered the purposes of my life on earth as talents that Christ is entrusting to and investing with me, so it is my responsibility to bring forth profits”. For Susan, “yes, God gave the authority to do certain

works; these assigned works are the purposes for which He put me in earth". Angela identified her roles as the duties she carries out according to God's plan to fulfill the purpose of her life:

I believe that God created me for a purpose; He has plans for me; ... I am trying to accomplish the purposes in my life. The main purpose is to glorify Him and preach His name everywhere I can. He also gave me a good voice, this talent He gave me for a purpose to praise Him and sing, which I do in the choir to send His message through.

The Coptic women outlined that they were servants and agents of Heaven. They declared that they were accomplishing their purposes on earth through the duties and responsibilities they had to perform. Thus, each had a role, or more, to carry out in her capacity as a servant. In this context the following three subthemes reflect what the participants defined and described as they identified their roles within the Coptic Church.

Duties and responsibilities. The transcriptions revealed that the women believed their duties and responsibilities were determined by their Christian status; as married Coptic women they believed they were helpers to their husbands. As wives and mothers, the women's duties and responsibilities were equally shared with their husbands. In their professional work each participant believed that she served Christ in her professional capacity. According to the participants, there are no outdated standards or confusion of their duties and responsibilities, as they are all defined in the Bible and similarly taught by the Church. In attempting to accomplish their duties and responsibilities, the women believed they were fulfilling their purpose on earth. In her description of her duties and responsibilities as part of God's plan for her life, Karen said:

It was God's call for me to be a helper for my husband. I help at home as wife and as mother. I also work full-time as a pharmacist to help financially. I pray for my husband,

my children, and even my clients. I make sure we attend the Church services together; their salvation and spiritual growth are on the top of my duties and responsibilities.

The spiritual life of Martha and her family were at the top of her priorities of duties and responsibilities:

When my children were baptized I undertook before God to be responsible; to make sure they learned the Bible, attend the Church, receive communion, build their faith in Christ, learn about Christ, Christianity, and our Church. I make sure they get the best education and discover their talents...these are my major duties and responsibilities...

Similar to Karen and Janet, in identifying her duties and responsibilities, Angela said:

The fulfilling of my obligations is not limited only at home, but also outside, where I work and serve in the Church. My husband and I always make sure that our children are nourished not only physically, but also intellectually and most importantly, spiritually. Both of us make sure that our children live safely...we teach them the Christian values and faith that protect them...these are most of my duties and responsibilities.

Her faith in God's plan encouraged Janet to give up her full-time professional job to accomplish her duties and responsibilities:

I believe that God has a plan for me. My duties and responsibilities are defined through His plan. I believe that leaving my full-time professional job to do home school with my two children is part of His plan...I have taken the responsibility to accommodate all their academic needs at home....I do help my husband... I am pleased to see my children growing intelligently and spiritually. God deserves all the credit, because He has been enabling me to perform my duties and carry the responsibilities He assigned for me to do. The fruits and blessing are very rewarding.

According to Georgette, her duties and responsibilities are placed by God and that she acts accordingly:

I have duties to do as a wife and a mother of three children...and, as caregiver for my disabled mother-in-law. I believed that Christ placed me in their lives for a purpose; it is my responsibility to fulfill His purpose for me. In my professional field, there are rules, legislations, ethics, and required skills to perform my duties, and it is my responsibility to bind my performance accordingly...in Christianity, it is my duty and responsibility to act according to what God plans and outlines for me to do. I always remind myself that if I comply with human's rules I also must obey God.

Mary described her duties and responsibilities:

It is my duty to do the Lord's will; I am responsible to carry out these duties whenever I am at home as a wife and at work as a high school teacher, as well as in the Church. I feel happy to accomplish God's will; this itself is a great reward for me.

For Gege, duties and responsibilities were not limited to any specific location or place:

I have duties and responsibilities wherever I go; e.g. when I am standing in line to receive communion, I help the seniors to take off and put on their shoes...to drive that person home, help someone who needs to know about Christ, visit a senior whose home needs to be cleaned and tidied, or needs laundry,...these are besides my regular everyday duties at professional work as an engineer, and at home as a wife and a mother.

For Susan, duties and responsibilities vary, based on time and place, for short-term or long-term:

The Lord sets His plans for me according to where and when I am. My duties and responsibilities with my two children years ago are not the same in the present time. My duties and responsibilities as a pharmacist in Egypt were different than being a

pharmacist in Canada. I believe when the Lord gave my new duties as a councillor, I felt it was my responsibility to get the appropriate education to perform my duties. Overall, God has a plan for every time and place where I am placed and He defines my duties and responsibilities that I have to accomplish.

Data showed common belief among all the participants that they were brought to earth for a purpose. Generally, all participants believed that God had a plan for each one, and it was their responsibility to accomplish their duties and fulfill their purpose on earth. Participants defined the first priority of their duties and responsibilities were to comply with what God wanted them to do during a particular time and within a specific location.

Performing the Role of Servants. The pronoun “servants”, the verb “to serve”, and the noun “services” were three common words used by all the Coptic women participants when they described their involvement or roles in their Coptic Church. According to the work of NVivo software, these words were used in each interview no less 25 times and up to 30 times with exception to one interview in which these words were mentioned 49 times. The women identified themselves as servants, and it is the main title they defined themselves by. There were many different roles, but they were all under the one title of servant. Each participant used the verb “serve” to describe her roles or the type of activities she carried out in the Church. The women considered all the different activities they performed in the Church as “services”. While in the Egyptian culture these three words have lost value in society and are now associated with belittling meanings (Shenouda III, 1982, 1997), it is a beloved term by which the Coptic women called themselves.

By defining themselves as servants, it meant they had to do what they were ordered to do; while this was not explicitly stated, their description implied as much. Regardless of the

activities, responsibilities, or assigned duties, each participant described her role in the Coptic Church based on her field of involvement in the Church. Some of the tasks participants fulfilled within the Church included, singing in choirs, teaching Sunday school, managing youth or adult groups, helping seniors, arranging fundraising, operating food banks, preaching about Christ, cooking and baking in the Church, leading missionary trips to Africa, South America and Canada, and running the Church gifts and book shops. Susan identified her roles as a servant:

I was serving in the choir of the Church; singing ..., scripting plays, participating in them, whether in playing or directing other youth or children to act. I serve as a youth leader... and junior high level of Sunday school...my roles through a very open-minded Church leader who was giving me always roles in preaching and going in society outside the Church, as well as serving the families of those youths. . Within that context, I started going deeper with these youths' lives.... I also started practicing counseling couples...I am responsible also for some cases with people who want to know about our faith and wish to be part of our Church.

Equally, in her description of her roles Mary indicated:

...my role is ... to serve and show people that God is there...most of that through my Sunday school teaching and services... I see myself as someone who helps out the high school girls as a group and also individually guide them and make myself available for them when they need me ... this is very significant to me... it makes me feel that I am doing something very important...that can make a difference to someone's life, someone who is struggling... I do not think I would give up these services.

As a servant, Martha defined the following roles she performed:

I am one of the Sunday school servants...I help newcomers.... I see if some persons need to talk in the Church, I go talk to them and make them feel they are part of the community. I am the family meeting leader...volunteering in other services...as a servant of God my role is to help anyone.... it does not have to be under a certain title to help. I do regular visitations to people with some needs...It is through this role, I feel I am serving Christ directly. So, my role... is to do the job God asks me to do, so I may help people anywhere out of the Church circle...

Janet outlined her services:

I serve high school girls class as a Sunday school teacher.... what I do with them along with other servants is take them on trips,...convention, do plays ... sport day,...Also, I would go with girls to special retreats,...have different topics to discuss, swim together... As well, I was assigned some troubled teens that required me to visit them on the regular basis..., I brought these teens to my house; we discussed the problems and how we could solve them...help them out to let them see themselves as Christian women and how God views them according to His words....I visited them at their homes, called them....I am involved in any service that comes up in situations that the priests trust me to do.

For Gege, when she was asked to describe her roles in the Coptic Church her response was the following question: “What do you mean by my roles, do you mean the type of services I do in the Church?” Her question reflects her beliefs that humility is the foundation of service of which she needs to remind herself. Then, Gege described her roles based on the services she performed:

I serve in multiple roles in the Church...in the kitchen preparing meals for kids and seniors, as well as for fundraising...I visit the sick members either at home or in hospitals and help them if they need. ..I serve...with a group of women...but, alone... I serve some

seniors...help newcomers...collect donations to the needy...ship the donated items to the Bishops in Africa... I do not need to have the position of priests to serve; services can be done based on the talents and gifts God gives me as a woman in the Church...I facilitate meetings for the Coptic bishops of African nations with many professionals...to support the services in Africa...I prefer to help and serve in areas that lack servants, regardless to the nature of tasks I do...It is good to be nice, passionate, humble, and caring.

Likewise, Karen outlined her roles:

In Church my role is related to teaching the children and high school girls in the Sunday school classes in the Church. As mothers are responsible for their children's spiritual life and growth...when they serve in the church they are still moms; they are assumed to be teaching the younger generation about God. Another role is cooking and preparing food for the different occasions in the Church - Christmas, Easter, the Passions week, or during the fasting. We also prepare food for prisoners and newcomers individuals. In Egypt, where there are people who could not afford to go to the doctors, I would treat them in the medical clinic inside the Church, in which I served the needy.

Similarly, Angela stated the following roles that she carried out:

In relation to my roles...the Coptic Church gives us many different opportunities in which I serve as a Sunday school servant..., in the Choir...to praise God...and preach about Him through the songs I sing. There are some cases assigned to me, including some girls who have...some personal issues; so I...visit them. I lead some private meetings for special cases. I am not restricted to perform my roles...wherever I have talents in performing some services I just do it.

According to Georgette, her roles as identified below:

I am a Sunday school teacher...as a Coptic Christian woman I deliver the Christian beliefs to younger people...I do also serve in the Kitchen...I am in charge of the gift shop in the Church... I am also serving in a group that is called HOPE, which means Help Others Prosper Everywhere in Canada and around the globe...I do missionary services, serve in food banks, raise funds for the people we help...I am on the Board of Directors of the Church Charity...and food banks, I organize...the Ontario Coptic Youth Convention where all the youth from all the churches in Ontario gather for some events...

Noticeably, each of the Coptic women who participated in the study appeared to have some leadership and service roles in the Church. Data showed the variety of roles played by these Coptic women within the Church were considered services and that the roles they performed were not regarded as positions, but as services that they performed. The above descriptions reveal that across all data, the women's roles were services in the Church. Services were not limited to teaching in meetings or Sunday school classes. The services identified seemed to have a wide range, from serving in the kitchen to serving as a board director. Exceptionally, Georgette, had roles that the rest of the participants did not perform. Regardless, to the range or type of roles each held in the Church, they all considered themselves servants of God through the services assigned to them.

Heavenly Agents. The theme of heavenly agent emerged from their roles in their Church and was a reflection of the Coptic women as Christians. The Coptic women meant that they were “representative of Christ” or “Christ” Himself; they had to act like Him and demonstrate that Christ was inside them. As representatives of Heaven, their role was to show people that they carried out the message that God wanted them to deliver to the people. For example, if God wanted them to reveal His love the participants had to demonstrate His message of love through

their own actions and services to people, and that the message did not necessarily have to be delivered through preaching. “Let people see your actions”, was what the Coptic women participants understood God wanted them to do; God did not say let people hear your words, actions speak louder. As agents of Heaven, their good actions would let people glorify God; this was what the participants tried to express through their role as agents of Heaven. Susan described herself as an agent of Heaven:

to follow Him, to love Him...and to change...until I mimic Christ’s image...He acts in me, but I have to allow Him to do so, because He does not force Himself on anyone...being His representative is to be like Him...follow how He acted.

Mary said, “I do what He asks me to do; I am His representative on earth”. As for Martha, “my role is to display Jesus’ likeness on earth as I am His representative, which is the greatest role that I carry out; I represent Jesus to everyone through my everyday actions”. In her description of her role, Gege said, “I am a small god on earth; I act as one of His agents or representatives to send His messages to other people”. Karen states:

I am a tool in His Hands; He moves me to where He wants to do His will. It is an honor and blessing for me to represent Him and let His name be glorified. It makes me wonder how God in His Glory lets me represent Him.

According to Janet,

When I act, I have to follow His way; I have to speak, try to act, and be like Him in every way. This is how I reflect His glory to the people I meet every day; the Lord called me to be His representative.

In her definition of her role, Georgette exemplified, “you know what an ambassador of a foreign country does, this is what God assigns me to do; I am His ambassador on earth and my role is to reveal His love and glory to mankind”. In the same sense, Angela said,

It is always my intent to show how God loves us and gave up Himself on the cross for us all. It is through loving, caring, forgiving, and sacrificing I can accomplish my role as a child of God who represents His likeness and glory.

In their own description and definition, each Coptic woman participant expressed that she had to act as God’s representative. While they indicated that God was in Heaven and that they were temporarily residing on earth, part of their purpose was to be heavenly agents on earth. Based on their beliefs, the participants acted according to what Christ commanded, to act in His stead; they must, therefore, act as His representative and do what He commanded them to do. On the other hand their actions were in tune with, and a reflection of, the love of Christ. Reflecting on His love as heavenly agents was, at the same time, a reflection of their love of Him through their actions.

Category Four

Coptic Women and Coptic Church Leaders

One of the core research questions addressed to the Coptic women was to describe their experiences with their Coptic Church leaders. The responses of the participants consisted of one major theme that reflected the participants’ point-of-view on their experiences within the patriarchy system of their Coptic Church; as Coptic women, the participants emphasized that they had to deal with the Church leaders, mainly those in the priesthood.

In the previous three categories, the focus of the participants was on their heavenly status, what tied them to Heaven, their relationship with God, as well as their roles and what services

they performed. To some degree, this category appeared to have a slight shift in focus as they described their relationship with the Church leaders instead of their relationship with God. This shift of focus presented their view on the fatherhood-priesthood system, roles, and personal interactions. In addition to the major theme of this category, there is a further subtheme that emerged as their experiences unfolded.

Theme Four: Coptic Women's Experiences in the Patriarchy System of their Coptic Church

The Coptic women were asked to describe their experiences with their Coptic Church leaders; they defined their experience as a father-daughter relationship. They identified the priests as their spiritual fathers and their fathers in confession. They described the priests as “well-educated”, “skilful”, “humble”, “caring”, “respectful”, “selfless”, “sacrificing”, and even “very sweet”. The participants appreciated getting the priest's view and advice on family and personal matters. They reported that they did not perceive the leaders as dominantly ruling the Church; rather, they considered and valued the priests as “spiritual men” who “gave up their highly prestigious, professional,” “well-paid” “careers” “to serve the Church and its members”.

The literature review presented in chapter 2 included a wide range of perspectives on the impact of patriarchy systems, including church systems, on women. These perspectives implicate the structures of the patriarchy systems as a main obstacle to the development and advancement of women. The literature review also illustrated that, regardless of the variation in the level of men's control or domination, the principles are broadly the same. Since the character of domination may differ, it was deemed necessary in this research to understand the patriarchy system of their Coptic Church especially in the modern world. The Coptic women who

participated in this study were in the best position to describe and reflect on their lived experiences within the patriarchal structure of their Church.

Moreover, the emphasis of the literature review was on how the patriarchal institutions, including the church and the social relations were responsible for the inferior and/or secondary status of women, including Christian women. With respect to Coptic women in the patriarchal system of their Coptic Church the literature review lacked any data that could shed some light on this relationship. Thus, one of the major questions addressed to the participants was to describe their relationship with their Coptic Church leaders. The following are the perspectives of the Coptic women participants and their description of their relationship with the Coptic Church leaders. In her description of her relationship with the Church leaders, Mary said:

I have a very good relationship with the Church leaders; they are very sweet people. I do not speak to them as often as many people do, but whenever I need them or ask them questions, they immediately respond face-to-face, by text, call, or e-mail...they always free a lot of time to me and they make sure they answer my questions, guide me, and lead me to the right path; they also follow up with me as well and make themselves available.

While she was elaborating on the male role in history and culture, Susan was asked to elaborate on the Church leaders and her relationship with them:

Let me tell you...as Susan...I feel that happy of having a male, or a priest, because I see them all as fathers...they make me feel that I am secure. I go to my father in confession to confess. I pick my father in confession, the one I trust and I listen to, because I like that in the Church to go to the elder as the Bible said...

When Martha was asked to describe her relationship with the Church leaders, she said:

...back home, I was so blessed to have more than one priest, not only Fr. Daoud Lamey. They all treated me like their own daughter; I was so close to them, I helped and served with them, directly. I really had a very good experience...In Canada, I still have blessed fathers that I serve with...I am a free human and that is a part of my character to oppose or reject one's views even this one is a Church leader, but I continued serving in the Church I found and knew that this was not the case. Rather, I felt that they even respected me more...I am not expecting these leaders to be perfect...only God is perfect.

