WHEN SILENCE SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS: EXAMINING THE PERCEPTIONS
AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WHO WORK IN FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS
WHERE ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE IS PRESENT

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to every woman who has ever experienced the loss of her voice. I dedicate this work to the eight women who participated in this study. I also dedicate this work to the memory of my precious father, Tryon Eichelberger, Jr.
Acknowledgments

*We are here not only to transform the world, but also to be transformed.* ~ Parker J. Plamer

When I entered the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University in pursuit of a doctoral degree in organizational leadership, I entered with the intention to obtain and create knowledge that would ultimately serve to transform the lives of others. What I did not consider was just how much my own life would be transformed. Indeed, when I reflect on my journey, I recognize the community who participated in the transformation process in distinct ways. I had many supporters, cheerleaders, encouragers, prayer warriors, and prayer partners. I had those who started with me on the journey and those who stepped in along the way. I made new friends and became a part of powerful networks. Therefore, as this phase of the journey comes to an end, I pause to express my overwhelming gratitude for all.

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Abstract of Thesis

Is silence golden? Is talk cheap? Does silence speak louder than words? This qualitative study answered the research focused question, *How do women who work in faith-based organizations (FBOs) in South Carolina perceive and experience organizational silence in the workplace?* Through semi-structured interview, eight study participants relived experiences of silence. The study concluded that women’s perceptions and experiences of silence were deep-seated and emotional. The enactment of silence and/or voice brought with it embedded thoughts and feelings that catalyzed sense-making and meaning. This study further concluded that women perceived and experienced silence through believing silence lessons that co-occurred with disregard in the organization, accepting silence systems that co-occurred with disillusionment in the organization, and choosing silence and voice that were directive in the organization.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Zerubavel (2006) suggested that there is a “heavy sound of silence” and one that is “unmistakable” which “often speaks louder than words” (p. 23). In her autobiographical seminal work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou (1969) explained her reason for ceasing to use her voice, “The only thing I could do was to stop talking…If I talked to anyone else that person might die. Just my breath, carrying my words out, might poison people and they’d curl up and die” (p. 87). Indeed, this *unmistakable heavy sound of silence* and the choice to speak or not to speak, served as the catalyst for the study of the silent and silenced voices of women who worked (or more specifically, were employed) in faith-based organizations (FBOs) in South Carolina where organizational silence was present.

Defined by Morrison and Milliken (2000) as the “withholding of information about potential problems or issues by employees,” the concept of organizational silence has been studied for more than 30 years (p. 707). The choice not to speak up, but rather to remain silent or withhold opinions and ideas or concerns at work, is within itself the most simplistic description of organizational silence (Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2003; Perlow & Williams, 2003). To this end, organizational silence is composed of “unspoken conversations” that remain unspoken because of a “deliberate avoidance” of speaking up about “the presence of things that beg for attention” (Zerubavel, 2006). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to investigate how women who work in FBOs in South Carolina perceived and experienced organizational silence.

This chapter establishes the problem of practice and provides context and background to align the problem with the study. Furthermore, the chapter provides the rationale, purpose, and the significance of examining the perceptions and experiences of women who work in FBOs in
South Carolina where organizational silence is present. The theoretical framework and the methodological design of this study are discussed. Additionally, the researcher role and researcher positionality are established. The chapter concludes with assumptions and limitations of the study and an overview of key terms.

**Statement of the Problem**

Perspectives and experiences of women consistently have not been invited to be a part of or to add to the dialogue on silence and voice. Over time, history has revealed a commonly acknowledged absence of women’s voices in the context of their experiences. This collective omission and “fundamental tension between knowledge and acknowledgement” (p. 3), brings to bear the phenomenon expressed by Zerubavel (2006) as a “conspiracy of silence” which serves somewhat as an unspoken collective agreement that although truths are known, “groups tacitly agree to outwardly ignore something of which they are all personally aware” (p. 2). Moreover, history of religion reveals that women and their work in religious structures have been present, but often as “silent participants” (Westerkamp, 1999, p. 10). Thus, the prevalence of silence or the absence of voice related to religion and the workplace provides a backdrop for further exploration of the topic under study.

While scholars have rigorously researched various aspects of organizational silence to include causes and effects (Brinsfield, 2013; Knoll & Dick, 2013; Whiteside & Barclay, 2013), organizational silence research has not focused on how women perceive and experience silence in organizations, specifically women who work in FBOs in South Carolina. As a result of nonexistent findings related to the perceptions and experiences of women in faith-based organizations where organizational silence is present, little is known about how women make meaning of silence, how women navigate the absence of voice, and how women navigate and/or
evolve in organizational environments or cultures in silence. Thus, not having sufficient knowledge of the perceptions and experiences of women who are silent in FBOs draws attention to the existing gaps in current organizational leadership, communication, and culture literature. Additionally, the absence of knowledge diminishes the ability to address, understand, and assign meaning to silence.

A robust investigation of the perceptions and experiences of women who worked in FBOs yielded findings that served as a catalyst to open organizational dialogue and to create latitude and make space to raise awareness of the personal, professional, and organizational implications of the silence of women. By collecting data from eight women who worked in FBOs in South Carolina, findings from the study infused the field with foundational knowledge of silence and voice in organizations. The findings from the study further illuminated the personal detriment to women and to the organization when women’s voices were silent and/or silenced.

**Context, Background, and Rationale**

The findings from organizational silence research over the past decade have been significant in that they offered a means by which to identify, assess, and measure employee silence in organizations and its impact on the organization. Yet, research has not focused on women. Because of the prevalence of silence in organizations and the understudied phenomenon related to women, this study provided a phenomenological approach to engaging the perceptions and experiences of women. The findings served to expand the organizational culture discourse the inclusion of women’s voices in this study.

**Why a focus on women?** According to UNICEF, over 353,000 babies are born each day around of the (as of 2013 estimate). This is the equivalent of over 129 million babies per year.
However, with the entry of each new baby into the world, more often than not, an undeniable truth enters into play; that is, the child is born into a gendered system. Her or his presence represents a deeply ingrained way of thinking about gender. Which gender is stronger? Which gender is wiser? Which gender is harder? Which gender is more dominant? Thus, it is often at birth where the socialization of gender begins. Pink booties, blue hats, baby dolls, and toy trucks become artifacts assigned to gender as a clear distinct of where gender boundaries exist.

Over time, research and theory has framed pursuits into the investigation of gender and gendered systems. There is an abundance of scholarly evidence suggestive of the importance of the need to give attention to the multiple dynamics that are present when conceptualizing the male and female. Theoretical frameworks have been established to ground these explorations into the differences and similarities among men and women. However, an investigation of the perceptions and experiences of women who work in FBOs necessitated a deeper exploration beyond differences in gender. There was a greater need to extrapolate from multi-layered dialogue on gender and to focus this study solely on women and how they experience the phenomenon of organizational silence in FBOs. Additionally, there was a need to understand dynamics related to religion and the moral authority that was embedded in religious traditions and the intersecting identities of women and the ways that women gave meaning to these dynamics.

While this study was not intended to suggest that men do not experience the phenomenon of organizational silence, the study sought to understand the impact of silence as experienced by women who worked in FBOs. Toward this end, the Center on Religion and the Professions noted, “Over millennia, women’s lives have been defined by religion” (2010). Women have demonstrated in exponential fashion that religious affiliation and religious vocation are important
to them. However, the Center further stated, “Religious beliefs have been behind many of women’s oppressions. Beliefs about women’s roles in religious leadership, worship, and ideology of the divine have impacted women’s experiences through the present day” (2010). Additionally, the Center on Religion and the Professions suggested, “Religions have brought with them proscriptions for female behavior, rules about treating women, and views of women that have ranged from empowering to devaluing (2010).

It is this recognition that undergirded a research direction to explore how women experienced and perceived organizational silence in the context of their work in FBOs. Recognizing the historical oppressions that have been intricately situated in the history of women’s affiliations and roles in many religious organization, this study delved deeply into understanding how women’s silence in the workplace.

**Why faith-based organizations?** According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, a faith-based organization (FBO) is defined as a religious congregation (church, mosque, synagogue, or temple); an organization, program, or project sponsored/hosted by a religious congregation (may be incorporated or not incorporated); a nonprofit organization founded by a religious congregation or religiously-motivated incorporators and board members that clearly states in its name, incorporation, or mission statement that it is a religiously motivated institution; and a collaboration of organizations that clearly and explicitly includes organizations from the previously described categories (2015).

Because of the religious and moral authority and the embedded hierarchy that rests within religious organizations, FBOs served as a preeminent organizational backdrop for this study and held at its core the consideration of religious tenets, values, and artifacts of the organization’s culture. This consideration of the cultural reality of FBOs was significant when considering the
role of women and faith and the connection to silence in organizations. Justifiably, Johnson, Tompkins, and Webb (2003) presented findings for 97 studies on the many ways in which FBOs are able to intervene in the lives of others through the programs and practices offered through the organization. Findings from the studies indicated that involvement in such practices “reduced hypertension, reduced depression, and reduced the risk of suicide” (p. 1). However, the review of the literature did not address the internal perceptions, experiences, or impact on employees within FBOs. This omission raised the question as to how employees functioned within the religious infrastructure of FBOs, but more specifically how women functioned, especially when organization silence was present.

Although there are proven successes and impactful outcomes from services, practices, and programs provided by FBOs, it raised the question as to whether the internal functioning of the FBO mirrors the external output. Specifically, when considering the perceptions and experiences of women and organizational silence, were women experiencing professional wins, while suffering personal losses? In seeking to explore this quandary, this study found its legitimacy.

**Why South Carolina?** Results from a 2013 Gallup survey showed that South Carolina was ranked sixth in the top 10 most religious states in the United States (Bryner, 2013). The results were based upon responses from over 348,000 interviews from adults over the age of 18, with a diverse population represented by gender, age, and race (Bryner, 2013). Gallup officials surmised that results in the South were based primarily on Southern culture and history that ultimately defined religiosity (Bryner, 2013).

Therefore, given the deeply entrenched religious and cultural phenomenon that exists in South Carolina, this study considered ways in which working in FBOs in the South could bring
to bear layered experiences of silence for women. It should be noted that the intent of the study was not to suggest that the problem was located solely in South Carolina, but rather to localize the problem within FBOs in this locale because of researcher access to participants in the state. Additionally, it should be understood that the overall intent of study findings was toward generalizability representative of women in organizations in varying sectors, industries, and locales.

**Research Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how women who work in FBOs perceive and experience organizational silence in the workplace. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was used for the study because it is the goal of the IPA approach to provide insight into how an individual makes meaning of a particular phenomenon that he or she has experienced. In answering the research question, *How do women who work in FBOs in South Carolina perceive and experience organizational silence in the workplace?* findings from the study provided valuable information for practice and for scholarly discourse. Specifically, the findings offered a new perspective from which to view the personal costs of silence to women in organizations. Study findings also provided insight for leaders related to ways women enact silence in organizations and the personal and professional impact of such silence.

Likewise, the findings informed organizational culture, communications, leadership, and behavior literature related to women and silence. Additionally, with a focus on addressing silence and catalyzing voice, the results from this study served to create a foundation from which to develop and implement organizational capacity building tools, leadership awareness, personal
and professional development, and executive coaching programs designed to promote positive and meaningful organizational practices related to women and voice in the workplace.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

Although silence is a prevalent phenomenon in organizations, at the date of this study, it still had been understudied and investigated in the organizational climate and culture literature (Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Nikolaou, Vakola, & Dimitris, 2011; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Therefore, this study contributed to organizational climate and culture literature by broadening the discourse related to women and experiences of organizational silence. Since the seminal work of Morrison and Milliken (2000), much of the focus of research has been on examining the silence as a collective phenomenon.

Building upon Schwandt’s (1997) action-based theory that organizations are human social entities that learn based upon the actions of the collective, Morrison & Milliken’s (2000) model focused on contextual variables contributing to organizational silence outside of individual variables. As these shared perceptions emerge at the collective level, “collective sensemaking” occurs as a means by which the collective seeks to make meaning of the organization (p. 714). This form of collective processing was defined by Schwandt (1997) as one facilitated by actors, symbols, and processes that interface with the internal and external environment and determine movement of information, needs or goals, coordination of parts, and creation of meaning.

Therefore, this socially constructed movement of information among the collective is fueled when there are identified commonalities regarding perceptions of managerial practices. This level of “social contagion, a spreading of attitudes and perceptions from one person to another” occurs when “there is a high degree of similarity between employees” (Morrison &
Consequently, catalyzed by managerial factors that contribute to social contagion, “(e.g., centralized decision making, lack of upward feedback mechanisms, defensive reactions to employee feedback)” organizational silence is increased. While there is great value in understanding organizational silence of the collective, this study focused on the individual level (employee silence) in examining organizational silence, hypothesizing that silence might have an adverse impact on women who work in FBOs where organizational silence exists.

**Theoretical Framework (Muted Group Theory)**

In this qualitative study, theory provided a means to enter into the worlds of women who worked in FBOs in South Carolina and to explore the phenomenon of silence in the organization. While a theory or theoretical framework cannot completely capture the nuances of the phenomenon under study (Anfara & Mertz, 2006), it can provide a pathway to deeper understanding and alignment of thought related to the perceptions and experiences of the study participants. As such, muted group theory as the theoretical framework for this study served to position the research within existing scholarly discourse and provided the language for focusing the study and unearthing meaning (Anfara & Mertz, 2006) embedded in the perceptions and experiences of the study participants.

Kramarae (1981) posited muted group theory as a means to frame lack of voice and the process of silencing. Houston and Kramarae (1991) presented women as a muted group as it relates to how women have been silenced interpersonally and within society. However, the scholars also emphasized how women could resist silence often driven by the dominant group. Thus, muted group theory advanced ways groups are muted on the basis of gender and how power dynamics provides privilege for some to have voice over others (Houston & Kramarae, 1991). Muted group theory made space for the examination of the act of silencing through power
and privilege and how voices can be silenced over time or how voices can be driven to silence through political ambiguity (Mears, Oetzel, Torres, Derkacs, & Ginossar, 2004). Therefore, in considering a study focused on understanding the experiences and perceptions of women, muted group theory connected to and aligned with the stated problem of practice. Additionally, because muted group theory “addresses excluded voices” (Mears et al., 2004, p. 8) it provided a foundation for answering the overarching research question of this study and provided a means for exploring the dynamics of power and muting and voice.

**Power and Muting.** Muted group theory provided a frame for investigating the dynamics of “power and muting” as components that are core to the theory (Mears et al., 2004, p. 9). In this study, power and muting raised the question whether women are equal in their opportunities to participate in the contribution of ideas and to organizational discourse (Ardener, 2005). This notion provided space to explore power and muting dynamics that were embedded in organizational silence among women who worked in FBOs in South Carolina.

**Employee Voice.** Just as much as muted group theory is concerned with muteness, Ardener (2005) noted, “In its linguistic aspect, it is concerned as least as much with what people say, and when they speak, and in what mode, as with how much” (p. 51). Advancing beyond the phenomenon of silence, muted group theory as theoretical framework for this study also provided a backdrop from which to explore the notion of women and *voice*. Understanding the instances of both organizational silence and employee voice added richer context to this study and provided a means to glean deeper meaning from experiences and perceptions.

**Researcher Role through Interpretivism**

The Interpretivism perspective is viewed as one with core research components rooted in reflection and interaction stimulated by “researcher-participant” dialogue, which lends itself to
qualitative research (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). An interpretivist is involved in the story on behalf of the storyteller as it unfolds (Butin, 2011, p. 60). This research approach provides creative space to glean information that can then be interpreted to include meaning and the reasons associated with such meaning. As such, the interpretivist can approach the study with an open mind and postured as a learner and not one that is in search of one answer. As answers emerge, the interpretivist is able to use the data to craft a trustworthy and authentic story (Butin, 2010, p. 59).

Because the interpretivist perspective leans firmly on the proposition that humans are by nature reflective and that meaning can be deduced from reflections, the “lived experience” can be of significant value to research outcomes (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). Furthermore, research relationship with the researched is a key component of the interpretivist perspective. In relating, the interpretivist allows the subject of the study to define truth rather than extrapolating truth merely from what is observed. Butin (2010) further stated, “An interpretivist perspective thus does not attempt to adjudicate between competing truth claims in order to determine the one best answer; rather, interpretivism suggests that all one can do is accurately and thoroughly document the perspective being investigated” (p. 60). Therefore, the interpretivist works to this end.

When situating the stated problem of practice in the paradigm of interpretivism, space was provided for significant variables related to the problem to emerge and to be “described and represented through diverse perspectives” (Butin, 2010, p. 59). This occurred through qualitative methods that allowed for the voices researched to be heard when provided opportunity to have an interactive role in the exploration and delivery of outcomes.

**Research and Methodological Approach**
In this study, an IPA methodological approach provided insight into how each study participant made meaning of the phenomenon of silence. The IPA approach provided a way to extrapolate detailed information about what was happening in the participants’ lives at multiple levels (Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, IPA made allowances for the researcher’s involvement at a deeper level, as the researcher sought to make sense of the participant as the participant made sense of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Data for this study were collected using semi-structured interviews in order to engage women who worked in FBOs by providing insight into their perceptions and experiences of organizational silence and how they made sense and assigned the meaning of this silence.

Therefore, given the research question, *How do women who work in FBOs in South Carolina perceive and experience organizational silence in the workplace?* an IPA approach was best suited for this study as it allowed for movement beyond descriptions and provided the freedom for participants to reflect deeply on their experiences of silence and to assign meaning to what they discovered from these deep reflections. Findings from a homogeneous sample of women who worked in FBOs gave voice to the experiences of participants and made space for the researcher’s analytic interpretations.

**Positionality**

Bowen and Blackmon (2003) asked, “When will individuals speak up about organizational issues, and when will they remain silent?” (p. 1393). This question is at the heart of understanding the phenomenon of organizational silence. According to Perlow (2003), silence is often attributed to a number of virtues: “modesty, respect for others, prudence, decorum” (p. 1). Perlow (2003) further suggested, “Thanks to deeply ingrained rules of etiquette, people silence themselves to avoid embarrassment, confrontation, and other perceived dangers” (p. 1).
Indeed, it has been this occurrence of silence that for over a decade has catalyzed scholarly perspectives that vacillate between the examination of organizational silence from the individual, group, or organization level and the role of dysfunctional leadership. However, beyond the well-examined and rich scholarly perspectives and the many levels from which it has been investigated, I was drawn to the phenomenon of organizational silence as a woman and because of my own lived experience of silence.

I am an African-American female who was born in the 1960s in a rural town in South Carolina. My first recognition of the detriment of silence occurred when I was in the second grade when a White male classmate reached into my desk and stole a marble that I had brought to school for “show and tell.” Astonished by his act, I immediately reported what had happened to my White female teacher. However, when approached by this teacher regarding my claim, my classmate responded to her by emphatically stating, “I did not that that nigger’s marble!” His response prompted her response back to me, “Don’t you ever lie to me again!” I watched and listened silently as my classmate used by marble as his item for “show and tell.” In a matter of moments, my entire world had been reframed. However, the greatest loss that I experienced was the loss of my voice. Consequently, my inability to speak out set in motion a traumatic, arduous journey filled with a perceived lack of power and confidence, while leaving me with strong messages and deep lessons about speaking up.

In spite of the many hurdles and obstacles I have overcome since my early childhood, I am still very aware that my experiences, whether negative or positive, have served to shape my own identity, biases, and perceptions. Over time I have been encumbered by systems and organizations where silence had a dominant role in the culture. In fact, my past workplaces inspired my desire to pursue this research direction. Therefore, when considering an
investigation of women’s lived experience of organizational silence through exploring its origin, context, and impact on personal well-being, I am aware of how my experiences of the loss of my own voice and my desire for women to use their voices in ways that contribute to the greater good had the potential to impact my research. I am aware that in my research efforts, hearing the lived experiences of women could lead to over-identification and misinterpretation of research data. Thus, in an effort to separate my personal opinions, assumptions, perceptions, and biases from my research, personal reflection and open-mindedness were necessary. While being aware of my history and personal connection to the topic, careful consideration was given to not imposing or allowing my experiences to influence the investigation, recognizing the detriment to research of unmanaged personal predispositions.

**Definition of Key Terms**

Interwoven throughout this study are key terms that serve to frame the study parameters. The primary key term is *organizational silence* or rather, the choice not to speak up, but to remain silent or withhold opinions and ideas about issues or concerns at work (Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2003; Perlow & Williams, 2003). In defining *employee silence*, Pinder and Harlos (2001) characterized employee silence as the “withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual’s behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstances to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress” (p. 334). Conversely, *employee voice* is, “The discretionary provision of information intended to improve organizational functioning to someone inside an organization with the perceived authority to act, even though such information may challenge and upset the status quo of the organization and its power holders” (Detert & Burris, 2007, p. 869).
Lastly, the term *faith-based organizations (FBOs)* defines a religious congregation (church, mosque, synagogue, or temple); an organization, program, or project sponsored/hosted by a religious congregation (may be incorporated or not incorporated); a nonprofit organization founded by a religious congregation or religiously-motivated incorporators and board members that clearly states in its name, incorporation, or mission statement that it is a religiously motivated institution; and a collaboration of organizations that clearly and explicitly includes organizations from the previously described categories.

