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## ABORTION

A Practical Theological Exploration of the  
Voice of Women Suffering from Abortion

Sofi Lindahl

Mentor: Joel Appelfeldt  
Enskilda Högskolan Stockholm

Thanks to God for the gift of freedom.  
Thanks to my family for the time given  
Thanks to my mentor for advice offered,  
and to my sisters in Christ for valuable input.

# **Abortion: A Practical Theological Exploration of the voice of women suffering from abortion**

**Keywords:** Abortion; Oppression; Force; Practical Theology; The Four Voices of Theology

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1. Introduction

Abortion. A single word capable of polarizing conversations in an instance, it is a word chock-a-block with values. A principle for some and reality for others. Interests are colliding at full speed when abortion is on the table. The official conversation about abortion bears likeness to a stormy ocean where the slightest mistake makes your boat overturn. Abortion is debated on social media, in media, in medicine, in politics, in church and in families. Frustration and misunderstandings as a result of debating it from multiple angles at the same time, the waves can go real high. I have been listening to the voices of women with unplanned pregnancies who consider abortion, and women who have had an abortion and who seek help to handle the aftermath of it, since 2019. Their voice has drawn me in this direction academically. This is a Practical Theological literature study of women who suffer from abortion and a theological reflection upon their experience. It is an ambition to take a dive and go under the waves, exploring what the storm looks like and feels like underneath the roaring wind.

## 1.2 Background

Sweden has an induced abortion law that protects free abortion until pregnancy week 18, and with some exceptions until pregnancy week 22 + 0, after applying for approval from the Social services legal council. A fetus is considered to be viable outside the womb after 22 completed pregnancy weeks, which is also the starting point of when a fetus is viewed legally as a baby. It is a woman's free choice according to law, to undergo induced abortion or not. The freedom lies in its accessibility, it being tax funded and the absence of requirements of reason. This law has been the same since 1st January 1975. Except for minor changes in 1996.<sup>1</sup> In order to update the abortion law to the current medical progress, the government has assigned this investigation to a group that will present a proposition on 3rd February 2025.<sup>2</sup> In 2023 there were 35 550 abortions in Sweden.<sup>3</sup> All abortion procedures are administered through healthcare and the woman needs to have an ultrasound in order to determine how long she is pregnant. If she is no more than 9 weeks pregnant she can undertake a medical abortion at home, or a surgical abortion at the hospital. If she is no more than 14 weeks pregnant she can have a surgical abortion. If she is past

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<sup>1</sup> SOU 2005:90. *Abort i Sverige*

<sup>2</sup> Dir. 2023:89. *Kommittedirektiv Förändringar i Abortlagstiftningen*

<sup>3</sup> "Statistik och data," Socialstyrelsen, accessed 12 aug, 2024

<https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/statistik-och-data/statistik/alla-statistikamnen/aborter/#:~:text=I%20Sverige%20utf%C3%B6rs%20uppskattningsvis%20mellan.aborter%20utf%C3%B6rs%20tidig%20i%20graviditeten.>

12-14 weeks pregnant it is considered to be a late termination of pregnancy. What abortion method to use in such cases is decided by the woman in consultation with healthcare. Medical abortion comprises two different substances. The anti progesterone Mifepristone is taken orally at the clinic and Misoprostol is taken vaginally at home 36-48 hours later.<sup>4</sup> Surgical abortion by vacuum aspiration is conducted up until week 12. The woman is given Mifepristone in order to prepare the cervical tap. Vacuum aspiration involves a plastic tube being connected to a vacuum machine that sucks the fetus and the placenta out of the womb. It is done under anesthesia and the woman may go home the same day. If it is a late termination of pregnancy, the procedure starts like a medical abortion with Mifepristone and then Misoprostol is given every 3-6 hours until the woman goes into labor and gives birth to the fetus that in most cases is no longer alive at the time of delivery, but in some rare occasions can be. A late termination of pregnancy is more painful and she is offered stronger drugs for pain relief.<sup>5</sup> Up to 12 weeks the fetus is handled as biological disposal, after 12 weeks the fetus is kept in the freezer until it is taken to a cemetery to be cremated and buried.<sup>6</sup> The field of research on abortion and its aftermath and relation to various feelings and mental unwellness and disorder differ widely in its conclusions. The research that concludes abortion to be overall beneficial for women, still shows a minor group of women who experience abortion as the opposite. The women who find abortion the opposite of beneficial exist, but there is no agreement on how many they are. One study says 8-12 percent<sup>7</sup>. Another study says it is 32.6 percent.<sup>8</sup> Someday we might know and agree on how many they are, but for now we need to be honest and say: we do not know how many, but we know they exist. The Swedish Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology has produced two reports on abortion. One in 2006 the other in 2018. The first report contains a section dealing with women experiencing force and violence in relation to choosing abortion, deploring the importance of increasing the knowledge about this in order for personnel to ask the woman

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<sup>4</sup> There is a scientific tension between the possibility for a woman to regret the abortion after taking Mifegyne and the consequences it might have on the fetus. There is no validated research. <https://www.acog.org> The tension is not just medical but also political. <https://mellanarkiv-offentlig.vgregion.se> Different parts are invalidating each others arguments and results of research. <https://www.abortionpillreversal.com/abortion-pill-reversal/faq> This study does not go further into this tension, although it would be interesting for further research.

<sup>5</sup> "Rutin för abort," Västra Götalandsregionen, 3 Aug, 2024 <https://mellanarkiv-offentlig.vgregion.se>

<sup>6</sup> "Rutin för omhändertagande av foster vecka 12+0 t.o.m vecka 17+6 på gynekologisk avdelning," Västra Götalandsregion, 3 Aug <https://mellanarkiv-offentlig.vgregion.se>

<sup>7</sup> Anneli Kero, "Paradoxes in legal abortion : a longitudinal study of motives, attitudes and experiences in women and men" (PhD dissertation, Umeå universitet).

<sup>8</sup> Lydia Hamama, et al. "Previous experience of spontaneous or elective abortion and risk for posttraumatic stress and depression during subsequent pregnancy." *Depression and anxiety* vol. 27,8 (2010): 699-707. doi:10.1002/da.20714

appropriate questions in the future.<sup>9</sup> In the second report this section has disappeared.<sup>10</sup> Force and violence relating to abortion is an absent theme in the last report. This study says something about the experience of women who are now invisible in this report.

There is a political discussion regarding making free abortion a part of Sweden's constitution and the political work is in process.<sup>11</sup> This political action is a reaction to what happened in 2022 in the United States when the national right for abortion was overruled by the U.S Supreme Court and made it possible for each individual state to regulate the right to abortion. Several states have limited the right to abortion and what happens in the United States is known to stir things up in other countries. The Swedish state is a secular state and religion is viewed as a private matter.

### **1.3 Problem and questions**

According to recent research there is a group of women who have undergone abortion against their own will, who have been pressured or threatened to have an abortion, and who describe their experience of abortion as only negative. This is the group of women whose experience I aim to explore and analyze. This exploration could possibly contribute to partly filling the gap of knowledge about force and violence relating to abortion.

- What is the voice of the women who suffer from abortion?
- What happens in the dialogue between the women suffering from abortion and other theological resources?

### **1.4 Aim**

My aim is to explore the experience of women who suffer from abortion and to offer a theological reflection upon it.

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<sup>9</sup> Gunilla Aneblom, "Bemötande och omhändertagande vid abort" in *Inducerad abort - Rapport nr 54*, edited by Lars-Åke Mattsson, (Elanders Tofters, 2006)

<sup>10</sup> Anneli Kero, Ann Lalos, "Kvinnors och mäns upplevelser av abort" in *Inducerad abort - Rapport nr 78*, edited by Ove Axelsson (Elanders AB, 2018) <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-47362>

<sup>11</sup> "SVT Nyheter: Inrikes," Sveriges Television AB, 3 Apr, 2024.

<https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/hallengren-oppen-for-grundlagsskydda-ratten-till-abort>

## 1.5 Demarcation

It is common within recent research on women and the decision making process to emphasize the paradox. Embracing the paradox without drawing normative conclusions about abortion in general. I will explore part of this paradox when focusing on women who suffer from abortion.

I will not focus on the voice of men in this study even though it would be of very real interest, and my hope is to one day be able to listen to their voice.

I will not go into further explanation of the Reproductive Justice movement, nor will I use it as a theory of my work. It is a social movement and I aim to stay in the theological field.

I have not been searching for or exploring the women who might be stuck in trafficking. This aspect of women who might be forced to have an abortion requires a study on their own.

The material is dated between 2005 and 2024

## 1.6 Recent Research

Recent research on emotional and psychological consequences of abortion differs in its various conclusions. Some research points to a correlation between abortion and a higher risk of mental illness, while some research claim there is no significant correlation.

In my previous study *Abortion and Pastoral Care - Experiences and approach: a quantitative study among pastors and deacons of the Covenant Church of Sweden*, the conclusion reflected a conflict between the existential language and the rational language when approaching abortion. Existential and rational structures are in conflict, structures which one uses to comprehend and deal with problems surrounding pregnancy and abortion.<sup>12</sup> Pastors and deacons experienced a silenced conversation and insecurity related to abortion. They view their own experience of caring for people in relation to abortion as limited but they express a will to care for them.

Maria Lilja Stålhandske has studied abortion from the perspective of Psychology of Religion focusing on the existential expressions of women with experience of abortion. She says the time appears to be arriving when we are able to study emotional reactions to abortion without questioning the legal right. Using a crisis-oriented study with the existential perspective of the

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<sup>12</sup> Sofi Mattsson, "Abort och själavård: Erfarenheter och förhållningssätt," (EHS, 2021), 24



experience, she elucidates aspects that are not revealed in other studies. Stålhandske concludes that women who live in the clinically-oriented, secularized Sweden are left to deal with the existential dimensions of abortion alone. She highlights the absence of ceremonies or rites connected to abortion, and the value of rites in order to handle existentially complicated experiences. She is not drawing on Christian values and her conclusion is addressing healthcare first hand.<sup>13</sup>

Anneli Kero is a doctor of gynecology. She conducts her research from the Institution of clinical science, obstetrics and gynecology, and the Institution for social work in the University of Umeå. In her study, *Paradoxes in Legal Abortion - a longitudinal study of motives, attitudes and experiences among women and men*, she sets out to examine, investigate and elucidate the decision-making process, experiences, attitudes, the long-term psychosocial consequences and contraceptive use. It is a quantitative study made in Sweden in 2002 and presents the experience and reasoning around abortion as a paradox. The fact that she includes men makes the study more inclusive, and is thereby able to make assertions that other studies cannot. Kero concludes that women and men want to have the right number of children, at the right time and with the right partner in order to combine good parenting with a professional career.<sup>14</sup> However, to have all these things in order does not ensure a continuation of pregnancy. The decision to have an abortion does not seem to be difficult to make, however, the termination of pregnancy is experienced as a painful life event. Women are able to make complex decisions to have an abortion without suffering any subsequent regret or negative effects, but there needs to be an openness to possible mourning and painful feelings even if a woman does not regret her abortion. Kero finds that 12 percent of the women had experienced pressure or threat in connection to the pregnancy.<sup>15</sup> 10 percent experienced the abortion process as only negative.<sup>16</sup> 18 percent stated that they wanted to continue the pregnancy, but did not.<sup>17</sup> I aim to explore the voice of some of these women.

Gunhild Maria Hugdal and her dissertation *The Right choice and the free choice* is set out to be a christian feminist ethical dissertation concerning empirical ethics. It derives from

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<sup>13</sup> Maria L. Stålhandske, "Omöjligt och nödvändigt: kvinnors livsfrågor och psykiska välbefinnande i samband med abort," *Socialmedisinsktidskrift* no.2 (2008): 149-139, <https://socialmedicinsktidskrift.se/index.php/smt/article/view/152/182>

<sup>14</sup> Anneli Kero, "Paradoxes in legal abortion : a longitudinal study of motives, attitudes and experiences in women and men" (PhD dissertation, Umeå universitet). Retrieved from <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-47362>

<sup>15</sup> Kero, "Paradoxes," 4

<sup>16</sup> Kero, "Paradoxes," 41

<sup>17</sup> Kero, "Paradoxes,"43

interviews with pregnant women and women who have been pregnant and how they themselves constitute the right choice and the free choice relating to abortion or continuing the pregnancy. Hugdal is interested in how relations, moral and contextual normality affects ethical arguments that are constituted in the individual. The choice of abortion or continuing a pregnancy is not made in a moral vacuum, the pregnant woman has to morally and ethically consider significant others when choosing. The pregnant woman also negotiates her choice with existing norms of reproduction such as planned reproduction, the ideal of gender equality, intensive mothering, and the idea of a good life.<sup>18</sup> The right choice is constituted as the caring, selfless and responsible choice.<sup>19</sup> Women choosing contrary to contextual normality will experience social costs, she will risk being assessed as immoral, unjust and careless, which she experiences as pressure. The free choice is negotiated through a creative interpretation of what is at stake relationally. Hugdal argues that responsibility is moral and moral is *not* per se just and therefore the woman is not free. She urges Christian feminists to acknowledge that the ideal of self sacrifice is hiding beneath responsibility that surrounds women in general and pregnant women specifically, and claims that political and structural injustices should not be accepted as a woman's responsibility.<sup>20</sup> To attain real freedom of reproductive choice, Hugdal concludes that women need to be liberated from the responsibility to justify their choices.

#### Summary:

According to recent research there is a conflict between the existential language and the rational language when approaching abortion. Pastors and deacons experienced a silenced conversation and insecurity related to abortion. There is a limited experience of caring for people in relation to abortion but an expressed will to care for them. Women who live in the clinically-oriented, secularized Sweden are left to deal with the existential dimensions of abortion alone. There is an absence of ceremonies or rites connected to abortion that would be valuable in order to handle existentially complicated experiences of abortion.

Women are able to make complex decisions and to have an abortion without suffering any subsequent regret or negative effects, but there needs to be an openness to the paradoxical feelings, women might mourn and have painful feelings even if she does not regret her abortion.

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<sup>18</sup> Gunhild Maria Hugdal, "The Right Choice and the Free Choice: An Empirical Ethical Contribution to a Christian, Feminist Ethic of Reproductive Justice" (Phd Diss. MF Vitenskapelig Hoyskole 2022), 201, 130

<sup>19</sup> Hugdal, "The Right Choice", 201-203, 153,

<sup>20</sup> Hugdal, "The Right Choice", 219

The choice is negotiated through various ideals and is concerned about relations. The right choice is constituted as the caring, selfless and responsible choice. In order for women to be real free they need to be freed from the responsibility to justify their choice.

## 1.7 Material

The written texts from the women were collected from various forums on the Internet such as Libero, Umo (youth reception) and Familjeliv, from newspaper articles and blogs.<sup>21</sup> One story was found on the website of Respect.<sup>22</sup> Most of the stories are written anonymously, only a few have signed by their name. To collect material this way is not conventional and at the beginning of this research there was an ambition to do interviews, a qualitative study. There is a considerable difficulty to reach these women since they are known to be part of the laps in other studies. When realizing the amount of material that is available on these forums and other websites I was inspired to let the study become a literature study instead. The search words I used at the start were, *forced to abortion*. I also used the searchword *regret I had an abortion*. After reading some of these findings I expanded the search to *abortion, he forces me to have an abortion, my parents forced me to have an abortion, suicide and abortion* and *he says he will kill me if I don't have an abortion*. In order to correlate with the 12 percent of the women in the study of Kero who say they experienced pressure or threat in relation to pregnancy, I chose the texts that witnessed some kind of force, persuasion or threat. The texts where the regret and despair was emphasized and dominant was chosen to correlate with those who, according to Kero, said they experienced the abortion as only negative. This material contains 75 texts that were organized into three groups, (A) 19 women who were pregnant at the time of writing and (B) 52 women who had undergone an abortion. (C) 4 women who had been pressured to have an abortion but chose to continue the pregnancy. The selected articles included quotes from women. Is there any reliability in these texts? We need to presume that these texts are produced by human beings, most of them are anonymous and some are not. After reading the report of the Internet Foundation I could not find any research that needed me to question the validity of these texts.<sup>23</sup> People lie, exaggerate, understate, twist, and forget things when they speak. I presume this to be

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<sup>21</sup> The oldest text is dated 2005 and the most recent is dated 2024. I stopped collecting material 2024-07-29.

<sup>22</sup> Respect is a movement for life within the Catholic Church, dealing with medical and ethical questions relating to human life.

<sup>23</sup> "Svenskarna och Internet: Rapport," Internetstiftelsen, 10 Sep, 2024  
<https://svenskarnaochinternet.se/rapporter/svenskarna-och-internet-2023/>

a risk in all types of research whose material is based on human beings speaking. Which makes this material no less valid than for example a questionnaire or an interview.

## **1.8 Outline**

In chapter two I give an account on The Four Voices of Theology and how I use this approach which originates from the field of Action Research. I give an account on some of the most central concepts that will follow through the research and I define important words. In Chapter three I give an account on the method by which I deal with the material, and I explain how I have been selecting and rejecting certain material. I make ethical considerations and describe aspects of reflexivity relating to the work. Chapter four has two parts, the first is focused on describing, and presenting what themes are in the voice of women suffering from abortion, and exploring certain aspects and themes within the voice of women suffering from abortion. The second part of chapter four is the theological reflection and analysis. This is where the conversation between Four Voices of Theology takes place, and is more normative than descriptive. I have chosen not to reflect on every aspect and theme that is in the voice of the women but rather selecting themes that offer some sort of disclosure and themes that I interpret as central to the dialogue. In the end of chapter four is the conclusion where I let my own theological voice become more explicit. In chapter five is the theoretical, methodological and final reflections where I make some point on how the Church could respond to the voice of women suffering from abortion.