In response to the same question, Janet described her relationship with the Church leader as follows:

I have a very neutral and positive relationship with all the priests we had in the past and with the ones we have right now. When I came to Canada, there was only one priest in our local Church. I remember that he used to take me to school; I was just new, I had no one to drive me, I was just scared, this was my first encounter with the priest here. In Egypt, it was just like "hi" and "bye". Here I developed a more personal relationship with them...started building or having confidence in the priests. So, I view them as a father and as a counsellor...so, when I go to the priest to confess... somewhat, the session...goes beyond that...I have very positive experiences with them all...I have that good trusting relationship...they are very friendly, they always come down to your level.

The same question was addressed to Gege. She described her relationship with the Church leaders as:

I respect them all as our leaders and guiders; they are sacrificing themselves for the entire community....they help us as much as they can, keep us unified as one community and

one house. I am very pleased with our Church leaders; they are very humble keep the peace among all. They support me and my family a lot.

When Karen defined her relationship with the Church leaders, she stated:

The common character I notice among all the priests in Egypt and in Canada is that they are all very spiritual leaders...who are trying their best to help us grow spiritually...when I was a child, as a child I communicated with the priests, but as I got a little older and having a different priest made a huge difference in the relationship...They have a great relationship with God,...the greatest intention to serve God; some just do not know how to deliver it, the majority are very skilful and well-educated.

Angela described her relationship with the Church:

I have all the respect to all the Church leaders...I see that we all work and serve in collaboration and respect. All the priests respect us and they make sure that we, as members of the Church, are never left out. So, they come to visit us, make sure that the Sunday school is running adequately, encourage us, make sure all the kids take communion...and that we feel that we are one family by organizing events and trips.

Like Gege, Angela was asked to personalize her description, as she was using the pronoun “we” in reference to herself:

I like the priests, because they come visit us at home..., make sure that my kids are attending the Sunday school, and use the services the Church provides..., make sure that my husband, who is a deacon, participates in serving..., and that I am attending the Church..., confessing. I trust my father in confession, who encourages and gives me guidance, assign me some spiritual instructions to follow,

As a leader herself, Georgette described her own understanding of her relationship with the Church leaders from a different perspective:

In general, there are some specific characteristics leaders must have, but some people see these characteristics as negative features; leaders have to be decision-makers and to some extent controlling...Parents who run their homes, must have the proper leadership, or they would not be able to manage their family the proper way; the Church leaders are the same... I personally, have the leadership attitudes, I do not see these negativities, but I do hear and listen to people concerned, trying to clarify what I am doing.

Following the description Georgette gave, she was asked if she could take the response to a personal level, as she mentioned that she dealt with bishops, priests and other leaders in many different events:

With full honesty, my experience with the Church leaders is very good. I always keep my relationship with the Church leaders very straightforward...I make it clear to all leaders and talk to them about the schedules, arrivals, departures, and the organization of events. I keep my relationship with bishops and priests, if you want to call it, as professional as it could be. I do not get involved with any of them at the personal level. They are human; they have weaknesses, but it is not my job to judge them.

Their descriptions and testimonies of their experiences with the Church leaders contradicted what the literature presented in relation to Christian women in the patriarchal system of their church. While the emphasis of literature centered on the negative impact of patriarchal systems, including church systems, on women, data from this research revealed otherwise. In contrast, the Coptic women praised and admired the patriarchy system of their Coptic Church. They saw it as the most ideal system that was fair to women and gender equality. Descriptions of the leaders in

the Coptic Church were not presented as dominant or controlling; rather, the leaders were perceived by the participants as the most caring, loving, humble, and selfless servants, not only toward the participants, but also their families.

Priesthood Is a Role, Not a Position. The Coptic women participants viewed the priesthood as a role performed by a few males in the Church, not as a position that discriminates against gender. As fathers must be males and mothers must be females, so they viewed the priests as servants who acted as their spiritual fathers; while the Church was their spiritual mother that gave birth to the children of God through its womb, referring to the baptism. Once more, the Church presents many symbolic expressions in its faith; these symbols become the real practices that are manifested throughout its dogmas and rituals.

The Coptic women explained that one of the primary roles of the priests was to perform the sacraments. One of these sacraments was the sacrifice, the offering of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which the priests perform and oversee. Therefore, duties associated with sacrifices and offerings were exclusively the prerogative of the priests, so that every member attending the services realized the role of God the Father through the role that the priests performed.

They concluded that the priesthood was not a position that devalued the Coptic women or discriminated against them. Rather, their perception was related to the symbolic significance of the male role, which represented God the Father. Based on her understanding, Susan explained that priests were male, because of the roles they had to perform and that there were biblical and historical roots that supported her perception:

The Coptic Church is like the apostolic time; we heard about Peter and Paul the apostles, but we never heard of Mary Magdalene or other women living in the first century were priests...But, it was never like keeping women out, because there are always deaconesses

in the church, there are always preachers in the church...women ministered in the Church...it is my understanding that there is no difference for being a Christian woman, but there is a difference in the gender role. The roles of priests are exclusive of me, as a Coptic woman, I have different roles in the Church; at the end, the priests and I, we are all servants of Christ, each in his or her assigned role.

Mary related her status of her roles in the Church; all individuals were equal and that each one in the Church had a different role in the type of services they performed:

In the Church itself, I see myself as a Sunday school teacher, or someone who helps the Church in some way...I see my status as a servant of God, try to teach about Him in any way I can. My role is much related to my status. I am a Sunday school teacher....I believe the priests have different roles, but the same goals in their services or roles.

Like Mary, Martha identified her status in the Church in relationship to her roles in the Church, as determined by the services she carried out. She believed that although men and women were equal, roles were different. In her description the priesthood was not a position, but a role:

As a Coptic woman in Christianity, I believe that Jesus created us exactly like Him....In Christianity, Coptic women are equal to Coptic men in everything... there are certain roles in the Church performed by men, but this has nothing to do with equality...as a Christian woman, I do not have to be a priest to pray for the sick or cast the evil Spirits out of some other people...being a Coptic woman, I have equal opportunity in faith in God to do so...being a priest is not like a job or career; it is only a role. God did not say that He gave this only to priests or men...Like the priests have their roles that they carry out in the Church I have different roles and involvements in the Church.

Janet explained that like any society or organization, in the Church there are roles performed by men, by women, or by both. She indicated that the priesthood was one of the roles in the Church performed by men, which according to her, did not reflect gender inequality; it was just a matter of a role, but not a position:

As a Coptic woman, I am very valued, very respected, very important, just equal status like anybody else...It is not like you can do this as a woman or cannot do that, because you are a woman...But, we have different roles in society, homes, and the Church...The Church would give me every opportunity to serve, but it would not let me give out communion, because I am not a priest. I do not see that the Church treats us different, for me this is just a difference in roles...the priesthood in our Church is a role conducted by men, this does not mean that you are less or higher than an individual, you just have a different role...I hope this answers the question!

Gege made a distinction between roles and title, or position, in the Church, after which she related her view that the priesthood was a task or a role carried out by men, while there were tasks and roles she performed as a woman in the Church:

Our Church has general roles that apply to everyone in the Church with no exemptions. Tasks in the Church are assigned according to the roles. Anyone carries out a certain task or role of a servant who is doing what he or she is asked to do. When I serve in the Church I do the tasks I am asked to do. When the priests serve in the Church they do the tasks they are asked to do. We are all equal, regardless of the nature of tasks, we all serve under the term servants.

Karen described that roles and tasks in the Church are about serving God in one's capacity; it is not about a job or leadership, although the majority of servants were leaders in what they were doing. Priests were also considered servants in their capacity as spiritual leaders:

The common character I notice among all the priests in Egypt and in Canada is that they are all very spiritual leaders. They are trying their best to help us grow spiritually...they have the greatest intention to serve God... so, they sacrifice their time, professional jobs; I know all of them are professionals who gave up their careers to be servants.

Angela described the priesthood as a role by men; the Church was not an employment centre that might discriminate against or withhold a position from women. Rather, it is the place of God, according to Angela, that was operated by God's rules:

If I go back to what I said earlier, as a Coptic woman, I perform multiple roles in the Church. I feel the Church allows me to exercise my right and faith within the roles that are defined by the Bible that says I cannot become a priest in the Coptic Orthodox Church, and that is according to the Bible. But I can serve as a Sunday school servant, through which I exercise my right and faith; we are all servants including the priests and the Pope.

Georgette elaborated on her belief that the priesthood was not a position that women were prohibited from; rather, it was a type of service in the Church carried out by men.

At home, the father has some roles that are different from the mother's roles and together both may have common shared roles.... In the Church the priests have roles that must be carried out by the men, we call fathers, but not by women...because they exemplify God our heavenly Father... they have very harsh roles; all the servants in the Church serve and

get served except the priests, they serve but no one serves them; their role is to sacrifice themselves for their people, like God gave up Himself for the world.

Coptic Women and the Role of Fatherhood in their Coptic Church. The relationship between the structures of the patriarchal system of the Coptic Church and the priesthood appear inseparable, resulting from the fact that each is based on the other. Therefore, the theme of fatherhood of the Church refers to both the role of the priesthood and the structures of the Church's patriarchal system. In their descriptions of the fatherhood (patriarchy system and priesthood) roles in the Church, the Coptic women explained that the father role was a spiritual role that carried within it the duties and responsibilities of the fatherhood tasks. For the participants in the study, priests were more than the Church leaders, they were considered fathers.

According to the participants, fathers bring positive benefits to their children that no other individual can provide. They also believed that fathers had a direct impact and influence on the well-being and development of their children. It is important, therefore, to understand the roles involved in fatherhood in the Coptic Church and its impact, not only on Coptic women, but also on the entire family of the participants.

The women laid out the connection between themselves and the fathers of the Coptic Church. They indicated that the fathers of the Coptic Church positively influenced their lives and the lives of their family spiritually, socially, intellectually, and emotionally. As married women, they emphasized that the love and care of the Church fathers was just as important to their children's development as a biological father's and sometimes even more. The fathers of the Church did not reject their children, regardless of their behaviour. They suggested that the love of the Church fathers played a bigger role in their children's problem-solving, social and

psychological adjustment, boost children's sense of well-being, and improve their emotional health. The Coptic women recognized that the fathers of the Church encouraged their husbands to become more involved in their children's care so the whole family benefitted.

In this regards, in their appreciation to the Church fathers, Karen, Janet, Susan and Mary shared the same view defined by Angela who said: “without the Church fathers our home and lives would not be the same; our marriage is blessed because of the effort of the Church fathers who care a lot about our spiritual growth that keeps us united”. Martha and Georgette also expressed similar experiences that Gege shared about the supportive roles of Church fathers in many aspects of her life. In this respects, Gege said: “when I lost my biological father the support of the Church fathers made, and continue to make a huge balance in my life. They shower us with their love and care not only spiritually, which is very important, but also emotionally, socially and even financially”.

Hidden Power and Feminism Rejoinder. In the light of the descriptions of Coptic women participants of the patriarchal patterns in Christianity, in general, and the Coptic Church, in particular, their lived experiences of the power relationship, especially from a feminist point-of-view remained somewhat concealed. In the absence of sufficient data or undisclosed experiences by these participants, identifying a theme or subtheme that elaborates on hidden issues may not be aligned with the limited relevant data provided. The issue of power, however, was implicitly present, but none of the participants described any relevant experiences on the issue. Rather, the participants expressed that they felt powerful, because of their relationship with God, that their power came from above, and due to the fact that God was their protector. In this regard, Susan noticed the unbalanced power relationship in some immigrant families, but that they were outside the Church:

...in the marital ceremony, the Church arranges this verse, which is related to submission: “wives submit to your husbands, as Sarah submitted to Abraham.” On the other hand, the Church gives the same commandment or makes the same request that men must love their wives as themselves and even die for their wives as Christ loved the Church and died for it...every woman...likes to be loved, taken care of, and protected by her man. As a reflex or outcome of that, I would run to that person for safety and love. Any relationship between two people has to be beneficiary both ways. I take care for care and love for love; I cannot separate both actions because it is a cycle. One is nurturing the other one’s needs... male is supposed to nurture while the other person is submitting in return...this is my understanding of submission.

For Mary, the issue of power appeared implicitly in her description of how she experienced her rights in the Church: “I was really never hindered or stopped from exercising my desire to serve in the Church. There is nothing really I wanted to do that I was not able to do in the Church”. Power, in Martha’s view, was her ability and the equal opportunity to perform what Christ was doing when He was on earth:

He gave me the power and strength to do what He was doing when He was on Earth. I believe that in Christianity, Coptic women are equal to Coptic men in everything...I do not have to be a priest to pray for the sick or cast the evil Spirits out of some other people ...as a new creation in Him we have the power to do what He has authorized us to do....

In Janet’s perspective, power came from her high status and relationship with God, who valued her more than society and that the value of power was demonstrated through the ultimate love of Christ for her on the cross:

So, you are kind of powerful when you feel that close, or that important to God, you feel very special and that you have a very high status. If God offered Himself on the cross for me as a sinner; He did so, because He loves me and, because He is a very humble Father. It is hard to see someone sacrifice himself for a good person. Let alone the King of all kings gave up Himself to give me life and make me a princess. It makes me feel more valued...and important individual...or as a woman.

Like Janet, Gege referred her strength and power to her status in Christianity and her relationship with God, through which she gets the power to love others and live, not for herself, but for other people:

This is what I think of my status as a Christian woman; I believe that I am strong by God's word. God is my power, strength, protector, and saviour...God teaches us a lesson that we do not live for yourself in life...we live for others, and even for the future of others yet to come on earth in the future. This is the power of love that God has given me.

Similar to Susan, Karen wondered how she would not submit to someone who loved her dearly and gave up His life for her. The power of submission was her decision and based on love and sacrifice:

As women submit to their husband...men love their wives as much as Christ loved the Church and died for it...If there is someone who loves me to such extent; he is willing to die for me, how am I not going to submit to him? For sure, I will submit to that person.

When there is love submission will be a piece of cake.

In Angela's point-of-view on the issue of power relations in the Church, she placed the commandment of God above any concern or personal issue. The power in Angela's view was

through obeying the word of God. Therefore, she did not believe that her right was violated as the priesthood was restricted only men in the Church:

I do not think or believe that the priesthood is a right that is taken away from me. The Bible said that the man is the head of the woman and that women are to submit to their men and that God is also the head of the Church and that Church submit to Christ. Given all these Biblical teachings, I grew up that we do not submit to women as priests; it is far from the teachings and regulations that we all must go by...I can only submit to what is acceptable.

Georgette saw God, her heavenly Father, as the most powerful being and the He was the Almighty God. As a daughter of that Almighty God gave Georgette the sense of power; it was through her powerful Father that Georgette could overcome what women, in general, encounter in society:

As a Coptic Christian woman I do feel that serving and taking many roles in the Church is very important...we believe in God and we believe that He takes good care of us...this gives me a sense of power, security, and a peace of mind that we should not be worried about anything in life because God is the Almighty and that He is the most powerful one and the greatest in all aspects cares for us.

As discussed in the literature review, feminists, including Christian feminists, believed that Christianity emerged from patriarchal cultures and societies that appointed men to authoritative positions in all levels of society, from government to home. In contrast, the Coptic women participants in this study expressed that their understanding of Christianity and Church patriarchal patterns exemplified the caring and loving pattern of the heavenly Father, who exhibited the ultimate level of humbleness and submission of the male (Christ in the flesh) to the

extent that He sacrificed His life for the Church and the entire world. According to the participants, priests, like their heavenly Father, represent the patriarchal pattern that Christ outlined and delineated; sacrifice their lives for their people.

Christianity, according to most historians, restricted the priesthood positions to males only, especially in the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Nevertheless, the Coptic women participants explained that the priesthood was not a position in the Church; rather, it was a role that was limited to men to represent the role of God the Father. According to many feminists, it was the goal, or at least the result, of this interlocking and overlapping identification of male humanity with male divinity, to entrench male power and privilege on earth. The participants also emphasized that as Christ loved the Church and gave up His life for the world, the priests, who represented Christ, had to act according to such patterns and to sacrifice their lives for those they serve. With this in mind, when the issue of submission was raised by five of the participants (Susan, Martha, Karen, Angela and Gege), they admitted that they did not mind submitting to the males who loved them, including their husbands and the priests. However, they also mentioned that they reserved the right to seek divorce in case an act of adultery was committed.

All eight study participants concluded that, regardless to gender, no one in human history was, or would be, greater than St. Mary, Mother of Christ. Within both the Catholic and Orthodox churches, there has been a special exultant place of veneration reserved for St. Mary, the Mother of God, as a central model of maternal virtue, a devotion that is generally not honored within Protestantism. Yet, Coptic women participants said that Christ Himself, her son in the flesh, did not choose St. Mary to serve as a priest, because the priesthood role was restricted to men in order to represent God the Father.