**Conclusion**

While this qualitative IPA study was not intended to be all-encompassing by presenting an exhaustive research agenda related to organizational silence, it was however intentional in its approach to offer insight into various perspectives of the phenomenon of silence and its implications for women. Whereas discourse in organizational silence has evolved since Morrison & Milliken’s (2000) seminal work, opportunities for rigorous research remain and considerations for the use of findings gleaned from this study are many. Chapter Two follows with an overview of the relevant literature that is critical to grounding the study.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The study of organizational silence has evolved over time. However, gaps remain and an opportunity exists for further and deeper exploration. The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study was to investigate how women who work in faith-based organizations (FBOs) perceived and experienced silence in their workplaces. Therefore, this literature review served as an investigation of existing literature as a means to undergird and infuse the research agenda.

This chapter provides an overview of the methods of the literature review. In addition, the chapter introduces muted group theory as a foundation for exploring the silence of women who work in FBOs. The chapter explores how organizational silence is situated in the context of the study focusing on the organizational silence model, employee silence, and employee voice. The chapter raises awareness of the role of leadership behaviors in employee silence. The chapter concludes with an examination of the costs of employee silence and a summary of the review.

Methods of Literature Review

As a process for reviewing the literature, searches were conducted using the Northeastern University’s Online Library and multiple databases which included Scholar OneSearch, JSTOR, Emerald, EBSCO, Wiley, Springer, Gale Cengage, Elsevier, ProQuest and eBrary. Terms in the research included but were not limited to “organizational silence,” “organizational behavior,” “employee silence,” “employee voice,” “muted group theory,” and “women and religion.” In conjunction with Northeastern University Online Library, Google Scholar was used to access literature not found in the library’s databases. Literature used in this review was selected based upon relevancy to the topic and its capacity for connecting key phenomena, ideas, and themes emerging from the literature.
Muted Group Theory

Sound theory was needed to serve as a framework for this study. Moreover, sound theory provided a means to tell the story of the phenomenon under study through offering opportunities to explore the realities, perceptions, and expressions of women who were experiencing silence (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). Sound theory also held within it the power to illuminate researcher paths to shifting mental structures and deepening understanding of the meaning assigned to the lived experiences of those under study (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). Muted group theory framed this study, as it provided insight into the dynamics of the perceptions and experiences of women who sit in silence in FBOs.

Social anthropologists Ardener and Ardener advanced the notion of muted group theory based on the observation that there is a dominant group in society and there are groups (i.e., women, people of color) silenced by the dominant group (Mears et al., 2004). In her seminal work, Women and Men Speaking, Kramarae (1981) espoused the notion of “women as a muted group” (p. xi). Considering that words spoken by women are often unread by men due to the subordination of women and differences in lived experiences, muted group theory emerged as a framework for examining the words and norms for speaking.

Therefore, related to this observance between the language differences in women and men, muted group theory was grounded in assumptions suggesting (1) women and men perceive the world differently and because of the differences in experiences, labor in society is divided, (2) because men are seen as dominant in society, their perspectives are valued over the perspectives of women, and (3) to have power in society, women must mimic the behavior or actions of the dominant group (Kramarae, 1981). Highlighting four primary premises of muted group theory, Mears et al. (2004) posited:
Members of different groups have different experiences and, as a result, different perceptions of the world. Second, each society privileges some groups over others. Third, an attempt to get their concerns recognized in the public realm, the subordinate groups must use the language and communication style of the dominant group. The fourth premise is that resistance and change are possible. (p. 8)

Using the premises of muted group theory, Kissack (2010) examined the organizational life of men and women related to the flow of communication within organizations. The findings of the study revealed that women’s voices are muted in organizations as a result of the lack of presence of an authentic language for women as their voices were silenced in the presence of the masculine nature in organizations (Kissack, 2010).

This lack of authentic language for women then presents a barrier to constructing or speaking about reality, and language becomes controlled (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). These premises thematically situate power at the crux of silence as a justification for why women are muted and dominated by the perceptions of males (Kramarae, 1981), illustrating the basis for further study of how women in organizations are muted by communication systems within organizations. As such, muted group theory provided the lens through which to explore experiences of women and silence in their workplaces.

**Standpoint theory.** The historical trajectory of standpoint theory has been epistemological in nature and rooted in two primary understandings: (1) “knowledge is situated” and (2) “there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced” (Heckman, 1997, p. 342). Specifically, standpoint theory suggests that the way power is viewed is dependent upon the set of lens through which an oppressed group is looking. In other words, an oppressed group sees power from their position and from the position of the dominant group (Griffith, 2014).
Standpoint theory emerged from the German philosopher Hegel’s work in the early 19th century; he posited the group to which one belongs informs what one ultimately comes to know about themselves, others, and society (Griffith, 2014). Building upon this seminal thought, Harstock (1983) examined Marxist politics and feminist theory and the development of standpoint theory. This form of thought established the foundation for contemporary scholars to build the tenets of standpoint theory. These tenets touted the role of power in marginalized women’s realities and how they perceived others and the world (Griffith, 2014).

While many of the tenets of muted group theory emerged from standpoint theory, muted group theory advanced the focus of women and power by providing a means for gaining deeper insight into the act of silencing through power and privilege and to understand how women’s voices in workspaces in such organizations can be silenced over time or how women’s voices can be driven to silence (Mears et al., 2004). From an IPA approach, in their own voices, participants of this study shared their lived experiences and informed the problem of practice by speaking to issues of power and silence.

**Situating Organizational Silence**

The choice not to speak up, but rather to remain silent or withhold opinions and ideas about issues or concerns at work, is within itself the most simplistic description of organizational silence (Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2003; Perlow & Williams, 2003). Organizational silence is composed of unspoken conversation that remain unspoken because of a deliberate avoidance of speaking up about the presence of things that beg for attention (Zerubavel, 206). This silencing occurs as defense mechanisms that serve to circumvent “embarrassment, confrontation, and other perceived dangers” (Perlow & Williams, 2003, p. 53).
However, the reluctance to speak up in organizations has been directly associated with organizational outcomes (Brinsfield, 2013) and the muteness of women in organizations.

**Organizational silence model.** In response to the far-reaching impact of the withholding of information related to concerns and issues in organizations, Morrison & Milliken’s (2000) seminal work purported an *organizational silence model* that contained at its core the notion that silence in organizations is a phenomenon of the collective. Thus, the focal point of the model turned to two distinct conditions under which organizational silence is developed, “(1) managers’ fear of negative feedback and (2) a set of implicit beliefs often held by managers” (Morrison & Milliken, 2000, p. 708). Morrison and Milliken (2000) argued that when these managerial dynamics are enacted, “*a climate of silence*” is developed within the organization, which ultimately facilitates shared perceptions among the collective and inhibits the prevailing response of silence (p. 708). According to Morrison and Milliken (2000), this climate of silence is characterized by a set of shared beliefs: “(1) speaking up about problems in the organization is not worth the effort, and (2) voicing one’s opinions and concerns is dangerous” (p. 714). This finding further speaks to the *sub-climate* of silence that can reside within organizational cultures and climates.

Therefore, with a singular focus on organizational silence as a phenomenon of the collective, Morrison & Milliken’s (2000) seminal work established a chasm and creative space for further exploration and differing perspectives on organizational silence and a deeper focus on employee silence or silence at the individual level. The existing gap establishes a significant premise from which to build the study directed toward understanding the perceptions and experiences of women in workplaces in FBOs where organizational silence exists.
Purporting the notion that organizational silence is a “potentially dangerous impediment to organizational change and development,” Morrison and Milliken (2000) advanced a focus on conditions that give rise to systemic silence (Figure 1) that ultimately serves as an impediment to pluralistic organizations (p. 707). Morrison and Milliken (2000) further suggested that the strength of an established climate of silence is dependent upon the sense-making activities of the collective and the processes by which meaning is derived.

While Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) seminal work established a groundbreaking model by which to understand the phenomenon of organizational silence at the collective level, the researchers took a cursory approach to addressing the impact of organizational silence at the individual level. Thus, when addressing employees feeling of not being valued, perceived lack of control, and cognitive dissonance, the scholars captured these individual outcomes as second-order outcomes that, in aggregate, may undermine organizational effectiveness (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Therefore, with a singular focus on organizational silence as a phenomenon of the collective, Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) seminal work established a chasm and creative space for further exploration and differing perspectives on organizational silence and a deeper focus on employee silence or silence at the individual level. The existing gap establishes a significant premise from which to build this study directed toward understanding the perceptions and experiences of women in workplaces in FBOs where organizational silence exists.
Organizational Silence Perspectives

Since Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) seminal work, subsequent scholars have theorized organizational silence and the contributing factors that served to develop and maintain the silence. For example, through the lens of cognitive, social, and organizational sciences, and the study of sociotechnical systems, Henriksen & Dayton (2006) examined organizational silence in a health services organization via three levels of analysis: individual, social, and organizational, while placing great emphasis on understanding system complexity.

In contrast to Morrison and Milliken (2000), Henriksen and Dayton (2006) argued the value of investigating individual factors, giving importance to understanding an individual’s vulnerability to “fear of retaliation, an inbred cultural censorship, and a desire to maintain harmonious working relationships” as mediators of organizational silence (p. 1541). Likewise,
moving beyond a focus solely on organizational outcomes, a study conducted by Perlow & Williams (2003) revealed, “Silence can exact a high psychological price on individuals, generating feelings of humiliation, pernicious anger, resentment, and the like that, if unexpressed, contaminate every interaction, shut down creativity, and undermine productivity” (p. 1). This recognition brings into question the price women pay when working in FBOs where organizational silence exists.

**Employee silence and employee voice.** In the past three years, research has focused a great deal on employee silence as an antecedent to organizational silence. Pinder and Harlos (2001) posited that silence in the individual level carries with it a broad scope of emotions, expressions, and behaviors. More specifically, Pinder and Harlos (2001) categorized employee silence as the “withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual’s behavioral, cognitive, and/or effective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstances to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress” (p. 334). Furthermore, Pinder and Harlos (2001) defined employee silence as “any communication that: (1) does not reflect the desire to alter circumstances, or that (2) is not directed to persons perceived capable of ameliorating those circumstances” (p. 334).

In conceptualizing this definition of employee silence, it is clear that employee silence does not equate to the absence of conversation or the expression of language (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Rather, based upon Pinder and Harlos’ (2001) definition, employee silence is enacted when information about issues and concerns are not communicated to leadership or to those who have the power to address and/or change the situation. This understanding of employee silence draws attention to the need to distinguish between silence and voice, or rather
the “intentional expression of relevant ideas, information, and opinions about possible improvements (Dyne et al., 2003).

Drawing from historical research and theories, recent scholars have sought to a greater degree to understanding mediating roles, forms, and motives of employee silence that ultimately lead to the silence of the collective. For example, with fairness perceptions as the catalyst, Whiteside & Barclay (2013) investigated antecedents of employee silence and the implications of engaging in silence. In two experimental studies, acquiescent and quiescent silence emerged as mediators of “the relationship between overall justice perceptions and emotional exhaustion, psychological withdrawal, physical withdrawal, and performance” (p. 251). The results of their study indicated that a means to address organizational silence in the workplace is to ensure that employees are treated justly and fair (Whiteside & Barclay, 2013). Likewise, Dyne et al. (2003) posited three types of silence, acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial, and argued the various reasons that employees offer for withholding information serve to differentiate the three types of silence. Therefore, moving beyond examinations of silence, Dyne et al. (2003) also presented the use of “voice” in the organization. As such, “parallel types of voice” were present, “Acquiescent voice, Defensive voice, and Prosocial voice” (p. 1359).

Furthermore, Detert and Burris (2007) presented findings from a two-phase study conducted with managers and employees. Central to the study was the use of voice which the authors defined as:

The discretionary provision of information intended to improve organizational functioning to someone inside an organization with the perceived authority to act, even though such information may challenge and upset the status quo of the organization and
its power holders, is critical to organizational well-being yet insufficiently provided by employees, who see the risks of speaking up as outweighing the benefits. (p. 869)

However, the scholars argued that differences in employee reasons for withholding information serve to differentiate the three types of silence. Additionally, Knoll and Dick (2003) captured the relationship patterns between correlates, antecedents, and consequences of quiescent, acquiescent, prosocial, and opportunistic silence and how these forms of silence emerge.

Brinsfield (2013) linked individual and organizational outcomes by conducting four quantitative studies that examined the motives of employee silence, the measure of those motives, construct validity, and the incremental value of empirically examined motives of employee silence. The findings revealed six dimensions of silence motives: ineffectual, relational, defensive, diffident, disengaged, or deviant. Further established was deeper insight into the nature and extent of intentional silence in the workplace (Brinsfield, 2013). In a study focused on how and why employees make the choice to remain silent, Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin (2003) examined the individual characteristics, organizational characteristics, and relationship with supervisor as variables related to the choice to remain silent (Figure 2).

![Figure 2: A Model of the Choice to Remain Silent](image-url)
Primarily, Milliken et al. (2003) interjected that there is a hierarchical relationship that exists between subordinates and supervisors that appears to intensify the discomfort with conveying information of problematic situations or issues to those above them. Findings from interviews with 40 full-time employees working across industries revealed that perpetuating, through silence, the decreased flow of upward information, employee silence is detrimental to the organization and to individuals within the organization (Milliken et al., 2003). To a larger degree, these findings from the literature have direct implications for women who work in FBOs in South Carolina. This study was intentional in exploring ways in which existing findings from the literature emerged in participant perceptions and experiences while illuminating new findings to add to scholar and practice discourse.

**Role of leadership behaviors in employee silence.** Zerubavel (2006) discussed the role of power in the organization and how power contributes to silence. Zerubavel (2006) further suggested that this silencing “is used as a weapon of subjugation…the suffocation of the others’ voice” (p. 41). Likewise, moving beyond social factors, which had been focus of previous scholars, Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco (2010) advanced the notion of “organizational terrorism” or the concept of dysfunctional leadership, characterized by abusive behavior and disregard for organizational members as a contributing factor to organizational silence and the need to exercise voice in the organization (p. 159). According to Caldwell and Canuto-Carranco (2010), employees experiencing organizational terrorism, “typically responded with four predictable responses: (1) exit, (2) voice, (3) loyalty, and (4) neglect” (p. 163). However, extrapolating the use of “voice,” Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco (2010) addressed voice as a means to emerge from organizational silence. This study also placed a focus on the role of leadership in organizational silence.
In another study, Duan, Lam, Chen, and Zhong (2010) conducted a qualitative study of 361 employees in China who were from 17 Chinese state-owned enterprises to examine leadership justice and its connection to employee silence. The findings showed that leadership justice was related to silence in a negative way, as the study delved deeply into the issues of leadership justice and fairness in organizations and the link to silence. Duan et al. (2010) proposed that employees will indeed keep silent when they are treated unfairly by their leaders. Thus, the scholars hypothesized, “Perceived leadership justice will be negatively related to employee silence” (p. 1289).

Gao, Jansen, and Shi (2011) examined the risks to employees associated with speaking up in the organization and the responses from leadership when employee voice is exercised. The scholars also investigated trust in leadership as a positive motivator of employee voice. The findings illustrated that trust in the leader also makes employees vulnerable to the leaders, which ultimately increases the likelihood that the employees will engage in voicing their opinions and suggestions. Conversely, when there are low levels of trust, there is an increased likelihood that employees will not take the risk to voice their concerns (Gao et al., 2011). Thus, looking deeply at empowering leadership behaviors and its ability to impact the relationship between trust in the leader and employee voice, findings showed that trust alone is not always sufficient. In order to produce a positive effect on employee voice, it requires an empowering leadership context in which leaders encourage and invite employees to voice their concerns and recommendations regarding work affairs (Gao et al., 2011).

Additionally, in a study of 175 employee-supervisor dyads, Rafferty & Resubog (2011) examined mediators of abusive supervision and linked them to organizational citizenship behaviors. Specifically, Rafferty and Resubog (2011) argued that there is a negative relationship
between abusive supervision and prosocial voice behaviors. In other words, voice behavior declines when the relationship between employee and supervisor is abusive because employees reciprocate by choosing silence. Hence, with a focus on abusive supervision, Rafferty and Resubog (2011) investigated ways in which employees behave and make meaning at work and ultimately hide the impact of destructive leadership by withholding contributions that could benefit the supervisor and the organization.

Costs of employee silence. Perlow and Williams (2003) examined the “high psychological price” on individuals. The study moved beyond a focus solely on the collective and focused on the total impact of the reign of silence in organizations and the detriment to individuals and organizations when silence exists. However, Perlow and Williams (2003) also addressed the benefits to remaining silent and the use of judgment in these instances. Additionally, the scholars included perspectives on breaking organizational silence.

To this end, in an effort to broaden the discourse related to organizational know and learning, Blackman & Sadler-Smith (2009) explored the forms of silence and silenced. The scholars made the assertion that “management learning researchers and practitioners should embrace silence, be wary of any prevailing orthodoxy which automatically and unquestionably privileges voice, and also accept the prospect of potentially dysfunctional effects upon learning if voice alone predominates, if silence is overlooked or listening undervalued (2009). Thus, the authors underscored the value of the inclusion of silence when seeking to understand how organizations know and learn.

Furthermore, Bogosian (n.d.) examined the link between employee silence and knowledge transfer and organizational learning as a means by which to eliminate employee silence. The author suggested, “Employees who remain silent about relevant work issues that
could inform their managers and organizations are in effect preventing the transfer of potentially valuable information” (p. 2). Therefore, this finding informed understanding related to how employee silence impacts knowledge transfer in organizations. Investigating leadership practices, Bogosian (n.d.) demonstrated positive and negative impacts on the transfer of knowledge and advanced that this assessment of practices demonstrates the complexity and contributing factors to elicit employee silence and encourage voice. It is these complexities that emerged from the literature that served as a call to action to further explore organizational silence and its impact on women who work in FBOs.

Summary

This review of the literature provided an expansive foundation from which to build a research agenda focused on answering the research question, *How do women who work in FBOs in South Carolina perceive and experience organizational silence in the workplace where organizational silence is present?* This question found relevance through the examined literature as it emerged as a means to address a gap that exists with the organizational culture and climate literature. Furthermore, the literature on the historical trajectory of women and religion revealed that for centuries women’s voices have been silent and silenced within various religious structures, as historical accounts have primarily been captured by men. Thus, with the existing literature as a backdrop, it was the intention of this study to invite women’s voices to express their own perceptions and experiences of silence in FBOs.

Whereas discourse in organizational silence has evolved since Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) seminal work, opportunities for rigorous research remain. For example, Verhezen (2010) asserted the need for “voice” in a culture of silence with the leader having a distinct role in facilitating voice. Thus, the findings of this study will contribute to the field and practice as it
will catalyze dialogue among organizational leaders and will illuminate the need for the development of a women-centric language in organizational cultures dominated by men.

Through the lens of muted group theory, with a focus on the silence and voice of women who work in FBOs where organizational silence is present, this literature review explored the organizational silence literature and the organizational silence model that forms the core of Morrison & Milliken’s (2000) seminal work. Although Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) work advanced the silence of the collective, gaps in literature emerged related to the absence of literature that delved deeply into the lived experiences and perceptions of women and organizational silence.

The review of literature also revealed the existing perspectives on employee silence and voice. Most notably, the literature highlighted the behaviors and expressions that are aligned with silence and voice. These findings from the review also brought to bear the notions of fairness and justice and how these dynamics interface with silence in organizations. Nonetheless, because there was not a singular focus on women, specifically women who work in FBOs where organizational silence was present, the literature opened a wide chasm to be filled through the findings of this study. The findings from the review created space for the exploration of the lived experiences of women that would ultimately create a means by which to call for the “un-muting” of women’s voices in organizations and the inclusion of their voices as a significant contributor to optimal functioning of the organization.

Another dynamic illustrated in the literature was the role of leadership in driving the silence of the organization. Situated at the core of the literature on the role of leadership and silence were dynamics related to power and trust. This finding is of particular interest because of this study’s intent to understand the role of leadership and silence for women who work in FBOs.
Moreover, the literature review brought to question the costs of employee silence and how it serves as an impediment to organizational learning. In examining the costs of silence, gaps remain as to the provision of an understanding of the costs of silence associated with the perception and experiences of women who work in FBOS where organizational silence is present. Thus, this review of the literature provided an entrée into deeper exploration and discovery.
Chapter Three: Methodology

When exploring how women in faith-based organizations (FBOs) experience the phenomenon of organizational silence, it was critical to investigate the phenomenon through a lens allowing the extrapolation of meaning from lived experiences. For this reason, qualitative research methods were suitable for this study because of its capacity to include the voices of the study participants and ways it allowed for rich descriptions of experience and the communication of meaning (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, recognizing the detriment or organizational silence on many organizations evoked the need to understand the perceptions and experiences of women in workplaces in FBOs in South Carolina where organizational silence was present. Therefore, the study answered the following question: How do women who work in faith-based organizations in South Carolina perceive and experience silence in the workplace?