## **Chapter 2**

### **2.1 Theory - Four voices of theology**

Fundamental theology is a key element in Catholic theological studies, and can be understood as offering a theological account of how we can do theology at all - that is, how God speaks to us and how we can hear that word. Fundamental theology can be understood as the discipline which in the light of faith reflects critically on the foundation of theology and basic theological issues. It is the theology of the self-revealed tripersonal God in Jesus Christ, the credibility of that revelation and its transmission and interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Theology of four voices can be construed as a response to the central questions of fundamental theology. Clare Watkins was part of The Action Research-Church and Society project between 2006-2010. In this project “The four

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<sup>24</sup> Gerald O`Collins, “Retrieving Fundamental Theology,” (Geoffrey Chapman, 1993), 40-41

voices of theology” emerged during that time as an infrastructure behind the theological reflection. They discovered four “places” where they were “hearing” important theological wisdom. From conversation across these “places” within the group and its variousity “moments of disclosure” were encountered. Insights are gained when a researcher is sitting with all these voices in open, listening conversation and these insights are called moments of “disclosure”. Somewhere in the place between practice and theology, Watkins assumes there to be a dynamic of divine revelation. She claims Christian practice is in itself a kind of theology as “faith seeking understanding”, and that her theological faith about what kind of God the Christian God is significant to the work.<sup>25</sup> “The four voices of theology” is not a model for theological reflection but rather a way to represent the fundamental theological approach and elucidating a way to work with practices theologically. The four voices are categorized as normative, espoused, formal and operand. The normative category would be scripture, creeds, Official Church Teachings, prayer and liturgy. The espoused category would be the theology embedded within a group’s articulation of its beliefs. The formal category is the insight of other disciplines and the operand category is the theology embedded within the practice of a group. It is important though to the founders of this approach not to handle these categories too separate but rather as a manner in which the one voice worth hearing - that of the triune God - might be heard. Where there is dissonance between the voices it is important to remain in that tension because that is the place where the voice of the Spirit might be discerned. Dunlop uses the “four voices of theology” in his teaching of ordinates in the Church of England and declares the importance of reflecting on a shared experience - if there is only one who has experienced something that needs theological reflection - that person becomes a gatekeeper for the theological voices.<sup>26</sup> Using Four Voices of Theology is an innovative approach to discerning the complexities and different layers of theology. The four voices of theology are mechanics, not structure. To treat the voices separately, or trying to identify the voices in an early stage is to misuse the approach. The conversation needs to unfold organically.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Clair Watkins, “Disclosing Church: An Ecclesiology learned from conversation in practice,” (Routledge, 2020),41-51

<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of this research I had the ambition not to do this theological reflection on my own. Attempts were made to engage in a group - reflecting upon the voice of women suffering from abortion. But the tension of the subject made the conversation strained, and the time required to reach a fruitful conversation made it impossible.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Dunlop, “Using the ‘Four Voices of Theology’ in Group Theological Reflection.” *Practical Theology* 14 (4): 294–308. doi:10.1080/1756073X.2021.1957075.

## 2.2 Definitions

Fetus: Words are loaded with values. The question is obvious to anyone familiar with the debate - what are you going to call, whatever it is, inside the womb? The definition of the word fetus is: an offspring of a human in the stage of prenatal development that follows the embryo stage, which is eight weeks after conception. Legally it becomes a baby at week 22 even though the medical term is fetus right up until birth. After exploring the voice of the women, it is obvious they tend to use the word *baby* or *child* when expressing their own experiences. Another common expression is to say *little life* or *little one*. In my ambition to give an account for the voice of these women I will use the word fetus up till birth when expressing my own analysis, and I will use whatever word the women is using, when giving an account of the voice of the women in order to be loyal to their expressed experience.

### The voice of the women suffering from abortion:

The voice of the women suffering from abortion is the term I use when referring to the women in this material. It belongs to those who viewed their abortion as a trauma, who had the abortion against their own will, who experienced pressure or threat in connection to the pregnancy and abortion and who experienced the abortion process as only negative, and I use the term when referring to these women.

Regret: Regret is understood to imply remorse, a moral anguish for actions one wishes was being undone as well as feelings of sorrow, disappointment, and distress about something one wishes could be different.<sup>28</sup>

Force: Force is to ignore someone's will and by physical strength or position of power make someone act in a certain way. When I use the word force in the analysis and conclusions it implies coercion, unlawful coercion, threats of various kinds, harassment and violence.

The voice of the women: There are 75 different written stories in the material and in that aspect there are many voices. When I use the singular term *the voice of the women* it is because they sometimes speak with one voice, and it resembles a choir - which is made up of individual voices singing as one voice.

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<sup>28</sup> "AH Dictionary:remorse," Harper Collins Publishers, 10 Sep, 2024  
<https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=remorse>

## Chapter 3

### 3.1 Method

As a first step I analyzed the material hermeneutically, reading the texts back and forth, letting the texts interpret, contrasting, reflecting and questioning each other, searching for recurring themes and words. My intention was to pay attention to details, pay attention to the “whispering” of the voice of women, to dominant stories and muted stories, to critique and relations of power.<sup>29</sup> As a second step I engaged with the texts with numerous questions, for example: What would you call the fetus? What advice would you give other women? Why are you posting this in this forum? Where is your happiness? What are your principles? What makes you angry? What do you need? Numerous questions like these, questions out of curiosity, query and compassion. I was in a dialogue with the text in this way for quite some time. By doing this I was paying attention and listening to the operant and espoused voice. I found the normative voice in the official websites of churches and denominations and by following its footnotes and links. My criteria for sorting the normative voice was that it should be of Swedish context, official and possible for women who suffer from abortion to access. It needed to relate to abortion or human value. The Formal voice belongs to theologians and the writings from sociologists and philosophers and healthcare. I have rejected two types of material - the one that belongs to Pro-Life advocates and pro-choice advocates, these voices sometimes offer cliches on human value or abortion.<sup>30</sup> According to Hanna Arend, cliches have the tendency to contain moral pride and result in distancing from reality, they make discernment superfluous and witness the lack of imagination. By rejecting these types of texts I believe to offer a greater focus on the experience of the women, and keeping as close as possible to the reality.

### 3.2 Ethical considerations

Anyone who is familiar with the subject of abortion knows about the tension surrounding it. There is so much at stake. Human lives. Women and children. Freedom. Political ideas of a good society, ideas of gender equality and sexual freedom, beliefs of right and wrong and human value. Abortion deals with existential issues, life and death, it is a delicate and private matter and

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<sup>29</sup> I am inspired by Jacqueline E. Lapsley. *Whispering the word of women. Hearing women's stories in the Old Testament*. In which she elegantly bridges feminism, academy and church with “informed trust”.

<sup>30</sup> Hanna Arend, *Den banala ondskan - Eichmann i Jerusalem*, trans, Barbro och Ingemar Lundberg (Daidalos 2018), 57-60, 297

although it is a legal right it is still viewed as a “last resort”.<sup>31</sup> The tension is between the ethical principle respecting the sanctity of life and the juridical standpoint respecting a woman's right to her own body. There is also a tension in the scientific field regarding the psychological consequences of abortion where there are diverse conclusions. The complexity of abortion is not only that the field of research differs in its conclusions but that women experience it significantly differently. The spectrum of experiencing abortion goes from only positive to only negative, and from mental growth and learning experience<sup>32</sup> to mental health disorder and suicide.<sup>33</sup> Anneli Kero says that there is a reluctance to draw attention to the negative and painful effects as well as the positive effects of abortion out of fear of providing fuel for those who are against legal abortion. The impact of abortion risks being hidden under the ambition to deal with the tension by silence. I am drawing attention to the painful effects of abortion, but I am not afraid to provide fuel for those who are against legal abortion, I am not afraid because I believe the truth is setting people free. And freedom is not something to be afraid of. I have asked myself the question whether I am victimizing these women, so I brought that question to the voice of the women. Are these women seeing themselves as victims? Yes, they do, victims blaming themselves for the abuse.

Most of the women in my material are anonymous, some are not, but they have all already agreed to publish their word officially. I do have the ethical obligation not to twist their words and it has been my ambition not to do so, even though it is not possible to know how each and every anonymous woman behind the text would feel understood. This study started out with the ambition to have a group reflection involving theologians from various Christian denominations. This ambition failed as a lack of time at disposal that the complexity and tension of the subject required. I have chosen to anonymize the participants in the failed attempt to involve other theologians in the work of reflecting upon the material.

### 3.3 Reflexivity

Since 2019 I have been volunteering for an organization that offers call support to women in crisis pregnancy, and to women who have had an abortion.<sup>34</sup> I have four years of experience listening to approximately 300-400 women and this has been significant to my understanding.

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<sup>31</sup> Kero, “Paradoxes,” 11

<sup>32</sup> Kero, “Paradoxes,” 41

<sup>33</sup> Fergusson, David M., L. John Horwood, and Joseph M. Boden. “Abortion and Mental Health Disorders: Evidence from a 30-Year Longitudinal Study.” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 193, no. 6 (2008): 444–51. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.108.056499>.

<sup>34</sup> [www.oplaneratgravid.se](http://www.oplaneratgravid.se), [www.efterenabort.se](http://www.efterenabort.se)



The place where the experiences of the women who suffer from abortion cross matters of faith, and social context, is where my interest in this matter arises. My ambition has been to keep an eye on myself, on my motives, on my presumptions and on my postulates. Pretending to be someone else, with other beliefs, experiences or views and then “spying” on my own text - is how my effort to do this looks like. In this way I have tried to make my implicit normative values explicit, Tone Stangeland Kauffman calls this playing the Devil's advocate, which is about challenging your own normative understanding.<sup>35</sup> I have a trained ear, which I believe has benefited this research, but the tension has been not to hear things from the earlier experiences and forcing this upon the material and rather to let the material speak for itself. Within the field of Practical Theology is an ongoing discussion about normativity, and the tension between theory and practice, between the descriptive and normative dimensions, but also the reshaping or reconstructing dimension of the research. Kaufman says the Practical Theologian needs to attend to experiences, practices, theological tradition and ecclesial tradition and be aware of one's significant role as a researcher.<sup>36</sup>

## **Chapter 4. Result**

### **4. The voice of the women - What are they talking about?**

Having set the context and background we are now to explore the experience of the women who suffer from abortion. The material contains stories from women who had the abortion recently and those who had the abortion a long time ago. It is a wide span. Half of the women in the material have had the abortion no more than a year before writing and half of the women have had the abortion from one year up to 18 years before writing. A few times there are aspects of religion but mostly there are not. Some women view themselves as victims and some as perpetrators. The more force she has experienced the more she tends to view herself as a victim. Women who were forced to have an abortion against their own will might still view themselves as perpetrators. Some of them are writing in order to seek help, some are writing in order to help others, others just need to get something off their chest. They are individuals, and there is variation in what they have experienced and their view upon their experience, still there are themes and expressions that are similar and often identical. When one is listening to what is similar, and identical and interpreting this hermeneutically, this shapes the voice of the women

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<sup>35</sup> Tone S. Kaufman, *From the Outside, Within or In Between? Normativity at Work in Empirical Practical Research* in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Anne Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Leiden The Netherlands Brill, 2016)141-142, 147-148

<sup>36</sup> For more reflexivity upon normativity go to Theoretical reflection on page 72

who suffer from abortion. The stories from these women are the articulated experience of a specific group which according to the theory of Four Voices of Theology would categorize as the espoused voice. This is what they are talking about:

#### **4.1 Force**

Force is to ignore someone's will and by physical strength, position of power or threat make someone act in a certain way.<sup>37</sup> This definition presumes force to be an act of a person in some sort of relation to another. Women who suffer from abortion are exclusively forced by their partner, his family or her own family. There are different aspects of force in the voice of women suffering from abortion. There are threats of various kinds and severity, there are physical aspects, economical aspects, relational aspects and psychological aspects of force. This statement is from a woman who was 26 years old at the time of the abortion, she had an abortion against her own will. She says she was persuaded, which would not be defined as force, but there are forcing aspects of her experience if we pay attention.

“Because I wanted to keep the baby he called me egoistic, and because he did not want it. At the same time my mother, who works at the Social Services, told me I could not have a baby considering my drug addiction. She said - don't you understand the social service will be waiting at the maternity clinic and take away the baby. No one believed I could be a mother, and even if I believed it myself, I was too weak from the drugs and I let myself be persuaded by others.” (B.17)

She is clear in her own wish. She wants to keep the baby, she believes she could be a mother but her boyfriend offends her and her mother is bringing the reality to her of the risk of having the baby taken away from her by authorities. She seems to believe in another future than those around her, and they are pressing their vision of the future upon her. If she would have been stronger she might have been able to resist, but she is not strong enough. It is hard to determine by what attitude they were persuading her to have an abortion, but it still seems to be true to her experience that they all, including herself, ignored her will. The woman continues by explaining the abortion as terribly traumatic, leaving her with deep wounds. When writing this text the woman has been clean from drugs for two years and she now has a child and explains how she still sees the face of the aborted baby, in the face of her now two year old child.

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<sup>37</sup> “SAOL: Tvinga,” Svenska Akademien. 29 Jul, 2022 <https://svenska.se/so/?sok=tvinga&pz=1>

In the voice of women who suffer from abortion, the threats of rejection and abandonment is commonly recurring. One might feel the urge to diminish these threats as irrelevant for the woman's future, especially in our culture with our vast ideas of female independence and female freedom from male oppression, and their level of implementation to politics. But the threat of rejection and abandonment seem to cause the women a lot of stress and pressure to have an abortion against her will.

“I wanted to keep it but he threatened to leave me, so I had an abortion and I feel like shit pretty much every day even though it has been a year since. We are now divorced and when I speak to him about the sacrifice I made for him, he says it doesn't matter.” (B.26)

This woman had an abortion, in order to save the relationship and to make her partner stay with her. She had an abortion because that was his preference. She did not want to choose abortion but she chose to make a sacrifice for him. He seems to be in a position of power, ignoring her will to continue the pregnancy when he threatens to abandon her. She is making a sacrifice to satisfy him not to abandon her.

The following woman has been married for 17 years to a man who is the father of their three children. Now she is 16 weeks pregnant with number four and he is threatening her with rejection and abandonment, and suicide:

“He does not want the baby and says, if I keep, he will kill himself or quit his job and leave and never again see his children or me...//...How am I, as his wife, supposed to go on in life, knowing that he would hurt himself or ruin the life of his children by disappearing if I keep it? And how am I supposed to live with myself if I have an abortion? I already love my child and feel its movements, have seen it on the ultrasound, he has also seen it but still he is cold as ice.” (A.12)

There is desperation in the voice of her husband, and he is possibly feeling existentially threatened by the fact that they might have four children rather than three.<sup>38</sup> He threatens her with either suicide or leaving her and their children. It is a double threat, which she seems to find equally demanding. She seems to think the responsibility for his actions would be hers. To choose abortion still seems just as difficult to her. His desperation is making him ignore her free will, and it is in his power to abandon her or commit suicide, but he presents it as a threat to her, shifting the burden of responsibility upon her, in order for her to have an abortion according to

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<sup>38</sup> The voice of men in relation to children, pregnancy and abortion would be an important future research.

his preference. His threats of desperation are exposing the woman to emotional and psychological force. If this woman would choose abortion she would have to ignore her own will and wish to continue the pregnancy and force herself to have an abortion.

When women choose to have an abortion against their own will in order to save the relationship there seems to be more than a question of relational or psychological matter. This woman is 22 years old and has been in a steady relationship for three years. She has just found out that she is unplanned pregnant and she is happy about the little life growing inside her.

“But my partner and his family want me to get rid of it. My partner more or less forces me when he says that he will throw me out, head first if I keep it, and I really have nowhere else to go. I have no steady income since I work on demand...//...sure I could choose to keep but I would be completely alone, with no income, no place to live and no close ones to turn to.” (A.4)

She thought she was in a steady relationship but now when she is pregnant it turns out not to be. The implications of being left are more than just relational, psychological and emotional. There are also social and economical implications. The man in this quote, is in a position of economical power and he is using this power to make her act in a certain way, ignoring her will to continue the pregnancy. To use violence or, threatening to use violence, in order to make someone act in a certain way is unlawful coercion, it is illegal and can lead to a fine or prison. It is the most obvious way of force. Still there seems to be no reflection among the women who suffer from abortion that they are being exposed to unlawful coercion. This woman describes a typical abusive relationship, and she lives in a women's shelter when writing this.

“I am 17 weeks pregnant and I will be having an abortion against my own will as a result of force...//...and now he threatens to take the child away from me when it is born and make my life a total misery. He wants to take the child and move 180 miles away and make sure I never see the child again”. (A.7)

She describes her situation as being forced to have an abortion against her own will and her partner is threatening to abduct the child. Death threats are recurring numerous times in this material.

“I was going to keep it, but my boyfriend, his big brother and their friends sent me texts, calling, and threatened me that they would find me and kill me and the baby if I kept it. So with support from my friend I had an abortion. I cried the whole time and felt incredibly bad”. (B.18)

“My ex boyfriend threatens to kill me for keeping.” (A.16)

“I thought I knew him but I was wrong. He is trying to make me have an abortion, he threatens to hurt me, he has even said kill me, and to hurt the child, to throw me down the stairs, to ruin my life, he does not stop calling and texting me.” (A.17)

“I recently found out I am pregnant even though i was using contraceptives, I have chosen to keep. My ex boyfriend threatens to kill me for keeping.” (A.16)

“I have been forced by my ex boyfriend to have an abortion twice and I feel terribly bad even though the first one was over two years ago. I wanted to keep and have always been against abortion. He said he would hunt me for the rest of my life and kill me if I kept it.” (B.39)

These threats are obviously unlawful, they all include a threat to her life if she does not choose according to his wish and have an abortion. To use violence or threatening to use violence in order for her to choose abortion is an obvious action of ignoring her free will and using a position of power in order to make her act in a certain way. Sometimes the threat to her life or her physical well being is implicit:

“He's trying to threaten the life out o f me in order for me to have an abortion”. (A.10)

“Me and my dad had a big argument and I haven't spoken to him for more than a year now and the last thing he said to me was that if I got pregnant I would regret it.(This was a threat where he said that if I was pregnant something would happen to my partner and my baby). From earlier experience I know he wasn't just trying to scare me”. (B.42)

“5 years ago I had an abortion because my partner certainly did not want to have a baby and more or less threatened me. I was scared and- yes that’s the way it was. I don't have any other explanations” (B.2)

When reading this material there are also significant others that seem to use psychological strength in order to make her have an abortion. These two women state it clearly:

“From day one, when we found out I was pregnant, I was then 5 weeks pregnant, he started brainwashing me...//...He did everything in his power to break me as much as possible so that I

would not dare to keep. Every day he stood over me scoffing while I was vomiting, calling me a drama queen”. (B.23)

“I have accepted to have the abortion and decided to have it. I sound cold and awful but I have lost all the love I need to go on with this pregnancy. The hardest thing is the way I have been forced. How he and his dad and his new girlfriend have joined forces against me. I basically feel psychologically raped. I find no better words.” (A.1)

They say their decision comes out of brainwashing and psychological rape. One of them had gone through with the abortion and one was still pregnant when writing. They both use rather strong words. Brainwashing is a term that is normally used related to war situations or religious sects, where a systematic isolation, threats and rewards are used in order to decode and reprogram someone's structure of thought. Rape is a sexual assault that includes penetration against someone's will. These women use these strong words like an image or a parable to explain how she perceives it. Some women describe their experience as losing a struggle.