Generally, Christian women, including Coptic women, are excluded from clerical roles within Christian churches, including the Coptic Church with exception to the Protestant denominations in which there are not any church sacraments including the priesthood although they have communion and baptism as well as deacons and pastors. The Coptic women participants in this study illustrated that they had a variety of roles in the Church, notably as Sunday school teachers, singers in the choirs, group and meeting leaders, and missionaries. They also indicated that the fact the priesthood role was restricted to men did not impose or reflect any unbalanced power relationship between them and the Church or the priests.

Category Five

Coptic Women and the Coptic Church

The final major theme of the data analysis is Coptic women's descriptions of their experiences in the Coptic Church, and the most frustrating and rewarding aspects of their faith. The women described their Church as the house of their heavenly father who always kept His doors wide open for everyone, including them. Symbolically and spiritually, Coptic women considered the Church as their unblemished mother. The women also addressed some issues in the Church that made them frustrated. Equally, they described rewarding aspects of their faith as Church members. Their experiences described in this fifth, and final, category included the differences of their experiences between the Church in Canada and the Church in Egypt. Thus, the major theme of this part is how the Church is considered Heaven on earth or vice versa and four associated subthemes.

Theme Five: Heaven on Earth and Earth in Heaven

The connection between Heaven and earth was demonstrated throughout all the transcriptions. The data showed that, according to their Christian faith, the Coptic women

believed that the Church was an inseparable part of Heaven; if Heaven was the kingdom of God, so was the Church; Heaven was also considered the victorious church. The gate of Heaven was open through Christ, as was the door of the Church opened through Christ. The participants added that everyone was invited to inherit Heaven, but all needed the Church as a free-will precondition.

Based on their Christian belief, the women explained that when they prayed and asked God to let, “[His] kingdom come [and His] will be done on earth as it is in Heaven”, the glory of God dwelled in the Church. Through, and during, the mass services, when the Body and the Blood of Christ were on the altar, it was the most significant moment that demonstrated the presence of God among His people. They also believed that the physical building of the Church was anointed with the Holy Myron, and thus, the Holy Spirit resided in and sanctified the entire place; therefore, based on their descriptions earth was considered Heaven on earth.

According to the data, the participants believed that when the people of Christ departed earth, their souls would be resting and waiting in Paradise, as He promised the thief on the cross. The souls of the departed always prayed for those who remained on earth until their missions and purpose on earth were accomplished; this was another aspect of the Christian faith that led Copts to believe the Church was in Heaven, as Heaven was on earth. Susan described the Coptic Church as a heavenly model on earth:

The Coptic Church is very unique; this is a historic fact; its pattern inherited from the apostolic time since St. Mark, the founder of the Coptic Church and Christianity in Egypt, which goes back to the time of Christ when He was on earth in the flesh. The first mass that was held, as the Bible confirms, was in St. Mark’s house, which became the first church in the world; Christ, Himself, was the high priest who offered Himself in the

form of bread and wine that were truly His Body and His Blood. This signifies that the pattern of the Coptic Church is a heavenly pattern that was first established by God in the flesh...

Like Susan, Mary said that earth was like Heaven, and in fact, it was Heaven: “The difference between the Church and outside the Church is like the difference between Heaven and earth; our Church is Heaven on earth”.

For Martha, being in the Church was like being in Heaven: “I’m beloved, when I am in the Church I am in Heaven, because when we pray we say, ‘our Father who art in Heaven’; He is in the Church”. In comparing the Church to Heaven, Janet described the Church as the house of her heavenly father:

Everything in the Church is very meaningful, which brings you close to God. But if you do that out of a ritual practice then it becomes a burden on you, you understand. To me, the Church is the gate of Heaven; when we are in the Church we are in Heaven, in the presence of Christ - this is what I experience and I believe.

In her description of her lived experience of Heaven on earth or earth in Heaven, Gege said:

“Giving me His Blood and Body for eternal life is beyond any glory on earth; I experience the glory of Heaven in the Church”. Karen described her experiences: “when go to the Church and participate in the heavenly services...I feel speechless talking about my heavenly experience in the Church”. Similarly, Angela defined her experience in the Church as in the Kingdom of

Heaven: “I believe that...receiving the sacraments in the Church leads to experience the Kingdom of Heaven, not only in the Church, but inside me”. Georgette defined Heaven on earth as her experience that began and remained forever, but in Heaven:

Kingdom of God started since I have become his daughter through baptism, communion, and the Holy Myron. Ever since, I started to live in Heaven while I am here in the Church and even outside the Church through my private time with God...

Together, the participants' reflections on how they lived heaven on earth were beyond the biblical teaching or the Church teachings; it was their own lived personal experiences at hand. Yet, they found themselves speechless to express the greatness and certainty of their heavenly experiences on earth.

Coptic Women and Equality in the Coptic Church. Gender equality in the Coptic Church, according to the experiences and understanding of the Coptic women participants, was unique and incomparable. All the Coptic women who participated claimed that no other place on earth could treat, or consider, women equal to men, except in Christianity and in the Coptic Church. With the exception of the priesthood role, that was limited to males in the Coptic Church, the Biblical texts and the Coptic Church deemed women equal to men and men equal to women.

Although Coptic women could not be ordained as priests, they did not question the role to be exclusive to males. As presented in the first subtheme of part four, "Priesthood Is a Role, Not a Position", the women explained that the priesthood was not a position in the Church, but a role performed by males who represented God the Father sacrificing His Begotten Son. The priests represented Christ, who authorized them to perform His role on earth. The women still defined themselves as God's representatives and image as illustrated in the first category of how Coptic women perceive their status. It was the understanding of the participants that if Christ wanted to choose females priests, He would have chosen His mother who was full of the Holy Spirit and from whom He was born in the flesh.

For the women, they perceived equality to be executed at its ultimate level in the Coptic Church. They provided examples and referenced the Bible to affirm that gender equality in Christianity and in the Coptic Church was incomparable to any other organizations on earth. Examples included their equal status and role in Christianity and in the Coptic Church, as described in the previous categories, specifically the first and fourth. According to Susan:

The Lord told Adam that she [Eve] is a helper and that she is exactly like you. As a woman, I am created from Adam; I am not less than him, but I am a helper equal to him... as a Christian woman, I know that I am as dear as the man; I am not less than the man. I have everything in Christ. St. Paul talked about many times that woman is not less than the man and that the man is not different from the woman, in Christianity...in the Coptic Church...I am equal to men in the Church, regardless to the different roles we have.

Likewise, Mary defined equality based on her equal status in Christianity and in the Church, as established by the Bible: "I believe that I am equal in God's eyes to any men or women...I consider this as a status of equality... I have obtained my beliefs...from the Bible, in which it says...that we are all equal". Martha also expressed similar descriptions of equality according to her beliefs in the Bible and her experience in the Coptic Church:

I believe that Jesus created us exactly like Him... in Christianity, Coptic women are equal to Coptic men in everything... being a Coptic woman I have equal opportunity and faith in God to do so; this is my understanding.

For Janet, her understanding of equality, whether in Christianity or in the Church, was stated by her following description:

It is my understanding and belief that I am very valued, very respected, very important, just equal status like anybody else...includes the opposite gender...The Church would

give me every opportunity to serve, but it would not let me give out communion, because I am not a priest. I do not see the Church treats us differently, for me this is just a difference in roles...This does not mean that you are less or higher than an individual, you just have a different role.... The sources of my beliefs and understanding are mainly the Bible and the Church teachings.

Gege believed that equality of women was best carried out in the Coptic Church, because of what Christianity taught:

As a Christian woman, I consider myself to be very lucky that I am Christian. I am also very proud to be Christian, because God created all mankind, including me, according to His image and in His likeness. As a Christian woman, I am a daughter of God, I am created according to His image and likeness and that I have to act accordingly. This best proves that we are all equal no matter how some may think... We are all equal men and women, educated or not...the One who created all of us equal is my Father, my King and my Lord...The Bible and the Church are the foundations of what I believe in.

Karen considered equality as a Christian and Coptic woman to be as well-valued as everybody else and that different roles did not indicate inferior status:

I believe I am equal to anyone in the Church including men; we all come, pray to the same God, take the same communion, and read the same Bible...we have different roles, such as the priest and deacons...these different roles do not make my status inferior as a woman in Christianity or in the Church... I am equally valued; I can see that in my mind.

Angela indicated that Christianity and the Church valued her as equal to all women and men and that she experienced equality in both better than anywhere else:

First of all, I am very proud to be a Coptic Christian woman and a member or part of the Christian Coptic Church. In regard to my status, the number one that makes me happy is that I am a child of God. He made me in His likeness, created me in His image; this affirms my status as His child. I believe that I am the temple of God and that God lives in me, these make the quality of my status well-valued. This makes me feel very happy, it makes me very special that I am granted this status through the Church, and also confirms that I am equal to any human in the Church regardless to my race, my age, my gender....The quality of being the daughter of God is above any known quality on earth...

Georgette described that since all humans, male and female, are created according to God's image then all children of God were equal. Based on her understanding, gender equality in Christianity and in the Church were the greatest models from which humans needed to learn:

As Christians, we are all children of God...We are all created by God, according to His image, and that we are all His Children and He loves us all. So, I understand and believe that...He made us equal. When the Bible says that God created men...it meant males and females - humans...This is part of gender equality that is applied to all humans; in my view it is the greatest model of equality that the entire world can learn from...

This subtheme, although tied to "*Gender and the Image of God*", one of the subthemes of the first category, sheds some light on gender equality that, according to the participants, originated in how God created men and women equally according to His image.

Coptic Women in Relationship to the Culture of their Coptic Church. As they revealed their experiences in the Coptic Church, the women shed some light on the culture of their Church and the influence it may have on them. Their views on this subtheme reflected that, while the Church was Heaven on earth, its culture was not purely representing that culture; even though

Heaven remained on earth, earth impacted and influenced the culture of the Church. The impact and influence of earth on the culture of the Church reflected the free will of its members to either choose to do God's will on earth or not.

The women stressed that while the Church should not be influenced by the culture outside its space, members of the Church including leaders, reside in and interact with society-at-large, which leaves its influence on them. Regardless, whether that influence is welcome or undesirable in the Church, it is brought into the Church by members from society.

Part of the Church's role is to navigate its members and redirect them when they deviate from the right path. Confession is one of the means to help members, including priests, to disclose their transgressions and get absolution from Christ through the priests. The Coptic women found that confession is one of the most important sessions, during which they could talk to the priests, certain that their confidentiality is strictly protected. They considered repentance and confession as a renewal of baptism, and communion as the cleanser of transgressions that are forgiven during confession. They specified that sins separate them from God unless they reconcile with Him. It is through these processes - the renewal of baptism, the forgiveness of sins, and the cleanser from transgressions - they could reconcile with God and return to the state of peace. This process, once again invites the rationale of gender role in the priesthood, as Christ is considered the greatest servant of reconciliation; priests are male to symbolize the role of Christ.

The Coptic women claimed that humans are imperfect and negative attitudes learned from society can become imprinted, implicitly or explicitly, on member personalities and influence their actions in the Church, even though they do not represent Church beliefs or reflect the Christian faith. For example, the women indicated that when the Arabs invaded Egypt in the

7th Century, beliefs of a different religion and culture were brought and imposed on the Copts for centuries. As a result, some of those foreign beliefs are manifested in the Church and Coptic women are constrained to some degree as to what clothes they wear or how late they can walk on the streets. The dilemma, as explained by the Coptic women, is that if the Church did not comply with certain cultural constraints it could put the safety of the Coptic women members in jeopardy. In contrast, the women expressed that in Canada they are freer from these constraints; they wear what they want and walk safely in the streets. The Church adopted the new cultural pattern in Canada and therefore, the Church does not interfere with these personal matters.

In her elaboration on her experiences of the Church's culture, Susan addressed the impact of the interaction between Church members and society, including the history and challenges of the interaction of Church members and society in both Egypt and Canada:

The Church in Canada and the Church in Egypt is one Church that lived for many centuries that conserve and reserve the faith in a culture that opposes Christianity and persecutes Christians....The Church, here in Canada, is facing many challenges to me more than Egypt, because in Egypt it is like black and white; take care of your children otherwise society is against them, thus the Church is a more preservative, conservative shelter for its children...in Canada, I think one of the very big challenges is that the Church is immigrant-based...because of the persecution in Egypt...Consequently, immigrants need support at home, because of the change of mentality between first generation immigrant parents living their own way, they are not settled or yet to adopt the North American way. Children are growing quicker and adjusting quicker than their parents.

Mary shed some light on her experiences of the Church culture, as well as the role of the priests whenever she sought their help:

In general, the priests are always there whenever I need them, have questions, or problems, or concerns in my life, in general, or even as a married woman. I find that the confession sessions are productive spiritual and personally...from the memories I have, somewhat I think priests are a little bit strict in Egypt than the priests here in Canada...

Martha described her experiences of the Church culture in Egypt and Canada, and she also distinguished between the influence and impact of the social location on the culture of the Church. As well, she talked about her experience with the priest and in confession:

I do not see any differences for being male or female in exercising one's faith or right in the Church. If you look, you find most of the Church servants are females. The females are more involved in the Church than males. During the services, you can see more females at benches than males, and even on the male side, you still see more females in our Coptic Church. Most of the leaders and coordinators are females. It is not because I am a female I experience these clashes and having my ideas sometimes rejected; it can happen to anyone, male or female... I have a great relationship with the priests, especially my father in confession, who I consider like my biological father, I trust him a lot....My experience in the Church has never been affected at all by being a female. I am able to exercise both my rights and faith without any hesitation or barriers because I am a female.

In her response about any differences she might have experienced between the Coptic Church in Canada and the Coptic Church in Egypt, Martha replied:

Because of the area in which I was raised in Egypt and attended the Church there, which was Heliopolis, Cairo, the Church there is completely similar to the Church here. I really do not see any differences between the two here or there.

Janet described her experience of church culture by pointing out how she thought the Church was in Egypt, prior to immigrating to Canada, and that she found the Church here was different. When she visited Egypt years later, she discovered major changes in the culture; they became more open-minded. She also noticed that even her bishop, who would visit Canada, had changed:

I think that the Coptic Orthodox Church has gone through so much persecution, right! So, when I look back, I think the Church kind of got to a place in a cozy corner which kind of lamented for many years on the persecution...Certainly, I have positive experience in both the Church in Egypt and Canada; however, I noticed that in Egypt where I grew up, there are more restrictions in the way girls dress...I feel here maybe, because of the atmosphere around us, the priests try to have discussions with the teen. But this is only based on my experience when I was young, I lived there [in Egypt] until I was 13. But, when I went back to Egypt in a visit and saw the activities, especially the youth activities, I could tell there was a huge difference, they changed a lot. Even our bishop who comes and visits us here in Canada, he also changed a lot than how he was years ago. They are now more open-minded.

In her clarification as to what was changed in the Church, Janet replied that the changes referred to the ways of communication of some priests or bishops that reflected the Egyptian culture but not the culture of the Church. She added that in regard to the faith, dogma, rituals or teachings of the Church, all remained unchanged.

Similar to what Janet clarified, in reference to her experiences in the culture of the Church, Gege explained that despite the imperfection of people, the Church was the “perfect environment”:

The Church is my source of peace, in which I feel the presence of God and experience His grace and love; it is the greatest and perfect environment...all the priests...are sacrificing themselves for the entire community; they are like candles melted to light the way for us...with respect to the culture of the Church...Egypt or Canada; there is not much of a difference...Faith, dogmas, traditions, and rituals are the same everywhere in the Coptic Church across the entire world but not only between Canada and Egypt; these are unified in the Church. The differences are in the culture that influences the servants...the mentality is different between servants in Canada and the servants in Egypt. But in our present time, technologies close many gaps between culture differences. Now I do not see differences, I can say they are the same. In Egypt we pray in Arabic and Coptic languages. In Canada, we pray in English and Coptic languages. So, the Coptic language is commonly used in Canada and Egypt...

In her explanation of the culture of the Church and the culture of Egypt and Canada, Karen acknowledged that the Church was more traditional, to the extent that changes were impossible:

The culture of our Church is related to its traditions, the culture of the Copts; it is a very conservative culture, especially back in Egypt. The culture of Egypt, not the Church, views women as they are less than men. No one ever said it, but I kind of felt it that we come second somehow.... in our Church we still follow some traditions that are not part of Christianity. For example, girls cannot have communion if they have the motherly cycle; at this point of time I felt that we are less. I always felt shy and had to hide as

people were looking at me as why I was not going for communion...especially in Egypt, where everyone goes to Church takes communion...Another point is when women give birth to a child, if the child is a boy we remain for 40 days, during which we cannot attend the baptism of the child, and if we give birth to a girl the waiting time is 80 days; of course we cannot have communion then...These kinds of non-Christian traditions, as you may call them, lead you to believe that you are less, but the fact is the Church is not responsible for most of these non-Christian cultural traditions that were forced on us. In Canada, when we attend the mass, my husband and I and our kids, we sit together on one bench as a family in the Church...to explain to the kids what is going on, this means a lot to me and to my husband too.