Methodology Justification and Research Design

At the core of qualitative research is the opportunity to realize assumptions and to use “interpretive/theoretical frameworks” to investigate the problem and to extrapolate meaning from the perceptions and experiences of study participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Justifiably, this study took an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to giving voice to the perceptions and experiences of women who work in FBOs in South Carolina. Therefore, IPA served as the research strategy for gleaning from the varying perspectives of study participants (Creswell, 2013).

IPA emerged out of philosophical tenets of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). Originated by Husserl in the 20th century, phenomenology is a discipline that focuses on “things as they appear in our experiences, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experiences” (Smith, 2003). Phenomenology can be
understood as “a disciplinary field in philosophy, or as a movement in the history of philosophy” (Smith, 2003). Suspending judgments and questions, phenomenology calls for a focus on “the way things are experienced rather than various extraneous concerns which might simply obscure and distort what is to be understood” (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012, p. 17). It is this quest for deeper understanding of experiences that establishes the IPA approach as the strategic means to delve into the experiences of women who work in FBOs and in organizational cultures where silence exists.

*Hermeneutics* serves as a theoretical underpinning of IPA with a focus in interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). The hermeneutical approach considers the “lifeworld” of the participant with the premise that “individuals have realities that are invariably influenced by the world in which they live” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729). Therefore, an interactive approach can be taken that allows the non-linear movement regarding ways of thinking about data and the different perspectives present (Smith et al., 2007). Accordingly, in seeking to understand how women who work in FBOs where organizational silence existed, IPA moved beyond the “descriptive methodology” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 102) and opened the way for interpretation of experiences and meaning for women in FOBs and gave voice to their experiences and perceptions related to organizational silence.

IPA is *idiographic* in nature in that it captures thick descriptions of individuals as they experience specific situations or events and then delves more deeply into interpreting and analyzing those experiences in an effort to understand patterns of meaning and how meaning emerges thematically (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). More specifically, the IPA approach provides space and latitude for participants to enter a sense-making process as they assign meaning to experiences occurring in their world (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Additionally, the
IPA invites the “conceptions” of the researcher as a vital component of the interpretive analysis process (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Thus, the IPA approach provides a lens to interpret data through developing a deeper understanding of the person in-context of her world. This allows for “a wider social, cultural, and perhaps even theoretical, context” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 104).

**Contrasting Perspectives.** While purporting foundational concepts related to phenomenological and IPA approaches, Husserl and Heidegger also espoused contrasting perspectives. For example, Heidegger “asserted that humans are embedded in their world to such an extent that subjective experiences are inextricably linked with social, cultural, and political contexts” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729. This idea of “situated freedom” is an “existential phenomenological concept that gives individuals the freedom to make choices based upon the situations or experiences of their daily lives” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729).

However, Husserl purported the concept of “radical autonomy” which was in direct opposition to “situated freedom” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729). The differences between the two schools of thought rests in the fact that the phenomenological approach describes lived experiences through narratives, while IPA approaches yield the interpretation of narratives, while describing the meaning associated with what is discovered (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

**Study Rationale for IPA.** The justification for using an IPA approach is that it is idiographic in nature in that it seeks to capture thick descriptions of each individual as they experience specific situations, events, and/or phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, the approach provides a method for delving deeply into interpreting and analyzing those experiences in an effort to understand patterns of meaning and how meaning emerges thematically (Larkin et al., 2006). More specifically, the IPA approach provides space and latitude for study participants to enter a sense-making process as they assign meaning to experiences occurring in their world.
Thus, as women who worked in FBOs in South Carolina where organizational silence was present assigned meaning to their experiences, the findings provided a means to understand what is currently unknown in the literature. Additionally, IPA invites the “conceptions” of the research as a vital component of the interpretive analysis process (Chapman & Smith, 2002). This invitation enabled the researcher to connect to the experiences of the women to a deeper degree, providing a lens by which to interpret data through developing a deeper understanding of the person in-context of her world.

**Participants and Sampling Strategy**

The IPA approach uses small and homogeneous samples to allow for a carefully situated focus on each case (Smith et al., 2009). For this reason, the population under study was comprised of eight women who worked in four FBOs in South Carolina where organizational silence was present. The FBOs for this study were selected from among sectors of higher education, nonprofit, non-denominational church, and denominational church. The logic for the selection of these organizations stemmed from the recognition that study participants would provide varying perceptions and experiences in varying contexts or environments (Smith et al., 2009). The study participants held leader/manager (mid-level) positions that were one to two steps down from the leader of the FBO and worked their positions for at least two years. The rationale for exploring women who were employed in mid-level positions was because of their close proximity to the leader of the organization in an effort to better understand if and how the leadership role and behavior drove and/or perpetuated silence in the organization.

While the FBO from which each participant is selected was diverse, homogeneity existed at the participant level in that each participant had in common the particular experience of organizational silence (Smith et al., 2009). Accordingly, FBOs where individual participants
were employed had no less than 10 employees and had longevity of operations for a minimum of 10 years as a FBO. More specifically, of the four FBOs identified for the study, six Black women and two White women consented for participation in the study. Attention was also given to the ages of the participants in an effort to ensure diversity in generations was represented.

Therefore, purposeful homogeneous sampling was used as the sampling strategy with a focus on ensuring that each participant met the basic criteria of having perceptions and experiences of organizational silence in their work in FBOs. Additionally, purposeful sampling created a means to answer the research question from among a group of individuals who were closely defined by their lived experiences (Chapman & Smith, 2002). The criteria for the study were as follows:

1. Women were employed in FBOs
2. Women were in mid-level leader/manager positions in the FBO
3. Women were experiencing organizational silence
4. Women were employed for more than two years
5. Women were either Black or White

The sample-specificity lent itself to inductive logic of IPA and was directly linked to findings that were applicable (Smith et al., 2009).

Recruitment and access. Study participants were recruited from among FBOs in South Carolina. An initial announcement (Appendix B) and prescreening survey (Appendix A) were distributed to women in mid-level leader/manager positions who worked in FBOs in South Carolina in an effort to assess the presence of organizational silence in the organization. Based upon the results of the survey, invitations to participate in the study were extended to select
women who acknowledged the presence of silence in the FBO where they were employed and who met other identified criteria.

Word-of-mouth and email networks were used in the recruitment process utilizing an announcement to request participation (Appendix B). After showing an interest in participation, potential participants were sent a prescreening survey. After reviewing the results from the survey, individual letters (Appendix C) providing detailed information of the intended study and an invitation to participation were sent. Along with the invitation to participate, a time was scheduled for a phone conversation in an effort to develop a level of comfort with the research process.

Once the invitation to participate was accepted, participants received additional information related to the study. This information included IRB approval to conduct the study, the protocol of the study, confidentiality statement, and guidelines of the study. Upon consent to proceed, a time to meet with each participant to review consent forms and to obtain signatures was established. Locations of the meetings were based upon the convenience and comfort of the participant. Initial interviews were scheduled at the time consent forms (Appendix D) were signed.

Data Collection Overview

With the researcher serving as the facilitator of the process, data for the study were collected using semi-structured, one-on-one interviews in order to garner the rich, thick descriptions of how women who worked in FBOs perceived and experienced organizational silence and how they made meaning of its presence. Entering into the life-world of the participant (Smith et al., 2009), the researcher used open-ended questions to provide a process for detailed exploration of a phenomenon that was “nearly invisible” upon observation only
As a result, study participants were given a forum to use their voices to communicate their individual perceptions and experiences of silence.

The interview questions (Appendix B) were designed to facilitate the deep exploration of personal and organizational experiences of silence, both past and present. An interview protocol guided each of the interviews and was inclusive of questions and prompts that allowed for the collection of data on the participant’s background and current context. Each interview lasted 90 or more minutes, with seven interviews occurring face-to-face and one interview occurring via telephone. Note-taking was a valuable component of the interview process in that allowed the researcher to capture nonverbal information in the form of body language and gestures that were relevant to understanding the emotions involved in the rich descriptions gleaned from each participant.

In an effort to facilitate a process that was comfortable and felt safe to the participant, interviews were conducted in locations and at times that were most convenient for the participant. After transcription, interview transcripts were made available to study participants. When considering IPA approaches and semi-structured interviews, Chapman & Smith (2002) noted, “Semi-structured interviews allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of participants’ responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas that arise” (p. 127). Therefore, the data collected using the IPA approach provided a means to delve deeply into the experiences, events, and situations of the participants and to glean meaning on all accounts.

**Data Storage**

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcribing service. Data were stored on a password protected digital device, an external hard
drive, and a flash drive. All external storage devices were secured in a locked drawer when not in use. All recorded materials, transcripts, and notes will be kept for no less than three years after the study. Additionally, the data storage and management process were communicated to participants before, during, and after the study to ensure their understanding of the measures that were taken for their protection and confidentiality.

**Data Analysis Process Overview**

When using an IPA approach, the data analysis process begins with the transcription of the interview from the digitally recorded files on a case-by-case basis (Chapman & Smith, 2002). As each study participant was interviewed, the data analysis process began for that set of data. Collected data were transcribed and transcripts from each interview were read and re-read and the audio files were listened to while reading and re-reading the transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). This level of engagement with the data was a means to explore the participant’s life-world and to provide the researcher an opportunity to be reflective about the interview process and the information gleaned from listening and from observation (Smith et al., 2009).

The next level of engagement with the data was through memoing and margin notes created for each interview (Saldana, 2013). These memos and notes consisted of the first emerging thoughts related to participant responses in broad, yet interconnected categories. These initial thoughts served to familiarize the researcher with the participant and to frame ideas and begin the processes for conceptualizing the best approaches to extrapolating emerging themes and for pushing through interpretive processes (Smith et al., 2009).

As a result of detailed note creation, the developing themes emerged (Smith et al., 2009). The specific themes emerged as a result of common thoughts, feelings, experiences, and meaning held by study participants. According to Chapman and Smith (2002), “Connections are forged
between themes until a coherent and organized thematic account of the cases is produced. Connections across cases can be made until a set of superordinate themes for the group of respondents is produced” (p. 127). From these connections, codes were assigned through coding processes. These processes allowed for prioritization of data and to honor participants’ voices (Saldana, 2013). These codes served as a symbolic manner in which to assign meaning to what was gleaned from the data (Saldana, 2013). A component of this process involved “de-conceptualization” to ensure participants’ reports were given the appropriate contexts between experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Clusters, superordinate themes, and nested themes were extrapolated from processes in noting and coding. Participant perceptions and experiences were further broken down and reorganized. This process of analyzing data became a focused collaboration between observation of the participant, the participant transcripts, and the researcher. This process was critical in capturing the significant components of the text and the connections across emerging themes (Smith et al., 2009). Nested themes from the emergent themes were realized in the analysis process. Additionally, superordinate themes were interwoven throughout and brought together a focus on identifying patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009).

**Trustworthiness and Validity**

In an effort to maintain the trustworthiness and validity of the study, the following strategies were employed.

**Clarifying researcher bias.** Because of the researcher’s experience with organizational silence as a woman, she was aware that in her research efforts hearing the lived experiences of women could to over-identification and misinterpretation of research data. In fact, Briscoe (2005) asserted, “These misinterpretations can occur because one always brings one’s history,
experiences, and categories to bear when trying to understand new situations; all researchers perforce bring their horizons of meaning with them” (p. 26). While being aware of her history and personal connection to the research topic, careful attention was given to not imposing or allowing her experiences to influence the research—recognizing the detriment to research of unmanaged personal predispositions. Machi and McEvoy (2012) stated, “If these attachments remain embedded and unidentified, the research will be severely compromised. A researcher hobbled by unchecked bias can only produce biased findings” (p. 19).

**Peer review and debriefing.** In an effort to manage biases and personal perspectives, peer review and debriefing was an added component of the research process. Relying upon the authentic feedback and target questions of peers, regularly scheduled debriefings throughout the processed provided opportunities to receive external insight into the methods of the study from a vantage point that the researcher would not otherwise have. These peer review sessions also provided an opportunity for the researcher to talk through the challenges and obstacles with peers who were committed to the success of the study and who provided feedback as a tool to enhance its effectiveness.

**In member checking.** In collecting the perceptions and lived experiences of women who work in FBOs in where organizational silence is present, it was critically important to keep the participants involved in this study by asking them to review the data collected for accuracy and authentic representation of their voices. In member checking served to maintain the credibility of the study, as participants provided feedback related to accuracy and the identifications of gaps or misinterpretations.
Protection of Human Subjects

For this study, ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research was used as outlined in the Belmont Report and disseminated by The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. The adherence to these principles also ensured that the knowledge gleaned from the study would be utilized with regard for the utmost respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

Respect for persons. As participants in the study were invited to share their perceptions and experiences of organizational silence, they were each treated as autonomous agents and allowed to share experiences, opinions, and thoughts related to organizational silence without interference from the researcher unless a participant indicated intentions to carry out actions that would harm others. Additionally, participants were asked to participate voluntarily and given sufficient information to make an informed decision related to participation.

Beneficence. Participants were informed of every aspect of the purpose, significance, and anticipated contributions of the study to the field. This information was shared with participants both verbally and in written documentation. Information shared also contained an explanation of the benefits, risks, and compensation for the study. Additionally, the researcher assessed the potential for harm throughout the duration of the study and made every effort to minimize it and its impact on the well-being of the participants.

Justice. Attention to justice was considered in the recruitment and selection of participants for the study to ensure that fairness and equity was extended to and consistent with each participant. No participant was extended advantages that other participants did not have. Participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and processes for securing information and data collected during the course of the study. Strict adherence to the ethical principles and
guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research as outlined in The Belmont Report framed the processes for protecting participants of the study. In instances of uncertainties or dilemmas, the researcher consulted with Northeastern University’s IRB.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

An assumption of the study was that participants working in FBOs would be willing to discuss their experiences of silence in the organization. Additionally, there was the assumption that participants would have the capacity to authentically articulate depth of experiences related to organizational silence and the aptitude to assign meaning to experiences. It was also assumed that if participants were apprehensive about speaking up in their organizations, they might be apprehensive about speaking about the silence to the researcher. Fear for safety or anonymity may have been a barrier to participant recruitment.

A limitation of the study existed in that it was singularly focused on the experiences of silence of *women* in FBOs and not that of *men*. Although the study was designed to understand the lived experiences of women, there were limitations in not hearing the lived experiences of men related to silence in FBOs. Therefore, the findings of the study may have prohibited generalizability of organizational silence in FBOs. Additionally, the selected organizations were founded in the principles of Christianity, presenting a limitation in the ability to hear the voices of women who in other FBOs in other religions. Finally, limitations may have existed due to participant/researcher bias where there may be opportunities to over-identify with the researcher as a woman who spent over a decade working in a FBO.
Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents findings that answered the research question, *How do women who work in FBOs in South Carolina perceive and experience organized silence in the workplace?* This qualitative Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study garnered the rich, thick descriptions of the perceptions and lived experiences of eight women who worked in FBOs where organizational silence was present. The IPA approach facilitated access to meaning and sense-making of silence within the organizations of the eight participants of the study.

The examination of study participants’ perceptions and lived experiences of organizational silence in their workplaces were situated at the core of this study. With a perspicuous IPA focus, emergent themes were gleaned from study participants’ explicit perceptions and lived experiences of organizational silence in the FBOs where they worked. The research question was answered through participants’ expressed challenges and concerns related to navigating organizational life in organizations where organizational silence was present. Study participants opened their life-worlds to the research process and provided a gateway for the extrapolation of thematic patterns and connections conducive to extensive data analysis and interpretation. Additionally, the research processes provided an opportunity for deep engagement with data collection and a means to further interface with study participants’ voices, feelings, sense-making, and meaning related to silence.

This chapter reveals key findings that answer the research question. Derived from the data collected and the analytical strategies employed in this study, this chapter is composed of the following main sections: (a) study context, (b) researcher participation, (c) data analysis process, (d) her story, (e) clusters, superordinate themes, nested themes, and (f) conclusion.
Study Context

The IPA approach facilitated the process by which the “life-world” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729) of each of the eight women was examined and the ways in which connections were made between the realities of their perceptions and experiences in the contexts of their world. Representing FOBs from sections in higher education, nonprofit organizations, nondenominational religious organizations, and denominational religious organizations, study participants brought diverse perceptions and experiences as shared through their unique perceptions and experiences of silence.

Through the eight semi-structured interviews (seven face-to-face and one via telephone), study participants embraced the deeply reflective interview process and relived experiences of silence in the organization. This deeply emotional engagement opened the way for each study participant to share her story in her own words. As such, cluster categories, emergent themes, and nested themes emerged, as the semi-structured interviews invited study participants to enter into a process of sense-making related to how they each perceived, experienced, and navigated silence in their individual organizations. Interwoven throughout thematic findings was the superordinate theme of power.

Researcher Participation

As an active participant in the research process, the researcher probed and listened intently to the perceptions and experiences of each study participant. In doing so, the researcher positioned herself in the research, and as a result acknowledged that her interpretation of the research data arose from her own historical experiences of silence in her personal and work life (Creswell, 2013). As such, throughout the study, the researcher remained sensitive to her positionality and personal experiences of organizational silence.
Additionally, the personal engagement with study participants’ perceptions and experiences provided permission and space for the researcher to not dismiss her lived experience of silence, but rather to recognize their existence and to align them with the framework of the study. Led by a commitment to appropriately manage philosophical assumptions enabled the researcher to have an authentic approach to how her own worldview shaped her personal perspectives of silence. This cognitive awareness prompted the researcher to develop and operationalize clear parameters regarding hearing and interpreting the perceptions and experiences of each study participant.

**Data Analysis Process**

In an effort to analyze the collected data in a manner that would illustrate the dynamic relationship between the parts of the whole, the first step was centered in an immersion in the data (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Taking a case-by-case approach, digital recordings of the data were listened to and transcripts were read and re-read with the intent to become familiar with the data (Smith et al., 2009). From this phase, an attentive memoing process began as a means to enter cycles of coding (Saldana, 2013). The coding processes served to guide emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009) for the purposes of identifying and extrapolating thematic categories, patterns, and connections (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Additionally, the levels of coding generated the construct for deep analysis and researcher interpretation of the data. The cycle of data analysis is displayed in Figure 3.
Figure 3: Clusters, Superordinate Themes and Nested Themes

An analysis of the data collected from the transcriptions of the eight participant interviews provided clusters, superordinate themes and nested themes that were directly aligned with answering the research question of this study. These thematic categories were derived from study participants’ perceptions and experiential accounts of organizational silence in their workplaces. With defined parameters of operation, the evolution of themes framed the means by which to underscore how women who work in FBOs perceive and experience organizational silence in the workplace. An overview of the clusters, superordinate themes, and nested themes specific to this study is provided in Table 4.1.
### Table 4.1

*Overview of Clusters, Superordinate Themes, and Nested Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Thematic Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Clusters      | The organized interpretation of the interrelationships, connections, and patterns that speak to the essence of the data that have been grouped together (Smith et al., 2009)                                      | • **The Journey into Silence**  
Family, cultural and religious experiences and messages heard over time and translated into lessons learned, believed, and embraced that served as a predisposition to silence in the workplace.  
• **The Journey in Silence**  
Deep feelings that converged around the mental, physical, and emotional impact of navigating the day-to-day silence in the workplace.  
• **The Journey Out of Silence**  
The sense of intrinsic power found in the ability to choose silence or voice, dependent upon organizational situations and dynamics in the workplace. |
| Superordinate Themes | Identified patterns between emergent themes gleaned through the process of putting like with like resulting in a name for emergent themes that have been grouped together. | • **Enacting Silence Beliefs**  
“I remember being told to be silent. You can be seen but not be heard.” (Red Barron)  
• **Accepting Silence Systems**  
“I know not to speak up at certain times because I’ve felt embarrassed and because I felt shamed for being myself.” (Hannah)  
• **Resisting Silence for Voice**  
“A lot of people will speak but they won’t address things. I really feel like if we don’t address things it won’t be healthy.” (Wonder Woman) |
| Nested Themes  | Identified subthemes that illustrate the specific connection to overarching superordinate themes (Osborn & Smith, 2006).                                                                                   | • **Powerlessness, Apprehension, Submission**  
“I kind of feel like sometimes I’m not going to be heard here.” (Deborah)                                                                                                                                 |

Continued
Clusters. Through the organized interpretation of the interrelationships, connections and patterns that speak to the essence of the data that have been grouped together (Smith et al., 2009), the coding processes related to analysis of the data opened the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009) by which data were first synthesized into three clusters distinguished by: (1) the journey into silence, (2) the journey in silence, and (3) the journey out of silence (Table 4.1). In a non-linear fashion, each cluster category encapsulated emergent themes that revealed the perceptions and lived experiences of silence in the workplace for each of the eight women in this study. Thus, housed within each cluster category were thematic alignments that revealed the essence of participants’ perceptions and experiences of organizational silence as illustrated through their individual silence journeys. Specifically, through deconstruction of the data, themes emerged in the form of a “journey” as each study participant relived her silence experiences that occurred over time.