“Two years ago I was pregnant and more or less forced by the father of the child and others to have an abortion I fought for several weeks to be allowed to keep, I offered to care for the child myself, but after their threats and harassment I understood it would never work and I chose to do what they wanted.”

This woman goes on by explaining how the abortion has affected her and that she is now experiencing a loss of will to live. She put up a fight against those who wanted her to have an abortion, but she lost the fight, or perhaps it would be more correct to say she surrendered like this woman says.

“I fought and fought but finally I gave up and had an abortion like everyone, both friends, family and relatives, wanted me to”. (B.45)

Women who suffer from abortion describe a struggle or a fight against significant others who think abortion is a better option, who demand she have an abortion, who threaten her to have an abortion and in other ways harass her in her decision making process, ignoring her will to continue the pregnancy. They are most often completely alone in their own corner of the fight or struggle and those who are against her are either a stronger part or outnumbering her.

“His family says I am an egoist that wants to keep and that I will be the reason for their family breaking up, for his mum and dad getting a divorce and that I will be the reason for the death of my boyfriend's grandmother”. (A.3)

In the voice of the women suffering from abortion the force is not explained, only stated as such.

“I have been so violated that all I could do was to obey. Even though I had nothing to lose and could easily have cared for the baby myself”. (B.40)

“I have had an abortion because of force and pressure from the father of the child” (B.29)

“I was threatened, forced and extorted by my ex to have an abortion against my will 4,5 years ago”. (B.32)

“5 months ago I was forced to have an abortion by my parents. I am 17 years old.” (B.41)

The women do not bother explaining the threat or pressure, but want to say that it was there. Even though we are left without further explanation, we know she labels it force, and that force is to ignore someone's free will and by physical strength or position of power make some act in a certain way.

### **Summary:**

Women who suffer from abortion are talking about force. They are talking about threats of being relationally and economically abandoned. They are threatened to have an abortion or being responsible for their partners suicide and family break ups. They are facing death threats, threats of violence and if they continue the pregnancy their child is threatened by violence as well. They are being harassed for weeks, by significant others trying to persuade them to have an abortion. They might call it persuasion, but their experience of persuasion is more similar to harassment because it is a constant arguing until she surrenders, rather than a calm discussion at one or two occasions. It is reasonable to feel frightened and scared as a result of threats by someone in a position of power or greater strength. It is reasonable to feel weak if you have lost a fight or a struggle. If a woman is alone in this fight and has no one to allegiance with, it is reasonable to think that the loneliness matters to her. They say they want to keep, but significant others who are in a position of power and greater strength are ignoring her free will to continue the pregnancy and this is why they say they were forced to have an abortion against their will.

## 4.2 Regret and despair

Regret is understood to imply remorse, a moral anguish for actions one wishes was being undone as well as feelings of sorrow, disappointment, and distress about something one wishes could be different.<sup>39</sup>

“Today I deeply, deeply, deeply REGRET having the abortion, I know I could have managed being a mother at such a young age, and I will NEVER be able to forgive myself for depriving myself of a baby, my daughter of a big sister/big brother. NEVER! ”. (B.27)

“My partner is suffering on my behalf, but he tells me to look ahead. But I can’t”. (B.4)

“I do not want to live, I find no comfort or peace in life anymore.” (B.10)

“I do not know how I am supposed to get over the abortion I had, five years ago.” (B.8)

The women have a hard time getting over the abortion, they have a hard time forgiving themselves, they seem to be stuck in the event. They are asking each other how to move on, how to find forgiveness, how to live with themselves, they say they will never forgive themselves and that they will never accept it. In this material the women seem to experience greater despair if the choice was made without force. If there was a lot of force due to her having an abortion she might still regret the abortion but not really go into despair. Thoughts of suicide are just as frequent with those who had a forced or rather free choice. Despair is the loss of hope, hope is a positive state of mind looking to the future with expectations of a positive outcome.<sup>40</sup> Christians tend to relate their hope to the promises of God, to his grace and mercy, and to Jesus Christ as the hope of resurrection and eternal life. Hope is foundational in the Christian life, alongside faith and love. If hope is somehow looking forward to positive outcomes we see that the main thing that women who suffer from abortion are hoping for - is to be pregnant again, they are hoping for another child.

“All I want now is to be pregnant again, but my partner does not want that and it does not feel right since I had an abortion 8 months ago.” (B.1)

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<sup>39</sup> “AH Dictionary: Regret, remorse.”

<sup>40</sup> “AH Dictionary: Hope.”



This is desire, or despair. All she wants is to be pregnant again. She is so regretful that she wishes to die, and all she wants is to be pregnant again. The wish to be pregnant again is also in conflict with her conscience when she says it does not feel right.

“I have friends who had an abortion and now they have a baby, they say the only way to get over it is to have another baby. Is that true? In that case I am screwed! I am single so I wont have any children yet... Please help.” (B.23)

This woman had an abortion as a result of force, and now she is single and she is regretting the abortion. She says the abortion was traumatic and that she has had suicidal thoughts. Now she needs help. Help to feel better, help to get over the abortion, help to know what to do with all the pain and regret. At first it might look like hope. The hope of another child. If hope is a positive state of mind, looking to the future with expectation for a positive outcome - then what these women are voicing sounds like something else. They seem to hope for a new pregnancy and a new baby more like a strategy to get over the abortion, a new baby to make them feel better. If hope is a positive mind looking to the future expecting a positive outcome, then what these women say is something else. They are rather looking to the future with a troubled mind looking for relief from all the pain. When listening to the voice of the women it seems clear that they are having trouble hoping for a positive future. They are in various degrees of despair.

When a woman is forced to have an abortion there are always significant others involved, it is worth noticing that after the abortion is done, she is rather alone in her experience. When they speak of regret, they are solely referring to themselves, even though there were significant others involved in the decision making process. The following quote comes from a woman who had two children when she became pregnant with number three. She chose abortion as a result of stress. It was a quick decision based on rational thinking.

“I am so broken...I have to struggle just to get food on the table. I long for the evening so I can let go of my mask I have been putting on just for the children, and just cry and REGRET REGRET REGRET this awful ending.” (B.50)

This woman describes her regret as breaking her and she hides her brokenness for the children by putting on a mask, acting normal. All she really wants to do is cry and regret the abortion. She is writing regret in all caps and repeating it three times, this expresses a regret that is intense and dominant in her experience. The decision to have an abortion is explained as a shared decision

between her and her husband. She was not forced, they chose this together as a result of consent. She says:

“Everything was going too quickly...had we just given each other a little time to think I know we would have decided to keep”. (B.50)

But when she is describing the regret she refers only to herself. The same is for all the women who describe regret. Regret is not a shared experience, it is exclusively private. Even if she was forced, by one, two or several people to have an abortion, she is alone in her regret.

This woman says she was forced to have an abortion in order to be released from compulsory care at a drug clinic. If she wanted her freedom back she had to have an abortion.

“I have lost faith in society and feel a great deal of self hatred and guilt over the life I have taken”. (B.42)

She was forced by others who represented a system, who were in a position of power and who ignored her free will, but she is the one regretting the abortion. It is remarkable that the woman is alone in her regret, after she has been forced to have an abortion by her significant others, or others in a position of power. Before the abortion her story revolves around more people than herself. After the abortion her story revolves around herself and her regret. Regret it is not a shared experience.

The women who regret the abortion sometimes describe it as instant regret. They feel regret immediately after swallowing the first pill. They go home and google their possibility to stop the abortion. Sometimes they describe how they felt good and relieved after the abortion but that the regret entered their experience later, depending on how their body responded to the abortion, if they became infertile or if they were pregnant again. Sometimes they say the word regret and make it explicit, sometimes they speak about their experience of regret in another way making the regret implicit. They might say they “feel bad” or they “feel sorrow”, “guilt” and they “wish to die”. Somewhere in all these bad feelings regret might be implicit.

### **Summary:**

In the voice of women suffering from abortion regret is a dominant experience. Regret is not a shared experience, regret is a lonely experience. Some talk about regret explicitly, some implicitly. Regret is not necessarily a negative emotion, since it might lead to positive actions.

When regret turns into despair it is because hope is absent from the experience, and the positive aspects of regret are not there. They feel stuck, and do not know how to go on in life. They might look to the future for another pregnancy or another baby, but it sounds like an expression of desperation rather than hope.

### **4.3 Pain and suffering**

Pain and suffering is another theme that women experience in these situations. The hurt might come from the experience of loneliness, people turning away from her and from being misunderstood. This following quote comes from a woman who is pregnant when writing:

“It feels like I am the only one in the whole world who was hoping for this child. I have had an abortion once before several years ago and this only gives me more anxiety. How many children do I have to kill for the sake of others?! I cry and cry but everyone else seems cold”. (A.9)

“No one wants to be there for me. No one wants to support me. I feel so helpless. Twenty years old and pregnant. In Stockholm on top of all, where it is practically impossible to find a first hand apartment contract”. (A.2)

“There were no doctors, no nurse, gynecologist, therapist, psychologist, minister or relative that understood. I was treated as if I was the weird one who did not want to kill the baby in my belly just because its biological father raped me. Wanting to be a mother of a child like the one I was expecting was not acceptable. And I was very lonely”. (C.1)

They are alone in their hope for a positive future with a child, they are alone in practical matters of life and they feel lonely when their wish to continue the pregnancy is not accepted by their significant others. The loneliness is painful. When they have an abortion as a result of force, they feel like they have lost a struggle. Losing a struggle makes them feel weak and this seems painful.

“I felt all alone in the pregnancy and that is why I finally gave up and now, 11 months later I still cry over my decision. I feel so weak yielding so easily letting him have his way.” (B.23)

“I have never had anything more beautiful than the twins, and my weakness and kindness to other people made me kill what meant the most to me in the whole world” (B.49)

“My ex just left me with everything, he did not even want to be a part of anything, and I had to fix everything with the funeral and everything. You get so much anxiety from yielding.” (B.45)

All these women say they had an abortion against their own will. The time before the abortion was hard for them since they were under pressure of various degrees, after the abortion they felt pain related to their own weakness.

Women who suffer from abortion also seem to be experiencing pain related to babies and other pregnant women.

“Now, four years later, I am still really sad and bitter. I can not watch newborn babies on television without bursting into tears. I have difficulties meeting families with little children without starting to think “Why did I do it?” and then become really sad...//...I feel like I panic when I think about it. It is hard to breathe”. (B.48)

"Unfortunately it sometimes hurts so terribly to see other children and pregnant women. My Facebook-Flow overflows with baby pictures or pictures of little children, ultrasounds, pregnant bellies, and so on...//... I quickly scroll past them since it provokes anxiety, especially the ultrasounds. They give me nasty memories since I chose to look at my ultrasound that made me cancel the abortion, which I then had to book again.” (B.24)

They react to visual imagery in a way that is painful to them, that reminds them of the abortion. Women who experience pain in relation to visual imagery of children are also reminded of a future that could have been theirs. That was theirs for as long as she was pregnant, but when she had the abortion she also lost that future.

“I feel a great existential anxiety, and the thought that I might never experience this again is unbearable...//...How long can you really mourn something that never was?” (B.13)

This is the only time in the material that someone uses the word existential anxiety, it is possible though that she puts a label on what others are experiencing although they use different words.

### **Summary:**

They are expressing pain and suffering relating to being lonely, abandoned, misunderstood, and with no one taking their part. When their significant others are joining forces against her, this is painful to her. Visual imagery of children, ultrasound pictures, pregnant women, anything

relating to children or pregnancy may cause her pain, since it activates memories of her own loss. The loss of a baby, the loss of a pregnancy and the loss of a future as a mother of that particular child.

#### 4.4 Crying and sorrow - “Every day”

When listening to the experiences of women who suffer from abortion there are crying. Some had their abortion recently, some had it several years ago, regardless of the time passed since the abortion they may say they cry over it *every day* or that *not a day goes by* without them thinking about it. They cry *daily*, they feel like crap *every day*, they regret it *every day* and every *waking hour* they think about what life could have been.

“I was back to work the day after the abortion and my everyday life continued as usual, which it still does, but inside me it has been a chaos and so much crying when no one is watching”. (B.34)

“For two years I cried daily over the fact that I deselected my child, mostly secretly, it is not acceptable in our society to mourn a child you chose to get rid of”. (B.3)

“I have been feeling very bad and I have cried everywhere, but havent had the strength to care if I have cried outside among people or on the bus”. (B.31)

“I have for example burst into crying in grocery stores, stairwells, buses, in such a way that people stop to ask me how I am, and if I need them to call someone to come and pick me up or if I want to talk ”. (B.32)

She either cries alone, keeping up the happy face for some time just to break down when no one is watching, or she cries everywhere without the capacity to control it. The reason for crying is not expressed. One might cry from different feelings such as guilt, pain, sorrow, anger or lament. One of the women in this section expresses the reason to be “chaos”. One might be able to imagine what “chaos” stands for, possibly she experiences all different kinds of feelings, memories and thoughts in a tangible disorder and is wrestling these within. When they say they have cried daily for years, one needs to consider this to be true. It could certainly be an exaggerating way of saying that the sorrow was great, still, they are frequently using the same vocabulary which made it a dominant theme. Therefore it is at least reasonable to consider the possibility that they actually mean what they say. That they have cried over it every day for several years.

## 4.5 Hell and curse

These are words from the religious vocabulary, even though they are used in an everyday language without religious intentions they still carry religious implications. By exploring these words and how they are being used we might be able to unfold some aspects of the experience of women who suffer from abortion. Those who threaten women to have an abortion seem to use the word “hell” as a threat of how their life will turn out if they continue the pregnancy. Hell is a place of death and suffering.

“Finally I can not take it anymore. I start to realize that it will be a living hell if I do not do what he wants. I give up. Monday morning I started to take folic acid, on Tuesday I made an appointment for abortion”. (A.1)

“He said I would be a lousy mom and that he would make sure to turn my life and the child's life into a living hell. That me and my child's life would turn into a nightmare basically...//... I felt all alone in the pregnancy, that is why I finally gave up”. (B.23)

Threats like these are probably hurtful and truly frightening. She tries to put up a fight but surrenders to the threat. The choice to have an abortion is not really a choice, it is a woman losing a fight, or at least it is a woman giving up and giving into his threats. The time after the abortion is also described as hell, and one woman reflects upon this like this:

“Now I feel torn between two awful options. 1. I have an abortion and I will grieve, and the question is whether I will feel a grudge against him and probably not be able to continue to live with him???? Option 2. I keep the baby, “destroy” his life, (which also feels incredibly egoistic), become a single mom, which I really see as a huge failure, a child has the right to be desired. Whatever I decide, my life is hell”. (A.19)

It is possible to question and reflect on the plausibility in these options, but the way she presents them, she experiences herself to be torn between two awful options and having to choose either of them - is regarded as hell. Sometimes they know, or guess that they will experience the abortion and the time after, as hell. Sometimes the experience is an unexpected surprise to them. This woman knew she would feel bad from having an abortion but was taken by surprise when it turned out to be worse than she thought.

“I knew I would feel very bad for a period, but I could never imagine it would be such a hell for so long. Such a mixture of feeling of sorrow, panic, of being offended and angry. And so much time I

have spent on thinking about how it would have been if I had kept it, over and over again, even though these thoughts lead nowhere. I repeat swallowing that damn pill and curse myself sometimes for not just spitting it out and leaving”. (B.34)

“All I wish is to get pregnant again. My boyfriend wants to wait a little longer so I guess I will be living in this hell a little longer”. (B.48)

Hell is described as being trapped in thoughts and feelings, repeating the experience over and over again, without it leading anywhere. Women who suffer from abortion seem to experience their life after an abortion as hell. To use the word hell is to say something is awful, the opposite of pleasure and freedom. To curse something or someone is to invoke supernatural powers over something or someone in order to bring misfortune.

In the experience of women who suffer from abortion we see them cursing the pill.

“She asked me if I wanted to have the abortion now, and without thinking I said yes. I am going to the midwife stuffing myself with that damn pill. Come home and start feeling panic thinking what the hell have I done” (B.4)

“So much time spent on kneading what it would be like if I chose to keep, even though it changes nothing. Keep repeating swallowing that damn pill and I scold myself for not spitting it out and leaving.” (B.34)

These women seem more likely to view the pill as already cursed than wanting to evoke supernatural powers over it, or possibly they view the pill as evoking supernatural powers over themselves for taking it. They also curse themselves for swallowing it, and not just leaving the facilities. Even if they do not seriously, and rationally believe that the pill is cursed or cursing them, they are not speaking the language of rationality, they are speaking of an experience that has caused them regret, suffering and pain and these words are used since they feel appropriate in order to express their experience. They are not trying to explain in order for someone to understand, they are voicing their pain, and for that they find these words suitable. When taking into consideration the force, the regret, the despair, the pain and suffering, it is not beyond all doubt that they might actually mean what they say, when they say they experience life before or after the abortion as hell, and that the pill is damned. It is not beyond all doubt that they are not implying there to be supernatural aspects to it.

## Summary:

Hell and curse are strong words with religious implications, used by the women who suffer from abortion in order to voice their pain and express their experience. Hell is experienced as being trapped in the pain. They might experience life as hell on both sides of the abortion. They use the word *damned* when talking about the pill, and it might be them just using strong words in a lack of other words or they might be implying supernatural aspects of their experience.