For Angela:

In regards to the culture of the Church, you know there is more freedom and respect to us all as Coptic Christians in Canada than in Egypt. In Egypt we, or me as a Coptic woman, I would face a lot of harassment from non-Christian citizens...but in Canada, I am free to go attend the Church, whether meetings or any services, I want to participate in; it definitely gives us a lot of room and opportunity to practice our faith freely...However, all the services we practice in Canada we practice in Egypt. All the sacraments are the same, especially the confession; I find the priests are more open-minded than the one I had in Egypt. In Canada we are able to dress what we want, again, I am not saying that this is right or wrong. But, what I am trying to say is that in Egypt, we have to dress in a certain way, because we know the culture would not accept anything we put on, either when we walk on the street or attending the Church... there are some limitations and restrictions... because of the culture in Egypt, while in Canada it is more open and more flexible.

Georgette elaborated on the Church from a traditional point-of-view and also addressed the challenges encountered in Egypt and Canada:

The Coptic Orthodox Church is the original in Christianity; it is a very traditional strict Church, what I mean by traditional and strict, is that our Church has strictly kept the Christian faith and dogma protected since the time of Christ and the apostles. Our Church protected the Christian faith from the heresies and fought their heresies. Our Church is very strong in its faith and spirituality. Of course, Christ is the main protector of His Church, but He has given the strength and power to the father of our Church to protect the faith... the Church confronted with some challenges...based on the culture and society. In Egypt...the Arab culture impacted our Church somewhat but never the faith. The same in Canada, there are different social and cultural challenges that Coptic people, including women, face...when it comes to culture it is the same, I feel that we are more Egyptian in Canada than when we were in Egypt...

This subtheme, the Coptic women in relationship to the culture of their Coptic Church reflects on the culture of the Coptic Church and the impact or influence of the culture of Egypt and/or Canada on the Church. The participants revealed similar experiences in the culture of their Church. They explained that the Church in Egypt encountered challenges that impacted them as Christians and as Coptic women. Challenges included the Arab cultures and the non-Christian traditions that influenced the Copts and their Church. Coptic women indicated that, as a result of these challenges, there were some restrictions imposed on them in Egypt, such as what to wear and when they had to be home. The participants expressed that they had more freedom in Canada and that no one harassed them or restricted them in any way. Based on their experiences, they considered the Church as the greatest environment for them in Egypt and in Canada, and

that the Church always tried to keep them united as one family. The confession was also part of the practices in the Church that the women valued and admired.

Most Frustrating Aspects of Faith for Coptic Women. When the research participants were asked to describe the most frustrating aspects of their faith as married Coptic women, their initial response was the question, “what frustrating aspects”? As each participant started to explore the question, data revealed that the frustrating aspects varied from one another, but each had at least one aspect to share. Two of the eight participants (Karen and Angela) shared one common aspect, while the other six (Susan, Mary, Martha, Janet, Gege, and Georgette), each had a different personal aspect.

The single aspect that was identified by Karen and Angela was about the period of time, 40 days, when Coptic women give birth to boys, and 80 days when they give birth to girls. During the time period Coptic women could not take communion or attend the baptism of their newborn babies, if they decided to get them baptized during that period. Karen and Angela added that they had to attend personal ritual prayers, during which the priests prayed for their purifications. The two participants found that, based on the New Covenant in the New Testament, such practices were biblically groundless, and were only conducted in the rituals in the Old Testament for a reason that was no longer needed in the New Covenant. Therefore, both Karen and Angela claimed that there was no justification or compelling reason for this practice in the Church, and that led them to feel frustrated. Karen explains:

The most frustrating aspect was when I gave birth to three kids. Luckily, I only had to go through this frustration three times...when women give birth to a child, if the child is a boy we remain for 40 days, during which we cannot attend the baptism of the child, and if we give birth to a girl, the waiting time is 80 days...we cannot have communion then. I

understand that this practice was in the Old Testament for a reason, which has no room in Christianity, especially after Christ paid the price of our sins on the cross.

Likewise, Angela expressed that the only frustrating aspect she had was the fact she had to wait for 80 days if she was to attend the baptism of her newborn daughter:

There is really nothing that is frustrating for me in the Church...just when I gave birth to my daughter I had to wait 80 days to be able to attend her baptism and take communion. I am not even sure where the Church did get this idea from. There is no ground in the Bible about it, you know, when there is something that has a solid ground in the Bible then I have self-satisfaction about it...what if, God forbid that something goes wrong to the baby before she gets baptized; I want to make sure she has the key to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But if she is not baptized, I do not know what her status or the future of her eternal life is...this is the only concern I have, with the Church.

Susan's frustrating aspect of her Church was related to the abusive relationship she experienced and the fact that the Church did not allow divorce for such experiences. It was Susan's faith and the help she received from the Church that enabled her to continue her relationship with her husband. She defined her situation as a dilemma that she either had to act against the rule of God and seek divorce or to save her marriage:

If anything that is frustrating for me, I am not going to say frustrating in the Church, it is a struggle...a long time before I immigrated to Canada...without going on into further detail, I strongly holdfast to the commandments of the Lord, that there is no divorce unless adultery is committed. I came to Canada with the mentality that I wanted to keep my marriage, raise up my kids in a Christian way; I really wanted to do something about the relationship between my husband and myself. When I came to Canada, I pumped into

a different mentality that is different than what was in Egypt...the priests do not know the people enough to start helping them...I tried to keep the status quo. I struggled a lot, deep down I want to keep and save my marriage...I wanted someone to tell me, “you know Susan, I can understand what you are going through, it is your choice, but we cannot allow divorce”...in life, I do not like to throw the table, I always keep striving, striving for the best outcomes out of what I have...I do not settle for less, I hate to fail....

Martha explains:

As a Coptic married woman, I feel that very few of the Church leaders would expect you to surrender to their expectations...so, surrendering to the priests’ expectations because they love you so much and they strongly believe that what they say is for your best interest. I know they are doing it out of love. People think this is the best way of solving the issue, by imposing their solution or say but I believe it should be neutral between the couple. I know what they are doing is never against my faith; it is something that people think that you have to do it. This can make you very frustrated, but this does not add anything to your experience in the Church...

For Mary, the length and number of fasts made her struggle, but she claimed that there was nothing that made her upset:

Frustrating aspects? Maybe struggling. There are a lot of fasts that we have to do in the Church, but it is not specifically related to me as a Coptic married woman. I think I struggle in general with human being, but not in the Church...So, as a Coptic woman, I cannot think of any struggles I have in the Church at all. Nothing of what I shared with you has to do with struggles in the Coptic Church.

Janet denied that she experienced any frustrations in her faith or in the Church, but because of her interest in singing joyful songs she wanted the Church to be more flexible in accepting and adding what she liked in the Church:

I cannot think of any frustrating aspects. Maybe just that music situation I experienced. For me singing is a very important way to communicate with God...I think...we work very hard to preserve our traditions...we have those Coptic hymns, which I admire...but when it comes to signing songs, we feel like dolls, we are not supposed to move, I am not trying to say that we are supposed to dance, but to emotionally respond and react to the Christian songs. This is the only flustering part, if you want to call it this way...

“What! Frustrating aspects of my faith,” Gege asked. In her reply to this question she stated:

There are not any frustrating aspects in the Church of my faith. The frustration comes when I focus on my problems, issues, or sins. I am trying to teach myself that I have to focus on Jesus, who has the solution for my problems...when I feel weak I get frustrated, instead of seeking the strength of Christ who is able to give me the strength....I must go through tribulation and carry the cross so that I can have my thoughts and heart in Heaven. But if everything is nice and rosy I would not be motivated to think of my final destination, which is Heaven. The Church helps me to better cope with my frustration, but it never frustrates me by any means or, because of any reasons including the fact that I am a woman.

Georgette made a comparison between her and other non-Christian women to justify how lucky she was to have her faith, and thus there were no frustrating aspects:

I do not think or see that there is a frustrating aspect of my faith or an issue related to me as a Coptic woman in the Church...I do not know if this is something that I should bring

up or not, if I compare myself as a Coptic Christian woman, to other woman of other religions, I am in a great place... I am as happy, grateful, and thankful as I am Christian and as a Coptic.

The above descriptions show that frustrating aspects of faith for the Coptic women participants in the Church vary among participants, depending on their lived experiences and perceptions. The data reveals that participants were happy and pleased with their faith and Church and that frustrating aspects were not directly tied to their faith or the Church. In the case of Karen and Angela's frustration with the waiting period of 40 or 80 days, was according to them, related to the Old Treatment and imposed by the Arab culture. Some of the other six participants tried to call the frustrating aspects a "struggle", because their issues were more at the personal level, whether this was the music of interest, the length of fasts, people's attitude, marital relationship issues, or imposed opinions.

Most Rewarding Aspects of Faith for Coptic Women. Expressions by the Coptic women participants reflected two ends of the most rewarding aspects of their faith –rewards on earth and eternal rewards in Heaven. The participants emphasized that the most rewarding aspects of their faith were the fruits of their services and involvement in the Church. In the Church choir, the most rewarding aspects were how participants were able to preach through the choir, send messages of God to the congregation, and use their voice as the talent God gave them to praise Christ and attract people to Christ. In addition, helping individuals resolve their problems and overcome hardships are other rewarding aspects of their faith. Participants indicated that watching the sick heal through the prayers they offered on their behalf was another rewarding aspect. Seeing spiritual growth among the Sunday school youth and children, and helping new immigrants adjust and settle in Canada and feel comfortable in the Church community were also

rewarding aspects. The Coptic women participants themselves, felt rewarded by the services they provided others, they believed that there would be heavenly rewards for their work with others.

At the personal level, the women recognized the rewarding aspects of their faith through their families. They expressed their appreciation to the Church that nourished them spiritually and resulted in success in many areas of their lives. They claimed that when their families were well-nourished in the Church they were safe from drug dependencies or wasting their time in places that could lead them to live in sin. They specified that their husbands were protected in the Church and kept them involved in many different activities, that in return made them ideal husbands; otherwise, they would act and care differently for their families.

The women added that the Church cared for their children, not only spiritually, but academically, physically, and socially. They listed activities that the Church provided to their children, which they considered significant rewarding aspects of their faith, including sports, tutoring, summer camping, group sessions, individual care, creating social and community events, arranging international trips to help other children and adults, and prepare and train them to serve in their Church, community, and beyond.

Being one with Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and daughters of God the father were considered the greatest rewarding aspects of the Coptic women's faith. Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ was another rewarding aspect that kept them united with Christ; their sins were forgiven, their bodies and souls were purified, and their eternal lives were ensured. Susan stated:

I am really so thankful to my Church, I think it is very Christ-centered. ...if I am leaving home and kind of upset about something I always go to Church; it is always open, and most of the time it is quiet in the morning when I go and kneel there where I feel the

presence of God. This will be always my harmony, this is my fuel, this is where I sit down and shed my burden out of my shoulders and I get my peace and my energy for the day. I love my Church, these are my rewards... My reward is that the Lord...in the Church, I practice all my rights.

Mary's most rewarding aspects are:

I definitely appreciate and I find it very rewarding, specifically as a Coptic married woman. I have a lot of resources in the Church that I can seek for help and advice as a married woman. Like, any time I have questions, or concerns, or having problems, I know at any point I can go and see a priest or go for counseling that is available in the Church, I know that I always have positive help from these resources...these are the most rewarding aspects for me as a Coptic married woman...I be able to get the help I need instantly... It is very rewarding to me to know that if I have a problem or an issue I can find the good guidance or the positive advice and help from these resources...Serving in the Church and beyond is also very rewarding aspect.

The most rewarding aspects for Martha are:

feeling that I am home inside the Church; I feel comforted and feel the peace in the Church...I am so blessed to have so many activities for my kids and that our kids can get involved in the Church, spend time in it, instead of going outside the Church's environment...this was one of the blessings I had when I was young; it helped me to stay focused on God. As there are many distracting events outside, the Church knows how to keep the kids very busy, whether during the Sunday school classes or other activities. Our kids have no time to go outside the Church circle, this is what I like to see my own kids and like to see them focusing more on Christ...The Church leaders really help me vent out

or get the right advice...the Church is the right place and that what you say will not be disclosed. These are some of the rewarding aspects. I feel that the Church is safe for me and for my kids...and their future...Besides, personally, I feel that by doing the services is that most rewards I can get, that is to serve God, after which I feel happy and pleased.

Janet described her most rewarding aspects as the following:

The most rewarding aspects of my faith in the Coptic Church as a married Coptic woman are that I have that wonderful Church for my kids, it is beautiful. If I were not married I would not mention that part as you asked me as a married woman. As a married woman, no matter what I try to do for my kids, I still struggle with my kids. I strongly believe that the first Church is at home. The Coptic Church provides support spiritually, socially, and physically in activities they involve the kids in and build up their faith. We have a lot of liturgies, besides Sundays, the Church is always open. So, when I drive I can stop by, I feel the Church is like home, it is always open, so, you can go in and pray; pray for people, which gives you a sense of comfort. This is really a great blessing and rewarding.

Gege described her most rewarding aspects:

I am so proud to be a Coptic woman; the Church makes me feel that God came to the cross for me personally. He gives us forgiveness and promises us with the eternal life with Him in Heaven; this is the best reward; it makes me feel that I am very special. He also rewards me here on earth through His peace, love, and hope. He supports me in all the troubles I go through, this is another reward. It is like having a very difficult exam, but you still successfully pass, He makes me pass. So, the rewards are in both here on earth and there in Heaven.

The following is what Karen described as her most rewarding aspects:

How the family is valued in God's eyes and in the Church is a great reward for me as a Coptic married woman, and that we should not underestimate each other. Seeing our children growing in the Coptic faith is another reward. Having the child baptized is a great reward. Having known that God used my body to bring a new life and watching the child being born again is very rewarding....communion is another great reward. Serving God and being able to help other people and children are great rewards. The greatest reward of my faith is the eternal life in Jesus and with Him in Heaven.

Angela stated that her most rewarding aspects are:

In terms of the most rewarding aspects of my faith as a married Coptic woman, a summary of everything we touch on can answer this question. My status in the Coptic Church where I can practice my right and faith freely....,the Church, as a place for my kids where they are taught the greatest values from the Bible....,practicing my rights or our rights as a family through the sacraments to have the greatest status, which is the children of God...,investing our talents, and our gifts..., for my husband, the Church is the greatest place where he can exercise his faith, and right, and practice his role in the Church as a deacon. The Church protects him from being in an undesirable place...knowing that there is a special place for us all that cares for me and for all my family...there is no end or limits for the rewarding aspects of my faith as a married Coptic woman...above all, the eternal reward, the heavenly Jerusalem with the Lord Jesus forever is everlasting reward.

In her description, Georgette said that the most rewarding aspects of her faith are:

I think I have covered a lot of these throughout the interview, but let me summarize it. The most rewarding aspects as I mentioned earlier, that I am very lucky to be a Coptic woman...when I go teach a Sunday school class...when I see the kids happy and they love

me and I love them...organizing events that are successful...and the fact that God is taking care of us are all very rewarding aspects of my Christian and Coptic faith. Overall, Christianity is very rewarding for me here on earth and also in Heaven...Christ promised us to be with Him in Heaven, it is an incomparable reward.

The women's descriptions of their experiences in their Church provided data of the final category of this chapter. In the major theme participants reflected on their experience of living Heaven on earth and being in Heaven, not as a metaphor, or way of thinking, but they were assured that they were in Heaven with Jesus. They also explained that while they were in the Church they experienced the glory of Heaven and the presence of God.

Equality was one of the four subthemes in this category, for which the participants described and reflected on the incomparable nature of equality in Christianity, in general, and in the Coptic Church, in particular. The culture of the Church, along with the social culture, was the second subtheme that showed the interactions between the socio-cultural factors and their influence on the Church, as well as the culture of the Church as a Christian organization, as perceived by the participants. The last two of the four subthemes addressed the most frustrating and rewarding aspects of the participants' faith as married Coptic women.

Summary

Overall, this chapter presented the data analysis of the phenomenon of the lived experiences of Coptic married women in the context of the culture of their Coptic Church. As indicated, the analysis thematically presented five major themes and several related subthemes. As a result of the theoretical framework and methodology used, bracketing was used instead of rewording what the participants said about their lived experiences, as they are the true authors of the data.

To let the data testify, thus, was a decision carefully made to assure the most open presentation of the lived experiences of the participants as described in their own words. Also, this decision honoured the women's participation and their right to have their actual voices heard and not merely echoed through the analysis. Therefore, the researcher took each transcription and data analysis to each participant to confirm the accuracy of the data that best represents what they said and meant to say. Each participant was given the opportunity to review, revise, add, or delete any information of the data collected and the analysis. As a result, the themes in this chapter are the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences and holds their confirmation of what is presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Implications for Social Work

Social work research investigates the social issues people encounter in their environments and what environmental factors influence them. Social work professionals practice and deliver their services across a diverse range of social work and welfare practice settings, including medical, academic, social, correctional, political, and religious institutions or organizations. As a result of the complexity and diversity of social work practice, in and with diverse settings and populations, as well as multiple related issues, research helps social workers expand their knowledge within their areas or settings of practice, to benefit individuals and society at large. Social work researchers try to find out the effect of people's environment and assess the extent of the impact of the environment on people.