Through the journey into silence, themes clustered around ways in which three study participants were exposed to family, cultural, and/or religious messages and lessons related to the need to minimize their voices or cause their voices to disappear. As a result, themes indicated ways in which the study participants’ journeys into silence served as an antecedent to their silence in their organizations. Through the journey in silence, themes clustered around ways in
which three study participants experienced after arriving in their organizations. Reliving experiences of navigating the day-to-day silence in the workplace over time, emergent themes underscored how each of the three women perceived and experienced silence in their workplaces. Clustered under *the journey out of silence*, emergent themes coalesced around a keen knowledge of intrinsic power to choose silence and voice, dependent upon the organizational situations in the workplace and the autonomy their maintained related to the voice behavior they chose. Through the clusters of *the journey into silence*, *the journey out in silence*, *and the journey out of silence*, deep examination of the data facilitated connections and patterns that were revealed in three superordinate themes.

**Superordinate themes.** Through the process of abstraction from clusters, identified patterns between emergent themes were gleaned through the process of putting like with like resulting in superordinate themes (Smith et al., 2009). These superordinate themes were situated according to ways in which participants felt silent and/or silenced and/or the way in which they felt empowered to choose silence or voice. Specifically, the connections to silence were captured through three superordinate themes: (1) believing silence lessons, (2) acquiescence to silence systems, and (3) choosing silence and voice (Table 4.2). Three study participants’ perceptions and experiences of silence in the workplace were found in the silence lessons from childhood, family, culture, and/or religion these participants had come to believe. Three study participants’ perceptions and experiences of silence in the workplace were found in ways which participants were encumbered by organizational systems that drove silence and their acquiescence to those systems. Three study participants’ perceptions and experiences of silence in the workplace were found in their intentionality in choosing silence and voice. Moreover, nested under each
superordinate theme were subthemes that were directly connected to the ways in which study participants perceived and experienced silence in the workplace.

**Nested themes.** The nested themes in this study served as extensions to superordinate themes and connected specific meaning and sense-making (Saldana, 2013) to superordinate themes in this study. As such, nine nested themes were identified and organized based on interpretation of study participants’ perceptions and experiences related to believing silence lessons, acquiescence to silence systems, and choosing silence and voice. These nested themes were: (1) powerlessness, (2) apprehension, (3) submission, (4) self-preservation, (5) resignation, (6) resentment, (7) self-regulation, (8) self-determination, and (9) self-inclusion. The display and characterization of all themes is found in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Superordinate Themes and Nested Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Theme</th>
<th>Superordinate Theme</th>
<th>Superordinate Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believing Silence Lessons</td>
<td>Acquiescence to Silence Systems</td>
<td>Choosing Silence in Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nested Themes</td>
<td>Nested Themes</td>
<td>Nested Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Powerlessness</td>
<td>• Self-Preservation</td>
<td>• Self-Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Apprehension</td>
<td>• Resignation</td>
<td>• Self-Determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Submission</td>
<td>• Resentment</td>
<td>• Self-Inclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In essence, believing silence lessons means having a sense of powerless, apprehension, and/or submission. Likewise, acquiescence to silence systems means feeling the need for self-preservation, having a sense of resignation, and having a sense of resentment. Additionally, choosing silence and voice means having a sense of self-regulation, self-determination, and self-inclusion.
Through examination of participant life-worlds, each cluster category, superordinate themes, and nested themes revealed the perceptions and experiences of organizational silence in the workplace. The following section provides an introduction of each study participant. The section also offers a glimpse into the “multiple realities” of study participants’ life-worlds and their connection to silence in the FBOS where organizational silence was present (Creswell, 2013, p. 20).

**Her Story**

Before each study participant was asked to share her perceptions and experiences of silence while working in an FBO where organizational silence was present, it was important for each study participant to have a sense of ownership of the research process of which she had agreed to enter. As such, each of the eight women were invited to select her own pseudonym for the study. Additionally, guided by a series of initial questions and prompts, she was asked to share about herself and her perceptions and experiences of silence in her organization.

Each woman’s unique perceptions and experiences gave *voice* to her diverse journey, whether filled with challenges, triumphs, limitations, courage, failure, and/or resilience; her story illustrated her perceptions and lived experiences of silence. Furthermore, each woman’s unique story provided a backdrop for this study and allowed her perceptions and experiences in the FBO where she worked to take center stage.

**Meet Ramona (Higher Education FBO)**

*I know my voice is only powerful for people who must feel the same way I do.*  
~ Ramona

Ramona identified herself as a 28-year-old Black woman who grew up in a family with six siblings and was the first in her family to have graduated from college, earning a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in Social Work. She was also the first in her family to have obtained a
professional job/career. Because she was the first in family to accomplish educational and professional goals that others in her family had not, Ramona expressed her struggle with the perceptions her parents and siblings maintained regarded her success. Although accomplished, she still felt an awkward sense of shame for achieving what others had not. As she reflected on the tension she experienced with her family, she shared, “I always felt pressure to stay at the level my siblings and my parents were at so that I didn’t exceed and be someone who they looked upon as trying to be too much.” While Ramona was very proud of her many milestones, when she spoke of her successes in the context of family, she spoke apologetically.

However, in spite of familial tensions, Ramona was drawn to work in a higher education FBO out of a sense of “calling” and a desire to have a positive impact in the organization and with those whom the FBO served. Ramona began her current job as a career coach and mid-level leader in a high education FBO more than two years, shortly after her college graduation. As Ramona returned to work in this FBO from which she graduated, she did so with great excitement and hope for what her presence would mean to the students and to the FBO in the newly-created role. After all, Ramona was invited to assume the role. She did not seek this opportunity. Therefore, when she accepted the job, at the core of her decision was the thought that she was needed. She shared, “I’ve always been lucky or blessed to be placed in a position or somewhere that I felt I was needed, and when I no longer feel I’m needed, I always go.”

In many instances during the interview, as Ramona unearthed her perceptions and experiences with organizational silence in her workplace, she also expressed strong thoughts and feelings about her readiness to “go.” She acknowledged, “Some things started happening and I felt I no longer had a purpose and now I am just working for financial means. I’m feeling like my purpose is up. The power is bigger than me. Even if I try to have a voice out there, this isn’t the
place that my voice can be powerful.” Through her voice in this study, Ramona and fellow participants’ perceptions and experiences of silence speak loudly.

**Meet Wonder Woman (Higher Education FBO)**

*The painful realization is the issue is not that you can’t have the conversation. The issue is not having a voice in that conversation.* ~ Wonder Woman

Wonder Woman identified herself as a 51-year-old White woman. She grew up in a location between San Francisco and Lebanon, Maine. Her family moved to Maine when she was seven. At that time, they went from living in the Bay Area with lots of family to living in a singlewide trailer in a field in Maine. She moved back and forth between the two areas for most of her childhood. As such, she described her family as, “relatively dysfunctional.” For this reason, she suggested, “Many of my family experiences inspired my passion and my commitments for issues of voice and issues for all people being treated with dignity and respect.”

Wonder Woman had an extensive educational history. She earned a Bachelor’s degree and a Masters of Art degree in communication studies. Additionally, she earned an Ed.S. degree and then earned her Ph.D. in Educational Policy-Planning and Leadership. She also earned two professional certificates from the Terry School of Business and from Harvard. Wonder Woman has worked in academe for her entire professional life (more than 30 years). In her current role, she has served on the faculty and mid-level for over 13 years in a higher education FBO.

Wonder Woman “grew up with faith being pretty sterile.” She attended a “lily-White calm church” that was “just no fun.” One of her most poignant memories was a time when she was angry because her brother was allowed to be an altar boy, but she was not because she was a girl. “I had a petition and had the other girls in the church sign it and present it to the leader. Did me no good, but I did it. I was never allowed to be one, but I just thought it was wrong.”

However, Wonder Woman was drawn to her current role because of the faith traditions of the
institution/organization. Specifically, the mission suggesting, “One should do all they could, whenever they could, and however long they could” deeply resonated with her. She shared, “I am a person that believes that even given the challenges I’ve had in my life, I’m still a person of great privilege and access to things that many people don’t have. It’s simply what you do to use your powers for good. So, the mission is what really drew me here.”

Nevertheless, Wonder Woman discussed frustration and disappointment with diminishing attention to the tenets of faith and core values in the FBO. She shared experiences of speaking up and experiences when she “accepted silence.” As a result, she framed her approach to responding with her personal mantra, “Silence is permission.”

Meet Esther (Nonprofit FBO)

... but then, I didn’t feel like it was my place to speak about it. ~ Esther

Esther identified herself as a 58-year-old Black woman and a wife of 32 years, mother of four, a grandmother of seven grandchildren and several grand-dogs. She is an ordained minister, an associate minister at her church, and a pastor’s wife. Additionally, Esther authored a fictional book focused on helping young girls and young adults to navigate the challenges and stressors that come with growing up in the 21st century. Additionally, Esther authored a book and created a program for single mothers.

Esther has worked as the Community Education Coordinator and mid-level leader in a FBO focused on empowering African-American communities and churches. She came to the organization because of its efforts to serve communities with tremendous health disparities. Esther has approached her work from the premise, “God wants us to have a prosperous life. He wants us to lead a holy life.” As such, she has maintained a connection with those she has served in communities.
Esther grew up with her grandparents. One of the most significant messages handed down to her was the adage, “Children should be seen and not heard.” As a result, within the organization, Esther shared her challenges with navigating her “place” in the work environment. She expressed, “There are times when I just silenced myself from everybody.”

**Meet Red Barron (Nonprofit FBO)**

*Maybe I need to speak out. Maybe I need to shout, “Hey, this is not working, we need to do what I know will work.” But I feel that it would just go in one ear and out the other.*

~ Red Barron

Red Barron identified herself as a 52-year-old African-American woman, wife of 24 years, mother of five sons, a grandmother of four granddaughters, pastor, and a “third generation preacher’s kid.” Her memories of her childhood were centered in the church and in experiences of “church life.” Red Barron reflected on being “surrounded by church” all her life. She believed her lessons in serving fueled her passion for working with the community. She shared, “I am just comfortable working with the community. We know that the African-American church is the hub of our community. It’s who I am. I’m comfortable working there.”

Red Barron further emphasized being raised by pastors helped shape her life, her work, and her desire to work in and with FBOs. For nearly three years, she has served in the role as a mid-level leader and Principal Investigator in a FBO with a mission to serve African-American communities and churches. Red Barron expressed, “I get up in the morning excited knowing that I’ve been blessed with the opportunity to work with people in the community.” She further suggested:

I think the call on my life specifically is to work with broken and hurting women and children. When you go to faith-based communities, contrary to what most people think, everything is not a bed a roses. This is what I love, being able to go in and talk with
people, and more so listen than talk. People really want to express their feelings. They just need someone to listen. That’s what I enjoy doing.

However, she shared that her connection and experiences as a leader and with church leadership offered her a keen awareness and provided a depth of knowledge and understanding that, “The African-American church is a boy’s church. It’s hard for women, especially in a leadership position, to have a voice. When you take the initiative to speak up, usually it’s negative consequences.”

Red Barron also aligned her “church” experiences with her experiences with leadership in the workplace. “What I’ve been praying about is that the Lord would pull the blinders from his [leader of the FBO] eyes, or in some way let him see that it’s damaging not only to the community, but also to the project.”

Meet Cee Cee (Nondenominational Religious FBO)

>The aspect that is most difficult is that I’m trusted to execute, I’m trusted for my character, for who I am, and who I represent, but I have no access or authority. ~ Cee Cee

Cee Cee identified herself as a 53-year-old Black woman. She grew up with Filipino, Romanian, Mexican, Korean, Ocean, White, and Black people. Cee Cee left home at 20 years old with her three-month-old child. While she sought to make a life for herself and her daughter, Cee Cee found herself in an abusive relationship. Cee Cee shared, “During that time, I was in a very abusive relationship, which kind of stopped my movement and progress toward going to school. That was seven years of my whole future in an abusive relationship, but I finally broke free.”

Cee Cee’s freedom led to her faith beliefs and ultimately to her role(s) in the nondenominational FBO where she has worked for 13 years. Shaped by her background, her failures, her accomplishments, and her faith, Cee Cee expressed ways in which she was
challenged by the silence that existing in the FBO where she worked, especially in light of her perceptions and experiences in being undervalued as a woman. “Although there are other women, I don’t think that other women are recognized as leaders. The only woman that gets recognized as a leader is the co-pastor. That’s a woman. That’s the pastor’s wife.”

Meet Deborah (Nondenominational Religious FBO)

I’ve just felt like I don’t have a platform to even voice an opinion, and a person that is built like me, that’s frustrating. ~ Deborah

Deborah identified herself as a 49-year-old Black woman, wife for 28 years, a mother to three children and six grandchildren who loves Jesus. Deborah discovered at a very young age that she had a “heart to minister to others.” She explained, “People are just automatically drawn to me.” As she reflected on her work history, she recalled the majority of the jobs she held had been related to serving and caring for others in some capacity. Even when she was a stay-at-home mom, she volunteered her time to help others. Additionally, Deborah emphasized her compassion and a passion “to fight for the underdog.” She shared, “I think I just always knew that I was supposed to help people and that I’m supposed to do something on this earth to help people feel better about themselves. I feel like if somebody’s being taken advantage of or if somebody is struggling, I know how to help them.”

Her compassion for others and her desire to “work in full-time ministry” led her to assume the role as the Assistant Director of a program in her nondenominational FBO. Specifically, her role offered her the opportunity to work with her husband, the Director, in the leadership of more than 500 volunteers. However, since being in the role, Deborah grappled with feelings of not being valued for what she brought to the workplace. She shared, “You can kind of, if you’re not careful, think that it’s a boy’s club. It makes you just feel like you’re not valued
at all, and you know that you’ve got all this stuff in you and you just don’t know how to get it out. No value.”

Meet Faith (Denominational Religious FBO)

There have been times in some of those conversations where I have certainly kept my mouth closed because I haven’t felt like some of the people, particularly the older guard, are able to hear what I have to say. ~ Faith

Faith identified herself as a 35-year-old Black woman and pastor of a denominational FBO. Faith made history when she became the first female pastor, the first Black pastor, and the youngest pastor in the first congregation she led. Faith grew up in a small rural town and was the only child. She was the first in her family to go to college and to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees. At a young age she was told by a number of people, “You have a call on your life.” She shared, “Even through my years growing up, there were always people who say something in me that I did not see in myself, that I could never see.” These messages from others followed her through high school and college years. Not certain of their meaning, Faith stepped away from the path others saw as a natural fit for her and she began a path to a different career. She admitted, “My undergraduate degree, I have a B.S. in Chemistry. I was going to pharmaceutical school.”

However, through various encounters and experiences along the way, Faith came face-to-face with her reality, that she was “called to preach” and “called to pastor.” As a result of her decision to pursue a life in ministry, Faith encountered some tension from various family members who did not believe women were called to be pastors. Nevertheless, to date, Faith has served as pastor in two churches within her denomination. As such, she has been met with challenges related to speak or not to speak. She shared, “In some ways I felt that I wanted a softer tone. I felt like they looked at me like, ‘She’s just one of those loud-mouthed women
who’s going to tell us what to do’ blah, blah, blah, because I think women do sometimes, when they’re strong and in leadership roles, they get labeled as bossy. I wasn’t trying to be labeled as bossy. I’m just saying I’m just a leader. I’m helping us move forward.”

Meet Hannah (Denominational Religious DBO)

*I actually made a note in my phone as a reminder, it’s time to pull back a little, it’s time to be quiet, and it’s not time to pester anybody.* ~ Hannah

Hannah identified herself as a 35-year-old Caucasian/Irish woman, wife, and pastor of a program for children. Prior to stepping into her vocation as a denominational pastor, Hanna entertained thoughts of being a soccer coach, a teacher, community service administrator, a firefighter, and a state trooper. However, she made the choice to work in Christian education at the request of her mother. After her position as a Christian educator was eliminated, Hannah was devastated and uncertain. She shared, “So I said to God, ‘If you want me to go to seminary, you have to sell this house I have now,’ and then my house sold a week later.”

Hannah’s journey brought her to South Carolina and into her position as children’s pastor. In coming to her role, Hannah believed she was right where she was supposed to be. However, after more than two years, she faced challenges with navigating the frustrations of not being able to speak to issues and concerns. Hannah shared, “Sometimes they’re like, ‘we don’t want to deal with that right now,’ or whatever. ‘That’s small potatoes right now,’ or whatever. There is some role confusion as that exactly what I am supposed to do and occasionally leads to frustration.” Through her voice in this study, Hannah’s perceptions and experiences of silence speak loudly.

Thus, expressed through sharing their individual journeys, study participants’ perceptions and lived experiences revealed deep meaning and feelings related to silence and voice. The following sections will illuminate the alignment of the superordinate themes with study
participants’ perceptions and experiences of silence in the work place. Table 4.3 provides a visual overview of this alignment.

Table 4.3

*Superordinate Themes Aligned with Study Participant Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Participant</th>
<th>Believing Silence Lessons</th>
<th>Accepting Silence Systems</th>
<th>Choosing Silence and Voice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ramona</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wonder Woman</td>
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<td>Esther</td>
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<td>Red Barron</td>
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<td>Cee Cee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
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*Believing Lessons of Silence*

_I don’t feel like I had a voice as a kid._ ~ Deborah

Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron’s responses to semi-structured interview questions revealed their genesis of silence through generational, historical, and cultural messages and how they learned what they came to believe about silence. The intersections of learned silence and silence beliefs, along with the forces and/or undercurrents that facilitated a journey into silence emerged in study participants’ recollections of when they were first silent or silenced. From childhood experiences, messages, and/or lessons, the examination of perceptions and study participants’ lived experiences provided space to enter into their life-worlds and to engage in a deeper understanding and interpretation of the catalytic beginnings of silence.

In the data collection process, Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron shared their perceptions and experiences of silence related to the messages they had internalized over the course of their lives. Through the emotions of delving deeply into their backgrounds, each of the
three women unearthed the beginnings of what they learned and what they believed about silence. With shifting emotional tones in their voices, expressive gestures, and body language, yet with great courage, the following interview transcription excerpts that captured Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron’s lived experiences provide insight into their lessons learned and their beliefs about silence.

**Deborah.** From family messages and “church” lessons, Deborah’s learned silence and the silence beliefs she embraced were prominent in the perceptions and experiences she shared:

I don’t really feel like I had a voice as a kid. We lived in a house where you just did what your parents told you to do, especially my daddy. If you didn’t do what he said, you was going to get it.

Even with my family, if … There’s four of us girls, and sometimes we’ll have a family meeting about my mom and try to talk to her about situations. I remember the last one we had. We all had talked to each other before the meeting. ‘Okay, this is what we feel like, and this is what we feel like we need to say to her.’ Well, here I am again, the spokesperson. By the time that meeting was over my mama was so mad and me, and I’m thinking, ‘Y’all didn’t say a word.’ ‘Well, we were letting you do all the talking.’ ‘But that’s not what we talked about!’ I think because of those experiences I’ve also tried to pull back and say, ‘Well, let somebody else talk.’

At this particular time, I felt like I was doing real good at knowing when to speak and when not to. But, there were two older ladies in this church that we were going to, and they were much older than me, old enough to be my mom. They were like, ‘You’re just too loud. You just need to be quiet. You just don’t need to be doing all that laughing all the time. You need to just be meek and mild,’ and all this. I just remember going to God
and saying, ‘God, this is the way you made me, but I’m going to listen to them because I’m supposed to listen to the elders, ‘or whatever. I kind of feel like sometimes I’m not going to be heard here, so let me just do something on the side so that I don’t sound like I want to be out front all the time.

The excerpts from Deborah’s transcripts articulated her feelings of loss of voice and/or hesitancy in using her voice. Drive by power structures in her family and in her faith communities, Deborah learned that the use of her voice was associated with punitive consequences. As a result, she sought to avoid such consequences by not speaking or by guarding her voice. Thus, feeling the need to “pull back,” Deborah’s belief system about silence caused a sense of surrender to make space for the voices of others, while suppressing her own. Exchanging her voice for silence, Deborah shared feelings of hopelessness related to her belief that her voice would not be heard even if she did speak.

Therefore, driven by internalized lessons and beliefs associated with the need to shrink back, Deborah looked for other ways to distract herself from the silence of her own voice. As such, her perceptions and experiences through the lens of what she had been taught and what was imposed on her provided depth in understanding of the power of perceived authority and authoritative structures in driving silence behaviors and muting. Consequently, Deborah perceived and experienced silence through lessons she believed and internalized. As a result, like baggage, when she entered the workplace, she brought her lessons and beliefs about silence with her. Consequently, her silence in the workplace was filtered through the manner in which she believed silence lessons and enacted those lessons and beliefs.

**Ramona.** The “struggle” with minimizing herself and her strengths in an effort to maintain her comfort and the comfort of those around her framed what Ramona had learned
about silence over time and how her beliefs about silence shaped her life-world. The experiences with her family and the lessons learned as a result served as a factor in suppressing her voice.

Ramona shared:

I’m probably the first person in my immediate family, there’s seven of us, who actually pursued high school, college, and graduate studies. I’m probably the first person that actually had a job that you had to have a specific qualification as well. I always felt pressure just at the level that my siblings and parents were at so that I don’t exceed and become someone who they looked at upon as trying to be too much or using my degrees to get to where I am now. That’s something I’ve always struggled with, so that’s why I never really pushed myself further than what I felt was comfortable.