## 4.6 Dissociation

Dissociation is a psychological condition where an individual to some degree tunes out mentally and distances oneself from emotions and situations. It might happen from conflicts, breakdowns, and stressful situations. It affects consciousness, memory, perception and motor skills.<sup>41</sup> The experience of shutting down in various ways is recurring in the experience of the women who suffer from abortion. They seem to reach a point of distress where something happens to them that is beyond their control.

“I had an abortion one month ago that I regret so much:( ...//...now I realize I want children and regret my decision obviously. I experienced tunnel vision and could only see one way out there and then.” (B.6)

“After I had the abortion I almost felt nothing at all, like I shut down completely and returned to an ordinary life immediately...//...until one day when everything collapsed”. (B24)

“I became cold and heartless. I took the first pill to end the pregnancy and I still did not feel any regret or sorrow. I was completely indifferent...//...when the fetus came out I burst into tears! I saw the little baby with my own eyes. It had fingers and toes, ears and nose. What had I done?” (B.44)

“Looking back, I can not understand why I did it, all I remember is that I was completely mute, could not get a word out, no tears, nothing, I was like a walking dead!” (B.27)

“I was sitting there with the nurse for so long, before I swallowed the pill in panic, which I now curse so much. I was like on another planet, completely unable to say stop! I wish I would have

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<sup>41</sup> “Doktor.se: Psykisk hälsa, dissociation,” DoktorSe Nordic AB, 7 Sep 2024  
<https://doktor.se/fakta-rad/psykisk-halsa/dissociation>



left but I think the hormones and mental weakness...//...made me incapable of acting, it sounds really strange why I just did not leave, now I hardly understand why I did not.” (B.33)

“I have accepted the abortion and decided to do it. I sound ice cold and horrible but I have lost all love in order to continue this pregnancy.” (A.1)

They explain this experience with various words. They say they have tunnel vision, that they shut down emotionally, they are being emotionally cold, indifferent, and like walking dead, or like being on another planet. Even so, they all describe something similar. They are not in contact with themselves during a period of time. They are not in contact with their surroundings, thoughts or emotions. They are distant from themselves and from time and place, but only for a period of time before they return to normal emotional connection. When they realize what has happened, they collapse, they burst into tears and they can not understand why they did not react in another way.

#### **4.7 Forgiveness and penalty**

Women who suffer from abortion are either searching for forgiveness, or they judge and punish themselves for the abortion. Forgiveness and judgment are two ways of dealing with guilt and regret. Women who suffer from abortion experience childlessness, regret, despair, pain and suffering to be a penalty for having an abortion. Childlessness and feeling bad is considered to be a reasonable penalty for the abortion. They say they deserve these things. In a legal sense, a penalty is a consequence of rules being disobeyed or broken. A jury or a judge decides the appropriate penalty for a specific action. In the experience of suffering from abortion the women are their own judge.

“It helped me to have a baby. It took a year of trying before she came, during that time I often thought it was my penalty. I rejected the baby who came to me unplanned then I should not have the one I wanted.” (B.3)

This woman had an abortion as a result of threats. She seems to view the child as an agent, either coming or not and she can either welcome it or reject it. In this quote we see how rejecting a baby is a rule being broken and childlessness is a consequence and a penalty. The woman is not in control of her fertility, the baby is. This following quote comes from a woman who had an abortion as a result of force.

“I really feel like I have killed my twins. I would have gone to jail for doing the same action a couple of months later...//...I am afraid to have children in the future, they might be unwell as a punishment for the abortion.” (B.49)

Aborting her twins is experienced as killing them. In a manner of “matter of fact” she says jail is the penalty for the same action if more time would have passed. In the first sentence she is reasoning by the logic of jurisprudence. Killing is illegal and the penalty for breaking that rule is prison. In the second sentence she seems to reason from individual ideas of life. Ideas that bear likeness to Karma, which is an eastern religious term of a natural law of cause and effect. She had an abortion that will possibly cause her the karma of having unwell children in the future. She might also imply that she is afraid to have children suffering from illness or disability and risk experiencing this as a punishment for the abortion in retrospect.

Forgiveness in a psychological sense is when someone who has been wronged goes through a process of changing feelings against the offender. Rather than desire vengeance, forgiveness makes a way for tolerating the offender, or even reconciliation.<sup>42</sup> There is only one woman in this material talking about God and his forgiveness, the rest seem to search for a way to forgive themselves or to gain forgiveness from the fetus.

“I was stirring in the ceiling asking God and the fetus for forgiveness” (B.14)

“I just wish I never had an abortion. How could I? How am I supposed to forgive myself? Who did I remove? I feel terrible...” (B.7)

“Forgive me, you little one, who came so quickly and suddenly. You were welcomed by my heart, it was my brain who made the decision. Forgive me.” (B.19)

These women speak about forgiving themselves and how impossible it seems. They also speak about asking the fetus for forgiveness. Women who suffer from abortion are recurrently asking questions related to the future. They want to know how they are supposed to go on in life, how to forgive, how to live with themselves, how to get over the abortion and how to feel better. It is worth noticing that the man is nearly completely absent in this experience of searching for

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<sup>42</sup> “Psychology Today: Forgiveness,” Sussex Publishers, 11 Sep 2024  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/forgiveness>

forgiveness, judgment and penalty. Only a handful of times do the women express anger or judgment over their significant others or healthcare.

## 4.8 Critique

In the voice of these women there is a recurring critique mainly against healthcare but also against culture and significant others. Some of the critique is loud and furious, some is subtle and careful. The critique is not neutral, or constructive, it resembles a cry out of pain. Women who experienced non violent persuasion still have criticism in their voice. This quote comes from a woman who had an abortion in order to save her relationship.

“I wish there was someone at the clinic who would grab me and ask if this was what I really wanted, instead of just wiping my tears and explaining that they understood that I thought it was tough”. (B.21)

This woman says she had the abortion against her will since her husband threatened to leave her if she would continue the pregnancy. Still she seems to experience that the decision was up to her in the end. She says she knows it was her decision and that the staff at the abortion clinic have no obligation to question it. Now she regrets her decision and hates herself for what she has done. This woman seems to wish for some resistance for someone to grab a hold of her. To grab someone is to use physical strength in order to make another person come to senses. It is a common scene from the movies, and I will illustrate it with this fictive example.

Example: Olivia has experienced a frightening situation and is reacting to it with overwhelming emotions, when Hector shows up, in a desperate need of important information. He grabs Olivia's upper arms and holds her firmly, perhaps even shaking her a bit, while looking her straight in the eye, asking for this very important information. This treatment makes Olivia come to her senses instantly and she is able to respond to the important question.

We do not know if the women in the material wish for this exact treatment, but it seems she wishes for something other than comfort and agrees. They want to be smacked awake, grabbed, and questioned. They seem to be wanting resistance. Dissociation is experienced as being disconnected to one's emotions, thoughts and surroundings. It is possible to link the wish for

being smacked awake to the experience of dissociation. The following quote comes from a woman who regret the abortion:

“I do not understand how I could not be questioned from the healthcare or how they were not asking any questions at all, what I thought about childbirth, fertility, etc, also with my age in mind, which might have made me think about how life with a baby might have been. I do not understand how healthcare can be so flippant on such a large decision. Of course I understand the right to abortion but for it to happen with no conversation or questions whatsoever. Of course I want to have a baby and now I realize what I have done.” (B.6)

When a woman applies for an abortion, the rule and routine of the staff is not to make sure she has made up her mind and not question her decision. She does not understand this rule and routine, but it is a rhetorical question implying that this rule and routine has not benefited her at all. It is worth noticing that she realized the implications of an abortion after it was done.

Women who claim responsibility for the decision tend to argue their criticism in a similar way. The following quotes all have in common the little word *but* which is between her agreement of the legal right or philosophical view and the criticism.

“Of course I understand the right to abortion *but (my italics)* for it to happen without any conversation or questions. Of course I wanted a child and now I realize what I have done.” (B.6)

“I think women should have the right to decide over their bodies, *but (my italics)* I also think we should have the right to know the consequences of a decision” (B.15)

“I understand it was up to me in the end, and they have no obligation at all to question my decision...it was my decision *but (my italics)* I hate myself for what I have done and I am terribly regretful.” (B.21)

There is agreement up to a certain point. They bring their criticism after acknowledging the general ideas. They are saying two things at the same time. There is agreement and disagreement with the political right to have an abortion and with the philosophical idea of a woman's right to decide over her body simultaneously. Some agree with the practice of never questioning a woman's decision to have an abortion and some are criticizing the same practice and want resistance.<sup>43</sup> By using the word *but*, they say that they have experienced something that makes

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<sup>43</sup>“1177: Abortlagen,” Inera, 7 Sep, 2024  
<https://www.1177.se/sa-fungerar-varden/lagar-och-bestammelser/lagar-i-varden/abortlagen/>

them question the legal, practical and philosophical way abortion is provided. The following quote comes from a woman who was pressured to have an abortion but chose to continue the pregnancy, she is responding to another woman who had an abortion as a result of pressure:

“I am sorry for what you had to go through, but I am glad that you and other brave women bring this up, many abortions are a result of pressure from the guys, you do not read about that when you read about abortion statistics. I think it is a lack of empathy to pressure your female partner to have an abortion just because you do not want to take responsibility for the consequences of sex.”  
(C.4)

Their shared experience of violence and pressure in relation to pregnancy and abortion is unnoticed by scientists and statistics. She criticizes men who avoid the adequate responsibility for their reproductive ability. This following quote comes from a woman who says she had the abortion because she has been so violated that all she could do was to obey her boyfriend. She did not dare to initiate a conversation about her own wish to continue the pregnancy:

“I hoped they would bring it up so I could explain. I never dared to tell anyone (except to my guy) that I did not want to do it. Unfortunately no one did and no one at the Mvc (mothers clinic) or the abortion clinic asked. Not until after the abortion was I offered to talk to a psychologist. Then the damage was already done so I declined”. (B.40)

This woman was most probably in an abusive relationship. She is hoping for someone to question her, but they go with the conventional practice and do not question her decision to have an abortion, and the experience has done her damage. This following quote comes from a woman who says she blames the healthcare:

“They put all focus on removing...despite my tears and the fact that I said I did not want, or could not do what I now have done, despite the fact that I totally crashed saying I could not do this to the little life. NO ONE told me I was not ready to end it...Before the plus I was the happiest in the world, how could I let myself be fooled that the best thing was to have an abortion?! My inner and my heart was not being heard and I blame a lot of it on the healthcare. They are so short-staffed that they only do what they have to and they do not give a damn about you as a patient, it is like rolling in, rolling out. There is no time to stop and see the human being in it all, you are like a paper someone just stacks in a pile and then takes the next one” (B.33)

This woman had the abortion because she felt she needed to think about other people close to her. When she was having the abortion she told the nurses she did not want to do it, that she

could not do this to the little life, she was crying a lot and was sitting with the pill in front of her for a long time. Her critique has to do with the experience of not being seen and her heart was not being heard. She was crying, expressing her own resistance and she was hesitating. She wonders why no one told her she was not ready to have an abortion and she blames the healthcare. This expression might indicate that she thinks they have a responsibility for her pain and suffering, and that they have not been living up to it. The experience of not being seen is expressed by more women in this material.

“I will contact the therapist where we made the decision, I will say how wrong it was to end the pregnancy. I regret contacting the therapist of the abortion clinic at the hospital... I should have turned to someone else. It feels like the abortion clinic works like an assembly line, that all they think of is to make me comfortable and safe to have an abortion...rocking you into a fake trust. I feel like I was never allowed to think and reason with my heart...we were supposed to think rationally and forget our emotions.” (B.50)

This woman expresses similar things. The assembly line is a similar metaphor as papers being stacked on a pile, indicating an experience of being one of many, not being seen or heard. This woman also experiences that her heart was not allowed to take place in the decision. She says that the abortion clinic and the healthcare were rocking her into a fake belief of the abortion being comfortable and safe, which was not true to her experience. Their criticism regards healthcare before the abortion and after the abortion

This following quote comes from a woman who had an abortion as a result of force, she says it was traumatic and made her suicidal. She needs help to handle the aftermath of the abortion but feels diminished.

“Please tell me what to do? Going to public psychiatry does not help since they do not take this problem seriously and turning to the private psychiatry is too expensive” (B.23)

She had the abortion a year before writing this, as a result of threats. She says her boyfriend brainwashed her, insulted her and threatened to make her and her child's life into a nightmare. Now she seems desperate for help, and her critique is that the public healthcare does not take her problem seriously. Her problem is that she experienced the abortion as traumatic and needs help in order to go on in life. Another woman says like this:

“The hardest feelings came a long time after. Now I am somehow too much of a coward to ask for help. Tried to get help at my local health center one year ago. Unfortunately the therapy turned into dealing with other things. It was too hard to talk about it and I was too ashamed”. (B.34)

She was ashamed for not getting over her abortion after such a long time, and to hide the shame she let the therapy concern other things. This experience is making her feel stuck, and probably misunderstood and lonely. There are also recurring stories of how they feel uninformed about the reality of the abortion.

“A fetus, our baby, very little, but still our baby, hanging dead between my legs. “You will do the abortion at home”, well, thank you. I understand it is saving resources, and it is our choice, but to censor this into “clumps”, and “bleeding a little” was an understatement. Why did no one tell me about the risk of seeing a fetus? I tried to push it out, but it did not help. It was out, but seemed to be hanging in it's tiny umbilical-cord? I don't know. I felt like a murderer feeling so sorry for the little one who was going to face it's destiny in a toilet. “It's natural” said the midwife about the effects of the pills, but she forgot to say inhumane...//...if I would have known about that risk I could have said “I can not risk that, I could not mentally cope with that. I will keep the baby and be more responsible with contraceptives in the future.” (B.19)

The experience of seeing the fetus was described as inhumane, and the criticism is aimed towards the healthcare system. The critique against healthcare is related to being misinformed about the risk of seeing a fetus and about the risk of feeling as bad as they do after the abortion. There is a wish to be seen, heard, offered resistance and for their experience of the abortion to be taken seriously. They do not understand why they were not more questioned about the decision or why the healthcare seems to not bother when she says she doesn't want to have the abortion or about her sorrow. Some criticize the healthcare system for the incapability to offer any support in continuing the pregnancy. The lack of support made them feel lonely and helpless and abortion seemed like the only way out.

“No one offered any support if I was to continue the pregnancy. I felt so lonely” (B.53)

The lack of support to continue the pregnancy is also criticism against their own social network:

“It would have been easier if I had the support of my close ones, if they would have tried to understand my situation instead of expressing their own views. In the end I am the one living with the decision for the rest of my life”. (B.21)

Close ones, family, friends, partners, are criticized for their lack of capacity to endure with her in the suffering. They seem to be able to be compassionate for a while, but not for as long as she needs to. There is a time when her close ones think that the suffering is enough.

“I think about it every day and I cry when I am alone...//...my close ones think I am fine now, since I laugh, smile, talk and behave. But I am not. I still think about suicide from time to time...” (B.32)

“My biggest fear before the abortion was that I would be simulating pregnancy and never really be happy, and now I am experiencing all that. Everyone said that time would ease the pain. I should have listened to my gut.” (B.43)

They complain about their close ones lack of understanding, support, endurance, and their diminishing of the fetus and her experience. Some women criticize the culture. This quote comes from a woman who had medical abortion after being pregnant with a partner who argued for abortion. Her choice was described as her own, but influenced by her partner's reluctance.

“I had a friend who had a medical abortion and woke up at the clinic where several girls had just had a medical abortion. And everyone woke up as they were crying, because the body reacted that way. Why do we not talk about this?” (B.15)

This criticism targets culture for not acknowledging the consequences of abortion. Several women are experiencing the same thing, crying from a bodily reaction. The question is possibly expecting an answer. Why do we not talk about this? - Is there a reasonable reason for the silence? Most likely there is criticism in the question. Why do we not talk about this? - We should be talking about this, it is not fair to the women to keep quiet about this. Culture is mainly criticized by its diminishing attitudes toward the fetus and a woman's lack of coping with the abortion. The following quote comes from a woman who had an abortion against her own will, she was harassed and threatened to have an abortion.

“It is not accepted in our society to mourn a baby you chose to abort...//...When you are being told it is your decision, it becomes your own fault. You punish yourself greatly.” (B.3)

This woman says she wants to mourn her baby, but it is hard since the culture says abortion is a woman's choice, it is a female right to decide whether to terminate or continue the pregnancy, but



women who suffer from abortion relate their experience to force rather than freedom and they have the abortion against their own will in order to please others.

### **Summary:**

Women who suffer from abortion criticize the system of healthcare for not noticing the force and the pressure and for not offering resistance when she is possibly experiencing dissociation. The criticism regards being misinformed about the risk of seeing the fetus, and the aftermath of abortion. They criticize their significant others for the lack of support, lack of endurance in her suffering and for diminishing the fetus and her experience of abortion. The culture is mainly criticized for diminishing anything in her experience.

### **4.9 The body**

To become pregnant and to have an abortion is a bodily matter. It is happening to the body and the body reacts in various ways. When the women who suffer from abortion talk about their experience they are talking about their body and how its reactions affect them. They are also talking about the fetus's body and how seeing it has affected them. This woman is reacting strongly to abortion. She had the abortion because she knew it would not be approved by her family. Her boyfriend was supportive in continuing the pregnancy but she chose abortion because she thought her family would freeze her out or at least be commenting negatively about it. She is experiencing regret and losing the will to live. She is inconsolable.

“I had the abortion last week and I was feeling okay, but now my body is reacting differently. My body feels empty and I am experiencing the abortion as a huge mistake! I can not understand what I have done! The pregnancy was unplanned and the abortion was my choice, but why am I starting to regret it? The fetus feels more alive now after the abortion and I dream of babies all the time”.

(B10)

She is describing her body as the starting place of regret. Her body signals emptiness which generates regret, the loss of will to live, panic anxiety and disturbing dreams. Her mind might be doing okay from the abortion but something is happening to her body that she was not prepared for and the reaction of her body makes the mind question her action.