The literature review revealed that patriarchal systems and structures rest on male power, authority, and control over women. The data also revealed that within the patriarchal system women's status is downgraded according to the views and standards of many societies. Serving as a social worker in the Coptic Church and in the Canadian Coptic Centre led me to question the lived experiences of married immigrant Coptic women within the patriarchal structures and system of their Church, and how patriarchy affected their world. Based on the descriptions of the married immigrant Coptic women who participated in this study, their lived experiences in the patriarchal system of their Church revealed a different story to the views held by many feminist scholars. All the participants believed that they held the greatest status in, and through, the patriarchal system and structure of their Church. Data showed consistent understanding among all the participants of their status and beliefs within the patriarchal system of their Church. Across all the transcriptions, data revealed that issues of inequality and imbalanced power

relations were not part of the participants' experience in the Church. Transcripts revealed that all the participants had a wide range of knowledge about their faith, dogma, Scriptures, as well as the rituals and practices of their Church. Despite their royal and godly status, humbleness was exhibited by all the participants, who called themselves servants, although they believed they were the representatives of God on earth. There was extensive information across the data about the relationship to God and ties to Heaven.

Primarily, the aim of this chapter is to discuss the descriptions of the lived experiences of the eight Coptic women who participated in the research in relationship to their Coptic Church. As indicated in the previous chapter, as well as in the methodological chapter, to let the data testify was a careful decision made to assure the best representation of the lived experiences of the participants, as described by them in their own words. It is my belief that in honour of the research process, integrity, and the voice of the participants, my effort in this chapter is to focus on the interpretation, meaning, and perspectives of the participants. While this chapter is about the discussions, the aim is not to provide critical analysis or elaboration of the data, rather, the central focus of the discussion section of this chapter is to present what I learned from the participants about their lived experiences in their Coptic Church and present what they asked me to do.

Discussion

What I learned from this research, specifically, from what the participants disclosed, is the core of the discussion in this section. In conjunction, the homework that the participants required from me is also integrated, along with what I learned from the actual research. By homework, I am referring to what the participants asked me to find and to present, such as the exact Biblical references they referred to as sources of their understanding of what they

discussed or experienced. The homework also confirmed the foundations of their understanding to the researcher and readers; it also reveals the wide range of knowledge the participants had, and what their understanding, faith, and beliefs are based on. The significance of carrying out the homework illustrates the foundations of the lived reality of the participants; it also uncovers the implication of the concealed faith on their perceptions, meaning, and interpretation of the patriarchal structures and system of their Church.

What Has Been Learned

The qualitative research was based on a descriptive phenomenological paradigm and the research question was developed according to a number of factors, as indicated in the rationale in chapter one and the literature review in chapter two. To begin with, I still anticipated that the Coptic women who participated would share issues or concerns similar to the ones presented to me by other Coptic women during my work with them, and that their experiences would be parallel to the literature reviews. At some point, I wondered that while I was conducting a research on how these women were impacted by the patriarchal structure and systems of their Church, I started to question in my mind why these women admired such a structure and a system which was unfolded throughout the data analysis. However, I did not allow my expectations to lead or deviate the participants from how they chose to respond to the research questions. Rather, their responses dictated and directed the research questions, accordingly. I was careful in formulating the research question and, to the extent that every time I was asked to elaborate on the question, I simply repeated the question slowly so that each participant had the same information of how the questions were asked or addressed in order to avoid or eliminate my influence on the participants. Most importantly, the research questions were open-ended semi-structured interviews to allow conversation to flow freely; several topics could be discussed

and unplanned information explored (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 2006).

I must admit that despite my extensive experience in the Coptic Church, of which I am a member, the data the participants provided challenged my thinking. The descriptions of the participants' experiences were a major challenge to the available literature on the patriarchal structures and systems. I confess that I expected the participants' lived experiences within the patriarchal structures and systems of the Coptic Church would be similar to what was presented in the literature and the issues previously brought to my attention by many other Coptic women. At one point in her review to my research proposal, my supervise Dr. Linda Kreitzer advised me to tone down what was found regarding the negativity and impact of the patriarchal structure and systems on women; not all patriarchal structures and systems were necessarily oppressive or negative to all women. Similarly to what Dr. Kreitzer said, the interview data revealed different experiences from what the literature presented, despite the similarity of the issues the participants shared to the concerns that were previously shared with me by non-participant Coptic women.

Based on the data the participants gave, I concluded that my experience and understanding of the Coptic culture might have served as a blind spot that hindered me to see beyond the box of the issues and the literature on patriarchal structures and systems in society, in general, and the Coptic Church, in particular. Therefore, getting the information directly from Coptic women who were directly involved was more reliable than my own assumptions or the available literature, which lacked the lived experiences of these Coptic women participants in their Coptic Church's patriarchal system. Listening to the voices of the participants was the most reliable way to understand their meaning of their lived experiences. The following summarizes what I learned and what the data in the body of the research lacked.

The Admirable Patriarchal Structure and System. Based on I what learned from the participants, I asked myself if there is an admirable patriarchal structure and system for women. The answer to this question is yes - the Coptic Church that participants admired and were proud of. In his book *An Anthropology of Admiration*, Heinich (1997) outlined that understanding is lacking when the attitude of the general public is deemed to be the only challenger on record that is admired, but when arguments are examined from a particular view that is not restricted to the general public, then opinions and judgments are different from what is on record. Data revealed that the admirability and pride of the participants of the patriarchal system of their Coptic Church were due to a number of reasons. Before outlining these reasons, it is important to shed some light on what brings forth admirability from scholarly perspectives.

Admiration, according to social scientists, is a social emotion brought forth by people of competence, aptitude, and skill exceeding set standards (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Van De Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2011). It promotes social learning in groups and induces self-improvement through observing and learning from role-models (Haidt & Seder, 2009). Algoe and Haidt (2009) and Suls (2000) and Suls and Wheeler (2000) identified that admiration is a feeling people have toward morals of excellence when they witness someone perform an act of exceeding virtue. Unlike envy, which leads people to feel frustrated about the competence of others, admiration inspires and motivates (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt & Seder, 2009; Suls, 2000; Suls & Wheeler, 2000). A particular social group or community in which people admire one another is called a mutual admiration society or culture (Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2007); this classification is applied when two or more people always express their admiration to one another. Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) viewed mutual admiration as people's desire to form a type of team for a specific purpose that fulfils significant goals in their lives.

What the scholars articulated about admiration seems to be well-aligned with the character of the participants and their admiration of their Church. It was very clear that the level of knowledge demonstrated by all the participants was significantly great. Participants also held different university degrees and worked in Canada as qualified professionals such as physicians, pharmacists, teachers or engineers. While such level of education and work positions of privilege could lead to high levels of satisfaction, on the other hand both factors can also lead these women to criticize their Church. It is well-demonstrated that each participant admired the Church, as well as the performance and involvement of its leaders, who demonstrated exceeding virtue. Participants stressed that the entire congregation was not only a team, but one body with one goal, which was to inherit eternal life with Christ. The following are some of the references the participants referred to, confirming that they were one body and that they would inherit eternal life: “So it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other” (Romans 15:5). Another reference says: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Also, “... an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). With regards to love, they indicated that the Bible said: “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:9, 10).

It is indicated that admiration only occurs when people believe that improvement is possible for them (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Studies show that witnessing admirable performances or acts not only increase or enhances motivations for self-improvement particularly in the domain of witnessed excellence, but also leads to more motivation in the volume of work and effort toward achieving life goals (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu 2002).

Based on participant descriptions of their roles and services, as well as the roles and services of their Church leaders, the workload reported is quite high, which also reflected the level of motivation they all had to participate. Admiration, according to Algoe and Haidt (2009), is related with higher-level cognition processes involved in motivation. Haidt and Seder (2009) and Suls and Wheeler (2000) emphasized that admiration is also allied with people's tendency to praise the performances and acts of others, and is associated with their desire for contact and proximity with what they admire. The wide range of services and roles participants performed and their tendency to praise one another, including the priests and the rest of the Church leaders, affirmed their admiration of their Church system and structure. What St. John the Baptist said to Jesus was also said by the participants in praising others: "He [Jesus] must become greater; I [John the Baptist] must become less" (John 3:30).

All the participants in this research expressed their deep admiration to both the Coptic Church and its leaders. In their descriptions, according to NVivo Software count, the participants used words such as "loved", "admired", "fulfilling", "pleased", "satisfied", and "lucky" to express admiration toward their Church. They also admired the patriarchal structure and system of the Church, which according to them, was deemed to be the greatest example of gender equality and humbleness on earth. They believed that their patriarchal system represented the caring and loving God of mankind and gender equality. For the participants, the Church system exemplified Heaven on earth and was incomparable to any earthly organizations.

The Coptic women who participated in the research asserted that the leaders of the Church were the most loving, caring, and sacrificing men to whom they trusted and with whom they felt secure. In order to support their views with Biblical reference about the ultimate level of love and care they received from the Church leaders, one of the verses the participants included

was: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 1:1).

Participants articulated that they admired the Church when it was quiet, during which they were able to have some private time with God. Similarly, they loved and admired the Church during the services and among the congregation, when they felt they were of one body made up of many members with God as the head. One of the verses participants referred to in this context is: “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <http://biblehub.com/romans/12-5.htm> So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:4,5).

The frustration that the Coptic women experienced was not related to the Church or envy toward the men who were ordained priests; they did not see the restriction of the priesthood to men as a form of discrimination that made them frustrated or envious. The perception held by participants was that there were many organs in one body and that each organ had its function just as written in the Bible in Romans 12:4 (as quoted above) and that, “Christ is the Head of the body” (Colossians 1:18). However, with respect to the participants’ frustration of the imposed rule related to the menstrual cycle and the birth, the participants blamed foreigner cultures for such unjustifiable practice of which the Church needed to get rid of them.

Heinich (1997) and Immordino-Yang, McColl, Damasio, and Damasio (2009) stressed that when the views, opinions, and judgments of the particular (Coptic participants) are different from the public record (existing data in the literature review on patriarchal structures and systems) about understanding men’s roles in their Church the voice of the particular is almost absent from the predominant public record. With this in mind, the participants viewed patriarchal structures and systems from their own points-of-view and based on their Christian faith. The

participants said they are renewed humans with new hearts and thoughts who act according to new principles, by new rules, with new ends, and in a new Church. By renewed humans or having a new heart, thoughts, acts or principles they mean so in the new nature they received in Christ but not as new immigrants in Canada. In this regard, they referred to what the Bible says: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, the participants perceived the priesthood as a role that had to be carried out by men, because it represented the fatherhood pattern that God established. In addition, the participants indicated that since they are all members or organs of the body of Christ, who is the Head of that one body, they must all “have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). In the end they emphasized that they were all servants of God, each in his or her role, and that there was no role that degraded women or valued them less than men. Therefore, each participant expressed her gratitude and appreciation that she was a Christian Coptic woman and that she was a member of the Coptic Church. So, in the views of these particular participants, the patriarchal structures and systems of their Coptic Church is admirable, as neither men nor women in the Church compete to have an authoritative role at the expense of the opposite gender, as there are not any opponents. This is not to say that the participants did not have their own struggles within or outside the Church, but their points-of-view on the struggles were different from predominant perceptions on the same struggles in the public record.

Patriarchal Structure and System Does Women Proud. The Coptic women participants expressed that they were “so proud” to be Coptic Christians and members of the Coptic Church. All the participants regarded their Coptic Church and the leaders as highly honourable and credible. With exceptions for the 40 or 80 days ritual and the birth issues they said that their

beliefs and faith in their Coptic patriarchal system, including the Church leaders, dogma, rituals, and services brought forth pleasure and satisfaction of which they were so proud.

In the literature, social psychologists identified two types of pride, authentic (positive pride) and hubristic (negative pride) (Tracy & Robins, 2007b). Carver, Sinclair, and Johnson (2010), Ekman (2003), Lemerise and Dodge, (2000), Rosin, Haidt and McCauley (2008), Tangney, Wagner, and Gramzow (1989) and Tracy and Robins (2004b) characterized authentic pride as “accomplished” and “confident”; whereas; they characterized hubristic pride as “arrogant” and “conceited”. Evidence provided by Tracy and Robbins (2007b) demonstrated the semantic differences of the two types of pride and the differential links with personality characteristics. According to their view, Tracy and Robins (2004a, 2007a) indicated that authentic pride draws from particular accomplishments, and it is often centered on the efforts made towards attaining goals. In contrast, hubristic pride drives from more universal beliefs regarding one’s abilities and strengths, as reflected in self-praising, such as “I do everything well” or “I am talented naturally” (Tracy & Robins, 2004a, 2007a). In other words, authentic pride drives from one’s self-evaluation of “doing,” while hubristic pride drives from self-evaluation of “being” (Lemerise & Dodge, 2000; Rosin, Haidt & McCauley, 2008; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher & Gramzow, 1992). It is concluded that the hubristic pride is comparatively defensive (McGregor, Nail, Marigold & Kang, 2005) and neurotic in nature (Gershman, 1947; Tracy & Robins, 2004b).

In spite of its centrality to social interaction and behavior, Tracy and Robin (2007b) pointed out that pride has been given little attention in the literature of social personality. I must admit that until I reviewed some of the literature on pride, I had not known about its centrality and connection to social interaction and behavior. The fact that each participant felt proud of the

patriarchal system and structures of her Coptic Church led me to search for what makes people in general, or the participants in particular, proud to belong to a particular group, system, or faith.

According to social psychologists, in its positive connotation, authentic pride refers to a satisfied sense of attachment toward an individual's own, or another's, choices and actions, or toward a homogenise group of people (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Authentic pride, according to Tracy, Robins and Lagattuta (2005), is considered a product of admiration and praise, an independent self-reflection, as well as a fulfilled sentiment of belonging. Bushman and Baumeister (1998) stressed that the absence of authentic pride is connected to what provokes aggression and other anti-social behaviors or unhealthy social interactions as a result of perceived threats to the ego. So, unlike hubristic pride as self-love, authentic pride is virtual sentiment that leads to enhancing the individual's social status in society or in their social group (Brown & Marshall, 2001). The absence of hubristic pride explains the humbleness and selflessness, as well as sacrificing for others (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Tracy, Robins & Lagattuta, 2005).

The participants claimed that authentic pride explains their enhanced status as being made in God's likeness and image (Genesis 1:27), being a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), daughters of God (2 Corinthians 6:18), princesses of the King of all kings (Revelation 5:10), and granted an equal status to men (Galatians 3:28). Despite the new royal and heavenly creation or nature they held (2 Corinthians 5:17), the participants exhibited humbleness, selflessness, and sacrificing for others through their roles in the Church as servants to every person; so, the presence of pride represented the virtual sentiment that the participants had.

According to social psychologists, authentic pride is considered an important emotion that plays a crucial role in many areas of socio-psychological functioning of the individual (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Weiner, 1985). The authors claimed that authentic pride reinforces altruism and stimulates adaptive behaviors, including achievement. The Coptic women participants expressed the importance of selflessness and that sacrifices for the sake of others, or mankind in general, were very important to all of them. Achievements for Coptic women were attained on earth and in Heaven and there would be more rewards in Heaven. The honorable status that they have and the heavenly glories that await them, as well as the sense of satisfaction, fulfillment, and pleasure for them were incomparable achievements.

In light of the literature, it appears that the sentiment of pride that the Coptic women participants expressed was inspired by their status in Christianity and their Church. According to Brown and Marshall (2001), the role of pride is fundamentally associated with self-esteem and is maintained for self-enhancement, in turn increases one's feelings of the good pride. In other words, pride is considered the primary sentiment that builds self-esteem that influences a wide range of interpersonal progression and basic emotions.

Recent studies revealed that pride has different, cross-cultural, nonverbal expressions that are recognized and identified by people (Tracy & Robins, 2004b, 2006; Tracy, Robins, & Lagattuta, 2005). It is emphasized that the expressions of pride may communicate one's achievements or success that brings forth the sentiment, and thereby enhancing one's social status. Leary, Tambor, Terdal, and Downs (1995), Ekman (2003), Lemerise and Dodge (2000), and Rosin, Haidt and McCauley (2008) indicated that pride reinforces behaviors that generate positive sentiment, enhance self-esteem, and enhanced social values and status resulting in

increased social communication. Thus, in the case of the socially valued achievements and success, pride operates not only to promote, but also to maintain social status and acceptance of the group that a person belongs to.