The reason why I don’t speak is because I know it’ll probably hurt someone’s feelings and I don’t want that to be the reason why I speak. I don’t want to speak so that it hurts someone. I want to be that individual that leads a change, but sometimes in order to do that you have to make people uncomfortable, but I don’t know how and that’s something that’s personal. I don’t like to hurt people.

The impact for me has been there was a lack of confidence but also a feeling of being complacent, because I am not really too confident enough that I can do anything else now. So, I don’t need to go anywhere yet because I am not ready. I’m becoming complacent because it’s comfortable. The impact is definitely the lack of confidence, but also the increase of complacency.

Even after having achieved many accomplishments that her family had not achieved, Ramona felt the need to minimize her accomplishments in an effort not to appear more accomplished than her family. As a result of feeling the need to hide who she was, Ramona also
learned to hide her voice as she admitted her perpetual struggle to not push herself beyond that which made others comfortable. Led by her beliefs that not speaking would spare the “hurt feelings” of others, Ramona internalized her own paid related to ways in which she and her family had served to mute her voice.

Thus, capturing Ramona’s lived experiences of silence offered valuable insight into the power of learned silence and silence beliefs in perpetuating feelings of complacency and loss of confidence. Through the process of revisiting experiences of trepidation and tension related to forward movement, especially forward movement of voice, Ramona’s journey into silence provided clarity as to how believing silence lessons effectuated her silence behaviors in her workplace.

*Red Barron.* With deeply entrenched lessons from her family and church, Red Barron expressed beliefs about silence that emerged out of generational and religious cultures. Red Barron shared:

> From the family, from the church, the organizations we were involved in, as a little girl there were protocols and things that were expected of you as a pastor’s kid. I remember being told to be silent. You can be seen but not heard. I’ve had so many different experiences. Because my history has been the church, I’ve seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. When you take the initiative to speak up, usually it’s negative consequences. Because I battle with, ‘Should I say something, should I not?’ ‘Should I let it go, or should I actually put timing on it?’ Should I address the situation, or just be quiet?’ I spend too much time trying to figure out if that’s the right one or if it’s the wrong one, sometimes the opportunity passes. That battle.
I made a discovery, while I was talking to someone one day. She had told me about some of her life experiences. I shared with her some of the things that I had gone through coming up and how I felt that my voice didn’t matter, so I stopped using my voice. I went through some serious things in my first marriage for a while, physical and verbal abuse, and that just added to me and losing my self-worth and all of this. Just didn’t think that my voice was important. I really don’t know what my voice sounds like.

Red Barron’s transcripts captured experiences of lessons and beliefs associated with the meaning she assigned to being “seen and not heard.” Through family, church, and culturally learned silence, Red Barron’s journey into silence was encapsulated by beliefs engrafted into her ways of perceiving silence and enacting silence behaviors. Associating the use of her voice with negative consequences amassed strong feelings of indecision and uncertainty for Red Barron. In her rich description of the turmoil she experienced associated with the choice to speak or not to speak, Red Barron’s transcripts provided depth in understanding related to the power of learned silence and silence beliefs in generating feelings of disenfranchisement and self-doubt.

Additionally, revisiting experiences of physical and verbal abuse from a previous marriage, Red Barron associated her loss of voice with the power of another over her. Consequently, she expressed what she perceived as the insignificance of her voice. This silence belief ultimately led to self-muting and a loss of self-worth. As a result, Red Barron admitted to her inability to hear and/or identify her own voice. Therefore, interwoven throughout her transcript was reinforcement of the power of learned silence and silence beliefs. As such, believing silence lessons served as a silencer in her workplace.
Summative Analysis of Believing Silence Lessons

Beneath the surface of childhood, religious, and/or cultural experiences, Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron revealed deeply entrenched feelings related lessons and beliefs about silence related to the nested themes of powerlessness, apprehension, and submission as displayed in Table 4.4. The complexities of these messages and lessons of silence heard over time served as a catalyst for the way by each of the three study participants perceived and experienced silence based on their unique personal encounters with silence.

Table 4.4

Nested Themes of Powerlessness, Apprehension, Submission and Synopsis of Participant Feelings and Meaning Associated with Nested Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Powerlessness</th>
<th>Apprehension</th>
<th>Submission</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suppression</td>
<td>Pulling Back</td>
<td>Surrender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
<td>Shrinking Back</td>
<td>Self-Muting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalized Pain</td>
<td>Self-Minimizing</td>
<td>Loss of Self-Worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Confidence</td>
<td>Need to Hide</td>
<td>Self-Doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disenfranchisement</td>
<td>Struggle</td>
<td>Acquiescence to Silence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complacency</td>
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The power of family, cultural, and religious experiences and messages passed down and translated into lessons learned, believed, and embraced served as the driving factor in how the three study participants perceived and experienced silence in the workplace. Consequently, because of what was learned, Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron’s transcripts were replete with feelings and assigned meaning of silence manifested through the nested themes of powerlessness, apprehension, and submission.

**Powerlessness.** Lessons and beliefs associated with the use of silence and/or the use of voice perpetuated a sense of powerlessness for Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron. Expressed through recapturing historical instances where they believed they lacked the authority or capacity...
to act or speak, Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron experienced a sense of loss of personal power. Furthermore, each of the three participants explored and shared the tensions between their desire to speak and the lessons and beliefs that prohibited and/or inhibited their voice. As such, participants aligned with feelings of being powerless to reconcile voice behaviors when faced with the choice to speak or not to speak.

Consequently, the feelings of powerless consistently interfered with interpersonal dexterity. Especially when participants encountered the perceived powers of others. Deborah shared her thoughts related to her beliefs that her voice would not be heard if and when she made the choice to speak. As a result, she often chose silence, even when her voice was invited. Likewise, when faced with the choice to speak or not to speak, Ramona filtered her choice to remain silent through her belief that she should suppress her voice so as to not upset the status quo. Because of feelings of being powerless, Ramona expressed the sense of being hidden or consistently hiding.

Red Barron approached the sense of powerlessness through the metaphor of a “battle.” As a result of learned silence from her childhood and her beliefs passed down to her through her “church” affiliations, Red Barron experienced the ongoing sense of being torn between what she had learned and believed about silence and the expectations of others related to how they believed she should use her voice. This perceived “battle” precipitated her feelings related to a loss of power as she attempted to navigate between her learned silence and silence beliefs and the use of her voice.

**Apprehension.** Likewise, believing silence lessons also facilitated a sense of apprehension for Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron when faced with the choice to speak or not to speak. Each of the three women expressed concerns related to the consequences of speaking
up. Thus, connected with learned silence and silence beliefs, participants shared apprehensions about speaking up.

As such, fear-based apprehension associated with learned silence and silence beliefs demonstrated the tension that existed between Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron’s inability to discriminate between their own authentic voice identity and an imposed identity formulated through power structures. Toward this end, Red Barron spoke about her inability to know the sound of her own voice. The lessons from her childhood to be “seen and not heard” contributed to her apprehension to “fight” for herself, or rather to fight for her voice. These lessons and beliefs also emerged in her perceptions of the African-American church as a “boy’s club.” Additionally, Red Barron candidly shared her “discovery” that she stopped using her voice as a result of verbal and physical abuse from her first marriage. Her apprehension to speak up not only compromised how she perceived the importance of her voice, but also how she perceived her “self-worth” connected to her voice.

Experiences of not being acknowledged and/or heard by those with perceived authority and power was central to the reasons Ramona and Deborah were apprehensive about speaking up. They shared the ways in which the minimization of their voices caused them to “retreat” and to step back and to relinquish their voice to “let someone else talk.” Thus, Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron’s learned silence and silence beliefs led to their apprehension about speaking up and using their voices, even in situations when their voices would have provided added value to conversations and dialogue.

**Submission.** Believing silence lessons positioned Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron in a posture of submission to silence when faced with the choice to speak or not speak in various situations. The power dynamics associated with learned silence and silence beliefs prompted the
feelings of having their voices minimized. They submitted to family, cultures, and religions that were power forces and drivers of silence. These actions catalyzed a way of behaving and operating that were indicative of surrender to what had been taught and what was believed about silence.

Moreover, as a result of believing silence lessons, submission became the practice of Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron. Grounded in childhood, cultural, and religious lessons, each of the three women shared unique experiences when they yielded their voices to perceived power, authority, or forces. Specifically, for Deborah and Red Barron these lessons and beliefs were rooted in their deep connection to their faith and their desire to “please God” and to wait for him to “exalt” them. The desire to be viewed in the light of their Christianity was central to how each of the women approached the use of their voices. Based upon being “saved,” Red Barron was compelled to “let things go.” She suggested she would “rather be seen as weak than to lose her witness.” In all instances, Red Barron learned that “speaking up had negative consequences.”

The Essence of Believing Silence Lessons

The interview process for Ramona, Deborah, and Red Barron opened the way for their deep reflection and self-discovery related to ways in which their backgrounds, family, church, and culture had taught them lessons about silence. As they made their own connections to their lived experiences and the meaning they assigned to those experiences, they individually shared moments during the interview process when their discoveries were cathartic. As they revisited lived experiences when they were silent and/or silenced, they also revisited the pain associated with the lessons learned and the beliefs they held.

The nested themes of powerlessness, apprehension, and submission were palatable throughout the rich descriptions of Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron’s perceptions and lived
experiences of silence. Across interviews, each of the three women illuminated their struggle with their lessons of silence from the past and the enactment of voice in their present. After making discoveries about themselves and their lessons and beliefs about silence, sense-making and meaning for each of the three women included an expressed desire to want to speak, a desire to want to have voice, and a desire to want to step out of their state of silence. However, the three study participants exhibited a clearer uncertainty as to whether they could and/or how to navigate their deeply entrenched lessons of silence and silence beliefs. As each of the women were forthcoming about the influences and power of silence in their lives, it demonstrated a connection to how this silence they learned and developed beliefs around then became a characteristic of their individual identities.

As a result, when each of the women entered the workplace, they entered with a predisposition toward silence as a result of what they had each learned and they believed about silence over time. Thus, Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron’s journey into silence and their perceptions and experiences of silence underscored the power of believing silence lessons in driving their perceptions and experiences and how their silence was ultimately enacted in their workplaces.

**Accepting Silence Systems**

*I didn’t want to get caught up into all of the office politics at that point or to get in the way. I was like, ‘Let’s just let nature take its course.’* ~ Esther

In response to semi-structured questions related to the perceptions and experiences of silence within the organization where they work, Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah revealed personal thoughts and feelings descriptive of their day-to-day navigation of silence in the workplace. Across transcripts, Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah’s feelings of “fatigue,” and feelings of being “numb” in the FBOs where they were silent and/or silenced. Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah were
candid and unreserved as they shared their perceptions and their lived experiences of silence in their workplaces. As they described specific instances of being silent and/or silenced at work, challenges were unveiled in the form of their feelings of having their voices oppressed by systemic power structures. These systems were comprised of organizational policies, governance, culture, operations, and leadership.

Further exploration of their feelings unearthed ways in which they each acquiesced to silence in the form of surrendered acceptance. As if telling the “secrets” of the organization, yet with great courage, the following excerpts from Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah’s lived experiences provide insight into ways they accepted silence systems.

**Esther.** Although Esther did not enter the workplace silent, over time in response to systemic dynamics within the organizational culture, she became silent. Esther shared:

It just feels kind of numb. It’s like I’ve been sitting on some ice and I’m just numb or frozen. That feels that way when I walk in the org … I don’t feel the same warmth that I used to feel when I first got started. There’s a coldness that’s crept up into it like a vine that just extended itself and became choking.

I wanted to go to the Principal Investigator and talk to him about it but I didn’t and I actually had my speech ready, everything, my points, everything I was going to say and how I was going to say it. I had it all in my head, bullet points, I’m going to touch on this, this, and this, but then I didn’t feel like it was my place to do that. I thought that was the place of maybe a Director or I don’t know, somebody else but I didn’t feel like it was my place. I didn’t feel like I should, I don’t know, intervene or speak up or say anything about it to him.
At first I kind of like, ‘Well, I really had planned to talk to him,’ and the closer we got to the date, I didn’t know if it was my place to say something to him in regards to that. I didn’t think my job was in jeopardy, that wasn’t it at all and I didn’t think that it would be a problem for me. I felt like … ‘You know what, you probably need to stay out of it.’

It is scary because if you don’t speak up and you don’t say what you really want to say, ‘Have you lost your voice? Have you made a decision to conform? Have you changed yourself?’ That can be a scary place because you’re like, ‘Wait a minute, I’m still who I am but why didn’t I say something? Why did I take that route versus just going ahead and saying what I needed to say?’ That can be a scary place.

I’m beginning to shift my thinking about the organization as a whole, not in what I do and what we provide the community, because I promise you we love it. We are really in our element when we start talking to the population we serve, but just having to deal with all of the hierarchy and all the other stuff.

There are times when I just silence myself from everybody and didn’t do that in the beginning but I found myself at that place where I just need to be.

Throughout her responses to interview questions, Esther underscored her perceptions and experiences of silence in the FBO where she worked. Suggestive of ways in which she had become silent over time, Esther acknowledged being deprived of feelings of warmth she once felt in the organization. In describing the culture of the organization to date, she likened it to feelings of creeping coldness that gave her the sensation of being choked. As a result, even when desiring to speak, Esther considered systemic barriers and structures that precipitated feelings of misplaced voice and power. Grappling with feelings as to whether or not speaking up was her
“place,” Esther felt the need to protect herself from organizational power structures by giving up or giving into fear associated with speaking.

With the hierarchal structure of the organization as the backdrop of Esther’s descriptions of her perceptions and experiences of silence, power dynamics associated with organizational systems prompted her feelings of rancor related to ways in which organizational forces had muted her voice. Esther met with feelings of acceptance related to the undesirable phenomenon of silence. Consequently, she was compelled to silence herself as a means by which to safeguard against the realities of a system that was a drive of silence.

**Cee Cee.** With a desire to do “ministry,” Cee Cee entered the workplace with great anticipation. However, she encountered systemic dynamics that served as a barrier to her voice. Cee Cee shared:

My experience being a woman in the organization is that there is only one woman in the organization. That woman is the co-pastor and that pretty much as a woman, there is no existence of other women. Although there’s other women, I don’t think that other women are recognized as leaders. The only woman that gets recognized as a leader is the co-pastor that’s a woman. Although you may be a woman working and being a mid-level manager in the ministry, your contribution in relation to your responsibility aren’t as recognized as valuable because you are not that woman. There is no access in opportunity to speak up and voice your opinion. If there was access and opportunity, that would be a different story.
I can’t access an opportunity. There is a hierarchy that protects. There is limited opportunity to voice your opinion. That only happens for some at a certain meeting. If you’re not in those meetings, then you don’t have an opportunity.

It looks threatening. Threatening in that it causes fear of repercussions if you were to voice your opinion. It feels like you’re not valued. It feels like you’re being used. It feels like you don’t matter.

I try to work this unto the Lord and for his glory and all that he’s purposed me to do. I want to show my compassion and love for his people as he has love and compassion for me. I can’t focus on that [silence].

Encumbered by organizational systems and barriers to voice, Cee Cee unearthed the depth of her silence in the FBO where she worked. Acknowledging a sense of “calling” as her reason for being drawn to the work, Cee Cee articulated feelings of exasperation connected to her perceptions of being unrecognized, undervalued, and somewhat invisible as a woman and as a mid-level leader. As a result of the identified systemic dynamics, Cee Cee spoke transparently about her feelings of disappointment and a sense of defeat related to the lack of access to leadership and therefore having no opportunity to speak up. Experiencing the void of being uninvited to voice her opinion, Cee Cee underscored ways in which hierarchal structures in the organization served to perpetual silence, especially the silence of women.

In addition, Cee Cee identified the sense of feeling “threatened” as a dynamic related to systemic power. This perception of facing repercussions if she were to speak evoked feelings of avoidance in an effort to minimize the possibility of confrontation and conflict. Cee Cee acquiesced and accepted the realities of organizational systems and structures, which led to the
acceptance of her own silence as she resolved to not focus on the silence, but rather to focus her work on the tenets of her faith as aligned with her relationship with God.

**Hannah.** Feeling challenged by the systems of power in the workplace and overwhelmed with how to navigate the realities of silence, Hannah shared:

I was bopping into an office trying to check morale and check on people or tell them about an idea or connect. It was very poorly received. You get a few of those and you think, ‘hmmm, okay. Maybe it’s me and I need to adjust.’ I actually made a note in my phone that it will make a reminder that it’s time to pull back a little. It’s time to be quiet. It’s time not to go pester anybody.

It’s frustrating and there are days when I’m like, ‘oh, there’s got to be something easier I could do with my life.’

I know not to speak up at certain times because I’ve felt embarrassed and because I felt shamed for being myself. I guess shame would be one. Not wanting to get into trouble, so I guess that would be one big one. Most pastor people tend to be a little bit of people pleasers, so we don’t like it when somebody’s upset with us, so we tend to try and adjust accordingly.

Yeah, it doesn’t feel good. It diminishes and it makes me count my time, so have to be careful how I say that, but I don’t think I can do more than three years here. I haven’t told them that, but I don’t think I can do it.

I have to be silent about my job at home and I have to be silent about my job at work because clergy confidence and all those things and people just don’t want to listen; so yeah, I don’t have many places to put it.
Hannah’s shared perceptions and experiences of silence in the FBO where she worked highlighted ways in which the power interwoven into systems served to fuel organizational dynamics that led to her silence. With great confidence and strength of voice prior to coming to the organization, over time Hanna was met with systemic realities in leadership, structure, and expectations that ultimately served to mute her voice and generated feelings of “pulling back.” Communicating her frustration in silence, Hannah expressed feeling embarrassed and ashamed as she experienced a departure from her personal identity; she perceived that her silence had caused her to no longer be herself.

Additionally, her silence became symbolic of “people pleasing.” As such, she felt the need to accept and/or adjust to the systemic drivers of silence. However, the act of self-adjustment led to a sense of despondency and disaffection. Thus, Hannah was perplexed by the sense of still being physically present in her role, while having experienced a sense of resigning from the organization in her mind.

**Summative Analysis of Accepting Silence Systems**

As Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah shared their perceptions and experiences in the FBOs where they worked, each revealed deep feelings that converged around the challenges of navigating their day-to-day experiences of silence, as displayed in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

*Nested Themes of Self-Preservation, Resignation, and Resentment and Synopsis of Participant Feelings and Meaning Associated with Nested Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Preservation</th>
<th>Resignation</th>
<th>Resentment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-protection</td>
<td>Giving Up</td>
<td>Misplaced Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-silencing</td>
<td>Giving Into</td>
<td>Misplaced Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Defeat</td>
<td>Rancor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiescence</td>
<td>Emotional Departure</td>
<td>Exasperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulling Back</td>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unlike Deborah, Ramona, and Red Barron, who brought silences with them into the organization based upon their lessons learned and silence beliefs, Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah did not bring silence with them to the organization. Instead, over time within the organization they were met with systems and structures that ultimately prompted their silence in the workplace.

Through expressed feelings of “frustration,” “not feeling valued,” and “embarrassment,” Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah’s accounts of their journeys in silence illuminated ways in which they had arrived at a place of acceptance of their silence in the organization. Thus, their perceptions and experiences of systems and silence catalyzed the power of their acceptance of silence. Moreover, nested within the superordinate theme of accepting silence systems were three nested themes: self-preservation, resignation, and resentment. These nested themes further captured the feelings of associated perceptions and experiences interwoven within the life-worlds of Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah and the meaning and sense-making they assigned to their individual perceptions and lived experiences of silence in their workplaces.

**Self-Preservation.** Encumbered by systems of operating, systems of leadership, structural systems, and systems of governance, Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah became silent and/or felt silenced over time. In various ways, each of the three women expressed ways of operating or being sustained within the organization that were akin to self-preservation. Accepting the silence that was a part of their lived experience at work, each of the three women’s responses to interview questions revealed the diverse ways in which they each embodied feelings
related to the need to protect themselves, and silence was a means by which to establish this mode of survival.

Esther’s description of hearing the “roar” of silence caused her to respond with actions she believed would protect her from the external and internal noise of the roar. In an apologetic tone, she admitted, “One thing that, and I know this is going to sound really weird, but I put my earphones in to listen to music. I’ll listen to music or listen to a sermon or something of that nature and then, I don’t know, it just takes my mind away from it.” Cee Cee shared a similar form of self-preservation as she described the desire to not want to think about the silence. Thus, justifying the need for self-preservation, she shared, “I try to work this unto the Lord. That’s it. I want to show my compassion and love for his people as he has love and compassion for me. I can’t focus on that [silence]. I can’t go into that.” Likewise, not having a “place to put her silence,” and through her feelings of concern for her overall sense of well-being, Hannah communicated, “I’ve been trying to run and trying to do things that are fun for me. I need to do more active things because I’m finding this affects my sleep. The doctors have told me that, too; just finding ways to cope with this stress.”