“It is like my body is constantly asking me “why did you abort the pregnancy? You wanted the baby? What happened?” It is like a shock.” (B.34 )

“It is a trauma that still affects me, everytime I am about to have my period I also have a pregnancy psychosis. My body simulates a pregnancy, my belly swells and I am eating too much. It is like I'm subconsciously hoping to be pregnant.” (B.16)

“I love him with all my heart, but I was so sad when he “forced” me to have an abortion instead of trying to talk about it..I felt it did not matter if it was My body, the most important thing was him getting his will.” (B.9)

“I am trying to do what makes me feel better, working as much as I can. But there is always this little memory popping up even for a second, and all I want is to die. Every little bowel movement makes me nervous.” (B.43)

Their body is communicating in a way they did not expect. The body is questioning them and reminding them about the abortion. They are concerned about their own body, how it is reacting after the abortion but it is a private experience that is unnoticed by her significant others. Sometimes the women speak about another body than her own, the body of the fetus. This woman had an abortion against her will in order to save her relationship, she was 9 weeks pregnant, the fetus is around two cm long and has developed facial features. The web skin between fingers and toes has disappeared.<sup>44</sup>

“Even if I had made up my mind about the abortion, it was very hard and terribly painful. After the abortion I saw an embryo approximately 3 cm long in the bottom of the toilet. I saw the outlines of five fingers and five toes. When I saw the embryo in the toilet, my first instinct was to get it up and save it.” (B.11)

This woman is reacting by what might be her maternal instinct, she sees the embryo and wants to save it from the toilet. She says she had made up her mind about the abortion, even though her decision had been impacted by significant others. If the woman sees the fetus she tends to express this experience by describing body parts. The following woman also had abortion in week 9.

“I look down between my legs, I look closely and there I see a little head and two small ears right by my lower abdomen...//...to know that this little body is now in the sewer is completely unbearable to me.” (B.19)

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<sup>44</sup>1177: Fosterutveckling,” Inera, 7 Sep, 2024  
<https://www.1177.se/sa-fungerar-varden/lagar-och-bestammelser/lagar-i-varden/abortlagen/>

This little body is remembered by its head and ears. And the memory of it being in the sewer is unbearable to her. The following quote comes from a woman who had an abortion in week 16, and the body of the fetus is 12 cm long, weighing 100 g.<sup>45</sup>

“I had a late abortion done in week 16, but no one explained to me what that meant. Suddenly I felt warmth between my legs. I thought I was bleeding but it was my water that broke after they had pinched the membrane. A moment later I gave birth to the baby in the toilet. It was a baby with ten fingers and ten toes. I had to take care of it myself before the nurse came. It was terribly traumatic and has left me deeply wounded.” (B.17)

It is possible that her description of the baby's fingers and toes are only literal. But to say the baby has ten fingers and ten toes is also another way of saying that the baby was healthy and without abnormalities. She had to handle the healthy body without abnormalities until the nurse came and this experience has left her deeply wounded since she experienced it as traumatic. The following quote comes from a woman who had an abortion as a result of non violent persuasion from her partner. The abortion was done in week 10, which means the body of the fetus is 12 cm long and weighing four grams, its eyes, nose and ears are visibly clear.<sup>46</sup> She remembers the fetus by its body parts.

“I got the pill on Monday and did the abortion yesterday, alone, at home. Yes there was some physical pain, nausea and so on. But the real shock was when the fetus came out in my underwear and when I pulled them down and saw it laying there, eyes developed, fingers and toes laying on its side sleeping. I was just sitting there on the bathroom floor for an hour, crying and watching it.” (B.51)

This woman describes the fetus by its eyes, fingers and toes. The shock of seeing this, the shock of meeting with another body made her sit for an hour, crying and watching it. The following quote comes from a woman who had a late abortion in week 18, at that time the fetus is 20 cm long weighing 170-220 g, it is gathering fat and you can see lines of its fingerprints.<sup>47</sup> The woman describes her meeting with the baby like this:

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<sup>45</sup> “1177: Fosterutveckling.”

<sup>46</sup> “1177: Fosterutveckling.”

<sup>47</sup> “1177: Fosterutveckling.”

“When the baby was born, they asked me if I wanted to see it but after hearing the sound of it coming out in the tin bowl and the pain, I understood that it was something more than a clump of jelly, and I said I did not want to see it, I actually regret that today.” (B.25)

This woman is not describing any body parts, because she did not see it. But the sound of something more than a clump of jelly is her experience. It is worth noticing that she is regretting the opportunity to see the baby. One might think that she is better off not seeing it, but if this could have been a meeting between two bodies, she might experience missing out on that meeting.

### **Summary:**

The women of this material speak of their own body as the place where the regret starts. It signals emptiness, it is communicating to her, questioning her, reminding her of the pregnancy and the abortion. They also speak about the body of the fetus if they saw it coming out of her. The fetus is described by its body parts. When they talk about this experience, it resembles a first meeting, a meeting between two bodies. They describe this meeting as traumatic, terrible, and shocking, as a moment when they have a change of mind, or the moment when they start regretting the abortion. They speak about bodies in a way that materia matters.

### **4.10 Death**

Explicit words like *death*, *dying*, *killing*, *murderer* and *suicide* are prominent in these texts alongside words implying death such as *not alive*, *was living*, *funeral* and *lost the will to live*. In 45 out of 75 texts there is something explicitly or implicitly relating to death. John Wyatt claims in his book *Dying Well*, that death is a mysterious interruption of existence, that we were not intended to die, we were made to live forever. Human longing for eternity, stability, freedom from decay reflects our created nature and that death is an outrage of the original creation.<sup>48</sup> Death is sometimes defeating life and viability, it demands us to say farewell to what we hold dear to us. It overthrows us and defeats us. Death is sometimes a deliverance, a passover from a broken world to eternal life with God. In this section we will pay attention to the death relating to herself or the fetus, since death related to threats has been handled in the section about force.

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<sup>48</sup> John Wyatt, *Dying Well* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 11

“The anxiety will not subside...I am so regretful I would want to die myself! Like my baby had to do because of me...” (B.1)

“Bloodbath and extreme pain. Out came the most beautiful little boy I have seen. I wanted to die. I can not believe how I was not thinking straight.” (B.53)

“I am lying at home, bleeding. Can not write about what is happening and how I feel because I feel so damn bad. But I can say that this is the biggest mistake of my life. I even wish I will bleed to death and be cremated along with the little one.” (B.52)

They want to die as a result of regret and despair. The first quote is from a woman who chose abortion from what seems to have been her decision after hours of debating and crying with her boyfriend. She does not mention pressure or threat, but nor complete freedom. The second quote comes from a woman who chose abortion from what seems to have been complicated physical matters and the feeling of being alone. At the hospital she did not want to take the pill, but all her solutions to their problems were met by counter arguments from her husband. The third quote comes from a very short text that leaves a lot to the unknown. Still, they use the same words, they want to die, or they wish to die.

The following quotes come from women who express their wish to die somewhat more explicitly.

“I still think about suicide from time to time, having thoughts like it does not matter if I am hit by a car or murdered. It would only be good for then I will be free from everything...Simply feel like shit, and the only thing I want is to have my baby back, which of course is not going to happen.” (B.32)

“Five days ago I had my abortion. When I am in the bathtub I think about drowning myself. I bought a rope to hang myself...” (B.38)

“I am thinking of suicide, repeating the scenario of what happened during the abortion, I can not stop. It is like a film playing in my head over and over again.” (B.47)

Speaking of suicide is to take ones death wish to another level. When life gives you pain, death seems like an ending to the pain. Most of them say they are thinking of suicide, one of them say she has taken action according to those thoughts and bought a rope to hang herself. When they say they wish to die or that they think about suicide it is more likely they had an abortion not too

long ago. Days, weeks or a couple of months. Only a few had the abortion long ago, the longest is four and a half years from the time of writing. Some of the women who speak about suicide seem to have a lot going on in their lives. There might be other losses or already existing mental unwellness and depression that coexists with the experience of the abortion. In this forum and in these texts, the women still seem to relate the abortion as their primary cause of their wish to die, or suicidal thoughts. When they use the word *kill*, it is in relation to the fetus. They say they *can not kill* or, they *have killed*.

“I am only 18 but I can not imagine killing my baby in the belly when I am very well aware of what it will become.” (A.6)

“When I woke up from the anesthesia I was in shock. I thought to myself - have I killed a life now? This gave me extreme anxiety. Today my child would have been ten years old.” (B.16)

The first woman is still pregnant when writing and she visions the abortion as killing her baby in the belly. The second woman had a surgical abortion and woke up with this question of killing a life.

“I had seriously taken the life of a little child, my child!...//...I feel grief, anxiety, guilt. To me it is like I killed my baby on purpose.” (B.44)

“I am so angry with myself for putting them to death...//...I have for real killed my two children, had I waited just a few more months I would have gone to jail for doing it.” (B.49)

These women have a similar way of expressing it. They say the same thing in two different ways. They say it with emphasis, it is like they are making a statement and they want the reader to make no mistake about it - this is her reality, she killed her child/children. We hear the woman in the first quote, claiming the experience as to own it. She says “*to me* it is like I killed my baby on purpose”. Both of them are expressing it like it is a matter of fact leaving no room for debate. The women who suffer from abortion also use the word *murderer* as a label to themselves.

“I felt like a murderer and felt so sorry for the little one who were going to face its destiny in a toilet...//... something died inside of me the moment she flushed the toilet” (B.19)

“I understand she wanted the best for me, but to make me a murderer is not the smartest, because that's how I feel thinking of the baby” (B.25)

They tend to say they *feel like a murderer*. These quotes have less emphasis than those above, and are not as much a statement. There is a softness to it even though they use a heavily loaded word. They softly claim the right to say this because they are talking about themselves. This following quote comes from a woman who was pregnant after being brutally raped and almost killed, but who decided to continue the pregnancy.

“I wondered how it could ever be feministic to encourage a woman to kill her own child. That is how I felt. Everyone was talking about ending a pregnancy - but they were encouraging me to kill my unborn child who I loved...” (C.1)

Ending her pregnancy was synonymous to killing her unborn child. When staff of healthcare talked about ending the pregnancy she experienced it as an encouragement to kill the child she loved.

### **Summary:**

Women who suffer from abortion tend to talk about death when expressing their experience. They speak about their own death like it would be better than living in pain. Life is so painful, and the desperation is too great. In this experience they think about taking their own life, or longing for death. When they are still pregnant and think about abortion they speak about killing the fetus. When they have had an abortion they speak about the death of their fetus, and baby, and they grieve. Regardless to what extent she has been pressured or forced to have an abortion, regardless what pregnancy week she was in or what type of abortion method was being used, when they speak about the death of their fetus they refer to themselves as killers and murderers.

#### **4.1.1 Exploring the voice of women suffering from abortion**

In order to listen carefully to the voice of the women who suffer from abortion is to pay special attention to details. Is there anything in their experience that they are whispering rather than saying out loud? What are they not saying? What lies beneath certain statements? Paying attention to their actions, to their practice and what they are doing. In this section we are paying some attention to the operant voice. This is done by asking different questions or bringing themes to the text serving as lenses through which one might see things that are not obvious otherwise.

### 4.1.2 Exploring the questions

In order to explore the experience of the women I searched for what type of questions they were asking. When exploring the questions by women who had an abortion the most frequently asked questions are categorized in these:

“What the hell have I done?”

“How could I do it?”

“How am I supposed to go on in life?”

These questions are being asked in forums, on blogs and in paper articles. The first two questions I interpret as rhetorical questions. The woman is not really expecting an answer to the question, it is more a statement of guilt or regret. The third category is more of a real question, where the woman is really looking for ways to handle the experience. Women who are pregnant when writing tend to ask these questions:

“What am I supposed to do?”

“How am I supposed to go through with it (*the abortion*)?”

“Is there anyone else who has experienced the same?”

They end up in different forums where they bring their questions to whoever might listen and answer. They open up to each other and share their stories, and experiences trying to give each other answers to their questions.

### 4.1.3 Exploring the sacred

One way to understand sacredness is that it requires a larger portion of reverence and respect. Things that are sacred are to be handled carefully and with the intention and attitude of worship.<sup>49</sup> Attending to the voice of women suffering from abortion, there is something reverent about the way they speak about the names of their fetuses. They might have been thinking of names or decided on a name before the abortion or they decided to name the fetus after the abortion.

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<sup>49</sup> “AH Dictionary: *Sacred*.”



“I even had a name for the baby, a favorite name I would never even consider using for another child, since this child already exists, although only in my memory”. (B.3)

“I was told it was a girl, I gave her the name Ruth, which is my middle name. Jesus said she is being held by him. She is a ray of light, Ruth.” (B.14)

“I have given them names and saved the pictures from the ultrasound. Made a corner of remembrance and want them to be part of my life.” (B.49)

To have a name is an identity marker and a human right.<sup>50</sup> A name carries cultural and familial values. The names seem to matter in a reverent way, they speak of it with tenderness and intimacy. In the first quote we hear the woman separating the name to that particular baby. The name belongs to someone and even if no one else knows about it, she would never use that name for another child. They speak of the fetus as someone rather than something, and they speak with tenderness, intimacy and reverence, of a connection between the fetus and their heart.

“I saw you on the screen. Could not help but smile. Ultrasound. The little flashing lamp on the screen was your heart. But I would not go from ultrasound to a time of expectation. I was going to have an abortion. I had to resist all thought that you were someone, becoming my child. But I could not resist them, I put them away, hid them in a temporary hideaway in my heart”. (B.19)

“I already have children, and I love them above anything in the world! But I will always remember I have one more child and I want to keep that little life deep down in the bottom of my heart for the rest of my life!” (B.33)

What is sacred is treated with respect and reverence and in order to explore the sacred one can pay attention to what she describes as violated and disrespected.

“My husband is the world's kindest, there are other circumstances too that make you feel more or less forced to think about other people around you. In my case I was not forced by my husband, but I wish I would have thought about what's best for me in the end....because life did not get better now when I am in this grief. ” (B.33)

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<sup>50</sup> “Unicef: Barnkonventionen,” UNICEF Sverige, 6 Aug, 2024 <https://unicef.se/barnkonventionen/las-texten>

If you listen carefully to what she says you see that she felt forced to think about other people around her, and neglect her own preferences. She wishes she would have cared about herself, now she is carrying the weight of the sorrow and the grief. She continues like this:

“...how in the world could I let myself be fooled that it was best to terminate this pregnancy?! My inner and my heart was not heard and for that I blame the healthcare. They are so short-staffed they only do what they have to and they don't give a damn about you as a patient, it is like rolling in, rolling out.” (B.33)

This woman mourns the little life, her heart was not being heard, and as a result of that she describes the experience as being fooled. If anything is violated and disrespected it ought to be the fetus, her heart and the knowledge or truth. The heart seems to own some kind of resistance against foolishness. The women speak about their heart in a way that leads you to think that she wished she, and others would have respected her heart more, and when not doing so - it has been violated.

“All the time I really felt I did not want to do it. The brain found its logic but the heart was screaming no and now it feels like its been scattered into thousand pieces” (B.5)

“I was thinking about my family more than my heart, it tears me apart” (B.10)

“You were welcomed with all my heart, it was my brain that made the decision. Forgive me.”

“It feels like I was never given the opportunity to think with my heart... We were supposed to think rationally and forget our feelings.” (B.50)

above, we see the tension between her heart and brain expressed in individual ways. Heart and brain in conflict, abortion being a rational decision and the heart being hurt. We need to remember that this is the voice of women who say they did not want to have an abortion but they had it anyway, often as a result of force to some degree. The brain finds logical arguments for the abortion, and it is not hard to imagine it to be a necessity in order for her to go through with it. They go with the logic of the brain and have the abortion against their will and afterwards the heart is either scattered into thousand pieces or tearing her apart. The heart has not been given respect or reverence and now it is the centre of her pain.

The women also say they wish they knew more and had more information of how bad they could feel after having an abortion or about the risk of seeing a fetus. These following quotes address women who speak about the truth being somewhat violated.

“I write this in order for women to know. I will tell everyone about this, when the shame subsides, if it subsides. Because I believe that men would never have to suffer through this. Us women are supposed to be so strong and handle anything. Sitting on a toilet bleeding out a baby, just like that. All this I inflicted on myself, it is my fault. I do not feel worthy of any comfort on this earth. But I do feel that all women are worthy of knowing what an abortion really is like for real. And women are worthy of making a decision based on that knowledge. We are being so deluded.” (B.19)

“I asked my mother if the baby had a heart and she said - no it does not. Not in that week (*week 18*) it is more like a clump of jelly, not even a fetus yet...//... I often think about what happened, even though it has been 18 years since, I still carry it with me. Why did my mother not tell me the truth (*about the size and anatomy of the fetus. My italics.*) and why didn't the doctor tell me how it really was” (B.25)

“The only thing I can do now is to warn those who are about to make the same choice. I would inform them about the aftermath... give them the information I never got...”(B.50)

The experience of abortion was not what they thought it would be. The experience seems to be more hurtful than they could imagine, and more traumatic than what was mediated from the healthcare. If anything is sacred here it might be the knowledge and truth about the aftermath.

### **Summary:**

Women who suffer from abortion speak with respect and reverence about their hearts, the knowledge and truth about the aftermath of abortion and about the fetus. The heart seems to own the truth and the memory of the fetus. The fetus is given a name and a special place in her heart. When the sacred is being violated the heart is broken and shattered, the truth and knowledge is twisted or withheld from her, and the fetus's body is dead, or her memory of it is being diminished. Women who suffer from abortion seem to hold the baby, their heart and the truth somewhat sacred.

#### 4.1.4 Exploring freedom and oppression

Since force, and critique are themes in the voice of women suffering from abortion, it requires an exploration of freedom and oppression. Freedom is defined as the condition of being free of restraints, especially the ability to act without control or interference by another or by circumstance.<sup>51</sup> Significant others are trying to control and interfere with her decision, and make her have an abortion according to their will, we may call it relational interference or circumstances. Economical, social and practical aspects are also interfering with her freedom. They describe this as lack of support:

“I wanted to keep it, but since I did not get any support in that decision, I did not dare keep it and the risk of standing there alone.” (B.3)

“I did not have the support from the father of the child, or my parents. Since I did not have any support from anyone I gave in and had an abortion. They were on my side as long as I chose what they wanted.” (B.20)

They assess their support economically, emotionally and practically. They need assurance that someone will have their back. When she finds out she has no, or little support, significant others turning away from her, this generates fear of being alone. The lack of freedom equals, slavery, captivity or oppression.