Overall, the literature and the relevant research findings appeared to be aligned with the pattern of positive pride expressed by the participants, as all of them acknowledged and identified the sentiment of pride. In a similar pattern, all the participants also valued the same achievements and described the development of their successes in the cultural context of their Coptic Church.

The Male Dominance and the Hubristic/Authentic Pride. Patriarchy is considered a system of social organization, including the Church, which is characterized by male dominance (Therborn, 2004; Walby, 1990, 1997). Male dominance refers to the activities where the dominant partners are males or the center of power (Blackwell, 2005; Chakravarti, 2004). While the Coptic Church is a patriarchal system, in which males hold moral leadership, the women participants did not perceive or experience the fatherhood or the priesthood in the Church holding control, domination, or privilege over women. All the participants described that the priests manifested humbleness, care, love, and respect for female members. The participants emphasized that the priests did not hold any power; rather, the priests are considered servants who perform one of the roles in the Church and acted according to the Bible's advice: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you" (Romans 12:3).

As emphasized in the previous section, the literature revealed that hubristic pride, or self-love, is responsible for envy, jealousy, aggression, selfishness, and arrogance, as well as causing anti-social behaviours and unhealthy social interactions, due to perceived threats to the ego

(Brown & Marshall, 2001; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Tracy, Robins & Lagattuta, 2005; Tracy & Robins, 2007b). The absence of the hubristic pride explains the humbleness, selflessness, and sacrificing for others (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Tracy, Robins & Lagattuta, 2005). In contrast, authentic pride is considered a virtuous sentiment that leads to enhancement of the individual's social status in society and their social group (Brown & Marshall, 2001). Authentic pride refers to a satisfied sense of attachment toward an individual's own or another's choices and actions, or toward a homogenous group of people (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998).

Emphasizing the differences between the authentic versus hubristic sheds light as to why the Coptic women participants were proud of the patriarchal system of their Church, despite being excluded from the priesthood. All participants expressed humbleness and selflessness, as well as the sacrificing elements, that, according to Brown and Marshall (2001), Bushman and Baumeister (1998), and Tracy, Robins and Lagattuta (2005) are brought forth by authentic pride. The women stated that they were so proud of their Church and its patriarchal structure and system and that made them have a satisfied sense of attachment toward their homogenous group, as outlined by Brown and Marshall (2001) and Bushman and Baumeister (1998). In addition, the absence of hubristic pride as self-love thus explains why these participants did not express any kind of aggression, jealousy, or envy against men, nor demonstrate anti-social behaviors or unhealthy social interactions, which according to Bushman and Baumeister (1998) are imposed by perceived threats to the ego. The Coptic women participants denied having hubristic pride that, according to them, leads to an inflated sense of their personal status or accomplishments, and a sense of failure. Authentic pride gives them humility and motivates them to praise their Church.

While this study needs to be supported by scholarly review, the participants relied on their understanding of the Bible and Church teachings that have been established for more than two thousand years. From the spiritual and biblical teachings and points-of-view that the participants expressed wide knowledge and understanding, humbleness, selflessness, and sacrificing for others are virtual sentiments required in Christianity, taught by the Church, and practiced by the believers, including the participants and their Church leaders.

The State of Submission and Gender Equality. The Coptic women participants did not view submission as a form of gender control, inequality, or discrimination. Gender equality in the Coptic Church, according to the experiences and understanding of the participants, was unique and incomparable. All the Coptic women who participated in this research affirmed that when it came to gender equality, no other place on earth could treat, or consider women equal to men, except in Christianity in general, and the Coptic Church, in particular. In their view, the participants saw submission to their husbands as a significant symbolic model and illustration of the submission of the Church to Christ. They believed that they had to submit to their husbands who loved and sacrificed themselves for their wives, just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed Himself on the cross. According to their understanding, submission is not for abuse or dominance by their husbands, but in return for the love, care, and sacrifice they offered to their wives, and above all, for the sake of eternal life.

Relationships of dominant male partners, according to participants, were culturally orientated and had nothing to do with the type of submission in Christianity and its lived symbolic pattern in the Church that referred to the families of the participants. Based on the understanding and faith of the participants, submission represented obedience to God. Men had to act and follow the pattern established by Christ for the sake of salvation and eternal life of the

Church. In other words, the submission to the spiritual leaders of the Church was about submission to the spiritual roles and guidance that men carried out and their responsibility to provide spiritual leadership to their families.

In light of feminist perspectives, submission of women to the patriarchal system raises questions about women themselves (Kazan, 1998). According to Bartky (1990), women internalize the patriarchal culture and thus they believe that it is their job to submit to their culture and accept that they are inferior to men. While women hold formal and informal roles in many patriarchal societies or cultures, Kazan (1998) argued that regardless to what roles women be given, the patriarchal structure is enforced through law and culture that provides the means for society to operate and regulate their members; leading to girls raised in a way to internalize the patriarchal conditions and boys raised with full consciousness of their male distinctiveness.

Not all patriarchal cultures, however, preclude options for women. Kazan (1998) and Messer-Davidow (2002) outlined that in some societies women may hold beliefs of the patriarchal structure and system through religious functions. Also, in such societies women are given the right, through the church, to divorce their husbands on certain conditions (as in the case of the Coptic Church). In addition, a group of women may wield informal power or roles in patriarchal society, including the church where they can form networks and shape activities. Nevertheless, informal power is still not the same as institutionalized power, as such it can be taken away very easily and is still dependent on institutionalized power to exist or occur (Messer-Davidow, 2002). Regardless, based on the explanation of the Coptic women participants, their sense of power had one source that was God and based on one source means that was their weakness. In this regards, the participants tried to give an account of the method

God took to keep them humble, and to prevent them from being exalted above measure to cure their spiritual pride as explained in more details in the next subtheme below.

However, from the perspectives and descriptions of the Coptic women participants, they emphasized that they are well-aware of the patriarchal structures in Egypt and how the Arab culture imposed its restrictions on how women are treated and valued. In addition, all the participants expressed that they were knowledgeable and conscious of the patriarchal structure of their Coptic Church. Each participant distinguished between the two patriarchal systems of the Church and Egypt. The patriarchal system of the Church was considered as a heavenly ideal pattern that reflected the greatest gender equality in earth. In contrast, the patriarchal system of Egypt was seen as a social system that was based on gender inequality, which led to the oppression of women oppression. All the participants expressed their admiration, appreciation, and pride of the patriarchal structure and system of their Coptic Church. As laid out in the previous chapter, the participants considered the patriarchal structure and system of their Coptic Church to be the best, where gender equality is practiced to its ultimate form and could not be compared to any other structure or system. The scholarly arguments, in light of the perspectives and lived experiences of the Coptic women participants invite some questions. Do the Coptic women participants internalize the patriarchal culture and system of their Church, so that they believe it is their duty to submit and accept their capacity as inferior to men?

From a feminist point-of-view, the internalization is involuntary by women resulting from the notion of ‘sexist means exist’ in their societies and cultures (Barrett, 2014; John, 2004, Walby, 1986). From an interactionism perspective, such held beliefs reflect the inhibited ideas or beliefs about women that are internalized through socialization, the learning process through

culture and social interactions (Blumer, 1969; Hogg, 2003; Mcleod & Lively, 2003; Stryker, 1980).

This point invites both feminism and interactionism to exchange some perspectives on the issue. Feminism points the finger at the society and culture saying that people are not born sexist or came out of the womb thinking that women are inferior humans (Barrett, 2014; John, 2004; Walby, 1986). Interactionist on the other hand holds societies and culture responsible for what people learn and understand as well as the common beliefs and attitudes, including what shapes their thinking about themselves and others people of the same society or culture that are around them (Anderson & Taylor, 2009; Hogg, 2003; Mcleod & Lively, 2003; Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975). Therefore, the conclusion could be that people of a particular identity or cultural background often exhibit similar characteristics, articulate parallel thinking, express akin attitudes and engage in similar behaviors (Anderson & Taylor, 2009; Hogg, 2003; Mcleod & Lively, 2003; Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975).

With that being said, from the point of feminists, Coptic women may be perceived as if they internalized the patriarchal culture and system of their Church. From an interactionism perspective, Coptic women already defined and described that they all held the greatest status from God that He granted them through the Church. The data revealed that all the participants learned such beliefs through their Christian culture, including home, their Church, Sunday school, and the Bible. By all means, this is not to deny that internalization does exist, but it hard to disregard the fact that Coptic women did not believe that they have inferior status but rather they claimed to have the supreme status. Besides, if feminism holds societies and culture responsible for what is taught, interactionism agrees that that the learned beliefs shape people's thinking, attitudes and behavior. This conclusion may even resolve the argument for and against

of the term patriarchy that is addressed on page 25. Briefly, Barrett (2014) argues that the term involves the assumption of a universal system of inequality and evokes a universalistic notion of unchanged relations between men and women. Also, Walby (1986) sees that replacing the term patriarchy provides better analysis of gender inequality. Such disagreement over the definition of the term patriarchy, according to John (2004), implicates the influence of men's role on feminist analysis of the definition.

With this being presented, how Coptic women perceived the term patriarchy and how its discourse operated in the Church has challenged the notion of understanding patriarchy from their views. This is similar to the view of Barrett (2014) in which the term invites an unrealistic notion of unchanged relations between men and women. With Barrett's view in mind, it seems that at the micro level, the Coptic Church culture and beliefs shape its people's attitude and thinking of themselves (Coptic women) and of others (Coptic men) as interactionism claims. If at the micro level a particular culture and beliefs can shape people's attitude and thinking of themselves and of others, it is wondered that if positive thinking and behaviors are promoted toward women at the macro level would people's negative attitude toward women change also?

Clearly, their descriptions and awareness testify otherwise, to the extent that they all expressed their pride, satisfaction, sense of accomplishment and achievement, and admiration to the patriarchal culture and system of their Church. The descriptions illustrated how the Coptic women relied on the symbolic meanings they developed during the process of their social interaction, as outlined by Blumer (1969) and Herman-Kinney and Reynolds (2003). In their illustrations, they used symbolic meanings that shaped their understanding and beliefs as well as gave meaning to their experience. The organs of one body, as the blocks of one building, with

Christ as the head of the organs, and as the cornerstone of the one building, are among the symbols used by the participants.

In contrast to the arguments presented by Kazan (1998) that the negative patriarchal structure is enforced through law and culture that is not in women's favour, the participants explained that the enforced structure by their Coptic Church through law and culture provides the means for the advancement of the Coptic women rights and equality. Unlike the social regulations, based on what roles girls and boys are raised to assume under patriarchal conditions, all participants claimed Copts (including but were not limited to them) were brought up with full consciousness of gender equality as part of their Christian beliefs and Church teachings.

With the exception of the priesthood being limited to the males, the Biblical texts and the Coptic Church deemed women equal to men and men equal to women. Although Coptic women participants could not be ordained as priests, they did not object to the role as being exclusive to males. As presented in the first subtheme of part four, "Priesthood Is a Role, Not a Position", the women explained that the priesthood was not a position in the Church, but a role performed by males who represented God the Father sacrificing His Begotten Son. The priests represent Christ, who authorized them to perform His role on earth. The women still defined themselves as God's representatives and image. It was the participants' understanding that if Christ wanted female priests, He would have chosen His mother who was full of the Holy Spirit and from whom He was born in the flesh.

For the Coptic women participants, they perceived equality to be executed at its ultimate level in the Coptic Church. They provided examples and referenced the Bible to affirm that gender equality in Christianity and in the Coptic Church was incomparable to any other organizations on earth. Examples included their equal status and role in Christianity and in the

Coptic Church, as described in the previous categories, specifically the first and fourth. They also said that submission was not based on gender or that women had to submit to men. Rather, they said that submission was for all believers (males and females) to submit to one another regardless of gender, as long as submission was to the Lord, according to the commandment of God. In other words, no one is obligated to submit or to act in a way that goes against what God outlined in the Bible.

The conclusion that I learned from these findings is that submission is not restricted to women, but to everyone, regardless of gender, and that women are equal to men, and that the status of women is not less than the status of men. Also, based on the lived experiences of the participants, Christ submitted to His Father and gave Himself on the cross; therefore, the Church and all believers submit to Christ and that each member submits to one another in Christ, based on love and not on domination or relinquishment of control. Participants referred to the following verses to distinguish between the submission they believed in and other submission that they denounced.

First, one of the Biblical references participants referred to was about the discussion between Christ and His twelve disciples who were the second highest rank next to Christ, as mentioned in the Book of Mark: “And He came to Capernaum: and being in the house He asked them [the twelve disciples], What was it that you disputed among yourselves on the way? But they held their peace: for on the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And He sat down, and called the twelve, and said unto them, If any man desires to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all” (Mark 9:33-35).

Second, another Biblical reference the participants mentioned, also from the Book of Mark reads: “But Jesus called them [the twelve disciples] and said to them, you know that they

who are accounted rulers over the nations [referring to the gentiles] exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority on them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever of you desires to become first, he shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

In referring to these verses, Coptic women participants tried to confirm what was established by Christ regarding humbleness, serving mankind, refusing to exercise authority, and declining to be rulers. Christ rebuked His twelve disciples even discussing amongst themselves who was the greatest; rather, He wanted them to be called the servants of everyone. The word servant is attributed to the adjective slaves, which Christ affirmed when He says: “A servant is not greater than his master” (John 15:20); “You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 15:12-15). The twelve disciples, who were high priests, were the servants of everyone, not just women, thus, what authoritative roles they had as slaves from the social perspectives of the term slaves. From the civil perspective, submission to authority is considered obedience to the laws, while submission in Christianity is obedience to Christ who said to His twelve disciples: “Whoever listens to you listens to Me; whoever rejects you rejects Me; but whoever rejects Me rejects Him Who sent Me” (Luke 10:16). In their reflections, the Coptic women participants indicated that submitting to the Church and its spiritual leaders is about the obedience to the commandments of God.

Concealed Power in Manifested Weakness. Power is conceptualized and defined within a wide range of perspectives and there are disagreements over how it “should” be conceptualized

(Haugaard, 2010; Lukes, 2005). Disagreements have left the door open for someone to redefine the term power or how it should be understood. As indicated in chapter five the feminist approach is presented to serve as a theoretical framework. Thus, it is useful to shed some light on how the term power is perceived or conceptualized by feminist perspectives. How the term power is understood by the participants follows the feminist viewpoint of how power is conceptualized.

From the feminist theoretical frameworks, power is considered a central concept. In understanding how power is conceptualized from feminist perspectives, it is helpful to understand how the term has been reconstructed as a resource (to be redistributed), as domination, and as empowerment (Allen, 1999, 2008a; Hartsock 1983; Yeatmann, 1997 as cited by Narayan, 1997; Young, 1990 as cited by Wartenberg, 1990).

In terms of power as a resource that is unequally distributed among women and men, liberal feminists aim to redistribute this power equitably so that women can have power equal to men (Allen, 2008b; Cotterill, 1992; Lukes, 2005; Young, 1990, as cited in Wartenberg, 1990) implying that power can be quantified and possessed by individuals in greater or lesser amounts. The response to Young's critique of the distributive model led to an alternative conceptualization of power that does not view power as a resource, but views it in relation of domination (Allen, 1999). In referring to power as domination, according to Allen (2008a, 2008b), feminists have used common terms such as 'oppression', 'patriarchy', and 'subjection' to specify that it is a type of power-over relation. Namely, the term 'domination' refers to illegitimate, unjust, or oppressive power relations. Nevertheless, Miller (1992) rejected the notion of power as an oppressive domination; rather, she called it empowerment. In regards to how power is viewed as empowerment, a wide range of feminists of different theoretical backgrounds have argued for re-

conceptualizing power as a capacity to empower or transform oneself and others (Allen, 2008a; McGary, 1992; Miller, 1992; Wartenberg, 1990), which according to Wartenberg (1990) is identified as transformative power. What makes this conceptualization to be distinct from oppressive domination, control or unjust power-over-relationship is that empowerment aims to transform power; yet, it is still in fact a type of power over whom it is executed (Allen, 2008a, 2008b; McGary, 1992; Wartenberg, 1990). Miller (1992) stated that, “women may want to be powerful in ways that simultaneously enhance, rather than diminish, the power of others” (pp. 247-248). In relation to how women understand power or power relations, Miller (1992) wrote that “women's examination of power...can bring new understanding to the whole concept of power” (p. 241).

Based on their examination, Coptic women participants brought new understanding to power relations. These participants explained that they held power only when they were weak; power was manifested in them as long as they were weak or powerless. Exercising power over others, according to the participants, was the weakest form of behaviour. As a result, the participants explained that Christians, including themselves, had to give up or reject “earthly power” as conceptualized socially or politically. Power was understood by the participants in a radically different way. In order to define power, they said one had to understand first the love of Jesus Christ for mankind that led the participants to endure suffering love and self-sacrificing, which sounded radical compared to other ways of understanding power. Such power resulted from an inner spiritual strength that did not require physical power, military might, domination, or capability to defeat another.