Across transcripts, self-preservation emerged as a manifestation of Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah’s perceptions and lived experiences of silence in the workplace. Through their rich descriptions, each of the three women provided insight into the power present in their organizational systems to drive silence. Accepting the realities of their silence in the workplace, through their behaviors and actions each of the three women uncovered ways in which they have felt the need for self-preservation in silence. This mode of operation for each of the three women was illustrated through the nested themes of resignation and resentment.
**Resignation.** A prevalent nested theme interwoven throughout Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah’s responses to interview questions was the sense of resignation. Specifically, resignation represented the withdrawal from various aspects of the work and/or within the workplace. While still showing up for work on a daily basis, each of the three women described experiences and feelings associated with being present in body, but having resigned mentally and emotionally. In response to power systems of hierarchal leadership, structures, governance, and/or operations, each of the three study participants intimated unique feelings associated with the ways in which they had left the organization without actually leaving.

In a despondent manner, Hannah shared, “This silence doesn’t feel good. It diminishes and it makes me count my time, so I have to be careful how I say that, but I don’t think I can do more than three years here. I haven’t told them that, but I don’t think I can do it.” While Hannah’s inflection was one of sadness, it was fueled by a confident certainty that the power of systems and her acceptance of the realities of silence had caused her to reach the end of what she believed she could offer the organization although she was still employed there.

When addressing how she worked amidst the dynamics of silence related to systems and structures within her organization, Cee Cee shared, “I chose not to participate or involve myself.” In a contemplative way, Cee Cee’s choice to withdraw from areas of participation in the workplace highlighted her feelings of “not being valued.” Therefore, Cee Cee’s choice was congruent with the sense of resigning from the organization while still employed. Similarly, Esther shared, “I’m just in my office, so I don’t … maybe I don’t say anything more than I need to say. I’ve just gotten to the point where I can’t talk about things anymore.” The perceptions and lived experiences of silence as shared by each of the three participants rendered feelings of resignation that manifested in the form of withdrawing and/or retreating. Though enacted in
diverse ways, the three participants expressed behaviors symbolic of resignation also catalyzed feelings that were aligned with the nested theme of resentment.

**Resentment.** Experiencing instances of being treated in ways that drove their silence in their organizations, Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah shared experiences and feelings that were aligned with the nested theme of resentment. This sense of indignation was noted in her tone and body language as Esther shared, “Not being and doing what I felt called to do kind of strips you daily of your true self and who you are. I stated saying, ‘What am I doing here? Why am I here? And no, why am I still here?’” Esther’s reflective questioning was representative of the demeanor she assumed and one that was suggestive of resentment.

When expressing her difficulties navigating the power structures in the organization, Cee Cee revealed, “The aspects that are most difficult is that I’m trusted to execute, I’m trusted for my character, for who I am and who I represent, but I have no access or authority to give me that. There is no access or authority to speak up and voice your opinion. If there was access and opportunity, that would be a different story.” The sense of resentment related to the loss of voice and the ability to speak up in the organization prevalent across transcripts.

Embedded within Hannah’s expressions were feelings of resentment as she shared, “I did pipe up. I just wasn’t recognized, heard, or acknowledged. I literally spoke, so I had a voice, but I had no power. Power’s really a strong word. I don’t mean it like I’m not looking for power. I work for Jesus. I didn’t have any influence. They want me to pipe up, but my words are not seen as valuable, I guess, if that makes sense because like I said, one of my jobs is morale and a lot of times, when I report on that, they don’t want to hear it.” Accepting the realities of the power systems of silence, Hannah consistently acknowledged the system barriers to voice and her feelings of despair as a result of her silence in the organization.
The Essence of Accepting Silence Systems

The superordinate theme of accepting silence systems underscored the power of acceptance and silence and its ability to drive self-preservation, resignation, and resentment. These themes were representative of Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah’s unique perceptions and experiences of the challenges they met with while navigating silence in their workplaces. Revealed through feelings of frustration, embarrassment, loss, hopelessness, and defeat, Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah disclosed ways in which leadership, governance, and structures in their work systems served as a force for driving silence.

Accepting the realities of their silence, the study participants’ responses to interview questions revealed that while they entered into their FBO with a willingness and ability to speak, they became silent or were silenced as a result of systemic barriers to voice. Encumbered by the self-imposed limitations to speak or by systems that were not conducive to soliciting their voices, Esther, Cee Cee, and Hannah uncovered the mental, physical, and emotional impact of their day-to-day silence in the workplace. Sense-making and meaning emerged in the evidence of their ability to articulate the heaviness of silence and their desire to stay connected to the work they loved, but the relinquish the burden of silence that had gotten in the way of effectively carrying out the work.

Choosing Silence and Voice

I have always had a strong desire, need, and calling to interrupt silence and to give opportunities for voice particularly to young women that I didn’t have when I was at that point in my life. ~ Wonder Woman

With a focus on the superordinate theme of choosing silence and voice, each of the three study participants related their unique perceptions and experiences of silence to their knowledge of their intrinsic power to manage their silence and voice behaviors. While understanding that
silence was not the opposite of voice, Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther shared their awareness of silence and ways in which silence manifested in their workplaces, while they also shared instances of navigating silence and voice behaviors. Thus, central to this ability to navigate was the keen awareness of their ability to choose silence and voice.

Through the shared experiences of moments of temporary silence, Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther revealed feelings of anxiousness in the organization, indignation from unfairness, advocacy from injustice, and pain from being muted. However, each of the three women provided detailed accounts associated with using the negatives of silence for positive voice outcomes. Study participants demonstrated courage to speak and to work toward a need to be heard. The following excerpts from Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther’s lived experiences provide insight into their fortitude in choosing silence and voice.

**Wonder Woman.** Certain of the power of her voice, Wonder Woman’s responses to the semi-structured interview questions were fraught with feelings of frustration. However, her frustration was linked to the challenges she faced as she sought opportunities for her voice to be heard. Wonder Woman shared:

I have found myself saying repetitively for decades, ‘Silence is permission.’

A lot of people will speak but they won’t address things. I really feel like if we don’t address things it won’t be healthy.

There’s absolutely muting that happens. You have to make the decision. ‘Am I going to be the troublemaker again, the one that’s going to be perceived as stirring this up because this is an issue that needs to be said.’ It’s probably going to be, ‘Oh that’s [Wonder Woman].’
The frustrating part is professionally it’s exhausting and intimidating and you can start to feel paranoid that if you do or say certain things you make assumptions about how things are going to be perceived which is not fair but patterns are patterns. That’s really negative personally, but also personally I’m defiant.

Certain of the power of her voice, Wonder Woman approached the balance between silence and voice behaviors with a sense of control. Recognizing her ability to determine when and how she would use her voice, she was able to compartmentalize the feelings of frustration, pain, anxiety, and anger connected to perpetual silence. With the desire for the health of the organization and for her own sense of well-being, Wonder Woman was driven by needing to make the choice to use her voice. Thus, her commitment to voice became the means by which she included herself in organizational conversations and decision-making.

Managing feelings of intimidation related to speaking up, Wonder Woman became a contributor to organizational dialogue, even when the invitation was not extended to do so. Furthermore, in the face of feelings of frustration related to the impact of instances when she was silent, Wonder Woman was resilient as she recoiled from silence with feelings of resoluteness related to recapturing and sustaining her voice. With authenticity as the central component to her pursuit of voice, Wonder Woman’s voice commitment generated a feeling of personal and organizational responsibility to speaking up.

**Faith.** In describing her perceptions and experiences of silence in her FBO, Faith discussed her sense of freedom to use silence and voice to her benefit for the good of the organization. Faith shared:

I think one of the things that was very fortunate was that I grew up in a household where my parents gave me a lot of freedom to speak, so I’m sure that I fall back on that. I never
lived in a house or grew up in settings where children are seen and not heard. That was never the situation in the household that I grew up in.

Release, because release is so important, because that’s what I think about silence. One of the frustrating things about silence is that if you keep that stuff all bottled up and you don’t say it, it can stress you out. It can cause you to get sick. It can cause you to just … It can lead to an explosion, so that when it does come out you haven’t dealt with it, that it … When it’s there, it comes out and it’s like, ‘Hold on. Whoever is in the pathway there that I know, it’s not good at all.’

If you don’t help to influence others to speak up, then they don’t even realize the silence that is in the room, or even what the origin of silence is. I don’t know that they even recognize that.

Assured of the power of her voice, Faith spoke of ways in which she navigated silence in the FBO where she worked. As a result of an upbringing grounded in the encouragement and freedom to speak, Faith brought to the organization a sense of control related to how she chose to use her voice. Although she experienced frustration in instances of silence, Faith highlighted her perceptions of the significance of speaking up as a means by which to maintain a sense of well-being and responsibility for the management of voice behaviors.

Moreover, Faith gave voice to what she perceived as the critical importance of her feelings of responsibility to encourage and facilitate voice for others in the organization. As a result of her own resilience in navigating silence, Faith emphasized the personal leadership needed in governing her own voice behaviors and in turn influencing voice and opening understanding of silence behaviors for others. Although she experienced instances of silence,
Faith maintained a sense of determination related to choosing and sustaining voice in the organization.

*Esther.* While Esther’s journey in silence was demonstrated through her responses to the semi-structured interview questions, Esther’s responses also revealed her journey out of silence and her commitment to the use of her voice. Esther shared:

I wanted to begin to find out who I am and find my voice because I know that I have a platform but I’ve got it, I’ve got to do it. It’s not going to happen to me just happenstance, you got to put some action to it and start, and just do it.

I’m not going to be silent again about things I need to speak up about. I’ve already relegated that in my head.

There’s a good part of silence. We really do need to be silent, especially if you’re in anger or you can hurt someone, it’s words you push out like a tube of toothpaste and then you think you can stuff them back in there. You can’t just retrieve it and roll it back in. Silence can be good but then there is that other part, the bad part when you should open your mouth. When you should say something, but you don’t because of one reason or another be it fear, be it you just don’t think you have the words, or just because you are apathetic. I’ve learned that I don’t necessarily have to be silent. I can say what I’ve got to say and mean what I mean to say.

The best is yet to come and that I won’t allow myself to get caught in a space where I feel like I can’t say something and I don’t say something because of this, that, or the other.

Esther’s upbringing and cultural background were catalysts for silencing her voice early in her life. When Esther entered the FBO where she worked, she entered with a propensity for silence. Therefore, drive by historical factors and organizational dynamics as triggers, Esther
faced the challenges of navigating silence in her workplace. However, feelings of frustration, anxiety, and anger overwhelmed Esther to the point where her desire for voice became greater than her silence. Tapping into her resiliency, Esther felt a sense of determination to emerge from silence and enact voice behaviors in her organization. Reconciling that there is a “good part of silence,” Esther recognized her power to choose silence and voice as appropriate for the situation. Furthermore, resolute in her voice commitment, she expressed a desire for authenticity in her voice behaviors. Thus, with a sense of courage, Esther focused her attention on including herself in organizational dialogue and decision-making through her use of voice.

**Summative Analysis**

Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther’s responses to semi-structured interview questions provided insight into the ways in which each navigated silence, while including ways they used their desire, passion, and strength for the enactment of voice in their individual FBOs where they worked. As each of the three women shared their experiences of silence, they also communicated their feelings of power related to the choices they made to use their voices, as displayed in Table 4.6. Across inter views, Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther’s statements suggested the value they each placed on not being silence and to being irrepressible with their voices.

**Table 4.6**

*Nested Themes of Self-Regulation, Self-Determination, and Self-Inclusion and Synopsis of Participant Feelings and Meaning Associated with Nested Themes*

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<tr>
<th>Self-Regulation</th>
<th>Self-Determination</th>
<th>Self-Inclusion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Resoluteness</td>
<td>Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Discernment</td>
<td>Contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Voice Commitment</td>
<td>Authenticity</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Expressed through a keen awareness of their silence processes, each of the three women’s perceptions and experiences of silence clustered in the third category, the journey out of silence. Although feelings of frustration, anxiety, anger, pain, and/or regret surfaced in the interview responses, those feelings served as a catalyst for feelings that promoted voice. The superordinate theme of choosing silence and voice was central to shared perceptions and experiences. Moreover, deep exploration of participant feelings revealed nested themes of self-regulation, self-determination, and self-inclusion.

**Self-Regulation.** Through rich descriptions of experiences of silence, Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther shared ways they navigated the silence in pursuit of sustainability of voice. With knowledgeable of their organizational power structures and systems, each of the three women harnessed feelings of frustration, indignation, and injustice and recoiled in ways that led to feelings of power in voice-ownership through self-regulation. In instances where silence was experienced, each of the three women demonstrated resiliency through regulating their voice behaviors. Wonder Woman shared, “Personally, I’ve had to make some very careful and thoughtful decisions about what battles are worth fighting and what battles weren’t worth fighting.” Likewise, regarding the choice to regulate voice behavior, Faith admitted, “I try to also try to be a voice that can bring us together and not just fuel the fire.”

Additionally, although Esther’s responses to the semi-structured interview questions revealed her perceptions and experiences with accepting silence systems, her transcripts also illustrated ways in which she chose silence and voice. Specifically, based upon Esther’s perceptions and experiences of silence, the experiences in which she was resilient and had emerged from her silence behaviors in the organization. Esther shared, “I’m going to be vocal. I’m not going to allow silence to creep in again and choke me.”
Thus, through intrinsic fortitude Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther thematically spoke of regulating voice behaviors through choosing voice over silence. Each of their accounts of experiences of silence reflected their belief that they had the power to choose. The ability to weigh their choices provided a sense of confidence. Faith suggested, “I think that they know that I honor them and they also know where buck stops for me. Because they know that I’m not intimidated by this or that, and so in some regard, and maybe some of them might feel like I might be arrogant, but I don’t think it’s arrogance. I think it’s just confidence.” For each of the three women, this level of self-regulation also unearthed a nested theme of self-determination.

**Self-Determination.** Prevalent across Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther’s transcripts was their own esoteric sense of permission that they seemed to give themselves representative of the personal right to choose voice over silence. Expressed through feelings of frustration and anger, each of the participants made declarations about silence and voice. Thematically, these emerged and aligned with the nested them of self-determination. Wonder Woman shared, “It pisses me off. It makes me angry. It makes me frustrated and for better or worse it makes me more determined. I am not impressed with authority and if somebody expects me to be impressed by their authority I tend to be irreverent about it. I know that about myself.”

In demonstrating the power of self-determination, Faith added, “I would rather think it through and say it well instead of just being real quick on the tongue.” Additionally, as Faith shared deeply about her perceptions and experiences of silence, her responses demonstrated feelings related to a holistic approach to choosing silence or voice. Faith expounded, “I think that sometimes silence gets a bad rap. I don’t think silence is always a bad thing. I think sometimes it’s good to be still and just listen and not have to … Because we’ve been in a society where we
are valued by what you contribute to the conversation, about what you have to say and what you have to add to the product, whereas sometimes it’s okay just to sit back and listen and pick.”

When elaborating ways in which she would approach silence in her future work in the organization, Esther emphasized feelings of certainty, “I’m not going to be silent again. I’ve already relegated that in my head.” Therefore, through candid disclosure of perceptions and experiences of silence, each of the three women conveyed the evolution of their understanding of silence and their appreciation for the power to choose silence or voice as it seemed conducive to the situation at hand. Although challenged by structures and systems of power with the FBOs where they each worked, Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther shared feelings of personal empowerment in their ability to choose silence or voice and to include themselves in situations where silence would have otherwise isolated them and caused a sense of muteness.

**Self-Inclusion.** Wonder Woman and Faith admitted to having feelings of being isolated and uninvited when faced with silence in the FBO where they each worked. Related to feeling isolated, Faith shared, “I think sometimes silence looks like being in a room by yourself and with the idea that nobody else is with you, that you’re all alone, that you’re very isolated and that nobody else gets it. Nobody else. You don’t have anybody to lean on. You don’t have anybody who’s got you by the hand saying, ‘We can do this.’ I do think that sometimes silence, it could feel very isolating.”

Additionally, Wonder Woman shared her feelings related to feeling uninvited. “There is now very clear bifurcation of who has voice and who doesn’t in the big decisions. I came up with a term last year; I feel like myself and my colleagues, those of us who are at mid-level managers of my institution, we are simply white noise. We get told certain things enough so we’re not frothing at the mouth.”
Likewise, Esther described feelings of being less than authentic in instances when she made the choice not to speak. She shared her desire for voice, “I just want to ... I wanted to be who I was and do it the way I needed to do it. I started. I prayed about it and asked, ‘I want ... My Lord, I want to hear myself. I don’t want to leave this Earth unfilled.’ I started wanting to really find my voice, really find it.” This strong feeling of intentionality to want to use and hear her voice elucidated the theme of self-inclusion for each of the three women.

Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther’s transcripts revealed tenacious and deliberate actions to ensure the inclusion of their voices when they deemed inclusion important. Wonder Woman shared, “I have a reputation for being blunt and so I use that. I decide that’s fine. I think there are things I can say that for lots of complicated cultural reasons it’s harder for other people to say. To me, that’s part of using my powers for good.” Faith’s perceptions of inclusion were similarly aligned as she shared, “Very rarely do I have a fear of speaking. That’s not been the case. If there’s a fear it is because I am asking myself, ‘Am I going to offend somebody else? Am I going to hurt the larger situation?’ Not so much the fear of, ‘Is what I have to say valuable?’ Uh-uh (negative). Not that. I definitely have never had that experience ... I don’t have that experience just because that’s not the way I was reared and I’m very fortunate.”

Having experienced the detriment of silence in her organization and moving to a place where she developed the intention to include her own voice, Esther shared, “You know, I found my voice and it’s like, ‘Okay, I don’t mind hearing myself.’ Because your voice gives you power regardless if it’s what you say or how you ... the body language that you exude. I do think that all of it has given me my voice and I will use it!” Thus, the inclusion of voice behaviors was central to choosing silence and voice.
The Essence of Choosing Silence and Voice

With feelings of frustration, anger, pain, anxiety, unfairness, and injustice as a backdrop, Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther captured those feelings as a catalyst for the pursuit and sustainability of their voices in the FOBs where they worked. As a result, the desire to manage the undesirable feelings of silence, each of the three women embraced their sense of freedom in self-regulation, self-determination, and self-inclusion related to voice behaviors. Although unique in their approaches to enacting voice in the FBOs where they worked, each of the three women conveyed a strong sense of personal power to navigate systems, cultures, environments that were drivers of silence.

Sense-making and meaning for Wonder Woman, Faith, and Esther was extrapolated from the transcripts as they each described ways in which they determined not to be impeded by silence, but rather to use a sense of intrinsic power to choose silence or voice, dependent upon organizational situations and dynamics. Most importantly, the choice to speak or not to speak was within their individual realm of decision-making and not solely driven by external forces. Sense-making and meaning was central to not being encumbered by silence in the FBOs where they worked, but rather in being resilient in silence and powerful in voice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, findings from an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis were presented. Eight semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed, with the goal of understanding how women who work in FBOs in South Carolina perceive and experience organizational silence in the workplace. Patterns of meaning and sense-making were captured through detailed analytic interpretation of the interview transcripts. These patterns moved across individual cases and were illustrative of a synthesized analysis.
Chapter sections provided illustrative details of study participants’ perceptions and experiences of silence and how these perceptions and experiences were situated in journeys that led them into silence, journeys that kept them in silence, and journeys that took them out of silence. Participants’ feelings related to their perceptions and experiences of silence were captured in nine nested themes of powerlessness, apprehension, submission, resignation, self-preservation, self-regulation, and self-inclusion. Thus, the findings of this study answered the research question in that the examination of the perceptions and experiences of women who worked in FBOs where organizational silence was present interfaced with silence in the organization through believing silence lessons, accepting silence systems, and/or choosing silence and voice.

A discussion of findings will be presented in the chapter that follows. This discussion will establish connections between the findings of the study and published literature, and will explain the relevance of the findings to the theoretical framework for the study. Additionally, the significance of those findings to future practice will be highlighted, implications for action will be discussed, and suggestions for future research will be included.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

Overview

Prior research on organizational silence leaves little doubt that the phenomenon of silence has raised questions as it relates to the instances where individuals in organizations do not speak up, even when they are aware of the value of the contribution. Because of the conditions attached to the decision to speak or not speak, organizational silence is enacted when voice is suppressed. This withholding of information, opinions, concerns, and/or conversations (Morrison & Milliken, 2003) is often an artifact that is seated at the core of many organizational cultures and can be directly linked to organizational outcomes (Brinsfield, 2013). Although over the past decades, numerous studies have been conducted in an effort to understand forms of silence, mediating roles of silence, and cause and effect of silence (Brinsfield, 2013; Knoll & Dick, 2013; Whiteside & Barclay, 2013), the perceptions and lived experiences of silence have been understudied, especially as the research relates to women in organizations where organizational silence is present.

Purpose of this study. The purpose of this study was to explore how women who work in faith-based organizations (FBOs) in South Carolina perceived and experienced organizational silence in the workplace. With intentions to examine the perceptions and experiences of eight women who worked in FBOs where organizational silence was present, this study delved deeply into the life-worlds of each participant in an effort to enter their silence journeys. Through a range of emotions, participants embraced the interview process as a means by which to give voice to the lived experiences to which they had not yet assigned words or meaning. In giving voice, study participants were able to examine their silence behaviors and come face-to-face with
the choices they had each made to speak or not to speak and to assess the meaning of their choice.

**Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) in this study.** In an effort to garner rich responses that would lend themselves to the examination of the perceptions and experiences of silence of women who worked in FBOs, an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was used. The use of IPA provided insight into sense-making and meaning and made space for the researcher’s analytic interpretations related to thematic clusters, emergent themes, nested themes, and the superordinate theme of power, which was interwoven across themes. Taking a “person-in-context” (Larkin et al. 2006, p. 109) approach, interpretive analysis in this study was rooted in the intention to understand ways in which each participant related to the phenomenon of silence and how she engaged understanding and in aligning meaning and sense-making through her unique perceptions and experiences of silence (Larkin et al., 2006).

Employing “hermeneutics of suspicion” as a means to “probe beneath the surface of participants’ narratives to ascertain embedded power issues,” the study unearthed power issues that were embedded in participants’ lived experiences (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 731).

**Muted group theory in this study.** Muted group theory was the theoretical framework used in this study because of its capacity to establish a research foundation rooted in cause and effect of silence to collect, situate, and analyze the data. Focused on how women have been silenced interpersonally and within society (Houston & Kramarae, 1991), muted group theory framed the lack of voice and the process of silencing (Kramarae, 1981) in this study. Through the advancement of ways in which power dynamics provided the privilege to have voice over others (Houston & Kramarae, 1991), muted group theory opened the way for the examination of how voices could be driven to silence because of political or power ambiguity and how voices could
be silenced over time (Mears et al., 2004). Conversely, another element present in muted group theory was the emphasis on ways mean resisted the silence drive by a dominant group and made choices as to what to speak, when to speak, in what mode to speak, and how much to speak (Ardener, 2005).

**Power dynamics in this study.** As an “undercurrent in the silence literature” (Morrison & Rothman, 2009, p. 111), power emerged as a consistent dynamic in this study. Aligned with the study context of power, Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson (2003) defined power as, “An individual’s relative capacity to modify others’ states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments.” This definition of power established a frame for understanding this study’s superordinate theme of power as revealed through the silence journeys of the participants in this study. Across lived experiences and interwoven into the research findings of this study, practices of power foreshadowed the enactment of silence and silence behaviors. Thus, this study revealed ways that power was connected to silence as told through the voices of eight women who worked in organizations where organizational silence was present. The gravity of study participants’ journey into silence, journey in silence, and journey out of silence unveiled the power connected to learned silence, silence beliefs, systems and silence, accepted silence, resilience and silence, and voice and silence.

**Calling in this study.** Driven by a sense of “calling” to their work and with great fervency, each of the study participants illuminated her sense of inner and/or spiritual urge to work in a FBO. Thus, calling was situated in the backdrop of the study as related to what Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean (2010) defined as, “pro-social intentions—the desire to make the world a better place” (p. 429). With a deep desire for meaningful outcomes in their vocation, participants entered their roles in their FBOs anticipating desirable outcomes related to their
quest to fulfill their purpose (Baumeister & Wilson, 1996). However, participants’ experiences revealed deep-seated emotions related to the disconcertion of feeling this sense of calling while grappling with being silent or silenced in their FBO. While fully embracing the call to their vocation, in many instances they traded their voices. Thus, this submission to a sense of calling also brought about a surrender to silence.

**Conclusions**

This study contributes to the empirical literature as a result of its examination of the perceptions and experiences of women who worked in FBOs where organizational silence was present. The discussion in this chapter is organized around three major conclusions drawn from study findings:

1. Believing silence lessons co-occur with *disregard* in the organization.
2. Accepting silence systems co-occur with *disillusionment* in the organization.
3. Choosing silence and voice is *directive*.

These conclusions are discussed as it relates to their alignment with answering the research question *How do women who work in FBOs in South Carolina perceive and experience organizational silence in the workplace?* This chapter also provides (1) limitations of the findings, (2) implications for action, (3) recommendations for future research, and (4) a thesis summary. Throughout the discussion in this chapter, connections will be made to the literature and the theoretical framework of this study.

**Conclusion 1: Believing silence lessons co-occur with disregard.** Angelou spoke of identities in this fashion, “You are a sum total of everything you’ve ever seen, heard, eaten, smelled, been told, forgot—it’s all there. Everything influences each of us” (as cited in Deutsch, 2014). Additionally, Schein (2010) postulated that out of individual identities comes “a wealth of
prior learning in the form of assumptions, expectations, and patterns of coping” (p. 200). Roberts and Cleary (as cited in Ferdman & Roberts, 2010) suggested, “Identities are multifaceted; they encompass meanings that evolve from a range of sources (p. 98). The findings of this study illustrated how believing silence lessons catalyzed an identity immersed in a sense of disregard related to the enactment of voice for three study participants. Overlooking their own voices in response to the perceived power connected to the voices of others, each of them habitually lived on mute and/or in a position to be muted.

Subsumed under the superordinate theme of believing silence lessons were three nested themes: powerlessness, apprehension, and submission. Although each of the eight study participants expressed deep-seated emotions related to silence, three participants in particular referenced emotions connected to their silence that emerged from messages and lessons passed down from their families, churches, and/or faith beliefs. In sharing their lived experiences, each of the three participants provided rich descriptions and deep feelings related to ways the messages and lessons learned during their upbringing served as the impetus of their silence.

While existing organizational silence literature addressed and supported thematic findings, this study was able to enhance existing knowledge regarding how women who were encumbered with messages and lessons related to not speaking up, brought silence behaviors with them to the organization. Interview responses captured poignant details of the journey into silence for participants. Findings were significant in that prior studies on organizational silence had not focused on ways women were silenced and/or silent prior to entering the organization. Furthermore, the familial, faith, and cultural contributors to silence and the meaning and implications of such silence were predominant in this study, although not emphasized in previous research. This study revealed in a gap in current literature in that past qualitative studies at the
individual level examined the phenomenon of silence in the organization only, giving less attention to silence brought with individuals into the organization.

Through the lens of their own histories related to what they had come to learn and believe about the appropriate and/or inappropriate use of their voices, each of the three participants in this study articulated their deliberate avoidance of conversations in the FBO. Aligned with this premise, Zerubavel (2006) posited the notion that seated at the core of organizational silence is unspoken conversations that beg for attention. Perlow and Williams (2003) suggested this avoidance of speaking was often a self-defense mechanism to circumvent, “embarrassment, confrontation, and perceived dangers” (p. 53).

The findings from this study strongly aligned with the findings from the literature in that each of the three study participants expressed instances of feeling the need to pull back, self-minimize, and/or hide. Not wanting to experience embarrassment, confrontation, and/or perceived danger related to speaking up, each of the three participants perceived her silence as a means of self-defense. Van Dyne et al. (2003) defined this sense of withholding voice for the sake of self-protection as “defense silence” (p. 1327). Thus, parallels to defense silence were seen in each of the three study participants’ enactment of silence through self-muting.

Although qualitative research related to believing silence lessons was nonexistent, existing organizational silence research offered meaningful findings that paralleled with the findings of this study. In a study that explored the conceptualization of four forms of employee silence—quiescent, acquiescent, prosocial, and opportunistic—results related to acquiescent silence based on submission (Knoll & Dick, 2103) were directly aligned with the findings of this study with submission as a nested theme seated at the core of the journey into silence. Power dynamics connected to family and church cultures that served as drivers of learned silence and
silence beliefs prompted acquiescent behaviors in the enactment of silence for the three participants.

Thus, conformity to deeply-rooted lessons and beliefs demotivated participants to speak prior to their entrance into their roles in their workplaces. Knoll and Dick (2013) highlighted the association between such conformity and the passivity of acquiescent silence. Additionally, acknowledging the range of emotions associated with individual-level silence, in a qualitative study Pinder & Harlos (2001) developed the term employee silence and uncovered ways that acquiescent silence generated feelings and behaviors illustrative of intrinsic weakness. Aligned with Pinder and Harlos’ (2003) findings, data from this study revealed powerlessness as paramount to the perceptions of the silence embedded in the lived experiences of silence for three of the study participants.

Consequently, extrapolation of data from participants’ lived experiences revealed ways that power-influences and mediating roles of learned silence and silence beliefs diminished an inclination for the use of voice. Not only did participants lose the inclination to speak because of apprehension, over time they lacked the awareness of the power of their own voices. They acquiesced to the power of the voices of others who had framed their life-world. The examinations of the perceptions and lived experiences of each of the three participants further unearthed ways their beliefs suggested the voice solely belong to those who were holders of power. This sense of unidirectional voice further drove apprehension for speaking up and served to disempower voice. Keltner et al. (2003) associated “reduced power” with “increased threat and punishment and social constraint, and should thereby activate inhibition-related affect, cognition, and behavior” (p. 4). Additionally, Keltner et al. (2003) posited fear as an outcome of reduced power.
Based on the results of this research, power dynamics generated fear of speaking up for the three study participants. Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) seminal work espoused fear as a motivator of silence. Likewise, Henriksen and Dayton (2006) argued that “fear of retaliation and an inbred cultural censorship” were mediators of silence (p. 1541). This argument was strongly supported by the findings in this study. Participants’ learned silence and silence beliefs were directly aligned with a fear of punitive outcomes. Driven by cultural censorship, feelings of fear manifested in the nested themes of powerless, apprehension, and submission.

Prior studies have not focused on believing silence lessons and ways the family, church, and cultural background inform learned silence and silence beliefs for women who work in FBOs where organizational silence is present. However, Milliken et al. (2003) purported a model of the choice to remain silent (Figure 2) that underscored anticipated negative outcomes as a determining factor in not speaking up. “Being labeled or viewed negatively, damaged relationships, retaliation or punishment, or negative impact on others” (Milliken et al., 2003, p. 33), were situated at the core of the perceptions of each of the three participants whose lived experiences of silence found their origins in family, church, and cultural lessons and beliefs about silence.

However, findings from this study highlighted the emergence of other behaviors and feelings associated with not speaking up: (1) suppression, (2) hopelessness, (3) internalized pain, (4) loss of confidence, (5) disenfranchisement, (6) complacency, (7) pulling back, (8) shrinking back, (9) self-minimizing, (10) a need to hide, (11) struggle, (12) surrender, (13) self-muting, (14) loss of self-worth, (15) self-doubt, and (16) acquiescence to silence. As these findings emerged, it was this researcher’s interpretation that each of the three participants, in ways unique to them, held an overall diminished sense of well-being. Though silence had been engrained in them and
had now become a part of their identity, the impact of silence also seemed to equate to a diminished human spirit.

Conclusions from the findings of this study indicated ways in which believing silence lessons co-occurred with a sense of disregard. Ignoring, neglecting, and/or being inattentive to the power of their voices, in an effect to remain aligned with learned silence and silence beliefs, participants forfeited the power of their voices. These findings and this conclusion contribute depth to current literature as it broadens the scope of the perceptions and experiences of women and their journeys into silence. Furthermore, this study’s findings answer the research question and provide insight into the personal and organization impact of believing silence lessons.

**Conclusion 2: Accepting silence systems co-occur with disillusionment.** In a study conducted by Perlow and Williams (2003), findings revealed that “silence can exact a high psychological price on individuals, generating feelings of humiliation, pernicious anger, resentment, and the like that, if unexpressed, contaminate every interaction, shut down creativity, and undermine productivity” (p. 1). Indeed, three participants in this study expressed these and similar feelings related to their journeys in silence: (1) self-protection, (2) self-silencing, (3) avoidance, (4) acquiescence, (5) pulling back, (6) self-adjustment, (7) giving up, (8) giving into, (9) defeat, (10) emotional departure, (11) embarrassment, (12) shame, (13) invisible, (14) misplaced voice, (15) misplaced power, (16) rancor, (17) exasperation, (18) frustration, (19) undervalued, and (20) uninvited. Thus, traversing their silence in organizational systems, the three participants faced struggles with disengagement as a means of self-preservation.

Over time scholars have rigorously researched cause and effect of organizational silence (Brinsfield, 2013; Knoll & Dick, 2013; Whiteside & Barclay, 2013). Whiteside and Barclay (2013) investigate anecdotes of employee silence and the implications of engaging in silence. In
two experimental studies, they examined the relationship between employee silence and “emotional exhaustion, psychological withdrawal, physical withdrawal, and performance (p. 251). Findings from their study illustrated the impact of acquiescence to silence as a way of survival in the organization.

This researcher concluded accepting silence systems co-occurred with a sense of disillusionment. Specifically, because each of the three participants did not come to their organizations silent, but rather became silent or were silenced over time, they struggled with believing and/or seeing the “good” in the organization that they encountered in the beginning of their employment. Although connected to their work as a result of feeling a sense of calling and purpose, participants grappled with emotional departure, misplaced voice, misplaced power, frustration, and an overwhelming sense of feeling undervalued.

Driven by organizational systems comprised of structures, policies, governance, and leadership, findings from this study indicated that organizational systems generated decreased “organizational-based self-esteem” (Rafferty & Resubog, 2011, p. 274). Described as, “The extent to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy as an organizational member” (Rafferty & Resubog, 2011), diminished organizational-based self-esteem was central to the disillusionment participants faced as they navigated silence in their organizations. Moreover, this diminishing effect illustrated the tenets of muted group theory as it related to the muting of the three study participants driven by dominant systems.

Thus, because of the limitations placed on voice, language in the organization was controlled (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). Situating the power of systems and silence at the core of their muted voices, findings from this study revealed the choice not to speak up was rooted in anticipation that even if they spoke up, their voices would not be heard. Perlow and Williams’s
(2003) research supported findings from this study, as their research findings demonstrated that the tendency to remain silence was linked to a fear of a loss of status, embarrassment, or rejection related to speaking up.

As study participants made meaning of their perceptions and experiences of silence, their sense-making was also linked to their acquisition of a silence language. Housed within their non-verbal communication was a way of navigating silence demonstrated through a sense of self-preservation. The manifestation of silence language was seen in participants’ self-protection, self-adjustment, and avoidance. While this language provided participants with an alternative form of communication, the silence language also served to detach them from their personal power to enact their voices.

Conclusions of the findings from this study indicated ways that accepting silence systems co-occurred with a sense of disillusionment. While the literature is replete with studies that delve into factors that cause silence, there are gaps related to the disillusionment women experience when they enter into an organization that over time they become silent and/or silenced. These findings contribute to the current literature as it expands understanding of women’s perceptions and experiences of their journeys in science. Moreover, the findings from this study established a means to understand the alignment of accepting silence systems with a notion of disillusionment.

Conclusion 3: Choosing silence and voice are directive. Bowen and Blackmon (2003) posed the question “When will people choose organizational voice and when will they choose organizational silence?” (p. 1394). When considering two study participants’ proclivity toward choosing silence and voice, their answer to this question was central to their perceptions and experiences of silence. Through the nested themes of self-regulation, self-determination, and self-inclusion, study participants’ perceptions and experiences were informed by feelings of:
control, (2) management, (3) responsibility, (4) resoluteness, (5) discernment, (6) voice commitment, (7) choice, (8) contribution, and (9) authenticity.

Additionally, at the center of their responses was the notion of choice. In essence, when faced with the question to speak or not to speak, each of the two study participants were directive in that they took control, management, and responsibility for the enactment of silence and/or the enactment of voice. Unlike other study participants, this form of self-regulation was guided by a sense of commitment to voice. This sense of resoluteness was also illustrated through another study participant whose believing silence lessons served as a catalyst for her choosing silence and voice. As such, while navigating the power dynamics of organizational systems and structure, she embraced her personal power of discernment as related to when to speak, with whom to speak, and clarity related to the purpose of speaking.

This directive choice related to the enactment of silence and voice also revealed a sense of authenticity in ways each of the three participants found meaning and made sense of silence. Moreover, making space for their personal sense of well-being in the organization, each of the women were resolute in making choices toward the “good” in their work above and beyond the oppressive nature of silence.

In the literature, past studies related to voice have shown that individual attitudes and perceptions shape voice behaviors (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011). Referring to the “discretionary verbal communication of ideas, suggestions, or options” (Morrison et al., 2011), the experiences of voice and silence as shared by participants were rooted in the ownership of the choice to speak, with the recognition that there were consequences related to either choice (Van Dyne et al., 2008).
Furthermore, findings from this study were supported by Van Dyne et al.’s (2008) supposition that silence and voice were not opposites of each other, but rather the differentiating factor was the “actor’s motivation to withhold versus express ideas, information, and opinions” (p. 1360). Through a conceptual framework illustrative of “purposeful forms of silence and purposeful forms of voice” (Van Dyne et al., 2008, p. 1361), connections were made to ways the three study participants were directive in their approach to pursuing purpose in their choices to speak or not to speak. Deliberate in their decision-making regarding their silence and voice behaviors, findings from participants’ responses aligned with current literature.

However, a gap remains in literature related to the notion of self-inclusion and silence and voice. Ferdman (2007) advanced the notion that “inclusion starts with oneself” and plays a key role in “how we show up and express our full selves at work” (p. 95). Ferdman (2007) further suggested:

Inclusion is deeper and more powerful in understanding or working successfully across multiple differences. At the individual level, it involves being able to connect to and integrate the various components of our identities, so as to experience ourselves more fully, as well as helping to create the conditions that can help others to do this. (p. 96)

Findings from this study brought to bear participants’ awareness and appreciation for their multiple identities. This awareness fueled their confidence in engaging in processes for including themselves in organizational dialogue. Furthermore, participants’ awareness of their “whole self” (Ferdman & Roberts, 2014, p. 97) highlighted the synergistic alliance between authenticity and the courage to interject themselves in the directive enactment of silence and/or voice behaviors. Thus, the self-inclusion factor emerged as a notable revelation from the study.
The conclusion that choosing silence and voice are directive is aligned with muted group theory in that although the underpinning of the theory is focused on the muted and the process of muting, Mears et al. (2004) highlighted one of the four premises of muted group theory as “resistance and change are possible” (p. 8). Specifically, this premise underscored the significance in understanding that housed within the theoretical framework of muted group theory is space and latitude for movement out of silence. The researcher proposes the infusion of the findings from this study into the current gaps in literature as it relates to women’s journeys out of silence and the directive approach that is congruent with the process.

**Summary of Conclusions**

This study addressed the gaps in literature by providing a deeper understanding of the perception and experiences of women who worked in FBOs where organizational silence was present as lived through silence journeys. The journeys informed their personal identities and their enactment of silence and voice in the workspaces they occupied. Communicated through poignant perceptions and lived experiences, this study amalgamated the meaning of women’s silence journeys and concluded that: (1) believing the lessons of silence co-occurred with disregard, (2) accepting silence systems co-occurred with disillusionment, and (3) choosing silence and voice was directive. Furthermore, the conclusions in this study provided a foundation to build upon when addressing the current gaps in the literature. Moreover, the conclusions of the study have strong implications for action and for future research.

**Implications for Action**

According to the United State of Women (2016), “When it comes to agenda setting and opinion making, women are underrepresented in various areas. There has been great silence and a lack of capacity in ways to increase the voice and visibility of women in agenda-making and
opinion-making. This vast acknowledgement of voice deficit calls to question the actions that need to be taken to ensure that women are empowered to make the choice for voice in every sector or industry they have been called to occupy.

Therefore, based upon the findings from this study related to women’s journey into silence, their journeys in silence, their journeys out of silence, and the identified need for women’s enactment of voice in arenas where their voices have been silent or silenced, this researcher recognized a need for action for the following: (1) women, (2) organizational leadership, (3) diversity and inclusion practitioners, and (4) human resource development practitioners, and (5) organizations. If it is a priority for women’s voices to be unmuted and invited to contribute to critical conversations, therein lies a need for women and practitioners to give attention to silence and voice behaviors across sectors.

Women. Kramarae (1981) posited, “Words constantly ignored may eventually come to be unspoken and perhaps even unthought” (p. 1). Findings from this study illuminated the origin of silence for many women. Cultural lessons and beliefs served to shape women’s perceptions of silence engendered a sense of disregard related to voice. Additionally, systems of silence and the acceptance of such silence actualized a sense of disillusionment regarding the value and impact of speaking up. However, if women’s voices are to be unmuted, the process must first begin with women’s recognition and acknowledgement of their own silence and voice behaviors. This acceptance of truth would open the way for women to give themselves permission to address the power dynamics of silence, to seek learning and/or unlearning opportunities for unmuting, to advocate for changes in processes, systems, structures, modes of operation, and cultures that have served to mute their voices.
Organizational leadership. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) suggested “leadership must wrestle with normative questions of value, purpose, and process” if organizations are going to thrive (p. 14). Thus, this study has strong implications related to the need for organizational leaders who are charged with creating and leading systems, structures, modes of operations, and cultures to seek and develop competencies for understanding and for positively responding to embedded silence behaviors in organizations and extending the invitation for women’s voice. This researcher maintains a philosophical belief that an organization cannot realize its full potential and will not genuinely thrive unless the people within the organization feel valued, included, and heard.

Diversity and inclusion practitioners. The absence of inclusion can be seen as the absence of an “ethical imperative” (Ferdman, 2014, p. 10) to move beyond the superficial to “create environments in which a broader range of people can feel safe, accepted, valued, and able to contribute their talents and perspective for the benefit of the collective” (Ferdman & Roberts, 2014, p. 95). Winters (2003) emphasized, “Inclusion requires addressing both macro, systemic issues and ongoing micro behaviors that impact the experiences of individuals on a day-to-day basis” (p. 209).