There is one more aspect of this, which is the involvement of the political system and how it regulates the healthcare system. This following quote comes from a woman who was pregnant after sexual intercourse without contraceptives. She had informed her partner that she did not use any contraceptives and he still chose to have unprotected sexual intercourse. They had both been positive about an eventual pregnancy, but when it was a fact, he changed his mind.

“All Monday we are at war. I am convinced that I will keep the baby. He is threatening with suicide, saying that I will destroy his life if, his child's life, his new relationship. Finally he involves his father who is so cross with me. All day I am being harassed, telling me how stupid and selfish I am.../,...The fact that he and his father (and his new girlfriend) have joined forces against me has made me do it (*call for an abortion appointment, my italics*). I basically feel physiologically raped”. (A.1)

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<sup>51</sup> “AH Dictionary: Freedom”

This woman is still pregnant when writing. If we assume that she ends up at the abortion clinic without being questioned or offered any alternative like so many of the other women explain, then the question must be whether the system is taking part of what she is experiencing as a psychological rape? When women experience the abortion as forced upon them, something they do in order to please others, something they do against their own will, we need to be able to talk about responsibility. In what way is the politics, the healthcare and the care system responsible for making it possible for partners, husbands, boyfriends and families to force women to have an abortion? If there are routines to discover violence at the abortion clinic, then they seem not to always be practiced. For healthcare not to question a woman's decision is the conventional practice.<sup>52</sup> If there is a standard routine to discover force, and to offer the woman an alternative, or to help her continue the pregnancy according to her will, it is invisible in the voice of women who suffer from abortion.

“I have been forced to have two abortions by my ex boyfriend and I feel terribly bad about this even though it has been two years. I wanted to keep, and I have always been against abortion. He said he would hunt me for the rest of my life and kill me if I kept it.” (B.39)

From this story it is unknown to us whether the healthcare provider knew she was being forced and threatened to be killed and that she did not want to have these abortions. Maybe they knew, maybe they did not. Anyway they provided two abortions to a woman who was against abortion and did not want to do it, but did it because she was forced and threatened to be killed. Another woman explains it like this:

“I have been so violated and offended that all I could do was to obey the guy. I do not know why. I had nothing to lose and could easily have cared for the baby myself. I was stuck. People close to me, family, should have known I was against abortion and never would have chosen to have one. I was hoping for someone to bring it up with me so I could explain, but no one did...//...only afterwards was I offered to talk to a psychologist, but then the damage was already done and I declined.” (B.40)

These women who say they want to continue the pregnancy, that have an abortion against their own will in order to please others or escape violence, do not experience freedom, nor negative nor positive freedom, therefore we need to say they have experienced oppression.

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<sup>52</sup> There are routines saying they need to make sure she has made up her mind, but I have not been able to find any routine concerning violence and force. Read more about this further down.

## 4.2 Theological reflection and analysis

This is the time and place to open up the conversation with the Formal and Normative voices and let them engage in dialogue with the voice of the women suffering from abortion. Official Church teachings, informative texts collected from websites of various denominations, the voice of theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas, exegetical scholars such as Walter Bruggemann, Christian ethicists such as Morten Magelssen, philosophers such as Simone Weil, sociologists such as Eva Illouz, psychologists such as Ole Jacob Madsen, and more. There will be official writings relating to healthcare and legal documents. What follows are the aspects of the dialogue where there were moments of disclosure. Insights that are gained when a researcher is sitting with all these voices in open, listening conversation. Disclosure happens somewhere in the place between practice and theology, in the dynamic of divine revelation. The following accounts are given since they were recognised as disclosures.

### 4.2.1 Theological reflection upon the sacred

Searching for religion in everyday life, Nancy Ammerman works with a material consisting of people telling stories of their lives. Religion is embedded in a way that reshapes previous understanding and spirituality redefined when people are being asked to tell the story of their lives rather than answering questions. She states that in the stories of everyday life there are layers of modest spirituality and sacredness.

“The spirituality we are listening for is neither a quest for a sacred center that will orient all of life...//...nor a supernatural force that will provide assistance or salvation...//...It is more modest, but nonetheless profound recognition that the world is not wholly a story that can be empirically told. There is another layer of consciousness that can weave, more or less pervasively, in and out of ordinary events.”<sup>53</sup>

If the women would find the fetus, their hearts or the truth somewhat sacred, why don't they just say so? One way to understand this is by inviting cultural anthropologist Mikael Kurkiala, who claims sacred things relate to fullness and continuum and our language is building upon division which makes it incapable of fully capturing the holy.

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<sup>53</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Sacred Stories Spiritual Tribes - Finding Religion in Everyday Life*, (Oxfordpress, 2014), 9

“...in the unexpected meeting with the mystery-in a smiling infant, a diving sea swallow, an unexpected but palatable touch of another person- a fringe of the eternity that rests under the coincidental is opened, of the unity that lies beneath disruption, the experience that language is incapable of capturing”.

In our consumerist culture he claims the sacred is replaced by the logic of the market and this has made our souls go into exile.<sup>54</sup> According to Ammerman there are spiritual and sacred aspects of everyday life, and according to Kurkiala there is a built-in difficulty to capture things that transcends reality. Richness, depth and diversity of life is limited. Existential questions of life, death, good, evil, sexuality and reproduction have no room in the company of consumerism and technology and every individual is bound to find the answers on their own.<sup>55</sup> Is this true, in the experience of women who suffer from abortion, that the sacred language is replaced by the logic of consumerism and that they are bound to find answers to existential questions on their own?

“Everyone has different opinions of when one is ready and what necessary conditions one must attain in order to be able to care for a child. People who were close to me had a different view of that, so I was suddenly insecure.” (B.10)

“I had it done, even though I did not want to! He was technically right, maybe it was not the right time since I was not working full time and we were looking to buy a house and things like that. I followed his will instead of my heart” (B.38)

There is logic of the market, economy, rationality and calculation in some texts of the material and it mainly belongs to her significant others. She is affected by this logic, the logic is questioning the heart, and the sacred and her heart is pushed or forced aside. Women who write on different forums tend to ask existential questions relating to reproduction. Women who have been interviewed by a journalist and published in a newspaper article tend to offer guidance and advice in existential matters, sexuality and reproduction. The pregnant women, and the women who have had an abortion go on different forums in hope for answers to existential questions. Perhaps they are not entirely on their own, they are in a way together in this, helping each other, relating to each other, but they are all using technology in order to relate to each other, and they are anonymous on the forum so in that matter they are alone. Kurkiala argues that digital

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<sup>54</sup> Mikael Kurkiala, *När själen går i exil- Modernitet, teknologi och det heliga* (Verbum, 2019), 99

<sup>55</sup> Kurkiala, *När själen går i exil*, 208

technology enables us to connect with each other, to communicate and to interact with each other has become a substitute for God, in that way that it transcends reality and brings us meaning and a sense of belonging. Kurkiala makes a point out of language in itself is building upon division when it is trying to say something about the holy.

“...in the unexpected meeting with the mystery-in a smiling infant, a diving sea swallow, an unexpected but palatable touch of another person- a fringe of the eternity that rests under the coincidental is opened, of the unity that lies beneath disruption, the experience that language is incapable of capturing”<sup>56</sup>.

According to Kurkiala, church is the forum that indwells a power to bring back the soul from exile. This power sits in its rites, myths and narratives, in congregations, church-rooms and its symbols that all point to the sacred and offers the soul a resting place that it is very much in need of in order to be able to sustain in modernity.<sup>57</sup> According to the voice of the women suffering from abortion they hold the heart, the truth and the fetus sacred.

#### **4.2.2 Theological reflection upon the heart**

The heart is the prime physical organ and according to Christian thinking, the centre of moral activity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

“The heart is our hidden core, incomprehensible to our senses or to other people. Only the Spirit of God can fathom and know it. The heart is the deepest foundation of psychic life, where humans make their decisions. It is the place of the truth, where we choose between life and death.”<sup>58</sup>

Only the Spirit of God can fathom and know the human heart, the heart is in some mythical way connected to its creator. This is resonating with the voice of the women and how they speak of the heart - except they do not speak of the Spirit of God. The women hold their heart, the truth and the fetus sacred. There is a tension here between the katekes and the voice of the women and between possessing the truth or lacking the truth. According to the katekes the heart is the place of the truth and from it we choose between life and death, implying that the heart always knows the truth. The women suffering from abortion say they wish someone would have told them

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<sup>56</sup> Kurkiala, *När själen går i exil*, 208

<sup>57</sup> Kurkiala, *När själen går i exil*, 226-231

<sup>58</sup> “Katekesen: *Fjärde delen*,” Katolska kyrkan 16 May, 2024  
<https://www.katekesen.se/index.htm?kkk2558-.htm>



about the reality of the aftermath of abortion which indicates they did not know until after. Simone Weil reasons philosophically about the human heart, what is sacred and what happens when one violates the sacred. She says there is a part of the human heart that is sacred because it is expecting the good. When the human is inflicted with violence, this childish yet holy part of the heart will, according to Simone Weil, complain and cry “why am I harmed?”. It cries in protest against evil and unrighteousness, but it is a silent cry within the soul, and if it has the capacity to voice the complaint it can only be heard if it is offered silence and attention. Weil describes how public life in a democracy is dominated by the political game, and how organizations, unions and churches act in the same pattern as political parties trying to claim power. In this noisiness there is no real freedom of speech, no attentive listening and no intuition in order to understand the cry of the heart.

“This particular part of the heart that cries in protest against evil is the only part of the human being, except the intelligence, that has real interest in the freedom of speech...//...When freedom of speech is nothing more than freedom of propaganda for such groups, then there is no freedom of speech for the only part of the human soul that deserves to speak.”<sup>59</sup>

Weil says the human heart is sacred because it expects goodness, and it cries in silence when it comes in contact with evil. Christian thinking says it is the place of truth and decision between life and death and only God can really know the human heart.

According to research there is a correlation between the way a woman reflects upon the fetus and her future mental wellness or illness.<sup>60</sup> If a woman tends to view the fetus as a human and a future baby she is more likely to have negative emotions compared to those women who have a less emotional view of the fetus. Some women are given the advice from midwives not to look at the screen when they have an ultrasound examination, and the humanity of the fetus is usually down-sized by healthcare and significant others.<sup>61</sup> This might be done with good intentions in order to help the woman not to view the fetus as a human and a future baby so that she might more easily cope with the abortion. The question then must be whether the pregnant woman is in control over such a view, or if it is rising from within the heart. This quote comes from a woman of the material, she says:

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<sup>59</sup> Simone Weil, *Personen och det heliga*, (Artos, 1994), 15-16

<sup>60</sup> Philippa Goodwin, Jane Ogden, “Women's reflections upon their past abortions: An exploration of how and why emotional reactions change over time. *Psychology & Health*, 22(2), 231–248.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14768320600682384>

<sup>61</sup> Emelie J. Löfmark, “Jag ångrar min abort” *Läget*, 4 May, 2020  
<https://sites.jmk.su.se/laget/jag-an-grar-min-abort/3413>

“His solution to the problem is abortion, and I feel with all my heart that this goes against everything in me. I do not want to get rid of this budding life. I cry inside and it is tearing me apart. I will regret this for the rest of my life, this is my last chance, I am 39 and hardly have much time left. So despite my none-childwish, despite my none-child love, I do not want to get rid of it”.  
(A19)

Her heart is in the centre of the resistance against abortion. She never longed or wished for a budding life, she never felt love for children but now the thought of abortion makes her cry inside and it is tearing her apart. This woman has portrayed a rather rational picture of herself, but this rationality seems to have been trumped by her pregnancy and her heart. Women suffering from abortion seem to relate to their pregnancy and the fetus in a deep way through their heart. According to Christian understanding, God has imprinted the law in the human heart, in the conscience which is a human being's secret chamber and sanctuary where the voice of God can be heard. The conscience has a voice that speaks in the moment of importance and urges the human to do good, it testifies of the truth. According to the Catholic katekes the conscience is the first of all substitute of Christ.<sup>62</sup> If the experience of the fetus as a human and a future baby comes from the heart of the woman, it might very well come from the conscience, and then it might come from the truth which according to Christian beliefs, is Christ. In order not to view the fetus as a human and a future baby she will have to resist the experience rooted in her heart and conscience. If it is the heart that holds the fetus sacred, if it is her conscience that makes her view the fetus as a human and a future baby, then it will not matter whether the screen is turned away or if her partner says it is *nothing*. Her heart will continue to voice the pain and cry in protest against harm.

### **4.2.3 Theological reflection upon the fetus**

*In the beginning of life and in the end of life - tools for orienting ethical choices* is a letter from the bishops of the Lutheran church of Sweden to its ministers and deacons. It handles the Christian view of humans, Christian ethics, an ethical reflection of the beginning of life and the end of life. It wants to say something about fetal diagnostics and abortion, organ donation and euthanasia. When it comes to abortion the bishop's state a view of human life and value as a process rather than emerging right at conception. They say humans are created and creators,

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<sup>62</sup> “Katekesen: Artikel 6.”

individuals and community, free and responsible, righteous and sinners. They say their Christian ethic stems from the principle of human value, the principle of responsibility, the principle of children's best and the principle of justice. In relation to abortion they conclude that:

“The fetus is given a higher value of protection the longer the pregnancy proceeds. The Lutheran Church of Sweden says abortion can be accepted, since it is a crucial difference between a fetus and a baby”<sup>63</sup>.

A crucial difference between a fetus and a baby implies human value increases in process. There is some kind of confusion surrounding these concepts referring to the fetus, its life and human value.

“The board of education has emphasized that there is a relevant difference between a fetus, which is a “human of becoming” and a baby.”<sup>64</sup>

The question is whether there is a *crucial* difference or a *relevant* difference between a baby and a fetus. When bringing this idea to the material we find that women who suffer from abortion use the word fetus and baby interchangeably.

“It was a medical abortion since I was in week 13 I had to do it in the hospital. The same moment that the fetus came out I started to cry intensively! I saw the little baby with my own eyes. It had fingers and toes, ears and nose. What had I done? This was my baby, I saw it with my own eyes. I had seriously killed a little baby. My baby! I feel terribly bad about this and can not stop picturing the little, little fetus. I wish I could have it undone” (B.44)

“In a strange way I loved that embryo and felt it was my child” (B.10)

“A fetus, our child, yet very little child, hanging dead between my legs” (B.19)

These quotes show that women can use the word fetus and baby in the same sentence. No matter if the abortion was early or late they call the fetus their baby. In that way it does not seem to be true to their experience that there is a crucial nor relevant difference between a fetus and a baby.

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<sup>63</sup> Svenska kyrkan, *Livets början och livets slut: ett brev från Svenska kyrkans biskopar till präster och diakoner*. (Biskopsmötet, 2024), 59

<sup>64</sup> Svenska kyrkan, *Livets början och livets slut*, 52

If the woman thinks of the fetus as her baby or child, and others say it is a crucial or relevant difference between a fetus and a baby, she finds it hard.

“It was not a real baby if the abortion was done so early: he says. Which is the way most people seem to reason and that is why it is so hard for me to talk about it. I am starting to think I have become crazy, thinking of this early abortion like an obsession” (B.24)

This woman had an abortion two years before writing. She had it as a result of pressure, threats and harassment from her partner and his family. Now she is in a new relationship and wants to share her experience with her partner, and when he diminishes her experience it makes it hard for her. Women who suffer from abortion seem to share the experience of how other people tend to diminish her experience of aborting a baby or child.

“He thinks abortion is like removing gallstone and has no understanding of my hesitation or that I find it hard. It is just a sprout, no baby, he says...//... The more I think about it the more it feels like I really want to keep this baby if it was my decision.” (A.8)

Bringing the idea of a crucial or relevant difference between a fetus and a baby, it is contrary to the experience of women suffering from abortion. Furthermore, in the document there is confusion surrounding the concept of “a life of becoming”. On the website of the Swedish Lutheran church it is referred to as “a human life of becoming”, in the bishop-letter it is referred to as “a human of becoming” and in the statement from the board of education it is referred to as “a life of becoming”. Overlooking the confusion regarding the ontology and life of the fetus these statements represent the same idea, that human value is gained in process. Bringing this idea to the voice of women who suffer from abortion letting them respond to this idea we find that all of them (except two) tend to state life as such. Independently what week of pregnancy she is in at the time of expression.

“Now I am sitting here with a new baby in my belly and enormous anxiety over the life I rejected 1 ½ years ago”. (B.7)

“Åh you poor little life, what pain you must have had to endure” (B.14)

To view the fetus as a life of becoming, or a human life of becoming or a human of becoming, is not true to the voice of women who suffer from abortion. They tend to view the fetus as a human

baby, or a human child or unborn baby, when she is expressing her experience. This human life seems to be carrying value, as we saw in the exploration of the sacred.

“After having been so disrespectful to life and thinking “rational” I do not feel worthy of another life ever again”. (B.19)

The life was treated disrespectfully, and therefore this woman does not feel worthy of another life again, she feels unworthy to become pregnant ever again. Being pregnant is experienced as hosting a life, having an abortion is experienced as terminating that life. There is not enough sound of process in the voice of women who suffer from abortion that corresponds to the idea of the Lutheran Church of Sweden, that human life and value is a process.