For the Coptic women participants, power could be upheld when they were in a position of weakness, lost control over their circumstances, or when they chose to forgive their enemies

and reject sin. As well, the participants indicated that striking back against those who hurt them or getting angry was an indication of powerlessness while love dictated forgiveness. According to the participants manifested weaknesses, were the lived experiences, situations, circumstances and wounds that were hard for the participants to bear or remove, either because these weaknesses were beyond the participants' control or when they chose not to revenge for themselves. As Christians, the participants believed that Christ told them not to repay evil for evil (Matthew 5:38-42). The Bible taught them that "when reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate" (1 Corinthians 4:12-13).

According to the participants, only God has power, and that true power was rooted in Him and inspired by His love to all mankind. One of the Biblical examples the participants provided was related to the Apostle Paul who had an undisclosed thorn in his flesh about which he prayed to God "but [the Lord] said to me [Apostle Paul], 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'" In addition, God also said to him: "My power will tabernacle over your weakness"(2 Corinthians 12:7-9). In other words, human weaknesses can manifest God's power. In this context, the participants indicated that God's power was manifested in their weakness, just like treasures that were in earthen vessels. They also mentioned that their earthen vessels did not prevent God's treasures from being manifested in them; thus God's treasures would not be glorified without such earthen and weaken vessels. In other words, if they had upheld power the manifestation of God's power would not be recognized or glorified.

For the participants, the ultimate purpose of God in their weakness was to glorify the power that moved Christ to the cross to accomplish His work of love and this was not understood by many. In this regards, it is written in the Bible that "Christ crucified was foolishness to the

Greeks, a stumbling block to the Jews, but to those who are called it is the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:23). This latest verse was given by the participants to explain that spiritual paradox of their understanding of power and weakness.

Foundations of Understanding. The understanding of the participants of their own religion is fundamentally shaped by the way they relate to the records of their religion, the written texts and the teachings of their church, as well as the social and cultural practices that depend on the spiritual environments, such as their homes, family members, and members of the church congregation and its activities (Bryant-Davis et al., 2014; Nunan, 2003). Generally, understanding one’s religion is an innovative ground that provides the principles that constitute adherence and how the practice of religion is carried out (Richter et al., 2005). Learning about the sources that shaped the participants’ understanding of their faith and the culture of their Coptic Church, provides the foundation necessary to the participants’ understanding and the ramification of their understanding in their lived experiences in the Coptic Church.

The sources identified by the Coptic women participants that shaped their spiritual understanding included family members, especially parents, the Church leaders and teachings, the written records of the Church’s fathers, the Sunday schools teachers, and above all the Bible. The understanding exhibited throughout the interviews was what drove each participant to love, feel proud of, and admire her Christian faith, Church, and its patriarchal system. Each participant exhibited extensive knowledge and awareness of the related Biblical texts and verses referred to in order to support her understanding and beliefs and to justify her behaviours, feelings, and thoughts. For the participants, it was their understanding that led them to describe their status in Christianity, particularly the Coptic Church, as being made in God’s image, daughters of God,

equal to men, and residents of Heaven who served as representatives of their heavenly Father on earth.

Besides the expressed knowledge of their status, Coptic women participants explored their ties and sense of connection to God and to the heavenly angels. With this connection in mind, Bryant-Davis et al. (2014) explained that religion informs women's thoughts, feelings, behaviours, as well as their sense of connection through self-awareness and to the Higher Power and the angels.

For the Coptic women participants, Christianity, its dogma, teachings, Bible, as well as the Church were not just elements they understood; rather, these elements are the experiences the participants lived and the journey of their lives that does not end on earth, but continues in Heaven where they ultimately belong. Therefore, earth and everything in it is the least of their concerns, as the participants shifted their focus to Heaven, which is their aim, desire, hope, and eternal reward. The patriarchal system of their Church is thus, the most ideal pattern on earth that practices gender equality and fairness while waiting for the perfect eternal pattern in Heaven. According to the participants, understanding the principles of their Christian faith and that of their Coptic Church are fundamentally essential. Each participant believed that these principles were essential to understanding how God intended faith to operate in her life.

With that understanding, the participants indicated that they could practice their faith more effectively. It is the understanding of the participants that God operates as He promises and covenant throughout His words in the Bible. According to the participants, as long as they believe and obey what He says, He brings His promises to pass in their lives. For the participants, the bottom line was to trust God and agree to His terms of the covenant; thus, they walked in His ways through faith and love.

Implication for Social Work

The response of social work to the rising levels of public and professional interest in spirituality and religions poses a question about the importance or implication of such beliefs for social work practice (McKernan, 2005). Many findings in social work studies reveal that there is a need for both social work education and practice to give sufficient attention to the importance of religious and spiritual beliefs in many of the service users' lives as well as to the potential effectiveness of religious and spiritual interventions (Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2011; McKernan, 2005; Potocky-Tripodi, 2002; Reamer, 2015; Sheridan & Hemert, 1999; Sheridan, Wilmer & Atcheson, 1994; Wright, 2005; Soc, 2015; Streets, 2008). According to a number of sources, the spiritual and religious dimensions have been ignored by both social work educators and social work practice (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002; Sheridan & Hemert, 1999; Sheridan, Wilmer & Atcheson, 1994). No wonder that despite the reported significant growth of the Coptic immigrant population in Canada (Mississauga News", 2014; Statistic Canada's, 2010) no single study could be found on Coptic women.

Also, the profession's practitioners have increasingly recognized both: 1) spirituality and religions are very important variables in the lives of their services users (definitely, including Coptic women); and, 2) the lack of skill and training related to spiritual and religious aspects (including Coptic faith) among the profession's practitioners (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002; Reamer, 2015; Sheridan & Hemert, 1999; Sheridan, Wilmer & Atcheson, 1994; Wright, 2005).

The growing number of religious organizations, the virtual displacement of communities and families, and the emotional and psychological consequences of our modern society have led to myriad conditions that demand professionals including social workers to be skilful in spirituality and religions (Popescu & Drumm, 2008). Together, these beg the question I

addressed early on page 12: how can social workers intervene more effectively without having insights on the role of spirituality and religions in the lives of those whom they serve? Or as Morgan, Berwick, and Walsh asked (2008) “how can social workers attend to people’s spiritual and religious dimensions when they have had very little training on the dynamics and implications of this complex domain?” (p.11).

In their answer about the importance or implication of spirituality and religions for social work, Popescu and Drumm (2008) reported that spirituality and religions can be aggravating factors or healing tools or as Moore (2003) stated, “it can oppress clients as well as liberate them” (p. 2). For example, promoting killing, abuse and violence (Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999), dishonouring women (Nason-Clark, 2000), permitting polygamy (Potocky-Tripodi,2002), forbidding abortions (Reamer, 2015), or prohibiting even blood transfusion that could save the lives of loved ones (Reamer, 1994, 2015) are shown in the social work literature related to spirituality and religions as aggravating or oppressive factors. In contrast, some other social work literature related to spirituality and religions provide evidence of spirituality and religion as healing or liberating tools (Popescu & Drumm, 2008) , promoting care and love, calling for forgiveness (Mitchell, Hargrove, Collins, Thompson, Reddick & Kaslow, 2006), and providing hope and comfort to people (Pargament, 1997; Popescu & Drumm, 2008; Wright, 2005).

Prior to my study, as a social worker, I concluded that there was a clear need to give greater priority to exploring the potential significance of Christian Coptic Church beliefs in the lives and perspectives of married Coptic women. Social workers, according to Soc (2015), need to be able to respond appropriately to the needs of all service users, including but not limited to those for whom religious beliefs are important. For example, what Coptic women described

about their religious beliefs revealed that they were spiritual human who had strong spiritual longings and aspirations. Gratton (1995) indicated that people's spiritual longings and aspiration can be honored only when their spiritual capacity is taken seriously. Addressing spirituality in social work can help social workers to gain an understanding about people's experience especially when people speak about their relationship with God (Soc, 2015). Through understanding, social workers can use sensitive language, employ strategies and adjust their approach to the way religion is presented by people, which matters to them (Streets, 2008). The understanding and appreciation of social workers to the impact of religious beliefs and faith held by services users—such as the Coptic women—are helpful in considering the types of appropriate interventions (Farber, Sabatino, Taylor, Timberlake & Wall, 2003; McKernan, 2005; Streets, 2008).

Unfortunately, for Coptic women in the Orthodox Church, the inadequate or incomplete information in social work research related to any topic or social group impedes social policy formulation, implementation of social work services, and the enrichment of social work practice (Hepworth et al., 2010). A better understanding of the experience and context of these women will enhance social work practice within the community. Social workers are involved in a variety of contexts and the quality of their practice relies on, and is affected by, their knowledge, or lack thereof, while working with unfamiliar populations (Hepworth et al., 2010; Padgett, 2008; Royse, 1995; Rubin & Babbie, 2009). Therefore, the knowledge this study generated can enhance social work practice and reduce the possibility of ambiguity and misunderstanding while working with Coptic immigrant women.

No published research is available on the lived experiences of Coptic immigrant women situated in the Coptic Orthodox patriarchal structure and system, and this represents a significant

deficit in research availability. This study illuminates valuable insights and provides married immigrant Coptic women the opportunity to express their lived experiences within the culture of their Church. This is an opportunity they previously might not have had, and the knowledge gained is beneficial for people who will use the data, specifically social workers.

Spiritually, this research helps social work understanding that clients have long and religious beliefs that can be honored when their beliefs and spiritual capacity are critically taken into account (Gratton, 1995). In times of crisis, social workers are the professionals to whom clients turn for help. Social workers therefore are being challenged to honor the religious beliefs brought to them by clients from different demographic backgrounds (McKernan, 2005). But data lacked the credible information about Coptic women and their Coptic Church and beliefs that could be integrated into social work practice. The implications of this research are thus important for clients' engagement and access to the resources to which they turn for assistance, and also for social work in terms of what can be offered to such clients emotionally or spiritually. In honoring social work values and wisdom, having this research available helps social workers to understand the value of spirituality and religions and their impact on clients. Such understanding can enhance social work practice to better assess and serve clients.

Religious values and beliefs significantly contributed to the establishment of the North American people's social welfare policies (Cascio, 2003). Similarly, according to Cascio (2003), other social work principles including social justice, the worth of the citizens and their responsibility to greater society "are synonymous with corresponding religious values" that "have been steeped for centuries of [religious] traditions" (p.3). Cascio (2003) concluded that "in order to understand the mission of social work...it is necessary to understand the origins of social welfare" (p.3). Findings of this study revealed that the social welfare of Coptic women is

bounded by their religious values and beliefs. Thus, better understanding of how important religious values and beliefs are to Coptic women will help social workers resolve intergroup conflicts more effectively. Findings of this study invite social workers to have a religious and spiritual basis that not only reflects the values of social work profession, but also respects the religious values and beliefs of the CCC and its members including Coptic women. For example, the findings revealed that the perception of Coptic women as equal was based upon the principle of love. Based on this perception, Coptic women saw every person as a reflection of God the Father. This perception reinforced belief that they had the responsibility to love all mankind whom they considered their siblings. Thus, Coptic women believed that serving and taking care of people, even those who opposed them, was their duties required by God. Consequently, social workers may find out from Coptic women about what they want to do when they are in a conflict or distress with someone, as asking Coptic women to act against their opponents may not be what they want to do. Another example, based on the findings in my research of how Coptic women respond to challenges and pain, I learned a few interesting aspects. Coptic women viewed suffering as a stark and inevitable reality that each one would go through, and sometimes God would allow it to make them stronger, more compassionate toward others and more patient. Besides, Coptic women saw pain through a different lens which lined up with what they believed to be God's truths and Word in the Bible. For instance, if a woman is going through a difficult time in her life or marriage she is urged to pray, look for her partner's interest first, forgive and strive to make her marriage work while finding comfort in God's word. Furthermore, if there is a situation of chronic illness, Coptic women believed that their faith in God would elevate their spirit that He would strengthen them during their time of weakness and deterioration.

In brief, their trust in God and His Word leads them to draw inner power in dealing with problems and enables them to see each crisis as an opportunity for personal growth, character building and obtaining blessings. Understanding this unique way of coping with tragedies assist me in providing counsel along the same line and provide them with hope, encouragement and strength through their own belief system.

The implications of this study and its importance to social work educators' highlights comprehensive and integrated understanding to the overall body of knowledge that was previously lacking and for future research, social work practice, and general theoretical diversification that is currently in the public record. It is emphasized that there is a disconnection between the rising needs in practice and spiritual and religious content in social work education (Canda & Furman, 1999; Murdock, 2005); as reported, social work education has limitedly addressed these issues with little or no such education (Morgan, et.al 2008).

Reconnection can happen in the course of education when knowledge is generated to enhance social work practice while encountered challenges in practice beg for more knowledge production. Evidence-base practice is increasingly accepted in social work and becoming more apparent and pressing (Proctor & Rosen, 2008; Titler, 2007). This study has generated evidence-based knowledge for social work practice if resultant improvements to practice are to be realized. As social work requires more engagement in service that is based on research, the implementation of this research has the basis in evidence to extend the benefits of efficacy and effectiveness in research. In the real-world of social work practice the knowledge generated here can facilitate interventions, feasibility, and decision-support procedures. In particular, this study has strived to contribute knowledge in several ways: 1) it has generated an understanding of the lived experiences of Coptic immigrant women within the patriarchal Coptic Orthodox traditional

Church; and 2) it has advanced the welfare of Coptic women through the inclusion of their voice in research, with an overall commitment to social justice.

As indicated in the discussion chapter, the views, opinions, and judgments of a particular group (e.g., Coptic participants) may be different from the public record (e.g., existing data in the literature review on patriarchal structures and systems). A particular group may hold identity and beliefs that are quite different from what are considered as the norms of the beliefs of their culture (Morgan, et.al 2008). In agreement to these views, the participants said they are renewed humans with new hearts and thoughts who act according to new principles, by new rules, with new ends, and in a new Church. So, in the views of these particular participants, the patriarchal structure and system of their Coptic Church is admirable, as men and women in the Church do not compete to have an authoritative role at the expense of the opposite gender; men are not perceived from the perspective of the research participants as opponents. This indicates that theoretical perspectives need to be revisited in order to further the understanding of the livelihood experiences of certain groups or groups in a particular patriarchal structure and system, such as the Coptic pattern.

Summary

The lived experiences of married Coptic women in their Coptic Church were influenced by and reflected the thoughts, beliefs, and understandings they held. Each participant believed that she was a foreigner on earth and she had to maintain the heavenly pattern through her thinking and understanding in what she believed. In their descriptions, the participants outlined that their pattern was based on the following verse: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2). The commitment to this

pattern implies the significance of meaning associated with the heavenly pattern that they attested to and approved as the perfect pattern. Their confirmation and approval of the heavenly pattern implicated their disconfirmation and disapproval “to the pattern of this world”, according to the verse to which they referred. The meaning to do God’s will and to conform to His pattern was what mattered most in earthly discourses, systems, or patterns. The participants believed that they were citizens of Heaven and representatives of their heavenly Father on earth, and had to live accordingly; therefore, their lived experience in the Church, influenced by the heavenly pattern, they experienced and approved.

In this context, the importance of these findings is the recognition that there are important of Coptic religious beliefs in the realm of social work practice and its impact on Coptic women’s spiritual capacity. In the realm of social work practice, the importance of these findings is the recognition that there are important of religious beliefs related to the Coptic Church and its impact on Coptic women’s spiritual capacity. As spirituality and religions can be powerful tools of strength in practice they also need to be considerably explored in-depth for social work education. It is crucial therefore to incorporate and value the knowledge of spirituality and religions in efforts to holistically care for human. This study revealed how spirituality and religion embedded in the lives of Coptic women, data that needed to be acknowledged and further examined.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of Coptic immigrant women and their living faith in relationship to the culture of their *Coptic Orthodox traditional Church's patriarchal structure and system*. From the points-of-view of the eight participants, the study also investigated whether experiences were shaped subjectively, within the individual, and/or objectively, by the Church and other outside influences.

The general literature review indicates that the patriarchal structures and systems rest on male power, authority, and control over women and that women's status within the patriarchal structures and systems is downgraded. Initially, the existing body of literature along with what a number of concerns that Coptic women shared during my counseling sessions raised questions about the Coptic women's experiences in their Church. In the context of the available literature and the shared experiences, the negligible amount of research raised more questions regarding if the existing literature was conclusive or there was a need to know more about such an area.

The main major research question the study sought to answer was: "What are the lived experiences of married immigrant Coptic women in Canada in relation to living their faith in the context of their culture of the Coptic Orthodox traditional Church?"

In response to the research question, this study explored the narratives of Coptic immigrant women regarding their living faith in the *Coptic Orthodox traditional Church's patriarchal structure and system*, an issue that has been overlooked since the Church was established more than 2000 years ago.

In this study, there are five categories; each category includes one major theme and some subthemes.