This emphasis calls to action the need for diversity and inclusion practitioners to create and advocate for the implementation of systematic ways of addressing women’s silence at macro and micro levels. It is this researcher’s belief that simply recognizing the microcosm of identities within workspaces is not enough if the voices belonging to each person are not invited and included. Based upon the findings of this study, inclusion of women’s voices is critical for the well-being and empowerment of women in their workspaces. Thus, the findings of this study set
the stage for diversity and inclusion practitioners to bring the inclusion of women’s voices to the forefront of dialogue and practice.

**Human resource practitioners.** As the labor pool of women in organizations becomes increasingly diverse, it is critical the human resource practitioners give attention to “structural and cultural elements of the organization” (Offermann & Basford, 2014, p. 233). Beyond hiring processes, the findings of this study demonstrate the need for human resource practitioners to engage deeply in ensuring organizational practices and policies lend themselves to employee voice. Through strategic leadership development, staff training, development of accountability systems, human resource practitioners hold latitude and opportunity to assess organizational climates (Offermann & Basford, 2014) that are not conducive to women’s voices and to address attitudes and behaviors that hinder voice behaviors. Findings from this study illuminate the need for systemic interventions that will create organizational climates where all voices are invited.

**Organizations.** Hewlin (2003) stated, “Navigating in organizational life often requires members to employ tactics beyond simply performing an honest day’s work” (p. 633). Hence, related to this study, navigating organizational life requires attention to deep exploration of the organization’s culture and climate to assess organizational silence and voice behaviors. With the recognition that there are employees who are situated in organizations who have brought silence lessons with them, who have succumbed to accepting silence systems, and who have focused on choosing silence and voice, provides space and latitude for critical assessment of silence and voice in the organization. Thus, this study has strong implications for the health of organization life.
Limitations of the Findings

Findings from this study offer a unique contribution to literature that will provide enhanced discourse related to women and organizational silence. It additionally offers a distinct window into how this topic relates to practice and insight for the practitioner. However, study limitations exist and need to be acknowledged. One limitation is that the focus of the study was on faith-based organizations. Although each organization was diverse in structure, mission, and functioning, they were similar in that they operated out of the tenets of the Christian faith. Thus, it is possible that responses from women from other faith identities might have yielded more variations in findings. Additionally, it is possible that the inclusion of organizations other than faith-based organizations would have offered a more expansive examination of the person-in-context across industries.

Another possible limitation is in the recruitment process. A greater number of Black women responded to the request for participation than did White women. Although invitations extended to diverse audiences of women, responses were less from White women. While race did not emerge as a dynamic to silence, and equal representation from Black and White women might have altered such findings.

Last, the focus of the study was on how women perceived and experienced silence. While men were not included in the study, it was difficult to know in what ways findings would have been different based on hearing the perceptions and lived experiences of silence from the voices of men.

Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from this study identified opportunities for future research. This researcher’s work highlights women’s perceptions and experiences of silence not previously reported in
literature and could serve as an impetus for further qualitative work. Although the study of organizational silence has evolved over time, the literature reveals that organizational silence discourse has not adequately addressed how women perceived and experienced organizational silence in the workplace through the lenses of their journeys into silence, their journeys in silence, and their journeys out of silence. Therefore, it would be beneficial to consider various approaches, using different theoretical frameworks to further investigate the detriment to organizations when women’s voices in the organization are silent or silenced.

With the focus of this study centered on understanding women’s perceptions and experiences of silence at the individual level, the themes that emerged herein suggest that space and latitude exists to build upon this study and further explore the depth in which organizational silence impacts women in the workplace at the level of the collective. Specifically, through further qualitative studies, it would be wise for future research to: (1) expand and diversify sample size and configuration of women, (2) expand sectors and industries, (3) seek to more deeply understand how race and culture impact women’s silence, (4) further explore calling and purpose as a rationalization for remaining in organizations where organizational silence is present and (5) explore silence and voice and the connection to personal well-being.

**Expand and diversify sample size.** Based upon the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, the sample size of women for this study was considerably small. However, the use of other methodologies would allow for the expansion of the sample size and for increased diversity in participant demographics. Greater generalizability in findings from such studies focused on women’s silence would serve to address gaps in the literature related to women and organizational silence and would contribute to organizational discourse.
**Expand sectors and industries.** Because of the focus on faith-based organizations in this study, organizational literature would benefit from an investigation of women’s silence in organizations across industries and sectors. The inclusion of experiences of silence from diverse organizational structures, with diverse philosophical foundations that frame their work could garner findings that offer depth, understanding, and knowledge gain.

**Explore race and culture.** While this study included six Black women and two White women, future investigation of women and organizational silence research could be enhanced by the inclusion of the voices of women from other races and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, given the findings of this study related to the ways that culture informed women’s journeys into silence, a deeper investigation into the aspects of culture that drive silence would be beneficial for women, for literature, and for practice.

**Explore calling and purpose.** Seated at the core of why women were drawn to work in a faith-based organization and why they chose to remain even in the midst of silence was because of their sense of calling and purpose. Doing so could expand current literature related to dynamics that serve to sustain women in workplaces where organizational silence is present.

**Explore silence and personal well-being.** Across the findings of this study, participant responses were reflective of deep feelings connected to silence. This researcher’s interpretation of participants’ feelings and the meaning and sense-making they assigned to those feelings was that they were strongly connected to either a diminished sense of well-being being because of silence or an empowered sense of well-being because of voice. Therefore, when interjecting the phenomenon of organizational silence into a scenario of personal well-being, the question becomes, “What impact does silence have on well-being?”
For this reason, Ryff (1989) recognized the need for deeper examination of positive psychological well-being. Considering that social conditions have a role in determining positive well-being, Ryan and Deci (2000) stated, “Human beings can be proactive and engaged or, alternatively, passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function” (p. 68). Thus, this notion establishes the foundation for comprehensive qualitative research focused on how the phenomenon of organizational silence affects the personal well-being of women in organizations where organizational silence exists.

**Thesis Summary**

This study was guided by the following research question, *How do women who work in faith-based organizations (FBOs) in South Carolina perceive and experience organizational silence in the workplace?* At the time of this study, perceptions and experiences of women had not been a part of the organizational silence and voice discourse, especially in the examination of women who worked in FBOs where organizational silence was present. Little was known about how women made meaning of silence and navigated and/or evolved in organizational environments or cultures when they were silent or silenced. Thus, through the theoretical framework of muted group theory, researcher inquiry was able to determine how the perceptions and experiences of silence and voice behaviors were framed for women who worked in FBOs where organizational silence was present. Additionally, by means of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the meaning and sense-making of participant experiences were ascertained.

For the eight women in this study, making sense of their experiences meant gaining awareness of their silence journeys. Three cluster categories emerged: (1) journey into silence, (2) journey in silence, and (3) journey out of silence. Whether examining her journey into
silence, journey in silence, or her journey out of silence, each participant made connections to the meaning of her voice to speak or not to speak. Furthermore, each participant’s individual journey emerged thematically, it became a part of the three categories extrapolated from interview data. The cluster categories were not present in scholarly literature, as much of the literature reflected findings from qualitative and quantitative studies focused on organizational silence as a phenomenon of the collective. When the literature did, however, focus on individual or employee silence, the focus was not specific to women in its examination.

With respect to the superordinate themes and nested themes in this study, data yielded connections between concepts that we in some ways aligned with current literature, but not consistently prominent in its relations to women and organizational silence. However, literature did confirm this researcher’s findings regarding the superordinate theme of power. Unveiled across transcripts and embedded in each emergent theme, power dynamics were consistent in the enactment of silence and voice behaviors: (1) believing silence lessons, (2) accepting silence systems, and (3) choosing silence and voice.

Through sharing their perceptions and experiences of silence in the workplace and assigning meaning and sense-making to their individual journeys, each of the women were able to honor and validate their journeys and to embrace some aspect of personal power through telling their stories. For five of the participants, though not pleasant to revisit, the interview process empowered them to delve deeply into their secrets of silence and to expose elements of oppression or oppressive behaviors enacted through their silence. For two of the participants who entered the interview process with a strong sense of voice, reflecting on instances of silence seemed to further catalyze their desire to sustain their voices. For one participant, her journey in silence propelled a deep desire for a journey out of silence. Thus, with experiences of silence and
voice in the same organization, sharing her lived experiences in the interview process offered a greater sense of emancipation of voice.

Regarding the superordinate theme, believing in silence lessons, three participants were encumbered with multiple realities. Informed by lessons and beliefs from family, church, and culture, participants’ backgrounds were directly aligned with the ways they made sense of silence. Aware of their silence behaviors, participants felt the oppression of not speaking up, while also feeling the pull of their learned silence and silence beliefs. These feelings manifested in the form of three nested themes: (1) powerlessness, (2) apprehension, and (3) submission. Shrouded in a sense of calling to a vocation in FBOs, participants struggled to reconcile their purpose in the FBO while being unable to unpack the silence brought with them to the organizations. Thus, the process of sense-making related to their silence journeys also informed how they assigned meaning to the understanding that their journeys into silence also served as an antecedent to the silence they would ultimately enact with their FBOs.

Related to the superordinate theme, accepting silence systems, three participants found themselves perplexed by the challenges associated with navigating silence in their FBOs. With a keen recognition that their journeys in silence occurred over time, participants were overwhelmed by the systems that were drivers of silence and the impediments of silence on their sense of well-being. Faced with the choice to speak or not to speak, two participants consistently chose silence and one vacillated between silence and voice. Manifested through the themes of (1) self-preservation, (2) resignation, and (3) resentment, participants were met with organizational systems through leadership, operations, and governance that were drivers of silence. Yielded to silence, participants acquiesced to behaviors in the form of accepted silence. Acquiescent silence found in this study was also supported by organizational silence literature. Although studied at
the individual/employee level, the emphasis of the studies found in the literature did not specifically focus on women. Therefore, this study gave space and latitude to examine the depth of the perceptions and experiences of silence of women in FBOs who were inhibited by silence. This researcher’s findings illuminated the power of systems and silence and the power of accepted silence and their role in deepening the complexities and navigation of silence.

The superordinate theme, choosing silence and voice, facilitated findings related to the power of resilience and silence and the power of voice and silence. Through nested themes of (1) self-regulation, (2) self-determination, and (3) self-inclusion, three study participants exhibited behaviors consistent with the enactment of voice in their FBOs. Although they each experienced instances of silence, participants made the choice not to succumb to silence, but rather, they were resolute in maintaining their own personal power as they chose when to speak and when not to speak. While mindful of the power of their lived experiences of silence, participants were committed to voice behaviors and to remain authentic in the management and control of when they would speak, to whom they would speak, and the reasons for speaking. Participants were also intentional in their responsibility to include themselves in organizational conversations and dialogue, even when they were not invited to do so. This sense of self-inclusion further established the power of their voices in their FBOs.

This study illuminated the perceptions and experiences of women who worked in FBOs where organizational silence was present. Furthermore, the study concluded that women’s perceptions and experiences of silence were deep-seated and emotional. The enactment of silence and/or voice brought with it embedded thoughts and feelings that catalyzed sense-making and meaning. The study further concluded that believing silence lessons co-occurred with
disregard, accepting silence co-occurred with disillusionment, and choosing silence and voice was directive.

It is this researcher’s hope that the significance and value of women’s voices is raised through this study, that literature will be infused with research focused on the power of women’s voices, and that practitioners will create spaces for women’s voices. Finally, it is this researcher’s sincere hope that wherever there is a woman who is oppressed by her own silence, there will be another woman to lift her voice.
References


Griffith, T. (2014). *You can’t see what I can see: Examining the campus leadership experiences of Black female graduate students at a predominately White institution*, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University, Boston, MA).


APPENDIX A
Prescreening Survey

Instructions:

Please answer the questions below by checking the appropriate box beside each question. There is no right or wrong answer because all answers are based upon your experiences and all responses will remain confidential.

Questions:

1. I work in a faith-based organization (i.e. church, nonprofit, higher education, health system).  Yes  No

2. I can remember instances in my organization, where I did not voice my view or opinion about a work-related issue when doing so could have benefited the organization, work situation, or myself.  Yes  No

3. I can describe the instances (above) in detail because I remember it well.  Yes  No

4. In my organization, I am a mid-level leader/manager and not the leader of the organization.  Yes  No

5. I am still working in the organization referred to above.  Yes  No

6. I have been in the organization at least two years.  Yes  No

7. My organization is located in South Carolina.  Yes  No

8. My age is________________________

9. My race is________________________
APPENDIX B

Announcement to Request Participants

Katrina Spigner, Doctoral Student, Northeastern University

Are you a WOMAN who works in a Faith-based Organization? Have you ever kept quiet at work about a significant work related issue when you really wanted to voice your opinion? If the answer is “yes” then I would like to talk to you about your experience.

Let’s talk if:

(a) You work in a faith-based organization in South Carolina where you have remained silent about a work related situation when voicing concern and/or viewpoint could have been helpful to the organization and helpful to you.

(b) You are able to describe the situation in detail.

(c) You are a mid-level leader/manager in your workplace/organization?

I hope you will consider sharing your thoughts and experiences with me. If you are willing to participate or if you have questions, please contact me, Katrina Spigner at Spigner.k@husky.neu.edu or 803.446.0252. All inquiries and interviews are completely confidential.
APPENDIX C

Recruitment Letter

<<Date>>

<<Name of potential participant>>

<<Address>>

<<City, State, Zip>>

Greetings,

Have you ever kept quiet at work about a significant work related issue when you really wanted to voice your opinion? If the answer is “yes” then I would like to talk to you about your experience. I am conducting a research study through my doctoral work at Northeastern University. If you can answer “Yes” to all of the following questions, I would love to speak with you to discuss your interest in participating in this study:

(a) Do you work in a faith-based organization in South Carolina where you have remained silent about a work related situation when voicing concern and/or viewpoint could have been helpful to the organization and helpful to you? (b) Are you able to describe the situation in detail? (c) Are you a mid-level leader/manager in your workplace/organization?

The research involves confidential individual in-person interviews and may require 90 or more minutes of interview time. The interview will take place at a time and location of your choosing and be audiotaped so that I am sure that I have an accurate record of your thoughts. Only pseudonyms will be used in the research results. Organization and research participant identities remain anonymous. There will also be follow-up interviews as needed.
If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form at the first interview. If you have questions that need answers before you decide, I would be delighted to answer them for you. If you decide to participate, I will answer any other questions you may have about the study whenever they arise.

Joining the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, at any time and for any reason, without penalty. You can choose to skip over any question in the interviews that you do not want to answer, and can respond as much or as little as you choose to any particular question.

If you are remaining silent about a significant work-related issues in a faith-based organization in South Carolina and wish to participate in this study, I hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences. If you are willing to participate or if you have questions, please contact at Spigner.k@husky.neu.edu or 803.446.0252. All inquiries and interviews are completely confidential.

Thank you for your consideration of this study!
APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Institution: Northeastern University

Interviewee: 

Interviewer: Katrina Spigner

Date: 

Location of Interview:

Part I: Introductory Objectives

1. Review the commitment to confidentiality.
2. Review data storage procedures.
3. Review participant’s rights to exit the interview process
   - At any time, a study participant may exit the interview for any reason without any repercussions.
   - Any data provided by a participant who decides to exit will be deleted and never used in any part of the process.
4. Review participant’s right to review their own interview transcripts before they are used for research purposes.
5. Address any questions from the participants
6. Sign consent form

Part II: Interview Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about your experience and perceptions of being a woman who works in a FBOs where organizational silence is present. Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [if yes, thank the participant and turn on the recording equipment]. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. Again, I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a
pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts from the interview. I will be the only one privy to the audio files. My co-researchers will also help to review the transcriptions, but they will not have access to the audio files and only your pseudonym will be attached to the transcript.

We have planned this interview to last about 90 or more minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part III: Interview

I would like to hear about your experience and perceptions of silence in your own words. To do this, I am going to ask you some questions about the key experiences you encountered and your perspective at various times. Your responses may include any elements you deem as appropriate.

One of the things I am interested in learning about is how you have been silent in your workplace in a faith-based organization. The questions that follow reference many of those components of silence and ask you to discuss your experiences and perceptions relative to these components. Please ask me to clarify any aspect of a question that you do not understand.

A. Interviewee Background

Q1) Tell me about yourself

Q2) Tell me about your work history and how long have you worked in your current organization and what is your role?

I would like to hear about your experience and perceptions of silence in your own words. To do this, I am going to ask you some questions about the key experiences you encountered and
your perspective at various times. Your responses may include any elements you deem as appropriate.

One of the things I am interested in learning about is how you have been silent in your workplace in a faith-based organization. In this context, silence refers to how you have withheld or not used your voice because of fear, anxiety, distrust, and the like (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The questions that follow reference many of those components of silence and ask you to discuss your experiences and perceptions relative to these components. Please ask me to clarify any aspect of a question that you do not understand.

B. Perceptions and Experiences of Silence

Q4) What drew you to work in a faith-based organization?

Q5) What has been your experience being a woman in your organization?

Q6) What aspects of your role have been easiest for you?

Q7) What aspects of your role have been the most difficult for you?

Q8) Reflecting on your time in the organization to date, describe an experience that affected the you, the direction of your work, or the process of your work where you wanted to speak up about and issue or concern but did not? What was your reason for not speaking up?

**Prompt:** Describe what about this experience stands out the most for you.

**Follow-up:** If applicable, describe what you learned from this experience

Q9) Describe how this experience affected you personally.

**Prompt:** What did you believe was the underlying issue?

Q10) What do you believe influences silence in your organization?
Q11) What does silence in the organization look like to you?

Q12) What does silence in the organization sound like to you?

Q13) What does silence in the organization feel like to you?

Q14) How do you personally navigate the silence in this setting?

Q15) When you have been silent, how has the leader in the organization responded to your silence?

Q16) Do you believe the leader has a role in the silence in the organization? If so, what do you see as the leader’s role in silence in the organization?

Q17) Describe others ways you spoke on an issue without using words?

Prompt: What prompted you not to speak?

Q18) If you would have said something, what would you have said?
Q19) What do you believe has been the impact of your silence on your personal well-being?

Q20) How does your background (i.e. relationship with your mother) inform your decision to speak or not speak?

Q21) How do you believe your age has influenced your perception of silence in the organization?

Q22) What role, if any, do you believe living in the South plays in your silence in the organization?

Q23) What role do you see faith-based beliefs playing in your silence? (your own beliefs and/or the beliefs of the organization)

Q24) How do you perceive and/or experience the silence of others in the organization?

Q25) What else would you like for me to know about the silence in your organization?

Ask participant if they have any questions and thank them for their participation.
APPENDIX E

Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator: Katrina Spigner

Title of Project: When Silence Speaks Louder Than Words: Examining the Perceptions and Experiences of Women Who Work in Faith-Based Organizations Where Organizational Silence is Present

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask the researcher any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this study because you self-identified as a woman who works in a faith-based organization in South Carolina where organizational silence is present.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences and perceptions of women who work in faith-based organizations in South Carolina where organizational silence is present. The findings from the study will contribute to the field of organizational leadership.

What will I be asked to do?

The research involves confidential individual in-person interviews and may require 90 minutes or more of interview time. The interview will take place at a time and location of your choosing and be audiotaped so that I am sure that I have an accurate record of your thoughts. Only pseudonyms will be used in the research results. Organization and research participant identities remain confidential.
If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form at the first interview. If you have questions that need answers before you decide, I would be delighted to answer them for you. If you decide to participate, I will answer any other questions you may have about the study whenever they arise.

Joining the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, at any time and for any reason, without penalty. You can choose to skip over any question in the interviews that you do not want to answer, and can respond as much or as little as you choose to any particular question.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take about 90 minutes. After the initial interview is transcribed, I may have follow-up questions that will take 60 or more minutes to complete.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There may be questions asked during the interview that make you uncomfortable. Please note, you do not have to respond to any question which causes you discomfort.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may contribute to opening dialogue with organizational leaders related to organizational silence and its impact on women in faith-based organizations where organizational silence is present.

Who will see the information about me?

Your identity as a participant in this study will not be known. Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

All interviews will audio digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcribing service. Data will be stored on a password protected digital device and a backup of the data will be stored on an external hard drive and on a flash drive. All external storage devices will be secured in a locked cabinet when not in use. Additionally, participants will be given pseudonyms to protect their identity for the duration of the study. All recorded materials, transcripts, and notes will be destroyed upon the completion of the study.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.
If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?

If at any point you choose not to participate in this study, you can exit the study at any time by informing the research of your desire to exit the study.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Katrina Spigner, the person mainly responsible for the research at Spigner.k@husky.neu.edu or 803.446.0252. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Atira Charles at a.charles@neu.edu or 850.412.7753.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

No. There will be no payment for participation in the study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

There is no cost to you to participate in the study.

Is there anything else I need to know?

Please note you may refer to and ask questions regarding this consent form at any time.
I agree to take part in this research. (Please Print Name and Date)

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

____________________________________________
Date

____________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent Date

Printed name of person above