#### **4.2.4 Analyzing the critique**

Ole Jacob Madsen is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Oslo, Norway. In his book *The Therapeutic Turn*, he describes how psychology has gone from being a science in studies of the brain and the psyche and a profession, to becoming a central institution of everyday life for people of the modern society. How it has a major impact on people's lives and on the political reality of society. He claims Psychology has gone political.<sup>65</sup> This book is a critique against late modernity and the therapeutic culture that fosters around individualism, consumerism and the “death of God”, but also against psychology in itself for not being critical enough against itself and its relation to late modernity and the risks of actually not helping people but rather depriving them of existential meaning. Clinical psychology meets humanism in the liberalistic and existential philosophy in the 1960s, and is thereby imprinted by the ideology of individualism, and according to Madsen this is when psychology goes from clinical to cultural.<sup>66</sup> In humanistic psychology the human being is viewed as empty and fragmented, where conditions such as loneliness, alienation, competitive instincts are part of human nature and not connected to political, historical or economical structures. The way to feel good, and be psychologically healthy is through self-actualisation. In this idea the human being is carrying a potential inside of herself to become fully themselves. The self-help and self-actualisation goes hand in hand with expectation of consumption and draws on Gnostic features in that within the human is the secret of self-actualisation and salvation.<sup>67</sup> The problem

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<sup>65</sup> Ole J. Madsen. *The therapeutic turn. How psychology altered Western culture*. (Routledge, 2014), 171

<sup>66</sup> Madsen, *Therapeutic turn*, 18,19

<sup>67</sup> Madsen, *Therapeutic turn*, 27,50

with the therapeutic culture is that it does not take into consideration things like political, sociological and economical structures, and the individual is forced to take responsibility for herself and for her alienation, emptiness, distress and depression that actually belongs to such structures. Women who suffer from abortion are part of this culture, abortion is a political question, reproduction is biological but also a sociological issue (as I will go into further down).

“I am terribly happy about this little life that grows inside of me. But my partner and his family want me to get rid of it. My partner forces me, more or less, since he says that if I want to keep it I will be kicked out with my head first and then I really do not have anywhere to go, I have no solid income since I work on demand... Sure I could choose to keep, but then I would be all alone with no income, accommodation, and no one close to turn to.” (A.4)

The risk of becoming a single mother is among the most common reasons for abortion, and 12 percent of the men said that economic issues were the main reason for having an abortion.<sup>68</sup> The wish not to be a single mother is most likely to have both sociological and economical reasons. Madsen claims Religion has never intended to avoid suffering but rather to offer a way to address and endure it, whereas the therapeutic culture locates the meaning, and acceptance of suffering within the human, and there is no longer anything that can be called meaningless suffering or chaos since everything has received a name and a diagnosis for which something can potentially be done.<sup>69</sup> By locating responsibility, and authority within the person rather than with politics and structures the therapeutic culture society loses its possibility to rebel against structural injustices. He uses the example of a burned-out, stressed and depressed worker who is sent to therapy in order to work on herself, adapting her attitudes, and modifying her strategies in order to function properly at work. One of the women in the material who are critical to healthcare and the fact that she did not get all the information about the aftermath of abortion, who panicked at the clinic, and who felt invisible to the personnel and cursed the pill she swallowed - ended up at the therapist and describes it like this:

“My therapist says that I was in shock when the pregnancy was confirmed, and after that I was in crisis and to get through it and the grieving that comes after you have to allow yourself to grieve but not get stuck in kneading (really hard, I know!), you have to finally try to change the pattern of thought when the dark thoughts come over you and tear you inside. I have not gotten there yet and

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<sup>68</sup> Kero, “Paradoxes of legal abortion,” 28

<sup>69</sup> Madsen, *Therapeutic turn*, 54-55, 167

can not change my pattern of thought entirely, but at least I have the insight that I must eventually.... right now I allow myself to be sad and cry whenever I need to.” (B.33)

What we see here is how the individual woman bears the responsibility for her pain and her coping with the experience that caused her pain even though there is a system of healthcare providing the abortion. The responsibility for her suffering could have been divided on significant others and the system and politics. It is worth noticing that this woman has a lot of critique against healthcare, but she is the one who ends up in the therapist's office. We need to consider that there are structural underlying causes such as efficacy requirements on the part of the healthcare that contributes and takes part in the abortion which is the cause of the suffering of these women.<sup>70</sup> Madsen raises the question:

“are we closing our eyes to an unhealthy development in society assisted by psychology where the political solutions produce too great a burden and strain on the individual?”<sup>71</sup>.

According to Madsen religion places authority outside the human whereas psychology places authority within the human. Religion has structures of authority that serve the human well, and in the therapeutic culture there is no structure of authority. Madsen touches on an relevant question when he wonders whether health in fact can be a fully valid replacement for salvation.<sup>72</sup> The text about abortion, produced by the Lutheran Church of Sweden, has a therapeutic approach. It talks about advice and counseling in the decision, it offers help with dealing with sorrow or guilt and offers support after an abortion or during pregnancy or as a newbie parent. It is up to the woman or man to contact the church in order to get help. The advice given to someone who is close to a pregnant woman is to not judge or assess whether it would be right or wrong whatever choice she makes. Supporting the woman no matter what, is the key.

“Try not to affect her or give her guilt no matter what decision she takes. Your mission is to support, not to judge or assess.”<sup>73</sup>

When listening to the voice of women suffering from abortion, these are the questions they have while they are still pregnant.

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<sup>70</sup> Madsen, *Therapeutic turn*, 15-16

<sup>71</sup> Madsen, *Therapeutic turn*, 134

<sup>72</sup> Madsen, *Therapeutic turn*, 62

<sup>73</sup> “Svenska kyrkan: Abort,” Svenska Kyrkan 16 Feb, 2023 <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/abort>

“What am I supposed to do?”

“How am I supposed to go through with it (*the abortion*)?”

“Is there anyone else who has experienced the same?”

More than anything they are looking for advice on how to make the decision and what to do about their situation being pregnant and experiencing pressure, force, coercion and harassment to have an abortion. The second question is a rhetorical question - they wonder how they are supposed to go through with an abortion against their own will, and they are searching for anyone who might share their experience. They are looking for advice and shared experiences. In this material, regret and despair is a dominant experience and is rarely followed by a wish for others not to judge her. Mostly the regret is followed by her own judgment upon herself. When listening to the voice of women suffering from abortion these are the question they ask:

“What the hell have I done?”

“How could I do it?”

“How am I supposed to go on in life?”

The first two questions are rhetorical questions, implying insight, shock and guilt. The second question implies guilt and regret. The third question is one that searches for an answer, it is also quite often accompanied by questions relating to forgiveness. The advice given from the Lutheran Church of Sweden is not to judge or assess, and it might be too general and not taking into consideration the aspects of details in a woman's situation. Morten Magelsen claims that to make general conclusions in ethical values is a serious failure, and continuous:

“Human relations such as liaison, expectations, pressure, debt of gratitude, and relations concerning the acting individual like competence of decision making and personality can be most relevant to ethics and fortitude to such is highly important. A Christian ethic too concerned by the higher sphere may be criticized for missing what is actually ethically relevant.”<sup>74</sup>

The Seven days Adventists and the Catholic church explicitly speak about women being forced to have an abortion, and about details that might lead a woman to have an abortion such as economical, social and psychological aspects. They do not make a deep analysis of it, but by

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<sup>74</sup> Morten Magelssen, *Livet og døden- Kritne Perspektiver på bioetikk (Verbum, 2023)*, 299



saying it, they communicate that they know and understand something about the details. They also speak about a shared responsibility and say significant others and culture are also responsible for an abortion:

“The pregnant woman having an abortion is not alone responsible for her action, and the unborn baby is not the only victim in this context. Behind the decision might be a family where a child is not welcome, a social network that signals the pregnancy as a problem or a current culture that is not respecting human life.”<sup>75</sup>

The ethics of the Catholic church is explicit to some degree, and details are taken into consideration. There is some insight into how a woman might be influenced and pressured to have an abortion and that her partner might leave her for continuing the pregnancy. The burden of responsibility is not upon the individual woman, but shared by a number of actors.

#### **4.2.5 Theological reflection upon the body**

The Swedish Christian Council has produced a few documents that relate to human life. One of them is *The Gift of Being - About Church and Disabilities*.<sup>76</sup> This document is produced in order to provide information and inspiration in order to keep up the good work of making the church inclusive and able to receive the gift of being the body of Christ in all its diversity. It contains principles about human life, which is created in the image of God and principles of the worth of life, human life as a gift from God and principles of how to speak about disabilities. It says:

“In the perspective of the Gospel there are no human creatures whose life has a lower value, since God’s intention with earthly creatures is not depending on their skills or abilities.../...from a theological perspective, it is not correct to found the value of human life on qualities of human creatures. No matter the status of our bodies or intellect, we live in the economy of mercy”<sup>77</sup>

This text concerns people with disabilities, and contains christian values of the human body, and human value. We know from listening to the voice of women suffering from abortion that their own bodies, and the body of the fetus is a reality, the bodies matter. We learn from this document that from a theological perspective our bodies have value since we live in the economy of mercy.

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<sup>75</sup> “Respekt: Abort,” Stockholms Katolska stift 16 May, 2024 <https://respektlivet.nu/amnen/abort>

<sup>76</sup> Sveriges Kristna Råd, *Gåvan att finnas till-om kyrkan och funktionshinder- Skriftserie nr.23* (Skilltryck AB, 2017)

<sup>77</sup> SKR, *Gåvan att finnas till*, 13

In her philosophical reflection and critique against personalism, Simone Weil claims that there is something sacred in every human being:

“But it is not her person. It is nor her personality. It is her, simply, just this human...//...It is within this man neither his person nor his personality that is sacred to me. It is him. All of him. Arms, eyes, thoughts, all of it. I would not be able to prey on anything of all this without infinite remorse.”<sup>78</sup>

She seems to reach this conclusion since she knows she would feel remorse if she was to prey on anything of him. If someone would tear his eyes out and inflict pain upon him, his soul would be ripped apart by the thought of someone inflicting evil upon him. Deep within the heart of every human being, is an expectation to be shown goodness and not be inflicted by evil. This expectation is according to Weil the only source of holiness and goodness, and everything connected to this goodness is sacred. Therefore the bodies are sacred.<sup>79</sup>

Our bodies are flesh, blood and bone. We are made of substance. According to Magelssen, the classical Christian view is that all human beings, members of the human species, have human value because of what substance they are.<sup>80</sup> Magelssen is exploring ethical aspects of human life and death and on 350 pages he explores, reflects, argues and explains why and how human beings have value and holds the right to live and why the intention of taking the life of another human being is morally unacceptable. Women who suffer from abortion seem to agree with Weil and Magelssen, that the body of the fetus is sacred. They do not make complex reflections, they do not argue out of rational logical arguments, they just say like it is.

#### **4.2.6 Theological reflection and analysis upon death**

*Together towards Life - Mission and evangelism in Changing Landscapes* is a document from the Swedish Christian Council, containing guidelines for understanding and practicing mission and evangelism in a changing landscape in order for churches to be able to engage for life in abundance for everyone. It states:

“We discern the Spirit of God wherever life in its fullness is affirmed and in all its dimensions, including liberation of the oppressed, healing and reconciliation of broken communities, and the

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<sup>78</sup> Weil, *Personen och det heliga*, 11

<sup>79</sup> Weil, *Personen och det heliga*, 13

<sup>80</sup> Magelssen, *Livet og døden*, 191-201

restoration of creation. We also discern evil spirits wherever forces of death and destruction of life prevail.”<sup>81</sup>

The spirit of God is discerned wherever life is fully confirmed, in all its dimensions and evil spirits wherever death and life destroying forces rule. We know that women who suffer from abortion are experiencing death. They are threatened to death, they want to die, or they think about suicide. They feel like murderers and they say they killed a life or their own child. The document also states:

“A genuine Christian testimony is not just what we do but how we live our mission...//...It is energy for life in its fullness and calls us to engage in resistance against all forces, powers and systems which denies, destroys and diminishes life”.<sup>82</sup>

In the voice of the women suffering from abortion we hear that there is force, violence, coercion and harassment. We see healthcare, a system that sometimes enables force in its ambition to get the pregnant woman to have an abortion against her will. The Christian testimony calls us to engage in resistance against such things. We see significant others and healthcare diminishing issues related to pregnancy and abortion, pregnant women and their fetus.

Most churches say nothing on their webpages about abortion. ELM, EFS, EFK, E-church, Word of Life, Svenska Alliansmissionen, Hillsong, WAO-church and Covenant Church of Sweden, nothing written can be found. There are a few Churches and denominations that officially speak about pregnancy and abortion on their websites. But there is a great silence regarding this issue.

The Lutheran Church of Sweden acknowledges that pregnancy and abortion can be a hard experience and the church offers support, care and help, both when one is pregnant and after abortion. The church offers call support with a minister or deacon and helps to enforce the social network. The woman is encouraged to contact the church for further help. They tactfully declare that abortion is a difficult way out of a difficult situation.

The Pentecostal Church states officially that abortion is an emergency solution that should not be used flippantly. The church pronounces theological principles lifting human value and God as the holy Creator of all life, thus reinforcing the sanctity of human life. The church's view on abortion is restrictive and claims to have a responsibility to help pregnant women by

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<sup>81</sup> “Sveriges Kristna Råd: *Tillsammans för Livet-Mission och evangelisation i en värld i förändring*” (2013), 15 <https://www.skr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/tillsammans-for-livet.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> SKR, *Tillsammans för Livet*, 17

creating the best possible conditions for her by helping and supporting her. The church claims the value of human life to be non-negotiable and refers to a separate booklet for more reading on the issue, *The secret of faith - The Human (Trons hemlighet - Människan)*. In it we find a clarification on why and in what way the value of human life is non-negotiable:

“God is first in our lives. Before consciousness awakens God know us, before the mother knows she is with child, the father-heart of God is turned to the unborn child in her womb”<sup>83</sup>.

The text refers to the Gospel of Luke in the Bible and the story of when the newly pregnant Mary visits the pregnant Elizabeth and how she greets Mary as the mother of the Lord. This story has a history of being used in order to enforce the intrinsic value of the unborn, and the writers of this text affiliates with that.

The Church of the Cross in Örkeljunga (Korskyrkan) has an outreach ministry called “*Hello little Life - pregnancy support*”. It is a short text that communicates a positive view of the pregnancy but also acknowledges the possibility of it being overwhelming. If one is feeling lost, scared or hesitant about the pregnancy they offer call support and social support, and the woman is encouraged to contact the church in order to get help free of charge.

The Sevendays Adventists have an official document rich in content about pregnancy and abortion where they make principle statements about abortion and human life and value. The document is built as a guide to the congregation in how to care and support men, women and their family in different situations relating to pregnancy and abortion.

“The congregation ought to help ease the unfortunate social, economical and psychological conditions that contribute to abortion, to have conciliatory care for those who suffer the consequences in this matter.”<sup>84</sup>

In this document they say abortion is a tragic dilemma of the fallen humanity, and along with the Catholic Church they are the only Church who shares the insight of women being forced to abortion.

The Catholic Church states that human life is a gift from God and therefore sacred and ought to be respected and protected.<sup>85</sup> No human has the right to end another human life and

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<sup>83</sup> Pingst och Libris Förlag, *Människan*, (Svenska Tryckcentralen, 2008), 21

<sup>84</sup>“Adventistsamfundet: Om abort” Sjundedags Adventistsamfundet, 29 Aug, 2024  
<https://www.adventist.se/adventistsamfundet-om-livets-okrankbarhet-och-abort/7407/2>

<sup>85</sup> “Katolska Kyrkan: Varför är katoliker emot abort?” Stockholms Katolska Stift, 14 Sep 2024  
<https://www.katolskakyrkan.se/i-sverige/fragor-och-svar>

therefore catholics say no to abortion. It clearly takes sides with the unborn but also says that the solution to an unwanted pregnancy is to support the mother to a worthy life. Issues of economy, studies, a man who does not want the baby or disability does not justify abortion according to the Catholic church. The only time abortion is justified is when it is done in order to save the mothers life. For further reading on the issue it refers to its own foundation - Respect, which has a rich content relating to abortion and pregnancy. Listening to the few Churches that say anything about abortion or pregnancy, we hear that abortion is a difficult way out of a difficult situation, it is an emergency solution that should not be used flippantly and a tragic dilemma of the fallen humanity incompatible with God's plan of human life. Abortion is an intervention with the intention to end the life of the unborn baby.

Death seems to matter to these women as a reality, like pain leaves no room for hypocrisy, and the heart demands honesty. They speak about death threats, about wanting to die and thinking about suicide, about them selves as killers and the death of their fetuses. They are allowed to say these things and speak about death, since they own their experience and situation. But it is remarkably silent from other voices when it comes to death. According to healthcare abortion is to “terminate a pregnancy”, according to the Lutheran Church of Sweden abortion is “a difficult way out of a difficult situation”, according to the Pentecostal Church abortion is “an emergency option” According to Seven Days Adventists and the Catholic Church abortion is communicated to relate to the death or the ending of a human life. There is no way of knowing how the silent Church views abortion since it says nothing. According to the voice of women who suffer from abortion, the choice is experienced as rejecting their child or baby, and abortion is experienced as the procedure that ends the life of their fetus, or kills their baby. They do not speak about death as an inevitability, nor as a natural ending of life. They seem to speak about death as an undesirable threat to their life, or as a desperate way to deal with their own pain, or as a brutal interruption of the life of the fetus. In the critique of the women suffering from abortion we see criticism against healthcare, significant others and the culture for not seeing the force she might be under, for diminishing her experience about the abortion and the fetus, and not taking her pain seriously.