The first category focuses on the major theme of how the Coptic women perceive their own status; first, in Christianity and secondly, in their Church, as based on their own understanding. The eight participants indicated that there were no differences between their status in Christianity and their status in the Coptic Church and that their status in Christianity was established in and through the Coptic Church. In the five identified subthemes, the participants explained that it was through the Coptic Church that their status was ascertained as: 1) citizens of Heaven who reside on earth; 2) daughters of God; 3) equally made according to God's image; 4) become the temple of the Holy Spirit, and; 5) are princesses of the King of Kings.

The second category's major theme is related to the experiences of Coptic women in relation to their status that was described in the first category. Based on their experiences the following five subthemes emerged: 1) as fellow citizens they are no longer strangers or aliens from their God, their father, or from Heaven that was their home; 2) God is their refuge; 3) they are waiting to get to their eternal home; 4) as they live on earth, they are certain of where they are heading; 5) they are living the kingdom of Heaven lifestyle on earth, and; 6) reaching the eternal destination is the full reward they hope for.

The third category concerns the role of Coptic women in their Church based on the following four subthemes related to their roles: 1) to fulfill the purpose of being temporary residents on earth; 2) to perform their duties and responsibilities in helping others; 3) to be servants for everyone, and; 4) to act as heavenly agents.

The fourth category centers on the relationship between participants and their Church leaders as the major theme. In their responses, the following four themes emerged related to: 1) the participants' experiences in the patriarchy system of their Church; 2) their

view on the priesthood as a role, but not a position; 3) the significance and representation of the role of fatherhood in their Church to them, and; 4) their views of the hidden power and feminism rejoinder.

The fifth category's major theme involves the relationship between Coptic women and the Coptic Church. The emerged subthemes of this final category are: 1) how they saw the connection between Heaven and earth through the Church; 2) the uniqueness of gender equality in their Church is incomparable; 3) the influence of culture on their Coptic Church; 4) the most frustrating aspects of their faith are culturally oriented, and; 5) the most rewarding aspect of faith is mainly the eternal life in Heaven through the Church.

What I learned from the rich data the participants provided can be summarized in the following six points:

First, the patriarchal structure and system of the Coptic Church is admired by all the participants for a number of reasons, including that the patriarchal structure and system of the Church was deemed by them to be the greatest example of gender equality and humbleness on earth. They believed that their patriarchal system represented the caring and loving God of mankind and gender equality. For the participants, the Church system exemplified Heaven on earth and was incomparable to any earthly organizations.

Second, the patriarchal structure and system of the Church makes women proud, as all the participants regarded their Church and its leaders as highly honorable and creditable. They said that their beliefs and faith in their Coptic patriarchal system, including the Church leaders, dogma, rituals, and services brought forth pleasure and satisfaction that they are so proud of.

Third, regarding male dominance in the Church, the women participants did not perceive or experience the fatherhood or the priesthood in the Church holding control, privilege, or domination over women. All the participants said that the priests manifested care, love, humbleness, and respect for female members. The participants emphasized that the priests did not hold power; rather, the priests are considered servants who simply perform one of the roles in the Church and acted accordingly.

Fourth, in terms of submission and gender equality, the Coptic women participants did not view submission as a form of gender control, inequality, or discrimination. Gender equality in the Coptic Church, according to the experiences and understanding of the participants, was unique and incomparable. All the participants affirmed that when it came to gender equality, no other place on earth could treat, or consider women equal to men, except in Christianity in general, and the Coptic Church, in particular.

Fifth, according to the participants, power is conceptualized differently from the wide range of perspectives. Based on the participants' understanding, power is concealed and experienced out of weakness, hardship, suffering, and tribulation. In contrast, the participants explained that executions and manifestations of power, in any form, reflect their weakness and true powerlessness. The participants indicated that only God has power and that true power is rooted in Him and inspired by His love to all mankind. According to the participants, His power would tabernacle over their weakness, through which God's power would be recognized and glorified.

Sixth, the participants exhibited a wide range of understanding that drove them to love, feel proud of, and admire their Christian faith, Church, and its patriarchal system. For the participants, their understanding led them to describe their status in Christianity,

particularly the Coptic Church, as being made in God's image, daughters of God, equal to men, and residents of Heaven who served as representatives of their heavenly Father on earth. The participants identified that their understanding and knowledge is fundamentally shaped by the Biblical texts, the Christian teachings, Church coaching, and their family members, especially parents.

Overall, study findings reveal that the lived experiences of married immigrant Coptic women in their Coptic Church were influenced by, and reflected in, the thoughts, beliefs, and understandings of the participants. Each participant believed that she was a foreigner on earth and had to maintain the heavenly pattern through her thinking and understanding of what she believed. In their descriptions, the participants outlined that their pattern was based on the following verse: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2). The commitment to this pattern indicates the significance of meaning associated with the heavenly pattern that they attested to and approved as the perfect pattern. Their confirmation and approval of the heavenly pattern implicated their disconfirmation and disapproval "to the pattern of this world", according to the verse they referred to. The intent to do God's will and to conform to His pattern mattered most in earthly discourses, systems, and patterns.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are those characteristics of the research design, particularly its methodology and how it influenced the application or interpretation of the findings. In other words, there is a constraint on generalizability and utility of findings due to the small sample size, which required a different technique to establish reliability and validity. Therefore, I

considered the four steps (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for this study in order to ensure trustworthiness of the research findings. This study did not intend to establish a significant relationship from the data, as statistical tests usually require a larger sample size to ensure a representative distribution of the population so that findings could be generalized or transferred (Creswell, 2009). Generally, a small sample size may cause the research to suffer from insufficient data for the reliability required for the scope of analysis and be difficult to provide a meaningful relationship (Bernard, 2013).

Interviewing eight participants for this study was an extremely time consuming process. In addition to each interview, the time spent to transcribe the data was extensive as data collection and data analysis in qualitative studies are often time consuming (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007, 2009). In spite of this challenge, the interviews were the only method that this rich and extensive data could be gathered about the phenomena.

With this in mind, there are reasons due to which samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller particularly than those used in quantitative studies (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Ritche, Lewis & Elam, 2003). These include, as the study goes on, more data that may not necessarily lead to new information; qualitative studies are concerned with meaning but not with making generalization; and finally, qualitative studies are very labour intensive, analysing a large data can be time consuming and often obviously impractical (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Ritche, et.al, 2003). However, on one hand qualitative samples have to be large enough to assure that all, or at least most of the points-of-view that are essential are uncovered, as different participants can hold diverse perceptions. On the other hand, if the samples are too large then

data becomes repetitive and suffers saturation, as data does not shed any new information during investigation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The lack of prior related research on the topic was another limitation. Prior research could have formed the basis of my literature review and helped me to lay a foundation for understanding the research problem I was investigating. Thus, this research was designed as an exploratory (but not explanatory) research typology to explore the lived experiences of the participants in the context of their Coptic Church. This dissertation led to findings that were not initially anticipated. My findings are useful in making future research suggestions, because they can lead to new avenues to explain and explore in future studies.

The research of Coptic women's lived experiences does not agree with what is revealed in the literature review about the discourse of patriarchy and feminist perspectives on patriarchal structures and systems. The findings of this research were entirely new; they explored new information that needs to be further explained. Descriptions of the patriarchal structure and system of the Coptic Church was admired and regarded as the perfect pattern on earth is explicit in the data that participants provided. Future research of participants explaining the rationale behind admiring the patriarchal structure and system of the Coptic Church can build our understanding and knowledge, and add more meaningful data to what was already revealed through this research.

From a conceptual framework, this research was guided by feminist perspectives on the discourse of patriarchy as an oppressive system. The findings reveal that the patriarchy system of the Coptic Church is admirable and perceived as a perfect pattern for gender equality, aspects that the feminist conceptual framework lacked. Therefore, I recommend future research using social psychology views of religion in an attempt to examine women's perceptions of patriarchy

in a new context, setting, and culture; even when religion is examined by feminists, the record showed that the focus was limited to religion as an oppressive patriarchal system.

Nevertheless, with this mind, viewing the study from the perspective of other disciplines may invite the unseen insights to emerge (Symon & Cassell, 2004). While feminist perspectives served as a guiding theoretical framework, but as cautioned by Symon and Cassell (2004), I did not use as disciplinary-based interpretative frameworks to inform my accounts. However, aspects of the feminist disciplinary background lead me to view the discourse of patriarchy as an oppressive system, but as Lewis and Grimes (1999) and Symon and Cassell (2004) warned, it did not make me dwell on these aspects of the research context more than others. It is for these reasons I believe that I am not in a position to classify the participants as feminists unless this is how they view themselves. What mattered to me most was whose voices were allowed to be heard, and that was the voice of the Coptic women participants.

Recognizing the influence of my disciplinary backgrounds on the knowledge I tried to produce, should help me to avoid fitting people into my (disciplined) way of thinking about the reality or world of the participants. Symon and Cassell (2004) cautioned against trying to form some particular accounts, as I would deny the other meanings and interpretations provided by the participants. Being reflexive in such way entails reflecting on how the assumptions of my background discipline have prompted me to form a particular version of reality through my study (Symon & Cassell, 2004).

Being a member of the same organization and culture of the participants was an advantage that allowed access to the participants. Conversely, the culture and the nature of the research setting can lead to some biases of which the researcher may or may not be conscious. Therefore, I explained in detail what measures were taken to avoid perpetuating biases in the

reflexivity section. As a male, I expected to encounter limits on what was revealed to me in the interviews. My dual position as an insider-outsider inadvertently allowed my assumptions to come into play during analysis, an issue that was addressed in the data analysis, findings, and trustworthiness sections (Acker, 2000).

An interesting outcome of the research was that each of the eight participants reported to be actively involved in the Church and to perform some roles. Leaders were not intentionally targeted but it seems they were the ones that participated in the interviews. It may be seen that my being male and a leader in the church caused this to happen. However, what factors that did not encourage other members who did not have any roles in the Church to participate in the study remains unknown; being a male member and a researcher could be a potential factor. However, in her description of “the clashes” she encountered, one of the eight participants of this study, Martha stated on page 143 that “most of the Church servants are females Most of the leaders and coordinators are females. The females are more involved in the Church than males; during the services, you can see more females at benches than males”. Her description reflected the degree of involvement of Coptic women in the Church and that they were actively involved in the Church more than men. Martha’s description of the degree of involvement of Coptic women in the Church might explain why those who participated were all actively involved in the Church.

During recruitment, the sampling process was carried out appropriately to ensure the eligible participants who agreed to participate in the study; the population of interest was not difficult to reach. There were not any indications thus to conclude that those who did not participate because they did not have any roles in the Church purposely refrained from being involved in the research.

Reflecting on my understanding of how my maleness and leadership in the Church might have possibly influenced the participants in any ways is crucially important to address. My understanding is that being a leader and male in the Church could not have impacted the sample or influenced what participants said in any significant ways. Regarding my leadership, I have not been actively involved in the Church particularly at the locations where the recruitment took place since 2006 for serving out of Canada, studying out of the Province and accompanying my mother into the hospitals until she passed away in 2015.

So, my presence in the recruitment site has been negligible for years and my leadership remained unknown to many people in the Church including all the participants. Data testified that females were actively involved in the Church more than men and that most of the leaders and coordinators were females whose presence even occupied the benches of the men's side during the Church services. Such testimony reflected the level of women's involvements and active role in the Church.

With respect to my understanding of how my maleness might have had any effects on the disclosure of information, I believe, as Halpern (2000) emphasized, that gender differences seem to depend on the context. In the context of the research, all the participants in the study were all able to equally describe their understanding of their status in Christianity and the Church, and that their status could only be granted through the Church. They well-referenced the Biblical texts and for more accuracy they gave me a homework to do to verify that what they said was from the Bible as they did not know the exact verses or the particular reference of the verses. In general, as they read the scriptures in Arabic, they decided to ask me to locate the verses they wanted to convey what they said.

Besides, all the participants were able to identify their role in the Church and outlined the most frustrating and rewarding aspects of their faith as Coptic married women. Data revealed that in their interaction with the Church leaders, the participants were able to express not only the positives but also the negatives they encountered. So, in such context, the participants responded to the interview questions that were asked to all the participants who all were similar in the sample criteria but different in their charters. Therefore, the presence of maleness in such context did not seem to impose any intimidation to the participants in relationship to what they said or wanted to say.

Delimitations

While the limitations section has described the factors that were beyond the researcher's control, which might have influenced the research, the delimitations define the parameters planned by the researcher, which were deemed necessary for the research. Delimitations describe the choices I made as a set of boundaries of my thesis, which were in my control, so that research goals could be practically achieved. These boundaries of my research include the research scope of interest, objectives, population, question, and the theoretical and methodological frameworks. Clearly, detailed descriptions of these boundaries have been provided throughout this thesis as well as the rationale for these delimitations.

Strengths

This qualitative inquiry has numerous strengths (Babbie, 2007; Berg, 2001; Berry, 1999; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2009) and they are as follows: 1) information collected was based on the participants' own descriptions and meanings of their lived experiences; 2) this qualitative inquiry was helpful for describing in detail complex phenomena as they were situated

and embedded in local contexts; and 3) studying a limited number of samples was useful to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena.

In this research, the semi-structured interviews were not restricted to specific questions; rather, the questions were open-ended throughout the interviews, allowing conversation to flow freely, several topics were discussed, and unplanned information was explored. The framework allowed for quick adjustment as new information emerged. The research data was based on the participants' lived experiences and was more important than the methods. Thus, subtleties and complexities regarding the research participants and topic were revealed in-depth.

This study is the first of its kind conducted about Coptic immigrant married women's experiences in their Coptic Church. It has provided data specifically on these women's perspectives of their patriarchal structure and system that disagree with what has been addressed in the literature, particularly from a feminist perspective. Data generated on both counts have been absent from other studies related to women's lives in such a culture. Data generated by this study is new to the body of knowledge. Unlike the findings of most other studies regarding women's lived experiences in a patriarchal structure and system, lived experiences of Coptic women in their Church reveal that the women regarded the patriarchal structure and system of their Coptic Church as a perfect pattern and admired it. The study showed how religion shaped their understanding, perceptions, attitudes, feeling, thoughts, and actions in a way that is entirely different from what is known socially, culturally, and academically. Finally, this study specifically uncovered the perceptions of Coptic women about themselves and in relationship to God and Heaven, which has not previously been addressed by other studies.

Recommendations for Future Research

Having learned from all the participants about their admiration of the patriarchal structure and system of their Coptic Church, this led me to search for what made people admire a particular system; this finding was very challenging. The elements included in the discussion chapter were based on the perspectives of different scholars and social psychologists. Such elements, although aligned with the overall views of the participants, remain as speculations on future trends. There is need for future research that enlightens further understanding of what is behind the admiration of this particular group of Coptic women to the patriarchal structure and system of their Coptic Church. Is admiration of their patriarchal structure and system related to being “renewed human[s]”, the internalization by the women (as mentioned in the feminist views), or any of the elements I included as speculation, or a combination of any or all of these aspects? This question can only be answered by Coptic women, and is worth investigating in the future.

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Appendix E: Demographic Questionnaires

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your age?

- Under 35
- 35 to 39
- 40 to 44
- 45 to 49
- 50 to 54
- 55 and older

What is your marital status?

- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Never married

How many children do you have?

- I have _____child / children
- I do not have any children

What is the highest level of education you have received?

- No education
- Less than high school
- High school
- Higher than high school; please specify: _____

Do you work?

- Yes
- No

What type of work do you do?

- Housekeeper
- Other, please specify: _____

Are you an immigrant Egyptian?

- Yes
- No

How long have you lived in Canada?

- Less than a year
- More than a year
- More than five years

Are you affiliated with Christian Coptic Orthodox faith?

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify: _____

Where do you reside?

- Great Toronto Areas
- West Peel Regions
- Other, please specify: _____

Appendix F: Interview Questions/Guide

- 1. Tell me about your understanding of your status as a Coptic woman in Christianity.**
 - Please tell me about your sources of understanding in relation to your status as a Coptic woman in Christianity.

- 2. Tell me about your understanding of your status as a Coptic woman in the Coptic Church.**
 - Please tell me about your sources of understanding in relation to your status as a Coptic woman in Christianity.

- 3. Tell me about your role in the Coptic Church.**
 - Describe your relationship with the Coptic Church leaders.
 - Tell me about your experience of exercising your right and faith in the Coptic Church.
 - Describe any differences you experience between the Coptic Church in Canada and the Coptic Church in Egypt.

- 4. Describe to me your experience as a Coptic woman in the Coptic Church.**
 - Describe the most frustrating aspects of your faith in the Coptic Church as a married Coptic woman.
 - Describe the most rewarding aspects of your faith in the Coptic Church as a married Coptic woman?
 - If you had a magic wand, tell me how you would like to see your role as a married woman in the Coptic Church.

- 5. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me concerning your experience as a married Coptic woman in the Coptic Church?**