According to Walter Bruggeman criticism is absorbed in our culture, absorbed but ignored. Our culture is numb about death and lacks energy to resist. Because there is no room for passion, and no imagination of a different future, the people lack energy. Our culture is oppressive since the only source to freedom is the religion of the freedom of God. God is the only freedom but God is domesticated in our static religion to fit the purpose of sustaining the

culture. Our culture is incapable of facing death because in order to sustain its affluence, oppressive social policy and static religion, and stay in charge, it needs to deny all endings. If Bruggemann is right, then our culture can not face the death related to abortion, because abortion is needed in order to sustain its affluence and the understanding of itself as a community of self made men and women. If Bruggeman is right, the criticism and the voice of women suffering from abortion will be absorbed by the culture, and ignored, because it is numb about death. Bruggeman suggests that the only way to resist this culture is by prophetic imagination which he says is the capacity to publicly grief and lament the deathliness of our culture and hope that the ace of God will penetrate the numbness. But also the capacity to imagine a different future of freedom in the free God.<sup>86</sup>

#### **4.2.7 Theological reflection upon oppression**

Women have the formal right to decide whether to terminate a pregnancy or to continue the pregnancy but it is well known that men influence their partner in her decision. According to Kero one of the most stated reasons for terminating the pregnancy is related to the partner<sup>87</sup>. In this material we see men wanting to be supportive whatever choice she makes, we see men who want to continue the pregnancy but most frequently we see men wanting, demanding and forcing an abortion. Partners, husbands or boyfriends, no matter the premise of the relationship, no matter what pregnancy week, they might threaten to leave her and the children if there are any, or hurt her or the child when it is born. It makes you wonder, what is up with men and children? In this consumerist, rational, narcissistic culture, sociologist Eva Illouz states that there is a new way of being a successful man. Because of modernity and the progress of feminism the area for men to access power and status has moved from the roam of family to sexuality. A successful man in the 1800 was able to make lifelong commitments, express strong emotions, make decisions and had a large family. A successful man today is one who is distant from one's emotions, personally and financially independent and demonstrates authority by not engaging in a lifelong relationship.<sup>88</sup> According to Illouz, the sociological task of wanting and having children is now upon women.<sup>89</sup> Women are now the ones who have strong emotions, wanting to make lifelong commitments and have a family, men are unwilling to do such things which gives them a new dominance over women who are forced to keep quiet about her longing since

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<sup>86</sup> Bruggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 26-37, 41, 55

<sup>87</sup> Kero, "Paradoxes in legal abortion," 32

<sup>88</sup> Illouz Eva, *Därför gör kärleken ont-En sociologisk förklaring*, trans Svenja Hums, (Daidalos, 2016), 112

<sup>89</sup> Illouz, *Därför gör kärleken ont*, 115

emotional availability is unattractive to men.<sup>90</sup> If this is true, then children have gone from being the pride of a successful man to a threat and an obstacle for a man to gain success.

Male oppression of women is old knowledge. We know women are violated in close relations. We know about men controlling their partners, about sexual abuse, economic abuse physical abuse. One out of four women are or have been in an abusive relationship and domestic violence is known to increase during pregnancy.<sup>91</sup> The feminist movement has been successful in bringing this to a rather high degree of awareness in society.<sup>92</sup> But when it comes to abortions it seems like there is a loophole for male oppression since abortion is a legal freedom and there is no controlling the reason for the abortion. Women do have abortions as a result of violence and force as we know from various studies. This material is exploring the experiences behind the numbers.

When healthcare provides abortion without questioning a woman's decision, how do they know it is hers? And if they learn it is not hers then why do they provide it? When women are forced, pressured and threatened to have an abortion against their own will and they say this abortion has done damage to them, this ought to be relevant and worth reflecting upon, it ought to generate an ambition to avoid doing damage. Female oppression is an old story and an ongoing struggle. The Authority of Equality has a national strategy running from 2017 to 2026 in order to prevent and fight against male violence against women, they have set up four goals:

- Expanded and effective work of preventing violence
- Improved discovery of violence and stronger protection for women and children subjected to violence
- Efficient law enforcement
- Improved knowledge and method development<sup>93</sup>

Comparing the ambition of the Authority of Equality and its second goal to improve discovery of violence, with the experience of women suffering from abortion and The Swedish Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology that has produced two reports on induced abortion, one in 2006 and

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<sup>90</sup> Illouz, *Därför gör kärleken ont*, 91-156

<sup>91</sup> "Brå: Våld i nära relationer," Brottsförebyggande rådet 3 Aug 2024  
<https://bra.se/statistik/statistik-om-brottstyper/vald-i-nara-relationer.html>

<sup>92</sup> "Europaportalen: Jämställdhet mellan könen," Europaportalen.se  
<https://www.europaportalen.se/tema/demokrati-rattsstatlighet-friheter-och-val/jamstalldhet-mellan-konen>

<sup>93</sup> "Jämställdhetsmyndigheten: *Delmål. 6: mäns våld mot kvinnor ska upphöra*," Jämställdhetsmyndigheten. 4 Sep, 2024  
<https://jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/jamstalldhet-i-sverige/delmål-6-mans-vald-mot-kvinnor-ska-upphora/>

one in 2018. The report from 2006 contained a smaller section dealing with abortion and violence. It states:

“Kero claims 12 percent experiencing threat or pressure by the man, after becoming pregnant. Women who have an abortion because of domestic violence are especially exposed and possibly in need of extra psychological and social support after the abortion. The question of violence is keen and should always be asked, even if questions related to violence need further clarification, before they eventually can be included in the routine, with the aim of offering the possibility of help when a woman has been exposed to violence or threats.”<sup>94</sup>

This text implies insight of violence, threat and force related to abortion, it suggests the personnel makes sure the woman gets psychological help after the abortion, and makes the reader observant to the need for more knowledge on this. In the second report this section, and theme of violence is nowhere to be found. It leaves out the section relating to violence, pressure or threat.<sup>95</sup> The section relating to domestic violence in relation to abortion and pregnancy has disappeared in these 12 years. One might have thought that the knowledge about this should have increased and these questions should have been incorporated in the routine in order to fit the second goal of the Authority of Equality, but instead it has disappeared.

The pregnant woman is the only one who can have an abortion, the general attitude is that abortion should be a woman's choice and that is why the law is constituted the way it is. The basic argument for constituting a law of free abortion was to increase freedom for women to choose and increase gender equality.<sup>96</sup> Byung-Chul Han says that in a culture of achievement there is only guilt that has nowhere to go because it is part of your own failure. In this culture of achievement, where anything is possible if you try hard enough, people are not free, they have just become their own slave masters<sup>97</sup>. Hauerwas says, modernity created a new situation where choosing has become an imperative, and the freedom of choice is self-deceptive, manipulating and enslaving. We are doomed to freedom.<sup>98</sup> Bruggemann says we live in a culture that is indifferent to death, and in a politics of oppression.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Aneblom, “Bemötande och omhändertagande vid abort,” 23-24

<sup>95</sup> Anneli Kero, Ann Lalos, “Kvinnors och mäns upplevelser av abort,” 47-48

<sup>96</sup> SOU 1971:58

<sup>97</sup> Han Byung-Chul, *Eros Agoni*, trans. Ola Wallin (Ersatz, 2015), 17

<sup>98</sup> Hauerwas Stanley, *Det fredliga riket - En introduktion till kristen etik*. trans Patrik Hagman (Artos, 2012), 42-47

<sup>99</sup> Bruggemann, *Prophetic imagination*, 36



### 4.3 Conclusions

According to recent research there is a group of women who have undergone abortion against their own will, who have been pressured or threatened to have an abortion, and who describe their experience of abortion as only negative. This study includes individual voices collected and compiled, the experience is individual, still they are all part of something bigger. I will conclude the aspects that are involved in tension, since that is where there is disclosure.<sup>100</sup>

- What is in the voice of women suffering from abortion?
  - Experiencing despair alongside regret
  - The experience of being mentally raped.
  - Experiencing dissociation
  - Experiencing death.
  - Force, threats, coercion, harassment and violence
  - Lonesome fight against force, and fighting for themselves and their fetus
  - Loneliness, weakness, abandonment, and being stuck
  - The traumatic but important meeting with body of the fetus
  - The extensive crying everywhere or when no one is watching
  - The critique - against culture, healthcare and significant others
  - Questions - What am I supposed to do? How can I go on in life? Is there anyone else who has experienced the same?
  - Seeking support, guidance and compassion among strangers on the internet
  - The sacred heart, truth and fetus
  - Hell on both sides of the abortion
  - The body as a matter of fact - materia that matters
  
- What happens in the dialogue between the women suffering from abortion and other theological resources?
  - The women experience no crucial or relevant difference between fetus and baby.
  - The magnitude of the force and its systematic implications and the lack of discovery, resistance and support by the health care.
  - The lack of freedom and the reality of an oppressive culture
  - The silence of Churches becomes audible

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<sup>100</sup> Watkins, *Disclosing Church*, 48

- The resistance of some Churches appears
- The loophole of abortion related oppression

### **4.3.1 The loophole of abortion related oppression**

This study concludes there to be a cultural and systematic loophole for significant others to force women to undergo abortion.

- The cultural numbness to death,
- The way choosing is an imperative
- The new way of being a successful man
- The cultural burden of responsibility upon the woman
- Diminishing attitudes of the woman's experience of the fetus, being pregnant, and abortion
- The silent Church
- Systematic practice of politics without notion to force, results in systematic neglect of force

At one side of the loophole there are significant others who ignore the will of the woman, and by physical strength or position of power, force, pressure and threaten the woman to undergo abortion. On the other side of this loophole is the woman standing alone, rejected, exposed and hurt. For a while she is fighting for her heart to be taken seriously, fighting for herself, her future and her fetus. But sometimes she loses the fight, she surrenders to the force and has an abortion. This is possible since the political system has construed the law of free abortion to implicate the absence of any questioning or resisting a woman's choice to have an abortion. At the abortion clinic women have abortions against their own will and the choice to undergo abortion was forced upon them. Significant others are successful in their force since the healthcare system seems to systematically neglect women choosing abortion by force and making this possible. The culture is oppressive in that it contributes to the loophole with its attitudes. Our culture is diminishing the woman's experience of the fetus, of her pregnancy and abortion, choosing is an imperative, and the therapeutic part of culture oppressive in that it lays the burden of responsibility upon the woman. When she is experiencing regret, despair, pain, dissociation, sadness and more, related to the abortion that was forced upon her and provided by the system, she is responsible for her wellbeing and she needs to go to therapy in order to feel better. The culture is also numb to the part of her experience that relates to death. The culture is also numb

to death since it needs to deny all endings in order to sustain its affluence. The death of her fetus, the death threats she received before the abortion, her own wish to die and thoughts of suicide, it is being said in public, but diminished and absorbed by the numb culture.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Theoretical reflection**

The Four Voices are not so much a model for theological reflection, nor a pragmatic method for facilitating groups, but rather an attempt to diagrammatically represent the fundamental theological approach and elucidate the ways in which we work with practices theologically. I know from earlier experiences that the choice of theory can imprint the material and the conclusions in a way that may feel academically restrained. The Four Voices of Theology has enabled this work to unfold organically. It offers space for faith to seek understanding. The founders of the theory withhold there to be theology already existing in a group of people, its actions and its own verbalisation. When I first started to analyze the material I thought the theological matters were thin, except for one woman, these women in the material do not mention God or anything obviously God-related, they also made very few theoretical statements. But when the espoused voice, the experiences of the women was put into dialogue with the operant voice, the normative voice and the formal voice, something theologically significant was reachable. When the women spoke about bodies, or the critique for example, it seemed to have little theological implications until this was put in a dialogue with the other voices, and the tension made something happen, what happens is what the founders of the Four Voices of Theology calls disclosures a learning point where we might have gotten a glimpse of the divine word. In this material and by using Four voices of Theology as a lens, we learned that bodies were related to sacredness and critique was related to freedom and oppression. In the conversation, in listening to the four voices and paying attention to the tension or the harmony there were moments of disclosure, moments of insight.

Andrew Dunlop drew to my attention the risk of being a gatekeeper for theological reflection.<sup>101</sup> When The Four Voices of Theology was used in group as a way to reflect theologically upon a situation, he withholds the importance of it being a situation that everyone has experienced or else there will be one person who becomes a gatekeeper. The difference is that the experience is not mine - it is the womens, and the theological reflection is not done in a

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<sup>101</sup> Dunlop, "Using the Four Voices of Theology," 302

group, still the risk has been in my conscience and I have tried to handle this risk to the best of my ability by working with transparency and reflexivity.

## **5.2 Methodological reflection**

Different forums are a large source of individual experience that is accessible and pure in a way. They just say what they want to say without much filter, and it is then possible for me as a researcher to find it and search for it since it is being categorized by technology. I, as a researcher, am not affecting their statements in any way. The negative side of this might be the fact that I am not able to ask any type of questions in order to clarify anything. If there has been something unclear in her statement, it stays that way. I could have collected much more material by expanding the search words or by using more newspaper articles or just by collecting everything relevant. The material on the internet is too vast. I have been using the top hits on my search words sorted by relevance. It is always hard to get women and men to talk about this issue, it is well known and it is always brought up in the methodological reflection on research based on both quantitative and qualitative material. When approaching the experience of women this way, making it a literature study rather than a qualitative study, I believe it gives me access to something else, or something more. There is a writing that I have not been able to get a hold of - it is called *When life is not what we expected (När livet inte blir som vi tänkt oss)*. It ought to advise on how to counsel people in pregnancy and abortion.

## **5.3 Final reflection**

The recent research that I have given a short account for in the first chapter have been concerned about the reactions and experiences of women, the way women constitute ethics in choosing, the existential aspects of the experience and in what way pastors and deacons have experience of meeting these women in their profession.

There are probably more interesting findings to be made when it comes to structures of language and how they affect the understanding of abortion and the practice surrounding it. It would also be interesting to deepen the analysis using the thoughts of Hanna Arend and the way she thinks clichés are part of the political arena.

Stålhandske withholds the clinically-oriented, secularized Sweden leaving women to deal with the existential dimensions of abortion alone. Ceremonies or rites connected to abortion would be valuable in order to handle existentially complicated experiences of abortion. In this

research we see women asking how to forgive themselves or how to find forgiveness and how to go on in life. One woman in the material describes a practice that resembles a ceremony. It would be interesting to further explore what types of existing Christian rites could possibly fit their need, or if there are needs that would urge new rites to take form.

Hugdahl says the choice is negotiated through various ideals and is concerned about relations, and we see this also in this material. Hugdahl says the right choice is constituted as the caring, selfless and responsible choice, this might be true to women who are not forced to have an abortion, but in this material there are only a few women who ask, and state something about the right choice. In this material the force, coercion, regret and sorrow, are overshadowing principal aspects of right and wrong. They are not concerned about justifying the decision, they are concerned about crying over it, and finding a way forward in life - possibly through forgiveness. Hugdahl says that in order for women to be real free they need to be freed from the responsibility to justify their choice, but in this material it seems the women are quite alone with feeling responsible, for several years. What Hugdahl states is not obviously true to the women who are forced to have an abortion. In this material, the choice to have an abortion was not at all, or not completely their own, and therefore they are not concerned about finding ways to justify it, they are concerned about finding a way to handle the experience and finding a way to go on in life. If it would be possible to free women from the responsibility to justify their decision it would still be a question of what to make of the responsibility of her significant others and the healthcare system.

If the Church finds it important to engage in resistance against all forces, powers and systems which denies, destroys and diminishes life, she could:<sup>102</sup>

- Acknowledge the force relating to abortion, assessing it and judging it as unrighteous
- Resists the numbness of culture being concerned and responsive to death.
- Engage in prophetic ministry and not just therapeutic counseling.
- Adjust pastoral care and political resistance in the right time at the right place.
- Offer women a way out of the imperative of choosing
- Communicate to men how to be successful and free
- Communicate truthful attitude about the fetus, the human heart and abortion

If the church want to care for these women it needs to:

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<sup>102</sup> SKR, *Tillsammans för Livet*, 17

- Become an ally to her in the fight against the force and oppression
- A partner to her when he leaves
- A parent to her when they turn away from her
- Listen and respond to the questions women are asking
- Be thoughtful about where the burden of responsibility ought to lay

For further research I suggest:

- Exploring the voice of men suffering from abortion - or the voice of men pressuring for abortion.
- A deeper political and practical theological analysis of healthcare and the disappearance of the notion of force.

## 5.4 Summary:

**Abortion and Force - A Practical Theological Exploration of the Voice of Women Suffering from Abortion** is a Master thesis in Practical Theology. It is a literature study that aims to explore the experience of women who suffer from abortion and offer a theological reflection upon it.

**Background:** Research that concludes abortion to be overall beneficial for women, still shows a minor group of women who experience abortion as a trauma, or who had the abortion as a result of persuasion and threat. Some conclude it to be 8-12 percent, others conclude it to be 32.6 percent. In the report of The Swedish Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology 2006 there is a section dealing with women experiencing force and violence in relation to choosing abortion, deploring the importance of increasing the knowledge. In the second report from 2012 force and violence relating to abortion is an absent theme in the last report. This study wants to say something about the experience of women who are now invisible in this report and belong to the group who have experienced abortion as traumatic.

**Method:** The voice of the women was collected from forums on the Internet such as Libero, Umo (youth reception) and Familjeliv, from newspaper articles and blogs. In order for the material to correlate with the group of women experiencing pressure or threat in relation to pregnancy, I chose the texts that witnessed some kind of force, persuasion or threat. This material contains 75 texts that were organized into three groups, (A) 19 women who were pregnant at the time of writing and (B) 52 women who had undergone an abortion. (C) 4 women who had been pressured to have an abortion but chose to continue the pregnancy.

**Result:** The voice of women suffering from abortion contained go on different forums in order to search for advice, compassion or someone to share the experience with. Several recurring themes, such as force, which includes threats of relational and economical abandonment, threats of violence against her or her future baby if she decides to continue the pregnancy, and death threats. Regret and despair and how they are experiencing this alone. Pain and suffering of being lonely, abandoned, misunderstood and suffering loss, of experiencing significant others joining forces against her and the pain related to visual imagery of anything related to children or pregnancies. Extensive crying “*every day*” for years, and the experience of being trapped in what they compare to hell. They also tend to curse the pill and themselves for taking it. They either search for a way to forgive or they view everything bad as a reasonable punishment. There is criticism against healthcare for enabling the abortion, significant others for diminishing her experience and culture for not taking her pain seriously. In their voice and how they have experienced dissociation when the abortion was taking place. They speak about the death threats they have received from significant others who wants them to have an abortion, about the death of their fetus, wanting to die themselves or thinking about suicide. The body is a central theme to their experience, their own body communicating to them in a surprising way, and the body of the fetus is described by its body parts. If she sees the fetus during the abortion this is traumatic but spoken of in a way that resembles a meeting of another.

**Conclusions:** There is a cultural and systematic loophole that enables significant others to force a woman to have an abortion against her own will. This is possible since the political system has construed the law of free abortion to implicate the absence of any questioning or resisting a woman's choice to have an abortion. Significant others can be successful in their force since the healthcare system seems to systematically neglect women choosing abortion by force and making this possible. The culture contributes to the loophole with its attitude, diminishing the woman's experience of the fetus, of her pregnancy and abortion.

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